

Development Committee

Tuesday, 17th April, 2012

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Stalford (Chairman);
Aldermen Ekin and Stoker; and
Councillors Austin, Hartley, Hendron, Keenan,
Kelly, Kingston, Kyle, Mallon, Maskey, McKee,
McVeigh, Reynolds, Robinson and Webb.

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

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Mac Giolla Mhín, Ó Muilleoir and Spence.

Declarations of Interest Policy

(The Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive attended in connection with this item).

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 6th March, it had requested that further clarification be sought from the Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive in respect of the requirement for Members to withdraw from meetings whilst items in which they had declared an interest were under consideration by the Committee. Accordingly, the Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive drew the Committee's attention to various aspects of the Council's policy and answered a range of Members' queries. He pointed out that the advice within the policy was unambiguous in that in all cases where a Member had declared an interest, pecuniary or otherwise, it was expected that he or she should leave the room whilst the matter was under discussion and this applied equally to Committee and Council meetings. He indicated that further advice and training would be provided to Members in respect of the policy.

Noted.

Declaration of Interest

In respect of item 5b, viz., 'Employment Services Board – Request for Assistance', Councillor McVeigh indicated that he was a member of the Employment Services Board, but pointed out that this was in a personal capacity and not within his remit as an Elected Member.

Request for Deputations

It was reported that no requests had been received.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board - Gala Awards 2012

With the permission of the Chairman, the Committee was informed that the Council had submitted a number of applications in various categories for the Northern Ireland Tourism Awards, which would be hosted by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and which were due to take place on 21st May at the Grand Opera House. The Director reported that the Council's applications had included both the MTV Music Awards and the Belfast Zoo. Since the awards ceremony was considered to be one of the most significant events in the tourism and hospitality calendar, it was pointed out that it would be important that the Council was represented thereat. Accordingly, the Director recommended that the Committee agree to reserve a table for ten persons at the event, at a total cost of £750, for the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of both the Development and Parks and Leisure Committees (or their nominees), together with the appropriate officers and invited guests.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Retail Support Plan 2012/2013

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide Members with an overview of proposed Council support for the development of Belfast's independent retail sector during 2012/2013.**
- 1.2 Members will be aware from previous meetings of the Development Committee that Belfast City Council has been particularly proactive in supporting a wide range of initiatives to assist in the development and promotion of the independent retail sector across the City. Support for the independent retail sector also forms part of the Council's new Investment Programme and there is a commitment to continued investment in the sector over the lifetime of this programme.**
- 1.3 Members will also be aware that the Council provides significant support to Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) to provide an interface between council and local businesses within the city centre and to deliver specific services on behalf of the Council within this area.**

One of the key areas of work for BCCM is to improve economic performance for city centre businesses, the majority of which are retailers. Of the retailers in the city centre, it is anticipated that around 50% can be categorised as “independent” traders. However, BCCM also provide an important interface with the larger retailers and the shopping centres, and this can provide council with a wider perspective of the challenges faced by the broader retail sector.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 A thriving independent retail sector is important for the vitality and variety of our city, and Council has been instrumental in developing and delivering a number of initiatives, particularly over the last three years. Equally, the sector is dependent on a vibrant economy and, in the current climate, the retail sector – and in particular independent retailers – are under considerable pressure to sustain their business.**
- 2.2 The Belfast Business Needs Survey 2011 has provided up to date research on the size and subsequent needs of the retail sector in Belfast. This research, teamed with discussions with the retail sector, has allowed Council to identify a range of targeted interventions that will help fill gaps in provision that have been identified by independent retailers and key stakeholders across the city.**
- 2.3 The Belfast Business Needs survey noted that 56% of retailers in the city were particularly concerned at the inactivity and impact of the economic climate on their business. Retailers also raised concerns about competition and the rising cost of supplies. These issues were mirrored in discussions with retailers who also noted difficulties in promoting their unique independent retail offering and in marketing this to both Belfast residents and tourists. The Business Survey also noted the key areas of support of interest to retailers including trading online, sales development and business planning.**
- 2.4 While the majority of council support to date has focused on independent retailers, we also work with larger retailers to see how they can support our activities and complement the offering. One example of this is our work with House of Fraser on a design programme for undergraduate Fashion Management students, as a result of which one student was awarded an internship and subsequently a full-time employment opportunity with House of Fraser’s design team.**

We have also had discussions with House of Fraser about how they can include local franchises and concessions within the store and we worked closely with Jason Shankey in establishing his franchise within the Belfast store. We are due to meet with the larger retailers shortly and will bring any additional proposals back to Council in due course.

2.5 The current economic downturn presents real challenges for our independents and it is considered essential that an appropriate, tailored support programme is provided to the businesses at this time. This proposed support package should be considered in the context of the wider Council support for businesses, where the focus is on increasing productivity and competitiveness as a means of driving business growth. Independent retailers can also avail of many of these generic business development programmes and events.

