

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 11th November, 2020

REMOTE MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson);
Aldermen Dorrian and Kingston; and
Councillors Beattie, Donnelly, Ferguson,
Gormley, Hanvey, Heading, Howard,
T. Kelly, Lyons, Maskey, McLaughlin,
McMullan, Murphy, O'Hara, Spratt
and Whyte.

Also attended: Councillor Baker.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. K. Gilliland, Neighbourhood Services Manager (North); and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of Councillor Beattie.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 7th October were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd November.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

Schedule of Meetings 2021

The Committee approved the following schedule of meetings for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee during 2021 (All meetings to commence at 5.15 p.m.):

- Wednesday, 13th January;
- Wednesday, 10th February;
- Wednesday, 3rd March;
- Wednesday, 14th April;
- Wednesday, 12th May;
- Wednesday, 9th June;

- No meeting in July;
- Wednesday, 11th August;
- Wednesday, 8th September;
- Wednesday, 13th October;
- Wednesday, 10th November; and
- Wednesday, 8th December.

The Committee noted that the following Special Committee dates had also been scheduled, in order to receive presentations from outside bodies and that these would be arranged if required:

- Wednesday, 27th January;
- Wednesday, 24th March;
- Wednesday, 28th April;
- Wednesday, 23rd June;
- Wednesday, 22nd September; and
- Wednesday, 27th October.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following 3 items were restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Finance Update

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy provided an overview of the report.

During discussion, Members raised queries in relation to an update on current arrangements with GLL in terms of finance and staffing, an update on the Government's new furlough scheme and how it might be used by the Council, and confirmation of Civic Amenity Site finance.

The Committee noted the contents of the report which had been presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in October and noted that the questions which had been raised by Members would be submitted to the Director of Finance for comment.

The Zoo - Performance Update Q2 2020/21

The Neighbourhood Services Manager (North) delivered an update on the performance of the Zoo across the following areas:

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

She highlighted that BIAZA had held its annual awards for a range of zoo related categories. The Zoo's first Bronze award came with Animal Care, Husbandry and Breeding, with a focus on the François Langur monkey. This award focused on all the excellent work the Zoo had carried out over the years with the Francois, the aim for the award was primarily on breeding and introduction of individuals into an established group. A second Bronze was awarded to Education with the 'Science behind the Zoo' event.

During discussion, the Committee praised the staff for the increase in revenue and for obtaining the awards in such challenging times.

In response to Members' Questions, the Neighbourhood Services Manager (North) advised that the feasibility study on the Zoo was still in progress and engagement with Members would commence in due course. She stated that an update in relation to the disability access and changing station works would be provided.

The Committee noted the Zoo performance update report for the period July – September 2020 and agreed that the Chairperson send a letter of Congratulations to the staff at the Zoo, in relation to the 2 Bronze awards obtained at the annual BIAZA awards.

Department for Communities (DfC) Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme; Community and Business Cluster Interventions

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an overview of the proposed process for the delivery of business cluster and the community led environmental improvement scheme element of the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, including the delivery of citywide parklets and other similar interventions, together with an indicative timeline and eligibility criteria.

During discussion, Councillor McMullan welcomed the report and its inclusion of his motion - *Installation of Additional Parklets on Arterial Routes and in Neighbourhood Areas*, which had been proposed at the Council meeting on 2nd November, and which had been subsequently referred to the Committee for consideration, as outlined under Item. 3a.

During further discussion, Members raised queries in relation to the timelines for delivery of the projects, given the funding deadline and also the need for a partnership approach across the Council, Department for Infrastructure and Department for Communities. It was highlighted that this was particularly important where any proposals involved Departmental lands, or required approvals via the respective Departments, and the availability of staff resources to assist in the delivery.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor McMullan,
Seconded by Councillor Hanvey,

Resolved - That the Committee agrees to write to the Ministers for the Department for Communities and the Department for Infrastructure to welcome the project funding as outlined and also highlighting the need for a partnership approach across the respective organisations, including appropriate staff resources, to assist in the delivery of any projects requiring Departmental approvals and intervention.

