

**Democratic Services Section  
Legal and Civic Services Department  
Belfast City Council  
City Hall  
Belfast  
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast  
City Council**

**HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE –  
REPORTS TO FOLLOW**

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet both online and in-person in the Lavery Room - City Hall on Wednesday, 6th December, 2023 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

**AGENDA:**

2. **Restricted Items**

- (a) Belfast Zoo Quarterly Update (Pages 1 - 6)

6. **Growing Business and the Economy**

- (a) Building an inclusive labour market - research and event update (Pages 7 - 14)
- (d) Employability and Skills - Bridges to Progression Update (Pages 15 - 18)

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6  
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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<b>Subject:</b>	Inclusive Labour Market conference
<b>Date:</b>	6 December 2023
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy

**Restricted Reports**

**Is this report restricted?** Yes  No

**Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.**

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

**If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?**

<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Call-in**

**Is the decision eligible for Call-in?** Yes  No

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
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1.1	The purpose of this report is to update members on plans for a conference to take place on 22 January 2024. The conference will focus on how to make the labour market more inclusive – with a particular focus on addressing economic inactivity.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the report including details of the planned 22 January 2024 event focusing on inclusive labour markets</li> <li>• Promote the event to key contacts in their networks in order to ensure a wide representation and discussion at the event.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that funding for projects and organisations working with those who are economically inactive were significantly impacted with the cessation of EU funds. Traditionally, this work had been resourced through European Social Fund (ESF) funding. This concluded in March 2023. The replacement funding – Shared Prosperity Fund – does include a theme which focuses on People and Skills. The most significant element of this funding – around £50million – has been set aside for projects which focus on addressing economic inactivity. 18 projects were awarded funding for delivery through to March 2025 (from April 2023). 13 of these projects are based in Belfast (but some have regional coverage).</p> <p>3.2 As these projects mobilise for delivery, there are concerns around the sustainability of the funding model (which will run out in just over a year from now) as well as the ability of those projects, alone, to address a long-standing structural issue in the local labour market.</p> <p>3.3 In Belfast, economic inactivity presents a significant challenge for the city. The current economic inactivity rate for Belfast is around 29% - slightly ahead of the regional average. There are a number of reasons why people are economically inactive: students are counted among this figure as are those with caring responsibilities (looking after the family and home), health reasons and early retirees. While the inactivity rate is high, the overall unemployment rate for the region has decreased to an all-time low: figures for November 2023 show it sitting around 2.1%. What this means is that employers are competing within a limited talent pool. However the inactivity rate has never seen any real improvement over many decades – regardless of the prevailing economic climate and employment/unemployment rate.</p> <p>3.4 In more recent times, there has been a wider discourse around what solutions are needed to address the challenges of economic inactivity. This is a very complex problem that will require</p>