2.6 The proposed activities are set in the framework of the recently-published report by Mary Portas on behalf of the UK government. This report suggests that “High Streets of the future must be a hub of the community that local people are proud of and want to protect.” Members will be aware of previous activity in this regard where BCC has asked Minister McCausland to consider Belfast in its new ‘Portas’ based initiative which comprises local research into Northern Ireland’s towns on retail competitiveness. The Portas Review sets out six themes with 29 recommendations to re-animate town and city centres as well as local neighbourhoods. These include:

1. Getting our town centres running like businesses

- Introduction of ‘Town Teams’ to engage with local retail stakeholders to create sustainable high streets of the future – Council already supports a number of fledgling and established voluntary groups across the city as well as BCCM in the city centre.
- Importance of markets as a vibrant attraction in any retail area – (Belfast City Council already makes significant investment in Smithfield and St George’s Market and we have recently run a successful “Market Start Up” programme, creating 9 new businesses).
- Importance of Business Improvements Districts (BIDS) in providing local businesses to form a strategic partnership to benefit their area.

In Northern Ireland the BIDS Bill is currently being drafted, with the DSD Minister Nelson McCausland aiming to introduce the Bill to the Assembly before the summer recess. DSD expect that the BIDS legislation will be operational by next summer. This legislation could have implications for some of the key retail areas (who may consider becoming a BID) and for BCCM.

2. Getting the basics right to allow business to flourish

- The Portas Review focuses on the operating environment for retailers in England, particularly around rate concessions and controlled parking schemes. Belfast City Council has no direct control over these issues. We can however continue to lobby and liaise with public bodies to identify how they can best support retailers and businesses across the city.
- Make high streets accessible, attractive and safe. This is a key area of work for Belfast City Centre Management, within input from a number of council services including cleansing and community safety. The new Clean Neighbourhoods legislation provides a framework for council to make more impact in this area of work.

3. Levelling the playing field

- Introduce Secretary of State 'exceptional sign off' for new out of town developments and encouraging retailers to report on their support of the high street. Belfast City Council will continue to lobby for appropriate planning instruments to support town centre development.

4. Defining landlords roles and responsibilities

- Encourage property owners to be responsible landlords and explore further disincentives to prevent landlords from leaving properties empty. Although Council has no powers to do this, work has been done by the Renewing the Routes to identify and work with property owners to improve the physical appearance of streets across the city. We are also working with BCCM and others to look at the implementation of recent legislative changes to incentivise occupancy of vacant units, both for "meanwhile" use and for more sustainable business ventures.

5. Giving communities a greater say

- Give local retailers more say in what happens in their area. To support this it is proposed that council continue its support of traders groups across the city, and facilitate a proposed retail forum to give retailers an opportunity to raise and respond to issues and exchange ideas.

6. Re-imagining our high streets

- The Portas Review challenges us to look at our 'high streets' differently and to appreciate that they are not just places to shop but also act as neighbourhood hubs. Many of the traders' groups are engaging with non-retail businesses in their area and becoming "business associations". This recognises the mix of businesses on the high street. It also encourages support for a wider range of initiatives to benefit all businesses within an area, not just retailers.

2.7 Taking account of these recommendations, a draft support programme for the retail sector is attached for consideration.

2.8 The programme includes a range of marketing and promotion, business development, networking and mentoring initiatives to improve the performance of existing businesses and support collaborative marketing initiatives to increase footfall in identified retail locations. Details of each of the individual activities is identified below:

2.9 Business development initiatives:

2.10 1. Retail Therapy Programme

The Retail Therapy programme has been a feature of previous support programmes for the independent retail sector. Given its success to date – every £1 invested generates £10 additional business for participating companies – it is proposed that this tailored support continues. As part of the programme each participating retailer undertakes a business needs audit to identify the key issues facing them, followed by the creation of individual improvement plans. Businesses then have access tailored one-to-one mentoring, workshops and best practice visits.

Participants are also be eligible for small grants from Council to help with the implementation of their improvement plans, therefore providing long term benefits to each participant.

- 2.11 The participants on previous waves of the Retail Therapy greatly valued the programme and provided positive feedback regarding areas of future support. It is proposed that 30 Retailers be recruited on to this programme.

2.12 2. Retail Masterclasses

In 2011-2012, a series of retail masterclasses were provided. These were open to all independent retailers across Belfast and offered free of charge. Nine masterclasses were provided and these were attended by approximately 160 independent retailers across the city.

Feedback from these sessions has been extremely positive and many whom attended have indicated an eagerness to attend similar Council led events in the future. As a result it is proposed that these masterclasses continue to provide flexible and timely support to retailers to provide knowledge in appropriate areas and provide opportunities for networking.

