

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY
22 JANUARY 2009**

**EXECUTIVE
27 JANUARY 2009**

ARTS AND MEDIA STRATEGY 2009 – 2012

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with a summary of the views of the working group on the Draft City Arts and Media Strategy.
- 1.2 A copy of the revised Draft Strategy will be provided separately in advance of the meeting, having been amended to take account of the response to the external consultation, which finished on 12 January 2009.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members received a summary of the initial draft of the Arts and Media Strategy 2009- 2012 at the meeting of the Committee on 4 September 2008. Proposed issues and priorities for the draft strategy were discussed and a working group formed comprising of Councillors M Baldwin, Coates, Gale, Martin and Newcombe was formed to continue the discussion.
- 2.2 Members agreed the terms of reference for the working group, which briefly were to discuss and comment on priority issues relating to the draft Strategy in more depth. The outcome of the discussion was to be used by the consultants preparing the strategy to inform the content and priorities to be proposed in the consultation draft and subsequent action plan.
- 2.3 The working group met on 2nd and 23rd October 2008 and reflected on the scope of the draft Strategy, aiming to be aspirational and support delivery by the range of venues, artists and providers in the city whilst also understanding the need to manage expectations against a tight budget background.
- 2.4 The current strategy has provided the focus for the activities of the Council involving directly delivered and partnership based projects working with a number of organisations and individuals, including Arts Council England, Exeter Northcott, Exeter Phoenix, Spacex Gallery, Exeter Barnfield, South West Screen, British Film Institute and many others.
- 2.5 The Council is an active supporter for the arts, which includes the external programme of festivals and events and its grant support for the core strategic organisations providing the main infrastructure for arts activities in the city. It has also initiated new festivals and events and has encouraged the private sector to develop public art within development schemes. The large investment in the refurbishment of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and in its interim activities, supported by the Renaissance in the Regions

Programme, is adding to the Council's overall portfolio of arts based infrastructure and activities.

- 2.6 The City Council has supported the arts strongly within its work as promoting and supporting the tourism sector and raising the profile and image of Exeter. It has recognised the value of the arts in animating the City Centre and revitalising public spaces and has supported major capital projects to improve arts and media facilities.
- 2.7 The City Council has also worked to widen access to the arts through its Service Level Agreements with revenue-supported organisations. Emphasis is put upon the importance of taking artistic activity out into the community and partnership working within the education sector. It has also introduced the arts in community and play programme, promoted arts and media through its tourism marketing, and developed the Exeter Corn Exchange as a venue for live arts and entertainment.

3. WORKING GROUP VIEWS

- 3.1 The proposed Strategic Objectives in the Draft Strategy are as follows, to:-
1. adopt a corporate policy approach to arts and media development which places the arts and media at the heart of the City's corporate ambitions
 2. develop and strengthen the arts and media infrastructure and support and encourage creative production in the City
 3. develop further the City's portfolio of arts and media festivals to create a festival of regional/national significance
 4. support creative industries growth and development
 5. develop access to arts programmes and opportunities within community settings to encourage greater participation and involvement with the arts and media by residents of Exeter
 6. work in partnership with relevant agencies and partners to provide more opportunities for people, and young people in particular, to engage in arts education and learning programmes
 7. work strategically in developing new partnerships in and funding for the arts
 8. work with the arts and media sector and other partners to develop new models of sustainability and generate new income and funding sources.
- 3.2 The working group considered that one of the main thrusts of the objectives should be to encourage and facilitate increased accessibility to artistic activity. In terms of the resultant action plan, one direct way the Council could contribute would be by ensuring the festival portfolio maintained its breadth of programming. The objectives were otherwise supported.

Corporate Approach

- 3.2 The challenge and opportunity over the next few years will be to ensure that the role and contribution of the arts and media in delivering the Exeter Vision and other Council objectives is reflected in a wide range of policy aspirations across the Council, and in its working relationships with other stakeholders in the city. The working party acknowledged the ongoing need to build upon existing strategic and working relationships between arts services and other units in the Council. In view of the financial climate, the working group also

felt that the strategy should be explicit about building upon successful collaborating effort with external partners.

Arts Infrastructure

- 3.4 Exeter's arts infrastructure consists of its main arts venues and galleries, professional and amateur creative arts and media organisations, and arts agencies including the City Council. The basic arts infrastructure has not changed significantly over recent years, although there have been physical improvements to some venues including Council investment in the Exeter Northcott and Exeter Barnfield theatres, Exeter Corn Exchange, and Exeter Phoenix. Further improvements are needed or planned to these and other facilities. The working group considered that Spacex be added to the list of key organisations and reference be made to the range of organisations in the wider community which regularly contribute to cultural activity in the city. The contribution of the Cathedral and Exeter Arts Council should also be referenced.

Visual Arts

- 3.5 Exeter has historically had an active visual arts sector, which has led to initiatives to develop spaces and facilitate and contribute to the creation of the nationally renowned Spacex Gallery, the Exeter Phoenix and other less formal spaces for the visual arts. The major re-development of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum is expected to create new accommodation for exhibitions of the highest standard. The City Council has a public art strategy and has worked with developers and undertaken its own initiatives to include public art commissions and capital schemes.
- 3.6 The working group views were that the recommendation to establish a new visual arts event or festival be supported but with concern about its possible impact upon the funding of existing festivals. If other organisations considered that they can deliver such an event then that would be welcomed as the improved co-ordination and focus of an event would achieve greater impact.
- 3.7 The recommendation to secure funding to embark on a programme of commissioning of work or the hosting of a major national exhibition to place Exeter on the "national visual art map" was supported on the basis that it supported regionally produced art.

