

# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 7th December, 2022

## HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);  
Alderman Dorrian:  
Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Duffy, Hanvey,  
Heading, T. Kelly, Lyons, Maskey, McCabe,  
McDonough-Brown, McLaughlin, Murray,  
Nelson, O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.

In attendance: Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration  
and Development;  
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;  
Mr. S. O' Regan, Employability and Skills Manager;  
Mr. A. Cairns, Zoo Manager;  
Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor; and  
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

### Apologies

An apology for the inability to attend was reported on behalf of the High Sherriff, Councillor Hussey.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee of 26th October and 9th November were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st December, subject to the following amendments (9th November):

- Under the heading Cultural Mapping for Culture, Arts and Heritage, the Council had agreed that the minute be referred back to Committee for further consideration as a Member had been liaising with the Director of Economic Development regarding the listing of an additional ten venues which he wished to ensure had been included prior to the minute being ratified; and
- Under the heading Christmas Update, the Council had agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting which would detail the health and safety advice that had been given and also give consideration to the running of a Tree Lighting event in future years.

### **Declarations of Interest**

In relation to item 2.a) Presentations - Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast, Councillor Whyte declared an interest in that he was employed by Queen's University, and Councillor Spratt declared an interest in that his wife worked for Ulster University.

### **Correspondence Received - Queen's University Belfast**

The Committee noted the correspondence which had been received from Queen's University Belfast in response to the Council's letter in relation to its Widening Participation Programme, cost-of-living assistance, student intake and the impact potential funding cuts might have on future admissions.

### **Presentations**

#### **Ulster University and Queen's University**

The Chairperson introduced Ms. C. Young, Director of Student Plus, and Mr. E. Deeny, Public Affairs Manager, representing Queen's University Belfast (QUB), and Ms. A. Castry, Director of Campus Life, and Mr. D. Morrow, Director of Community Engagement, representing Ulster University (UU), to the Committee and they were admitted to the meeting.

The Director of City Development and Regeneration highlighted that Belfast currently had a student population of 45,000 full time students, with the majority of students studying at Queens and Ulster University and the remainder at Stranmillis, St Mary's and Belfast Metropolitan College.

She advised that the relocation of Ulster University from the Jordanstown Campus to the new Belfast City Centre Campus represented a major regeneration opportunity for the city centre, particularly in the northern side, with and the £364m campus provided 75,000m<sup>2</sup> of high-quality learning space for over 15,000 students per annum with a GVA impact of £160m and an overall benefit to the NI economy of £1.4billion (OCED). She reported that Council officers had continued to work with the Ulster University along with various stakeholders to support the successful opening and integration of the new Belfast City Centre Ulster University Campus, and to maximise the longer-term inclusive regeneration impacts and opportunities of this major capital investment programme, with much of this work being co-ordinated through the Community Campus Regeneration Forum (CCRF)

Mr Morrow provided an overview of the importance of students and student accommodation in Belfast and highlighted that students and graduates were an integral part in promoting City Centre Living. He outlined how students would help achieve Belfast's ambition:

- Housing led regeneration was an underpinning principle of "Belfast - A Signature City";

- The city had a strong base to build on with 45,000 students and over 7,000 PBSA already;
- Belfast was a young and vibrant city -students currently made up 14% of the population;
- Everyone would benefit from a thriving and prosperous economy. Students want to live in the city centre and bring spend and benefit across multiple areas;
- Students brought diversity to Belfast that was aligned to a welcoming, fair and inclusive society;
- The number of 18-year-olds would grow by 20% in the next five years and the universities were highlighting the need to increase places (by 4,250) just to maintain current opportunities for school leavers;
- As a city, we need to encourage investment to build appropriate housing for both students and graduates and ensure we could encourage our young residents to stay in the city longer; and
- There was already evidence of increased footfall on Royal Avenue by 47%-some of which might be attributed to UU's new Belfast campus.

Ms. Castry provided context of the current student housing market and pointed out that there was an increase in competition for HMO's particularly from NIHE, Immigration Services and statutory agencies and there were increasing accommodation issues across the housing sector which required a holistic view and should include the consideration of international student families and graduates looking for professional accommodation.

Ms. Young provided an overview of the student accommodation in Belfast:

- Belfast currently had a student population of circa 45,000 full time students, the majority from QUB and UU, with the remainder from Stranmillis, St. Mary's and Belfast Metropolitan College;
- There were 7,000 PBSA rooms in the city—the majority built since 2018 and approximately 5,000 in the city centre;
- Student Accommodation in both Purpose built (PBSA) and private rental sector was currently at capacity and a view of future demand had highlighted the city needed a further 6,000 rooms for students by 2028-30;
- There was a growing demand for PBSA over Private rental sector accommodation and insufficient rooms in planning or being built to address this shortfall; and
- PBSA opened since 2018 had successfully integrated with local communities and brought business and economic opportunities in the area.

Ms. Young described the benefits of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation, in that more and more students were applying to live in PBSA in their first, second and third years as it offered fixed price, high quality accommodation where students could balance study and lifestyle. She advised that PBSA accommodation typically included all bills; utilities, internet, insurance, communal cleaning, 24-hour security, gym membership and reception. Both universities also provided a comprehensive pastoral

support and residential programme. She reported that there was a range of accommodation at various price points and contract lengths to suit all student budgets and requests. She highlighted that prices offered by QUB and UU were, on average, 22% lower than other UK university accommodation for an ensuite room.

Ms. Young outlined QUB's plans to increase its student accommodation by 40% from 3,400 to approx. 6,000 rooms. She highlighted that Ulster University's independent review on accommodation demand indicated a need for a minimum of 1,700 beds in Belfast to meet demand for first-year guarantee, with additional beds required to meet increasing demand from returning and international students studying in our new Belfast campus. It was reported that UU currently had 700 beds under nominations agreements with PBSA adjacent to the Belfast campus, which would increase in 2023-24. UU also provided accommodation for 600 students at Jordanstown Student Village and were currently considering long-term options in the city that increases student accommodation provision adjacent to Belfast campus.

During discussion, the representatives answered a range of questions in relation to the accommodation fees and financial assistance available, data on the number of students using PBSA's, management of the reduction in students in the Holylands, regulation of PBSA's, future proofing of accommodation units, planning issues, investment and maintenance of units and potential rent increases. Members also sought clarity on the treatment of rates for PBSA and the representatives provided an outline on current rating policy.

