

# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 13th October, 2021

## HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);  
Aldermen Dorrian and Kingston; and  
Councillors Beattie, Brooks, Donnelly, Ferguson,  
Harvey, Heading, Howard, Hussey, Long, Lyons, Maskey,  
McLaughlin, McMullan, O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.

Also present: Councillors de Faoite and McAteer.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;  
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;  
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration  
and Development;  
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;  
Ms. E. Henry, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism; and  
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

No apologies were reported.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee of 8th and 22nd September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th October.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

### **Correspondence - Sustainable and Active Travel**

The Chairperson drew the Committee's attention to correspondence which had been received from the Private Secretary to the Minister for Infrastructure, in response to the Committee's request to the Minister to reiterate the need for working in support of investment into the required protected cycle lane network and to support the future roll out of the Belfast Bikes Scheme, extending its reach and accessibility throughout the city.

The Members of the Committee noted the correspondence.

**Restricted Items**

**The information contained in the report associated with the following three items was restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.**

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following three items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

**BRT Phase 2 - Draft Consultation Response**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 8th September, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) attended the meeting and presented the three shortlisted options which had been identified for public consultation and engagement, to link north and south Belfast:

1. O'Neill Road via Antrim Road to Cairnshill;
2. Longwood Road via Shore Road to Cairnshill; and
3. O'Neill Road via Shore Road to Cairnshill.

She pointed out that the public consultation period had been set from 26th July to 4th October, however, for the Council to share an agreed response to the Public Consultation an extension had been granted to the submission of the response until ratified by Council on the 1st November 2021.

After discussion, it was:

Moved by Alderman Kingston,  
Seconded by Councillor Hussey,

That the Members of the Committee agree that the Council response to the BRT Phase 2 Public Consultation would support the Shore Road route option (Shore Road to O'Neill Road), incorporating that the Council was not supportive of the introduction of a two-way system and associated adjacent halts in Donegall Place.

**Amendment**

Moved by Councillor Maskey,  
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin,

That the Council response to the BRT Phase 2 Public Consultation would support the Antrim Road route option with the proviso that, it incorporated, that the Council was not supportive of the introduction of a two-way system and associated adjacent halts in Donegall Place.

On a vote, 14 Members voted for the amendment, and five against and it was declared carried.

The amendment was thereupon put to the meeting as the substantive motion and passed.

The Members of the Committee:

- Noted that DfI had agreed to grant an extension to the consultation response until after the Council meeting of the 1st November to enable full Council to consider any response the Council may wish to make;
- Agreed that the Council response would support the delivery of the BRT Phase 2, and recognise the significant importance of the investment in terms of addressing climate change, delivering modal shift and connecting people with opportunities and amenities, and alignment with key policy and strategy documents;
- Agreed that, regardless of the selected North route, that the unsuccessful route would still be viewed as a primary public transport corridor with bus priority infrastructure, low or zero carbon vehicles, ticketless systems, feeder services and P&R facilities, and recommended that high quality connections to Glengormley are delivered;
- Agreed that the Council response would support the South preferred route and recommend that the Ravenhill Road was treated as a priority active travel corridor connecting a dense population in South Belfast with the Ormeau Park Gasworks Bridge and dedicated cycle infrastructure into the city centre;
- Agreed that the Bankmore link, as a dedicated sustainable and active travel corridor, would be supported by Council, and requested that DfI work with Council to optimise the route and regeneration potential of this corridor;
- Agreed that the Council response would identify the failure to connect directly to the Transport Hub, as a missed opportunity in terms of providing a coherent and comprehensive transport connection, and that by strategically realigning the local road network there were significant opportunities to address the current status of Great Victoria St;
- Agreed that the Council was not supportive of the introduction of a two-way system and associated adjacent halts in Donegall Place and that alternative options should be explored;
- Agreed that the Council response would request that, under the Bolder Vision, that DfI would work closely with key stakeholders, including Translink, City Council, the Chamber, UU and anchor institutions to develop a short,

sharp review for delivering effective public transportation, vehicular access and spaces for people requirements of the future city centre; and

- Agreed that the response would make recommendations that, due consideration would be given to overcoming localised issues through detailed engagement, including access and provision for local businesses, problem parking in adjacent areas, accessibility both during and after construction, and mitigating the impacts of construction.

### **Proposal**

Moved by Councillor O'Hara,  
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the Council response to the BRT Phase 2 Public Consultation would include the following recommendations:

- That the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) immediately introduce 12-hour bus priority lanes along all of the considered routes;
- That DfI consider the expansion of rail halts along the Shore Road;
- That the south bound route extends further south, beyond Cairnshill Park and Ride to Carryduff; and
- that DfI expediate residential parking schemes.

On a vote, 14 Members voted for the proposal and five against and it was declared carried.

### **A City Imagining Cultural Strategy – Update on Events**

The Senior Manager for Culture and Tourism provided the Members with an update on the ongoing development of city events as part of the 10-year cultural strategy, A City Imagining and on the progress against the new approach to St Patrick's Day from 2022.