2.13 3. Retail Mentoring Programme

Retailers across the city have identified a need for flexible and timely mentoring in response to issues arising which may affect their business. They noted that, while the masterclasses were extremely useful, they would benefit greatly from access to one-to-one expertise on topics including finance, succession planning, training and social media.

- 2.14 It is therefore proposed that council provide flexible mentoring support of up to two days for retailers who identify a specific need within their business and who are not on any other council supported programme. It is proposed that flexible mentoring be offered to at least 25 retailers. This mirrors the mentoring support that we can offer to other businesses but which is not currently open to retail businesses (given that European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding cannot be used for retail businesses).

2.15 4. Market Start Up Programme

This programme was introduced as a pilot in 2011-2012 to support potential entrepreneurs and new start-up businesses to explore market trading as a possible business model, in advance of progression to establishing a retail outlet at a future date.

2.16 The programme aims to provide support to individuals interested in establishing a specialist food or craft business and includes one-to-one mentoring, the opportunity to explore best practice, market research, product development and the development of business plans. On successful completion of the programme and subsequent vetting, participants were able to test trade at St George's Market for a limited period.

2.17 It is proposed that two waves of this programme take place with a total of 20 participants, subject to discussions with the markets management team regarding available space and taking account of existing waiting lists.

2.18 Marketing and promotion initiatives

5. New trader group facilitation

It is proposed that council will provide support to new traders groups across the city to help them to form legally constituted groups/associations. Tailored advice sessions will be offered to groups to help facilitate this, to link into existing support; identify their priorities for action to address the challenges and help deliver on these.

2.19 It is proposed that seed funding should be made available to work on issues such as collaborative promotion and marketing campaigns, events to increase footfall and customer loyalty initiatives. Initial discussions with traders have highlighted a wider range of issues including business rates; street cleansing; car parking and environmental improvements.

Whilst we can advise on these issues and advocate on their behalf to relevant agencies, through local elected representatives, it is suggested that the focus of this particular support should remain on those marketing-related issues.

2.20 We are currently working with six groups (Lower North Belfast Business Alliance, Cliftonville Circus Traders, Shankill Road, Antrim Road Traders, Holywood Arches, West Belfast) and it is proposed that we work with an additional three groups in the coming year.

2.21 6. Area Marketing Campaigns

Collaborative marketing and promotional campaigns will be encouraged for promoting the clusters of independent retail businesses across Belfast with a “shop local” focus and aimed at improving recognition of the importance of the independent retail sector in the city. This funding will be open to existing traders’ groups who area already constituted.

2.22 Under the previous retail support plan, provision had been made for local campaigns to enhance the profile of designated shopping areas through a range of targeted support initiatives. This enabled groups to undertake activities such as producing local trader maps and business directories, creating a website for promotion and online trading and organising local events to increase footfall and trading in specific areas.

2.23 It is proposed that constituted traders groups may apply for up to £30,000 in support for expenditure against a range of agreed promotional activities, similar to those identified above, within the current financial year. It is also accepted that a number of the traders groups are more advanced than others and that some may be able to bring resources to supplement the council contribution. In recognition of this, it is proposed that, beyond the £30,000 support provided, Belfast City Council can match the trader contribution £ for £, up to a total maximum contribution from council of £60,000. Consideration should be given to the sustainability of the proposed intervention, given that funding levels cannot be guaranteed in future years.

2.24 Networking initiatives

7. Retail Forum

It is proposed that Council facilitate a Retail Forum to allow exchange of ideas between stakeholders including local traders groups, Council representatives, Belfast City Centre Management, the Northern Ireland Independent Retailers Trade Association and other bodies.

BCCM currently operate a Retailer Stakeholder Group based on the City Centre, therefore account will be taken as to how these fora should interrelate. The forum could also update retailers on council initiatives, changes in legislation and provide an opportunity to network with other retailers.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 Financial

<u>Programme Activities</u>	Indicative Budget
Business Development Initiatives	
Retail Therapy Programme (incl. Retail Masterclasses): Business Development Programme for 30 retailers and six retail masterclasses.	£51,000
Market Start Up Programme: Support programme to help establish 20 new market businesses.	£30,000
Retail Mentoring Programme	£14,000
Marketing and Promotion Initiatives	
Trader Engagement: Support to help traders form legally constituted groups /associations	£10,000
Area Marketing Campaigns for constituted Trader Groups: Support for local traders groups to develop collaborative marketing campaigns	£100,000
Networking initiatives	
Trader Forum: Support two retail focus forum events	£5,000
<u>Total</u>	<u>£210,000</u>

- 3.2 It is proposed that, for those programmes that are subject to public tender, delegated authority be given to the Director of Development, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of Development Committee (or nominees), to approve the most economically advantageous tender, subject to the completion of a contract by Legal Services.

