

Draft Report



Chester-le-Street
District Council

Report to:	People and Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	30 th July 2008
Report from:	Director of Corporate Services
Title of Report:	Review into the Future of the Market Scoping Report
Agenda Item Number:	

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a proposed scope for a scrutiny review into a town centre market places. This is following the development of the new People and Place priority and the issue was also raised at the recent scrutiny workshop.
- 1.2 The report also provides a suggested outline timetable, terms of reference and objectives for the review.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The council's Town Centre Development Manager was consulted in the preparation of the report

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:

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- Investment in the Town Centre.

- 3.4 The work of the Task and Finish group will support 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 at the current time. However there maybe potential financial implications to any recommendations resulting from the scrutiny review process.

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. The task and finish group will be supported by the Director of Corporate Services, the Town Centre Development Manager and Smartspeed Consulting Services, consultants appointed as part of the **People and Place** priority delivery plan.

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 is being managed through a different way of scrutiny working by engaging consultancy and Town Centre Development Manager engagement.

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4.7 Crime and Disorder

There are no specific crime and disorder implications to this report at the current time. The review will take 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 is required to conduct this piece of work. However it is unlikely that any significant recommendations will be implemented in the lifetime of this council. Scrutiny recommendations 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.

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- 5.3 The Action Learning Set is 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 Action Learning Set project will involve looking at how the market's sustainability can be achieved over the next 5 to 10 years. It will look at other options in managing the markets including private sector engagement.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

6. OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

6.1 The objective of the review will be 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 will consider 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?

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- What decisions do this and the new unitary authority need to make in the light of the research findings?

8. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY AND WORK PROGRAMME

8.1 A proposed methodology and work programme is detailed below.

8.2 Consultancy Guidance

Principle research support will be 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.

8.3 Visits

On the guidance of the consultants visits will be arranged to appropriate markets and operators to understand how they operate successfully.

8.4 Evidence Gathering

The Task and Finish Group will seek 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 will be undertaken through a series of techniques including questionnaires, consultation events and online surveys.

8.5 Report Findings

The Task and Finish Group will prepare a draft report of their findings to be presented to the People and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and following agreement, to the Executive.

8.6 Timeline

The following timetable is proposed:

- Initial informal discussion on Draft Scoping Report 22nd July 2008
- Initial presentation, Scoping report and Task and Finish Group membership agreed 30th July 2008
- Visits to other markets and operators by 13th September 2008

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

9. CONSULTATION FOR THE REVIEW

9.1 The review will gather evidence from a variety of sources. The main evidence will come from information provided by the consultants, Officers and external partners, likely to include:

- Existing Markets
- Local residents
- Market Traders
- Town Centre Development Manager
- Community groups

9.2 The scoping report is at the preliminary stages of looking at good practice in other local authorities. It is suggested that Members consider visiting similar market town local authorities, to investigate how these issues are dealt with.

9.3 The evidence for the review will be obtained using a variety of techniques including:

- Task and Finish Group engagement and discussion
- Surveys/Questionnaires/Consultation
- Visits
- Desktop Research by Smartspeed Consulting Services.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That Members note the report.

10.2 That the panel give consideration and agree to the title of the review.

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- 10.3 That Members of the panel discuss and agree the outlined aims and objectives for the review.
- 10.4 That Members of the panel give consideration to the outlined methodology and work programme for the review.
- 10.5 That Members give consideration to witnesses to be used for consultation purposes during the review.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS / DOCUMENTS REFERED TO:

- Transition Plan & People and Place Priority

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