

Development Committee

Monday, 27th June, 2011

SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Stalford (Chairman); and
Aldermen Campbell, Ekin, Humphrey and Stoker;
Councillors Austin, Hartley, Hendron, Mallon, Maskey,
Mac Giolla Mhín, Ó Muilleoir, Robinson, Spence and
Webb.

Also attended: Alderman McCoubrey and Councillor Jones.

In attendance: Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;
Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Keenan, Kelly, McVeigh and McNamee.

Council Engagement in Employability and Skills Development Initiatives

(Mr. J. Walsh, Legal Services Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 Members will be aware that, at the February meeting of the Development Committee, a paper was presented to make Members aware of a number of projects which were seeking match funding for their European Social Fund (ESF) applications. Members agreed that they would defer a decision on whether or not to provide the match funding as requested until the projects had undergone economic appraisal by Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). These appraisals are now complete.

1.2 Members will also be aware that, at the March meeting of the Development Committee, requests for support from the Employment Services Board (ESB) and Employers' Forum (EF) were received. Following legal opinion as to whether these requests could be considered, the Committee agreed as an interim gesture, to grant funding to the Employment

Services Board, up to a maximum of £15,000, over a period of three months commencing 1 April, under the special expenditure powers as set out in Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, it being the opinion of the Committee that the expenditure would be in the interest of, and would bring direct benefit to, the District and the inhabitants of the District, with the Committee being satisfied that the direct benefit so accruing would be commensurate with the payment to be made.

- 1.3 At that meeting, Members asked that a report be presented to the June Committee outlining the wider issue of the Council's future involvement in employability and skills issues, and recommending a proposed approach for this work.

2 Key Issues

2.1 European Social Fund applications

Members are reminded that, at the August 2010 meeting of the Development Committee, agreement was reached on a set of criteria to be used to guide the development of any potential applications under ESF. These criteria included:

- Degree of fit with Belfast Employability and Skills strategy
- City wide/strategic impact
- Degree of duplication with other services
- Focus on agreed priority sector
- Expected job outputs against investment.

- 2.2 At that meeting, Members also agreed that requests for match funding received after the application process closed would not be considered.

- 2.3 In total, 10 projects made match funding requests to the council (including one council-led initiative). These projects have a total match funding requirement of more than £245,000. Details of the projects including a brief description of planned activity and match funding required from Belfast City Council are attached as Appendix 1.

- 2.4 The projects submitted by North Belfast Partnership and Training for Women Network (TWN) were not among the 84 applications approved by DEL. Both organisations appealed this decision but were not successful in their appeals.

- 2.5 Representatives from TWN, Upper Springfield Development Co Ltd and Women in Business did not meet with council officers to discuss their ESF funding applications ahead of the submission deadline. However the organisations did engage with council staff subsequently and asked that their applications be presented to the committee for consideration.
- 2.6 At the February 2011 Development Committee, Members suggested that, while they were unable to take a decision on the applications at that stage, the scoring used should remain valid and should be used for selecting the most relevant match funding requests at a future meeting. Scores were assessed out of a total of 50 marks taking account of each of the eligibility criteria already presented above, along with some consideration of value for money. This was a combination of ratio of staff to programme delivery costs and potential employment outputs. The scores are included in appendix 1.
- 2.7 Based on the assessments, it was proposed that Council considered support for three projects, namely:
- HARTE – contribution of up to £35,476 for year 1
 - Tools for Life – contribution of up to £20,000 for year 1
 - Learn 2 Earn – contribution of up to £5,000 for year 1, to support the self-employment element, which will complement the HARTE programme.
- 2.8 Given available resources and developments with other funders, it is recommended that these projects are supported for year 1 (April 2011-March 2012). Given the late start dates, there may be some downwards revision of the budgetary commitment required, subject to discussion with the individual project promoters.
- 2.9 Match funding support for Employment Services Board (ESB) and Employers' Forum (EF)

Members are reminded that, at the 28 March 2011 meeting of the Development Committee, it was agreed as an interim gesture, to grant funding to the Employment Services Board, up to a maximum of £15,000, over a period of three months commencing 1 April, under the special expenditure powers as set out in Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. In doing so, the committee indicated that it was of the opinion that the expenditure would be in

the interest of, and would bring direct benefit to, the District and the inhabitants of the District, and that it was satisfied that the direct benefit so accruing would be commensurate with the payment to be made. This decision was made on the basis of legal opinion from the Legal Services team.

2.10 The Employment Services Board brings together a range of public and private partners working on employability issues, focusing on the west Belfast and Shankill areas. A service level agreement (SLA) was drawn up between the organisation and Belfast City Council for the delivery of agreed services within the designated time period. These include:

- Participation in the TQ Work group providing input and advice on maximising benefit to those furthest from the labour market, with particular regard to the Operator contract in the short-term
- Monitoring the impact of welfare reform on the city's unemployed, including tracking the impact of benefit reassessment and promoting approaches to increase take up of existing support
- Supporting the continued development of the Health Employment Partnership in its expansion to cover areas of disadvantage across the City.

2.11 This work is still going on at present and will complete at the end of June 2011. The organisation is currently working on a plan to determine its strategic direction going forward and is anticipating making an application for further support under the Social Investment Fund (SIF) for its ongoing operations.

2.12 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. The Employers' Forum has helped almost 1000 people from the west Belfast and Shankill areas find employment since it was established.

2.13 The Forum is currently funded by Bombardier and Northstone Construction. Business in the Community (BiTC), who operate the Forum, were seeking funding from Belfast City Council of £40,000 per annum towards the operation of a citywide Employers' Forum. This would enable the roll-out of the learning from west Belfast and Shankill across the city. Members at the March meeting of the Development Committee did not propose to support this organisation, judging that its financial position did not appear to be as precarious as that of ESB. The organisation is still endeavouring to source funding and has asked to meet with Council officers late in June 2011 to consider what role Belfast City Council may play in this regard. As with the previous reports on this issue, it is suggested that any engagement and/or support should be framed within a wider, agreed approach to addressing the city's employability and skills challenges.

2.14 Proposed Council role in city-wide employability and skills development work

The funding-driven approaches identified above in this report indicate the need for Belfast City Council to agree its role and function in supporting employability and skills-related initiatives.

2.15 While there is a plethora of activity ongoing across the city, much of it is subject to time-bound funding or comes with a complex range of criteria which mean that accessing the provision and signposting individuals to relevant support is very difficult. At the same time, unemployment levels are continuing to increase across the city and in the wider region and this risks hampering our recovery from the downturn.

2.16 Much of the economic assessment work that the council has commissioned in recent years identifies the need to ensure that education and skills are aligned to the needs of the local economy and highlights the current mismatch in this regard. In particular, the economic inactivity levels in the city – which have never really improved, even during the decade of major growth from 1998-2008 – place a major brake on productivity and growth levels in the city.

2.17 As mandated by this committee, officers have held a number of preliminary meetings with senior DEL officials to consider the best approach to addressing these challenges. A draft scoping paper outlining the challenge, rationale and approach has been drafted and is attached as Appendix 2.

- 2.18 In summary, it is proposed that the collaborative city-wide forum would consist of a small grouping of key organisations committed to developing and working towards an integrated response to the challenge. Representatives on this forum would be senior level individuals capable of committing the organisation to specific activities and identifying commensurate resources to deliver on those activities. From a Belfast City Council perspective approach, this would provide a framework in which we could make informed decisions as to how and where we should commit resources to address the city-wide challenges of economic growth, aligned to a wider, coordinated approach to economic growth.
- 2.19 DEL officials have indicated that they may be willing to consider how they could realign their existing resources internally to support the delivery of agreed activity. This may be done by providing a member of staff on secondment – similar to the current arrangement around employability issues in Titanic Quarter. It is anticipated that Belfast City Council may be expected to make a financial contribution towards the salary costs, subject to further discussion with DEL. If this is the case, an allocation has been identified for this activity within existing resources.
- 2.20 In order to secure the leadership role for Belfast City Council, there is an opportunity for the Chair of Development Committee to lead and chair this process, if appropriate.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 European Social Fund

Budgets for each of the match funding requests are attached.