After discussion, the Committee:-

1. Noted the previously agreed budget commitments to deliver community and business cluster led environment improvement schemes, including parklets or other similar interventions within the overall DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme;
2. Noted that the Tranche 2 Letter of Offer for the Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme was received by Council on 28th October 2020;
3. Agreed the process for allocating Community and Business Cluster Grants as outlined within this paper and associated Appendix 1;
4. Agreed to delegate responsibility to the Strategic Director of Place and Economy to approve applications in line with the proposed process for allocation;
5. Agreed, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (2) (b), that the decisions would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that the decision was deemed to be a case of special urgency; and
6. Agreed to write to the Ministers for the Department for Communities and the Department for Infrastructure to welcome the project funding as outlined and also highlighting the need for a partnership approach across the respective organisations, including appropriate staff resources, to assist in the delivery of any projects requiring Departmental approvals and intervention.

Matters Referred Back from Council

Motion - Installation of Additional Parklets on Arterial Routes and in Neighbourhood Areas

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 2nd November, the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor McMullan and seconded by Councillor McReynolds, had, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“This Council recognises the importance of reimagining and reallocating community spaces as part of our recovery from COVID-19 for the benefit of local residents and businesses.

In line with our commitment in our ‘Our Recovery’ strategy, this Council will seek to install additional parklets on arterial routes and neighbourhood areas through the Department for Communities Revitalisation Programme, by setting out a specific fund for applications from businesses, institutions, community associations and other eligible applicants to be defined.

On the basis of these applications, Belfast City Council will act as the coordinating partner to lead and set out the process that will develop these physical projects from concept design and community engagement to delivery and monitoring and evaluation, working with the applicants as well as the key stakeholders (including but not exhaustive of the Department for Infrastructure, Imtac and the Department for Communities) in consultation with local residents.

Additionally, the Council agrees to engage with local businesses to improve and enhance a café culture across Belfast.”

The Committee noted the motion and that its contents had been addressed as part of item 2.c).

Motion -Belfast Bikes - Pilot Scheme to use Rolloe

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 2nd November, the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Baker and seconded by Councillor McLaughlin, had, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“Belfast bikes helps encourage citizens and visitors to our city to get around Belfast, while helping reduce our carbon footprint.

Promoting cycling and investing in safe cycle lanes will be paramount in our fight against climate change.

What if we can also help clean the air as we cycle.

A new award winning design called Rolloe transforms the humble bike wheel into an air purifier that sucks in polluted air, filters out the pollutants and releases the clean air back out into the city.

Similar to a motion last year to investigate the potential of city trees, I call on this Council to explore a pilot scheme to use Rolloe on Belfast bikes with the view to use throughout the fleet if successful and help promote all cyclists to explore the usage of Rolloe on their own bikes.”

Both the proposer of the motion Councillor Baker and seconder of the motion Councillor McLaughlin addressed the Committee and outlined the context of the motion.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that consideration of a Pilot Scheme to use Rolloe on Belfast bikes be included as part of the Belfast Bikes Strategic Review and a report on the matter would be submitted to a future meeting.

Request to Present

Transport Hub Alternatives Group (THAG)

The Committee agreed that Transport Hub Alternatives Group be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

The Committee agreed that NIHE attend December's City Growth and Regeneration Committee to provide an update in respect of the development of the City Centre Housing Waiting List, as well as an update on their Housing Programme. The Committee also requested that the NIHE could provide an update on repairs backlog and retrofit programme, if possible, together with their presentation in advance of the meeting.