Following discussion, the Committee noted the content of the report and agreed to approve four creative development awards for St Patrick's Day 2020.

### **Future City Centre Programme: Vacant Premises**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on a programme of work to address the rising number of vacant premises in the city centre, in multiple locations, including long established and resilient streets.

The Committee agreed to:

- Note the emerging programme of work to address the increasing number of vacant premises across the city centre, including ongoing data gathering and analysis;
- Note the refresh of the 'Retail and Leisure Proposition' for the City Centre to provide an updated overview of the city centre's performance in terms of retail and leisure-based occupiers and trends, together with evidence-based recommendations;
- Note the planned appointment of a commercial agent to assist with a pilot 'matchmaking' service to align potential business/occupier interest with suitable properties and to assist with the recommendations from the 'Retail & Leisure Proposition';
- Note ongoing work regarding targeted strategic acquisitions including the update on 2 Royal Avenue; and
- Approve the development and delivery of a pilot Vacancy Grant Programme to be rolled out over two years.

The Committee further agreed to extend the programme to include arterial routes.

### **Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is provide the Committee with an outline of the proposed approach to supporting local business associations to develop and deliver interventions that will drive footfall and create vibrancy in those areas.**

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to:**

- **Note and agree the approach to accessing funding to support the delivery of area-based support for local business associations to increase vibrancy and drive footfall in anticipation of a go-live date in early November 2021.**

#### **3.0 Main report**

- 3.1 Members will be aware of the ongoing challenges faced by local businesses as a result of COVID-19. The specific impact on the city centre has already been the subject of significant discussion and while there is some research to suggest that businesses outside of the city centre may not have been**

affected to the same extent, it is clear that retail and hospitality businesses in particular across the board have suffered as a result of the successive lockdowns.

- 3.2 The council has supported local business associations over many years, but the drive from these groups does tend to vary at different times. Over recent months, we have seen a significant increase in interest from a number of existing business associations across the city, as well as the establishment of new business associations. While the needs vary from area to area, they generally involve environmental improvements (additional planting, improvements to open space), creation of seating areas/new focal points, animation, cultural programming, events and local promotion activities.
- 3.3 Within the existing departmental budget, there is some limited financial provision to support business associations, but it is clear that many of the activities identified above could not be accommodated within this spend.
- 3.4 Given the feedback from the businesses, we have been engaging with relevant teams across the council to consider how we can establish a streamlined process of support for the organisations. We have also had some preliminary engagement with the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to explore whether they may be able to provide financial resources to extend the budget provision. The engagement of the departments is also critical, given the need to engage with them in order to progress many of the interventions in the public realm.
- 3.5 DfC has identified a potential opportunity to secure resources through their Revitalisation programme (subject to application and internal businesses case). This support is in keeping with the work recently undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG), which DfC have sponsored, in developing a 'Living High Street Toolkit'. This toolkit is premised on building capacity within the high street business and community sectors of towns and neighbourhood centres (such as the arterial routes) and viewed through the lens of a combined economic, physical regeneration and environmental perspective. It is, however, very much based on building the capacity within the business communities to identify and take ownership of driving forward change in their areas. DfC considers that this initiative could act as a pilot to inform future approaches and funding investments.
- 3.6 Following discussions with DfC/DfI and other sections across the council, the Enterprise and Business Growth Unit

and the City Regeneration and Development Division have developed an outline approach to move these proposals forward. Subject to approval at this committee and DfC's internal processes, officers intend to launch this initiative in November 2021.

**3.7** The overarching purpose of the initiative is to strengthen the competitiveness of our local business destinations, focusing on actions which aim to:

- Support the development of shared and safely accessible commercial areas
- Support the diversification of business destinations outside of the city centre
- Undertake initiatives that will bring together key stakeholders to benefit business destinations outside of the city centre
- Undertake initiatives that improve the quality of urban design, distinctiveness and townscape quality.

**3.8** The objectives include:

- Increasing engagement and partnership working between statutory partners and local business associations
- Supporting the development of area-based actions plans which address specific local concerns and deliver specific, measurable benefits over the short/medium and long term
- Increasing footfall and sales as a direct result of marketing and promotional activity; generating new customers or sustaining customer loyalty through increasing sales revenue, increasing the number of new customers or developing repeat business
- Enhancing the profile of the area with a view to stimulating economic activity
- Supporting the growth and development of businesses engaged in associated activity.
- Supporting the sustainability of businesses and local business associations.