4 **Recommendations**

4.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and approve the proposed Action Plan for 2012-2013
- Agree that, for those programmes that are subject to public tender, delegated authority be given to the Director of Development, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of Development Committee (or nominees), to approve the most economically advantageous tender, subject to the completion of a contract by Legal Services.”

During discussion, Members made reference to a range of initiatives which could be introduced to encourage people to shop within Belfast, as opposed to out-of-town retail centres. It was suggested that the Council could write to the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service requesting that consideration be given to addressing, sympathetically, shoppers' parking needs in certain areas and thoroughfares in the City. Such initiatives, it was suggested, could be introduced in conjunction with Translink and could be aimed at promoting shopping across a range of arterial routes and the City centre.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt the recommendations, subject to the above-mentioned course of action.

Support for Co-operatives - Application for Funding

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 **Relevant Background Information**

- 1.1 2012 has been recognised as the International Year of Co-operatives by the United Nations.
- 1.2 Cooperatives are defined as “autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise”.

As such, they represent a collective approach to the risk and reward associated with enterprise.

- 1.3 As a business model cooperatives are recognised as being resilient in challenging economic conditions. The fundamental difference of co-operatives is that they have members, not shareholders that make decisions democratically.
Members of the cooperative are simultaneously owners of the enterprise and beneficiaries of the enterprise activity.
- 1.4 There are a number of types of cooperatives including:
- Worker cooperatives – owned and run by the people who work there.
 - Consumer cooperatives - owned by its customers, employees can generally also become members.
 - Co-operative consortia – Co-operative consortia are formed when a group of businesses join together as a cooperative. They remain independent businesses, but by working together gain a competitive advantage.
- 1.5 While cooperatives are widely found in many parts of Europe, there are limited examples of cooperatives in Northern Ireland, outside of a number of well-known agricultural cooperatives and, to some extent, credit unions. In 2011 Cooperatives UK reported the existence of 239 cooperatives in Northern Ireland generating a total turnover of £0.9bn. The number of cooperatives within the UK has been experiencing growth in the since 2008 with 2010 being particularly favourable with growth for the UK sector of 9.2%.
- 1.6 Cllr McVeigh has asked that support towards the promotion of cooperatives as a business model is further investigated as part of Belfast City Council support towards business. In this context, Belfast City Council has been approached to become a partner in an Interreg IVB proposal focused on the development of cooperatives. The project is expected to last for 3 years and would cost in the region of €2m - €3m.
- 1.7 Members may be aware that the Interreg IVB programme supports transnational initiatives on a range of topics related to economic, environmental and social development.
- 1.8 Northern Ireland is located within the North West Europe (NWE) eligible area.

2 **Key Issues**

- 2.1** Interreg funding is available at up to 75% of eligible costs within NWE projects. This can include in-kind contributions such as staff time.
- 2.2** Projects require transnational partners, each of whom is willing to contribute to the learning within the project. To date, Limerick County Council has agreed to take the lead in the project. They have become interested in the concept of cooperatives following the move from the area of a number of foreign direct investment (FDI) schemes. There is concern not only at the loss of jobs in the area but also at the loss of IP (intellectual property) and research and development activity, which was the property of the FDI company. The council is keen to work with those formerly employed in the business to look at alternative forms of enterprise which will ensure that the profits, research, intelligence and networks from any new business initiatives are retained in the area.
- 2.3** Other partners that have confirmed their commitment to the project include University of Sheffield Hallam; Limerick City Council; Cooperatives Scotland and a Cooperative Development Agency in Netherlands. The Mondragon Corporation – a corporation and federation of worker cooperatives based in the Basque region, Spain – will also participate in the project as an observer (given that it is located outside the eligible area). Mondragon is the seventh largest Spanish company in terms of asset turnover and the leading business group in the Basque country.
- 2.4** The final details of the project are currently being worked out by the project partners but they are likely to involve some element of embedding knowledge in education programmes as well as practitioner conferences, demonstration projects and visits to enterprises. Local partners will also take a lead in piloting specific initiatives and disseminating lessons learned with other partners. For example, Limerick County Council is working with a professor in the University of Limerick to look at establishing a research cooperative. This will bring together research emanating from the university and, by establishing a cooperative model, will bring together the university and research fellows in a partnership in which risk and reward are shared. The expectation is that it will help retain some of the local talent in the city, thereby supporting the wider economic development and business growth.

There is an opportunity to explore a similar opportunity in Belfast, potentially focusing on a different research area.

- 2.5 The project budget is also being finalised at present. As a project partner, Belfast might be expected to commit up to a total of around €80,000 over the course of the project lifetime. This can be made up of both staff time and cash contribution.
- 2.6 Belfast City Council has been asked to be a partner given its potential to engage local businesses and research institutes to look at possible cooperatives models. There are a number of local cooperatives developing in the city at present, such as a taxi cooperative and a cleaning cooperative. However there may be scope for developing additional cooperatives and the funding available through this project will allow this concept to be developed further. Local organisations such as, Trademark Belfast are currently promoting individuals seeking to form cooperatives within the city. If approved, the cooperative model may form part of a locally based partnership model to take this project forward.
- 2.7 The deadline for the Interreg application is 11 May 2012, Belfast City Council are required to confirm their willingness to participate in the project in advance of this date.

