

Development Committee

Tuesday, 22nd February, 2011

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor M. Campbell (Deputy Chairman); and
Councillors Crozier, Ekin, Garrett, Groves, Hargey, B. Kelly,
Mallon, Mac Giolla Mhín, McKee, Mullaghan, J. Rodgers,
P. Robinson, Rodway and Stoker.

In attendance: Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;
Mr. T. Husbands, Head of City Events and Venues;
Ms. C. Taggart, Community Development Manager;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairman (Councillor Maskey) and Councillor Lavery.

Belfast City Centre Management Presentation

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 Members will be aware that, at the December 2009 meeting of the Development Committee, agreement was reached on the recommendation to approve annual funding for Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) of £190,000 per year for two years, subject to annual review, commencing April 2010 and subject to activities and targets being met. This means that the current request will be the final year of the current in-principle funding commitment.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Belfast City Centre Management has prepared a draft business plan for the period 2011-2013 (Appendix 1). The business plan outlines the broad areas of focus for the organisation in the coming two years. At this stage, funding is being sought from Belfast City Council for the first of the two years only.

2.2 The organisation plans to rationalise a number of its functions and to prioritise new areas of work, taking account of the economic climate and of the priorities of their major funders.

- 2.3 In this regard, some preliminary discussions have taken place with Belfast City Council at officer level and with Department for Social Development (DSD), as the organisation's principal public funders.
- 2.4 The proposed vision for the organisation – as identified within the business plan – is 'to assist in the development of Business Improvement Districts for Belfast City Centre'. The concept of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) is referred to elsewhere in these reports and members will be aware that DSD has recently issued a consultation on the matter. If the legislation on this issue progresses, the concept could be operational from Spring/Summer 2012.
- 2.5 Legislation is already in place in other parts of the UK and Ireland to permit the establishment of BIDs. In a number of other cities where BIDs have been established, the town or city centre management company often takes over the role of the BID management. In these instances, the BID management duties can co-exist alongside other work in which the organisation is involved or the town centre management company effectively becomes the BID management company. If this were to be the case, there would be a need for further discussion with Belfast City Council and the organisation's other key stakeholders.
- 2.6 The majority of the work of BCCM will be carried out and managed by three working groups. These are:
- Public Space Management
 - Economic Performance
 - Safer City.

These groups undertake a range of activities in the course of the year and the draft action plans for each are listed in section 7 of the draft business plan.

- 2.7 It is proposed that, subject to general endorsement of the business plan by this Committee, officers will work with the management team at BCCM to further refine the work of these groups, to ensure compliance with wider council policies and to support the delivery of council objectives.
- 2.8 From the Development Committee's perspective, there are a number of key areas of work in which BCCM can support our activities in the coming year. These include:
- Delivery of targeted strategy to create a unique, balanced retail portfolio in the city centre.
 - Coordination of activities to animate vacant premises, in conjunction with other relevant partners

- Support in delivery of Belfast Business Awards
- Support in development and delivery of initiatives to support the independent retail sector
- Liaison with business community to facilitate the roll-out of the final phase of the Streets Ahead project
- Support in delivery of street dressing and lighting initiatives.

2.9 There are also a number of wider issues affecting council services, particularly cleansing and accessibility issues. These will be dealt with through the Public Space Management Action Group, which is currently chaired by the Director of Health and Environmental Services.

2.10 In order to maximise the impact of our support for BCCM, it is also proposed that further work is done to identify synergies between their work programme and that of other organisations such as Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB), in order to ensure maximum return on investment for the council.

2.11 In line with guidance from our Internal Audit team, the issue of performance management in dealing with externally-funded organisations should be taken into account in any new agreement with BCCM. It is important therefore that funding from Belfast City Council to BCCM is related to the achievement of key performance indicators which directly relate to the objectives of the Council's corporate plan. It is therefore proposed that a service level agreement is put in place, incorporating a range of measurable targets and that this is monitored on a regular basis.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 The funding requested for this financial year is £190,000.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

4.1 BCCM will be required to ensure that their plan is equality proofed.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Members are asked to:

- Consider the request for funding of £190,000 for the financial year 2011-2012, subject to agreed actions being undertaken and to targets being met, as set out in a service level agreement

- **Agree that further discussion should take place between BCCM and relevant council officers and members as well as other key funders to agree activities, targets and budgets to be included in the service level agreement, in order to ensure an integrated approach to support for the organisation.**

6 Decision Tracking

An update report on progress will be presented to members in October 2011.

7 Key to Abbreviations

**BCCM – Belfast City Centre Management
DSD – Department for Social Development”**

The Committee was advised that Messrs. A. Irvine, B. McGivern and N. Maynes, representing Belfast City Centre Management, were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Irvine informed the Committee that Belfast City Centre Management would, on behalf of its core funders, deliver additional services to Belfast City centre which would contribute in a measurable way to a cleaner, safer, accessible and economically vibrant City. He then outlined the role of the organisation and indicated that its Business Plan to 2013 would be reviewed, as necessary, given the proposed introduction of Business Improvement Districts and the new governance arrangements which would be in place after the Local Government and Northern Ireland Assembly Elections in May, 2011. Mr. Irvine outlined a number of successful projects which the organisation had overseen during 2010-2011, including:

- the establishment of a ‘Be Rewarded’ scheme for Belfast schoolchildren;
- the launch of a cross-community ‘Belfast Street Pastors’ scheme, which worked to assist vulnerable persons at nights and weekends;
- the management of removable bollards schemes at various pedestrian zones throughout the City; and
- the completion of an application to accredit the City under the Purple Flag Night-time Economy Scheme for the Belfast area.

Mr. Irvine then provided an overview of the cost efficiencies and savings which had been identified by the organisation and indicated that Belfast City Centre Management and the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau had agreed to work together in a number of areas to enhance the image and tourist potential of the City.

Mr. Irvine concluded his presentation by requesting that the Committee agree to provide the sum of £190,000 to Belfast City Centre Management for the year commencing 1st April, 2011.

The representatives from Belfast City Centre Management then answered various questions which were put to them by the Members following which the deputation retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendation as set out and agreed to provide the sum of £190,000 to Belfast City Centre Management for the financial year 2011/2012.

Presentation by the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Members agreed at the January 2011 Committee meeting to receive a presentation from Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau on their 2011/2012 Business Plan and financial support requested from Belfast City Council. A copy of their business plan is attached as Appendix 1.**
- 1.2 The Tourism, Culture and Arts unit within Development Department is responsible for developing and marketing Belfast as a tourist destination. The unit delivers a range of product development initiatives, manages the visitor signage and the Belfast Tourism Monitor research contracts and delivers £1.4 million funding to the culture and arts sector to animate the city (for visitors and citizens). Marketing and visitor servicing are outsourced to BVCB to deliver. BVCB is a public-private partnership with over 500 private sector members. The main funders are Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Funding from these two organisations allows BVCB to lever additional funding from the private sector through joint marketing initiatives and this represents good value for money for Belfast City Council. In 2009/10 period total private sector income was £1,086,578.**
- 1.3 The BVCB Board is representative of the sector and includes both private sector and elected representatives from Belfast City Council. Other councils in the Greater Belfast area (and beyond) also make smaller contributions but have no representation on the board. NITB sits as an observer, as do a range of interests including retail sector representatives.**

- 1.4 This year, Belfast City Council is contributing financial support towards the following activities:

Marketing and Communications	£1,336,000
Visitor Servicing	£529,465

- 1.5 A progress report of achievements to date (January 2011) is attached as Appendix 2.
- 1.6 BVCB's 2011 – 2014 Business Plan was developed by an external consultancy team comprising ASM Horwath, EFA Tourism and City Marketing and Kappa Consulting. It is based on the Council's Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010 – 2014 and was developed in consultation with the tourism sector across the city. The plan is seeking £1,413,000 towards Marketing/Communications and the same level of support towards visitor servicing, £529,465, in 2011/2012 period. The increase in marketing/communications appears to be attributed to events marketing. This will be treated separately to their annual request for funding as specific marketing initiatives may be agreed with the city events team during the year. Therefore the assumption is that the level of support sought for marketing is £1,336,000 as BVCB have been advised that budgets will remain at last year's level.
- 1.7 The independent consultancy team has offered a fresh approach to BVCB's planning process and the team has identified a number of key challenges to be addressed by BVCB during the next 2-3 years. These are explored in the issues section.
- 1.8 The targets established for 2011/2012 period within the plan are to grow total overnight stays by 3.9% to 4,056,000 and day trips by 4.4% to 7,730,000.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 The key issues identified in this report are as follows:
- 2.2 Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau is a small team and the plan identifies the need for the organisation to stay focused on their primary objective which is generating bed nights and increasing occupancy. The key market segments BVCB should target are city breaks and discretionary business tourists. The key geographical markets will be closer to home, namely Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, GB and those destinations that have direct access to the city.

- 2.3 **BVCB and indeed Belfast City Council should establish closer relationships with NITB and Tourism Ireland to maximise the opportunities of collaborative marketing and to influence Tourism Ireland on the Belfast messages in those markets where BVCB will not be present. Officers would recommend that a Belfast focused team is established including BVCB, NITB and Tourism Ireland to develop integrated marketing campaigns in ROI and GB.**
- 2.4 **To promote Belfast as a City Breaks destination the key drivers are entertainment, arts and culture and historic sites. The report recommends that the Council commissions a cultural mapping of the city to identify the key strengths in these areas. Members will be aware that we have already embarked on a new Integrated Cultural Strategy for the city and this can be incorporated into this work. The outputs of this work must be captured in the work of BVCB to convey the city's strengths within marketing campaigns.**
- 2.5 **The consultancy team through consultation feedback has queried the impact of the Belfast Brand as many stakeholders regard it as a logo and call for a Belfast brand strategy, including the development of a Belfast narrative. Whilst BVCB will have a key role to play, the team felt that it was not clear who this responsibility lies with. Officers would recommend that given the importance of developing a strong narrative for the city that the responsibilities should lie with Belfast City Council.**
- 2.6 **The business plan identifies a number of new ways in which Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau should be monitored. In particular, the focus is on increasing occupancy levels across the accommodation sector as well as adopting key performance measures that international membership organisations such as European Cities Marketing report on. It is also suggested that a Discretionary Business Tourism Taskforce is established to review the performance of BVCB in winning conferences. This would result in a closer relationship with the sector and allow for even more transparency in relation to monitoring BVCB's performance.**
- 2.7 **The importance of Performance Management and the need for a performance related service level agreement was highlighted in a recent internal audit of the Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit.**

It is important therefore that funding from Belfast City Council to BVCB is related to the achievements of key performance indicators which directly relate to the objectives within the Council's Corporate Plan and those set out in the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010 – 2014. A typical set of performance indicators is set out in the table below.

Table 1 BVCB KPIs 2011-2012

Source – Belfast City Region Marketing and Visitor Servicing Plan 2011 – 2014

<u>Leisure Marketing</u>	<u>Conference Bureau</u>	<u>Communications</u>	<u>Visitor Servicing</u>
50,000 website visits/mnth	Secure 28,000 delegates	Host 120 press trips	BWC visitor numbers: 265,566
Present to 30 agents/operators in direct access mkts	Secure 78,000 bed nights	secure £3.5m advertising equivalent	BWC total enquiries: 348,636
20 tour leads (Germany)	£25.8m of conference trade	120m weighted opps to see	BWC gross income: £972,501
20 leads from WTM	Recruit 70 new ambassadors	Secure PR coverage for 230 articles	
Secure 31 cruise ships	Secure interest of 60 buyers	Produce & distribute 12 issues of the Corporate (product) e-zine	
Organise 20 fam trips/300 trade visitors	40 new leads in Europe, 40 in UK, 10 in USA	Produce & distribute 12 issues of the Consumer (product) e-zine	Airport TICs: visitor numbers: 87,882
Secure additional 158,000 bed nights (v 2009)	Host FAM trip	Issue a minimum of 36 (Corporate and Product) press releases	Airport TICs: total enquiries: 146,871
Secure additional 179,000 day trippers (v 2009)	Submit 120 bids/60% conversion rate	Attract 5,000 followers through social media outlets	Airport TICs: £316,950

2.9 The Business Plan flags the need to focus on IT solutions and maximise Belfast's presence on city break websites. This is also identified within the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework and it is clear that the city requires a joined-up approach to new media marketing and communications.

2.10 A further issue identified in the report, which was also identified in the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework, is the variance between national and city statistics. The Tourism, Culture and Arts unit are currently working with both NITB and DETI to address this issue in the long term.

- 2.11 Finally, the success of BVCB relies on the relationship between BVCB, BCC and NITB. This relationship has been further cemented by the new Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework for Belfast 2010 – 2014; however it is important that all parties agree the role of BVCB and the targets to be delivered. If Council commit funds to BVCB for 2011/2012 period, a series of trilateral meetings will be held to agree activity, targets and budgets to allow BCC to finalise its funding agreement.

3 Resource Implications

- 3.1 The same level of funding based on 2010/2011 period to be committed to BVCB for marketing and communications (£1,336,000) and Visitor Servicing (£529,465). This has been included in Departmental budget estimates for 2011/2012.
- 3.2 Development Committee should note that a number of issues need to be addressed including a new media tourism plan for the city, cultural mapping exercise, better alignment of research between national and city statistics and a branding strategy (including the Belfast Narrative). This work must be integrated into the work of the Council to support the work of BVCB but furthermore to ensure we maximise the outputs.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

- 4.1 BVCB will be subject to undertaking Equality Screening on their plan as part of our funding requirements.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 It is recommended that:
1. Members agree to commit £1,865,465 towards Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau Marketing and Visitor Servicing Plans for 2011/2012 period, subject to a detailed service level agreement and
 2. Members agree that officers, prior to issuing a funding agreement, engage with both NITB and BVCB to agree activity, targets and budgets to be included within the service level agreement and ensure an integrated approach between the three partners.

6 Decision Tracking

**Timeframe: March 2011 Agreement between BVCB, NITB and
BCC on actions, targets and budgets
Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay**

**Timeframe: April 2011 Funding agreement issued to BVCB
Reporting Officer: Kerrie Sweeney**

7 Key to Abbreviations

**BVCB - Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau
NITB - Northern Ireland Tourist Board
KPI - Key Performance Indicators
DETI - Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry”**

The Committee was advised that a deputation from the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau was in attendance to address the Committee regarding its draft Marketing and Visitor Servicing Plan for the period 2011 to 2014. Accordingly, Messrs. G. Lennon, Chief Executive, C. Rogan, Chairman, and M. Williamson, representing ASM Horwath, who were acting as consultants for the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau in the development of its Marketing and Visitor Servicing Plan, were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Williamson provided an overview of the work which the Bureau had undertaken during 2010 and provided information on the number of visitors to the City during that period. He outlined the economic challenges which faced the City during the forthcoming period and indicated that the Bureau aimed to ensure that Belfast became a major European city break destination. He pointed out that the Bureau would lobby for the establishment of a major convention facility in the City and then outlined the short and long-term objectives of the Bureau. He referred to work ongoing, which included a comprehensive cultural mapping exercise, and he provided an overview of how the Bureau aimed to build on its previous successes in a period of economic uncertainty. Mr. Williamson concluded his presentation and the deputation answered a number of questions on the future strategic development of the Bureau.

