

Report of the Head of Economic Growth

Scoping Report on the Economic Health of York City Centre

Summary

1. This scoping report presents the Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee with information on the economy of York city centre and themes that can be investigated to influence the city centre economy.

Background

2. In June 2018 this Committee welcomed the Executive Member for Economic Development and Community Engagement to its meeting and also received a presentation from CYC Head of Economic Growth which updated Members on the Economic Strategy 2016-23.
3. During the meeting Members expressed concerns at the number of empty shops in the city centre, but accepted that addressing this problem was complicated. However, it was agreed that York was doing well against national trends and across the city only three Council-owned properties were currently vacant.
4. A steady stream of high-profile retail failures is focussing national attention on “the future of the high street”. In York, there is a cluster of empty shops in Coney Street which has led to newspaper headlines suggesting that our retail sector is collapsing.
5. However York has one of the lowest vacancy rates in the UK, and a steadily growing tourism industry which is bringing increasing numbers of international visitors to the city. Employment in the city centre remains constant, but there are high numbers of jobs which are relatively low paid, bringing particular challenges to York due to our relatively high cost of living.
6. Amid all the calls on the Council to “do something!” there is little clarity on how we might influence the city centre economy beyond our role as a landlord, a highway authority and a planning authority.

7. The Committee Chair subsequently had a meeting with the Head of Economic Growth and the Assistant Director for Transport, Highways and Environment and agreed it would be useful to undertake a full Committee review of the city centre economy, the immediate problems it is facing and what measures could be taken to resolve them.

Options

8. Members can agree to undertake a full Committee review into the economy of York city centre, or not

Proposed Remit

9. Aim: To understand the economic health of York city centre and where the Council can influence the city centre economy.
10. Objectives:
 - a. To examine all the available evidence about York city centre as a retail location and how this has changed in recent years
 - b. Consider the factors that influence the city centre economy and what role the Council has to play
 - c. Understand the global trends that underpin changes in retail and the city centre environments and how these might affect York
 - d. Identify the Council's priorities with regard to the city centre economy.

Timeframe

11. It is envisaged that the review would be in a position to make recommendations after three meetings to:
 - i. Establish an evidence base – a briefing on the York city centre economy from the Economic Growth Team, existing key reports on city centres and retail space, consideration of York city centre as a location for employment and business growth and how York residents use our city centre;
 - ii. Gather evidence from Make It York, York Business Improvement District and York Retail Forum and consider a retail study being commissioned from the Business Rates Pool fund;

- iii. Consider a report summarising the above and making recommendations on key areas for the Council to focus on supporting a thriving York city centre

Consultation

12. The Committee will need to meet representatives from Make It York, York Business Improvement District, York Retail Forum and other relevant city centre partners.

Council Plan

13. This report is linked to the Prosperous City for All and A Council That Listens to Residents elements of the Council Plan.

Implications

14. There are no implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Risk Management

15. There are no risks attached to the recommendations in this report.

Recommendations

16. Members are asked to agree to undertake a full Committee review into the economy of York city centre

Reason: To help the focus on supporting a thriving York city centre

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Report Approved **Date** 17/07/2018

Wards Affected: Guildhall, Micklegate

All

For further information please contact the author of the report