Growing Business and the Economy

NI High Street Taskforce and Future City Centre Programme

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of the report is to:

- Advise Members of proposals by the Northern Ireland Executive Office in relation to a High Street Task Force.
- Seek agreement to reinforce the need for Belfast City Council to be represented on this, to help address the challenges faced by the city centre and recognising Belfast's role as the regional economic driver.
- Advise Members on some of the issues impacting on the city centre and to note the ongoing work undertaken in developing the Future City Centre Programme to help respond to these challenges.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are requested to:

- i. Note the proposals by the Northern Ireland Executive Office (TEO) in relation to an emerging High Street Task Force and a request from TEO for the Council to engage with a reference group that is being created in advance of the High Street Task Force.
- ii. Agree that the Council respond to TEO confirming agreement to engage with the reference group but to also highlight the importance of being part of the High Street Task Force on its formation. This will include reinforcing the importance and criticality of Belfast as the regional economic driver and the need for a focused and resourced approach in addressing the challenges faced by the city centre.
- iii. Note the emerging impacts on the city centre due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iv. Note the update in relation to the Council's Future City Centre Programme and the intention to bring a further detailed report back to Committee on the priority areas of focus within this.

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1 The retail and business landscape of the city centre is undoubtedly challenged and already there are a number of well-known high street brands and department stores with presence in Belfast either entering into administration or calling in financial restructuring experts to negotiate leases with landlords. This obviously has a much wider economic impact across all sectors, supply chains and rates income for the city.
- 3.2 Retail will be one of the most challenging sectors, along with hospitality and tourism, for recovery as the fundamental challenges faced pre-COVID-19 still remain an issue and indeed have been exacerbated with the increase use of online shopping. A proactive response is required to support businesses, SME's and independents to ensure the resilience of the city centre as a whole. However it is recognised that retail will not be the only casualty as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic as the tourism and hospitality industry in particular is suffering significantly.
- 3.3 In June 2020, a collective of various public and private bodies jointly called for the Northern Ireland Executive to establish a High Street Taskforce to provide support to businesses through the revitalisation of towns and cities across Northern Ireland. The call requested that businesses and central and local government work together collectively to deliver on much needed regeneration, provide business support,

devising economic interventions and to tackle key issues faced by town and cities in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.4 In August 2020, the Executive agreed that a cross-departmental High Street Taskforce should be established to consider and address the key issues affecting businesses. This work is being undertaken by The Executive Office (TEO). Following an approach by Council officers to TEO highlighting the importance of Belfast Council being represented on this, TEO have recently responded outlining that Ministers are keen to move ahead on the Task Force proposals and plan to initially convene a reference group including a range of government departments and key stakeholder bodies. They have advised that it is intended the reference group will transition into the full High Streets Taskforce. At this stage the proposed membership of the reference group is as below although TEO have highlighted this is not the final membership of the taskforce, and does not preclude membership by the Council when the full Taskforce is formally established.

- Retail NI;
- Hospitality NI;
- Confederation of British Industry (NI);
- NI Chamber of Commerce;
- NI Institute of Directors;
- NI Local Government Alliance;
- Department for Communities;
- Department for the Economy;
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs;
- Department of Finance; and
- Department for Infrastructure.

3.5 TEO has asked the Council to confirm their willingness to engage with this reference group and to confirm if the Council wishes to be part of the full Taskforce when it is established. The reference group is to develop terms of reference for the Task Force and advise on additional membership and thereafter make recommendations to the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the Executive later this month.

Key Issues facing Belfast City Centre

3.6 Belfast is the economic driver for the region. The Regional Development Strategy 2035 specifically recognises the need to enhance the distinctive role of Belfast City Centre as the primary retail location in Northern Ireland.