Mr. Lennon requested that the Committee provide the sum of £1,865,465 to the Bureau for the forthcoming financial year.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to provide the sum of £1,865,465 to the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau during the 2011/2012 financial year and approved the contents of its Marketing and Visitor Servicing Plan for the period 2011/2014.

**Relocation of Belfast Welcome Centre –
Economic Appraisal**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 The Belfast Welcome Centre (BWC) opened in April 2001. It provides a focal point for visitors to Belfast by offering general tourist information on Belfast and Northern Ireland, ticketing, retail and accommodation bookings and it plays a key role in delivering spending targets for Belfast and spreading the economic benefits of tourism across the City.
- 1.2 The BWC currently deals with approximately 385,000 enquiries per annum (of which 310,000 are from visitors to its premises at Donegall Place). Annual revenue costs (approx £1.6 million per annum) are part funded by BCC (£479,465 per annum) and the NITB (£158,000 per annum) with the balance of funding arising from profit on retail sales and commissions on ticket sales/accommodation bookings.
- 1.3 The ten year lease of the current premises at Donegall Place expired on 31 July 2010, but is renewable. The current premises are on the first floor and it has been a long term aspiration of the BWC to relocate to a more suitable ground floor location.
- 1.4 Members have been fully briefed on the possibility of relocating the BWC. TTC and Allan Balnaves produced an initial report demonstrating the potential of the BWC relocation to ground floor, presented to Development Committee on 13 January 2010. ASM Horwath were appointed in October 2010 to undertake the economic appraisal and presented initial recommendations to Development Committee on the 10 November 2010.
- 1.5 Having considered the views expressed by the Members at the above meeting the consultants are now in a position to present their final report for the Committee’s consideration.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Rationale for Relocation

The Belfast Welcome Centre was opened in April 2001 and is now 10 years old. During this period, tourism across the city has grown and the total number of overnight trips to the City region has trebled. The tourism product has changed across

the City, a new Belfast brand has been adopted, visitor patterns have changed and the use of technology has become a must for all tourism destinations – to attract visitors and service visitors once in a destination.

- 2.2 2012/2013 will be a key year for Belfast as the new Titanic Belfast attraction will be opened. This, alongside recent private sector investment into the city e.g. Merchant Hotel, demonstrates the recognition of Belfast's importance as a tourism destination and a Gateway to the rest of the region. London 2012 also presents opportunities that will not be present in future years, specifically in relation to the number of international media who will visit the UK to cover the Olympics. The Belfast Welcome Centre plays a strategic role in signposting visitors from honey pot areas to other parts of the city and therefore will play an important part in spreading visitors and benefits across the city in 2012 and thereafter.
- 2.3 The Belfast Welcome Centre needs to be updated and it has long been their aspiration to move to a ground floor location. It is therefore timely to explore the potential for relocation before any lease on the current premises is extended and any upgrade in the existing facilities is undertaken.
- 2.4 The principal focus of the economic appraisal has been to assess the location options which are currently available. A preferred location has now been identified and, subject to the approval of this option by the Committee, a full business case now needs to be worked up to establish how this location might be sustained financially.
- 2.5 Lands Tribunal
- Members are aware that BCC's lease on the Donegall Place premises terminated on 31 July 2010. BCC as tenant applied to the Lands Tribunal for an order for the grant of a tenancy for a further year from 1 August 2010 and month to month thereafter at the current rent of £160,000 p.a. The application was made to the Tribunal as it was not possible to agree the term of the new lease with our landlord. The length of term requested by BCC reflects the ongoing work around a potential relocation of the Belfast Welcome Centre.
- 2.6 The Member for the Lands Tribunal has set 25 March 2011 as the date for the hearing with written evidence to be submitted to the Member by 11 March 2011. Legal Services have instructed Bernard Brady to act for BCC and his

Opinion on the case is awaited. The landlord's position is that they will accept no less than a 5 year term at the existing rent for any further tenancy. Even if the Member sets a term which BCC still find unacceptable BCC will have 3 months to vacate the premises.

2.7 Capital Programme

It is important to note that this project has not been included within the capital programme agreed by the Council at its meeting on 9 February 2011 when this year's rate was agreed. Should the Committee agree to approve one of the options set by the consultants the associated capital expenditure would require approval by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. Any decision would be subject to advice from the Director of Property and Projects and the Director of Finance and Resources as to whether the project represents value for money and is fundable within the capital budget allocation. Furthermore the SP&R Committee will want to consider the project within the context of the wider capital expenditure proposals.

2.8 Next steps

The next steps in the process are set out in the Council's Decision Making and Gates Review Process. These are:-

Development Committee decision considered by the SP&R Committee as part of Quarterly Update on the Capital Programme. Formal Prioritisation within the Capital Programme (SP&R)

Financial Services examine the preferred option within the Green Book Appraisal, capture resource needs for the project and future departmental implications/efficiencies

Gate 1 Review – Business Justification; Recommendation to move forward or referred back for clarification

(Gate Reviewers)

Department develops full business case, including brief for delivery and performance indicators for benefits to be achieved

3 Resource Implications

- 3.1 All options are based on receiving ongoing revenue support from BCC of £479,465 per annum, however relocation may present an opportunity to reduce this support.

- 3.2 The capital costs associated with the options presented within the report range from £544K, which is deemed to be the minimum reinvestment required in the current location, to £1.62 million associated with relocating to a suitable ground floor location. Should the SP&R Committee agree to proceed with the project applications will be made to NITB for capital support.
- 3.3 As stated in Paragraph 2.7 above any decision to proceed will lie with the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in the context of the overall capital programme and the availability of capital financing within the current budget.
- 3.4 If a decision is taken to proceed £15,000 will be required from the Development Department's 2011/2012 budget to support preparation of full business case.

4 **Equality and Good Relations Considerations**

- 4.1 If this projects proceeds it will be subject to Equality screening.

5 **Recommendations**

- 5.1 Members consider the options presented by the consultants and if appropriate agree to refer the project to the SP&R Committee for its consideration.

6 **Decision Tracking**

Timeframe: March 2011 - Report to SP&R Committee
Reporting Officer: John Mc Grillen

Timeframe: April 2011 - Further Report to the Development Committee
Reporting Officer: John McGrillen

7 **Key to Abbreviations**

BWC - Belfast Welcome Centre
NITB - Northern Ireland Tourist Board
BVCB – Belfast Visitor and Welcome Centre”

It was reported that Messrs. M. Williamson and J. Parker, representing ASM Horwath, who were acting as consultants in this matter and who had prepared the associated economic appraisal, were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Williamson reviewed the role of the Belfast Welcome Centre and referred to the options which had been considered for its future location and development, which are set out hereunder:

- (i) do nothing;
- (ii) relocate to Donegall Square North (the former Northern Bank Building);
- (iii) remain at the Donegall Place site and refurbish the building
- (iv) remain at the Donegall Place site and do nothing; or
- (v) relocate to the Belfast Central Library.

Mr. Williamson outlined advantages and disadvantages associated with each of the options, including the fit-out costs, the operating costs and potential revenues, the wider economic benefit to the City and the cost-to-benefit ratio. He advised the Committee that, after studying the future potential options for the relocation of the Welcome Centre, it had been concluded that the most advantageous to the Council, on a longer-term basis, would be to relocate to the former Northern Bank Building, 8-10 Donegall Square North, since it would, in the consultant's opinion, offer the most viable solution for the undernoted reasons:

- the building was of a high-profile and offered a central location close to the City Hall;
- the location would, potentially, attract a higher number of visitors which would, in turn, generate additional direct and indirect spending opportunities;
- the location was close to the existing transport network and any Rapid Transit System which might be developed in the City; and
- the location would enable the utilisation of the latest information technology.

Mr. Williamson and Mr. Parker then answered a number of questions which were put to them by the Members regarding the potential capital costs associated with the proposals outlined and they then retired from the meeting.

A Member stated that, whilst the former Northern Bank building in Donegall Square North was located in an area that would prove beneficial in terms of prominence, accessibility and potential footfall, a full survey should be carried to establish the long-term viability of the building as a site for the Welcome Centre. It was suggested also, given the age and design of the building, that there might be a long-term financial burden placed on the Council should it choose this option and that other possibilities should be explored.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to note the information which had been provided within the Consultant's report and agreed further that £15,000 be allocated towards the development of a full business case for each of the options, subject to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreeing that the project be included within the Capital Programme.

Date of March Meeting

The Director of Development informed the Committee that, due to the unavailability of the Chairman (Councillor Maskey) on 9th March, it had been suggested that the March meeting of the Committee be moved from its scheduled date.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed that the meeting be rescheduled for Tuesday, 16th March commencing at 4.30 p.m.

Business Improvement Districts – Consultation and Proposed Seminar

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 The Department for Social Development (DSD) has recently launched a consultation on Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Licensing of Pavement Cafes. The deadline for the submission of responses to this consultation is 28th February 2011.

1.2 Given the range of issues associated with both items, it is proposed to prepare separate responses to the two elements of this consultation i.e. one response relating to BIDs and a separate response focusing on the licensing of pavement cafes. The latter consultation will be led by the Health and Environmental Services Committee while the Development Committee will lead on the BIDs response.

2 Key Issues

2.1 The consultation paper sets out the key principles behind a BID, examples of the types of BIDs that can operate, an overview of the benefits for all parties involved and some guidance as to how to ensure a successful BID.

2.2 The specific roles of a council are defined. These include:

- Provision of key information to the BID partnership (ratings information and baseline service information) to assist with the development of BIDs proposals and calculation of the levy
- Organisations of formal BIDs ballots
- Collection and enforcement of the levy.

The consultation paper also suggests that local councils will 'play an important facilitating role' in the development of a BID in their area.

- 2.3 The consultation paper defines a BID as means of allowing 'businesses within a defined area to vote for collective investment in specific additional services in order to improve the commercial environment within that area'. Additional services or projects are funded by a local business levy and all businesses within a potential BID have the opportunity to vote on proposals before the levy is imposed.
- 2.4 The paper reinforces the message that BIDs are led by businesses but they also note that there is generally a significant degree of cooperation and collaboration with the relevant local authority.
- 2.5 In preparation of this draft response, discussions have taken place with Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) to gauge the level of interest and awareness of BIDs within the BCCM area. In addition, a number of meetings have take place with Department for Social Development to understand their expectation of BIDs and to identify how they see BIDs fitting within their wider regeneration and town centre development initiatives.
- 2.6 It is understood that the BCCM have been undertaking a significant degree of consultation with their members on the BID proposals. Feedback suggests that members are widely supportive of being involved in a BID and note that they would like to see BIDs resources being used towards a range of services including:
 - Cleaner and greener – targeting specific issues such as chewing gum, flyposting and recycling campaigns
 - Marketing and promotion – buy-in to agreed marketing campaigns and resources for additional city dressing
 - Safety and security measures – development of the City Centre Beat initiative and support for additional safety measures such as Contact Points.
- 2.7 Within BCCM's response, a number of potential BIDs areas have been identified within the city centre including:
 - The main retail core
 - The Cathedral Quarter – focus on evening economy and events-related activities
 - The office quarter south of City Hall (Linenhall Street, Bedford Street, Adelaide Street).

- 2.8 It is understood that a number of other areas have expressed an interest in developing a BID. These include the Lisburn Road, where there is already an established Business Association whose members are making a financial contribution towards a range of marketing and promotional activity, and the Cathedral Quarter Steering Group.
- 2.9 Based on our analysis, there appears to be a range of critical success factors in any BID:
- They must be business-led
 - Successful BIDs have a genuine public-private sector partnership based on a clear, focused and measurable business plan
 - An upper limit of approximately 600 businesses seems to be the size beyond which the BID becomes unwieldy
 - BIDs require significant investment in the preparation stage: it is estimated that it takes 12-18 month preparatory work before a BID can become operational.
- 2.10 From a Belfast City Council perspective, there are a number of positives that could ensue from the introduction of this legislation – principally a greater buy-in and commitment from the businesses to improving their operating environment. However there are a number of questions, issues and concerns and these have been captured in the draft response to the consultation. They include:
- Collection of the business levy: there is significant concern about councils' role in this, as outlined in the draft legislation. It is suggested that this role should be carried out by Land and Property Services, as part of the rates collection work
 - Work involved in providing detail of a baseline of services: much of the development activity undertaken to support businesses is discretionary and can vary in focus and in value from year to year. Even within statutory provision, this is subject to change, based on changing priorities and the drive for service efficiencies

- The consultation paper suggests that tenants rather than property owners should be involved in a BID. While we appreciate the difficulties in tracing owners and acknowledge the concerns that owners will pass on the levy to a tenant in the form of increased rates, it would be important, where possible, to engage owners in BIDs
- 2.11 Members should also be aware of a number of wider issues raised by this proposed legislation:
- While the legislation suggests that councils are not expected to make a financial contribution to a BID, practice elsewhere suggests that councils have tended to provide financial support towards management costs of BIDs
 - Consideration will need to be given to the impact on wider service delivery of any demands from a BID.
- 2.12 The consultation document is centred around a number of questions including:
- Are the respective roles of local councils and the Department considered appropriate?
 - Most of the detailed regulation of BIDs will be covered by secondary legislation and will therefore be the subject of another consultation. However we would be interested to hear at this stage about the degree of prescription which stakeholders feel should be applied to the procedures for this element of the BID process, i.e. the development of proposals, consultation on proposals etc.
 - Do you agree with the proposal not to require landlords to become involved in the operation of BIDs?
 - Is it reasonable to frame the voting system in terms of votes cast, rather than eligible votes. Should a minimum turnout be specified in order to validate a ballot?
 - Is this a reasonable balance between areas to be covered by legislation and those which will be left to local discretion?
 - What degree of guidance and support would be welcome from the Department?

2.13 DSD have suggested that they would be keen to progress to draft primary legislation within the timeframe of the current Assembly. If this progresses according to plan, it is suggested that the legislation could be in place by Spring/Summer 2012.

