



## **Chester-le-Street** District Council

**Report to:** Executive

**Date of Meeting:** 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2009

**Report from:** Director of Corporate Services

**Title of Report:** Review into the Future of the Market  
Final Report

### **Agenda Item Number:**

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#### **1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is for members to consider and agree the final report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the scrutiny review into the future of the town centre market.
- 1.2 The final report is set out in Appendix 1. Members are recommended to:
1. Agree the review findings, conclusions and recommendations

#### **2. CONSULTATION**

- 2.1 The consultations required in respect of the work of the task and Finish Group are fully identified in the attached Appendix.

#### **3. TRANSITION PLAN AND PEOPLE & PLACE PRIORITY**

- 3.1 The Transition Plan, in effect, replaces the Corporate Plan 2007/2010. The Transition Plan includes a schedule of proposals from the previous seven priorities which ought to be and can be achieved in the remaining life of the council.
- 3.2 The council's choice to move towards a single priority of '**People and Place**' priority was considered as part of the budget setting process and forms a firm part of the Transition Plan.
- 3.3 The scrutiny topic has a direct impact on the following area of the **People and Place** priority:

- Investment in the Town Centre.

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- 3.4 The work of the Task and Finish group supported a key project of the the ***People and Place*** priority delivery plan in respect of the future of the market place. Scrutiny recommendations will be incorporated into the 'Handing over the Baton' Report to be presented to the new Unitary council in March 2009

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS**

##### 4.1 Financial

There are no financial implications relating to this report to this council at the current time.

##### 4.2 Legal

There are no legal implications relating to this report at the current time.

##### 4.3 Personnel

There are no personnel implications relating to this report at the current time.

##### 4.4 Other Services

The review will create an impact upon service departments required to support Members in relation to information requests and providing support to the investigative process.

##### 4.5 Diversity

There are no known diversity implications relating to this report at the current time. Accessibility to the Market place will be considered as part of the review

##### 4.6 Risk

There are no risk implications relating to this report at the current time other than human resource capacity issues as a direct result of Local Government Re-organisation. This issue has been managed through a different way of scrutiny working by engaging consultancy and Town Centre Development Manager engagement. The Town Centre Development Manager has fully supported the Task and Finish Group in reaching its findings, conclusions and recommendations.

#### 4.7 Crime and Disorder

There are no specific crime and disorder implications to this report at the current time. The review has taken into account any particular crime and antisocial behaviour issues related to the Town Centre marketplace.

#### 4.8 Data Quality

Every care has been taken in the development of this report to ensure that the information and data used in its preparation and the appendices attached are accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant and complete. The council's Data Quality Policy has been complied with in producing this report.

#### 4.9 LGR Implications

The proposals are a fundamental part of the councils Transition Plan. Therefore no agreement of the County Council was required to conduct this piece of work. However it is unlikely that any significant recommendations will be implemented in the lifetime of this council. Once agreed the Review Report will be incorporated into the 'Handing over the Baton' Report to be presented to the new Unitary council in March 2009

### 5. **BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW**

5.1 Through the development of the new single priority 'People and Place' a number of Action Learning Sets (ALS) has been developed to deliver on some of the key themes and projects. ALS2 – Investment in the Town Centre is considering the potential for the future of the market in Chester-le-Street. A specific project 'Research the Future of the Market' . Has been agreed as part of the **People and Place** priority delivery plan, and approved by the Executive.

5.2 Chester-le-Street market has been a popular attraction for many years. However people's habits change when faced with the development of other different retail opportunities and experiences. In a nutshell the 'market' for markets is changing. The market has been subject to significant investment as part of the regeneration of the Civic Heart project. Its attractiveness has been approved and other work of the Action Learning Set has developed significant programmes of events throughout the year to improve it further. Unfortunately, income from the market has not been achieving targets. It is therefore a right time to consider options for the markets future.

5.3 The Action Learning Set was very clear in that it wishes to raise awareness of and fully explore the viability of the options for the future of the market

5.4 The review involved looking at how the market's sustainability can be achieved over the next 5 to 10 years. It looked at other options in managing the markets including private sector engagement.

## **6. TERMS OF REFERENCE OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW**

6.1 The objective of the review was to:

- Evaluate the future of Chester-le-Street market in terms of its over the next five to ten years.

6.2 To achieve this review considered the following key issues and questions:

- Which are the top performing Market Towns?
- What do the best do?
- What do the traders think?
- Is the perceived decline in market performance a local phenomenon?
- Are 'traditional' markets elsewhere suffering from prevailing economic forces; such as the credit squeeze?
- In times of perceived economic difficulties markets should offer better value for money, what affect does the presence of discounters such as Aldi and Wilkinson's have on the market?
- What are the factors that are recognised to appeal to shoppers?
- Should the public sector continue to manage what is a private sector activity?
- Which companies run private markets and where?
- How do they compare?
- How does the relationship between such operators and local authority landlords' work?
- What rental could be raised from a relationship with a private sector operator?
- What is the sustainability of Chester-le-Street's market in the medium and longer term (five or ten year's time)?
- Suggest a way to maximize the investments that have been made and to increase profitability?
- What decisions do this and the new unitary authority need to make in the light of the research findings?

## 7. METHODOLOGY AND WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 The review methodology is detailed below.

### 7.2 Consultancy Guidance

Principle research support was provided by Smartspeed Consultancy Services. This company will:

- identify the top performing market towns and why they are the 'best';
- Obtain feedback from traders as to the current status of the market;
- Research the factors that appeal to visitors / shoppers to visit a (local) market;
- Identify and evaluate privately run markets;
- Analyse information gained to evaluate sustainability over the next five to ten years;
- Undertake report writing and reporting to inform the Task and Finish Groups discussions and interim and final reports.

### 7.3 Visits

On the guidance of the consultants visits were arranged to appropriate markets and operators to understand how they operate successfully. Findings are fully detailed in Appendix 1.

### 7.4 Evidence Gathering

The Task and Finish Group sought to engage traders and public through a variety of techniques in order to gain opinion on the future of the market in Chester-le-Street. This was undertaken through a series of techniques including questionnaires, consultation events and online surveys. Findings are fully detailed in Appendix 1.

### 7.5 Report Findings

The Task and Finish Group prepared a draft report of their findings which was submitted to the last People and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### 7.6 Timeline

The following timetable was proposed:

- Initial informal discussion on Draft Scoping Report 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2008
- Initial presentation, Scoping report and Task and Finish Group membership agreed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2008
- Visits to other markets and operators by 13<sup>th</sup> September 2008
- Progress Update to **People and Place** Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2008

- Web based questionnaire by end September with article in next District News by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2008
- Meeting with Traders by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2008
- Consultant report of findings and Options by 10<sup>th</sup> October
- Progress Update to **People and Place** Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2008
- Task and Finish Group informal meeting to discuss evidence gained by 14<sup>th</sup> November and agree recommendations
- Findings of Task and Finish Group reported to **People and Place** Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008

7.7 This report was completed slightly behind this target and this has been due to reduced capacity within the Legal and Democratic Services Team.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 The final report is set out in Appendix 1. Members are recommended to:

1. Agree the review findings, conclusions and recommendations

## 9. BACKGROUND PAPERS / DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO:

- Transition Plan & People and Place Priority

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