- 3.7 However, over recent years the retail sector in Belfast, like many other cities across the UK and Ireland, have suffered challenges from changes in consumer behaviours, the desire for enhanced experiences on the high street to convenience and online shopping are trends which are impacting the traditional bricks to mortar retail. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these changes and could see retail and other sectors contracting even more.
- 3.8 As of week commencing 19th October, the change in footfall levels in Belfast city centre (BID One District) is 35% down on the previous year. And so far, for the year to date, footfall is 43.5% from last year as the public adhere to government guidance on social distancing and the extensions of new Covid-19 restrictions.
- 3.9 The Office for National Statistics indicate the UK online retail sales experienced strong growth over the pandemic and in August 2020, the proportion of online spending was at 28.1% with clothing and household goods performing strongest and across all sectors, with online sales at significantly higher levels than last year.
- 3.10 The Council is currently undertaking its annual health check of the city centre and district centres across the city. Health checks comprise a number of indicators such as vacancy and diversity of use which can be utilised to establish trends and evidence to progress particular policy direction.
- 3.11 Early data shows the current vacancy rate for the city centre Primary Retail Core sits at 22% which is up 4% from last year. Whilst this survey was taken at a point in time in early Summer 2020, it is a further indicator of the challenges faced by the city centre. Some well-known high street brands which have been a familiar presence in Belfast for years have either scaled back on operations and closed stores or have gone into administration and ceased trading.
- 3.12 As an indicator, vacancy figures provide a snapshot on occupancy levels in the city centre but can be ambiguous as it doesn't reveal the factors behind a unit being vacant. For example, the level of retail churn with the number of units commercially advertised (i.e. to let or for sale), the size of the unit, units that are wrapped up in major development schemes and units used for temporary means such as meanwhile use or pop ups. Further research and analysis is currently being undertaken and a future paper will be presented to Committee in the coming months.

- 3.13 The impact of reduced office workers has also had a knock-on effect on footfall and businesses in the city centre. Office workers provide a large amount of footfall and trade to retail and hospitality businesses in the city. It is envisioned that continued or increased restrictions on movement will mean footfall will take longer to return to any 'normal' levels.
- 3.14 Belfast drives tourism across the region due to its attractive offer as a city break destination and business tourism destination. According to Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA), the tourism industry supports around 20,000 jobs in Belfast and enjoys 40% of regional tourism spend. The tourism sector is largely seasonal with around 60% of its revenues earned between April to November. NITA estimate the lockdown period (March to June) resulted in over £300m in direct visitor spend being lost to the NI Economy. The potential loss to 2020 visitor spend based on the Visit Britain estimates that the tourism industry in Northern Ireland could be facing losses of over £600M from overnight trips, a decrease of 70% on the estimated 2019 spend. In addition, 80% of staff are on part and full time furlough, 50,000 jobs are at risk with redundancies already made across the sector and there has been a significant knock on effect to supply chains.

Future City Centre Programme

- 3.15 Members will be aware that the Council have a Future City Centre Programme (FCC) that builds on the key findings and recommendations outlined in a previous retail analysis report undertaken by Pragma Consulting on behalf of the Council. The priorities of the Programme are being recast in the context of COVID-19 and taking on board recommendations from the High Street Task Force in England.
- 3.16 The objective is to ensure that it addresses not only challenges to the retail sector but the city centre as a whole. It is linked to the ambitions of the Belfast Agenda and Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy and is charting a way forward for diversification of uses, enhanced connectivity, investment and inclusive economic and cultural growth. The FCC Programme is integral to the deliver to the Council's Recovery Programme and establishes six cross cutting and inter-dependent pillars aimed at creating a dynamic, vibrant shared city centre where people will want to live, work and invest.
- 3.17 The key areas of focus are illustrated in the diagram (copy available [here](#)), all of which require cross-cutting collaboration across Council and wider city centre stakeholders. A further report will be brought back to Committee on this with detail on the various priorities.

- 3.18 It is considered that this Future City Centre Programme forms a sound basis for priority areas of focus for the city centre, both in the shorter and longer term and could be an important tool for discussions in the context of the proposed High Street Task Force.
- 3.19 There is a pressing need, now more than ever to plan ahead with our city partners and central government to ensure a joined up and collective approach to help facilitate the recovery of the city centre.
- 3.20 Given the significant challenges impacting on the city centre it is imperative therefore that the proposed High Street Taskforce moves forward at pace but with appropriate authority and resources to make impactful decisions to roll out immediately. Members are being asked to agree to the Council's response to TEO confirming agreement to engage with the reference group but to also highlight the importance of being part of the High Street Task Force on its formation. This will include reinforcing the importance and criticality of Belfast city centre being the regional economic and tourism driver in Northern Ireland. Within the context of the emerging High Street Taskforce it is considered that there needs to be focused approach in addressing the challenges faced by the city centre as it drives a programme of recovery for Belfast and indeed the wider region.
- 3.21 **Finance & Resource Implications**
- There are no finance or resource implications associated with this report.
- City centre businesses have a key role in the economic sustainability of Belfast and the wider economy and the rates base from the city centre represents a significant source of income for the Council.
- 3.22 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**
- The Future City Centre Programme is a high level regeneration plan. The significant projects taken forward within the plan will be screened in their own right."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Employability NI - Update and Proposed Way Forward