3 Resource Implications

3.1 Financial

The financial commitment is currently being finalised. A further report on the financial contribution required by Council, if approved will be submitted brought back to Committee to allow a final decision on participation.

4 Recommendation

4.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the request to register our interest in an Interreg IVB NWE project based on developing cooperatives.”

The Committee noted the information provided.

Employment Services Board - Request for Funding

(Mr. J. Walsh, Legal Services Manager, attended in connection with this item and Councillor McVeigh left the room whilst the matter was under discussion.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 Members will be aware that, in March last year, a request for funding was received from the Employment Services Board (ESB). This request was for £15,000 interim funding as the organisation expected to receive funding under the proposed Social Investment Fund (SIF). By June 2011, the funding still had not been released so ESB made a further request for an additional 6 month’s funding (£30,000), again in anticipation of SIF support. The total amount made available to the organisation over this 9 month period was £45,000.

1.2 In the period January-March 2012, the organisation received funding from a private sector sponsor. However that funding has now come to an end and, in the absence of any additional funding, the organisation has again approached the Council with a request that we provide funding for a 9 month period, up to an amount of £58,500.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Members may be aware that the Employment Services Board (ESB) was established in 2001 as part of the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces. Along with the Employers’ Forum (managed by Business in the Community (BITC)) and the Jobs Assist Centres (JACs)), it was intended that they would provide a support framework for developing targeted initiatives to help those furthest from the labour market to find employment.

2.2 ESB was funded by DETI and DEL initially to perform a range of functions but, since March 2011, it has had no core funding and has been seeking support from a range of sources.

2.3 ESB is a stakeholder organisation, bringing together a range of organisations including the Area Partnership Boards for West Belfast and Greater Shankill; Belfast Trust; Department for Employment and Learning (DEL); Social Security Agency; training organisations and the Employers’ Forum. Belfast City Council is also represented at both officer and member level.

- 2.4 In 2011, ESB was involved in a number of initiatives including:
- Participation in the TQ Work group providing input and advice on maximising benefit to those furthest from the labour market
 - Monitoring work on the impact of Welfare Reform on the unemployed in west Belfast and Shankill areas
 - Support for further funding for development of the Health Employment Partnership.
- 2.5 Following a meeting with officers on 4 April, correspondence was received from Padraic White, Chair of the Employment Services Board on 5 April 2012 to request that the Council provide an additional £58,500 funding for the coming nine months, in light of ongoing delays with the Social Investment Fund (SIF). The meeting with officers focused on understanding how ESB might add value to Council activity as part of the Investment Programme.
- 2.6 A similar, separate meeting took place with the Employers' Forum (EF) who had also submitted a funding request to Council to look at how they could support Council in delivering the employability elements of the Investment Programme. Officers provided feedback at both meetings to indicate that DEL had committed to working with the Council to support the target of 400 work placements and 200 new jobs. This support from DEL would be at no cost to the Council as it would be delivered through existing contractors across the city. In addition, there is an opportunity to target specific locations or target groups (including long-term unemployed) in these initiatives, thereby adhering to the Council's commitment to creating 'opportunities for all'. Employers' Forum will now consider alternative ways in which they might support the council in this work.
- 2.7 The request for support from ESB suggests that the organisation is uniquely placed to support Council and local communities in developing approaches to maximise the impact of investments and opportunities within the Investment Programme. The proposal suggests that they could work with Council to progress initiatives such as Springvale Innovation Centre, the Argyle Business Park, Shankill Piazza, Black Mountain Shared Spaces, Casement Park and St. Comgall's. In addition, it is noted that ESB is keen to 'ensure effective participation and assistance in the development, roll out and monitoring of the specific

employment, employability and skills initiatives and approaches including the Bursary initiative, the targeted employability initiatives, the 200 additional Council jobs and 400 placement, internship and apprenticeship places as well as the Belfast Social Clause Delivery Forum and the citywide Employability and Skills Steering Group’.

- 2.8 Members will be aware that work is progressing on the individual components of the Investment Programme and a report on the proposed way forward on the employability initiatives is to be submitted to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in May 2012. In addition, a report on options for way forward on the bursary scheme is to be presented to the Development Committee in the same timeframe. Both reports will be based on discussion with potential partners as to how these initiatives can be delivered in a way to ensure maximum impact, while operating within constrained financial resources.
- 2.9 Members should also note that the proposed city-wide employability and skills group – which this Committee agreed – has been included as a commitment within the Programme for Government. A number of recent meetings have taken place with DEL and other key statutory partners and a follow-up meeting is scheduled for 8 May. At this stage, it is anticipated that the partners will agree the broad framework for action as well as a number of priority projects to progress in the immediate term, including the potential resourcing issues associated with these. From the preliminary discussions, it is likely that early initiatives might focus on young unemployed (16-24) in a number of locations – particularly those where the problem is most acute. Clearly, it will be important to work with relevant local partners on these initiatives.