- 3.2 If the proposed approach to city-wide employability and skills issues is endorsed, Belfast City Council may be expected to make a financial contribution towards the salary costs of a staff member on secondment from DEL, subject to further discussion with that organisation.

- 3.3 Provision for both areas of activity has been made within the current estimates.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

- 4.1 There are no equality or good relations considerations attached to this report.

5 **Recommendations**

5.1 **It is recommended that Members:**

- 1. Note the match funding requests received by European Social Fund project applicants;**
- 2. Agree the recommendation to support the three projects identified, up to a value of £60,476;**
- 3. Note the proposed city-wide approach to employability and skills development issues and endorse this as a way forward for this area of work.”**

**Item 2 Appendix 1 – Operational Structure - Options
can be viewed on Modern.gov**

Overview of ESF match funding requests and amounts

Proposer	Project Title	Brief description of activity	Total project cost	Match funding requested from BCC	Overall score (/50)
Belfast City Council	HARTE (Hospitality and Retail Training for Employment)	Focus on getting long-term unemployed people into employment in hospitality and wider service sectors.	£459,999	£35,476	40
East Belfast Enterprise Agency	Lipstick & Money	Lipstick and Money promotes self employment to unemployed and economically inactive women.	£184,134	£21,411	27
East Belfast Enterprise Agency	Health 2 Wealth	Delivers enterprise training and leads to self employment in field of fitness training.	£300,517	£35,308	18
East Belfast Enterprise Agency	Megabytes	Project to help 16-19 year old NEETs (not in education, employment or training) to find employment or become self-employed in new media sector.	£169,578	£19,844	28
East Belfast Mission	Stepping Stone	Continuation of previous ESF project (work4u). Focus is on building employability skills of unemployed individuals. Council support is sought towards costs of an Employment Mentor.	£428,076	£7,636	31
Greater Village Regeneration Trust (GVRT)	Tools for Life	Employability programme concentrating on young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS). Project aims to increase employability of 90 young people p.a. through series of personal and vocational courses.	£449,522	£20,000	33
North Belfast Partnership	Public Employment Partnership	Based on previous ESF project that trains and matches LTU with public sector employment opportunities, supported through short work placements.	£590,000	£35,000	29
Time Associates & Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC)	Learn 2 Earn	Focus on hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism industry. Provision of entry level training, professional accreditation and enterprise support.	£202,443	£5,000	35
Training for Women Network	Gateway to success	Employability training, networking events across NI with 8 Partners responding to local need.	£2,688,650	£16,000	26
Upper Springfield Development Co Ltd	Jobs on the Move	Engagement and outreach work to provide pre-employment support for specific target groups. Focus on west Belfast but some city-wide provision	£784,000	£25,000	30
Women Into Business	Women Into Business Project	Project to assist women - NEETs in particular - gain employment or self employment. The programme will consist of networking, events, workshops and mentoring	£386,996	£18,576	26
Totals			£5,269,915	£245,082	

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 15th June, it had agreed to defer consideration of the above-mentioned report to enable clarification to be obtained on the proposals contained therein and to receive a legal opinion in respect of the Committee's powers to extend funding to the Employment Services Board under the special expenditure powers as set out under Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

Applications for Match Funding

The Director outlined the principal aspects of the report and clarified the criteria which had been utilised in assessing the applications received for match funding. He emphasised also the fact that Council funding was subject to the applicants being able to demonstrate that the additional match funding required was available from other public sources.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Robinson,
Seconded by Alderman Campbell,

That the Committee agrees, based on the assessments of the applications, to provide match funding up to a value of £68,112, for the top four scoring applications for European Social Funding, that is:

<u>Proposer</u>	<u>Project Title</u>	<u>Match Funding Proposed</u>
Belfast City Council	HARTE (Hospitality and Retail Training for Employment)	£35,476
Time Associates and Belfast Metropolitan College	Learn 2 Earn	£5,000
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	Tools for Life	£20,000
East Belfast Mission	Stepping Stone	£7,636

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Ó Muilleoir,
Seconded by Councillor Austin,

That the Committee agrees, based on the assessments, to provide match funding up to a value of £93,112, for the top five scoring applications for European Social Funding, that is:

<u>Proposer</u>	<u>Project Title</u>	<u>Match Funding Proposed</u>
Belfast City Council	HARTE (Hospitality and Retail Training for Employment)	£35,476
Time Associates and Belfast Metropolitan College	Learn 2 Earn	£5,000
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	Tools for Life	£20,000
East Belfast Mission	Stepping Stone	£7,636
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited	Jobs on the Move	£25,000

On a vote by show of hands seven Members voted for the amendment and five against.

The amendment was thereupon put as the substantive motion, when seven Members voted for and five against and it was accordingly declared carried.

Employment Services Board

The Director reminded the Members that, at its meeting on 28th March, it had agreed to provide funding to the Employment Services Board for a period of three months under the special expenditure powers as set out in Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. He pointed out that this three month period was due to end on 30th June, and subsequent to the meeting of the Committee on 15th June, a formal request had been received from the Employment Services Board for the Council to extend, for a further period of six months, at a cost of £30,000, its support to the organisation.

The Legal Services Manager outlined the Committee's options to provide funding under the special powers set out under Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, a summary of which is set out hereunder:

1. the Council has the power to incur expenditure, subject to it being satisfied that a direct benefit will accrue and that the benefit will be commensurate with the payment made;
2. the Council must objectively assess that there will be a direct benefit in terms of the objectives of the organisations as opposed to contributing to the running costs;

3. incurring expenditure to the extent that other projects or other agreed corporate objectives were compromised or prejudiced could leave the Council vulnerable to legal challenge; and
4. whilst there was an existing policy on Section 115 payments, the scale of the payment in this case required careful consideration in the context of the current climate of economic retrenchment and potential equality impact.

The Legal Services Manager pointed out that, should the Committee agree to extend funding to the Employment Services Board, it must be satisfied that any existing commitments of the Department would not be compromised and that direct, measurable and commensurate benefit would be accrued. He indicated also that it would be advisable for the Council to insert a caveat into any further agreement with the Employment Services Board which would ensure that payments from the Council would cease immediately should alternative funding be secured by the organisation.

A number of Members expressed concern that, in agreeing to extend funding to the Employment Services Board, the Council might encourage other organisations to submit similar requests for assistance. A Member referred to the fact that the Employment Services Board operated primarily in the west Belfast and the Greater Shankill areas and that, by providing funding to that organisation, agencies which provided similar services in other parts of the City could argue that the Council was giving preferential treatment to one area of the City to the detriment of other areas where similar needs existed. A further Member stressed that, should the Council extend the funding, there would be an obligation on the Employment Services Board to demonstrate emphatically that it had utilised the resources in a manner which was beneficial to the City overall.

In response, the Director assured Members that any funding provided would be subject to a Service Level Agreement which would set out clear actions to be undertaken by the Employment Services Board and that the activity would be monitored to ensure that the funding was being spent accordingly.

The Legal Services Manager made the point that, whilst the Committee had set a precedent in relation to the funding of the Employment Services Board, any future requests for funding from other organisation could be deferred until the Committee had approved a strategic policy for considering such matters.

Accordingly, it was

Moved by Councillor Mallon,
Seconded by Councillor Ó Muilleoir,

That the Committee agrees to provide funding to the Employment Services Board, for a period of six months, commencing on 1st July, up to a maximum of £30,000, under the special expenditure powers as set out in Section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, it being the opinion of the Committee that the expenditure

would be in the interests of, and would bring direct benefit to, the District and the inhabitants of the District, with the Committee being satisfied that the benefit so accruing would be commensurate with the payment to be made.

On a vote by show of hands eight Members voted for the proposal and five against and it was accordingly declared carried. In addition, the Committee endorsed the Council's City-wide approach to the promotion of employability and skills development as set out within the report.

York Street Interchange

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 The existing York Street Interchange is a key junction on the Strategic Road Network which links three of the busiest roads in Northern Ireland, the Westlink and the M2 and M3 motorways. It is the main gateway to Belfast from the North, provides access to the port of Belfast and well as facilitates local traffic movement.

