

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**DATE:** 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2010

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**(For all Enquiries)**

**WARD(S):** All

**PORTFOLIO:** All

### **PART I** **FOR INFORMATION**

#### **RESPONSE TO THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN**

1. **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to make the Overview and Scrutiny Committee aware of:

- Measures taken to support people through the credit crunch.
- Unemployment levels and other impacts on communities.
- The new internal partnership, Slough Economic Taskforce (SET) developed as a direct result of the downturn and how we work with Partners.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Committee is requested to note the supporting information and appendices attached to this report.

3. **Community Strategy Priorities**

- **Celebrating Diversity, Enabling inclusion** - this priority is met by ensuring that all sections of the community are aware of the services being made available specifically as a result of the economic downturn to minimise effects as far as possible.
- **Prosperity for All** – supporting people that have become unemployed as a direct result of the downturn and those that are facing even tougher conditions in obtaining employment. Supporting the redundant executives in realigning their skills and supporting them into either alternative sectors or enterprise.

#### 4. **Other Implications**

##### Financial –

Much of the additional work outlined in Appendix A has been possible through external funding, however, existing resources have been used to lever in additional resources. There are no additional financial implications as a result of this information report. Current and future financial obligations are subject to normal council budget setting processes. There are no direct matched funding obligations current or in the future related to this report

Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications – there are no legal or Human rights Act issues arising from the recommendations in this report

##### Equalities Impact Assessment -

N/A but all projects outlined in Appendix A have carried out their own Equalities Impact Assessments

#### 5. **Supporting Information**

##### 5.1 **Slough Economic Taskforce**

- The global economic downturn affected the nation and many LAs were left unprepared and without resources to be able to respond effectively.
- SBC were swift to respond. An internal group was set up to track trends so that the scale of the problem could be understood.
- Slough Economic Taskforce launched to support local residents and businesses through the credit crunch and economic uncertainty.
- The group ensured Information on the Slough Borough Council website for residents and businesses was available – <http://www.slough.gov.uk/services/17997.aspx>
- Advice for residents including credit crunch leaflet for residents, credit crunch housing and benefits leaflet.
- Top tips on dealing with debt; local employment advice and support. There are also useful links to other parts of the council website and also to useful external websites.
- Advice for businesses including Billing Collections and Recovery Debt; Business Grants; European Funding; Credit Crunch help, advice and information.
- Credit crunch leaflet for residents and businesses available to download from website or from MyCouncil; libraries; GP's etc.

##### 5.2 **10 Point Plan**

Private, public and voluntary sectors were consulted to understand the pressures they were experiencing. As a result of this a 10 point plan was compiled to respond to what our partners informed us of.

The 10 point plan would:

- Provide advice and information on dedicated web pages for residents and businesses
- Provide a series of employment seminars and workshops explaining the range of support available for those unemployed or those fearful of unemployment
- A series of seminars and workshops for small and medium sized businesses on how to survive the recession
- The development of job matching services
- A leaflet providing information on the range of support available to residents and businesses
- Increased support proposed for volunteering opportunities
- Increased resources being made available for advice services
- Paying small local businesses sooner
- Increasing advice and information for the homeless
- Increasing advice and information for people who are in debt

### 5.3 **Housing Support**

- Housing and benefits leaflet for residents being distributed to banks, building societies, bodyshops etc.
- Signed up for fast track on Mortgage Rescue Scheme.
- Housing currently exploring pre-eviction panel to reduce no. of homeless
- Articles in the council's newspaper on housing and debt and welfare advice and also on employment and training opportunities
- Increased resources in our Housing Needs team and reviewed our Homelessness strategy to reflect the growing pressures on the housing market and for individuals during the current economic downturn.
- Housing have own multi agency "recession watch" group incl. Housing Officers, People 1<sup>st</sup>, CAB and Shelter.

### 5.4 **Debt Support**

- Data Analysis on front line services.
- Customer Service – debt & welfare advice – more staff being transferred into this area.
- Working with neighbouring authorities to set up a Credit Union.
- Working with specialist teams and other agencies to target and investigate illegal trade including fraud, illegal money lending, and high pressure selling.

### 5.5 **Business Support**

The Economic Development and Inclusion Team has partnered with Business Link to ensure that support is available to local small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) through the Credit Crunch. As a result a range of workshops and seminars

were delivered to ensure SMEs were aware of the support and advice available to them.