A number of Members stressed the importance of place making and city centre living and the need for mixed tenure accommodation across the city. The representatives highlighted the need to integrate students in the city centre and the continued engagement with stakeholders and colleges to resolve issues, so that students could be part of the broader mix of residents.

The representatives confirmed that they were experiencing increased demand for student managed accommodation and that they felt there were cost savings overall for students. They advised that, if required, further data could be shared with the Committee on demand, and the transition from private rentals in the Holylands to PBSA's. Ms. Young noted there would always be some students who preferred private rentals and those students who wish to commute. Ms. Castry stated that they wished PBSA's to be part of a housing solution in North Belfast and they were not intended to displace locals from private rental properties.

In further discussion, the representatives highlighted the planning restrictions on Student Managed Accommodation to student only usage, however, explained that they would be keen to explore a flexible approach to maximise usage in the holiday periods for sporting events and conferences.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and that, where relevant, the representatives would provide further information on the issues raised.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

### **National Lottery Heritage Fund**

The Chairperson welcomes Ms. S. Byrne, Head of Investment, and Ms. M. Henry, Head of Engagement representing the National Lottery Heritage Fund to the meeting.

Ms. Byrne stated that the Heritage Fund was one of the 12 National Lottery Good Causes and received 5p in funding, out of every £1 spent on the national lottery. She advised that they funded projects with clear start and end timelines that were clearly related to UK Heritage and the projects must encompass a mix of capital and activities or activity only, such as:

- Museums and collections;
- Community heritage;
- Landscapes and nature;
- Historic buildings and monuments;
- Industrial, maritime and transport; and
- Cultures and memories.

Ms. Byrne advised that they funded public and not-for-profit organisations, as well as private owners of heritage assets in cases of clear public benefit under £100k.

She provided an overview of the refreshed strategy by conserving, preserving and restoring heritage, including: Heritage at Risk; Inclusion of under-represented groups; Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability; Resilience; Place and Partnerships. She highlighted the various funding programmes and investment which had been made since 1994 across Northern Ireland.

Ms. Byrne described case studies of the Heritage Fund's work across Belfast, which included: Belfast City Cemetery, Tropical Ravine, Templemore Baths, Ulster Museum National Museums NI, Collecting the Troubles and Beyond - National Museums NI, Belfast Hills Landscape Partnership, HMS Caroline - National Museum Royal Navy, Titanic Hotel, Belfast, Principles for Remembering - Reimagining Belfast City Council and Belfast Stories.

Ms. Henry highlighted the importance of joined up thinking and working strategically to enhance the city and informed the Committee of the framework for partnership working. She pointed out that heritage delivered:

- Regeneration of City Centre;
- Climate benefits of adaptive reuse of heritage assets;
- Community wealth building;
- Tourism at City and Neighbourhood levels;
- Civic Pride;
- Bringing communities together;
- Sense of Place and identity;
- Jobs and skills creation; and

- Business growth.

During discussion, the representatives answered a range of questions on city centre hidden heritage and the lack of interest from the private sector to restore heritage.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

### **Restricted Items**

**The information contained in the report associated with the following four 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 four 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.

### **Council's Powers on Vesting**

The Divisional Solicitor outlined the powers of vesting available to the Council and summarised the vesting process.

### **Proposal**

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

Resolved - That the Council draft a Vesting Policy.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report;
- Noted that Legal Services was currently engaging with various Departments to ascertain the appropriate 'Ministry' to make a Vesting Order on behalf of the Council when seeking to utilise its powers in relation to economic development; and
- Agreed that Council officers draft a Vesting Policy for consideration.

### **Belfast Zoo - Quarter 2 Performance Update**

The Committee was provided with an update on the performance of the Zoo during Quarter 2 (July to September) of the 2022-23 financial year which included information on the following areas:

- Visitor Services
- Education Services
- Animal Collection
- Marketing and Events, and
- Financial performance.

The Committee noted the Zoo performance update report for the period July to September 2022.

### **Future City Centre Programme: Vacant to Vibrant**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an update on the progress on the pilot capital grant scheme, 'Vacant to Vibrant' which included the outcome of recent application submissions.

The Committee:

- Noted the update in relation to the city centre Vacant to Vibrant pilot capital grant scheme; and
- Agreed to the recommended grant awards as outlined within Section 3.19 and 3.20 of the report.

### **Quarter 2 Finance Update**

The Committee noted the report and the associated financial reporting pack which outlined the Quarter 2 financial position for the Committee including a forecast of the year end outturn.

### **Matters referred back from Council/Motions**

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 9th November which had been referred back to the Committee by the Council at its meeting on 1st December. An extract of the minute is set out hereunder:

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY  
GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 9th November, 2022

---

### **Cultural Mapping for Culture, Arts and Heritage**

*The Committee was reminded that, as a key action of Belfast's ten-year cultural strategy, A City Imagining, the Culture Unit, in partnership and the Department for Communities, had jointly commissioned a report on Belfast's cultural infrastructure. The aim of this report was to analyse what physical space was available for residents to experience culture, and to examine current physical resource allocation for the cultural sector across the city.*

*The Director of Economic Development advised that the overall cultural mapping project was key to the delivery of the city's cultural strategy and the city's community plan (the Belfast Agenda). He described the significance of the research, and the requirement for a whole city approach in terms of a critical analysis of physical resources for cultural activity, identifying gaps and models of good practice – starting with a study of the physical resources for culture. He pointed out that the Culture Team were committed to delivering a cultural mapping of the city within A City Imagining implementation plan 2020-2023.*

*He explained that the Cultural Mapping project addressed the existing and future needs of Belfast's cultural and creative industries sector by ensuring that policy was informed by up to date and accurate data whilst also providing a valuable resource for the public to increase engagement and participation. Furthermore, this data had the potential to be utilised by residents, visitors, artists, cultural and creative organisations, funders and planners. This Cultural Mapping Report was Phase One of a major cultural mapping project which included the following phases:*

- Phase One - A review and analysis of Belfast's hard cultural infrastructure;*
- Phase Two – Study and Scoping of the soft infrastructure, identifying cultural resources, networks links and patterns of cultural practice. Research with partners and community networks, wide-reaching public engagement and cluster engagement, crowdsourcing ideas; and*
- Phase Three – An interactive digital cultural map product that would allow residents to browse the city's cultural offerings. This would be similar in concept to Dublin's 'culture near you' project.*