1.2 It is considered that the existing traffic signal control at the York Street junction causes delays and congestion particularly at peak times, therefore DRD Roads Service have identified a number of options to remove the bottleneck. They are currently carrying out consultation on four options in order to identify a preferred option for the scheme.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Road Service has developed four options (A, B, C and D) aimed to improve traffic flow on the strategic road network. The options will provide direct links between the Westlink and the M2 and M3 motorways by creating new flyovers over and underpasses below the existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail bridges. Details on the four options are outlined below.

2.2 The key features of Option A are:

- Movement between M2 and Westlink via underpasses below ground level underneath new York Street bridge and existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail bridges**
- Westlink to M3 movement via underpass below existing ground level and new York Street bridge**
- M3 to Westlink movement controlled by traffic signals similar to existing**

- All slip roads at Clifton Street remain open
- Cost approximately £72m.

2.3 The key features of Option B are:

- Movement between M2 and Westlink (southbound) via new bridge over existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail bridges, approximately 18 metres above existing ground level
- Movement between Westlink and M2 (northbound) via underpass below existing ground level under new York Street bridge and existing Dargan Rail bridge
- Westlink to M3 (eastbound) movement via underpass below existing ground level and under new York Street bridge
- M3 to Westlink (westbound) movement via new bridge over York Street
- All slip roads at Clifton Street remain open
- Cost approximately £100m

2.4 The key features of Option C are:

- Movements between M2 and Westlink via underpasses below existing ground level underneath new York Street bridge and existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail Bridges
- Westlink to M3 movement via underpass below existing ground level and new York Street bridge
- All slip roads at Clifton Street remain open
- Cost approximately £98m

2.5 The key features of Option D are:

- Movements between M2 and Westlink via new bridges over existing Lagan Road and Dargan Rail bridges, approximately 18metres above existing ground level
- Westlink to M3 movement via traffic signal controlled junctions at York Street and Nelson Street
- M3 to Westlink movement via new bridge over York Street
- M2/M3 bound on-slip from Clifton Street closed
- All other slip roads at Clifton Street remain open
- Cost approximately £95m

2.6 Roads Service are currently carrying out a public consultation exercise on the options for strategic road improvements at York Street and have requested the opportunity to present details of the options to a Special Development Committee. Members may wish to consider the following issues in the context of the presentation:

- **The need to consider potential air quality impacts on existing residents in the surrounding area. The Council would request that the impact on all relevant receptors are considered in the decision making process to identify the preferred final option. Also consideration should be given to all proposed future development in the surrounding area in relation to exposing receptors to poor air quality. The impact of the noise from the traffic should also be assessed.**
- **North Belfast is already regarded as being dominated by major road infrastructure which severs it from the city centre. There is a concern that proposed new road infrastructure could have the potential to exacerbate the problem of community severance. In previous Council responses to proposed new road infrastructure or changes to local road configurations, the Council has requested that consideration is given to a more traditional urban street design to maximise connectivity and ensure minimisation of potential adverse impacts on the surroundings communities.**
- **Roads Service may wish to consider the new interchange options as part of a broader area that allows assessment of the opportunities for the reallocation of existing potential surplus road space within the surrounding network. Any increase in the efficiency of the proposed junction arrangements should deliver direct positive impacts for the northern city centre and surrounding communities. The redesign of Dunbar Link and the reduction in road space could contribute to enhanced connectivity within the city centre and the integration of the areas to the north of the Frederick Street Dunbar link axis.**
- **Consideration should be given to potential regeneration opportunities linked to the development of new road infrastructure in the area.”**

It was reported that Mr. R. Spiers and Mr. L. Walsh, representing the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service, together with Mr. M. Megarry, representing URS Scott Wilson, project consultants, were in attendance to provide a presentation in respect of the proposals and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman (Alderman Stalford).

Mr. Megarry provided a detailed overview of the four options which the Roads Service was considering for the upgrade of the York Street Interchange. It was explained that the current round of consultations with the various statutory bodies and agencies was the second stage of the process and that, thereafter, a preferred option would be identified for the interchange and further consultation would be undertaken on this option.

During discussion, Members made the following points:

- that the Roads Service should consider the introduction of a two-way system at York Street to enable better access to the City centre from residents of that area;
- that the matter of the enhancement of pedestrian access to the City centre from the inner North Belfast area should be addressed to enable ease of access;
- that at all stages in the project, the long-term requirements for vehicular access to and from the City should be addressed; and
- that the issue of the displacement and isolation of communities, such as the former Sailortown community, should not be exacerbated by any proposals.

The Chairman (Alderman Stalford) thanked the representatives for attending and for the manner in which they answered the Members' questions and they then retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that officers would submit an interim response to the Department for Regional Development based on the comments made by the Members and that a further report would be considered at the Committee's meeting in August in respect of the Council's response to the four options outlined on the upgrade of the York Street Interchange.

Establishment of Steering Groups/Working Groups

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

1.0 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Members will recall that the Committee, at its meeting on 15th June, agreed to defer consideration of the establishment of Working and Steering Groups to enable a revised report to be submitted. This was due to concerns raised regarding the**

demands that the membership of such Groups would make on Elected Members. It should be borne in mind that, since the Committee has agreed to meet on a twice monthly basis, there now exists an opportunity for it to examine matters in detail which previously would have been considered the Working Groups. In revising the previous report, it is evident that Working Groups should only be re-established if they adhere strictly to the following principles:

- Working Groups should be established only if they are considered to be essential for the achievement of effective and efficient decision-making;
- such Working Groups should be appointed only for a fixed-term and for a specific purpose;
- the Groups would not have decision-making powers but rather would produce a report with recommendations for consideration by the appointing Committee;
- after the Working Group has fulfilled its remit it would cease to exist; and
- Working Groups should be formed on the basis of All-Party representation with nominees sought from the Party Group leaders.

2.0 Key Issues

- 2.1 The range of Working and Steering Groups which had been established during the previous Council term ceased to exist on 5th May, coinciding with the Local Government Elections.

Should the principles for the establishment of Groups be applied, then the numbers can be downsized accordingly. A re-assessment is set out hereunder:

2.2 2012 Events Working Group

The remit of this Working Group is to formulate and oversee a programme of activities to mark 2012 as an international year of significance for the city. Next year will see the Council host a series of keynote events which will provide an opportunity to showcase Belfast as a premier tourist destination. These events will coincide with the London 2012 Olympic Games and the centenary of the sinking of the Titanic. All these activities will provide a significant level of

international profile and cultural focus for the City and Northern Ireland. Previous membership consisted of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), together with one representative from each of the Political Party Groupings on the Council.

2.3 Recommendation

Given that the year 2012 will be of specific importance to the City, it is recommended that this Group be re-established and that it meet on an ad hoc basis, until the end of 2012, under the guidance of the Director of Development.

2.4 Digital NI 2020 Strategy Working Group

This Group was established in April, 2011 to manage and explore the opportunities and challenges for the Council arising from the Digital NI 2020 Strategy. Its remit is to engage with a number of key stakeholders and bodies in the development of new initiatives which would be of benefit to the Council arising from the Strategy. Whilst this Group did not meet prior to the election it had been anticipated that the Committee would be represented by the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, together with one representative from each Political Party not represented by the aforementioned members.

2.5 Recommendation

Since the suggested lifespan for this Group is for a period of eight years, it is perhaps unfeasible to establish a Working Group for this purpose. Therefore, it is suggested that this project be led by officers within the Department and that periodic progress reports be submitted to the Committee.

2.6 Titanic Quarter Working Group

The purpose of this Working Group is to oversee the Council's contribution to the Titanic Quarter Memorandum Of Understanding and the ongoing development of the Titanic Quarter. The group will help establish an agreed programme of activity aimed at engaging all local communities throughout Belfast.

Membership consists of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Committee (or their nominees), together with one representative from each Political Party not represented by the aforementioned Members.

