

**REPORT TO:** SCRUTINY ECONOMY COMMITTEE  
**Date of Meeting:** Scrutiny Economy Committee – 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015  
**Report of:** Cllr Denham, Chair of the Cost of Living Forum  
and Portfolio Holder for Economy and Culture  
**Title:** Cost of Living Forum – final report and recommendations

**Is this a Key Decision?**

No

**Is this an Executive or Council Function?**

Council

**1. What is the report about?**

Providing the Cost of Living Forum's final recommendations to the Scrutiny Economy Committee.

**2. Recommendations:**

- a) To hold an ESIF information event in January 2015 in association with LEP and the Federation of Small Businesses to which private and voluntary sector organisations and stakeholders will be invited to attend.
- b) To hold a 6 month review of ongoing, relevant Council work streams identified by the Forum, reporting back to the Scrutiny Economy Committee with an update.
- c) To promote the Living Wage by putting information on the Council's website, the Exeter Citizen and through social media highlighting the work of the Cost of Living Forum and providing case studies reflecting the Council's success in implementing the Living Wage along with an interview with a local business which has implemented the Living Wage successfully.
- d) The Cost of Living Forum should continue to meet annually.
- e) To engage with existing businesses via their networking events to raise the profile of the Living Wage and the Cost of Living Forum work.
- f) To provide Council staff with information to increase their knowledge of the Living Wage which they can share with outside organisations.
- g) To share the Cost of Living Forum reports with East Devon District Council and Teignbridge Council.

**3. Reasons for the recommendations:**

- i. To encourage collaborative working between the Council, private and voluntary sectors and stakeholders in relation to ideas and submitting bid applications for ESIF funding. A combined approach to bids may increase the chance of successfully securing funding.

- ii. To monitor progress in respect of the Council's existing and relevant work streams in direct relation to the work of the Cost of Living Forum.
- iii. To ensure that the Scrutiny Economy Committee remains up to date on the issues and work taking place in respect of (ii).
- iv. To ensure that ongoing issues surrounding the Cost of Living and the difficulties faced by Exeter residents are monitored, so that finding further strategies and solutions to tackle these difficulties remains at the forefront of the Council's priorities.
- v. To highlight the benefits of implementing the Living Wage to businesses and the probable effect on productivity.
- vi. To identify networking opportunities where the Council may be able to talk about the Living Wage and the Cost of Living Forum work amongst the local and wider business community.
- vii. To work collaboratively, on a cross boundary basis, with our neighbouring authorities to address this national issue.
- viii. To invite comments from Members of the Scrutiny Economy Committee in respect of this report, the work of the Cost of Living Forum to date and its final recommendations which ensures a robust and accountable scrutiny process.

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

None.

**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:**

Members of Scrutiny Economy are referred to the previous interim report submitted by this Forum to this Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014, together with the research report of Exeter University dated September 2014.

The Forum identified 8 sub topic areas requiring further investigation and have since established that all but one of these areas are currently being addressed via other Council work streams. The only area not addressed relates to a need to put forward a business case to all small businesses, in relation to the Living Wage and with particular reference to tangible statistics. The Forum agreed that a business case

may encourage businesses to pay the Living Wage to their employees which, in turn, should also increase productivity therefore having a significant and positive effect, not only on the finances of individuals, but also in respect of the local and wider economy.

Through the Forum's investigations and with the assistance of Exeter University providing localised research, the Forum has satisfied the criteria of their Scope which was:-

- 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.
- 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.

The Forum is now in a position to provide final recommendations to its parent Scrutiny Committee which are contained within this final report. These recommendations provide a definitive way forward on a practical level, highlighting how the Council may influence factors which affect the difficulties faced by Exeter residents, in relation to the Cost of Living. It is the Forum's findings that particular attention to the areas of promoting the Living Wage, the positive effect of this on productivity and bids for specific project funding must be a current priority for the Council if it is to successfully support and assist the residents of Exeter in tackling the difficulties created by the Cost of Living.

## **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?**

The recommendations contained within this report, if approved, have the potential to contribute towards the improvement of the health and well being of Exeter residents and beyond and to improve the local economy.

**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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