*The Cultural Mapping report (copy available [here](#) ) provided strategic recommendations for improving Belfast's creative provisions in the short and long term and could be seen as a tool that could inform broader plans for the city alongside other areas, including, but not limited to, regeneration, heritage, and economic development.*

*He outlined the recommendations within the Cultural Mapping Report as follows:*

- A key recommendation in this phase one report focused on addressing the shortage of affordable artist studio space in Belfast. Members would be aware that, at a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in February 2022, it had been agreed to open a new funding scheme for artist led organisations to provide financial and development support for this sector. As part of this support, members also agreed a strategic review of artist studios and maker-spaces in Belfast which would identify examples of best practice and potential solutions to this issue. This research would be conducted over the coming months, with a number of long-*



*term recommendations presented to Committee in March 2023;*

- *The report identified 2 Royal Avenue as a space which could accommodate artists. On 15th April, 2022, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had approved the proposal around Meanwhile Use until the end of 2023 at our recently acquired 2 Royal Avenue building, with a focus on cultural, animation and creative activities. The proposal was to create a non-commercial space in the heart of the city and provide citizens and visitors with a free and accessible place to relax and enjoy arts programming and a cultural offering, whilst developing long term strategy use. In July 2022, the Council had submitted an application to the Levelling Up Fund, proposing a 'Creative Hub', for the building at 2 Royal Avenue. The concept was based on a mixture of complimentary commercial, creative and cultural activities across the building to create one holistic offer;*
- *Recommendations in this Cultural Mapping report also focused on Cultural Entrepreneurship as it related to physical space. As members would be aware, The Vacant to Vibrant, 2 year pilot, Capital Grant Scheme had allocated £1m to seek to support local independent businesses and SME's, social economy businesses and creative and cultural organisations that would provide a unique or distinct offer for the city centre and transform vacant spaces to become vibrant. This scheme had garnered interest from the cultural sector. At the Expression of Interest stage, approximately 33% of the submissions by businesses/organisations were from cultural sector. Many from the cultural sector Eols have indicated that they were seeking maker space and their property requirements also might not align with the parameters of this grant, which would primarily seek to occupy and activate vacant ground floor space in prominent areas of the city centre; and*
- *Long term recommendations in the report included a hotel levy. As members would be aware, this was considered in the tourism plan for Belfast, "Make Yourself at Home", presented to the Committee on 6th April 2022. Within this plan, it was acknowledged that, while areas like passenger duty and visitor levies were not within the remit of the Council, we would adopt policy positions based on up-to-date research, consultation and evidence.*

*The Director of Economic Development informed the Committee of the next steps in the Cultural Mapping Process. Phase Two of the Cultural Mapping work would delve deeper into research and scoping of the infrastructure identified in this initial phase. The phase would create a holistic view of the cultural sector and identify networks and artistic and cultural practice patterns. This would also include looking into public participation, cluster interaction, research with partners and community networks, and the people and groups that use these spaces as their workplace. He advised that his work was due to be commissioned in November 2022, with a report presented to the Committee in May 2023. The overarching objective of this work was twofold, firstly, to increase and understanding of cultural infrastructure, drive use and participation and, secondly, to seek to agree long term remedies with partners in areas where gaps in provision were demonstrated. He pointed out that the Team would also continue to work with organisations across the city to locate and source suitable properties where there was an immediate or emergency need.*

*During discussion, the Director of Economic Development explained further the methodology of the report and the engagement with the Arts Council and other cultural bodies. Members raised the issue of some research gaps in the Cultural Mapping report, in that not all Musical Venues and Theatres had been included from across the City and some venues needed to be defined further. The Director advised that the report was not a complete list of cultural venues, however, Members could submit any additional prominent cultural venues to be included in the audit for consideration.*

*One Member also pointed out that the Balmoral DEA needed to be included in the illustrative maps of the city.*

*The Committee noted the contents of the Phase One report on Cultural Mapping and that Members would submit any additional prominent cultural venues to be included in the audit to the Director of Economic Development for consideration.*

The Committee noted that a report would be submitted to a future meeting to include the additional venues which Members had submitted to the Director of Economic Development, together with an update on Political Tourism issues.

### **Request to Present**

#### **Department for Infrastructure - York Street Interchange Review Update**

It was reported that a request had been received from the Department for Infrastructure to present the findings of the York Street Interchange Place-Making Review at a future meeting.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and agreed to receive an in-person presentation from the Department for Infrastructure on the findings of the York Street Interchange Place-Making Review at a future meeting. The Committee requested that the presentation document be received in advance of the meeting and noted that

questions or issues Members wished to raise would be compiled and sent to Dfl in advance of its deputation.

The Committee also noted that a reminder would be sent to Dfl Roads regarding the outstanding information which had been requested at its meeting in November.

## **Growing Business and the Economy**

### **Employability and Skills Update**

The Committee considered the following report:

#### **“1.0 Purpose of Report**

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on a range of activity undertaken so far in 2022/23 to support skills development, economic engagement and job outcomes for key target groups.**

**1.2 The work programme supports the inclusive growth ambitions of the Council by targeting interventions on key cohorts, including:**

- Residents out of work and experiencing barriers to employment/self-employment, including those who are long-term unemployed and economically inactive
- Residents with low skills levels
- Young people who do not have a baseline Level 2 equivalent qualification and/or at risk of dropping out of (or not in) education, employment or training
- In work, low earning residents
- Those living in areas of highest multiple deprivation.

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the work undertaken in the financial year to date and the positive employability and jobs outcomes associated with the work
- Approve the allocation of £40,000 from the existing E&S Revenue budget to continue to work in partnership with RSA Cities of Learning to progress Digital Badging in the city.

#### **3.0 Main report**

##### **3.1 Employment Academies**

Members will be aware that Employment Academies are one of the key instruments that the Council's Employability and Skills team utilises to help people into work. While the

content of Employment Academies varies from programme to programme, there are a number of consistent components, namely:

- Employer-led skills training related to the specific job role
- In-situ work sampling/work placements
- Employability support particularly focused on the final employment interview (all candidates are guaranteed a job interview).

