

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY

6 MARCH 2014

2013 CHRISTMAS MARKET

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This brief report sets out key issues arising from the 2013 Christmas Market, reviews the impact of the market and identifies key issues for 2014.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Negotiations on a City Centre Christmas Market commenced in early 2012, with the first Exeter Cathedral Christmas Market in November/December 2012. The Cathedral Christmas Market is operated by Market Place Europe Limited (MPEL), with a five-year market contract between the Cathedral and MPEL.
- 2.2 Year one of the market saw 55 stalls, growing to 70 stalls in 2013. 2012 saw a high percentage of total stalls occupied by food operators; a better balance between food and 'craft' stalls was achieved in 2013. 2013 also saw an increase in the number of local and South West craft stalls, with an objective being to increase this number still further in 2014.
- 2.3 The area of Cathedral Green covered by the market was increased in 2013, with planning consent now in place to allow for further expansion of the market in 2014 through to 2016 (the final market during the current Cathedral/MPEL contract).
- 2.4 The 2013 Cathedral Christmas Market was supplemented by one-off specialist markets operated by the City Council in Castle Street and Fore Street and by the regular street food and craft market run in the Guildhall Shopping Centre.
- 2.5 The Cathedral Christmas Market has recently been awarded the title of "Best Speciality Market in the UK" by the National Association of British Market Authorities.

3. IMPACT

- 3.1 Market Place Europe estimates that the number of visitors to the Christmas Market was 500,000 – a 40% increase on the estimate for 2012. It is significant that Market Place reported visitors from a wide catchment area, with a number of individuals and tour operators visiting Exeter instead of other established Christmas Markets, most notably Bath. Increasing the size of the market ensured that the market became another key feature of the city's pre-Christmas offer and that visitors stayed for as long a period as possible.

- 3.2 The appeal of the market as a key city centre destination caused some challenges – specifically in relation to congestion at peak times in some areas of the market. To ensure the market continues to attract more visitors to the city year-on-year, changes to stall layout will be necessary to alleviate such problems in future years.
- 3.3 Whilst it is important that the Christmas Market sees a year-on-year growth in visitors it is clearly of importance that the market contributes to a city centre that also sees year-on-year improvements in the number of visitors and atmosphere. Analysis of national footfall information suggests that national town and shopping centre footfall was down in 2013 against 2012, with a drop of an average of 3% during the 5 weeks pre-Christmas. Against a national picture that remains relatively downbeat, it is welcome that in Exeter, footfall analysis for Princesshay and Guildhall Shopping Centres shows an increase of 1.75%.
- 3.4 It remains clear that, whilst footfall figures for Exeter are encouraging, the position of Exeter alongside other town and city centres is one where there remain no grounds for complacency and where external factors such as poor weather can have a devastating impact on trading performance. It is noticeable that during week 51 (final week of the Christmas Market) footfall was particularly weak – this was due to heavy rainfall for much of the week.
- 3.5 Feedback from existing businesses in the Cathedral Yard and Cathedral Close and from businesses in the central city centre area has been upbeat in relation to the contribution that the Christmas Market made to the success of the city centre during the pre-Christmas period. The reality is, however, that the contribution that the market made to the smaller specialist independent trading areas of the city centre, Gandy Street and the West Quarter in particular, was at best neutral. A clearer focus on how Christmas Market visitors can be driven more successfully in to the independent shopping areas has to be an area on which to focus in 2014.
- 3.6 Areas on which there should be a focus in 2014 are:
- Further expansion of the Christmas Market – within the areas for which planning consent was given in 2013;
 - A focus on ensuring a stall ‘mix’ that complements the offer provided by the city’s independent businesses – particularly within the areas of Fore Street, South Street and Gandy Street;
 - Examination of opportunities for ensuring day and overnight visitors’ dwell-time in the City Centre is maximised, with encouragement to visit the key independent trading areas of the City Centre;
 - Examination of market layout to ensure visitors have as enjoyable a visit to the market as possible.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The City Council does not directly make any financial contribution to the delivery of the Christmas Market other than that of the City Centre Manager and other members of the Economy Team staffing the Visitor Information Point in the market.

5. RECOMMENDATION that:

5.1 Scrutiny notes and comments on the positive contribution made by the 2013 Exeter Cathedral Christmas Market and supports the development of the Christmas Market in 2014, with:

- Further expansion of the Christmas Market – within the areas for which planning consent was given in 2013;
- A focus on ensuring a stall ‘mix’ that complements the offer provided by the City’s independent businesses – particularly within the areas of Fore Street, South Street and Gandy Street;
- Examination of opportunities for ensuring day and overnight visitors dwell-time in the City Centre is maximised, with encouragement to visit the key independent trading areas of the City Centre;
- Examination of the market layout to ensure visitors have as enjoyable a visit to the Market as possible.

5.2 The City Council commend the Cathedral for allowing and supporting the development of the Christmas Market and the skill of the operators Market Place Europe Limited which has contributed to it being acclaimed as the Best Speciality Market in the UK.

**JOHN HARVEY
CITY CENTRE MANAGER**

ECONOMY DIRECTORATE

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report: None**