**3.9** The proposed initiative will put in place a 2-year pilot programme of support for business associations that are based outside of the city centre boundary/ BID areas. This programme will involve a two-stage process:

- Stage 1 of the support will engage new and existing traders and business associations. It will help those groups that are not formally constituted to do so (being constituted will be a pre-requisite for accessing the funding). It will also provide support to groups to develop an area-based action

plan. This action plan will form the basis for moving to a stage 2 application. It will demonstrate how the group will meet the programme objectives around driving footfall and creating vibrancy in the area and will identify the priority areas for action, based on research and consultation with local businesses

- Stage 2 will enable the group to draw down resources to support delivery. Key areas of expenditure will include marketing, activities aimed at driving footfall to an area, developing business skills, enhancing the look and feel through small-scale environmental improvements, animating the area through events and activities and providing opportunities for groups to engage with representatives in statutory organisations and other partners across the city (overview of support included in Appendix 1). Associations will be provided with technical assistance throughout the process – both in terms of business support and engagement and in terms of the specialist technical skills associated with small-scale infrastructure investments.

- 3.10 It is envisaged that the pilot will support up to 10 business associations to access funding. Depending on the level of demand for support, a proposal may be submitted to extend the scheme (subject to appropriate approvals and access to resources). The total budget available to each association through stage 2 is a maximum of £40,000. The total budget request to DfC to support this scheme is £475,000, in addition to a £30,000 contribution from Belfast City Council to support the delivery of consultancy support for stage 1 which sits within the existing council budgets.

3.11 Financial and Resource Implications

The indicative budget allocations are conditional on securing resources from DfC, as set out above. The activities outlined within this report are expected to be resourced through an application and business case to the DfC Revitalisation fund, with the exception of £30,000 which will be from the 2021/22 Enterprise and Business Growth budget.

While the Enterprise and Business Growth team will coordinate this programme of work and remain the accountable team, the nature of the activities to be delivered will require input across the department.



**3.12 Equality or Good Relations Implications/  
Rural Needs Assessment**

**The proposed project referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. The proposed project will go through a process of equality screening which will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts.”**

The Committee agreed:

- the approach to accessing funding to support the delivery of area-based support for local business associations to increase vibrancy and drive footfall in anticipation of a go-live date in early November 2021; and
- that officers undertake to present a report to a future meeting of the Committee outlining how Economic Development Officers could be assigned to understand and address specific areas of north, south, east, and west Belfast.

**Matters Referred Back from Council**

**Belfast City Nightlife and Night-time Economy**

The Director of Economic Development reminded the Committee that the Council, at its meeting on 4th October, had considered the following motion which had been proposed by Councillor de Faoite and seconded by Councillor Smyth:

“Belfast City Council:

- i. Recognises the profound impact of the pandemic on the city’s nightlife, music, arts and entertainment sectors and the night-time economy and acknowledges the actions of Council Officers to support a managed return of Belfast’s nightlife in difficult circumstances;
- ii. Further recognises that, for many residents and visitors, Belfast at night may not feel safe or welcoming at present due to changes in behaviour and the use of space over the last 18 months;
- iii. Believes significant night-time challenges existed prior to COVID-19, including issues around licensing, policing, public safety, diversity, organisational and venue capacity, public transit and sustainability;
- iv. Further believes that the establishment of a vibrant, diverse and sustainable nightlife between 6pm and 6am will help us meet the objectives set out in the Belfast Agenda, including encouraging city centre living and creating a vibrant, well-connected environment for people to enjoy;

- v. Seeks to create a nightlife for the City which is inclusive of young people, women, LGBT+ people and ethnic minorities;
- vi. Believes that this work to establish Belfast's nightlife takes on a new urgency following the pandemic;
- vii. Notes that several cities have chosen to establish a nightlife co-ordinator including Dublin, London, Amsterdam, Washington D.C., New York, Paris, Zurich, Toulouse and Mannheim;
- viii. Shall convene a one day roundtable discussion about the future of Belfast's nightlife and the immediate challenges posed in the city between 6pm and 6am, with Elected Members, relevant Executive Ministers and political representatives, trade unions, public and private transport providers, artists, event organisers, venue owners, industry and consumer representatives, student unions, Belfast City Youth Council and non-profit organisations, including but not limited to Reclaim The Night, the Rainbow Project, Women's Aid and the SOS Bus; and
- ix. Agrees to establish a co-ordinator for Belfast's nightlife or "Night Mayor" who will co-ordinate the work of the Council and relevant partners in developing and promoting the city's nightlife and night-time economy following the roundtable discussion."

He pointed out that, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the Motion was referred without discussion to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

Councillor de Faoite addressed the Committee and referred to the Belfast Agenda. He stated that it did not mention the nightlife economy and that it should include a focus on Belfast City nightlife and the nighttime economy. He added that the Council, as city leaders, should take the time to bring interested partners and stakeholders together to establish clear parameters and appoint a champion to lead on that work.

### **Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Hussey,  
Seconded by Alderman Kingston,

That Committee agrees that, in advance of a report on how the Motion would be facilitated, resourced and managed, officers would establish the feasibility and interest in convening a roundtable discussion and the creation of a Night Mayor.