3.2 Given the volatility in the labour market – and the limited financial resources available to undertake the work – our decisions around the priority work plan have been driven by a number of factors including:

- Opportunity presented by a number of growth sectors (particularly tech and fibre) to support participants into roles with higher earning potential. In recognition of the additional skills support work required, these interventions tend to have a higher per capita cost for participants but offer a positive return on investment in terms of salary levels for those successful in finding work following engagement in the programme
- Ongoing need to work with employers to convince them of the value of alternative approaches to finding talent other than pre-existing qualifications and/or experience. This is particularly the case for our work in new sectors – specifically those that have tended to think ‘degree first’ and have not considered alternative routes
- Employers with entry level jobs – particularly in sectors such as hospitality – continue to experience significant challenges in finding workers and officers are working with them to consider issues such as terms and conditions and payment of the real living wage in order to attract and retain talent
- Opportunities to support existing employees through upskilling interventions – supporting individuals to improve salary levels by progressing to a better job and thereby embedding a skills-escalator by creating additional entry-level roles.

3.3 In this year, we have allocated over 700 places to our Employment Academy interventions. A breakdown of the sectoral engagement is detailed below:

Employment Academy	Participant Numbers	
HSC, Childcare & Playwork Upskilling Academy	119	
Transport Academy	110	
Construction Sector Academy	99	
Retrofit Academy*	97	
Classroom Assistant Employment & Upskilling Academies	55	
Tech Academy	55	
Business Services/Administration Academy	50	
Customer Service Sectors Academies	40	
Fibre Academy	40	
Childcare and Health and Social Care Academy	35	
BCC General Operative & Business Support Academy	23	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>723</b>	
*The purpose of this Academy is to create the skills infrastructure needed when job demand occurs and as such this will not be measured in terms of job/better job outcomes.		

- 3.4 Given seasonal variations, most Belfast Employment Academies go live in September and then January of each year. However, we delivered a number of Academies over the summer months as outlined below with some significant job outcomes. Of the places allocated above across the 2022/23 financial year, from April 2022, 409 people have started an Employment Academy with 191 completing to date and 138 job outcomes, representing an into-work rate of 72% of those completing.
- 3.5 The September roadshows this year were held in Girdwood, St Comgall's, Crescent Arts Centre and Banana Block. In addition to this, officers promoted Employment Academies at jobs fairs in Duncairn Arts Centre, Kennedy Centre, Park Centre and St George's Market. As a result, over 400 people have applied for the Autumn suite of Belfast Employment Academies and are currently going through pre-academy screening and selection. An insight into current activity in the variety of sectors is detailed below.

**3.6 Tech Employment Academy**

Members will be aware that the tech sector is one of the largest employers in the city at present. It also remains a key focus for Invest NI in terms of future investment and support for existing businesses and is identified in the draft 10x vision as a priority area for future government support. To date, it has been challenging to secure employer support for exploring alternative engagement mechanisms, particularly those that set aside the requirement for a degree qualification – even for entry-level roles.

**3.7** Following extensive research and engagement with employers, the first Tech Employment Academy was launched in June 2022. The programme had over 100 applicants for this ground-breaking 16-week programme supported by Allstate and Citi. Screening and selection included aptitude assessments and interview with 17 starting for jobs the programme, focused on Software Development and Product Management. The programme ran for 16 weeks and concluded in October 2022. To date, 12 participants (71%) have progressed into immediate employment with starting salaries for the above roles range £23k-£28k. Further employability support is being provided to remaining participants including job applications, CV support, interview preparation etc. All participants were deemed employable by the participating employers, who were restricted only by the number of roles on offer.

**3.8** As we move forward, the intention is to continue to offer Employment Academies in this area. Strategic employer engagement has been ongoing throughout the Autumn to build awareness of the offer and seek involvement. We have allocated an additional 38 places for people to commence in early 2023 once employer demand is secured. It is interesting to note that, of those who did not secure a place on this first Tech Employment Academy, a large number of the (unsuccessful) applicants to the pilot cohort remain engaged and interested in participating as we move forward.

**3.9 Retrofit Academy**

The Reset for Growth report completed by the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission (IIGC) in June 2021 identified the need for a retrofit programme of scale in Belfast to create employment opportunities in this new sector, while supporting the city's zero carbon commitments. Following our initial scoping work, it became apparent that a significant

stumbling block was the lack of a curriculum in this space. Officers were successful in securing funding through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) Community Renewal Fund to develop a pilot intervention that would help build a curriculum for the vocational skills in this sector while also providing skills support for a number of individuals – thereby providing the 'building blocks' for a larger-scale intervention in partnership with key organisations including NIHE.

3.10 To date, almost 100 participants have taken part in the training as follows:

- Level 2 – Understanding Domestic Retrofit – 57 Participants
- Level 3 – Retrofit Adviser – 20 Participants
- Level 4 - Retrofit Assessor – 5 Participants
- Level 5 – Retrofit Coordinator – 15 Participants

3.11 Moving forward from this pilot, the intention is to expand the level of uptake in order to build the supply chain so that government commitments in this space can be met. In parallel, the Climate Commissioner has led on the establishment of a local Retrofit Hub. This brings together a range of work strands related to retrofitting including skills development; building regulations; academic research and government incentives in order to take a more strategic view of the opportunities and challenges within this sector and to develop more coherent responses that can support the drive to zero carbon while also creating employment; improving housing stock and supporting new business development opportunities.

3.12 Fibre Employment Academy

Research undertaken by Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre (EPC) identified the utilities sector as having significant potential for future growth and one that could help improve both median salary levels and business competitiveness and productivity. Based on these insights, officers last year brought forward a Fibre Academy. Working with the delivery partners, we developed an intervention covering a number of roles including fibre installers, splicers and groundwork teams. Based on 2021/22 delivery, employment outcomes were very positive (90% into-employment) and starting salaries for successful applicants averaged at £29k. Some of those who completed the programme last year have already moved into management positions, including an individual who was out of work due to Covid, and who has moved into a project management role with a local fibre company earning a salary of £50k pa.

3.13 Based on the early success of the initial cohorts, we have just commenced delivery of a new programme in November this year and will engage 40 people before the end of the year. Demand from employers remains high and we expect that this will continue.

3.14 **Business Services**

In addition to tech and digital roles, the wider professional and business services sectors have witnessed significant employment growth over the last decade. Our research indicates the potential for further growth. As a result, we developed a number of interventions this year – including a Business Services Academy that focused specifically on Business Support and Administration roles within Belfast City Council as well as other employers. A particular success of this Academy has been the engagement with the disability sector, which has led to a high number of people with disabilities participating in the training and securing employment.

