

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY ECONOMY COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting: 13th November 2014
Report of: Cllr Rosie Denham : Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture
Title: The Cost of Living Forum – Interim Report to Scrutiny Economy

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

To update the Scrutiny Economy Committee as to the progress of the Cost of Living Forum in relation to Exeter University's Research report, the issues identified by the Forum for further investigation and the timetabling of the remaining work.

2. Recommendations:

- That the Scrutiny Economy Committee note this report and the progress to date of the Cost of Living Forum.
- That the Scrutiny Economy Committee is content with the 8 areas identified by the Forum for focussed investigation.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- To ensure that Members remain fully informed as to the progress of the Cost of Living Forum.
- To ensure that Members have the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the work of the Forum and its progress.
- To welcome any comments Members' may have in relation to the 8 sub areas identified by the Forum for focussed investigation.
- To provide the opportunity for Members to participate in the Cost of Living sub groups if they wish to do so.

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

None at present for the purposes of this specific report to the Committee.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

This report raises no issues for the Section 151 officer to consider.

6. What are the legal aspects?

None.

7. Monitoring officer Comments

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring officer to consider.

8. Report Details:

The Cost of Living Forum continues with its extensive work in line with the following aims and objectives:-

- a) To gather evidence to establish a baseline on wages and the cost of living in the City of Exeter.
- b) To gather and analyse evidence on the impact that low wages and the high relative cost of living has on residents in the City (taking a broad perspective on impacts and to include Health and Wellbeing).
- c) To gather and analyse evidence on particular problems (for example, the impact of students on private sector rents – do we really know what the relationship is?).
- d) To explore (in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders) strategies and solutions to problems identified following the gathering of evidence for this Forum.

An interim report to Scrutiny Economy was presented on the 6th March 2014 with a request for Members to approve a recommendation for funding which would enable the commissioning of Exeter University to carry out specialist and localised research in relation to Housing and Wages within the Exeter area. The recommendation was approved and the University concluded its work (which included desk top research combined with residents', stakeholders' and employers' surveys) by the beginning of September 2014. A copy of the Exeter University research report is attached for Member's information. The research report has addressed objectives a), b) and c) as listed above. It is now for the Forum to explore strategies and solutions as per objective d).

The Cost of Living Forum met on the 15th September 2014 to discuss the University's research report and identified certain topics which required further focussed investigation. This would then establish whether the Council, stakeholders and external organisations may be able to assist the residents of Exeter in direct relation to the cost of living. The areas identified were as follows:-

1. **Working with young people in schools to provide better careers advice and to raise awareness as to what is available in the local economy.**
2. **Availability of financial advice – it was suggested that the private and voluntary sectors could work together to achieve this.**
3. **Debt strategy – to look at the immediate future as more families need access to more finance.**
4. **Availability and access to affordable and ethical credit.**
5. **Procurement – with particular attention as to how the Council procures and reviewing what powers the Council has under the Social Value Act (with particular reference to the Living Wage).**

- 6. Skills agenda relating to productivity (Knowledge Economy Strategy).**
- 7. Grants – liaising with Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure that the Council make the most of any available grants and funding.**
- 8. A need to put forward a business case to all small businesses with particular reference to tangible statistics.**

Some of these areas may already be the subject of review via different streams of work within the Council (either through departmental research, consultation or under a separate proposal for Scrutiny Task and Finish Group investigation). Items 2, 3, 4 and 5 fall into this category. The remaining areas will be subject to a focussed sub group investigation and it is intended that the sub groups will report back to the main Forum identifying if there is anything that the Council can do, either through direct action or possible influence, to tackle the problems faced by Exeter residents in relation to the Cost of Living.

It is envisaged that the work of the Forum will be completed within the first quarter of 2015 with a full report submitted to Scrutiny Economy Committee with recommendations at that point in time.

- 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?**

Not applicable. However, when the work of the Forum is completed, future recommendations (which may be approved and implemented) could have a positive impact on these areas.

Cllr Rosie Denham – Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None

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