

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 6th August, 2010

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Crozier (Chairman); and
Councillors Attwood, W. Browne, Campbell,
Hendron, N. Kelly, Lavery, McCarthy, Newton,
O'Reilly, Robinson, J. Rodgers and Rodway.
- Also attended: The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Humphrey); and
Councillors Jones, B. Kelly and Mac Giolla Mhín.
- In attendance: Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;
Mr. S. McCrory, Democratic Services Manager;
Miss S. Watson, Strategic Neighbourhood
Action Programme Manager; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors D. Browne, Hartley and Stoker.

Strategic Regeneration Frameworks

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks and to seek comments and approval for the draft SRF response to be submitted to DSD.

In June 2006, the Department for Social Development launched its Renewing Communities programme which included a commitment to the development of Strategic Regeneration Frameworks (SRF's) for each of the five areas of Belfast covered by Area Partnership Boards (East, North, South, West Belfast and Greater Shankill).

‘Each Belfast Area Partnership will be commissioned to provide a Strategic Regeneration Framework for their area, which will set a strategic context for important initiatives such as Neighbourhood Renewal, the development of arterial routes and the Health Action Zones’.

The Strategic Regeneration Frameworks aim to:

- To provide a strategic vision and context for guiding regeneration, planning and development.
- To identify a portfolio of strategic regeneration activities which could be delivered by the public/private sector.
- To set investment priorities for the area and influence planning decisions.
- To provide a clear comprehensive plan for action.
- To link with existing and emerging policies, projects and initiatives.

The Strategic Regeneration Frameworks have now been presented to Belfast City Council, Government Departments and key agencies for consultation.

Key Issues

A Belfast City Council draft response to each of the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks has now been prepared. The response focused on the following key areas:-

- Strategic fit with Council's corporate plan.
- Alignment with other key Council policies and strategies.
- Identification of the key projects/activities that the Council is already delivering that addresses the regeneration priorities within the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks.
- How the Council plans to use the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks.
- Restrictions within the funding environment.
- Any specific issues that the Council has with some of the key recommendations.
- Recommendations for moving the process forward and potential next steps.

Given that the SRFs affect all departments across the Council and potentially have resources consequences, we are bringing the overall report to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee so that decision can be made in the context of the overall corporate and financial planning of the organisation.

Core recommendations

At the heart of the response are a number of core recommendations that need to be considered. It is recommended that each SRF should be viewed as a long term vision for their respective area. The current documents should be viewed as the first step in a longer term process and if they are to move forward then they need to consider the following:-

- There needs to be further consideration as to how these frameworks can connect into a city-wide agenda and connect to citywide strategic developments e.g. Titanic Quarter.
- There needs to be on-going engagement rather than one-off bi-lateral meetings with key organisations to ensure that the SRF's can continue to play a role in informing the current and future planning process.
- The SRF's now need to consider the prioritisation of projects and activities and their proposed timeframes for implementation.
- The SRF's also need to be reviewed to take into account financial constraints and the current economic climate which had not been a factor when the frameworks were developed.
- Potential sources of funding and strategic partners need to be identified for priority projects.
- There needs to be clarity around the roles and responsibilities of BRO, BCC and the Area Partnership Boards in taking the SRF's forward.
- There needs to be on-going citizen engagement undertaken by the Area Partnership Boards to ensure that the SRF's are living documents.

Issues with the SRF's

The Strategic Regeneration Frameworks are intended to be high level reference documents that are capable of guiding the sustainable regeneration of Belfast over the next 10-15 years. Whilst they identify a vision and articulation of local issues, needs and aspirations, achieving the objectives could take decades.

The following issues/observations could be made about the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks:

- The SRF's are 5 very different documents and each has a different focus which can make it difficult to pull together into an over-arching framework for the city.
- The SRF's are inwardly focused and there needs to be more emphasis on connecting them to a citywide agenda.
- The SRFs are vision documents and there are no committed resources identified to realise many of the objectives.
- They lack innovation/new approaches to addressing historical challenges.
- The recommendations are very general – clear actions and priorities need to be identified.
- There is no real sense of prioritisation or timescales being attached to area ambitions.
- An asset based approach to area regeneration would have been more constructive.
- There is a lack of connection between the SRF's and the Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans and there is no reference to the five local area Master plans also commissioned by DSD.
- There would appear to be some confusion regarding the role and function of the SRF's. This would need to be clarified when considering how it could influence planning processes.