2.14 Exploring the implications of BIDs for Belfast:
Proposed seminar with Commissioner Rob Walsh

Rob Walsh is the Commissioner for Small Business Services in New York city. As part of his brief, Commissioner Walsh is responsible for the 64 Business Improvement Districts which deliver nearly \$80 million dollars in supplementary services for the direct benefit of more than 64,000 businesses in the city.

2.15 Commissioner Walsh will be in Belfast on 10/11 March as part of his participation in the One City Conference referenced elsewhere in these committee reports. There is an opportunity to organise a seminar on BIDs as part of his visit. This will offer a mechanism to raise awareness of the opportunities presented by BIDs, to debate some of the challenges presented to the city administration in working with BIDs and to ultimately help us shape our ongoing discussions with DSD.

2.16 The proposed date for the seminar is 10th March 2011. The event may be organised in conjunction with Belfast City Centre Management.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 DSD Consultation

There are no immediate resource costs associated with this consultation response. There are longer term resource implications associated with the possibility of business improvement districts being established. These are covered in the main body of this paper and include: collecting fees, managing the BID account, managing the ballot process, and being able to clearly define what Council services will be provided as part of the core rates and what services are extra.

3.2 Commissioner Walsh Seminar

There are no excessive costs required to hold the seminar given that Commissioner Walsh is already in Belfast attending the One City Conference. Up to £500 is required for hospitality.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

- 4.1 There are no equality and good relations considerations associated with this response.

5 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to :

1. Approve the attached draft consultation response; and
2. To raise any issues about the draft response that they wish to be included
3. To agree to holding a BIDs seminar on 10 March 2011 with Commissioner Rob Walsh as keynote speaker and agree to hospitality costs up to £500.

6 Decision Tracking

No specific timeframe for decision tracking.

7 Key to Abbreviations

**BCCM – Belfast City Centre Management
BID – Business Improvement District
DSD – Department for Social Development”**

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations, subject to the Council’s response emphasising that the City as a whole should be considered as being eligible for consideration under the Business Improvement Districts scheme.

**Northern Ireland as an Enterprise Zone –
Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Inquiry**

The Committee was reminded that the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at Westminster was undertaking an Inquiry into Northern Ireland’s designation as an Enterprise Zone. It was pointed out that a briefing session, at which the Committee’s views on the Inquiry had been ascertained, had taken place on 8th February and that the Members’ comments had been included in the Council’s response. Accordingly, the Committee endorsed the undernoted submission:

“Appendix I

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee:
Northern Ireland as an Enterprise Zone

Draft Belfast City Council response to the Inquiry – January 2011

Introduction

- 1 Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee’s inquiry on Northern Ireland as an Enterprise Zone.
- 2 We note that this inquiry is taking place as part of a wider piece of work by the Committee on rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy which was expected to be completed by the end of 2010 but which has not yet been released. These comments are therefore made in the absence of the wider contextual study and analysis.
- 3 The term ‘enterprise zone’ was introduced in the 1980s to denote ‘an experiment in urban policy to stimulate economic activity by giving businesses as much freedom as possible in which to operate¹’. These zones were geographically designated areas, established for a period of 10 years, in which companies could benefit from a series of tax allowances, relaxation of planning restrictions and rates relief facilities. In total, 38 sites were designated, including sites in Belfast – of which one area is now in the ownership of Belfast City Council - and Derry in Northern Ireland.
- 4 Having read the comments of the Northern Ireland Secretary Owen Paterson and the Prime Minister David Cameron in relation to the current proposals, it is our understanding that the expectation is that the policy will apply across all of Northern Ireland as opposed to geographically-designated locations. Therefore we are working on the premise that any new proposals would focus on growing the size of the private sector and creating additional investment across the region as a whole as opposed to a number of targeted interventions. Our subsequent comments are made based on this assumption.

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government (2003), Enterprise Zones Monitoring Report 2002-03

- 5 We have also assumed that the activities proposed for the Enterprise Zones will have to be achieved within existing (and already reduced) budgets, as opposed to any additional expenditure becoming available. As a council, we would have significant concerns around any proposals which may reduce the business rates income to the council, given that this is a major driver of our wider service delivery to the ratepayer. If additional rate relief was to be introduced as an element of the Enterprise Zone, would we want to ensure that the shortfall to councils would be made up by central government or the Northern Ireland Assembly, as is the case for the recently-introduced Small Business Rate Relief Scheme.
- 6 Given the relatively short timeframe allowed for the response, we have made our elected members in council aware of the inquiry and have drawn together some of their comments in relation to this. However this response has not yet been endorsed by the appropriate committee structures. It will be considered by the Development Committee at its meeting on 15 February 2011 and will be endorsed at the 01 March 2011 meeting of Council. Should there be any changes to the attached comments, we will make the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee aware of these in due course. We have also taken account of the views of the business community in the city and have discussed the implications of this potential development with the key business organisations.

How does an enterprise zone operate?

- 7 As previously identified, the key incentives attributed to the enterprise zones established in the 1990s included rates relief initiatives, tax allowances on capital expenditure and relaxed planning restrictions. This series of measures gave rise to a variable range of outputs. The evaluation of the Northern Ireland Enterprise Zone experiment suggests that, of the 7,300 jobs created on the Enterprise Zones, 1,200 are net additional jobs on the zones themselves with 440 net additional jobs in the local areas around the zones. Given the public investment of £10.7million (of which 90% was spent on the Belfast Enterprise Zone), this equates to a cost per job of £9,200 in the zones themselves and £24,000 in the local areas. The overall conclusion of the report notes that, while there was some regeneration impact in the designated boundary during the period of operation of the Enterprise Zones, there was no net growth in employment in the region as a whole and only

limited impact in the surrounding areas. Overall, it suggested that the same effect could probably have been achieved at a lower cost by reducing the amount of 'deadweight' on both capital allowance and rate relief which could be differentiated between economic sectors or reduced over time².

- 8 Although the regeneration needs of the city today are significantly different to those in the 1980s, the lessons learned suggest the need for careful consideration of the investment package, taking a wider view of the incentives to be offered. Creating an Enterprise Zone in the current climate should be a mixture of regulatory instruments and investment stimuli set in the context of clear targets regarding the number and type of businesses to be established and supported.
- 9 As previously noted, if this is to be a region-wide policy, consideration should be given to the types of companies that we would like to see established in Northern Ireland, prioritising support for those that contribute most significantly to increasing productivity by developing a tailored suite of business support provision.
- 10 Enterprise zones should be closely aligned to the research expertise and technology capabilities of universities and colleges. In Belfast, we have two universities and one further education college and there is a significant opportunity to further enhance collaboration between these organisations and the business community in the city. This may require some consideration as to how universities and colleges are funded, including additional support for targeted activities that contribute directly to the wider economic development of the region.
- 11 The rationale for the establishment of the Enterprise Zones in the 1980s was to 'augment weak property markets³'. While the property market is currently in a downturn period, we do not consider that the previous approach would necessarily work in the current climate. We consider that there remains a concern regarding potential displacement and reduction in property values.

² Department of the Environment (1998), *An evaluation of the Enterprise Zone experiment in Northern Ireland*

³ Department for Communities and Local Government (2003), *Enterprise Zones Monitoring Report 2002-03*

- 12 We would also caution against any significant reduction in planning stipulations around Enterprise Zones. We support the work which is already underway to streamline the planning system and acknowledge the need to speed up the current system, particular where proposals will support the economic development of an area. However we consider that the appropriate due diligence is also important for the longer-term viability of the site.
- 13 In the 1980s, Enterprise Zones were operated by the Department of Environment, in the period of Direct Rule. As a devolved responsibility, we suggest that consideration should be given to the appropriate model for the operation and management of this initiative. We would be keen to play a key role in any Belfast-based activities and consider that this is complementary to our wider plans for the sustainable regeneration of the city.

Why should Northern Ireland be declared an Enterprise Zone?

- 14 The arguments for declaring Northern Ireland an Enterprise Zone relate principally to the need to enhance the region's economic competitiveness and to reduce the productivity gap between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.
- 15 There are a number of reasons for the current economic situation, most of which pre-date the current economic crisis:
- Dominance of public sector and over-reliance on the sector for direct and indirect employment opportunities
 - Traditionally high levels of public subvention
 - High levels of economic inactivity, concentrated in small geographical areas, with consequently high levels of deprivation
 - Relatively low levels of new business start-ups
 - Low earnings levels in the private sector
 - Geographical location with accessibility issues and high transportation costs
 - Social problems as a result of previous inter-community tensions and their impact on social mobility
 - Multiple governance structures increase bureaucracy and can impede development.

- 16 While a number of these elements might apply to other parts of the UK and beyond, the emergence from the conflict situation over the last forty years, coupled with the current economic climate, requires a radical and fresh approach to stimulating enterprise in Northern Ireland.

What should be included in any enterprise zone proposals?

- 17 Enterprise zone proposals could include a range of regulatory measures, fiscal incentives, investment stimuli and business support activities. The overall drive should be to create more businesses, particularly those which can provide value-added services, as well as stimulating greater investment in research and innovation and encouraging companies to explore new markets. The support should be clearly-defined, widely accessible, of a high standard, with limited administrative burden on the part of the business. Consideration should also be given to the wider social and economic impact of Enterprise zones including possible social clauses and commitment to recruitment of long-term unemployed etc. Enterprise Zones should provide focused, targeted support and provide a platform for developing innovative approaches.

- 18 The focus of the proposals should be on providing sustainable investment support which will lead to productivity and business growth. There should not be a reliance on ongoing public intervention without any clear expectation as to the outputs expected.

Are these proposals aimed at any particular sectors?

- 19 There are strong arguments for supporting incentives that will encourage the growth and further development of identified sectors, with a view to building critical mass and developing highly connected clusters of companies that can be globally competitive.

- 20 There are a number of sectors which, we believe, offer significant growth potential and in which we plan to focus some of our investment in the coming years. These include:

- Creative industries: film and television, digital media
- IT and software development
- Health technologies
- Environmental technologies

- **Tourism and hospitality development:** related to the wider events and tourism development programme, particularly in the coming years (e.g. Titanic Belfast, World Police and Fire Games)
- **Financial and business services.**

21 We consider that, with the appropriate mix of regulatory rationalisation and targeted support, the development potential of these sectors – in which the region could potentially have a competitive advantage – would be maximised.

22 However there is also an argument to suggest that we need to see more new businesses in all sectors, to address the current low levels of business start up rates in the region. A tailored package of support needs to be available to those businesses that have the potential for further growth.

Is there a priority as to what should be included?

23 We consider that there will be a need for a ‘basket’ of support mechanisms which can help both indigenous businesses and foreign direct investment companies.

24 We acknowledge the role that corporation tax has had in attracting investment and are conscious of the wider debate of how a reduction in corporation tax can be balanced against a reduction in the overall contribution to the NI budget.

25 As previously noted, we support a tailored package of support for those businesses that have the potential to grow and create wealth and further employment. From a management perspective, it will be important to consider the relative merits of investment in each case, with a view to maximising return in this difficult financial climate. We consider that any intervention should be output-focused, in agreement with the business.

26 We would have some concern about any possible rate relief measures, particularly if they impacted on the business rate income to councils. If a rate relief scheme was to be introduced, we would want to ensure that councils would be compensated for any loss of revenue.

- 27 We feel that significant consideration should be given to skills development support, both for those who are not in employment and for those already in work. This activity should be aligned to the wider Regional Economic Strategy (currently at consultation stage) and should be prioritised on key growth sectors and current gaps in provision. We intend to make this a central plank of both our Belfast masterplan and a new integrated economic strategy for the city.

How long should the enterprise zone operate for and what aspects might be made permanent?

- 28 The previous enterprise zones had a 10 year duration. We accept that the changes required to turn around the Northern Ireland economy will only see an impact in the medium to long-term although we consider that measures need to be agreed as soon as possible in order to allow that process to get under way, as such, we suggest a minimum designation of 5 years.

- 29 We consider that what is required in the long-term is a re-orientation of public expenditure to support economic growth in key industries. As such, this will require re-prioritisation of budgets over successive budgetary periods, with all investment linked to specific targets and outputs. On a permanent basis, public spending should focus on creating a dynamic economy supported by a skilled labour force, with a sufficient support system to help those who cannot access employment opportunities.

Which aspects would be the responsibility of the UK government and which would be the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive?

- 30 The roles of the respective governmental partners will be dependent on the activities agreed, should enterprise zones be introduced. However we would work on the assumption that any fiscal measures would require UK government consent while other incentive and support packages are likely to be determined by the Northern Ireland Executive.

- 31 As the largest local authority in the region, we would be keen to play our part in any enterprise zone activity within our area and would commit to working with our partners to align our expenditure to ensure maximum impact.

What worked well, and what did not work well, when there were enterprise zones previously in Northern Ireland?

- 32 Successive evaluations of enterprise zones suggest, in the main, that while they may have been successful in attracting development to disadvantaged areas, they were a blunt instrument that did not necessarily offer best value for money.
- 33 A report by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister⁴, carried out in 2006, indicates that:
- In selecting sites to be designated as Enterprise Zones, consideration should be given to issues such as connectivity, crime rates and general image of the area. Research showed that, where this was not the case, it was possible that, once the incentives ceased, the property market in that area could collapse to an extent that the buildings were no longer lettable or saleable
 - An efficient and effective planning regime, coupled with other incentives, can stimulate regeneration activity and investment
 - Enterprise Zones are not always the best ways of addressing market failure in an area. When identifying sites, consideration should be given to long-term sustainability, rather than prioritising solely on the basis of deprivation in a ward. It may be more appropriate, instead, to introduce improvements to the area e.g. improved transport facilities to allow residents to access employment opportunities elsewhere in the city
 - Capital allowances were the most 'popular' element of the Enterprise Zones incentives, particularly for developers. However in the current climate, where there is already over-provision, it could be argued that this would simply add to the problem, rather than encouraging businesses to occupy vacant properties
 - Enterprise Zones should have at their disposal a package of measures, rather than being established as a stand-alone solution, based on property incentives
 - Efforts should be made to relate the development potential of Enterprise Zones to the available pool of labour. Skills development and training should be a central component of any Enterprise Zone.

⁴ OPDM (2006) *Transferable lessons from the Enterprise Zones*

- 34 The evaluation of the Northern Ireland Enterprise Zones undertaken by Department of Environment and alluded to at point 7 above suggest that while they did help with the physical re-development of key sites, they were a costly investment and similar outputs could have been achieved at a lesser cost. In the current climate, this is an important issue for consideration.
- 35 There was no particular impetus in the Northern Ireland Enterprise Zones to support new starts and this was largely the case with other designated areas. Northern Ireland is a small business economy – indeed the majority of businesses in the region could be categorised as micro-businesses. However our business start levels are still below the regional average. Therefore any new Enterprise Zone activity should prioritise new business starts, helping them enhance productivity once established.

