

**REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ECONOMY**

**Date of Meeting: 21 January 2016**

**Report of: Cllr Lyons  
Chair of the Growth and Marketing Exeter Task and Finish Group**

**Title: Growth and Marketing Exeter Task and Finish Group Report**

**Is this a Key Decision?**

No

**Is this an Executive or Council Function?**

Council

**1. What is the report about?**

To report the findings and recommendations of this Task and Finish Group to the Scrutiny Economy Committee.

**2. Recommendations:**

- (i) A review of the current staffing levels and budget available for the Economy and Tourism Department is undertaken by Senior Management in conjunction with the Economy and Tourism Team.
- (ii) A business case in respect of (i) is to be submitted to the Scrutiny Economy Committee for consideration.
- (iii) The sharing of Economic Development expertise between neighbouring local authorities across the wider areas of East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge is formalised by way of an agreement.
- (iv) An Economic Development conference is held, led by Exeter City Council's Economic Development Team, also involving East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council, Exeter University and Exeter College to include combined presentations aimed specifically at new businesses.

**3. Reasons for the recommendations:**

- (a) The previous investment in marketing designed to attract further inward investment opportunities for Exeter has created an unprecedented increase in the number of enquiries received from companies wishing to relocate to Exeter.
- (b) The current resources and staffing levels within the Economy and Tourism Department are currently insufficient to deal with and manage this extra demand.
- (c) Exeter has the highest number of enquiries in respect of relocation amongst its contemporary Authorities. Out of 1000 enquiries received over the last year the Economy and Tourism Department have only been able to deal with 100 due to current resources, resulting in 900 missed opportunities. This raises a legitimate question around the need for additional budget/resources bearing in mind that the current level of demand is likely to continue.

- (d) A detailed review of the budget available to the Economy and Tourism Department is both timely and necessary and should identify what additional resources are available; explore what can be achieved for different levels of available funding; understand the implications of an increase in additional funding/resources for both the Economy and Tourism Department and the Council as a whole; consider whether re-structuring of staff within the Department could provide part of the solution.
- (e) Economic Development Teams at Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge have a mutually beneficial and good working relationship. Expertise is shared on occasion between Authorities on an ad hoc basis. To formalise arrangements in this respect will support a continued approach to combined Authority working and provide a level of security to the existing.
- (f) A conference aimed at new businesses involving other Local Authorities, key stakeholders and organisations will raise the profile of Exeter and the Heart of the South West. It will reinforce the commitment to growth and inward investment and will highlight what Exeter and the wider area has to offer including the benefits of the location, infrastructure and key support. Attracting new business to Exeter and the wider area together with encouraging new businesses is essential, as is promoting links between businesses, both existing and new with both key services and organisations.

**4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources:**

None at present in respect of the proposed recommendations in this report.

If recommendation (ii) is approved, a business case will be submitted to this Committee which will contain details of the projected financial implications if the business case were to be implemented.

**5. Section 151 Officer comments:**

- 5.1 There are no additional financial implications contained in this report.

**6. What are the legal aspects?**

It will be necessary to instruct Legal Services should the Scrutiny Economy Committee approve recommendation (iii).

**7. Monitoring officer Comments:**

This report raises issues of possible closer working relationships with neighbouring authorities, which, if formalised, will need to be covered by an acceptable agreement

**8. Report Details:**

Growth and Marketing Exeter was identified as a high priority topic for Task and Finish Group investigation at the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme Meeting which took place in June 2015.

Membership of the Group consisted of:-

Cllr Lyons  
Cllr Edwards  
Cllr Denham  
Cllr Biaylk  
Cllr Henson  
Cllr Holland

Chief Executive and Growth Director  
Assistant Director, Economy and Tourism  
Economy and Tourism Manager  
Senior Economy and Tourism Officer

The Group established their scope at the outset and agreed that the key objectives should be to:-

- Identify the opportunities within the City which are not being progressed or not being progressed in the way they should be.
- Find out who our competitors are – what are they doing marketing wise and who are their partners?
- Draw comparisons with areas which have strong inward investment and marketing campaigns.
- Identify ways in which the Council can persuade its neighbours, big stakeholders and businesses to contribute towards the economic growth and development of the City.

### **The Current Investment Overview**

The Economy and Tourism Manager provided a brief investment and tourism overview. A PR agency had been appointed on a 12 month contract to deal with media/VIP visits for instance and to promote investment and business relocations to Exeter.

