

Agenda Item

Executive Board

12 April 2006

CP



Review of Exe Estuary Partnership

Summary

Corporate Overview Committee considered at their meeting on 7 July 2005 a report from the Chief Executive regarding the arrangements for the Exe Estuary and the benefits to East Devon. The Committee were also made aware of a meeting between the Chief Executive and senior officers from Devon County Council and Teignbridge District Council which recommended that there was a need for a joint review of the job specification and description for the vacant Estuary Officer post and a reassessment of the location of the post. Overview Committee also recommended that further negotiations with all agencies including Exeter City Council about the remit, funding and location of the Partnership and its officers before the Memorandum of Agreement was to be signed off by Executive Board. This report is the outcome of these recommendations being taken forward and an extensive review of all aspects of the Exe Estuary Partnership by all key partners.

Recommendation

That Executive Board considers and agrees :

1. The revised Memorandum of Agreement.
2. The adoption of funding scenario 2.
3. The revised job description for the Estuary Officer and approves the recruitment of a new Estuary Officer.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

Executive Board recommended a full review of the partnership arrangements on 15 June 2005 and the outcomes of that review to be reported back to the Executive Board on their completion before any decision would be made about future funding.

b) Alternative Options

Not to sign the Memorandum of Agreement and withhold funds from the operation of the Partnership.

c) Risk Considerations

The decision not to sign the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) by East Devon DC will mean that the whole partnership will become unsustainable and Devon County Council as host authority has indicated it will have no choice but to formally terminate the arrangements for the Partnership.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

There is a proposed budget allocation of £7,140 for 2006/07 for the Exe Estuary Partnership that has yet to be agreed due to the need for formal ratification by Executive Board. However East Devon DC is being requested that it increases its funding contribution to either £11,000 or £8,500 for 2006/07 as outlined in the report below. The overarching aims and objectives of the Partnership are in line with the Corporate Priority to "take care of and improve our environment".

e) Date for Review of Decision

N/A

Main Body of the Report

1. Overview

1.1 The review has been undertaken by all those organisations that currently fund the Partnership and those who have a direct financial responsibility within the funded Cycleau project – these are Devon DC, East Devon DC, Exmouth TC, Teignbridge DC, English Nature, Environment Agency and Devon Sea Fisheries Committee

1.2 The review that was undertaken through a series of meetings between all parties considered its structure, governance, including the MoA and the job description of the Estuary Officer. The review working group has agreed draft documents for approval by the funding partners with a view to recruit an Officer and proceed with delivering an action plan as soon as is possible.

2. Results of Partnership Review

2.1 A new streamlined structure outlining the constitution of the Partnership (Appendix A) has been proposed which seeks to retain a partnership approach to decision making, but will reduce the previous burden of administration on the Estuary Officer. The link to the Estuary users has been retained as a key part of the structure but overall there is a reduction in the need for attendance at numerous meetings. The new structure has amalgamated the existing Joint Advisory Committee and Steering Group arrangements into the Management Group as the overarching executive body so reducing meetings and ensuring there are clearer lines of decision making. The new governance structure would now comprise :

- **Management Group** - consists of funding partners, those with a statutory duty on the estuary, including the Chairman of the Exe Estuary Forum and any other organisation or individual the Group wishes to co-opt.
- **Exe Estuary Forum** – a broad based group representing the users and communities that are associated with the Estuary.
- **Estuary Focus Groups** – these groups which represent key issues relating to the estuary would meet as part of the Forum and report to it.
- **Funding Partners Working Group** – this group would meet, steer and advise the work of the Estuary Officer.
- **Exe Estuary Officer** – employed to take forward the agreed outputs of the Management Plan and Business Plan on behalf of the Partnership.

2.2 The Memorandum of Agreement (Appendix B) is an important tool to establish the sustainable funding for the Partnership and for all those engaged within it the benefits and liabilities associated with signing it. The current MoA has been revised to reflect the new structure that is proposed though the financial contributions within are reflective of Scenario 1 (see below) and would need to be amended if Devon CC is able to secure the funding formula in Scenario 2.

2.3 The job description (Appendix C) has been revised so that it takes into account the need to deliver the refocused work of the Partnership. The Review Working Group unilaterally agreed that the Estuary Officer should prioritise its future work programme on delivery of projects that benefited the health and condition of the estuary. These would be achieved in partnership and through “adding value” with externally sourced funds that would target areas such as biodiversity, sustainable tourism, educational and community linked initiatives. This would enable more activity on the “ground” and less time spent servicing committees and focus groups. This would in turn help to focus the role and responsibilities of the Management Group to help guide the delivery of these activities and so ensure that decisions that are made will relate directly to the wildlife, recreational needs and active community engagement that occurs on the estuary.

2.4 It is important that the funding arrangements are agreed so that a budget is available through joint contribution to employ the Estuary Officer and provide a small working budget, The current budget is set at £38,700 which is made up of the following contributions :

Devon CC : £11,000
East Devon DC : £7,000
Teignbridge DC : £9,700
Exmouth TC : £2,000
Environment Agency : £5,000
English Nature : £4,000

It is proposed that there are two funding scenarios for the future :

- Scenario 1

Devon CC : £11,000
East Devon DC : £11,000
Teignbridge DC : £11,000
Exmouth TC : £2,000
Environment Agency : £5,000
English Nature : £2,000

Total : £44,000

- Scenario 2

Devon CC : £8,500
East Devon DC : £8,500
Teignbridge DC : £8,500
Exmouth TC : £2,000
Environment Agency : £8,500
English Nature : £8,500

Total : £44,500

2.5 Exeter City Council have reaffirmed their position and that is they continue to direct resources at their review of the Harbour Authority but have expressed the view that they will consider returning as a core funding partner in the future following the completion of the Harbour Authority review.

2.6 Devon CC are pursuing Scenario 2 as their preferred option and are awaiting a response from both English Nature and the Environment Agency on their proposed increased contributions that are required to make this an achievable and viable proposition. In the event of this not being achieved then, as was made aware at the Executive Board meeting in June 2005, East Devon DC would be requested to make an additional £4,000 contribution to the Partnership based against its allocation of £7,000 in 2004/05. Certainly Scenario 2 represents a more balanced approach to the funding issue and also demonstrates financial equity across all the key stakeholders within the partnership.

2.7 Discussion was also carried out amongst the Review Working Group over the location and hosting arrangements of the Estuary Officer. The consensus was that the arrangements should remain as they currently stand with Devon CC continuing as host authority and that the Exeter location provided a central “base” for ease of access to the estuary for the postholder and also as a central axis for the funding partners.

Legal Implications

The legal implications are set out for consideration in this report

Financial Implications

The 2006/07 budget includes a sum of £7,140. Both scenarios exceed this sum so may need to be matched by Service reductions from other budget areas.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

N/A

Background Papers

- Appendix A - Constitution of Exe Estuary Partnership
- Appendix B – Revised MoA
- Appendix C – Revised job description

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Executive Board
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