What lessons can we learn from enterprise zones, or similar initiatives to try and stimulate enterprise in other countries?

- 36 The lessons from the Northern Ireland and other 36 UK examples have been referred to above. Essentially, it is important to design a package of support that meets the needs of the local economy, as identified within an agreed economic strategy. We are at a disadvantage in that this does not exist at present in the region. It should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Wider Issues

- 37 We are aware of some positive experiences of area-based economic regeneration initiatives such as the Coalfields. Equally, we acknowledge the success of wider economic policy interventions which were not confined to designated areas. In this regard, the Republic of Ireland's experience (pre-2008) in establishing a favourable taxation regime, coupled with significant investment in education and skills development and developing a strategy based on a number of key target sectors presents an example of how a broader policy approach to supportive enterprise development can be effective.
- 38 While these approaches were different, there were a number of similarities in the lessons learned, namely:
- Need for a clear strategy to guide development activity and resources
 - Need for partnership working

- Importance of establishing clear outcomes that are shared by all partners
 - Need for investment in skills and education driven by the target economic sectors
 - Need to develop innovative approaches to address deep-seated challenges.
- 39 The current economic climate presents significant challenges for the Northern Ireland economy. While we are not alone in this, we have a range of structural challenges within the economy which need to be tackled if the economic trajectory is to reach its optimal level.
- 40 It is clear that a similar mantra has been promoted for the last half century with little change in overall performance and output, even during our most successful decade (1997-2007). As such, a more bold approach is required, with appropriate budgetary resources directed towards an overall goal of enhanced competitiveness. Designating Northern Ireland an Enterprise Zone is one way of doing this but there is a need for further debate as to what specific stimulus and investment packages will address that need and what delivery mechanisms are appropriate to ensure that it takes place.
- 41 Belfast is the regional economic driver and, as the local council with responsibility for the development of this city, we are keen to engage in further debate on the matter and to work with partners to deliver a step-change in economic performance in the city and the wider region, for the benefit of all our residents.”

**Northern Ireland Executive Economic
Strategy Consultation**

The Committee considered the undernoted report and endorsed the associated Council response as set hereunder, subject to it being strengthened to emphasise the importance of environmental technologies as a future growth sector.

- “1. **Relevant Background Information**
- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Executive announced the first phase of its consultation on a new regional economic strategy entitled ‘Priorities for Sustainable Growth and Prosperity’ in January 2011. The deadline for submission of comments is 24 February 2011.

- 1.2 The work is being led by the Northern Ireland Executive Sub-committee on the Economy, which is headed up by Minister Arlene Foster MLA. A two-stage approach has been adopted. The reason for this is that the work of the UK government on rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy is awaited and the Committee considers that this has the potential to significantly influence the content of the economic strategy. The draft economic strategy will be subject to a further public consultation later in 2011.
- 1.3 A copy of the document is attached as Appendix 1. A draft Belfast City Council response is attached as Appendix 2
2. **Key Issues**
 - 2.1 The framework for growth focuses on the twin challenges on rebalancing the economic towards higher value-added private sector activity and the need to undertake a more immediate rebuilding phase, to address the impact of the global downturn on the local economic and labour market. Priority has been placed on driving export-led economic growth.
 - 2.2 The document contains a range of themes and priorities on which view are sought. It is proposed that, based on the comments received, and taking account of the UK's government's work on rebalancing the regional economy, a draft economic strategy will be issued for consultation later in 2011.
 - 2.3 The consultation document has been issued by the Northern Ireland Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy. This is in direct response to criticism with regard to the lack of implementation and delivery of previous strategies.
 - 2.4 The document identifies the key challenges in Northern Ireland's economic performance: low productivity levels, little improvement in gross value added (GVA) over time, lagging behind other UK regions in emerging from recession, disproportionate levels of private sector job losses and significant parts of the population with low skills levels.
 - 2.5 The document is framed around a series of 21 key questions on which it is seeking commentary. These include:
 1. Do you agree with the key economic challenges that are expected to influence the performance of the Northern Ireland economy over the next 10 years?

2. Are there any additional aspects that should have been included and which need to be addressed in the full economic strategy?
3. Learning from what has worked in economically successful regions across the world and adapting measures to Northern Ireland's circumstances will be key to meeting the challenges. Are you aware of other successful initiatives around the world from which we could learn?
4. What evidence is there that these initiatives were successful and would be appropriate to meet the challenges facing the Northern Ireland economy?
5. Looking ahead to 2020, do you share the Executive's long-term vision of the Northern Ireland economy?
6. Given the challenges facing the Northern Ireland economy, do you agree that promoting export-led economic growth should be the key economic priority of the Northern Ireland Executive?
7. Do you consider the proposed rebalancing themes to be sufficient to meet the longer-term challenges faced by the Northern Ireland economy?
8. Recognising the inter-dependence of these themes, which do you consider to be the most important in driving the long-term vision of the Northern Ireland economy?
9. What is your view on the proposed short to medium term rebuilding themes identified in this strategy?
10. Are these sufficient to meet the challenges resulting from the economic downturn?
11. Are there other themes which the Executive should consider when preparing its economic strategy?
12. Do you agree with the proposal to redirect resources from the short to medium term measures to rebalancing measures as the economic recovery takes hold and the labour market situation improves?
13. Are there further cross-cutting themes which should be considered in relation to the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy?

14. How do you think these cross-cutting themes should impact on the rebuilding and rebalancing themes identified earlier?
 15. Recognising the more constrained public expenditure position in the coming years, do you consider the extent of prioritisation given to the economy to have been sufficient or is there a need to go further in future years?
 16. Which are the key organisations able to deliver against the Executive's economic priorities?
 17. Are there any areas where roles and responsibilities could be clarified?
 18. Under the rebalancing themes noted above, what do you consider to be the key actions to rebalance the economy and ensure sustained improvements in long-term economic growth
 19. Under the rebuilding themes identified, what do you consider to be the key actions necessary to rebuild the economy after recession?
 20. In allocating resources to support this strategy, should the Executive prioritise particular sectors of the local economy in order to deliver sustainable improvements in long term growth?
 21. What sectors should be prioritized and how do these align with the framework and priority themes outlined earlier in the document?
3. **Resource Implications**
 - 3.1 No specific resource implications at this stage.
 4. **Equality and Good Relations Considerations**
 - 4.1 No specific equality and good relations considerations at this stage – strategy will be equality-proofed.

5. **Recommendations**

5.1 **Members are asked to:**

- Note the attached draft Belfast City Council response to the consultation on the Northern Ireland Executive's priorities for sustainable growth and prosperity
- Agree that this be presented as the Council's draft response (subject to any amendments suggested), subject to ratification by Council.

6. **Decision Tracking**

No specific decision tracking required.

7. **Key to Abbreviations**

None.

8. **Documents Attached**

Appendix 2 – draft Belfast City Council response to consultation.

**Northern Ireland Executive Economic Strategy: Consultation on
Priorities for Sustainable Growth and Prosperity**

Draft Belfast City Council Response: February 2011

- 1 *Do you agree with the key economic challenges that are expected to influence the performance of the Northern Ireland economy over the next 10 years?*
- 1.1 The key economic challenges likely to influence the performance of the regional economy over the next 10 years have been identified as low productivity levels, little improvement in gross value added (GVA) over time, lagging behind other UK regions in emerging from recession, disproportionate levels of private sector job losses and significant parts of the population with low skills levels.
- 1.2 These challenges are well rehearsed and have formed the core of the analysis in successive research reports and strategies into the Northern Ireland economy in recent decades.

- 1.3 In this regard it is difficult to argue that these are not the key challenges for the Northern Ireland economy in the coming decade. However we would also suggest that account needs to be taken of infrastructure to support economic development. This may include telecoms infrastructure (recent positive developments include Project Kelvin and the investment in broadband infrastructure) as well as transport infrastructure (air, train, road) and workspace and office space which can support entrepreneurship and encourage business growth.
 - 1.4 In addition to these factors affecting the region's future economic growth, Belfast City Council considers that leadership and strong governance are critical elements underpinning regional growth. This may include both political leadership and business leadership.
 - 1.5 There is limited recognition of the role of cities – and Belfast in particular – as focal points for economic growth. In the current Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 10 year review, it is noted that the new RDS is being prepared in a very different economic context to its predecessor. The consultation document describes 'how cities and urban areas will come to the fore and will be the drivers for economic development. The main spatial considerations shaping future growth are the importance of Belfast and Derry with a network of key service centres...' (para 2.59). Belfast currently provides employment for 108,000 in-commuters from neighbouring districts – over half of all those employed in the city. This importance should be reflected in the levels of infrastructure investment to drive and consolidate growth, as an economic generator for the wider region.
- 2 *Are there any additional aspects that should have been included and which need to be addressed in the full economic strategy?*
- 2.1 As identified above, the issues of governance and connectivity are also central to an area's economic performance and should be considered in the regional economic strategy. In Belfast, we are currently working on a new masterplan in the city, with a view to identifying a blueprint from the city's future development. This will be supported by an integrated economic strategy – to reflect the aspirations of the regional strategy – which will seek to maximise the economic potential of the city.

- 2.2 The RDS has, as one of its central aims, to ‘strengthen Belfast as the regional economic driver’. This aspiration should be reflected more strongly in the current consultation, taking account of the central role that the city will have in rebuilding and rebalancing the economy.
- 2.3 In addition, given the significant concentrations of deprivation and unemployment in many areas across the region, it is considered that the regional economic strategy must take account of these issues and must develop proposals to address these deep-rooted challenges.
- 2.4 In the Belfast City Council area, there are a number of pockets of deprivation, focused on the inner and outer areas of Belfast City Council area as well as in some of the outlying areas on the city boundary. Unemployment in the city has doubled since the start of the recession, with those aged under 25 and the less skilled bearing the brunt. The resident employment rate remains below the regional average.
- 2.5 Consideration should also be given to the regulatory environment. While many policies are agreed at a UK level, there is some scope for local interpretation and management. This should include the planning framework, ensuring that it supports appropriate and sustainable economic development, while preserving the nature and character of the region.
- 3 *Learning from what has worked in economically successful regions across the world and adapting measures to Northern Ireland’s circumstances will be key to meeting the challenges. Are you aware of other successful initiatives around the world from which we could learn?*
- 3.1 There are many examples of successful economic strategies at national, regional and local levels. However we concur with the comment that there is no single correct path, no ‘one size fits all’ approach to promoting economic regeneration.
- 3.2 Having said this, it is widely accepted that the issues identified as challenges, in addition to those which we have noted, are generally present to a greater or lesser degree in those strategies deemed as being successful.

- 3.3 **Belfast City Council has engaged directly with a range of partners to undertake comparative analysis of the city's competitiveness and to identify those areas where improvements must be made if this is to be enhanced. In particular, we draw attention to the work of OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). OECD's LEED (Local Economic and Employment Development) programme. LEED undertakes research to identify and implement new policy responses in cities and regions across the world, focusing on building quality jobs as a means of creating prosperity. Belfast is a member of the network and has benefited significantly from the research and analysis work undertaken.**
- 3.4 **Belfast is also a member of the Phoenix Cities network. This is a network of seven European cities who have engaged in a collaborative research initiative to look at how cities are working to address decline. The work looks at how these cities have approached a range of initiatives including re-shaping city governance, developing special neighbourhood-based initiatives, skills development programmes, and enhancing entrepreneurship levels.**
- 4 ***What evidence is there that these initiatives were successful and would be appropriate to meet the challenges facing the Northern Ireland economy?***
- 4.1 **The 'phoenix cities' were chosen because of their comparable industrial heritage. All participating cities had tried a range of partnership-based economic development strategies to address the decline. These were generally based around a range of approaches, all of which are valid in a Belfast and Northern Ireland context.**
1. **Economic strategies focused on entrepreneurship, investment, skills development and development of new (niche) sectors**
 2. **Public agencies saw the value of investment in physical infrastructure – both in city centres and in neighbourhoods**
 3. **A high priority was placed on addressing hard-to-tackle social challenges, focused on pockets of disadvantage in certain neighbourhoods**
 4. **Public investment was used to lever in private finance, using a range of innovative financing mechanisms. Public funding – wisely invested – was significant in pump-priming private investment.**

This work demonstrates how the themes of economic, physical and social regeneration are closely inter-related and the experiences demonstrate the opportunity to replicate this practice in the appropriate context.

- 4.2 One of the central elements under consideration by the UK government as a means of rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy is the opportunity to allow the region to lower corporation tax in order to enhance investment in the region. The inward investment levels in Republic of Ireland are undoubtedly considerable when compared to Northern Ireland and are cited as one of the key drivers behind the ‘Celtic Tiger’ years. While there has been no definitive decision as to whether this development would be possible in principle, it has met with support from the key business organisations. However it is acknowledged that corporation tax is only one measure used by the Republic of Ireland and that Northern Ireland could not necessarily implement all those measures.

5 *Looking ahead to 2020, do you share the Executive’s long-term vision of the Northern Ireland economy?*

- 5.1 As with the economic challenges identified, it is difficult not to support the vision for the economy in 2020. However this aspiration appears generic in that it could apply to any other region or economic area. As such, Belfast City Council would be supportive of a vision which is more specific – possibly in terms of those sectors which are to be the focus of support in coming years. With regard to the city itself, the Regional Development Strategy identifies Belfast as a regional centre for administration, commerce and specialised services. We are supportive of this focus and our new corporate plan - currently under development – will align closely with these aims.

- 5.2 Given the extent of the challenges faced in the economy, this vision may be difficult to achieve within the given timeframe. However it is clear that, with some strategic focus and targeted activity, progress could be made towards achieving the aspirations outlined. A more manageable, realistic vision may help focus activities to achieve progress in the short to medium term.

- 6** Given the challenges facing the Northern Ireland economy, do you agree that promoting export-led economic growth should be the key economic priority of the Northern Ireland Executive?
- 6.1** Increased exporting is critically important to the recovery and ongoing sustainability of the Northern Ireland economy. It is likely to be one of the outcomes of investment in the challenges previously identified (skills, innovation, R&D, education and enterprise). However this is a policy agenda which has previously been followed by the main development agency Invest NI. Therefore consideration will need to be given to a more radical approach to delivering on this objective and to putting in place the appropriate support structures to allow companies to engage in export activity. This will include both first-time exporters and more experienced exporters seeking to explore new markets for their products.
- 6.2** In addition to exporting, there is also considerable value in the service sector, both as an economic generator and as a source of employment – often for those with low skills levels. The tourism and hospitality sector is a major source of revenue and employment in the Belfast City Council area and in the wider region. Last year, the city welcomed over 9 million visitors, contributing £451million to the local economy. Given the range of upcoming events of international relevance (World Police and Fire Games in 2013; City of Culture in 2013), consideration should also be given to the potential role of service industries in the future growth of the region.
- 6.3** Particular attention needs to be given to micro and small businesses – which dominate the Belfast and regional economy. Traditionally, councils have worked with this target group and have achieved much success in this regard. In Belfast, we worked with over 1000 companies across a range of sectors in the last years. We have also developed specific sectoral initiatives in the creative industries, advanced manufacturing, sustainable technologies and independent retail sectors. These companies require particular support to consider exporting their products and services. This reflects our wider comments on the need for a tailored suite of support, guided by the needs of individual businesses.