On a vote, five Members voted for the proposal and 13 against and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed that a report on how the Motion would be facilitated, resourced and managed would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

### **Community Wealth Building**

The Director of Economic Development reminded the Committee that the Council, at its meeting on 4th October, considered the following motion which had been proposed by Councillor Murphy and seconded by Councillor Black:

“This Council:

- i. Recognises the economic disruption caused to communities across the district caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency, periods of economic recession, and Tory austerity;
- ii. Further recognises long-standing economic problems in the District, including inequality, low-paid employment, poor rates of socially ineffective investment, deprivation, and unsustainable levels of carbon emissions and ecological damage;
- iii. Commends Minister Hargay's intention to establish a departmental advisory group to embed and deliver Community Wealth Building which centres on: a more just and fair labour market; an inclusive economy with a focus on growing and rebuilding the local economy; and ensuring land and property in our communities generates wealth for the people who live there.

Therefore, this council commits to developing a fully funded community wealth building framework with the purpose of democratising the economy by empowering community organisations, non-profits, social enterprise and cooperatives to be established or expanded with the ambition to create employment and grow local economies.”

He pointed out that, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the Motion was referred without discussion to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

The Committee agreed that a report on how the Motion would be facilitated, resourced and managed would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

### **Growing Business and the Economy**

#### **Economic Outlook and Overview of Business Support Services**

The Director of Economic Development reminded the Members that, at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 12th May 2021, approval had been granted for a range of activities aimed at enhancing the level of business start-ups, growing existing businesses and supporting new investment in the city.

He reported that, in partnership with Belfast Chamber of Commerce, the Council had undertaken a large-scale survey of Belfast businesses, which had been the first of a series of bi-annual surveys that would be undertaken, covering a minimum of 400 businesses each time. He stated that the survey would act as a barometer of business sentiment to build intelligence on how businesses were performing, identify their immediate challenges and gauge the outlook and prospects of local companies. He added that the findings would be used to inform and shape interventions by the Council and its partners to support business, employment and economic activity in the city.

He outlined the key achievements in start-up, social enterprise and cooperatives, and business growth.

The Director advised the Committee of the undernoted priorities for the following six months;

- Working with the other councils, Invest NI and DfE to bring forward plans to revamp the approach to business start-up post-2023;
- Continuing to deliver the Enterprise Pathway pilot, focusing on those furthest from the labour market;
- Launch the Digital Transformation initiative in partnership with the 10 other councils across the region;
- Build on support for Social Enterprises and Co-operatives by working with the procurement team to enable better access public procurement opportunities;
- Working towards recognition of being a “Social Economy Place” – the first in Northern Ireland;
- Delivering a new approach to support vibrant business destinations across the city by working with local business associations outside of the city centre;
- Delivering on the strategy and action plan for the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor; and
- Working with digital and innovation teams to increase the volume of SME engagement and support growth strategies for key sectors.

The Members of the Committee agreed to:

- Note the findings of the recent Belfast Business Survey which was to be undertaken every six months, in conjunction with the Belfast Chamber, and which will inform future areas of work;
- Note the outcomes of the activities undertaken over the past six months, particularly in the areas of business start-up, growth and investment;
- Note the planned activities in the coming months; and
- To write to The Executive Office to request that consideration be given to setting up a co-operative development agency for Northern Ireland.

## **Jobs and Skills Outcomes**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

### **“1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on a number of existing and planned interventions to improve skills and help people find a new or better job, focusing on key target groups and those furthest from the labour market.

### **2.0 Recommendations**

The Members of the Committee are asked to,

- Note the range of existing and planned interventions to improve skills and help people find a new or better job, focusing on key target groups and those furthest from the labour market
- Note the job outcomes delivered by some of the key interventions
- Note the planned activity for the coming months
- Agree to join the RSA Cities of Learning network, making a financial contribution of £30,000 towards the programme of activity from November 2021.

### **3.0 Main report**

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the pandemic has had a significant on the economy of the city.

At its peak, more than 20,000 people in Belfast were on furlough and the claimant count numbers in the city more than doubled following the initial lockdown in March 2020.

- 3.2 As we emerge from the series of lockdowns and the remaining restrictions are gradually moved, the labour market is slowly improving. However there is significant volatility with demand hugely outstripping supply in a number of sectors (tech and digital; logistics and health and social care) while other sectors are much more vulnerable (hospitality; retail). This is borne out in the recent Belfast Business Survey which is covered in more detail in a separate report to the committee.
- 3.3 A number of research reports have identified the fact that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on those who were already most vulnerable prior to COVID-19. In labour market terms, this has meant that those who were already

having difficulty in finding work slipped further back as those who had more recent experience or transferable skills moved into an already competitive jobs market.