3 Recommendations

3.1 Members are asked to:

- **Consider the request for funding from Employment Services Board for £58,500 for a 9 month period”**

The Committee was reminded that the request for financial assistance had been the third such occasion on which Council had been approached in this regard. Members pointed out that the responsibility for funding such organisations lay ultimately with central government agencies and that the Council could only make a payment under the specialised expenditure powers which it possessed under Section 37 of the Local Government Finance Act.

The Legal Services Manager reminded the Committee that, should it be so minded to accede to the request, it must assure itself that the expenditure provided would bring direct benefit to the whole of the City and its ratepayers. In addition, Members should be satisfied that any benefits accruing would be commensurate and measurable with the payment to be made. It was suggested that the Committee should request that the Employment Services Board provide Members with a detailed plan of action which would outline the specific steps it would take to utilise the Council's payment in accordance with the requirements of Section 37 of the Local Government Finance Act.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Stoker,
Seconded by Councillor Webb,

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the request for financial assistance by the Employment Services Board to enable further information to be received in respect of that organisation's specific plans to utilise the proposed Council contribution for the benefit of the whole of the City.

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

Further Proposal

Moved by Councillor Reynolds,
Seconded by Councillor Maskey,

That the Committee agrees to provide funding in the sum of £58,500 to the Employment Services Board under the special expenditure powers as set out within Section 37 of Local Government Act; it being the opinion of the Committee that the expenditure would be in the interests of, and would bring direct benefit to, the City and the ratepayers of the City, 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 agreed to the following course of action:

- That a letter to be sent to the Employment Services Board requesting that, prior to the meeting of the Council on 1st May, it would provide all Members with a detailed plan of action on how the Council's contribution would be used to deliver tangible benefits to the City in accordance with the provisions as set out within Section 37 of Local Government Act;

- That a letter be forwarded to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Employment and Learning expressing the Council's concern at the lack of funding provided to the Employment Services Board which, in turn, had placed the Council in the position where it was being approached for assistance; and
- That a letter be forwarded to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister expressing the Committee's concerns at the delay in the establishment of a Social Investment Fund which could be used to support organisations such as the Employment Services Board.

Belfast Masterplan Update

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 21st February, it had agreed that the Council's Draft Masterplan would be subjected to further political scrutiny in order to align it with the Council's Investment Programme for 2012/2015, and to take into account the priorities set out within the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government. In addition, it was agreed that consultation on the Masterplan would be carried out over two phases, with initial engagement being undertaken with the various departments within the Northern Ireland Executive, following which it would be issued for further consultation to allow the Council to gauge wider perceptions and enable additional modifications to be carried out.

The Director reported that the meetings with the various Departments of the Executive had commenced. The feedback from those meetings would, together with the comments and suggestions of Members, be incorporated within an updated document which would be considered by the Committee prior to the second stage of the consultation process being undertaken. The Director suggested that the secondary consultation process could be carried out through a series of workshops which would address, in conjunction with a range of key stakeholders, the thematic issues within the Masterplan. It was proposed that such workshops would be facilitated by the independent consultants, viz., SLR Consulting, which had formulated the original draft document, at a cost not exceeding £15,000, provision for which had been included within the Department's financial estimates.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed also to the hiring of SLR Consultants for the undertaking of the workshops as outlined.

Renewing the Routes Programme 2012/2016

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an update on the progress to date in the implementation of the 2012/2016 Renewing the Routes Programme.

York Street Interchange Proposals - Update

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 27th June, it had received a presentation from representatives of the Department for Regional Development's Road Service in respect of the four options which it had identified and issued for consultation regarding the upgrading of the York Street Interchange. At that meeting, the Committee had agreed that officers submit an interim response to the Department for Regional Development based on the comments made by Members regarding noise and air quality and the potential regeneration impacts of the upgrade work. The Director reported that, in order to assist the Council in its response, a request had been made to the Roads Service for additional information on its initial findings in respect of the potential air and noise impacts which would be associated with the scheme. However, there had been a delay in receiving that information which meant that the Committee would not be able to consider the Council's draft formal response to the proposals until early May.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that a special meeting to consider the Council's response, to which all Members would be invited, would take place in early May on a date to be determined in conjunction with the Chairman.

Active Travel Projects

Pursuant to the minute of the meeting of 20th March, the Committee noted the contents of an update report which provided an overview of the Development Department's applications for funding assistance under the terms of the Department for Regional Development's Active Travel Projects.