- 7 *Do you consider the proposed rebalancing themes to be sufficient to meet the longer-term challenges faced by the Northern Ireland economy?*
- 7.1 Belfast City Council concurs with the themes as identified, namely innovation and R&D; employability, competing in the global economy, encouraging business growth and developing the economic infrastructure.
- 7.2 While we recognise that the principle of sustainable development has been included as a cross-cutting theme, we consider that this is of such importance that it should be considered as a theme in its own right. This should involve stimulating the development of 'green' businesses, tapping into existing research resources through the local universities. It should also involve measures to support businesses to consider environmental efficiencies as a means of improving their bottom line. There are numerous examples of how this can be achieved and Belfast City Council has just completed the third phase of the BITES (Business Improvements through Environmental Solutions) programme, which has helped the twelve participating companies reduce their overheads by £250,000, divert significant volumes of waste from landfill and reduce carbon emissions.
- 8 *Recognising the inter-dependence of these themes, which do you consider to be the most important in driving the long-term vision of the Northern Ireland economy?*
- 8.1 Belfast City Council considers that addressing the skills challenges is fundamental to building a sustainable, innovative, dynamic economy. At present, there appears to be a disjoint between skills training undertaken and those required by industry.
- 8.2 A recent study undertaken by Oxford Economics on behalf of Belfast City Council in 2008 found that over half of net new jobs in Belfast over next decade will require graduate qualifications while less than 1 in 7 will require no qualifications. A similar report undertaken at Northern Ireland level sought to forecast future skills needs up to the period 2020 – the period of this strategy. This report noted that, if Northern Ireland had equivalent UK concentrations in sectors, the following could be achieved:
- 12,000 more people in employment with sub-degree, degree and post-graduate qualifications
 - 30,000 more managers and 20,000 more professionals

- 4,000 more STEM degree holders
- 7,000 more creative and arts degree holders in the workforce.

8.3 The report concluded that there was an absence of a clear sectoral roadmap for the economic future of the region – something that we have also commented on in this response. In order to achieve the targets set within the existing Programme for Government (PfG), it suggested that growth would require uplift in skill levels across the workforce, particularly at graduate and post graduate level. The current funding challenges around university education will place additional pressure on achieving this target.

9 *What is your view on the proposed short to medium term rebuilding themes identified in this strategy?*

9.1 Given the scale of the challenge, we consider that it may be unrealistic to consider that the two themes of improving employment opportunities and employability and promoting employment can be considered short to medium term themes.

9.2 Instead, we consider that these should be integral to any future economic strategy for the region, even when the ‘rebalancing’ stage has been reached.

9.3 Belfast City Council notes the comment around the insertion of social clauses in public contracts from 1 January 2011. We have been working with Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) at the Titanic Belfast development and have introduced mechanisms for implementing and enforcing the delivery of social clauses. Much learning has been built up around best practice on these measures which, we feel, should be shared across all public agencies.

9.4 With a view to the comments around procurement, we consider that there is much work to do to make public contracts more accessible to local SMEs through the supply chain. We have recently introduced a supplier model, linked to some of the major capital schemes in the city, and have set targets around new business to be won by local contractors. There is a clear opportunity to build on this initiative, particularly given the reduction in public expenditure on capital projects and the difficulties faced by the construction sector.

- 10 *Are these sufficient to meet the challenges resulting from the economic downturn?*
- 10.1 As noted, the scale of the challenge is such that it will take these – as well as an uplift in activity on all themes – to meet the challenges.
- 11 *Are there other themes which the Executive should consider when preparing its economic strategy?*
- 11.1 As previously noted, a potential additional theme is ‘promoting sustainable development’. In addition, consideration may be given to the issue of ‘governance’. Although not strictly a theme which will address the current economic challenges, strong leadership – backed up with appropriate levels of investment – will be required if the underlying challenge of increasing private sector productivity is to be met.
- 12 *Do you agree with the proposal to redirect resources from the short to medium term measures to rebalancing measures as the economic recovery takes hold and the labour market situation improves?*
- 12.1 As previously noted, we are not convinced that the measures identified as short and medium term will be just that, due to the depth of the challenge. We accept the need for an uplift in activity in these areas but consider that they may have to be extended beyond the short term, subject to a review of their impact.
- 13 *Are there further cross-cutting themes which should be considered in relation to the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy?*
- 13.1 Taking account of those additional themes suggested above, we consider that the economic strategy would be more holistic, targeted and measurable than the current proposals.
- 14 *How do you think these cross-cutting themes should impact on the rebuilding and rebalancing themes identified earlier?*
- 14.1 The suggested ‘sustainable development’ theme should contribute to the challenge of increasing private sector productivity by investing in new technologies and processes which will give the region a competitive edge in a high value added sector.

- 14.2 Consideration of the governance of this strategy will help ensure that its targets are clear, that progress is monitored and that initiatives are developed in response to changes in the economy. This governance needs to be cross sectoral and needs to bring together the appropriate range of skills, financial resources and political engagement to ensure that the economy remains at the top of the agenda in the new Programme for Government.
- 15 *Recognising the more constrained public expenditure position in the coming years, do you consider the extent of prioritisation given to the economy to have been sufficient or is there a need to go further in future years?*
- 15.1 While progress has been made, it is clear that there is a need for buy-in across all of the Executive departments to ensure that targets are shared and that systems are re-focused to place the economy at its heart.
- 15.2 In addition to direct delivery mechanisms, consideration needs to be given to wider factors which will have an impact on economic development, including planning, skills development, business regulation, infrastructure and education.
- 16 *Which are the key organisations able to deliver against the Executive's economic priorities?*
- 16.1 We note and concur with the organisations identified as being central to the delivery of this strategy: Northern Ireland Departments and their agencies; local councils; the UK government; community and voluntary sector organisations; the private sector (including social economy businesses) and the trade unions.
- 16.2 However, as identified above, responsibility at the Northern Ireland Executive should extend beyond the departments generally identified as being responsible for economic development – i.e. Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). Departments such as Department of Environment (DoE) – from a planning perspective – and Department of Finance and Personnel (DfP) – from a resource and infrastructure perspective – will be central to ensuring delivery.

- 17 *Are there any areas where roles and responsibilities could be clarified?*
- 17.1 Belfast City Council and our local government partners would welcome the opportunity to engage in a structured discussion around our role in the support of entrepreneurship and small business development.
- 17.2 Since 1992, councils have been engaged in a range of local economic development and regeneration activities, responding to local needs. Resources have been provided through European funds and there remains the opportunity for additional support within the existing programme – which runs up until 2013.
- 17.3 We acknowledge the need to clarify provision from a business perspective and to ensure optimal use of scarce resources and would welcome the opportunity for further engagement on this matter.
- 18 *Under the rebalancing themes noted above, what do you consider to be the key actions to rebalance the economy and ensure sustained improvements in long-term economic growth?*
- 18.1 We consider that the rebalancing themes are inextricably linked and, as such, are all important to address the current challenges. As previously noted, we consider that the employability activities are central but would once again stress the need for this provision to be driven by the overall strategic direction in which the economy is moving.
- 18.2 We also consider that it will be important to target resources to enhance the volume and value of start ups. Recognising the importance of prioritising resources in this challenging climate, we accept that it may be appropriate to have access to a menu of targeted support, to be focused on those companies that demonstrate the most significant growth potential.
- 19 *Under the rebuilding themes identified, what do you consider to be the key actions necessary to rebuild the economy after recession?*
- 19.1 We note the activities announced by the Deputy First Minister in response to the downturn, namely enhancing access to bank finance and supporting small businesses to access procurement initiatives.

- 19.2 While no concrete figures have been provided to quantify the value of funding levered or of contracts won, our direct engagement in business support initiatives leads us to suggest that these measures have not had any significant impact on local small businesses.
- 19.3 There are merits in all the activities identified but there needs to be greater collaboration between all agencies supporting businesses to ensure that they are aware of and avail of all possible avenues of support and that this is delivered in a responsive and targeted manner.
- 19.4 For example, we consider that there is considerable opportunity to introduce flexible employment initiatives which will address the current unemployment challenge, particularly for those who have lost their job in the downturn or for new graduates. These should be targeted at small businesses, enabling them to develop new products, processes and management tools to address the challenges that they are facing. Efforts should be made to ensure that there is no conflict between training subsidies offered and statutory benefits as this can act as a disincentive to people engaging in such schemes.
- 19.5 The recession has made it more difficult for those who had been long-term unemployed or furthest from the labour market to find employment. While there are likely to be significant changes to the welfare system at a UK level, Belfast City Council recognises the need for ongoing and sustained investment in pre-employment initiatives for this target group, as a means of addressing the growing economic inactivity levels which represent a significant drain on public resources and create a range of social challenges.
- 20 *In allocating resources to support this strategy, should the Executive prioritise particular sectors of the local economy in order to deliver sustainable improvements in long term growth?*
- 20.1 As previously noted, Belfast City Council would support a strategy which identified key target sectors and pulled together appropriate resources to deliver on this. In doing so, it is important to take account of wider policies which impact on economic growth (e.g. planning) and ensure that there is synergy and that all departments are following a common agenda – which has economic growth at its core.

- 21 *What sectors should be prioritised and how do these align with the framework and priority themes outlined earlier in the document?*
- 21.1 We concur with the findings in the Matrix report and note the analysis which identifies the opportunities offered by the target sectors. We note that, due to the skills and infrastructure requirements of such business sectors, companies and investors are likely to choose a location in or near the regional capital. We trust that, recognising this fact, the Northern Ireland Executive will focus its economic investment on the city. In this regard, we welcome the recent announcement around the investment in the Paint Hall development. This will support the growth of the creative industries – in which we have invested significant resources – and will complement the wider leisure, business and residential developments in this area.
- 21.2 While the majority of these sectors align with the framework and themes identified, we would once again draw attention to the potential of the service sector, particularly hospitality and tourism, which have contributed to economic growth in recent years. While there may be concerns regarding wage levels within the sector, they can provide a route into employment for those not currently working. In addition, the opening of new world-class facilities such as Titanic Belfast and the arrival of major events such as the World Police and Fire Games and the UK City of Culture not only add to the cultural offering but offer a platform to showcase the region and to raise the quality of provision within these sectors.”

**Employability Support - Proposals Received
and Proposed Approach**

- “1 **Relevant Background Information**
- 1.1 Members will be aware that they have given endorsement at previous meetings to developing an agreed approach to employability initiatives across the city and to sharing information on performance across a range of initiatives.
- 1.2 A separate report deals with requests for ESF (European Social Fund) support which will contribute towards some of the operational objectives of a city-wide plan. A number of applications have recently been received to provide support for the governance and management of this work, as well as a wider programme of activities.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Under the auspices of the Task Forces for West Belfast and the Greater Shankill areas, a number of structures and initiatives were created to address the significant challenges of economic deprivation and low skills and employment levels in those areas.

2.2 Two groupings were established to address the employability issues in particular. These were:

- Employers' Forum**
- Employment Services Board**

2.3 Employers' Forum

The Employers' Forum was established in 2003 by Business in the Community (BiTC), with the support of Bombardier Aerospace. The Forum provides an interface with up to 40 employers, working within 6 sectoral 'clusters'. These include construction, engineering, contact centres, retail and IT. The employers are committed to helping those furthest from the labour market to find work by providing support to help develop employability skills, identifying opportunities for work experience and ultimately providing sustainable employment opportunities. Through the Employers' Forum, a number of initiatives have been developed with local employers to improve the job-readiness of the long-term unemployed, with a view to moving them into the world of work. Since its inception the Forum has supported 991 long term unemployed into jobs.

2.4 The Forum has, to date, been funded by the private sector, principally Bombardier Aerospace. The current funders are Bombardier and Northstone. Business in the Community (BiTC) who operate the Forum are seeking funding from Belfast City Council of £40,000 per annum towards the operation of a city-wide Employers' Forum. This would enable the roll-out of the learning from west Belfast and Shankill across the city. The principal activities to be undertaken would include:

- Engaging employers to provide training, work experience and placements as well as jobs to long term unemployed across the city**
- Providing a forum in which employers may share experiences, ideas and support relating to key labour market issues across the City**
- Engaging more employers to participate in providing opportunities to the long term unemployed.**

2.5 The Employment Services Board

The Employment Services Board (ESB) aims to 'link and broker the needs of unemployed people in West Belfast and Greater Shankill to employment and enterprise opportunities and to review and develop the range of support interventions available.'

2.6 The Board consists of a range of representatives from the statutory and community sectors who are dealing with issues affecting the employment of those furthest from the labour market. There is Member and officer representation from Belfast City Council. The Board is facilitated by a small core secretariat and is chaired by Padraic White.

2.7 In addition to the work in the west and Shankill areas, ESB has also provided the 'stakeholder forum' function for the LEMIS programme – a community-based targeted employment initiative that operates across all of Belfast as well as in Derry and Strabane. This forum is charged with providing quarterly updates to DEL on the progress of LEMIS as well as highlighting potential barriers to service delivery and identifying opportunities for collaborative initiatives and promoting the LEMIS service. Participation in the Stakeholder Forum is made up of representatives from all Area Partnership Boards (BAPs) across Belfast as well as officer representation from Belfast City Council. Laterally, LEMIS delivery agents have also been invited to these meetings.

2.8 The current contract with DEL for this work is valued at around £60,000 annually, having been reduced from £80,000 in previous years. In March 2010, ESB was officially informed by DEL that they work resource the organisation to focus on the stakeholder forum work only and that this contract would not be extended beyond March 2011.

2.9 Both organisations work closely with the Job Assist Centres (JACs) in these areas. The JACS were also established in response to the Task Force reports, as a means of bringing together under the auspices of a community-based organisation, a range of employment and employability services. These organisations continue to be funded by Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

2.10 Wider discussions with DEL

Following initial contacts with DEL made during the development of the Belfast Employability and Skills Plan, the issue of information sharing and developing collaborative initiatives to target identified need on a city-wide basis was identified as a critical priority.