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Update the Committee on the Department for Communities (DfC) Employability NI initiative
- Detail the specific proposals around Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships (LILMPs) and update on engagement with DfC about how these might work in Belfast
- Secure approval to move forward along the lines agreed with DfC in order to bring forward the partnership in Belfast.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the update on Employability NI
- Agree to move forward with DfC as set out within the paper, taking an incremental approach to establishing the Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnership and prioritising key elements of activity.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Employability NI is DfC’s new approach to providing support services for unemployed individuals seeking to get back into to work. Rather than a stand-alone programme, it is a series of interventions that will evolve over time, as legacy programmes (such as Steps to Success and Access to Work) come to an end. It is intended to be a cross governmental approach to co-designing and co-commissioning (including with local government potentially) a sustainable future strategic employment offer which provides a tailored level of support proportionate to need. It has been designed in order to:

- Deliver a reduction in economic inactivity and long-term unemployment to bring NI closer in line with UK rates
- Provide increased support for those with health conditions (esp. mental health) and disabilities

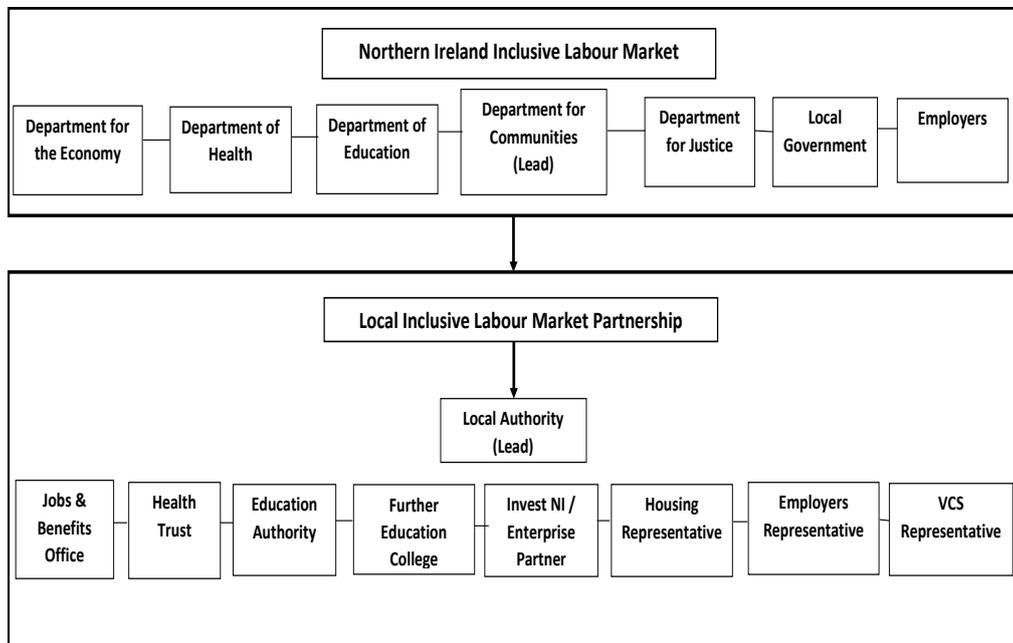
- Create a mechanism for government to collaborate with Councils and other Departments to offer local solutions.