- 3.4 Despite the volatility, council officers have been working closely with our stakeholder partners and with employers in key sectors to support the delivery of a range of interventions to help those furthest from the labour market to find sustainable employment in those sectors where demand has remained strong or is beginning to recover. This work has meant that, since April 2021, we have been able to bring 381 people on to our Employment Academy programmes across a range of sectors. This level of demand – both from employers as well as those looking for a job or a better job – represents a significant increase on figures from previous years. By way of example, in 2018/19, we supported around 500 people through Employment Academies over a full year – in a very buoyant economic climate. A number of recent changes including an expansion of the Employability and Skills team and the introduction of a new, more flexible commissioning framework, means that we have been much better placed to respond to opportunities, meeting employer demand and bringing forward solutions that benefit local businesses and residents.
- 3.5 The procurement framework covers four broad areas (lots). These are:
- Lot 1: Care Sectors: Health Care; Social Care; Education; and Childcare/Playwork – delivery partner is People 1st
  - Lot 2: Customer Service Sectors: Leisure; Hospitality; Tourism; and Retail: delivery partner is Workforce Training Services
  - Lot 3: Practical Sectors: Transport & Logistics; Construction; Green Economy; and Manufacturing: delivery partner is Workforce Training Services
  - Lot 4: Office Based Sectors: Administration; Financial; and Digital: delivery partners are BMC in conjunction with LEMIS+ partners (Ashton Community Trust; GEMS NI; East Belfast Mission; Upper Springfield Development Trust and Impact Training).
- 3.6 The lots will remain in place for up to four years. They provide the council with significant flexibility in developing and delivering targeted interventions within the relevant sectors. This flexibility has already been invaluable in enabling us to scale up at pace to support the increased number of participants as detailed above and will be an important resource to have access to as we seek to build our reach in new areas such as tech, digital and green skills.

- 3.7 As a complement to the four lots set out above, we have created an additional mechanism called a DPS (Dynamic Purchasing System). This provides the Council with access to additional alternative market capacity and capability in the areas covered by existing Employment Academies (e.g. if the existing provider cannot meet our needs). It also provides an opportunity to bring on new organisations in order to test out innovative approaches, to respond to specific employer/participant needs not covered within the framework or to provide specialist interventions (e.g. activities to ensure that specific target groups can access the job opportunities on offer, such as English language support or assistance for those with additional learning needs). The DPS will remain open for five years and organisations can register at any time.
- 3.8 Of those who started an Employment Academy since April 2021, 174 people have completed and 122 have secured employment so far. This represents an into-work rate of 70%. Of the 224 people still going through a programme, 90 are already in work and are receiving support, qualifications or licences needed to access a better job. These include Level 3-5 qualifications (e.g. in childcare sector, allowing staff to move to supervisory roles) and specific vehicle licences to help existing drivers progress to better-paid driving roles, including those within public sector organisations.
- 3.9 In terms of volume, the most popular Employment Academies are within logistics, leisure and social care sectors, although childcare and playwork strongly feature, particularly for those wanting a better job. A Nursing Assistant Employment Academy has also recently completed, with 17 people applying for Nursing Assistant posts within Belfast HSC Trust. Construction is another sector that has been in high demand, with both generic and female-targeted Employment Academies delivered over the last few months. The into-employment rate for these programmes has been in excess of 80%.
- 3.10 Over the coming months, a full programme of Employment Academies is being scheduled, with a significant volume of activity planned for the post-Christmas period. In order to raise awareness of the opportunities, a Meet the Employer event will take place in St George's Market on 9 November. This will give potential participants a chance to find out more about the upcoming academies and to register interest to participate as well being able to apply directly for vacancies.

Employers across a range of sectors with workforce demand will be in attendance, and they will be able to provide an insight into emerging roles within their business as well as current vacancies for people who can apply directly for on the day. Additional information on the event will be circulated to all members in advance in order to ensure that it can be promoted as widely as possible to all interested parties.

- 3.11 While the Academies represent short, employer-focused, into-employment interventions, the team has also been engaged in a wider range of jobs and skills-related activities – always with the aim of supporting inclusive growth. Although the increase in unemployment as a result of COVID-19 has not been as significant as might have previously been expected, the claimant count is still more than double the pre-pandemic levels, at around 5.7%. In recognition of the increased volume of claimants that may find it relatively easy to get back to work but that may need some light-touch support, such as interview preparation or advice on job search, officers are working on the introduction of a targeted intervention. This will be delivered by our existing partners through the new commissioning framework. It will focus on linking those who are more recently unemployed to existing opportunities in sectors such as hospitality, construction, logistics and social care through to attracting back, for example taxi-drivers who may require some additional support to return to this sector. This will mean much shorter (and therefore less resource intensive) interventions as well as providing exposure to employers who are currently recruiting, such as the event on 9 November.
- 3.12 In addition to the delivery, there is also significant development work underway to scope out new interventions that can contribute to the inclusive growth commitments. One key area of work at present is focusing on creating new pathways into the tech and digital sectors. While this sector has remained largely resilient throughout the pandemic, our research shows that there are limited pathways into the sector for those that do not have a degree. This challenge was identified through the work of the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission and the relevant government departments have committed to work with the council and with employers in the city to explore potential solutions. New pathways are also being scoped for emerging sectors, including the green sector. Work is at an advanced stage in developing a retrofitting qualification at level 3 and level 5. This will offer opportunities for new entrants to access opportunities in a future growth area. It will also present significant reskilling opportunities for companies in the



construction sector, helping them to future-proof their business and look towards new opportunities for future growth.