DEL have suggested that they are still supportive of this and would be keen to consider resource support to allow this work to be undertaken, should Belfast City Council agree to take the lead in this regard. Further discussions between DEL and Belfast City Council will be required in order to scope this work in more detail and to identify the resourcing implications.

2.11 Research undertaken in developing the Belfast Employability and Skills Plan suggests that, while many organisations are delivering vital services on the ground, there is a lack of coordination and working to an agreed goal. In this regard, it is difficult to build critical mass or to see progress towards target. In the current economic climate, it is becoming increasingly important to consider greater collaboration and synergy, while maintaining service delivery, particularly for those in most need. In this regard, DEL will be a key partner in building a strong partnership for enhancing employment opportunities for the citizens of Belfast.

2.12 There is also an opportunity to link with the major employer organisations such as CBI, CEF and Northern Ireland Chamber. These organisations have recently launched their 'jobs plan' – an ambitious plan to create 94,000 by 2020. This coalition approach reinforces the merits of collaborating to address the current employment challenges in the economy.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 Financial

The funding requests from the Employment Services Board and the Employers' Forum are likely to exceed £100,000. At present, these resources are not available within existing departmental estimates.

3.2 The financial and wider implications of leading on a city-wide approach within council resources will require ongoing dialogue with DEL and will be dependent on the nature and scope of the work. Any approval to proceed would be subject to committee agreement.

3.3 Human Resources

The coordination role will be managed within the Economic Development Unit. Discussions will be undertaken with DEL should additional staffing commitments be required, possibly in the form of a secondee from the Department.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

4.1 Any proposed approach will be subject to equality proofing.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the requests for support from the Employment Services Board (ESB) and the Employers' Forum at a total cost of around £100,000 per annum. This sum has not been provided for in current estimates.
- Note the discussions underway with DEL with a view to creating a platform for sharing information and developing collaborative initiatives on a city-wide basis, with a view to enhancing provision and addressing the current employment challenges in the city and agree to the continuation of this approach.

6 Decision Tracking

Should the proposal to work with DEL be endorsed, an update report will be presented to Committee in April 2011.

Timeframe: April 2011

Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

7 Key to Abbreviations

CBI – Confederation of British Industry
CEF – Construction Employers' Federation
DEL – Department for Employment and Learning
EF – Employers' Forum
ESB – Employment Services Board
LEMIS – Local Employment Intermediary Service"

During discussion, a number of Members expressed concern that, due to the reduction in the level of funding being provided for such schemes by Central Government, the Council was receiving unsolicited requests for financial assistance for which no funding provision had been identified within Departmental budgets and, therefore, placed the Council in an unenviable position.

After discussion, during which it was agreed that additional information be provided in respect of the performance of the projects within the Greater Shankill area, the Committee deferred consideration of the matter to enable a presentation to be provided by the Employment Services Board and the Employers' Forum at its meeting in March.

North Belfast Advice Partnership

The Committee was reminded that the Council was a major funder of advice and information services by means of a consortium model, based on geographic providers located in North, South, East, West and Central Belfast. The Community Development Manager explained that advice funding throughout the City was made up from two sources, with the Department for Social Development providing £469,902, and Belfast City Council contributing £355,729, giving a total for 2010/11 of £825,631. That approach had been established in 2005/2006, and assisted over twenty organisations, which included both the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the independent advice providers. This finance was allocated to the consortia on a pro-rata basis based on a deprivation-weighted index as outlined:

- North Belfast: 27.33%
- South Belfast: 13.51%
- East Belfast 16.82%
- West Belfast: 32.34%
- City Centre: 10%

The Community Development Manager reminded the Committee that the North Belfast Advice Partnership had consisted of seven providers. She pointed out that, in May, 2010, the Lower North Belfast Community Council had withdrawn from the Group and that the North Belfast Advice Partnership had initiated a process to secure a new partner organisation to deliver advice in the Lower North Belfast Partnership area. She advised the Members that expressions of interest to provide this service had been received from two groups, viz., First Steps and the Loughview Community Association Project. Following a lengthy selection process, both organisations had been deemed not to be in a position to meet fully the requirements of being an advice provider.

She reported that the North Belfast Area Partnership had been providing advice services, on an outreach basis, to the York Road/Shore Road area, using part-time staff to provide advice at six different locations. Given the delays experienced in identifying a suitable provider for advice services in the Lower North Belfast area, it had been necessary to establish further outreach provision at three new locations, namely, the Grove Wellbeing Centre, the Grove Housing Association and North City Training. The Community Development Manager pointed out that the North Belfast Area Partnership had undertaken to appoint a replacement organisation within the Lower North Belfast area in line with best practice and that extra outreach provision, as outlined, was being provided until March, 2011. She added that provision of this extra service would have no additional resource implications for the Council and it was recommended that the Committee approve a variance of the previous allocation in the sum of £14,604.05 to the North Belfast Area Partnership to deliver the programme of advice in the Lower North Belfast area to the end of the financial year.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendation.

Lower Castlereagh Area Proposal

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 10th December, 2008, it had agreed to provide funding in the sum of £29,800 over a two-year period to the East Belfast Community Development Agency towards a major community development project to be undertaken in a number of areas within East Belfast. It was reported that the aforementioned programme had concluded in December, 2010 and that significant progress had been achieved throughout that period. The Community Development Manager reported that a further proposal had been received from the East Belfast Community Development Association seeking the Council's assistance to extend, until June, 2011, the programme to the Castlereagh Street; Castlereagh Road; Albertbridge Road; and Woodstock Road areas. The Committee was advised that the programme would enable the East Belfast Community Development Agency to host a number of stakeholder meetings, form a Working Group and commission a community-needs audit to assist in the preparation and publishing of an Area Action Plan.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to provide funding of £7,450 towards the cost of extending the programme into the Lower Castlereagh area on the basis that the East Belfast Community Development Association consult with locally Elected Members during the formulation of the Action Plan.

Advice Services: Volunteer Training

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 13th January, 2010, it had agreed to provide financial support up to a maximum of £20,000 to the Citizens' Advice Bureau in connection with its scheme to provide training for an additional thirty advice service volunteers from across the five Belfast advice consortia. It was reported that, since that the economic situation had failed to show any significant improvement since the Committee's original decision, that a further request had been received from the Citizens' Advice Bureau seeking the Council's assistance to host a further two training courses, each of which would have a capacity to train fifteen volunteers. The Director outlined the costs associated with the provision of the additional training courses and requested that the Committee agree to provide funding, up to a maximum of £14,000, to co-ordinate and enable the training of an extra thirty advice service volunteers across the five consortia in Belfast.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister: Child Poverty Plan

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 **The Council has been asked to respond to the Office of the First Ministers and Deputy First Minister's Child Poverty Plan. The Child Poverty Act 2010 (The Act), see the attached documents, enacted on 25th March, places a statutory obligation on the Executive to develop a child poverty strategy and lay it before the assembly by 25th March 2011.**

- 1.2 The aim of the strategy is to provide the opportunity for all children and young people to thrive and to address the causes and consequences of disadvantage. The strategy is based on the framework for tackling child poverty, produced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) although in recognising the Northern Ireland context, they have separated childcare and education as these are not represented by one service.
- 1.3 The strategy is not intend to replace or replicate existing strategies or work but rather to provide the strategic direction for the eradication of child poverty. The strategy also allows for the current financial climate and the uncertain Budget allocations, therefore it is a high level strategy intended to bring focus to the issue and promote a common aim.
- 1.4 The strategy contain four priorities:
- Ensure, as far as possible, that poverty and disadvantage in childhood does not translate into poorer outcomes for children as they move into adulthood
 - Support more parents to be in work that pays
 - Ensure the child's environment supports them to thrive
 - Target financial support to be responsive to family situations

The elements of the strategy are shown in diagram 1.

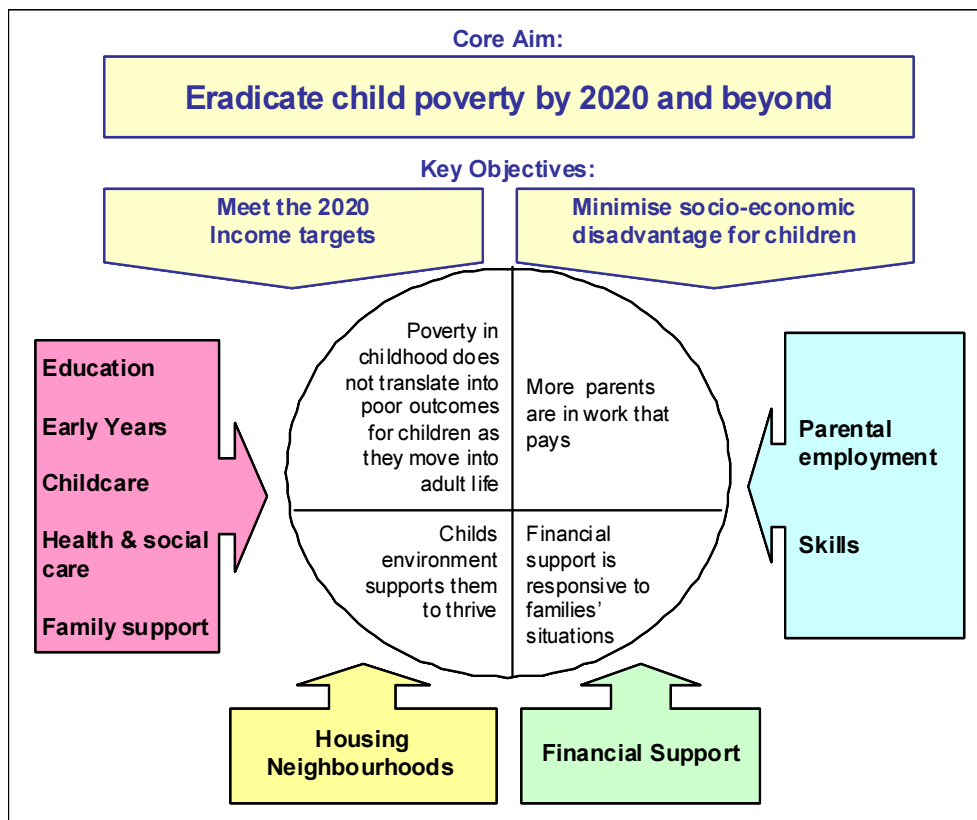


Diagram 1.

A number of principles will underpin and support the delivery of this strategy:

- A shift towards tackling the root causes of poverty and not just treating its symptoms;
- Putting children at the centre of the Strategy and taking into account their views when developing policies and programmes to tackle child poverty;
- Adopting a Life Cycle approach, breaking the cycle that results in children born into poverty becoming working age adults in low income;
- Promoting excellence in support across a range of key policy areas including employment and skills, education, childcare, health and family support, housing and neighbourhoods, and financial support;

- A gradual shift towards the use of preventative measures to tackle child poverty and, when families face difficulties, intervention at an early stage, reducing the likelihood of more serious problems developing in the future;
- Applying an evidence based approach;
- Adopting a whole family approach which concentrates on all members of the family - children, young people, and their parents and supporting family life;
- Empowering and enabling parents on low income into work and make work pay for those on low pay;
- Promoting partnership working across all sectors including public, private, voluntary, and community sectors;
- Recognising the current economic climate and the need for the Strategy to be balanced against existing financial limits.

1.7 More information about the strategy can be found online at:
<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/improving-public-services/ofmdfm-consultations/ofmdfm-consultations-current-forthcoming.htm>

2 Key Issues

2.1 The main issues for Belfast City Council are:

- 2.2 - The principles of the strategy are complementary to the Council's Draft Corporate Action Plan to tackle Poverty and Reduce Inequalities.
- 2.3 - The majority of the strategy document sets out the legislation and rationale for having a strategy. There is less detail about the specific actions that will be undertaken. Where actions are proposed, no target, resources or accountabilities are mentioned. Therefore it is difficult to provide much feedback on the document.
- 2.4 - The document does not mention the role of Councils other than to acknowledge our input to workshops and to commit support for local councils, and others, who provide services and programmes which meet the needs of local communities, particularly disadvantaged communities.

- 2.5 - The original deadline for a response was the 6 February 2011. We have managed to secure an extension until the 10 February. This allows us one day after committee to make any changes.

3 **Resource Implications**

- 3.1 There are no immediate resource costs associated with this consultation response.

4 **Equality and Good Relations Considerations**

- 4.1 There are no equality and good relations considerations associated with this response.

5 **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

- 5.1 1. Approve the attached draft consultation response; and
5.2 2. Raise any issues about the draft response that they wish to be included.

Decision Tracking

Further to approval the response will be sent to the Office of the First Ministers and Deputy First Minister's Child Poverty Plan

Timeframe: April 2011 Reporting Officer: Barbary Cook

Key to Abbreviations

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)

Documents Attached

Council Response

COUNCIL RESPONSE

1.1 **Overall comments**

- 1.1.1. You will be aware that the Council has been working on its own Draft Corporate Action Plan to tackle Poverty and Reduce Inequalities and we believe that the principles of your strategy are complementary to the Council's.

We have attended various meetings with you during the development of both strategies, which we believe have been beneficial, and we are keen to continue this dialogue. It is hoped that our draft strategy will be discussed and approved by committee in the near future.

- 1.1.2. Considering the dialogue that we have had, it is slightly surprising that your strategy document does not mention the role that Councils might play in helping to reduce poverty and the affects of poverty. We are pleased that the document acknowledges our input to workshops and that it commits support for local councils, and others, who provide services and programmes which meet the needs of local communities, particularly disadvantaged communities. However, we feel that it may be useful to highlight specific examples of ways in which councils might be able to support the strategy, subject to resource availability.

1.2 Responses to the specific questions

- 1.2.1 We have used the template you provided for specific responses. Please see the following pages.

Question 1: Do you agree/disagree with the Framework outlined in chapter 2, section 2.1?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	X			

Please provide details of any additional areas which you think should be included in the framework

It would be useful if the framework made reference to the importance of measuring outcomes; the monitoring and collection of data; and the supporting infrastructure required to sustain it.

Question 2: Do you agree/disagree with the overarching aim at 2.11?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Do you agree/disagree with the strategic priorities at 2.12?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Do you agree/disagree with the underpinning principles at 2.13?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Please provide details of any additional strategic priorities or principles which you think should be included

‘Whilst recognising that the tax and benefits system is led by the UK Government centrally, the Executive will continue to strenuously advocate for the appropriate level of income resources on behalf of our children and their families.’ The council’s own research into the roots of poverty in Belfast also confirms the primary importance of the tax and benefits system in addressing poverty issues.