	<p>a multi-faceted solution involving partners across many areas including health; skills support; economic development; social security and childcare support.</p>
3.5	<p>While DfC retains the policy remit for this area of work, the input from a wider number of partners means that sustainable solutions that make an impact can only be found if all partners get behind the issue and make long-term commitments in this space.</p>
3.6	<p>One of the reflections that we have identified is the absence of a clear understanding of the scale, nature and scope of the challenge. This inhibits the ability to have an informed discussion on potential solutions. In recognition of this, under the banner of the Belfast Labour Market Partnership, officers are planning to host an event at Ulster University's Belfast campus on 22 January 2024 entitled: Inclusive Labour Markets: Opportunities, Challenges and Solutions.</p>
3.7	<p>The aim of the conference is to facilitate discussion and instigate actions which can address economic inactivity and champion inclusive employment, stimulate an informed discussion of the need for and value of creating a more inclusive labour market and work towards a coherent solution that can improve outcomes for citizens and support a more competitive and productive economy.</p>
3.8	<p>The objectives of the event are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a shared understanding of the nature and scale of economic inactivity across the region</li> <li>• Establish a critical analysis of challenges and solutions within 'the system'</li> <li>• Develop a shared understanding of what is possible and what could be achieved through collaboration</li> <li>• Provide opportunities to learn from best practice, exchange knowledge and share ideas for the future</li> <li>• Identify key steps require to move towards a sustainable solution.</li> </ul>
3.9	<p>The conference is intended to act as an opener for a much wider discussion on this issue. This is particularly important given the pending funding end-date in March 2025 and the need to ensure that a well-considered solution is developed and resourced to take over at that point.</p>
3.10	<p>Aligning with key policy and strategic priorities, including the Belfast Agenda, the Inclusive Growth Strategy, Levelling Up and 10X, the programme will include opportunities for discussions on a range of issues such as:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for greater engagement between health and employment support services</li> <li>• Potential implications of further welfare reform</li> <li>• Re-skilling and upskilling support to encourage labour market participation and progress</li> <li>• A future investment model that can make an impact.</li> </ul>
3.11	<p>A draft agenda can be found in Appendix 1. This is still in development and is subject to further changes as we work through it with our partner organisations.</p>
3.12	<p>The target audience for the event will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer/business organisations: Chambers of Commerce, FSB, CBI, Software Alliance, CITB, NISCC etc. as well as local enterprise agencies and anchor institutions such as Belfast HSC Trust, Belfast Harbour</li> <li>• Government departments and agencies responsible for policy, commissioning and delivery: Department for Communities, Department for the Economy, NI Skills Council, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Department for Health, Public Health Agency, Department of Justice, The Executive Office</li> <li>• Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) across the region</li> <li>• Employability and skills providers and representative/support groups such as NICVA, UKSPF projects, Apprenticeships NI providers, FE colleges, Belfast Area Partnerships, VCSE panel, advice sector etc.</li> <li>• Other key stakeholders within the employability and skills field such as RSA, Institute for Employment Studies, IPPO, QUB, UU, ERSI, The Law Centre etc.</li> <li>• Academic input through universities, colleges and research institutes.</li> </ul>
3.13	<p>In order to set the scene and ensure that the discussion is grounded in research and analysis, Ulster University’s Economic Policy Centre (EPC) team will undertake research in advance of the conference and this will be shared on the day. This research will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context and background: high level long-term trends in economic inactivity, identifying the social and economic implications, backdrop of demographic and labour shortage challenges, importance and success of third sector in working with key marginalised groups and need for creative solutions</li> <li>• Understanding the economically inactive: outlining definitions, levels and rates of inactivity in Belfast/NI, overview of headline reasons for inactivity</li> <li>• Medium term and post-pandemic picture: reasons for inactivity both medium term and post-pandemic; long-term sick (e.g. benefit system, reasons for sickness, severity of</li> </ul>



	<p>conditions, increased waiting lists, etc.), looking after family home (e.g. women overrepresented in unpaid labour, lack of flexibility in positions across all sectors/occupations, affordable childcare etc.), early retirees (e.g. ‘great resignation’ post-pandemic but broader need to retain older workers) and other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic concentration: outline the spatial composition of inactivity, highlighting inner city areas that perform particularly poorly on multiple economic indicators (e.g. inactivity, employment deprivation, multiple health conditions, poverty) and how these indicators link together to form at times entrenched concentrations over many years</li> <li>• Demand-side insights: understanding where jobs are likely to come from; in what numbers; what skills levels they will require – and thinking about potential impacts for engaging those not currently actively engaged in the labour market</li> <li>• Policy and employer solutions: begin to identify policy solutions and the need for creativity, including third-sector cooperation, cross-departmental approaches and employer engagement.</li> </ul>
3.14	<p>There will also be a contribution from Tony Wilson who leads up the Brighton-based think tank Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and who is currently working on the Commission for the Future of Employment Support. Tony has worked at the heart of UK government on a range of labour market and skills issues and has particular expertise in labour market policy and analysis, the design, delivery and evaluation of employment and skills programmes and supporting organisations to understand and apply evidence of “what works” in employment policy and service delivery. Tony was part of the team that developed the Employability NI model which had, at its core, the Labour Market Partnerships structure so he is very familiar with the Northern Ireland landscape.</p>
3.15	<p>The event will also include an input from Andy Haldane, Chief Executive of RSA and former Chief Economist at the Bank of England. Belfast City Council has been working closely with the RSA over a number of years on projects such as Digital Badging.</p>
3.16	<p>It is hoped that the conference can act as the start of a conversation about what needs to change to create the best conditions for achieving an inclusive labour market. It is expected that it will lead to further cross-sector engagement in order to drill into this complex issue and to try to identify sustainable solutions that can start to make an impact on what has been an intractable challenge for many decades. This has been identified as a priority area of work in the refresh of the Belfast Agenda.</p>