SME Seminars/Workshops included:

- Surviving the Credit Crunch - 24/03/09 (approx 100 attendees)
- Sustainability/Climate Change - 02/06/09 (approx 100 attendees)
- Marketing your business in a cost effective way - 13/10/09 (approx 80 attendees)

Future seminars planned for quarter 1: January – April 2010:

- MSD UK – Meet the Buyer
- 2012 Olympics – how to secure contracts
- Innovation – how can businesses be more innovative in the way they do business as well as the product they deliver
- Process Industries – information on support that is available specifically for this sector
- Skills – how to improve your skills or acquire the skills necessary to set up in Business

Other support available to SMEs:

- SMEs invoices paid within 10 days.
- Also exploring any options on business rates.
- Increased support for volunteering options.
- New Entrepreneurs Network
- Posters advertising leaflets at major council buildings.

## 5.6 **Employment Support**

- Annual Job Fair – Workshops held for the first time in January 2009 on support available to people who are unemployed or facing redundancy. Next event to take place 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010.
- Steps 2 Employment workshops and job clubs, CV writing support, application form filling and interview techniques.
- Additional funding for “Targeted Employment Support” project for 16-25 year olds and BME males
- Enhanced Advice & Guidance through the Adult Careers Prototype.
- Tracking NEET figures, looking at training and job opportunities available, and bringing together partners from Connexions, secondary schools, the local college, Jobcentre Plus to take practical action about the rising unemployment rates for 16-25 year olds.

- Working through the Children's Centres to track any rising unemployment among parents using them, and add to the services already available to parents about job hunting, benefits and available childcare.
- Tracking any other changes in schools or education and children's services to look at any impact on families and communities. Two recent examples are an increase in applications to become foster carers, and rising interest in childminding.

## 5.7 **Employment and Enterprise Group projects**

1. Steps 2 Employment – External funding has been sourced to set up specific support for those that are unemployed or have become unemployed as a direct result of recession. The project helps people with job search, CVs, interview tips and provides people with information on the current labour market.
2. Lone Parents Project – This project works specifically with Lone Parents providing careers information, advice and guidance, equipping participants with key employability skills and ensuring they receive all the necessary in work benefits and support.
3. Migration Works – A project funded by the Border and Immigration Office to support the newly arrived communities to integrate into the community as quickly as possible.
4. Slough Working Better – a national prototype which tests various ways of delivering careers information advice and guidance through various frontline services eg GP surgeries, My Council. One of the methods being tested is around placement opportunities for unemployed people. The funding has allowed the recruit of a Placement Officer to build links with employers for this to happen.
5. Enterprise Centre – The centre works with unemployed people across the town to provide employment support and advice. A recent partnership with BAA has enabled Slough unemployed people to be recruited and trained for terminal 5 retail opportunities.
6. Enterprise Link – This project works with people who aspire to become self employed and set up their own business. A recent new Entrepreneurs Network to provide advice, information, inspiration and informative speakers to upcoming, budding entrepreneurs.

**5.8 Across all the above projects, 2461 clients have been seen and provided with various elements of support. Of these 174 are known to have achieved sustainable employment. Others have gone into training or set up in business. Without the support of these projects, clients would more likely have remained unemployed, disillusioned and unsure of which route to take.**

## 5.9 **Unemployment in Slough**

Unemployment started to rise in 2008. Job seekers allowance figures rose in Jan 08 from 1580 to 1970 in Dec 08. This year, unemployment was 2260 in Jan 09 – 3,350 in Nov 09. However from Oct 09 – Nov 09 unemployment had declined by 165. It is envisaged that unemployment may be decreasing month on month but on a small scale. *(Please see appendix for a chart of this information)*

## 6. **Conclusion**

- Despite the economic downturn having adverse effects on certain sections of the community, relative to other authorities Slough is doing well.
- Unemployment slowed at a faster rate and reversed the upward trend, compared to other Berkshire Authorities
- Despite the downturn, we have helped to mitigate the impact of unemployment through the above projects. The key distinction to demonstrate this is that 16 to 25 year old unemployment is amongst the lowest in the country. Indeed the November figures show a dramatic fall in 18 to 25 year olds unemployment which has fallen more sharply than the rest of the South East and figures are the lowest since last March. Additionally our long term unemployed is lower than the UK and the South East as a whole. This suggests that the support infrastructure we provide is helping to prevent people from getting stuck in the rut of long term unemployment. We might have a slightly higher short term unemployment figure but more of them tend to find work again quickly
- Effective Partnership working has been demonstrated as a result of the downturn. Many projects, initiatives have been delivered in collaboration with internal and external partners.
- Initiatives have been possible through external funding
- There is still uncertainty around the lag factor for the economy e.g. America has demonstrated that although it has come out of recession it is still seeing unemployment rise. This could be because it takes time for confidence to rise, and employers feel that they have to make workers redundant to free up resources for other investments.

## 7. **Comments of other Committees**

The Cabinet considered this report at its meeting on 8th February, 2010 and noted the supporting information and appendices.

## 8. **Appendices Attached**

- 'A' - Unemployment in Slough
- 'B' - Labour Market profile of Slough

## 9. **Background Papers**

None