- We would note that support for low income families might also be included as a priority and that such families are also at great risk from poverty.
- We would suggest consideration of additional principles:
 - Addressing barriers to accessing statutory services caused by poverty.
 - Ensuring the meaningful and ongoing engagement of those experiencing poverty (and representative organisations) during the delivery of the strategy
 - Encouraging partners to imbed the strategic priorities into their mainstream planning

Priority action areas

Question 3: Do you agree/disagree with the priority action areas identified under this strategic priority in section 2.14?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Support more parents to be in work that pays

Question 4: Do you agree/disagree with the priority action areas identified under this strategic priority in section 2.14?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Please provide details of any additional priority action areas which you think should be included

The Council already provides access to parents through basic skills training programmes. These are delivered in our Community Centres that are often in areas at risk of poverty. Programmes include:

- The ACE Scheme;
- The Job Assist Scheme;
- Digital Communities;
- Step up to Work;
- Volunteering opportunities and;
- Step up to Learn

Additional funding might enable the Council to extend these programmes.

Ensure the child's environment supports them to thrive

Question 5: Do you agree/disagree with the priority action areas identified under this strategic priority in section 2.14?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Please provide details of any additional priority action areas which you think should be included

There is potential for support for this section from existing Council services. As well as the obvious play and leisure support we provide (see separate consultation response on the Play and Leisure implementation plan), the Council could support this through:

- Its funding and delivery of arts, sporting and leisure activities.
- Using its contacts and Community Centres to enable access to parents, especially those in poverty or in danger of poverty.
- Targeting its physical regeneration activities.

Target financial support to be responsive to family situations

Question 6: Do you agree/disagree with the priority action areas identified under this strategic priority in section 2.14?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Future implementation of the strategy

Question 7: Please provide any comments on how you think the priority action areas in section 2.14 should be taken forward to deliver the overarching aim of the strategy

The priority action areas are comprehensive and we agree with their content. We do have a number of general points, listed below:

- One potential concern is the number of priorities (there are 32 significant priority areas listed). If the strategy has too many priorities then, by definition, they are not actual 'priorities'. There may be an argument to be made - particularly in times of constrained budget - for a greater focus on those priorities which are likely to have the most significant impact on child poverty in Northern Ireland.
- We would suggest that a critical element of the strategy (as in any strategy) is the robustness of the delivery plan, which we note will be published in due course. It is therefore difficult to make comments on the likelihood of successful implementation without reference to this plan. It would be important to see, against each action, detail of lead departments or organisations, targets, delivery dates, etc.
- There is reference in the document to "those key initiatives and signature projects to progress the strategic priorities". While such initiatives are important, and to be welcomed, we would also suggest that for a long term, sustainable impact the strategy must influence and re-shape the day-to-day mainstream planning and service delivery of government departments.

Please provide details on how you think the Monitoring framework should be developed, including the identification of appropriate indicators to measure progress

We suggest that monitoring should also include an integrated approach to on-going engagement with those in poverty (and their representative organisations). While statistical data is important in measuring impact, it is not the complete picture and the views and experience of those for which the strategy is being developed will inform an important and more nuanced measure.

Please provide any other comments you wish to make

While we appreciate the efforts made to make the consultation response process easier to complete, we would suggest that more work is required to make the process more convenient.

The Department might like to consider the use of more modern electronic tools and techniques to allow commenting and consideration of the strategy (eg, wikis, comment-able web pages, or other online collaboration tools).

We'd also be keen to see feedback on the consultation process – in terms of how and why comments and suggestions have (or have not) be incorporated into the final draft.”

After discussion, during which the Committee agreed that the vital role which local community-based organisations played in combating child poverty be emphasised, the Committee endorsed the Council's attached response to the aforementioned consultation.

Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister:
Play and Leisure Plan

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 **Relevant Background Information**

The Council have been asked to respond to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister's, (OFMDFM) Play & Leisure Implementation Plan. This plan supports the Play and Leisure Policy agreed in 2008. See documents attached, appendices 1-3.

1.1 **The Play and Leisure Policy**

OFMDFM published a Play and Leisure Policy Statement in 2008 following a two-year period of cross-sectoral consultation. As part of that process, Belfast City Council submitted a formal response as agreed at the Community and Recreation (Community and Leisure Services) Sub-Committee meeting on 6th February 2007.

The Policy is targeted at all children aged 18 years and under. It is anchored within, and supports, the delivery of the ten year strategy, 2006 – 2016, for children and young people.

The Policy Vision for play is:
'to recognise, respect and resource play is to recognise, respect and value childhood.'

1.2 Implementation of the Policy

To enable the implementation of the Policy and Leisure Statement, the OFMDFM commissioned PlayBoard NI to provide technical expertise and to chair three Implementation sub-groups comprised of representatives from across the sector.

1.3 The sub-groups focused on the following areas:

0-11 years

12 – 18 years

cross – cutting themes , for example, cultural and disability issues.

1.4 Derry/Londonderry and Belfast City Council represented a District Council perspective on the sub-groups. Belfast was represented on the main committee and the 12-18 sub-group by the Community Development Manager and later by the Children & Young People's Manager. The Play Development Officer sat on the 0-11 sub-group.

1.5 The work of the sub-groups has been completed with the production of a draft Implementation Plan.

1.6 The Implementation Plan

The Plan has been divided into 4 main aims:

Aim 1: Places & Spaces

Aim 2: Championing Play and Leisure

Aim 3: Access to Play and Leisure

Area 4: Workforce Development

1.7 The Plan considers a number of cross-cutting issues including;

Continuous Professional and Workforce development

Meeting the particular needs of groups of children, for example, children with disabilities and children from migrant communities

The risk benefit debate

The active participation of children and young people.

- 1.8 Play and Leisure Partnerships**
Learning from experiences within England and Wales, the plan recommends that Play and Leisure Partnerships are established to oversee the delivery of the policy. This is to enable the pooling of resources and coordination of services.
- 1.9** It is further recommended that District Councils provide the central coordinating role for the play and leisure partnerships.
- 1.10** Limited financial support has been made available to assist Councils to develop the play partnerships and strategic plans. The initial funding deadline has now closed and it is uncertain if further funding will be made available.
- 1.11** The main role of the Play and Leisure Partnerships will be to take responsibility for driving the delivery of the implementation plan within each council area.

Membership of the Play and Leisure Partnerships within each District Council area will include a range of local statutory, voluntary, community and private sector organizations that have a responsibility for:

- Play services, parks and open spaces
- Services for disabled children and young people
- Public health
- Schools
- Service Commissioning
- Community relations
- Policing
- Children and Youth Service providers
- Housing
- Transport
- Childcare
- Planning
- Services for ethnic minority groups

- 1.12** Children and young people would be represented and supported to ensure that their voices and opinions are incorporated into the work of the partnership. Partnerships will also be required to consult with wider groups of children and young people at key junctures.

2 Key Issues

2.1 The main issues for Belfast City Council are:

2.2 - Resources. The plan sets out a range of desirable outcomes but makes available no additional resources, asserting that 'These actions cannot be taken forward at departmental level but need to be progressed by Councils'. In so doing, the final draft plan fails to reflect the concerns raised throughout the working group process in relation to the absence of additional resources being offered to Councils should they be prepared to assume 'lead responsibility'. In a context of budgetary constraint, it is unlikely that additional financial support will now be forthcoming from central government departments. Council should therefore be very wary of accepting responsibility in the absence of appropriate additional funding being made available.

2.3 - Play and Leisure Partnerships - Councils are expected to take the lead role in developing and coordinating the Partnerships. Within Belfast City Council, play and leisure crosses two Departments. Should Council be minded to establish such a partnership, responsibility for leading it would need to lie within one Department and with a designated lead officer.

2.4 - The main focus is on the open space provision for play and leisure. Playwork and staffed play provision has little mention in the plan.

2.5 - The original deadline for a response was the 6 February 2011. We have managed to secure an extension until the 15 February.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 There are no immediate resource costs associated with this consultation response. There are longer term resource implications as discussed in paragraph 2.2 above. These are in respect of the potential new duties expected of Council.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

There are no equality and good relations considerations associated with this response.

5 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to :

1. Approve the attached draft consultation response; and
2. Raise any issues about the draft response that they wish to be included.

6 Decision Tracking

Further to approval of the draft consultation response:

Timeframe: March 2011

Reporting Officer: Barbary Cook

7 Documents Attached

OFMDFM 'Play and Leisure Implementation Draft Consultation Response'

COUNCIL RESPONSE

1.1. Overall comments

1.1.1 The City Council is fully committed to supporting children and young people and has this as a corporate priority. This can be seen by the substantial resources allocated to play and leisure services. In the context of play alone, Council invests some £1m annually in the inspection, maintenance and equipment replacement in 78 playgrounds across the city. A further £650k is planned in capital works. Council also deploy 16 play workers in 6 dedicated play centres and other sites across the city, representing a further investment of £650k per annum. In addition we operate and maintain 10 leisure centres and all the cities parks.

1.1.2. It is reasonable to assert, therefore, that in supporting the broad thrust of the policy and its underpinning principles, Council is already providing significant support to the OFMDFM's Play and Leisure Policy. Consequently we are concerned that implementation of OFMDFM's plan appears to require additional financial and staff resources from BCC despite the issue being raised throughout the working group process. Thus far, the only additional resources made available by central government (via PlayBoard) has been to support Councils establish play partnerships and formulate strategic plans. The initial funding deadline has now closed and it is uncertain if further funding will be made available.

- 1.1.3. Councils are expected to take the lead role in developing and coordinating the proposed Play and Leisure Partnerships but the structural approach, as proposed, may not be appropriate to Belfast. The adoption of a standard structure, based on the inclusion of a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations, may be unnecessarily cumbersome in the particular context of Belfast City Council. In particular the plan tends to refer to 'Play and Leisure' as a unitary concept. Within City Council, however, the structural organisation of 'play' and 'leisure' are as distinct functions and are already 'embedded' within existing service provision - unlike many other Councils.
- 1.1.4. There may also be difficulties with the Play and Leisure implementation plan as Council has virtually completed its planning and financial cycle for 2011-12. As such there is a concern that corporate, departmental and service plans will have been completed with no linkages to actions contained within the OFMDFM plan.
- 1.1.5. Finally, the form used for consultation feedback is very restrictive for feedback. Hence this covering letter and modification of the consultation response template. In seeking to encourage consultation the process should be more user-friendly.
- 1.2. Comments on specific sections of the implementation plan
 - 1.2.1. Introduction: Barriers to Play & Leisure - The Council agree and endorse the following points contained within the introduction:
 - that factors such as a loss of open space and under investment in parks and playgrounds significantly increase barriers to play; and
 - that there are limited opportunities for children with disabilities or additional needs.
 - 1.2.2. The latter point is something the Council is specifically working towards with regards to outdoor play space. The Council will take cognisance of these points when developing its future strategies, plans and development programmes (i.e. pitches strategy, Active Belfast and Open Spaces strategy and citywide participation plan).
 - 1.2.3. Section 1.3: Who is the implementation plan for? - The Council agrees that partnership working is key to delivering success and we would welcome the opportunity to explore the potential for greater partnership working in the future particularly in relation to play provision and enhancement.

- 1.2.4. The plan also alluded to the fact that an investment of almost £9 million had been allocated to enhance existing play and leisure facilities. Our Parks & Leisure department would be keen to establish exactly how much of this funding was invested in the Council's sites.
- 1.2.5. Section 2.1 - This section defines and describes play as 'freely chosen'. Perhaps the current situation with European safety compliance for equipment/ surfacing and access can limit this 'free' choice. Within the Council we are considering a move towards more environmental/ natural play spaces where children can play in a more imaginative way.
- 1.2.6. Section 2.2 - Under the principle of accessibility, the plan states there should be 'sufficient provision'. The definition of what 'sufficient' means is not referred to within the plan. The department would be keen to find out what this standard is and how it is actually measured. The Parks and Leisure facilities are accessible to all but some people have the perception that it is not safe for them to use facilities in particular locations.
- 1.2.7. Under the principle of inclusion the department would also suggest that the views of children should be considered and incorporated into the overall consultation process when developing play facilities. The Council uses its Youth Forum to seek young peoples input and views and to consult on a regular basis.
- 1.2.8. Section 2.3 - Child and Young Person friendly Communities - This section has strong links with the council's shared space agenda and would advocate that our leisure centres, parks, pitches, cemeteries and the Belfast Zoological Gardens are shared spaces for all.
- 1.2.9. Access to Spaces & Places - The Council through the provision and programming of quality parks and open spaces and leisure environments provides perfect places and opportunities for children and young people.
- 1.2.10. We would endorse the statement that 'local neighbourhoods' are to be planned and designed with children and young people. The department would like clarification on whether this will be managed through the Neighbourhood Partnership Boards, how will this actually be done and what are the implications for the council? The Council would also like to emphasise that design is complementary to the open space and environment.

1.2.11. **Section 2.4: Partnership Working for Play & Leisure –** This section mentions that local play and leisure partnerships are to be established but the department feels that there is not enough clarity about how this would function and what our role and contribution would be. As mentioned in the introduction, we have concerns that the standard approach may not suit the Council, where play and leisure services are provided across more than one department.

1.2.12. **Section 2.5: Monitoring and Evaluation -** The Council feels that the monitoring and evaluation section is quite weak and that monitoring and evaluation of the plan is as important as the delivery of it. It is vital that a performance measurement framework (containing key performance measures) is developed at the outset. The section refers to the fact that OFMDFM will develop an indicator set which will measure the delivery of the outcomes – the Council would welcome the opportunity to be consulted on this.

1.2.13. The Council also queries whether an annual review of the plan will be sufficient.

1.3. Responses to the specific questions

1.3.1. We have used the template you provided for specific responses. Please see the following pages.

Question 1: Do you agree/disagree with the 4 key action areas outlined in draft plan?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			X	

Please provide details of any additional action areas which you think should be included in the plan

The main focus of the plan is on ‘open space’ provision for play and leisure. Playwork and staffed play provision has little mention.

Question 2: Do you agree/disagree with the key impact areas outlined in the draft plan under places and spaces for play and leisure?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	X			

Please provide details of any key impact areas which you think should be omitted

Within the action plan there is reference to the use of child friendly, accessible evaluation tools for measuring satisfaction levels. The Council would be keen to find out what they are and how the information will be useful for us.

One of the key actions within the action plan is to take forward an audit of unused/ vacant space within a council pilot area. An audit of all open space within the city was commissioned by the Council in recent years. There may be some transferable information within this report that could be relevant.

The action plan also mentions a professional bodies working group to develop design standards – this is something that the Parks and Leisure Department would be keen to get involved in.

Please provide details of any additional impact areas which you think should be included

Planning and design needs to promote play and leisure – The Northern Ireland Planning Service has a statutory duty to consult the relevant Council about every planning application it receives and to consult the Council during the preparation of a development plan. Councils have the potential for major influence in ensuring there is space allocated for children to play.