2.7 Recommendation

Since the Titanic brand is vital to the City's tourist industry it is recommended that this Group be re-established and that it meet on an ad hoc basis in 2011 / 2012 under the guidance of the Director of Development.

2.8 Tourism Forum

The Tourism Forum was established in April 2011 to oversee the implementation of the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework. Its role is to provide regular feedback to the Development Committee; to prioritise and co-ordinate the delivery of tourism projects and to monitor and review the effectiveness of the Tourism Framework. Membership of the Forum is comprised of key stakeholders from throughout the City representing the tourist industry. The Council has an overarching role in co-ordinating this Forum and ensuring that it

2.9 Recommendation

The Forum has a specific remit, viz., to oversee the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework. It is recommended that the Forum be re-established and that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman (or their nominees) represent the Committee. Minutes from the meetings of the Forum would be submitted periodically for the Committee's information.

2.10 Sister Cities Nashville Steering Group

The remit of this working group is to agree and monitor the implementation of an annual action plan to strengthen the relationship between Belfast and Nashville. Its membership includes representatives from Tourism Ireland, the United States Consulate, the BBC, the Ulster Historical Foundation, the Ulster-Scots Heritage Society, the Queen's University of Belfast and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. In November, 2010 the Development Committee agreed to increase membership of the Group to include, in addition to the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Committee, one representative from each Political Party not represented by the aforementioned Members.

2.11 Recommendation

It is recommended that this Group be re-established and that it meet on an ad hoc basis during 2011 / 2012 under the guidance of Director of Development.

2.12 RISE Steering Group (Broadway Junction Sculpture)

The Rise Steering Group was established to oversee the development of the public art at Broadway Roundabout. It includes representatives from the Department for Regional Development Roads Service, together with local community and political representatives.

2.13 Recommendation

Given that the project is almost complete, it is recommended that this Steering Group is not re-established and that the Committee, if necessary, consider any outstanding matters relating to the project.

2.14 Lisburn Road Public Art Steering Group

The Development Committee, at its meeting on 13th April, agreed to establish a Steering Group to oversee the development of two pieces of public art at vacant sites on the Lisburn Road – with potentially other areas of the City included at a later date. The remit of the group was to oversee the appointment of an artist to produce suitable art pieces for the proposed sites.

At the meeting of the Committee on 15th June, the view was expressed that the project did not require the establishment of a formalised Working Group.

2.15 Recommendation

It is recommended that this Group is not re-established and that the project is led by officers within the Department on the understanding that the Elected Members for the Balmoral District Electoral Area be updated on an ongoing basis.”

The Director outlined the principal aspects of the report and indicated that officers from within the Development Department had undertaken initial consultations with stakeholders from the Gaeltacht Quarter with a view to submitting a report to the Committee in September on the Council’s potential future involvement in the development of this Quarter, in conjunction with other Quarters, across the City.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to the following:

The Events Working Group

That the 2012 Events Working Group be re-established and that its membership consist of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), together with one representative from each of the Political Parties not represented by the aforementioned Members.

Digital NI 2020 Strategy Working Group

That this Group be dissolved and that its work be undertaken by officers from within the Department, with periodic reports thereon to be submitted to the Committee as appropriate.

Titanic Quarter Working Group

That this Group be re-established and that its membership consist of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), together with one representative from each of the Political Parties not represented by the aforementioned Members.

Tourism Forum

That this Forum be re-constituted with its membership consisting of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees).

RISE Steering Group (Broadway Junction Sculpture)

That this Steering Group be re-established until 1st October, 2011 and that its membership consist of one representative from the Balmoral and Lower Falls District Electoral Areas.

Lisburn Road Public Art Steering Group

That this Group be not re-established and that the project be led by officers from within the Department on the understanding that the Elected Members for the Balmoral District Electoral Area would be updated on an ongoing basis.

Sister Cities Nashville Steering Group

In discussing the matter of the City's linkages with Nashville and the re-establishment of the associated Steering Group, a Member made the point that the Council should seek to re-examine its current linkages with a view to enhancing formal relationships with additional cities in North America and elsewhere.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Ó Muilleoir,
Seconded by Councillor Hartley,

That the establishment of the Sister Cities Nashville Steering Group be deferred to enable a report to be considered on the establishment of an International Linkages Steering Group.

On a vote by show of hands five Members voted for the proposal and eight against and it was accordingly declared lost.

After further discussion, it was

Moved by Alderman Stoker,
Seconded by Alderman Campbell,

That the Sister Cities Nashville Steering Group be re-established and its membership consist of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), together with one representative from each Political Party not represented by the aforementioned Members.

On a vote by show of hands eight Members voted for the proposal and five against and it was accordingly declared carried.

Review of Regional Transportation Strategy – Draft Council Response

The Committee was reminded that, on 16th March, the then Minister for Regional Development, Mr. Conor Murphy, M.L.A., had launched a consultation document on a revised Regional Transportation Strategy, which was due to conclude on 28th June. The Director reported that the revised Strategy sought to establish the high level aims and objectives for future transport policy within the region and would form the basis for decision-making and funding priorities.

The Committee then received a presentation from Mr. T. Robinson, AECOM Consultants, on the aims and objectives of the Department's revised strategy and he clarified a number of issues raised by Members in this regard. Accordingly, the Committee endorsed the undernoted response as the Council's position on the Department's Regional Transportation Strategy consultation document:

“COUNCIL RESPONSE

Consultation on the Regional Transportation Strategy 2011

1.0 Introduction and Context

The Minister for Regional Development launched the Public Consultation of the revised Regional Transportation Strategy for a 15 week period on the 16th March until 28 June 2011.

As civic leader Belfast City Council seeks to be proactive in influencing transport policy for Belfast and the wider region. In recent years Belfast has become a competitive tourist destination, a desirable place to live and work and an attractive place to invest. With growth and prosperity however, there has been a continuing increase in the use of the car, which cannot be sustained. The Council is concerned about how the city will cope with the increasing demands on our transport infrastructure.

The Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) 2002-2012

The Regional Transportation Strategy was originally published in 2002 with the following vision:

'To have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life'

As stated in the original document The RTS, as a 'daughter document' of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS), identified strategic transportation investment priorities and considered potential funding sources and affordability of planned initiatives over the following 10 years.

At the time, the Strategy provided a range of transportation initiatives across Northern Ireland to improve our transportation structure, promote sustainable travel and encourage the use of modes of travel other than the car, including:

- Quality Bus Corridors (QBCs) on all main Belfast Commuter routes;
- Commencement of a rapid transit system on the BMA;
- Strategic highway improvements to provide, for example, up to 14 bypasses, approximately 85 kilometres of dual carriageway and 11 major junction improvement.

In finalising the RTS it was recognised that demand management measures would be required in Belfast, both to optimise the contribution of the additional public transport investment and to reduce the possible negative impacts of additional car use. The strategy noted, therefore, that following the planned improvements to public transport, parking charges could be raised and/or parking availability reduced for long-stay commuter parking.

The 2002 RTS set a number of targets for 2012 for various modes of travel within the region. In addition, the development of 3 separate Transport Plans to deliver the strategic objectives of the RTS facilitated the development of additional targets in relation to average traffic speeds on Key Transport Corridors and key routes in the Belfast Metropolitan Area, as well as the establishment of targets for the coverage of bus services and enhanced services.

Belfast City Council

Through the engagement in this consultation and with the Department for Regional Development, the objective is to strengthen the Council's role in leading the social and economic regeneration of Belfast. The Belfast Masterplan advocates greater responsibility for the Council as the sole political authority with a remit for Belfast, based on the view that effective city governance and leadership are key requirements to achieving interrelated regeneration and transport objectives.

In this context, the Council has recently developed its own Transport Policy as a framework for the Council to lead by example and help shape transportation in the city in a sustainable, accessible, and cost-effective way for all who live, work and visit the city. The key objectives of the Council's policy include:

- To seek to influence the development of transportation policies and proposals which improve connectivity and encourage modal shift away from the private car to more sustainable forms of travel such as walking, cycling and public transport; and
- To seek to ensure a higher level of emphasis of capital on sustainable transportation schemes, ensuring that the priority is allocated to sustainable modes such as walking, cycling and public transport schemes.