3.15 **Care Sectors**

Since April 2022 we have supported 35 people through an Employment Academy with 19 people having already moved into paid employment within a care sector job. In addition to this we have also enabled 119 Belfast residents to develop their existing knowledge by offering them the opportunity to upskill for a better job in a care sector role, from Health and Social Care to Childcare and Playwork.

3.16 Our upskilling programmes support participants to achieve their Level 3 and/or Level 5 qualifications within their chosen profession. This then qualifies them to progress into more senior roles within their organisation. It also improves their earning potential and creates further entry-level positions for new entrants into the sector thereby enabling a skills-escalator model in the city. Finally, these upskilling academies also help to fill the skills gaps within these industries and ensure the provision of health and social care services across the city – particularly important for those who are more vulnerable.

3.17 In September 2022, officers also developed an upskilling programme for Classroom Assistants. This will support residents to achieve Level 3 in Supporting Teaching and Learning in School, enabling employees to move from precarious temporary employment to permanent roles within the education sector. We are also working on a pilot academy for new entrants to the Classroom Assistant role which is due to begin in early 2023.



### **3.18 Construction**

The Employability and Skills teams has been working in the construction sector for a number of years. More recently, our work has focused on supporting the development of major construction schemes, including Weaver's Court. Since April 2022, 99 participants have engaged with our support programmes and 78 having moved into paid employment to date. In addition to this, officers have delivered a General Operative Employment Academy for BCC posts ringfenced for long-term unemployed and all seven who completed secured employment with BCC. Another new intervention in the construction sector has been to focus on key roles that have specialist technical skills. Some examples of additional training that we have provided includes digger/dumper driving and telescopic forklift operation. Staff that have these specialist licences and training can potentially move from minimum wage to earning between a £16ph-£24ph.

### **3.19 Social Value**

The Employability and Skills team continues to support colleagues in Corporate Procurement Service (CPS) in the implementation of the social value toolkit. Our contribution focuses on the employability and skills elements of the toolkit. We have recently produced explanatory materials for employers to outline the types of support that we can provide them with in meeting their social value obligations.

3.20 We also provide advice and guidance to colleagues across the council on social value and supported delivery on several projects such as City Cemetery, redevelopment of St Comgall's, redevelopment of Millennium Park, Templemore Baths Restoration and Shankill Shared Women's Centre project. The work done as part of the creation of visitor's centre at City Cemetery recently won the Social Value Project of the Year award at the Construction Employer's Federation's Construction Excellence Awards 2022.

### **3.21 Digital Badging**

Digital Badging is a relatively new area of work for the Council over the last year. We explored this area of work given the disproportionately high numbers of individuals in the city that have no or low skills. Working with the RSA through a pilot phase in which they provided match funding to the council, we have issued 435 Digital Badges to people completing an Employment Academy. Moving beyond the

Council, we have signed up 19 of our partners and they are now working on creating their own digital badges.

3.22 Building on the success of the first year in operation, it is proposed that we extend our partnership with RSA Cities of Learning, Badge Nation and Navigatr by way of a community membership licence. This will enable the Council to continue to write, issue and support providers and employers with access to Digital Badging memberships. It will also offer participants access to a live jobs feed on the Navigatr platform, linking them to local job opportunities connected to the skills they have developed through their badges. The partnership with RSA going forward will also provide the Council with scoping, intelligence and research in line with our priorities. Year 2 of the project will cost the Council £40,000. This allocation has been set aside within the existing budget for this financial year.

3.23 Stakeholder Engagement

The Employment Academy work relies heavily of a range of employability organisations to engage and support participants and to communicate and share information on planned activities. At present, we have a network of almost 200 employability practitioners that we engage with on a regular basis and is open to all employability organisations in the city. Over the last year, the communication has largely been through monthly online meetings. However the plan from next year is to move towards more in-person events and engagements.

3.24 Members will be aware of the significant funding challenges for this sector in the coming year, particularly relating to the end of European Social Fund (ESF) support and the lack of clarity around Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) implementation. While the Council has limited authority in this regard, we recognise the importance of having a strong employability sector that can engage and support individuals that are furthest from the labour market.

3.25 One mechanism that we have identified to provide support to the sector is that we have recently become a corporate affiliate partner of the Institute for Employability Professionals (IEP). Through this partnership, we have been able to offer membership places to 100 employability practitioners in the city. The IEP will provide participants with development and upskilling support for their staff. This should be beneficial for those organisations seeking to secure funding or win new business in the future and will also provide access to the most recent thinking in this area of work. The IEP will also provide us with access to a range of expertise and we will use the network to organise events

that can benefit the wider sector across the city. The first event is planned for January 2023 and will focus on mental health training and working with those who are neurodivergent. Attendance will be open to all those who are IEP members in the city.

### **3.26 Financial and resource implications**

The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2022/23 budget for the Employability & Skills section of the Place and Economy departmental budget that was included as part of the estimates that were approved by this Committee on 12 January 2022.

The allocation of £40,000 to RSA Cities of Learning to progress Digital Badging in the city will be taken from this existing budget.

### **3.27 Equality implications/rural needs assessment**

The team has created a CRM system that allows them to track participant data across all engagement activity. This information is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that all equality implications are considered. Officers also use this information to address under-performance in specific areas and then put in place targeted actions to redress the balance in future engagements.”

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development provided further information on the data and completion rates of the Employment Academy interventions and explained the breakdown of the various provisions across the city. The Employability and Skills Manager advised that drop-out rates were low and that further data could be provided on progression and completion rates of the various academies. The Director highlighted that work was continuing to ensure opportunities were being accessed across the city and a further update would be submitted to the Committee in due course

He also advised that a request had been received from the European Social Fund Peer Group to present to a future meeting of the Committee,

The Committee:

- Noted the work undertaken in the financial year to date and the positive employability and jobs outcomes associated with the work;
- Approved the allocation of £40,000 from the existing Employability and Skills Revenue budget to continue to work in partnership with RSA Cities of Learning to progress Digital Badging in the city;
- Agreed that the European Social Fund Peer Group be invited to present at a future meeting of the Committee; and

- Noted that a report would be submitted to a future meeting to provide further data on Employability and Skills provision across the city.

### **Positioning Belfast to Compete**

#### **Belfast Bikes Quarter 2 Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

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

1.1 To update Members on the performance of the Just Eat Belfast Bikes scheme in the second quarter (1 July to 30 September 2022) of year 7 of operation.