3.17	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>Funding for the event has been set aside within existing Employability and Skills and Labour Market Partnership budgets already approved by this committee. Ulster University is making the venue available free of charge.</p>
3.18	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>The outcomes of this event are to try to identify solutions that can have a positive impact on equality and good relations as well as addressing other economic and social challenges. The event will include invitees from all across the region.</p>
4.0	<p><b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b></p>
	<p><b>Appendix 1:</b> Draft conference programme</p>

<b>Inclusive Labour Markets: Opportunities, Challenges and Solutions Ulster University Belfast Campus, 22 January 2024</b>	
08:45-09:15	<b>Registration, refreshments and networking</b>
09:15-09:20	<b>Event Welcome</b>
09:20-09:25	<b>Context and Overview</b>
09:25-09:45	<b>Economic inactivity: who, what, where and why?</b> UU Economic Policy Centre
09:45-10:05	<b>Emerging findings from the Commission of the Future of Employment Support: lessons for Northern Ireland</b> Tony Wilson, Director, Institute for Employment Studies
10:05-10:35	<b>Panel discussion: reflections on the research and emerging Commission findings</b>
10:35-10:55	<b>Comfort break and refreshments – move to breakout rooms</b>
11:00-12:00	<b>Breakout sessions</b>
	<b>Breakout session 1: Health and employment services – working together?</b> <i>More than 110,000 people in NI are sick and disabled and out of work. This figure is proportionately higher than RoI and all other UK regions. This session will focus on ways in which our health and employment services might work together better. What lessons have been learned about effective personal support? Are there local-level interventions that could have a positive impact if they were scaled up? Do we need to develop new programmes in NI and, if so, what should they look like?</i>
	<b>Breakout session 2: Future challenges: welfare reform and advice</b> <i>The introduction of Universal Credit is ongoing and further reforms are planned. The implementation of these reforms has been a significant challenge to individuals, JBOs and employment service providers. What will be the future challenges and how are JBOs responding? What role can the advice sector play - working alongside employment services - to ensure that all claimants receive a comprehensive and quality support service that meets their needs?</i>
	<b>Breakout session 3: Joining up skills and employment services</b> <i>With unemployment levels at a record low, employers are operating in a challenging labour market. By widening their approach to talent attraction to include engagement with those not currently in the labour market, there are opportunities to address those pressures. But what is the skills journey for those who are not currently in work? And is there more that can be done to encourage training and upskilling for those who are unemployed and economically inactive? How can companies think more laterally about their approach to talent attraction and retention? And what support is available to help them do that?</i>
	<b>Breakout session 4: Resourcing the solution: discussion on the future investment model for economic inactivity and labour market support</b> <i>The principal funding source for economic support delivery is currently SPF. With no clarity of commitment beyond March 2025, what should the resourcing model for this support look like? Do we need to think more radically about the system? And who might be involved? What can we learn about good practice examples in other locations and what impact would this have in NI - both in terms of investment levels and in terms of outcomes?</i>
12:00-12:15	<b>Comfort Break – return to plenary session</b>
12:15-12:35	<b>Feedback from breakout sessions</b>
12:35-13:00	<b>People Make Places: inclusive labour markets at the heart of successful towns and cities</b> Andy Haldane, Chief Executive, RSA
13:00-13:15	<b>Next steps and close</b>
13:15	<b>Lunch and networking</b>

