



Subject:	Request to present – Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC)
Date:	13 June 2018
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Claire Patterson, Business Research & Development Manager

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	As part of the ongoing commitment to hold regular strategic briefings, it is proposed that Committee receive an annual economic briefing and presentation from the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) at their meeting in September 2018. This provides an opportunity to consider the city and regional economic conditions and forecasts to inform future direction and priority setting around key inter-related programmes of work for the Council - growing the economy, employability & skills and city development.
1.2	Members will be aware that the Council have agreed to contribute to the work of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) to enhance the ongoing analysis and

	<p>monitoring of the city economy and support the underpinning evidence base for the Belfast Agenda and the emerging economic outcomes for the city.</p>
1.3	<p>The briefing will also provide an opportunity for the Committee to consider the work that the UUEPC have carried out on the development of a local skills barometer. This model has been developed at a Belfast City Region level to forecast the skills required by the economy and the likely availability of the skills in the population over the next 10 years. This will be used to inform, target and measure employability and skills interventions for Belfast. It has been used in the development of the Belfast Region City Deal proposals.</p>
1.4	<p>Members are asked to consider the economic briefing in the context of the current uncertainties associated with the decision for the UK to leave the EU and the pressing need to develop new approaches to address the city's persistent challenges as a result of high levels of economic inactivity, low skills levels and the need to grow the private sector.</p>
1.5	<p>The Committee has expressed the importance of and their interest in hearing from a diverse range of perspectives on economic issues and prospects for Belfast and the region.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agree to receive a presentation from the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre at the September Committee meeting; and – Consider and make suggestions for any additional economic input at a future meeting.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>The Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) is an independent economic research centre focused on producing evidence-based research to inform policy development and implementation. It engages with all organisations that have an interest in enhancing the economy and its work is relevant to government, business and the general public. The Centre's Advisory Board includes Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Department for the Economy, First Trust Bank, Ulster University and Department of Finance. Belfast City Council is the first local government member.</p>
3.2	<p>The Centre has developed a macroeconomic model for Northern Ireland providing a comprehensive set of economic data and forecasts, which will help assess the impact of potential policy initiatives on the Northern Ireland economy and contribute effectively to the</p>

policy debate. The Centre has also developed a Skills Barometer for Northern Ireland, which assesses the current and emerging skill needs by sector as well as forecasting future skill needs in Northern Ireland. This work will directly inform how the Council approaches its key priorities to address the city challenges of supporting business start-up and growth and addressing the skills and employability issues in the city.

3.3

Members are asked to consider the economic briefing in the context of the current uncertainties associated with Brexit and the pressing need to develop new approaches to address the city's persistent challenges of high levels of economic inactivity, low skills levels and the need to grow the private sector. The new Brexit committee may also wish to avail of the opportunity for these briefings.

3.4

The factors that influence economic growth do not solely lie within the local government's control, therefore strengthening business relationships and local-central government relationships is a central tenant of the Belfast Agenda as well as being critical to build the city's role as the regional driver.

3.5

The UUEPC acts as a 'critical friend' for the Council, which has been central to the development of the Belfast Agenda and the key priority of growing the economy. This ensures that the priorities, programmes and plans are evidence based and targeting the areas that will have maximum impact; for example, targeting business support and employability & skills programmes. The UUEPC has been involved in a number of specific pieces of work that have informed the Belfast Region City Deal and the Council's plans and programmes. This includes:

- producing economic forecasts to inform the Local Development Plan to shape the city's future development;
- assessing the under-represented groups in enterprise and self-employment;
- analysis of the key employment sectors emerging from the Belfast Agenda target of 46,000 new jobs in the economy;
- briefings on the potential opportunities and implications of Brexit for Belfast and the City Region; and
- developing a localised skills barometer for Belfast and the City Region.

3.6

It is proposed that the presentation and briefing will draw on these key research pieces to outline the work of the UUEPC, the key issues for the Northern Ireland economy and economic forecast as well as what this means for Belfast as the regional economic driver.

3.7	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that the Council is represented on the Board of the UUEPC and has previously agreed to contribute £25,000 per annum for a two-year period (which will be subject to renewal in 2019/20).</p>
3.8	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>There are no equality and good relations implications.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>