##### **2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 The Committee is requested to:

- note the update of the Just Eat Belfast Bikes performance for Year 7 Q2 (June to September 2022);
- note the update to the notice of motion regarding free access for young people;
- note the progress with regard to phase one and phase two expansion.

##### **3.0 Main report**

##### **3.1 Background**

The Belfast Bikes scheme was launched in 2015 as part Belfast City Council’s physical investment programme. The Department for Regional Development provided initial capital funding for the scheme as part of their Active Travel Demonstration Projects budget. The scheme launched with a network of 30 docking stations and 300 bikes. The scheme has been operated by NSL continually since inception using bikes and supporting infrastructure from ‘Nextbike by TIER’. The scheme currently operates with 573 bikes (including those in reserve for new stands) and 50 docking stations.

**Expansion of the Scheme**

**3.2 At CG&R on 12 May 2021 it was agreed that an additional four Belfast Bikes docking stations would be deployed using DFI Active Travel funding. Installation began in Q1 and current status is as follows:**

- Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre was installed on 7 July 2022 and is operational;**
- Olympia Leisure Centre was installed on 25 October 2022 and is operational;**
- Kennedy Centre installation has been delayed due to supply chain issues, and is expected to be operational by mid-December;**
- Waterworks installation has been delayed due to supply chain issues, and is expected to be operational by mid-December.**

**Council officers are currently liaising with the operator and supplier to improve the supply chain issues for future installations.**

**3.3 At CG&R on 9 June 2021 it was agreed to proceed with an additional 15 docking stations. An investment of approximately £525,000 is required, based on cost estimates from previous network expansions. At SP&R on 18 June 2021 members agreed for £500,000 to be invested in the expansion proposal.**

**3.3 A procurement exercise is ongoing for the design and installation of eight stations in Phase 1 (to be installed 2022/23):**

- North: Yorkgate and Shore Road**
- West: St Mary’s College and Shankill Road**
- South: Lisburn Road and Malone Road**
- East: Castlereagh Road, Upper Newtownards Road.**

**Seven stations will follow in Phase 2 in the following year (2023/24).**

**3.5 As previously agreed by the committee, discussion and agreement through Area Working Groups is required to determine exact locations and consider those against the Site Expansion Matrix. These site options and discussions with Area Working Groups commenced in November.**

### Operational Performance

#### Availability

- 3.6 Following challenges sourcing replacement bike parts earlier in the year, supplies and bike availability significantly improved during Q2. Average daily bikes on the street during Q2 was 340.
- 3.7 An additional 180 bikes have been purchased to facilitate the ongoing docking station expansion, so availability levels are expected to further increase in coming months.

#### Membership

- 3.8 There were 75,129 registered Belfast Bike users at the end of Q2.
- In Q2 'Pay as you go' (PAYG) memberships was the most popular form of membership, accounting for 95% of users.
  - Annual memberships accounted for 5% of users. There is an ongoing trend of users switching from annual membership to PAYG.
  - Casual memberships have greatly reduced, accounting for less than 1% of memberships, due to the introduction of PAYG.

#### Journeys

- 3.9 There have been 1,292,583 journeys since the scheme was launched including 56,175 journeys during Q2 Year 7.

Although this is a decrease of 23% from the same period in Year 6 (which was an exceptionally busy year for the scheme), journeys during this period increased by 12% against Q2 average since the scheme commenced.

#### Vandalism

- 3.10 Members will be aware that vandalism is an ongoing problem. Upgrades to the forks to help prevent the unauthorised removal of bikes has been successful however, damage is now being caused to the rear wheels while bikes are being forced from docking stations. There have also been instances of bikes being set on fire and damaged beyond repair.

- 3.11 There were 130 instances of vandalism in Q2. Vandalism costs payable by the Council for this period is £17,201. This figure is significantly higher than the quarterly average (£5,314).
- 3.12 Members should note that generally the number of vandalism incidents has decreased in recent years, however vandalism costs have increased due to the higher cost of parts associated with a higher quality of bike. Bikes were upgraded to 'SMART' bikes in 2021. For comparison, in the same period in 2017, there were 243 instances of vandalism at a cost of £6,032 i.e. higher incidents but at a lower cost. See [Appendix 1](#) - tables 2 and 3 for annual comparison.
- 3.13 Members should also note that following the upgrade to 'SMART' bikes, the amount of theft has decreased due to GPS tracking in the bike allowing for recovery. The operator is very proactive at retrieving missing bikes.
- 3.14 The bikes operator continues to deliver operational improvements and community engagement initiatives with PSNI to help decrease vandalism incidents.

#### Subscriptions and Usage Revenue

- 3.15 Income from fees and charges in Q2 was £71,608.

Year to date income from fees and charges is £123,699. This is 29% higher than average for this period.

#### MARCOMMS

- 3.16 Marketing activity during Q2 included:
- Advertising campaign including radio, digital and outdoor;
  - Full page advert in City Matters magazine (circulation of 160k homes);
  - Council-led press release on new station at Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre with additional stations to follow. Media coverage included Belfast Live, North Belfast News (front page), Andersonstown News, South Belfast News and South Side Advertiser;
  - Additional media and social media coverage included NIfamilybloglife, NI Travel News Online, Insider Media, 4ni.co.uk;
  - Social media updates across all Belfast Bikes channels on new station at Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre with additional stations to follow.

- 3.17 Belfast Bikes currently has 5.1k followers on Twitter; 1.7k on Facebook; and 1.1k on Instagram.

Operator contract

- 3.18 NSL continues to operate the Belfast Bikes scheme, with a contract renewal available until 2024. Council staff are reviewing the scheme and will make future recommendations for the management, operation and potential expansion of the scheme as part of a new procurement package.

Sponsorship

- 3.19 Council officers are currently assessing procurement options for a new sponsor of the scheme.

Response to Notice of Motion

- 3.20 Following a Notice of Motion from Councillor O'Hara the Committee agreed on 4th March 2020 to investigate *'as part of the current strategic review of the Belfast Bikes Scheme, consideration be given to granting free access to young people 25 years of age and under to the scheme'*.
- 3.21 Belfast Bikes operator, NSL, added date of birth (D.O.B.) as an essential criteria for users from 13 October 2022. It would be prudent to wait approximately six months to allow the majority of users to upgrade their information before accurate age demographics can be determined.
- 3.22 However, initial reports indicate the 49% of users fall within the '25 and under' age group. Providing free usage to under 25's is likely to have a significant detrimental impact on revenue generated from the bike scheme, which directly contributes to operating costs.
- 3.23 Alternative proposals for discounted rates for certain users (e.g. young people, students, corporate discounts) are being explored. The current operator has advised that while discounted offers are complicated to be added to the system, they can be done. The application of these is being finalised and it is hoped trials will commence in the coming months.