The current work is very much “on line” and can be split down into:-

- a) The “Invest in Exeter” website
- b) The Commercial Property Register

The Council meets regularly with Devon County Council on “Devon Delivers” and Exeter is featured in their campaigns, for example, in respect of the Science Park. Larger businesses tend to employ a relocation agency to find areas for re-location and the Council works with these agencies and individuals. In addition to this the Council works with nationwide magazines to raise the profile of the City through professional articles and publications. The work is very much aimed towards professionals.

Sponsorship for branding is sought if it is felt that it would compliment the Council's work. Extensive social media and search engine campaigns are operated. The main aim is to attract businesses to relocate and invest in Exeter.

There is a changing perception of Exeter, which has attracted major investment over the last 10 years. Core communication is an important aspect and the subject of a whole 12 month program. Video and media libraries are constantly updated so that good quality images and videos are available. Case studies of businesses which have recently re-located to Exeter are carried out and the Council continues to work closely with partners and neighbours.

### **The Guest Speakers**

As part of the Group's investigations the following guest speakers attended:-

**1. Guy Mills: Business Manager, Enterprise and Economy, Cambridgeshire County Council**

Guy explained what Cambridge are doing in respect of the University, Science Parks, Combined Authority approach and the LEP, the importance of infrastructure and transport, affordable housing and student accommodation, tourism and inward investment. This provided the Group with the opportunity to draw a comparison and ask questions.

**2. Richard Veal, Managing Director of a South African company which has recently re-located to Exeter.**

Richard had approached the UKTI at a Trade Show, on the back of the global financial crisis. He explained that as the Pound is more stable for international businesses and the UK has a lot to offer entrepreneurs (a stable environment; clear rules and tax rates; development grants and a willing work force) it makes the UK a very attractive option for re-location. He made enquiries as to possible areas within the UK and Devon was identified through those enquiries. Exeter gave the impression of being an ancient town receiving a new lease of life which he found an attractive quality.

On a personal level he was looking for a City with good communication lines and transport links; an area which was beautiful with plenty of outdoor activities which also had good OFSTED accredited schools which are commutable within a 25 mile radius.

### **Exeter City Council's Excellent Assistance**

Richard told the Group that the Council's Economy and Tourism Department provided fantastic support - nothing was too much trouble and the Economy Department acted as someone "on the ground" to respond very quickly to enquiries with information and also to provide research support. At the time there was a grant available for developing businesses in the South West through the LEP to help with travel and transportation costs which was extremely helpful. Exeter City Council convey that it is willing to go to great lengths to help and support new businesses and employment in the locality and specifically Exeter. Generally there appears to be an appetite for attracting people and businesses into the UK to create new business and jobs.

### **The Good Points**

- UKTI initially sparked Richard's interest in the UK. When he contacted Exeter City Council's Economy and Tourism Department, they performed, were very helpful and delivered a high quality of support which was critical and created an excellent impression.
- A "soft landing" option on business premises is also attractive as this means that companies can easily expand to a bigger unit when required and only have to give 30 days' notice to move out of the existing premises. Affordability, ease of use and flexibility to demand in this respect is a big advantage.
- The broadband is fantastic in the area– quick and cheap.
- Exeter's City status is very important – Plymouth, Torquay, Cornwall, St Albans and Surrey were also considered but were ruled out in favour of Exeter.
- The road networks are very good in and around Exeter with good transport links via road, rail and air to other areas.
- Exeter provides the opportunity for a good business grounding whilst offering the best of a rural lifestyle on the outskirts.

**A possible improvement:-**

- The Council's website needs improving. It should be more about Exeter, what it represents and provide information on the University expansion, road and infrastructure for instance, which is currently not easy to find on the existing website.

The Council's website is currently being redesigned and the Task and Finish Group were able to pass on this particular suggestion to the officer responsible. A special meeting of the Group was held and the Digital Media Officer was able to show the Group what the new website would look like, particularly in relation to the Business section. The Economy and Tourism officers also had the opportunity to feed in to the new design to ensure that essential information and pages were included within the Business Section. It was recognised that there will be a much better facility with the new website to monitor traffic and where it originates from. This will provide much more detailed information and statistics to assist the Economy and Tourism Department.

**9 What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, Economy safety and the environment?**

None.

**Cllr Lyons**

**Chair of the Growth and Marketing Exeter Task and Finish Group  
Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

**Background papers used in compiling this report:**

None

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