- 3.13 While a significant proportion of the work that we have been engaged in to date has focused on those already in the labour market or trying to find a job or move to a better job, we have a number of interventions in place for young people, both in the formal education setting and outside of the school environment. Our GCSE support programme was significantly disrupted over the last two years given the challenges faced by schools during the pandemic and the limited face-to-face time with students over that period. Delivery for the current academic year is planned to be both school-based and community-based with places for at least 365 young people, focusing on those not currently predicted to achieve at least Grade C in English and Maths GCSE, with the objective of helping them achieve a pass. In recognition of the extraordinary challenges of the last two academic years and the impact that this has had on educational attainment – particularly of those who are already vulnerable – additional activities are currently being planned, for example, mid-term intensive learning programmes during the Halloween break.
- 3.14 We are also supporting 186 young people who either already have or are at risk of dropping out of the education system, employment or training through our Youth Support Programme. To date, 109 young people have progressed into positive outcomes with 40 into employment and 69 into further education/training. While this programme has not completed, this currently represents a positive outcome rate of 58%. This programme is also an important feeder as we develop additional skills development initiatives, particularly in the digital sector.
- 3.15 RSA Digital Skills project

To add value to our work, Belfast has recently been engaging with a number of external networks and partnerships. One of those networks is the RSA. The RSA operates globally with the aim of seeking ideas and solutions to resolve some of the most significant societal challenges. Through their Cities of Learning work, they provide technical support and expertise to network members to help them bring forward innovative approaches to learning within each of their locations, and also support learning across all of the network members. As part of this work, they have been successful in attracting funding from the Garfield Weston Foundation and have been engaging

with cities that they identify as having the potential and commitment to bring forward new learning solutions in a way that can meet their criteria for a City of Learning – and they approached Belfast as part of this work. Emerging from our initial engagement with the RSA, we are proposing to bring forward a project to develop bespoke Digital Badges for our employability interventions. These badges will be used to recognise and validate the work undertaken through our programmes as an alternative to the standard practice of asking for qualifications/experience. The RSA Cities of Learning will also work alongside officers to challenge how some current practices are excluding those that may not have the formal qualifications but that have aptitudes and strengths that could make a valuable contribution to the workforce.

3.16 Officers will also offer employability and skills providers across the city with access to digital badging for their own organisations. These badges will recognise the ‘hidden’ skills of their participants by creating a digital portfolio of their achievements and skills to use alongside CVs. This will further develop collaboration with providers in the city whilst addressing the disproportionate levels of those recorded as having ‘no or low’ skills. We will also engage with employers to ensure that there is buy-in to and recognition of the model and that they can see the merits of this approach to talent acquisition and development.

3.17 The funding from Garfield Weston Foundation will cover 50% of the costs associated with this project and partners are asked to bring forward the remaining 50%. It is proposed that the council agrees to allocate £30,000 towards this project for a 12-month period from November 2021, with the remaining £30,000 being provided by the Garfield Weston Foundation (coming via the RSA).

3.18 Financial and resource implications

The RSA Digital Badges project will require an allocation of £30,000. This funding has been set aside in the Employability and Skills budget for this year that was previously agreed through the estimates process. Funding for all other activities set out in this update has also previously been approved through the estimates process.

3.19 Equality implications/rural needs assessment

One of the key advantages of this approach is that it will enable us to target resources on specific groups, including

**those with particular access issues and barriers that currently prevent them from accessing training and employment opportunities. Our participation data is regularly reviewed to ensure that we are making a positive impact on key target groups.”**

The Committee agreed to:

- Note the range of existing and planned interventions to improve skills and help people find a new or better job, focusing on key target groups and those furthest from the labour market;
- Note the job outcomes delivered by some of the key interventions;
- Note the planned activity for the coming months; and
- Join the RSA Cities of Learning network, making a financial contribution of £30,000 towards the programme of activity from November 2021.

### **Positioning Belfast to Compete**

#### **Estates Gazette Awards – 'City of the Year' Award**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development reported that Belfast had been shortlisted in the 'City of the Year' Award category in the 2021 Estates Gazette Future of Real Estate Awards which celebrated cities, advisers, investors and developers from the UK and beyond that were driving innovation, long-term thinking and future proofing in the built environment.

She pointed out that the Belfast submission had highlighted how its young, vibrant and highly educated workforce, resilient infrastructure, strong civic leadership and city partnerships were priming Belfast for a positive economic future.

She advised the Members that the awards ceremony would take place in London on 28th October, 2021 and that, it was recommended that the Committee approve the attendance of the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson or their nominees, plus one officer.

