

Council Meeting on 19th April 2023

Agenda Item No 8

Questions by Members to Full Council under Procedure rule 9.2

Question 1: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Deputy Leader of the Council from Councillor Mike Allen

Over-50s account for the majority of UK employment growth in the past decade, one in four have been furloughed this year and face devastating financial implications. Over 50s who fall out of the workforce are twice as likely to become long-term unemployed.

- a) How does EDDC ensure there is strong employment support for older workers and that employers are age-friendly and inclusive. Just a 1% increase in the number of people in work aged 50-64 could increase UK GDP by around £5.7 billion per year with knock on positive effects on local economies.
- b) Will EDDC commit to becoming an age-friendly employer leading by example and encourage employers in our area to do the same.
- c) Are the businesses EDDC contracts with asked whether they offer flexibility for older workers or how they recruit in a way that attracts older workers.
- d) How does EDDC ensure that local services that support unemployed people back to work reflect the needs of those aged over 50.
- e) How can EDDC work with DCC to use commissioning powers and work with local Further Education providers to ensure specifically tailored skills training for those in mid to later life, and develop ring-fenced funding for retraining after unemployment or redundancy for those in mid to later life. This should include sector-based training related to labour market opportunities and transferable skills.

Answer:

I appreciate the concern regarding employment support for the over 50s. The furlough scheme ran between April 2020 and October 2021. The latest labour market profile statistics from February of this year indicate that there were 415 unemployment benefit claimants aged 50 or above in District. That equates to 1.3% of the overall 50+ population which compares favourably to the equivalent figures of 1.8% for the South West and 2.8% for Great Britain. Our issue is less our older economically active residents of 50-64 years looking for work, and more our economically inactive 16-64 years resident population (people who are neither in employment nor unemployed). The same labour market profile shows that we have 17,200 such residents (Oct 2021 – Sept 2022) representing a higher proportion of our East Devon population than either the South West or Great Britain data (22.6% compared to 19.7 and 21.6 respectively). Of these economically inactive residents of working age, 86.9% in East Devon do not want a job – significantly higher than in the SW (82%) and Great Britain population.

It is this higher degree of economic inactivity in East Devon which has shaped our three UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills projects to be delivered in 2024-25. These will

focus on providing employment support for economically inactive residents of all ages with disabilities to improve their employment prospects. We will also be providing support for young residents not in employment, education or training to improve their employment opportunities. This is targeted at younger residents since levels of economic inactivity are significantly higher in our 16-24 years population. Lastly, we will be targeting our economically inactive residents across all age groups to encourage take up of re-skilling and up-skilling opportunities to gain net zero related skills such as accreditations required to enter the retrofitting marketplace.

We will continue to work with local Further Education colleges to ensure that the skills and training needs of our residents are met to best effect including through sector-based initiatives. A decision on whether to become formally recognised as an age-friendly employer, for example by signing up to the Age-Friendly Employer Pledge, would need to be considered by the new administration through the Personnel Committee and would link with other initiatives that HR are working on, including 'growing our own' to support entry in and progression through the organisation. Equally a requirement for business that the Council contracts with to offer flexibility for older workers would need to be considered through a review of our Procurement Strategy.

Question 2: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities, and Portfolio Holder Strategic Planning from Councillor Mike Allen

Please explain how much has been spent in the last 2 financial years on the new Local Plan.

Answer:

Production of the Local Plan utilises resources which are primarily held as part of the Planning Policy team budget, however this budget is also utilised for other planning policy work which is not part of the local plan and so splitting this out to identify the monies spent on the Local Plan from this budget is difficult. Furthermore much of the evidence base for the Local Plan has been jointly funded with the neighbouring authorities of Exeter City Council, Mid-Devon District Council, Teignbridge District Council and Devon County Council as part of an on-going programme of developing a shared evidence base which has been an approach taken for many years using funds held in a separate account. In addition resources from other services have also fed into work on the local plan including staff resources from teams including Economic Development, Countryside and Housing among others who have helped to produce policies and evidence documents relevant to those service areas. It is not therefore possible to identify exactly how much has been spent specifically on the new Local Plan. I can however assure you that wherever work can be carried out in house this has been done to minimise expense and the production of a shared evidence base with costs shared with neighbouring authorities wherever possible has further helped to keep the cost of external consultant reports to a minimum.