As part of the Public Consultation process for the revised RTS the Department of Regional Development's (DRD) Regional Transportation Division produced the Regional Transportation Strategy 2011 - , A Sustainable Transport Future – Public Consultation Document.

This response outlines the Council's understanding and views on the Public Consultation for the revised RTS, and these are expressed under the headings contained in the Public Consultation Document for which the Department have specifically requested feedback, broken down into the following themes:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to get to?
- How will we get there?
- Making choices
- What will we do next?

2.0 Where are we now?

This section of the Public Consultation Document attempts to set the scene putting transportation issues in context and highlighting some background information with respect to the economy, society and the environment.

The Public Consultation Document then goes on to highlight the progress of the RTS against the principal initiatives and it is this point and in particular the implementation of initiatives affecting Belfast that are further examined at this juncture.

Public Transport

The Council notes the investment that has occurred over the life of the RTS 2001 in the provision of new, modern trains and buses, as well as the construction of new bus stations at Lisburn and Coleraine and a combined bus and rail station at Bangor. All these help facilitate sustainable travel to and from Belfast.

As stated in the introduction to this response, the existing RTS committed to the development of QBCs on all main Belfast commuter routes. This has not happened on a number of the main arterial routes into Belfast, and on other routes where QBC's have been launched, bus priority measures have been installed intermittently, for example the Newtownards Road. This has resulted in limited success for bus journey time reliability and evidence that, at existing bottlenecks and pinch-points on the network, road space allocation remains heavily biased towards private vehicles.

The implications of this are reflected in the Trends in Transport Section of the Public Consultation Document which identifies that from 2001-2009, average bus speeds in Belfast fell by 11%. This compares with results for car speeds which over the same time period increased by 21% on 11 surveyed corridors in Belfast.

A key issue in providing attractive public transport services is connectivity but Belfast's bus network continues to suffer from a lack of through services, travelling through the city centre as opposed to terminating there. This is coupled with a lack of orbital services which provide travel to areas other than the city centre along arterial routes.

The existing RTS also identified the commencement of a Rapid Transit System in the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA) as a principal initiative. This has not happened and the Council has concerns that commencement of the development of preliminary designs for a pilot rapid transit network represents the progress in the 10 years since the RTS was published. This compares with the construction and operation of bus based rapid transit systems Fastway Crawley/Gatwick, Fastrack, Kent and ftrmetro Swansea (to name a few), all since 2002.

Cycling and Walking

The Council notes that there has been some increase in the number of people walking in Belfast but the trend across the region is downwards. Whilst the trend upwards in the number of people walking in Belfast is welcomed, there is no commentary on what measures have been introduced which may have contributed to this.

In relation to cycling it is clear that the targets which have been identified in the existing RTS for 2005 had still not been achieved by 2008.

Parking

With regards to the existing RTS statement regarding the introduction of demand management measures in Belfast and the reduction in the number of parking spaces available for long stay commuter parking, the Council notes the enhanced enforcement that the introduction of decriminalised parking has provided, however, the continuing abundance of both free and subsidised parking in Belfast, for example, on derelict development sites, or in adjacent residential areas, remains a major barrier to achieving significant modal shift.

Highways

The Council, in response to the consultation paper 'Developing a Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS)' in 2001 stated that there had been an over emphasis of funding on roads at all levels. The resulting 2001 RTS vision, coupled with the targets for 2012 which it set were seen as an opportunity to redress this balance and move towards the development and promotion of a more sustainable and efficient transportation network which would facilitate a modal shift away from the private car.

It is clear that despite the vision and sustainable objectives of the existing RTS, the emphasis of the strategy remained with providing new and upgraded highway capacity. This was further emphasised by the suggested spending ratio for roads (including walking and cycling) to public transport of 65:35 in the existing RTS, which subsequently moved, as a result of the investment strategy, to a ratio of 80:20.

Air Quality

When considering the proposed RTS commitments relating to the management of air quality, it should be noted that the European Commission introduced the Air Quality Framework Directive in 1996, followed by a series of Daughter Directives designed to assist member states to manage air quality effectively thereby safeguarding public health. The Daughter Directives established health-based standards known as limit values for a series of common ambient air pollutants, which were to be met by a range of target dates. In addressing their obligations under the Directive, the European Commission directed that member states should maintain ambient air quality where good and improve it in other cases.

In terms of characterising the impact of poor air quality upon human health, a pollutant such as nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) typically damages cell membranes and proteins but at higher concentrations, it can result in acute inflammation of the airways. Particulate matter (PM₁₀) also impacts upon lung function and may contribute towards excess mortality rates. Sulphur dioxide (SO₂) stimulates nerves in the lining of the nose, throat and the lungs which can lead to a feeling of chest tightness and a narrowing of the airways. This latter effect is particularly likely to occur in people suffering from asthma and chronic lung disease. Other common ambient air pollutants such as benzene (C₆H₆) and 1,3-butadiene (C₄H₆) are classified as carcinogens.

In 2008, the European Commission introduced Directive 2008/50/EC on Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe which merged existing air quality legislation into a single directive and also provided for time extensions of three years for particulate matter (PM₁₀) or up to five years for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and benzene (C₆H₆) for complying with limit values, based upon conditions and assessment by the European Commission.

In order to fulfil its obligations under the Air Quality Framework and subsequent Directives, the current overarching United Kingdom government strategy for managing air quality is the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as published in July 2007. The UK government has indicated that air pollution causes annual health costs of roughly £15 billion to UK citizens and that poor air quality tends to predominate in densely populated urban areas, so human exposure is significant.

From a Northern Ireland context, Part III of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order places a statutory obligation upon district councils to review periodically air quality within their districts in order to determine whether objectives are likely to be achieved in compliance years. Where, as a result of an air quality review, it appears that any air quality standards or objectives are not being achieved, or are not likely to be achieved within the relevant period then the council is required to designate by order, as a minimum, the spatial extent of the exceedence as an Air Quality Management Area.

The district council is also required to develop a written action plan in pursuit of the achievement of air quality standards and objectives within the designated Air Quality Management Area. The plan must include actions that the council will undertake as well as actions from other relevant authorities. The Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 prescribe a range of relevant authorities including the Department for Regional Development. The Department for Regional Development has responsibility for transport strategy and sustainable transport policy, provision and maintenance of all public roads and public transport policy and performance.

Belfast City Council completed a review and assessment of air quality across the city in 2004 and declared subsequently four Air Quality Management Areas for exceedences of particulate matter (PM₁₀) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) standards. Supplementary research indicated that the principal source of particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide within the Air Quality Management Areas was road traffic. The four Air Quality Management Areas border arterial routes into the city as follows-

- The M1 / Westlink corridor from the Belfast City boundary at Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park to the end of the Westlink at the junction with Great George's Street and York Street including Stockman's Lane and Kennedy Way. This area was declared for predicted exceedences of both the nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter annual mean air quality strategy objectives as well as exceedences of the particulate matter 24 hour mean objective and the nitrogen dioxide 1 hour mean objective.
- Cromac Street to the junction with East Bridge Street and then from East Bridge Street to the junction with the Ravenhill and Albertbridge Roads and Short Strand. This area was declared for predicted exceedences of the nitrogen dioxide annual mean air quality strategy objective.
- The Upper Newtownards Road from the North Road junction to the Belfast City boundary at the Ulster Hospital incorporating the Knock Road to the City boundary at Laburnum Playing Fields and Hawthornden Way. This area was declared for predicted exceedences of the nitrogen dioxide annual mean air quality strategy objective.
- The Ormeau Road from the junction with Donegall Pass to the City boundary at Galwally. This area was declared for predicted exceedences of the nitrogen dioxide annual mean air quality strategy objective.

Belfast City Council published an Air Quality Action Plan for the city in 2006, designed to achieve the particulate matter air quality standards as soon as possible, and to achieve the nitrogen dioxide standards by 1st January 2010. As the pollutants were attributed principally to road transport, the plan predominantly comprised actions by the Department of Regional Development and its Agencies. Accordingly, the Department for Regional Development Roads Service contributions were based upon the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, which is scheduled to conclude in 2015, subject to economic appraisal, statutory function and funding availability.