Public Spaces create a welcoming environment for all children and young people - BCC could support this through: Training for staff who plan playgrounds; development of partnerships with community groups; using staff to conduct consultations and evaluations with children; Play staff involved in projects in open spaces

Influencing professional practice in building and design – This should form part of the main work of the Play and Leisure Partnerships.

Promoting the conversion of unused land into viable play and leisure spaces - This would involve additional resources both for initial development and then for long-term maintenance. The Council would be seen as the main provider for this. Consideration would need to be made of alternative ways to use land through the Play and Leisure Partnerships.

General - Reference should be made to an action which looks at promoting play across boundaries within this area.

Question 3: Do you agree/disagree with the key impact areas outlined in the draft plan under championing play and leisure?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	X			

Please provide details of any key impact areas which you think should be omitted

While Council does not necessarily disagree with the actions proposed, it should be noted that many of the activities suggested are already performed by Council and we would not be keen to drop existing proven processes for an as yet unproven approach. Areas this might affect include:

- A lobbying role.
- consultation mechanisms
- Strategic plans to implement Play and Leisure.
- Reviewing existing quality.
- Reviewing service provision.
- Working with local community groups to promote greater recognition of the benefits from play and leisure with parents.

Please provide details of any additional impact areas which you think should be included in the plan

One of the actions relates to providing financial support to Councils to facilitate the development of strategic plans – the Council would welcome this type of support to ensure the principles of the play and implementation plan are embedded at council level and included in any future corporate and departmental strategies and plans.

The action plan makes reference to researching and promoting existing quality standards, the Council would be keen to know which standards the action is referring to and it would be clearer if this was stipulated as part of the action.

Question 4: Do you agree/disagree with the key impact areas outlined in the draft plan under access to play and leisure?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	X			

Please provide details of any additional impact areas which you think should be included in the plan

The action plan area 3 makes reference to promoting the use of play services by an assessment of inclusive play – this is something the Council would be keen to build into future independent playground inspections as it is essential to improve the opportunities for disabled users across the city.

This aim will focus on undertaking an assessment of existing services to determine access and inclusion. A baseline would need to be established with agreed criteria. Accessibility will differ for children coming from different economic and cultural backgrounds; abilities; age and developmental stage; and area they live in. For children in Belfast a play facility in the next street may be inaccessible due to the political makeup of neighbourhoods or to a child's background.

There is a recommendation to establish safe and accessible travel routes through 2 pilots. This could be obtainable through developing partnerships with organizations like Sustran.

Question 5: Do you agree/disagree with the key impact areas outlined in draft plan under workforce development?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	X			

Please provide details of any key impact areas which you think should be omitted

Again, while Council does not necessarily disagree with the actions proposed, it should be noted that many of the activities suggested are already performed by Council and we would not be keen to drop existing proven processes. For example, BCC currently ensures all Playstaff are trained to NVQ level III in Playwork. Additionally, short-term courses are offered through the play service for community groups, community development staff and summer scheme workers.

Question 6: Do you agree/disagree with the actions outlined in draft plan?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	X			

Please provide any other comments you wish to make

In general the implementation plan may need to be tightened up. Although we appreciate that this is part of the purpose of consultation, the Council recommends that each action requires allocated resources and key performance measures need to be outlined for each of areas. The Council also suggests that each action has specific delivery partners assigned to them where appropriate to ensure accountability and continuity of delivery.”

After discussion, the Committee endorsed the Council’s attached response to the aforementioned consultation.

Department for Social Development –
Guidance Document on
Provision of Local Generalist Advice

The Committee was advised that the Department for Social Development had issued a draft guidance document to Councils in respect of the provision of voluntary advice services. The Community Development Manager reported that the guidance document would assist the Council to make informed decisions on the future sourcing of local generalist voluntary advice and, therefore, it was requested that the Committee agree to host a briefing session in respect of the draft guidelines.

The Committee agreed to host a briefing session on a date to be determined in conjunction with the Chairman (Councillor Maskey).

Community Development
Grant-aid Programme 2011/2012

The Committee considered the undernoted report and appendix and adopted the recommendations as contained therein:

“Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 **At the 14 October 2009 Committee, Members considered a report on the Departmental Grants Review. This report noted that there would now be three strands of funding including the Community Access Fund, the Annual Fund and the Multi-Annual Fund. These strands were determined by the average level of funding currently allocated to successful organizations: under £10,000, between £10,000 and £25,000 and £25,000 +.**
- 1.2 **Community Services offer a range of grants as set out in the policy ‘A Guide to Grant Aid for Community Organisations’, which was agreed by Council in January 2004. The grant categories could be sub divided into large and small grant categories. The service, with support from the newly created**

Department Grant Aid Unit, is working to align service grants into the Departmental Grant programme. The time-frame to align the MAF grant types has been agreed as from April 2012. This applies to the Advice & Information grant and the Capacity Support grant.

- 1.3 **Small Grants:** Traditionally Community Services manage 3 small grant schemes and these include Community Development Project Grant, Summer Play Schemes and Community Chest awards. They are subject to application and allocated competitively against agreed criterion. The grant programme for 2010/11 is operating within current procedures and it is intended to continue this approach in 2011/12 in advance of the new Community Access small grant programme. This was agreed as part of the Development Department Grant Aid Review and is scheduled for implementation in autumn next year for the 2012/13 funding rounds.
- 1.4 **Large Grants.** The community grant programme includes three larger grants: Revenue; Capacity Building Grant and Advice Services
- 1.5 The Community Revenue grant is available to eligible organisations delivering wide ranging community development programmes in community buildings at neighbourhood and area level. While assessment focuses on the range and content of the local service, the grant specifically assists groups with general building costs, e.g. utilities, Insurance, Health and Safety, Cleaning, Admin, Telephones etc.
- 1.6 In April 2010, members considered a paper outlining options for the future management of the revenue grant programme and agreed to continue the Revenue grant as an 'annual' stream for 2011/2012 to permit sufficient time for appropriate preparatory work including supporting policy development and a risk management framework to be put in place. It was agreed that following the policy work there would then be a carefully co-ordinated move to 'multi-annual' after 2012. This work is being progressed by the Community Facilities Unit and the Departmental Grant Aid Unit.
- 1.7 All 2011/12 Revenue grant support will be dependant on satisfactory monitoring and the submission of robust and eligible programmes for 2011/12.
- 1.8 Arrangements have yet to be agreed for the administration of the Capacity grant and our support for Advice & Information consortia in 2011/12 financial year

2 **Key Issues**

2.1 **Advice & Information**

Members are aware that BCC is a significant investor in the delivery of independent advice services across the city and have developed a successful model of consortia advice provision based on geographical providers (North, South, East, West and city centre). BCC investment focuses on generalist advice provision to the community at large.

2.2 Previous papers have noted that these are challenging times for both the voluntary advice sector and government. Future support needs to note a real need for collaboration and the sharing of resources and services to address the challenges presented by welfare reform and the difficult economic climate.

2.3 In the current year, BCC have administered £825,631.00 funding for the sector, which includes a restricted grant of £469,902 from DSD. DSD have not yet indicated the level of funding for Advice and Information services for next year.

2.4 In light of the ongoing roll out of the DSD strategy *Opening Doors Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services*, committee agreed we should review and refine the BCC Support Strategy for Advice Services post 2011 and develop a related action plan. Furthermore it was agreed that this work will be developed closely with members and key stake-holders. It was further agreed that a key component of the strategy development will be to agree the appropriate number and location of Advice Centres and related outreach provision across the city

2.5 In November 2009 DSD advised that then Minister Ritchie intended as part of the Opening Doors strategy to publish further guidance 'in consultation with councils' before piloting the new advice framework in partnership. At that time, DSD indicated their intention to invite expressions of interest from councils to permit a pilot phase in 2010. Furthermore implementation of the new framework should take account of and fit the new council areas post RPA. DSD indicated that adoption of the agreed model will coincide with RPA implementation time scales then expected to occur in 2011.

2.6 This draft guidance has only just been published for consultation by DSD with the intent to assist Councils in the provision of voluntary advice services. Officers have initiated plans to draft a BCC response which will include mechanisms to ensure member participation. The closing date for response is 7th March 2011.

2.7 The shape of the 2011/12 Community Services grant support for the Advice sector will therefore be influenced by the following factors:

- the ongoing roll out of the DSD Opening Doors Strategy which has been significantly delayed
- the level of available funds: BCC and DSD.
- alignment of this MAF grant to the new Departmental Grant Aid Unit.

2.8 Recommendation:

For the 2011/12 grant programme, officers propose that members consider extending the current 2010/11 grant offers into the next financial year. Any grant offer would be dependent upon:

- The consortia satisfactorily meeting 2010/11 monitoring requirements
- The submission of appropriate annual work plans, related budget and key targets and outcomes

2.9 Officers will present a refined grant programme proposal which incorporates recommendations from the agreed DSD strategy and which aligns this grant with the MAF procedures set down by the Departmental Grant Aid Unit. This work will be presented to committee in advance of a public call for applications in Autumn 2011.

2.10 Capacity Support

The Capacity Grant was competitively allocated via open application for the 2010/11 financial year with 17 organisations successfully offered grants. This grant category primarily funds larger community support organisations who offer capacity building support to their member and other local groups. The organisations also provide networking support, contribute to local area planning and are a voice for community issues for their locale.

- 2.11 In the current year BCC have administered funding in the amount of £601,662.28 in support of community infrastructure (Appendix 1). One organisation was not paid (as it has been dissolved) and Play Resource Centre are paid from the budget via a Service Level Agreement authorised by Committee in 2009. The budget includes levered grant from DSD. DSD have not yet indicated the level of funding to District Councils for the Community Support Programme for next year.
- 2.12 The current situation of reduced financial resources is having an obvious impact on grant support for the voluntary and community sectors. Future support needs will be mindful of the requirement for collaboration and the sharing of resources and services to address the challenges presented by welfare reform and the difficult economic climate.
- 2.13 The service is currently leading the development of a Community Development framework for council and committee will be aware of an engagement seminar for members scheduled on 11 February. Once agreed, this framework will inform how best council can direct their limited resources in a strategic manner in order to maximise targeted community development outcomes. It will support all departments to identify and tackle core community needs and concerns, as well as making best use of core assets and opportunities.
- 2.14 This developing framework, alongside the DSD strategic work to inform their future approach to Urban Regeneration and Community Development, will inform the targeted outcomes of this investment in community infrastructure organisations.
- 2.15 Once Council consider and agree the BCC Community Development Framework, officers will review the Capacity grant criteria and present any related recommendations to align this grant category in advance of inviting applications for 2012 in the autumn.
- 2.16 The shape of the 2011/12 Community Services grant support for community infrastructure will therefore be influenced by the following factors:
- the development of the BCC Community Development Framework
 - the level of available funds: BCC and DSD.
 - alignment of this MAF grant to the new Departmental Grant Aid Unit.

2.17 Recommendation

For the 2011/12 grant programme, officers therefore propose that members consider extending the current 2010/11 grant offers into the next financial year. Any grant offer would be dependent upon:

- The group satisfactorily meeting 2010/11 monitoring requirements
- The submission of an appropriate annual work plan, related budget and key targets and outcomes

2.18 The total available budget for both grant categories, and the rest of the Community Service Grant Programme, will be dependant upon maintenance of the DSD Community Support Programme grant.

3 Resource Implications

All allocations will be made in line with available 2011/12 grant budget streams.

The estimated DSD Community Support Programme Grant for 2011/12 is £1,535,206 which will facilitate a total Capacity Support Grant budget of £632,150 and a total Advice and Information grant budget of £825,631.00.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

There is no adverse equality or good relations impact.

5 Recommendations

Committee are asked to:

- i. Note the arrangement for the 2011/12 small grant programme and revenue grant support
- ii. Advice & Information Grant 2011/12: agree a one year extension to the current grant contracts for the Advice and Information grant recipients pending compliance with monitoring requirements and the submission of appropriate annual work plans, related budgets and key targets and outcomes
- iii. Capacity Grant 2011/12: agree a one year extension to the current grant contracts for Capacity grant recipients pending compliance with monitoring requirements and the submission of appropriate annual work plans, related budgets and key targets and outcomes

- iv. Officers review current arrangements to refine future grant support programmes to align them to developing strategic frameworks and ensure compliance with the MAF arrangements / the Departmental Grant Aid Unit. Recommendations will be presented to committee for consideration and to facilitate an open call autumn 2011.

6 Decision Tracking

Catherine Taggart to implement committee decision.

7 Key to Abbreviations

MAF Multi Annual Funding

Appendix 1

Advice Allocation per area:

North Belfast 27.33%
South Belfast 13.51%
East Belfast 16.82%
West Belfast 32.34%
City Centre 10.00%

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Amounts</u> <u>2010/2011</u>	<u>Amounts</u> <u>2010/2011</u>	<u>Totals</u> <u>2010/2011</u>
	BCC Standard	DSD Allocation	BCC + DSD
<i>North Consortium</i>			
Citizens Advice Belfast	£38,889.71	£39,169.00	£78,058.71
Ardoyne Association	£58,334.57	£89,255.23	£147,589.80
<i>South Consortium</i>			
Suffolk & Andersonstown Citizens' Advice Bureau	£4,810.25		£4,810.25
Ballynafeigh Comm. Dev. Association	£43,266.52	£63,483.97	£106,750.49
<i>East Consortium</i>			
Citizens Advice Belfast	£29,906.23	£39,519.00	£69,425.23
East Belfast Indep. Advice Centre	£29,906.23	£39,519.00	£69,425.23

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Amounts 2010/2011</u>	<u>Amounts 2010/2011</u>	<u>Totals 2010/2011</u>
	BCC Standard	DSD Allocation	BCC + DSD
<i>West Consortium</i>			
Greater Turf Lodge Residents' Association		£7,382.20	£7,382.20
Neighbourhood Dev. Association	£31,173.67	£16,610.77	£47,784.44
Springfield Charitable Association Ltd	£37,960.56	£11,997.24	£49,957.80
Falls Community Council	£5,176.44	£24,608.51	£29,784.95
Corpus Christi Services	£4,946.37	£10,457.91	£15,404.28
Shankill Citizens' Advice Bureau	£20,935.82	£44,301.54	£65,237.36
Suffolk & Andersonstown Citizens' Advice Bureau	£14,839.00	£36,607.27	£51,446.27
Central Belfast			
Citizens Advice Belfast	£25,761.89	£34,021.04	£59,782.93
Belfast Unemployed Res Centre	£9,818.12	£12,969.32	£22,787.44
	£355,729.00	£469,902.00	£825,627.38"

Chairman