The Committee agreed:

- To note that Belfast had been shortlisted for a 'City of the Year' Award at the 2021 Estates Gazette Future of Real Estate Awards;
- To approve the attendance of Committee Chair/Deputy Chair or nominees and one officer at the Estates Gazette Future of Real Estate Awards Ceremony, taking place 28 October in London, at a maximum cost of £1,750, subject to prevailing COVID restrictions; and
- To dispense with call-in, to facilitate attendance at the event which had been scheduled to take place in advance of a meeting of full Council; and
- That officers would bring a report back to a future meeting of the Committee outlining the actual costs associated with attendance at the Estates Gazette Future of Real Estate Awards Ceremony.

**Strategic and Operational**

**Community Planning Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

- 1.1** The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on community planning with a specific focus on the work being taken forward by the newly re-configured ‘Jobs, Skills and Education’ and ‘City Development’ Delivery Boards.

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1** The Committee is asked to:

- (i)** note the on-going work of the Belfast Agenda Jobs, Skills and Education delivery Board and the City Development delivery Board;
- (ii)** note the alignment and synergies between the Boards and the work of the Committee;
- (iii)** note the proposed transition of the City Stakeholder Group established to support planning and implementation of the DFC Revitalisation Programme to City Centre Delivery Group (as set out in para. 3.10-11 below)
- (iv)** note the ongoing opportunities for Elected Members to input and shape the work being taken forward through Community Planning Partnership, including the refresh of the Belfast Agenda and associated delivery plans, over the coming months/years.

**3.0 Main report**

**3.1 Background**

Members will recall that in order to ensure that the vision and ambitions set out within the Belfast Agenda (community plan for the city) translated into action and to secure the commitment from city partners in supporting delivery, four cross-sectoral delivery Boards have been formed (City Development | Jobs, Skills and Education | Living Here | Resilience and Sustainability) under the auspices of the

Community Planning Partnership (CPP). These delivery focused Boards have been established to encourage and

enable greater collaboration across partners to understand and and seek to address the challenges and priorities for the city and its communities.

- 3.2 As reported to Committee in June 2021, CPP partners agreed to reconfigure two of the Boards to align priorities and maximise the synergies and impact of their work. As highlighted, the focus of the two Boards – City Development and Jobs, Skills and Education – clearly aligns with the work of this Committee. Members will also recall the intention going forward to update the Committee on the work of the boards alongside specific engagement and input from elected Members and Parties through the All-Party Community Planning Working Group and Community Planning Partnership. Members should note that the newly reconfigured Boards met for the first time in April and May 2021 respectively as well as specific action planning workshop sessions to reaffirm priority areas of focus. This report provides an update on these sessions and key activity underway through the Boards.

3.3 Jobs, Skills and Education Update

Members will be aware of the ongoing review and refresh of the Belfast Agenda. Since the launch of the review in September 2021, we have been continuing the conversation with our city partners, including our Delivery Boards, to examine and define the key challenges, opportunities and priorities for the city for the period 2022-2026. To help inform the new Belfast Agenda a co-production has been adopted with city partners and stakeholders and is being rolled out in three phases: i) a review of existing priorities, ii) planning what needs to happen next and iii) consulting on our plans. On 10 September a workshop was held with the Jobs, Skills and Education Board as part of the first phase of this engagement. The workshop focused on:

- i) Taking stock of the current economic and labour market position in Belfast in the context of the Belfast Agenda commitments
- ii) Securing collective agreement on a small number of priority interventions that the Board can drive forward over the next 18 months
- iii) Shape and input into the refresh of the Belfast Agenda.

- 3.4 The out-workings of this workshop will feed into subsequent engagement phases, allowing us to co-design action plans and a relevant, refreshed Belfast Agenda which can deliver a positive impact for everyone in the city.

3.5 A detailed report providing an overview of the Board workshop session is attached at Appendix 1. A number of key overarching areas emerging from workshop discussions are summarised below:

- General consensus that the priorities identified in the emerging Belfast Agenda delivery framework (2022-26) reflect the key challenges and opportunities for the city.
- Highlighted the significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on widening existing inequalities – with NEETS and inactivity rates rising and therefore a greater need for a collaborative approach to addressing these challenges.
- Recognition of the importance of the emerging Labour Market Partnership and ensuring better connections across partners and with those furthest removed from the labour market. Highlight the flagship opportunity this presents for the city.
- Recognition of the significant opportunities presented by the Department for Education's 'Fair Start Action Plan' to address educational underachievement within the city and across the region. In this context, the Board (and CPP partners) will develop a Belfast specific proposition which seeks to align with, build upon and accelerate elements of this regional plan with a focus on enabling and encouraging place-based delivery with supporting budgets.
- A strong focus required to support and enable more new business start-ups, including social enterprises, in the city, given their importance to our economy
- Advocated the need to create focus and momentum on a small number of key challenges that require collaboration across partners to resolve – rather than spreading energy and resources across a wider range of activities.