Consultation: Big Lottery Fund Supporting Families

The Committee considered a draft Council response to The Big Lottery's proposals to deliver a support programme during 2012/2015 which would address the needs of families and young persons. Such a programme would seek to address, inter alia, the issues of poverty, substance abuse, disability and homelessness and would be delivered through an open programme for which a sum of £15 million had been allocated. It was reported that the programme would support activities and develop, in particular, the life skills of families with children under the age of twelve.

Accordingly the Committee endorsed the undernoted response, subject to it being amended to reflect the following comments:

- That the response would include a request that provision be made for the inclusion of programmes which would deliver suicide awareness training and address educational under-achievement;

- That, in order to enhance the potential for communities to maximise the benefits arising from the programme, that community sector grants be aligned to the timescale for the programme, viz., over a period of three to five years; and
- That the response should indicate that the scope of the programme should be widened to include all areas where acute need is identified and incorporate a request that the upper age for “Assistance for Children” be raised from 12 years to 14 years of age.

Council Response

Q1. Do you think the programme aim best reflects the needs of families in Northern Ireland? Yes.

Q.2 Do you think the programme outcomes best reflect the needs of families in Northern Ireland? No

Q.2b If no, what do you think the most important outcomes are for families in Northern Ireland?

Outcome 2 should be widened to read “opportunities to learn and develop together”. The use of the word “learn” on its own may lead people to think of formal educational issues and attainment only whereas the focus should be on the wider development of the family and young person. There may also be scope for including reference to the opportunities to engage with and better understand different communities (see our reference to interface areas for questions 3b).

Q.3 We are proposing that this programme should support families facing challenges such as physical and/or emotional abuse; poverty; substance/alcohol abuse; disability; homelessness; separation; social isolation and caring Do you agree with our definition of the challenges that a family may face? No

Q.3b If no, what other factors should be included?

The legacy of the Troubles and those living in or near interface areas should be highlighted as a particular challenge. There is much evidence to show that those living in interface areas are more likely to be in poverty, with lower levels of educational attainment etc. Social isolation is mentioned as a factor, and whilst this could perhaps fall under this heading, given the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, it is important to recognise the importance and impact of good relations on our society. Although there are many programmes designed to help in the transition from conflict, the impact on families particularly those at interface areas should still be acknowledged.

BIG may want to give some thought as to how a family centred approach, such as that being proposed under this scheme, could work hand in hand with other funding streams and initiatives (for example, that are targeted at interface communities) to provide a more joined up and intensive level of support.

Q.4 Do you agree that this programme should support families with a child/children younger than 12 years of age? Yes.

Q.5 Should we encourage and support partnership working and collaboration across sectors?

Leading on from our comment about interface areas, yes it is important that this funding promotes collaboration and partnership working. There are many initiatives that would benefit from intensive work with families – but often this level of intensive support is too expensive and time-consuming, therefore efforts instead focus on wider programmes or universal type activities. It would be helpful if this funding could promote partnership working and actually encourage the joining-up of funding, resources and initiatives so that macro and micro level activity can take place collaboratively.

Q.6 Do you think the proposed grant sizes of £100,000 - £500,000 is appropriate? Yes.

Q.7 Do you think the proposed grant length of three to five years is appropriate? No.

Q.7b If no, what is the appropriate grant length?

Local communities engaged with Lottery and other grant schemes have raised concerns about the short-term approach to some funding and the number of pilot initiatives. The opportunity for 5 year funding streams would be welcome, but steps should also be taken well before the funding comes to an end to look at transitioning or mainstreaming successful projects. The Greater Shankill and West Belfast Integrated Services for Children and Young People would be a prime example. Given the nature of this support / funding it will take time to build up the relationships and rapport with families in order to make a real difference; funding should therefore be for a minimum of 3 years.

Q.8 How can we ensure the projects we fund involve families in project design, development and delivery?

It could be a requirement of funding that projects include representatives from families (ideally those in the programme).

It should also be a requirement that participating families are able to comment on the programme during its life and at its end. This could be through a standard and not overly complicated survey form. This could form part of any annual monitoring and would ensure lessons are learnt and projects amended as necessary. A permanent 'families' forum' could be funded and established to comment on future projects during the life of the overall programme.

Q.9 Are there any further comments you wish to make about our proposed programme to support families?

Generally we would be supportive of this scheme as it fits with the Council's ethos of improving quality of life and many of our supporting corporate objectives and activities. The focus on family should provide a much needed "people-centred" approach and, as it is built around the core societal concept of family, it should provide a much more targeted and holistic approach to helping address need. The focus on early years (support and intervention), particularly within the context of a family setting, is a theme which emerges regularly in our engagement processes. We would therefore welcome any funding that helps provide that holistic and micro level support.