Update on Covered Cycle Stands city-wide

- 3.24 Whilst Covered Cycle Stands are not part of the Belfast Bikes scheme, both initiatives are aligned to the Bolder Vision with a focus on improvements in the active travel provision and infrastructure across the city. Covered Cycle Stands are part of the Active Travel Enablers project.



**Phase 1**

- 3.25 Under the Dfl Sustainable and Active Travel elements of the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, 10 covered cycle stands were funded city-wide. Locations were agreed in previous CGR Committee and the status is as follows:

Gasworks	Installed July 2022
St. George's Market	Stand delivered but still awaiting Dfl approval
Grosvenor Community Centre	Installed September 2022
Shankill Leisure Centre	Installed July 2022
Belmont Park	Installed August 2022
Inverary Community Centre	Installed August 2022
Belfast Zoo	Installed August 2022
Waterworks	Installed August 2022
Belvoir Activity Centre	Installed August 2022
Mary Peter's Track	Installed September 2022

**Phase 2**

- 3.26 Members received an update on the Dfl funding for the Active Travel Enabling Projects in March 2022 that outlined the projects, budget and timeframe for delivery. In terms of the covered cycle stands, officers drew upon the priority areas identified by Sustrans, and these locations were also assessed in terms of the deliverability within the timeframe as well as the key criteria aligned to cycle infrastructure provision.
- 3.27 Following a procurement process, a supplier has been appointed for the next 10 covered cycle stands being delivered in-year.
- 3.28 **Financial & Resource Implications**

**Finance**

There are no specific financial or resource implications contained within this report.

### **3.29 Equality or Good Relations Implications**

**None.”**

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development highlighted that usage for the financial year was expected to increase in the Spring, however, the reasons for the decline in usage to date would be investigated further.

During further discussion, one Member raised concerns in relation to the lack of cycle infrastructure in Belfast and suggested that the Committee request confirmation from the Department for Infrastructure of the budget allocation for 2022/2023.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the update of the Just Eat Belfast Bikes performance for Year 7 Q2 (June to September 2022);
- Noted the update to the notice of motion regarding free access for young people;
- Noted the progress with regard to phase one and phase two expansion; and
- Agreed to write to the Department for Infrastructure to request confirmation of the budget allocation for the delivery of the Belfast Cycle Network in the financial year 2022/23.

### **Strategic and Operational Issues**

#### **Committee Plan - 6- Month Update**

The Committee was reminded that the 2022-23 Committee Plan had been developed in the context of the Council's Corporate Plan and the emerging, refreshed Belfast Agenda and contained the commitments within the Corporate Delivery Plan, which were under the remit of the Committee, plus additional deliverables that had been agreed by the Committee. It outlined the main priorities and programmes of work that the Committee was overseeing to maximise the Council's contribution to the Belfast Agenda and deliver a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery.

It was reported that Appendix 1 (copy available [here](#)) outlined progress with the main commitments in the Committee Plan for the six month period, April-September 2022 and that many of the commitments would continue to be delivered over the course of the year and the Committee would be kept informed of its progress.

The Committee noted the contents of the mid-year report and progress against the agreed actions within the 2022-23 City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan.

**NI Housing Executive - Consultation on draft  
Corporate Plan 22/23 - 24/25**

The Committee considered the undernoted report and associated appendices:

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

**1.1** The purpose of this report is to update Members on the draft consultation response to NIHE’s Corporate Plan 2022/23 – 2024/25 which is due to be submitted to NIHE by 14th December 2022. A draft response will be submitted on behalf of Belfast City Council subject to approval by this committee and further subject to Council ratification in January 2023.

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1** The Committee is asked to:

- Consider and approve the Council’s draft consultation response submission to the NIHE’s consultation on their draft Corporate Plan 2022/23 – 2024/25 enclosed with this report at Appendix 2.
- Consider and agree that the response, subject to any amendments by Committee, will be submitted by the closing date of 14th December 2022 on the basis that it remains subject to ratification by Full Council in January 2023.
- **Note the draft response has been formed on the basis of previously agreed Council positions on housing which were submitted in response to the Department for Communities consultation on the Housing Supply Strategy 2022-2027 and consultation on Intermediate Rent.**

**3.0 Main report**

**3.1 Background**

Members will know that the NIHE is the Strategic Housing Authority for NI and a public landlord at scale. With an annual budget of more than £1.2bn, NIHE provides a range of public services across NI, with a footprint extending to more than 220,000 homes and services impacting on one in every three people. NIHE is also a Community Planning partner, chairing the Housing-Led Regeneration sub-group (which is aligned to the ‘Our Place’ theme currently being developed as part of the on-going refresh of the Belfast Agenda) which sits under the City Development Board, reporting to the

Community Planning Partnership. Through this group, as part of the process of refreshing the Belfast Agenda, NIHE are leading on the collaborative development of an action plan for housing-led regeneration which will help us deliver the agreed Belfast Agenda target to grow the city's population by 66,000 by 2035, with the Local Development Plan (LDP) providing the planning framework to allow us to build the 31,600 homes which are required to meet that target.

Although housing has been identified as a priority in its own right in the Belfast Agenda, the wider impact of good quality housing on the health and wellbeing of residents of Belfast and other priority outcomes of the community plan should not be underestimated. It is within this broad, cross-cutting context that Council's draft consultation response has been prepared.

Council had previously provided a response to both the Department for Communities Housing Supply Strategy 2022-2027 consultation regarding Proposals for Intermediate Rent.

#### **Emerging draft NIHE Corporate Plan**

During the summer and autumn of 2021, NIHE engaged with customers and stakeholders to commence the process of developing their new three year Corporate Plan. These engagement exercises enabled them to identify a number of strategic themes and key priorities for the next three years (2022/23 – 2024/25).

#### **Emerging Priorities and Objectives**

NIHE's draft Corporate Plan sets out six high level priorities / objectives for comment:

- i We will work with our partners, taking the lead role as the Strategic Housing Authority, to increase social housing supply to help meet identified need.
- ii We will help NI meet its emissions targets, address the impact of climate change and help sustain and protect our environment for future generations.
- iii We will invest around £1,973m\* (over the next 3 years) into our local economy, through our housing services, construction activity, employment opportunities and through our support for the health, voluntary and community sectors. In the same period we will process circa £1,148m in Housing Benefit payments across public and private housing tenures.