3.6 Workshop participants agreed that the Jobs, Skills & Education Board should focus on three priority areas and highlighted specific programmes of work to be developed further as part of the action planning process. The three priority areas are:

**Economic Recovery**

- Bringing together partners to look at how we can achieve a significant increase in the number of

business start-ups, with a focus on driving city competitiveness and productivity – while also considering how this work can support inclusive growth.

- Bringing forward new interventions to support the continued growth of the tech and digital sector – with a focus on creating inclusive pathways to develop new routes into this growth area.

#### Employability & Skills

- Recognition that the Labour Market Partnership will be a critical element for bringing forward key employability and skills interventions and agreement to ensure that regular updates are provided
- Exploring ways of intelligence gathering and sharing in order to inform and shape new interventions – need for short term and longer-term insights.

#### Educational Attainment

- Consideration of how a Belfast-focused response to the Fair Start Action Plan can be taken forward
- Exploring opportunities to enhance the support available at Key Transition Stages – with a special focus on early years.

- 3.7 As the engagement work on the refresh of the Belfast Agenda continues, the Jobs, Skills & Education Board and its supporting task groups will now undertake further action planning work to consider how the key interventions can be moved forward. One of the critical issues will be to consider how we can secure partner buy-in and resource allocation in order to ensure that there is shared ownership of commitments and outcomes.

#### City Development Update

- 3.8 Members will note that a similar workshop session is being planned to take place for the City Development Board in late October / early November 2021. The focus of this workshop will be to consider and unpack what specific interventions, programmes and actions are to be taken forward in support of the four priority areas identified by the Board and Community Planning Partnership i.e.

- i Housing-Led Regeneration
- ii City Regeneration and Investment
- iii Access, Connectivity and Active Travel
- iv Future City Centre

3.9 In addition to the planned workshop in October, it is important to note that there has been significant work already underway and/or emerging across the City Development Board's four themes. Some specific areas which we would highlight for Members information include:-

- Agreement and establishment of a Housing-Led Regeneration delivery sub-group chaired by NIHE is underway.
- Consensus on need to bring forward transportation plan for Belfast.
- Continued delivery of £4.2m Revitalisation Programme to support recovery from pandemic.
- Ministerial and NI Executive departments commitment to the Bolder Vision and ongoing work to proceed to public consultation and next stages and implementation, alongside the importance of other city-wide connectivity priorities.
- Engagement with developers in support of the work of the Board and to ensure we maximise the benefits and potential access to opportunities from future investment schemes (inclusive growth). This will complement the cross-sectoral representation and input into community planning including the community and voluntary sector.
- Participation in the Renewed Ambition Programme engagement workshop around the Social, Economic and Environmental Impact of Real Estate

3.10 Maintaining momentum and focus

Members will be aware that in support of the development and implementation of the Covid Recovery Revitalisation Programme that an external and cross-sectoral 'City Stakeholder Group' had been established and provided important insights and, experience to help shape the programme. Whilst we are emerging from the emergency response to the pandemic with restrictions being eased, there are no doubt significant strategic and operational challenges which need to be addressed including, among other things, a clean, green, inclusive and safe city centre. It is therefore proposed that we build upon the strength and success of the City Stakeholder Group, and recalibrate and transition it into a City Centre Delivery Group reporting into the City Development Board and the Community Planning partnership.

3.11 This Group would bring a cross-sectoral perspective and input into understanding and seeking to address the key



challenges facing the city and seeking to align resources as appropriate. Subject to CPP approval in November 2021, the group would also act as a forum to advocate for Belfast and help engage/influence NI Executive, Departments and other structures (e.g. High Street Task Force) to unlock barriers. This proposal would complement and support the Council's (and CG&R Committee's) significant leadership and implementation role around city development, including supporting city centre revitalisation. It is important to note that the City Development Board and community planning provides the forum to consider and progress non-city centre considerations and priorities as referred earlier in the report.

### **3.12 Role of Elected Members**

Elected Members will be engaged at each stage of the review process underway to refresh the Belfast Agenda and shape the 4-year action plans which are to be developed over coming months. This will include, for example, Members' co-design workshops, Party Group briefings, Committee engagement and through the All-Party Community Planning Working Group.

### **3.13 Financial and Resource Implications**

Any financial implications arising from this report will be covered from existing budgets. The review process will involve the participation of all community planning partners, who will need to commit their resources to the review process and the agreed action plans.

### **3.13 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment**

**There are no equality, good relations or rural need implications in this report."**

The Committee agreed to:

- note the on-going work of the Belfast Agenda Jobs, Skills and Education delivery Board and the City Development delivery Board;
- note the alignment and synergies between the Boards and the work of the Committee;
- note the proposed transition of the City Stakeholder Group established to support planning and implementation of the DfC Revitalisation Programme to City Centre Delivery; and
- note the ongoing opportunities for Elected Members to input and shape the work that was being taken forward through Community

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**City Growth and Regeneration Committee**  
**Wednesday, 13th October, 2021**

- Planning Partnership, including the refresh of the Belfast Agenda and associated delivery plans, over the coming months and years.

Chairperson