Local Area Regeneration Projects

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 20th March, it had agreed to provide financial support to a number of small-scale Local Area Regeneration Projects across the City. However, at the meeting, Members had requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting which would provide an overview of the criteria and processes which had been used in selecting the projects for consideration. It was requested also that the report would clarify the specific role and remit of the Department's Strategic Neighbourhood Action Programme, together with an overview of the officers responsible for projects in each area of the City.

A Member suggested that the report submitted did not address specifically the issues raised at the meeting on 20th March. He expressed concern at the lack of prior consultation which had been undertaken regarding the choice of projects and stated that the availability of funds for any community-based initiatives should have been drawn to the Members' attention at the earliest opportunity. The Member referred specifically to a project which he believed had met the criteria as set out within the report and which should have been considered for funding.

In response, the Director undertook to re-examine the specific circumstances pertaining to the project referred to and report back to the Member in this regard. He pointed out that, in future, the responsibility for the funding of such projects would fall within the remit of the Area Working Groups, which had been established by Council at its meeting on 1st April.

The Committee noted the information provided and it was noted that further information would be provided in this regard.

Ainsworth Community Centre

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 **Ainsworth Community Centre is located at 117 Mayo Street. Since the 1970s the centre has been locally managed by Ainsworth Community Association with the premises and land vested in Trustees by virtue of an Assignment of Lease dated 17 January 1975. The Association was funded under revenue and small grants by the Council for more than 25 years.**
- 1.2 **The Community and Leisure Sub Committee 29 November 2005 approved a Deed of Covenant and Charge by which the Council made a grant of £11,000 to the Association towards the expenditure to be incurred to complete the construction of a new community centre. Subsequent to this the Service continued to be in contact with the Association but indications were that the total funding package for the new build had yet to be achieved and work not yet commenced.**
- 1.3 **In late spring 2008 a site visit carried out due to non return of revenue grant monitoring information 2007/8 indicated that the Centre had permanently closed. Subsequent contact with the Secretary of the Association confirmed the current condition of the building had required closure but the hope was that a rebuild programme would still be achieved. No further building related grant support was released and at some stage subsequent to this the Association ceased to exist.**
- 1.4 **In late 2011 the Service was invited to attend an interagency group established in the Ainsworth area. The group aim is to improve/ regenerate the area specifically in regard to local services and community safety.**

Group membership is made up of PSNI, NIHE, BRO, local residents and representatives of a number of community organisations within the Greater Shankill area. A current focus of the group is the need for the demolition of the existing centre, which is significantly deteriorated, and development in due course of a new facility.

BRO have indicated that they will make funding available for a feasibility study but there is not yet a specific timescale or funding source for a new build programme. A survey has also been carried out in the area in regard to the needs of young people.

- 1.5 As a consequence of this initiative, a public meeting of local residents was held on 25 January 2012 which resulted in Ainsworth Community Association being reformed and constituted. This new Association will drive forward current plans for the area.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 DSD have written to the Council 14 February 2012 confirming that they plan to vest the property with a view to its demolition and seeking the Council's view in regard to the existence of the Deed and Covenant registered against the property. BRO have received a letter from the Trustees confirming consent to the community centre being vested and acceptance of the statutory evaluation of around £40k. This payment will be made to the Trustees as owners of the land and building.
- 2.2 Legal Services advice in regard to the Deed and Covenant indicates that there is an ability for the Council to recoup the grant awarded given that the project was never commenced. Legal have also confirmed their intention to write to DSD to register a Caution against the property in respect of the Deed of Covenant and Charge.
- 2.3 The Trustees have confirmed that when payment has been generated in terms of vesting this will be used to clear bank debts (£14,000) and a possible outstanding debt for caretaking duties (£5,000) and they are aware that there may be a requirement to repay the Council grant awarded under the Deed and Covenant. They confirm that all remaining funds will be transferred to the new Ainsworth Community Association to support delivery of their plans for the area.
- 2.4 The newly constituted group have made no formal application to BCC in relation to the previous grant monies given the early stages of their planning in relation to any new build.

2.5 DSD have advertised the Notice of Intention to Vest in three Belfast papers on 29th March and 5th April 2012. There is a 28 day objection period, which commences from 5th April 2012.

3 **Resource Implications**

3.1 The Deed of Covenant and Charge agreed a grant ward of £11,000 towards the expenditure to be incurred to complete a new building.

3.2 The Trustees have indicated an ability to repay the £11,000 to Council the source of which will be the income generated from vesting of the site

4 **Recommendations**

4.1 Members should consider whether they wish Council to seek to recoup the monies registered under the Deed of Covenant and Charge and, if so, that DSD and the Trustees are advised of this decision without delay.

4.2 Members note any further request from Ainsworth Community Association for financial support will be presented for Committee consideration.”

The Committee noted the information and agreed that the sum of £11,000 would be recouped from the Trustees of the Community Centre.

Chairman