Issues for BCC to consider

In addition to the issues specified above, the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks also raise key questions that need to be considered as the Council moves forward in this response. These include:-

- What happens to the SRF's in the future?
- What is the role of the Area Partnership Boards?
- How do we consider these frameworks within the financial constraints of the organisation?
- How realistic are these documents in the current climate?
- How should expectations be managed regarding implementation?
- How can these documents be used to inform the Belfast Masterplan
- How can these documents be used to prioritise the City Investment Framework?

These are all issues that will be considered in the context of the development of the Council's new Corporate Plan 2011-2014.

On going work

In September 2009, BRO established a Joint Working Group with representation from BRO, BCC and the Area Partnership Boards to take the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks to a stage whereby they could influence the next Programme for Government. The activities that were undertaken as part of this process included:-

- Analysis of key SRF proposals.
- Assessing their alignment with Government Policy direction.
- Identifying the challenges for moving specific projects and activities forward.
- Bi-lateral meetings held with representatives from all Government departments and key statutory organisations to discuss how the SRF's challenge or align with departmental priorities.
- Assessing responses received from a number of departments.

Creation of the 'Belfast Package'

At the September meeting of the Strategic Regeneration Framework Steering Group it was agreed that following the engagement process with the statutory agencies this could produce a 'Belfast Package' rather than a revised set of SRF's and an over-arching document. It was suggested that this could be a two page Appendix to the Comprehensive Spending Review proposals which would identify over-arching priorities for the city from April 2010 – March 2013 in key thematic areas such as employment, education, health, enterprise and investment as well as referring departments to the five area frameworks and their specific proposals should they wish to consider them in further detail.

This approach has been selected as DSD envisages that the next Programme for Government will concern itself with broadly similar priorities, aims, goals and targets. The document will seek to demonstrate the fact that many of the high level objectives are aligned with current government policy and programmes. It is not envisaged to be a lobbying tool to influence other departments but

that it would be anticipated that if departments are considering prioritising future programme spend that the Belfast Package document would be seen as a document which would support that prioritisation process.

This paper is still being developed and it is anticipated that it will be submitted to the Executive in September. This paper will be circulated to Committee when it is complete.

Resource Implications

Co-ordinated through the SNAP team

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report and to:

1. Endorse the draft SRF responses and approve the submission to DSD.

Decision Tracking

There is no decision tracking attached to this report.”

The Director of Development outlined the background to the development of the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks for each of the five areas of Belfast covered by the Area Partnership Boards, the aims of the Frameworks, the key areas on which the Council's response focused, the core recommendations, the issues and challenges which the Frameworks provided, the key questions which the Council needed to consider and how the Council could use them as a tool to aid its own prioritisation process for area-based activities.

With the assistance of visual aids, the Strategic Neighbourhood Action Programme Manager reviewed each of the five Frameworks in turn and provided details on their overarching strategic objectives and specific comments and questions regarding their implementation, recommendations for moving the process forward and the potential next steps for each of the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks.

During discussion, the Members made the following comments:

- the Frameworks appeared to be insular in nature and made no reference to the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy;
- each of the Frameworks had a number of common as well as area specific issues and these common issues needed to be identified in an overarching Belfast Framework;

- there needed to be a recognition of the funding constraints of the Council;
- the need to hold both Party Group and area-based briefings in order to allow all the Members more time to look at the responses in detail; and
- given the timeframe which would be required to undertake the aforementioned briefings, that the Department for Social Development should be requested to extend its deadline for the submission of responses.

The Chief Executive highlighted the importance of resource identification to the successful implementation of the issues identified in the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks and suggested that briefings on the Capital Programme be carried out alongside the area briefings.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed:

- (i) to defer consideration of the proposed response to enable either Party Group or area-based briefings or both to be arranged in order to provide the Members with the opportunity to consider both the Frameworks and the Council's proposed response in detail; and
- (ii) that the Department for Social Development be requested to extend the deadline for the submission of responses.

Chairman