At present, ambient air quality monitoring indicates that nitrogen dioxide concentrations continue to exceed United Kingdom and European health based standards in all Belfast Air Quality Management Areas. Standards for particulate matter were only recently achieved along the Westlink corridor however, it is unclear whether the downward pollution trend will be maintained. In addition, ambient levels of nitrogen dioxide are also elevated at a number of other roadside locations across the city and therefore, may eventually result in the declaration of further air quality management areas. Accordingly, it is understood that the Department of Environment (DoENI) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) are currently assessing the need to submit an application to the European Commission seeking a time extension of up to five years for the Belfast agglomeration for compliance with nitrogen dioxide standards.

The council would also wish to highlight the social equity issues in relation to ambient air quality across the city. Belfast residents are exposed to some of the highest levels of transport related air pollution in Northern Ireland despite experiencing the lowest levels of household car ownership. (Department for Regional Development Travel Survey for Northern Ireland In-depth Report 2007-2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, whilst the existing RTS 2001 document was successful in obtaining funding for a number of transportation infrastructure investments, in the interim years, it has failed to fully realise a number of its objectives and targets. The early aspirations of a more equitable and sustainable funding package did not materialise.

There is clearly the need for a more detailed review of the RTS including its success and failures and this should be a keystone in taking forward any revised Regional Transportation Strategy. There are a number of areas where there is clear under-performance and more detailed analysis of these 'gaps' is an important area and should inform the direction and emphasis of policy in the future.

Trends outlined in the Public Consultation Document, figures for 2007 showed that 83% of all home to work journeys in Northern Ireland were by car compared to 79.9% at the time the existing RTS was published in 2002. This compares to 71% in England, 69% in Scotland and 62% in the Republic of Ireland.

This illustrates that the existing RTS strategy has left Northern Ireland lagging behind in promoting modal shift and providing a sustainable transportation system. The revised RTS Strategy needs to proactively address this situation.

3.0 Where do we want to get to?

As stated in the Public Consultation Document, our transportation systems and infrastructure need to be developed so they are fit for the 21st century. The new direction for transportation needs to have at its core, the drive for sustainability in the travel choices we make and therefore public transport, cycling and walking should be safer, convenient, reliable and more environmentally friendly alternatives to the car, making them the first choice for people and business, not the last resort.

The Revised Strategy Methodology

The existing RTS set out a transport vision statement and proposals which were assessed against five key objectives of Environment, Safety, Economy, Accessibility and Integration. However, the strategy initially concentrated on identifying solutions to existing problems in the network. It was only after these options for solutions were compiled as a long list of options, were they subject to appraisal against the five objectives. This approach, coupled with the pre-determined funding split and the requirement to reduce the highways' structural maintenance backlog allowed a favourable prioritisation of new and upgraded highway schemes.

It is clear that the revised strategy as outlined in the Public Consultation Document takes a different approach. Instead of a vision there are now three high level transport aims proposed, namely:

- A. Support the Growth of the Economy
- B. Enhance Quality of Life for All
- C. Reduce the Environmental Impact of Transport

The document then proposes 12 Strategic Objectives that are linked back to the aims. These objectives are anticipated to help achieve more sustainable transportation networks and are:

1. Improve connectivity within the region;
2. Use road space and railways more efficiently;
3. Better maintain transport infrastructure;
4. Improve access in our towns and cities;
5. Improve access in rural areas;
6. Improve connections to key tourism sites;
7. Improve safety;
8. Improve social inclusion;
9. Develop transport programmes focussed on the user;
10. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport;
11. Protect biodiversity;
12. Reduce noise and air pollution.

It is our understanding that, in order to be considered on a prioritised list of options, any proposed scheme must be assessed against the 12 strategic objectives in the policy prioritisation framework to ensure their 'policy fit'. This is an added level of 'prior assessment' which was not present in the existing RTS and given that the strategic objectives have been tailored to the overall goal of sustainable transportation networks, this methodology could ensure that any schemes or interventions which are taken forward for delivery will have sustainability and environmental consideration as key elements.

High Level Aims of RTS 2011

In line with the Executive's stated key focus, the Council would consider that the growth of the economy is key to the success of Northern Ireland, in terms of providing a region where business can thrive and attracting inward investment. Coupled with this, the Council would stress the fact that Belfast is the primary economic driver of the entire region and therefore the city's economic success is crucial for the growth of the entire Belfast region and Northern Ireland as a whole.

It is acknowledged that transportation infrastructure and services are an essential part of economic activity but these need to be developed sustainably as there are obvious environmental implications to transport spending.

In this context, the Council would welcome the *'Reduction of the Environmental Impact of Transport'* as a high level aim.

It is hoped that the presence of this high level aim will ensure that any transportation schemes which are prioritised due to their positive implications for economic growth, need to be sustainable in order to also contribute to the reduction of the environmental impact of transport. These are not mutually exclusive and we note the findings of the Stern Review – 'The Economics of Climate Change' which indicated that a well-designed transportation strategy can support economic growth and tackle carbon emissions. This is a key factor in the region's attempts to achieve the legally binding targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions discussed earlier in this response.

During the Council's own consultation process the content of the high level aims were debated. There was comment that the aims should be more specific. For example in Scotland, their equivalent aims are: Improve journey times and connections; Reduce emissions; and Improve quality, accessibility and affordability. However it is noted that the Strategic Objectives highlighted in the Public Consultation Document pick up particular points and specifics such as reduction greenhouse gas emissions.

Strategic Objectives of RTS 2011

The Public Consultation Document asks the reader to rank the Strategic Objectives proposed in terms of importance. It is the view of the Council that all the Strategic Objectives should have equal rank as the prioritisation of any strategic over another (for example, *'improved connectivity within the region'* over *'reduce noise and air pollution'*) may lead to a bias in favour of less sustainable interventions. In addition, the prioritisation of Strategic Objective number 5 - *'Improve access in rural areas'* over Strategic Objective number 4 - *'improve access in our towns and cities'* may lead to a bias in terms of funding of schemes in the rural areas compared to Belfast.

With regard to the strategic objectives proposed, the Council would be of the opinion that *'Improved Journey Times'* should be included as a strategic objective and on the basis of sustainable travel modes, or at least coupled with the *'improved connectivity'* objective. This is a key transport objective of the Council's Masterplan (Belfast: The Masterplan 2004 -2020), which is discussed later in this document.

It is noted that Strategic Objective number 1 commits to *'Improved Connectivity within the Region'*. The Council believes that connectivity is a key issue for economic development and social inclusion within Belfast and therefore would be of the opinion that connectivity needs to be a key objective within towns and cities, as well as within the region. We would therefore suggest that strategic objective number 4, *'improved access in our towns and cities'* is revised as *'improved access and connectivity in our towns and cities'*.

We would also suggest that Strategic Objective 2 *'Use road space and railways more efficiently'* should be changed to *'Use the transportation network more efficiently'* as this encompasses all modes not just roads and railways and would address integration of transport modes.

The Council would also consider that *'improved health'* should be considered as a strategic objective under the *'Enhance the quality of life for all'* high level aim as the improvement and promotion of walking and cycling will have direct benefits to people's health.

The Council notes that the Regional Transportation Strategy 2011- contains a commitment towards sustainable development and an acknowledgement that *'society and economies are completely dependent upon the environment which encompasses them and are therefore bound by its limits and capabilities'*. Referring to the May 2010 Everyone's Involved - Sustainable Development Strategy, strategic objective 4 on *'striking an appropriate balance between the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and better quality of environment'* makes specific mention of air quality in the context of ensuring that an appropriate policy and legislative framework is in place supported by a regulatory regime which will delivery statutory environmental standards in respect of air, water and other environmental pollution.