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Subject:	Employability and Skills – Bridges to Progression
Date:	6 December 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Sinéad O'Regan, Employability & Skills Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information relating to any individual</li> <li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li> <li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li> <li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li> <li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li> <li>6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction</li> <li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li> </ol>	
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the allocation of Bridges to Progression resources based on the outcome of the competitive application process undertaken.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approve the allocation of Labour Market Partnership (LMP) resources for Bridges to Progression and note the proposals to seek proposals from delivery partners to provide targeted support that can improve outcomes for participants.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><u>Labour Market Partnership</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that the Labour Market Partnership is an intervention supported by DfC within all 11 council areas. Resources from the Labour Market Partnership enable the Council to increase the range and scope of employability and skills activity. The LMP also provides a platform for engagement with government departments, community partners and business organisations as a means of refocusing regional programmes more effectively within the Belfast area. The LMP action plan recognises that, while there are gaps that have been identified that will necessitate the creation of new interventions, not all activity need be new ‘provision’ or ‘programmes’; sometimes it is equally important to profile and/or promote existing interventions. One of these interventions is Bridges to Progression which officers have ensured operates as a ‘test and learn’ to inform any recommissioning of Skills for Life &amp; Work DfE contracts.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Bridges to Progression</u></p> <p>Bridges to Progression is an intervention to support young people aged 16-17 years who are at risk of disengaging from Skills for Life &amp; Work due to their personal circumstances. Participants can access intensive personal support to help them progress in and complete their formal training, with the ambition of improving the levels of progression into employment or further training. Previous analysis had flagged a very high level of drop out from these programmes, particularly in Belfast. It showed that the reasons behind participants no longer engaging with the programme related to wider social challenges – rather than the programme content itself.</p>

3.3 At the October 2023 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, it was agreed that officers would seek expressions of interest from organisations delivering these programmes, outlining how they would use resources to add value to the core activity with the objective of improving outcomes for participants. It was also agreed that officers would undertake assessment of the applications for funding in line with the approach detailed in this report.

3.4 While all Training for Success/Skills for Life & Work providers were invited to submit applications for 2023/24 outlining how they would use the resources, seven applied and six met the quality threshold. Bridges to Progression offers an average of £750 per participant up to the maximum of £90,000 allocated from LMP Budget 2023/24:

Applicant	Activity proposed	Requested	Awarded
Springvale	<b>Engage Programme:</b> teambuilding, mentoring, mental health support, employer engagement & lifestyle support	£19,811	£15,113
People First	<b>Employ a counsellor:</b> 1-1 and group counselling sessions, crisis response service, behavioural support through CBT & staff support around boundaries, signposting and managing challenging behaviour	£20,000	£15,257
Springboard	<b>HeadStart Programme:</b> lifestyle support, employer engagement, training, team building and extra tutoring support for essential skills	£18,466	£14,087
Workforce	<b>Jets Programme:</b> personal and social development mentoring, employability coaching	£20,000	£15,257
Bryson	<b>Well-Mind:</b> mental health support through goal planning, conflict resolution, health and nutrition	£19,700	£15,028
Impact	<b>LEAVE Programme:</b> employability mentoring, mental health support, employer interfacing, training, workplace resilience, steps to overall participation	£20,000	£15,257

3.5 While the LMP budget has £90,000 allocated for Bridges to Progression, the total cost of applications above was £117,977. As outlined above, officers recommend to proportionally reduce each award to ensure that we keep within budget.

3.6 The key performance indicators are to engage with 120 young people at risk of disengaging from Skills for Life & Work for a minimum of 10 hours contact time. With the submissions and awards as detailed above we are confident we can deliver a quality and effective intervention to support those most at risk of disengagement supporting a minimum of 120 young people.

Officers are also engaging with the Department for the Economy to seek to incorporate the flexibility offered within Bridges to Progression with future iterations of Skills for Life & Work with the aim of improving employability outcomes. The Department are keen to ensure that

3.7	<p>the learning from Bridges to Progression are utilised as a ‘testbed’ for innovative approaches to keep young people engaged on and progressing from statutory programmes such as Skills for Life &amp; Work. This engagement will therefore include establishing common measurement and evaluation tools and processes as well as convening targeted engagement with each provider and their participants to capture learning in real time.</p> <p><b><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the agreed 2023/24 budget for the Belfast LMP Action Plan.</p>
3.8	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>The project referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. New projects or service areas are equality screened and a rural needs assessment completed. Consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts at the initial stages of project development.</p>
4.0	<b>Appendices</b>
	None