



Subject:	Economic Inactivity research
Date:	3 March 2021
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this paper is to provide the Committee with an update on the key findings of a report into barriers experienced by economically inactive residents within the Urban Village areas across Belfast.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the key findings and barriers of this research; and• Note and agree the way forward, based on this research.
3.0	Main report

3.1	<p>Members will be aware that economic inactivity is one of the most significant challenges for Belfast – and has been so for some time. Economic inactivity rates in the city are regularly ahead of the Northern Ireland average and, in some parts of the city, can be almost double the regional figure. A key element of the council’s work on employability is to focus on supporting inclusive growth by targeting our interventions on those furthest from the labour market – including those who are long-term unemployed and economically inactive. In order to understand the barriers faced by those individuals in finding work, the council undertook a research project in collaboration with The Executive Office’s Urban Villages programme. The data gathering element of the research was largely undertaken in advance of Covid-19. However, it is important to acknowledge that the pandemic is likely to exacerbate the barriers to economic activity as identified in the results of this research.</p>
3.2	<p>The research process was initiated through a series of meetings with representatives of the Urban Village Local Reference Groups and included desk research; 36 one-to-one interviews, 252 questionnaires and 12 focus groups to qualitatively explore any perceived barriers to economic inactivity in depth. Those engaged in the research are currently engaged within community provision within their local communities (through Urban Villages).</p>
3.3	<p>Of those individuals who were involved in this research, 1/3 have been out of work for between 2-5 years and 27% were out of work for over 5 years. Over half of respondents are living with a health condition or disability. Almost 3/4 of those aged between 19-49 years reported having no qualifications.</p>
	<p><u>Overview of key findings</u></p>
3.4	<p>While respondents were not specifically engaged on employability or skills-based projects when they were interviewed, over 75% considered securing employment to be important. Just under half stated that the salary level required for an individual to leave the welfare system in favour of paid employment was between £16,000 and £24,000. The two key driving factors for finding a job were for financial gain and also to have a sense of purpose.</p>
3.5	<p>The preferred employment sectors for female respondents were retail, office and administration. For males, the preferred employment sectors were manufacturing and construction. Only 2% view finance; and 6% IT as preferred employment sectors – while these are recognised as two key growth sectors for the city. 24% of respondents have considered the option of self-employment or starting their own business.</p>

3.6	<p>The main barriers identified by respondents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications: two thirds feel they require skills training and almost two thirds have been unable to resource this and feel this is exacerbated by a lack of employment experience and not being able to identify referees to provide to prospective employers • Intergenerational Economic Inactivity: three quarters indicated that the potential impact on their benefits, or those of their household, is a challenge to securing and remaining in a job and 87% reported that they do not have family support and encouragement to help them get a job • Capacity and Confidence: over two thirds described themselves as not being confident in presenting themselves at job interviews and 60% worried their communication skills would be a barrier in a job environment • Caring Responsibilities: two thirds of respondents have dependent children or care for other family members and 81% of those with primary care responsibilities cannot afford the childcare to work. Half of these respondents indicated they would need to work part time or secure flexible working arrangements • Health & Disability: almost a fifth of respondents stated that they live with a physical health condition and almost all of these stated they consider their physical health to be a barrier to employment. 26% of respondents stated they live with a mental health condition and all considered their mental health to be a barrier to employment • Age: almost two thirds of those aged 50+ years believe that age is a barrier to getting and remaining in a job • Legacy Issues: the research illustrated that 65% of respondents felt confident about working in a community not considered to their own although this was predominantly by those from ethnic minority/migrant communities • Language & Recognition of International Qualifications: just under 80% of black and minority ethnic (BAME) respondents feel that their ability to speak English is a challenge to getting and remaining in a job and 84% of BAME respondents have been unable to access certain types of training because they couldn't afford to pay.
3.7	<p>The research also identifies a key roles for local authorities in tackling long-term economic inactivity and notes that place-based solutions are necessary to reach those who are out of work for a long period and/or economically inactive. This confirms the rationale behind the ongoing work on the Labour Market Partnership for Belfast in partnership with the Department for Communities, as reported at the November meeting of this Committee.</p>
3.8	<p>Taking account of the findings, officers plan to use the insights in a number of ways:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share with the Department for Communities in order to explore the potential for additional support to address barriers – particularly the provision of support for childcare both during training and in the early stages of employment, in order to ensure that an individual can confidently take on a role • Ensuring that these findings shape all of our employability interventions for these target groups as part of our development approach • Continue to work with employers through our Employment Academy model, including negotiating with the employer to explore how the qualification/experience levels normally expected at recruitment stage can be adapted to provide opportunities for people within these target groups, with the Employment Academy packaging together the skills/qualifications required as well as employability support for the individual • Engaging with local communities around opportunities within the digital sector – including youth engagement support, school engagement activity and the co-design of Employment Academies and other bespoke solutions within this sector • Continuation of the Enterprise Pathway programme as a way of engaging with those who are economically inactive/long-term unemployed and helping them move into self-employment by providing intensive wrap-around support • Disseminating the research finding across Council, for example in the development of the Inclusive Growth City Charter through to our approach to Social Value and Developer Contributions as well as the economic, social and community recovery plans within Council • Continue to influence the scope and remit of the emerging Shared Prosperity Fund and other large-scale interventions to ensure that they are informed by the specific needs of these target groups and that eligible activity reflects their needs.
3.9	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>No specific financial or resource implications</p>
3.10	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The unit undertakes equality screening on the overall work programme to ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of each project. The Urban Villages programme covers targeted areas across Northern Ireland.</p>
4.0	Appendices
	N/A