Accordingly, the council is pleased to note that the Department for Regional Development has included a strategic objective within the draft Strategy document of reducing noise and air pollution (C.12 - page 29). However, in view of the extent of the statutory and other obligations on the Department in relation to air quality, current ambient pollutant concentrations and the direct disbenefits to public health, the council is disappointed to note the nature of the

Department's subsequent commitment towards air quality as detailed on page 32 – *'we will seek to reduce noise and air pollution wherever possible'*. The council would recommend a definitive commitment to achieve the air quality standards at the earliest opportunity and maintain them thereafter.

With regard to climate change, the draft Strategy highlights that transportation currently accounts for around a quarter of man-made greenhouse gases in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, the draft Strategy commits to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation. The council is disappointed, however, to note that the Department has chosen to deal with greenhouse gas emissions and ambient air quality as distinct issues. By way of amplification, the March 2010 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) publication entitled *'Air Pollution: Action in a Changing Climate'* highlights that climate change and air pollution share common sources and that changes in the climate will impact on air quality. Furthermore, the 2007 Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland concludes that after many years of significant improvement, air quality benefits are becoming increasingly costly to achieve, making actions difficult to justify on an air quality basis alone. However, when climate change considerations are included in the evaluation process, then actions are more easily justified such as in the case of the promotion of low or zero emission vehicles. In the longer term, take-up of ultra low emission vehicles in urban areas where air quality is a priority will likely result in significant public health benefits.

It should be noted that DEFRA and the devolved administrations are considering the recommendations of a recent review of local air quality management across the United Kingdom. The review included recommendations to build upon synergies between climate change and air quality policies and actions at local level. Therefore, the council recommends that the draft Strategy should be amended to emphasise the synergies between ambient air quality and climate change in order to reflect overarching United Kingdom government policy and in order to derive maximum local environmental and public health benefits. By way of example, there are clear air quality, climate change and public health implications for the proposed transport interventions relating to the use of alternative fuels in publicly owned vehicles and public transport and to advising on vehicle choice and promoting the use of alternative and renewable fuels amongst consumers (page 43).

The Strategic objectives outlined in the Public Consultation Document and the suggested revisions outlined above would ensure general alignment with the key objectives in the Council's Transport Policy and the Belfast Masterplan. There are, however, a number of key objectives in the Council's Transport Policy relating to Belfast's airports and port of which cognisance should be taken. These are as follows:

- The sustainable future development of Belfast's airports to ensure continued connectivity to Belfast City Centre and a high level of accessibility by sustainable modes of travel;
- The potential for implementation of new public transport interchanges at George Best Belfast City Airport;
- The sustainable development of Belfast port to ensure continued connectivity to Belfast City Centre and the strategic road network; and to ensure a high level of accessibility by sustainable modes of travel;

In addition we note that policy directions set out in the consultation document for the review of the Regional Development Strategy in January 2011 set out the importance of the metropolitan area centred on Belfast as the driver for economic growth.

It is the view of the Council that, given the key Executive Priority of economic growth, a Strategic Objective should relate to the metropolitan area centred on Belfast and should be *'Improved access and connectivity within and to the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA)'*

Alternatively, Strategic Objective 4 could be amended to read *'Improved access and connectivity in our towns and cities and in particular the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA).'*

4.0 *How will we get there?*

This section of the Public Consultation Document outlines the current way in which schemes are implemented and sets out the types of interventions that would contribute to at least one of the strategic objectives set out in the previous section.

The current process for evolving a transportation strategy into a scheme or intervention 'on the ground' involves identification of a transport initiative within the RTS which is then implemented through a specific development plan.

Transportation Interventions

Section 4.3 of the Public Consultation Document has identified a list of what it terms strategic interventions. These are intended to support the Strategic Objectives discussed previously.

It is our assumption that these '*strategic*' interventions represent themes or headings under which '*specific*' interventions would be brought forward and assessed through the policy prioritisation framework. This point is not particularly clear within the document and would require clarification

However, this would seem to be consistent with the example of the policy prioritisation framework from South-East Queensland presented in Section 5.2 of the Public Consultation Document, as well as the comments in Section 6 of the Public Consultation Document which states that a long list of possible transport interventions will be drawn upon agreement of the Policy Prioritisation Framework.

In addition it is considered necessary for the Department to clarify this issue there is some ambiguity in the wording of Section 4.2 which leads the reader to initially believe that only the '*strategic*' interventions identified are to be taken forward for assessment against the strategic objectives as opposed to '*specific*' interventions which are mentioned later in the document.

Strategic Interventions

In considering the Strategic Interventions contained in the Public Consultation Document, we have considered the proposals contained in the Belfast Masterplan. As part of its key objectives, the Masterplan aims to deliver an accessible and sustainable city for future generations and recognises that it is both more sustainable and economic to provide access to the city centre by public transport rather than by expanding the road network capacity. This means limiting the use of cars for journeys that could be made by public transport. The Masterplan identifies key strategic interventions to impose these limits including:

- **Making public transport an attractive, preferred mode of travel; by controlling the amount of car parking; by road closures, or by charging road users**
- **Reclaim road space from the private car;**
- **Control on-street parking more rigorously and limit the provision of off-street space;**
- **Enhancement of bus services by provision of through-services linking the different quadrants of the city; the introduction of orbital routes, increased frequency, effective priority and related enforcement;**
- **Reclaim road space for pedestrians and cyclists**

We note the following Strategic Transportation Interventions in the RTS Public Consultation Document which would generally align with the Masterplan's transportation objectives:

- **Improved connections between different modes of transport;**
- **Prioritisation of road space for public transport;**
- **Introduction of more Park and Ride facilities;**
- **Good transport solutions to Growth Areas and Town and City Centres;**
- **Introduction of further innovative public transport services which meet the needs of communities;**
- **Promotion of walking and cycling;**
- **Restricting car parking in Towns and Cities;**
- **Enforcing Parking and Traffic Offences;**

We would request, however, that to fully complement the Masterplan's strategic interventions outlined above, revisions to the wording of some of the RTS Strategic Interventions would be required, and these are outlined as follows:

- **'Prioritisation of Roads Space for Public Transport' should be revised to 'Prioritisation of Roads Space for Public Transport, Walking and Cycling'. This would safeguard the Masterplan's objective to 'reclaim road space for pedestrians and cyclists'.**

- ‘Good Transport Solutions to Growth Areas and Town and City Centres’ should be revised to ‘Sustainable Transport Solutions to Growth areas and Town and City Centres’
- ‘Promotion of Walking and Cycling’ should be changed to ‘Improvement and Promotion of Walking and Cycling facilities’

In addition to the points raised in relation to the Strategic Interventions, the Council would note that the Public Consultation Document contains no reference to targets (e.g. a desired Modal Split) within the lifetime of the revised Strategy. We would request that the Department clarify its position on how the success of each of the strategic interventions in achieving the Strategic Objectives of the Strategy can be gauged in the absence of any targets or monitoring.

Specific Interventions

In terms of the development of specific interventions which would contribute to the strategic objectives of the RTS, the Council has already identified a number of proposed improvements to the city within the Masterplan and the Council’s Transport Policy document. The Council would continue to advocate the need for close engagement with local councils during the selection of specific interventions to ensure that the Council’s proposals are safeguarded and there is a specific role for local councils in planning and delivering transport, especially in light of the review of public administration (RPA).

This point is further strengthened by the fact that it is unlikely that there will be funding for a suite of Transport Plans to deliver the specific interventions, as was the case with the existing RTS. The Council considers it vital that, given its status as the economic driver for the region, Belfast is fairly represented in any Regional Delivery Plan. The Department states in the Public Consultation Document that:

‘A significant amount of recent work has been carried out around the transport needs of communities and businesses that may preclude the need for new Transport Plans. These include Active Travel and Freight Plans, Roads Service and public transport providers’ corporate and business plans and local Masterplans’.

The Council is of the opinion that should this approach be adopted by the Department, the proposals of the current Belfast Masterplan are included in any Regional Delivery Plan.

The Council would be of the opinion that the main challenge for delivering an improved and more sustainable transportation infrastructure will be to make public transport, walking and cycling, an accessible, attractive alternative to using the car and the preferred choice for travel throughout Northern Ireland. A key objective of the Council's Transport Policy is:

'to ensure a higher level of emphasis of capital expenditure on sustainable transportation schemes, ensuring that the priority is allocated to sustainable modes of travel such as walking, cycling and public transport schemes'.