Performing Arts

- 3.8 The strength of performing art activity depends a great deal on creative production. Exeter has a number of independent theatre companies which produce work in the city and tour to other venues. For example, the activities of Theatre Alibi, Magic Carpet, and the Exeter Northcott are notable. The amateur arts sector is also important and the Exeter Arts Council plays a key role in channelling City Council grants to support local creative projects as do initiatives like the grants awarded under the Autumn Festival. Media production is supported by the Exeter Phoenix and independent media producers.
- 3.9 The challenge for many independent companies and individual producers is to secure the resources necessary to sustain their creative work. This sector

of the arts is fragile and the reduction in Arts Lottery funding, added to the difficult economic climate, is adding to the uncertainties. Members supported the merging of the recommendations made by the consultants with that highlighted as the primary challenge under the Corporate Approach above, namely to ensure that the role and contribution of the arts and media in delivering the Exeter Vision is reflected in a wide range of policy aspiration across the Council, and in its working relationships with other key stakeholders in the city.

Film and Media

- 3.10 The working group agreed with the consultant's view that there is considerable potential for growth in the film and media sector particularly because of the increasing importance of digital media, including the impending "digital switchover". The rapid take-up of alternative access to media through social networking websites and increasingly sophisticated mobile devices is resulting in the need and opportunity for a completely new approach. The working group agree that there should be more reference in the strategy to supporting the creation and growth of businesses involved in the generation of digital media content and organisations supporting the development of relevant skills.

Castle Quarter

- 3.11 The Working Group suggested adding that there should be improved signposting and marketing to the Draft Strategy recommendation of establishing the Quarter with additional cultural facilities, including improvements to the wider public realm to create more attractive public walkways and spaces. It is still hoped that the private owners of Exeter Castle will achieve their expressed intention of creating a lively cultural venue.

Festivals and Events

- 3.12 The last Scrutiny Committee – 13th November 2008 agreed the future programme of improvement and broad content of the portfolio of events for 2009. In summary these included:
- continuing the Autumn Festival, including both award schemes, to support and encourage the development and enhancement of locally delivered events and offering local groups training in fund raising, event management, and health and safety
 - exploring all avenues to continue to develop Animated Exeter beyond 2009 including continuing to seek to establish "arms length" management of the festival under a Service Level Agreement, and
 - in the event of this not being possible, considering incorporating animation and digital media as a key element into other festivals in the portfolio
 - continuing the annual Service Level Agreement with Vibrasonic Festival Limited to deliver the Vibrasonic festival.
 - the Summer Festival focussing their limited resources on key areas by retaining a directly promoted core classical programme, developing a partnership agreement with the city's key venues, recognising their known expertise to add to the core programme by producing a broad range of events, re-establishing a free large scale opening event with a theme of circus and carnival, and researching the possibility of

running a larger ticketed event in collaboration with a commercial promoter.

- 3.13 These points already recognised the recommendations of the Draft Strategy to:
- work with relevant agencies and partners to provide more opportunities for people and young people in particular, to engage in arts education and learning programmes
 - work strategically in developing new partnerships and funding for the arts

Creative Industries

- 3.14 It was agreed that the recommendation for the development of a creative industry sector should be an aspect of the Strategy. In particular the recommendation for the provision of workspace was supported, conditional upon suitable funding being secured from external sources and with the necessary links established with training and business support providers.

Arts in the Community

- 3.15 Exeter has a strong amateur and voluntary arts sector. The grant aid channelled through Exeter Arts Council is a valuable source of funding support as are the Autumn Festival grants and its role as a showcase. Work within communities has been supported via the education and outreach programmes of the revenue funded organisations. The working group supported the notion of extending this further where resources allow.

Arts and Learning/Young People

- 3.16 The City Council supports professional arts organisations and others who undertake a wide range of education and learning support programmes and work with adults, children and young people. Young people are provided with opportunities to participate in the arts, both within the formal education sector and through community based initiatives and projects, including those linked to Animated Exeter and the programme of activities organised by RAMM. The consultant's suggestion of the establishment of an event or group to bring together the various strands of arts education and youth arts activity was supported. Reference should be made in the Strategy to the events organised by the Museum.

Sustainability and Growth

- 3.17 The Draft Strategy rightly highlights that the arts and media sector have a heavy reliance on public sector and grant funding which increasingly is likely to be more difficult to secure. There is a need for the city's arts and media sector to diversify its sources of income. The consultant suggests the creation of a partnership with the private sector to encourage private sector investment in the development and enhancement of the city's cultural offer, with the aim also of attracting new and additional funding from regional and charitable agencies. The working group considered that this would be difficult in the current climate and that the Council should work collaboratively with experienced individuals in existing arts organisations to support the preparation of bids and opportunities for organisational development and review where it would help sustainability.

4. DRAFT STRATEGY

- 4.1 An amended version of the Strategy incorporating these comments and those received in response to the consultation stage has been sent to Members separately in view of the timescales for the preparation of this report. A schedule of other comments received has also been provided.

5. RECOMMENDATION that:-

- 5.1 Scrutiny support and Executive agree the content of the final draft of the Arts and Media Strategy 2009 – 2012.

**RICHARD BALL
HEAD OF ECONOMY AND TOURISM**

ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None