- iv We will work with our partners to deliver innovative housing solutions for our customers and to help reduce poverty and improve Health & Wellbeing
- v We will engage with our customers to ensure that they are at the heart of service improvements and our business delivery model.
- vi We will be an employer of choice and deliver high quality services for all in N.I.'s increasingly diverse community.

The consultation also includes in its Appendices the NIHE's Annual Business Plan 2022/2023 and associated performance indicators and targets.

Members should note that the NIHE has highlighted a number of overarching caveats in setting the context for the development of the Corporate Plan. These include:

- The strong focus on preparing for a 'revitalised organisation.' NIHE notes that much work has been done during the last year to develop an Outline Business Case to consider and assess the potential options for a new financial model for the organisation to enable it to borrow to invest. Assuming progress will be made on this, the NIHE hopes to be in a position to borrow by 2025.
- The plan notes that Cost of Living impact and considerations is an evolving situation and will be reflected in the Plan at the time of publication.
- The actions allocated to priorities are all 'subject to funding allocation' in terms of delivery.

#### Key Considerations

Below is a summary of the key points raised by officers in the draft consultation response. As noted above, many of these issues were previously highlighted as part of Council's consultation response to the Housing Supply Strategy and the consultation on Intermediate Rent. Details of the full response to the draft NIHE Corporate Plan can be found at Appendix 3 for Members consideration.

- Council notes that where the overall vision statement for the NIHE's Corporate Plan states that 'Everyone is able to live in an affordable, sustainable and decent home', that the first stated objective makes reference to 'social housing supply' only. Whilst Council recognises the need to and is supportive of the objective to increase social housing supply to meet identified need, we would suggest that as the strategic

Housing Authority, NIHE should focus on work to address housing affordability challenges in a broader sense as there are also affordability pressures in the private housing markets which require intervention

- NIHE should take a lead role in providing research, evidence and advice across a number of areas, including within its capacity as a statutory consultee in planning applications, in relation to for example: the delivery of mixed-tenure developments, implementing an industry standard for retrofitting or standards for energy efficiency, and ensuring that all interventions are the most appropriate and cost effective in the long term.
- As the first Local Development Plans (LDPs) are nearing adoption including Belfast's, the NIHE has a significant role in supporting the refining and implementing key housing policies through further work on providing data and developing new ways of working
- Cross-cutting collaboration and policy coordination is required across all relevant public and statutory sector bodies as well as exploring opportunities to work with third party and private sector partners
- NIHE should ensure that shared priority areas for action identified in Community Plans are embedded within the Corporate Plan and resourced appropriately (e.g. Supporting vulnerable people through Complex Lives model and its alignment with Housing First ; co-designing and delivering housing led regeneration schemes etc).
- NIHE should take the lead in working with relevant bodies to develop industry standards for retrofit and to seek to maximise the potential benefits and opportunities presented through 'green skills' and address the current mismatch between the skills demand and the current and future supply of such skills into the construction labour market. Consideration should be given to opportunities to invest in training staff in green skills including retrofitting.
- Encourage NIHE to establish standards which ensures that all new homes should be built to carbon-zero standards rather than continuing to build homes which will require retrofitting in the future.
- Welcome the opportunity to continue to work collaboratively with the NIHE in terms of the Council's employability programmes and ambitions to secure well paid and sustained employment opportunities for unemployed and economically inactive residents of Belfast ensuring that we have inclusive growth

- Encourage the development and implementation package of new affordable housing products as part of new developments would greatly help improve choice to a range of more affordable housing options

In addition to the specific comments on the high level objectives, the Council's response also sets out a range of key considerations which we believe are critical in terms of developing and delivering quality housing supply within the city. Some specific issues are highlighted in our response to question 3 and previously form part of Council's response to the Housing Supply Strategy consultation e.g:

- There are currently a number of policy, financial and structural challenges which are impacting upon the ability to successfully deliver placemaking housing regeneration schemes including the delivery via public /private partnerships
- Need to address the current and future pressures surrounding wastewater infrastructure
- Signposting to key key points highlighted in the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission: 'Reset for Growth' Report
- The need for housing investment funds to support new housing construction at scale in a similar manner to other UK cities and consideration as to how existing funding can be best utilised or refocused to support housing led regeneration priorities and unlock development
- Need to support, enable and encourage greater collaboration between the public and private sector to design innovative approaches to o unlocking key challenges with identified major city housing led regeneration schemes,
- Collaborative approach across government and with private sector in terms of identification and development of viable land.
- A Bolder Vision – which has '*Promote City Centre Living*' as one of its 4 key moves
- Need to recognise the significant and importance of city centre living to the future reimagining and sustainability of the Belfast (and other city and towns) high street / city centre. Highlight that the 'A Bolder Vision' has a core focus on 'Promoting City Centre Living', which it is recommended be central to any emerging recommendations from the High Street Task Force and embedded within Executive funding priorities

The consultation concludes by reiterating Council's commitment to continuing to work collaboratively with the NIHE and other stakeholders on maximising housing development and regeneration opportunities across Belfast as well as working together to address many of the associated social changes impacted upon through good quality housing.

#### **4.0 Financial and Resource Implications**

None

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

None.”

The Committee:

- Approved the Council's draft consultation response submission ([Appendix 3](#)) to the NIHE's consultation on their draft Corporate Plan 2022/23 – 2024/25 ([Appendix 2](#));
- Agreed that the response, subject to any amendments by the Committee, would be submitted by the closing date of 14th December 2022 on the basis that it remained subject to ratification by the Council in January 2023; and
- Noted the draft response had been formed on the basis of previously agreed Council positions on housing which were submitted in response to the Department for Communities consultation on the Housing Supply Strategy 2022-2027 and consultation on Intermediate Rent.

#### **Issues Raised in Advance by Members**

##### **GP services in Belfast (Councillor Heading to Raise)**

Councillor Heading outlined his request to invite the Strategic Planning and Performance Group to attend a future meeting of the Committee to present on how they plan to maintain GP services in Belfast, in particular details of future provision based on the Belfast Agenda population growth ambitions, especially in the City Centre where there are limited GP services.



The Committee agreed to the request and noted that the organisation would be invited to attend the Special Meeting in February.

Chairperson