The Council therefore believes that the existing funding ratio outlined previously in this response provides a major barrier to promoting a culture change and subsequent modal shift from private car use to more sustainable transportation modes and the historic spending ratio in favour of roads has led to a level of infrastructure which is inadequate to aid the implementation of innovative sustainable policies.

It is the view of the Council, that as we face a prolonged period of reduced public expenditure, there should be a priority given to relatively low cost, sustainable measures such as bus priority, walking and cycling rather than the large road schemes which would utilise the majority of this constrained budget. In addition, the need to implement quality bus corridors and improve bus frequency should be given priority in the revised strategy. Additional specific interventions that the Council would advocate for inclusion in the Strategy include:

- Quality Bus Corridors;
- Orbital Public Transport Routes;
- Active Travel Initiatives;
- Rapid Transit;
- Park and Ride;
- Connectivity to airports and ports by sustainable means; and
- Gamble Street Station linked to new developments such as the University of Ulster campus and regeneration proposals in the northern part of the city centre

5.0 *Making Choices*

This section of the Public Consultation Document identifies what it describes as a new approach to implementation. This objective led, rather than problem led, approach developed through a number of transport studies in the early 1990's where the 'top down' (objective led) and 'bottom up' (problem led) were different approaches to the development of transport strategies.

The objective led approach outlined within the document highlights an approach that takes a broad view on which programmes or schemes will contribute to specific policy objectives.

Policy Prioritisation Framework

It is our assumption that the process through which this will take place is using the Policy Prioritisation Framework which scores individual specific interventions against the strategic objectives of the Strategy to ensure their 'policy fit'.

The Council notes that the DRD states that they will work with key stakeholders to develop an agreed Policy Prioritisation Framework and scoring guidance. As stated above, there is a need for close engagement with local councils in planning and delivering transport. One of the key internal policy objectives of the Council's Transport Policy states that:

'In line with the proposed transfer of local planning functions to local councils, we will adopt a strong and public leadership role in the promotion of sustainable development of the city of Belfast and will ensure a consistent and integrated approach to land use and transport planning'

The Council Transport Policy also outlines a desire to develop effective working relationships with appropriate delivery agencies for the delivery of local transportation schemes to support local communities and integrate with a community planning approach.

Given the importance of ensuring that the Policy Prioritisation Framework and associated scoring guidance integrates transport with other existing and emerging Executive strategies and policies such as RDS, it is essential that the Council should have the opportunity to engage with

the Department in compiling the Policy Prioritisation Framework and the scoring guidance. It is also considered that this should be published for consultation prior to agreement of the final Framework composition.

The Council considers that the Policy Prioritisation Framework approach allows the development of sustainable transport corridor plans (as required by SPG-BMA 3 in the RDS), whereby sustainable modes of travel can be assessed under the same scoring criteria as competing road schemes to highlight their advantages in achieving all the strategic objectives of the RTS and therefore allowing prioritisation for these sustainable measures over the provision of new or additional highway capacity. Transport Corridor Plans should be formulated to integrate the development of sites, in particular housing and employment, with the proposed transport network and provide a phased programme for implementation of improvements to transport infrastructure and services that enhance accessibility for all.

6.0 *What will we do next*

The Public Consultation Document outlines what steps will be taken following the application of the Policy Prioritisation Framework and states that the Initial Prioritised List would be subject to Transport Assessment where the Department would take into account value for money, equality and environmental considerations and political / public acceptability. This would result in a Prioritised Assessed List which, along with the Comprehensive Spending Review, would allow informed decisions to be taken on the transport interventions to include in a draft Delivery Plan.

It is considered that this section of the Public Consultation Document lacks detail and seems to 'tail-off' without a clear explanation of how interventions which progress through the Prioritisation Framework eventually make it to inclusion in the draft Delivery Plan.

The 'Making Choices' section of the Public Consultation Document states that this will be done within a secondary framework which can include things like equality, value for money, deliverability, acceptability and capital cost. It is our view that Public Consultation Document should be extended to provide a clear breakdown and explanation of the different elements of what it terms 'Transport Assessment' so it is clear if this is simply a continuation of the GOMMS/Web TAG type appraisal process that was included in the existing RTS document or a new approach.

Delivery Plan

As noted previously, the Public Consultation Document states that interventions which progress through the Policy Prioritisation Framework and subsequent 'Transport Assessment' will appear on a 'Prioritised Assessed List' which, along with the Comprehensive Spending Review, would allow informed decisions to be taken on the transport interventions to include in a 'Draft Delivery Plan'. The Department has stated, in the Public Consultation Meetings, that it is unlikely that funding will be available to develop revised area specific transport plans which were undertaken to implement the existing RTS (e.g. BMTP, SRTP and RSTN TP). It is likely that any new Delivery Plan will be developed on a regional basis.

In this context, the Council would seek to ensure that the proposals contained in the Belfast Masterplan are taken forward and included in any Regional Delivery Plan. It is considered that close engagement with the Council is vital when developing the Delivery Plan to ensure that the aspirations of the Belfast Masterplan are not jeopardised.

We would also note the Department's comments at the recent public consultations that any proposals which are taken through the policy prioritisation framework will require political buy-in and sign off from the Executive before being committed to inclusion in the Delivery Plan. The Council would seek to ensure that the major urban areas do not suffer from any bias in terms of funding ratios which in recognition of the importance of transport to the economy should support the economic drivers for the region.

The Council would re-iterate the point that the role of Belfast as the key economic driver for the region should be supported to maximise the potential for sustainable economic growth based on the higher gross value added in the Masterplan area and other urban centres."

Attendance by Lord Mayor at the World Police and Fire Games in New York

(Mr. G. Copeland, Events Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was reminded that Belfast would host the bi-annual World Police and Fire Games in 2013 and that approximately 25,000 competitors and visitors from throughout the world would be visiting the City for the event. It was reported that the 2011 Games would take place in New York from 26th August till 4th September, and it was customary for the First Citizen of the succeeding host city to attend to accept

formally, at the closing ceremony, responsibility for the hosting of the Games. It was reported that, in attending the 2011 Games in New York, the Lord Mayor, who would be accompanied by the Events Manager, would undertake a series of engagements to promote the 2013 Games in Belfast, as well as discussing with the organisers the format and tourist potential which the event would bring to the City. It was reported that the costs associated with the visit, including flights, accommodation and subsistence, would be in the region of £5,200.

After discussion, the Committee authorised the attendance at the 2011 World Police and Fire Games of the Lord Mayor (Councillor Ó Donnghaile) and the Events Manager and agreed to the payment of the costs as set out.

Bus Tour Companies in Belfast

With the consent of the Committee, the Chairman (Alderman Stalford) informed the Members that, at the Board meeting of Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau held on 23rd June, concern had been raised regarding the methods being used by certain bus tour operators to attract customers. This issue had been of particular concern when cruise ships had visited the City and, as a result, Belfast City Centre Management had introduced a Code of Conduct which most bus tour operators had signed up to, on the understanding that there would be repercussions for those companies which did not adhere to the code. Accordingly, a monitoring system had been established to manage the activity of the bus operators to ensure that the code was being adhered to and which the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau was proposing to reintroduce in 2011. A request for financial assistance in this regard had been made to the Council.

After discussion, the Committee agreed:

- to provide support up to maximum of £2,000 towards the re-establishment of the monitoring service in 2011; and
- to request that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board contribute 50% towards the costs of the service.

It was agreed also that a letter be forwarded to the Minister for the Environment, Mr. Alex Attwood M.L.A., requesting the he undertake to examine the issue of tour operators within the City. It was noted that the Director of Development would raise the matter with the Director of Health and Environmental Services to establish whether the Council had any powers under licensing legislation to regulate the activities of tour operators.

Submission of Minutes

Resolved – That, in accordance with Standing Order 12, the foregoing minutes be submitted to the Council for adoption at its meeting on 4th July.

Chairman