3.2 Since 2018, council officers have been part of the Employability NI Programme Board. The Board's work has been on hold since early 2020 but, by that point, there had been broad agreement on the substantive programme elements.

3.3 One of the key elements of the programme design was the proposal to create 'Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships' in each council area. They were intended to:

- Provide leadership and lead on the integration of services
- Develop local area plans including setting targets for performance
- Manage devolved funding and its delivery through a dynamic purchasing framework
- Manage arrangements for the evaluation of local interventions.

3.4 The proposed composition of the partnership and its structure is set out below.



3.5 While DfC's original intention was to go live with the new approach from October 2020, COVID-19 has set their programme back to some extent. They are still finalising the

work on the Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships, with a view to having these operational in each council area at some point in the coming financial year. However, following a series of engagements with officers in Belfast City Council's Economic Development team, DfC has agreed in principle to move forward with establishing a labour market partnership in Belfast as a precursor to the roll-out across the region. At present, officers are finalising details but it is likely to involve an incremental approach, progressing from oversight of existing and new interventions (including their new 'Work Ready Citizens' programme which has just been put out to tender with a closing date of mid-November and which has been divided into 11 sub-contracts, along district council lines) towards a more active role, with the council taking on the task of local convenor of a partnership approach to employability interventions in Belfast.

3.6 The advantages to working with DfC on Employability NI include:

- Ability to target employability interventions in line with need, ensuring a more inclusive approach to economic growth
- Enhanced level of insights on the localised nature of employability and inactivity challenges – and ability to tailor resources in line with need
- A more responsive series of employability interventions – with enhanced progression and employment outcomes for those engaging in the activity
- The potential to move towards a more formal strategic leadership role for councils in this area of work – as is the case in most other EU countries.

3.7 There are a number of key differences between DfC's current way of working and the proposed approach under Employability NI. With specific regard to the Belfast Agenda and the Inclusive Growth commitments, the following are important to note:

- The programme will involve voluntary participation rather than mandatory engagement. This builds on the learning from many of the community-based providers and European Social Fund (ESF) projects. It will be reliant on building a trusted network of referral points and creating a seamless approach to engaging with individuals who often present with very complex needs
- The Department has been very clear in its commitment to focus on the long-term unemployed

and economically inactive. This is a huge challenge in Belfast and the scale of the problem here is more significant than in most other council areas. The Inclusive Growth strategy currently identifies four target groups – one of whom is the economically inactive. This challenge is going to be even more significant in a post-COVID economy – where jobs numbers are significantly reduced

- The preferred delivery model is based on local management of programme delivery, with local defined as each of the local authority boundaries. The rationale for this approach is to ensure that programme delivery is reflective of local area needs from a participant and employer perspective. This should provide us with a much more granular data set on who the LTU/economically inactive are, where they live, what the associated social issues are and what the implications for service delivery (for us and other partners) might be. There may also be an opportunity to re-focus this data and agree our indicators for economic inactivity as part of the work on our stretch goals for the next four year period of the Belfast Agenda
- Given the reasons behind our economic inactivity problem in Belfast, it is likely that there will be a significant focus on health-related economic inactivity. This will require a much better way of working with the Health Trust and other health partners
- There is currently a significant volume of local delivery through community and voluntary organisations, many of whom are delivering European Social Fund (ESF) activity. There is still some lack of clarity regarding the future focus of the Shared Prosperity Fund but it will be important to consider the implications of any reduction in local delivery
- The Department's proposal is that the delivery model will involve a mix of statutory and community/voluntary based provision. However the critical element will be to consider how it can be outcomes-based (i.e. progressing in training/towards or into employment) while focusing on what is right for the individual. Given the range of organisations that are likely to be involved in delivery of this service, there are likely to be some challenges in getting this right.

Proposed approach

- 3.8 Based on our recent engagement with DfC – and taking account of the pressing nature of the unemployment challenge – officers consider that the best way forward on this is to:

- Mobilise the partnership quickly with a focus on the new Work Ready Citizens contract (currently out to market)
- Engage with DfC and QUB on the underpinning labour market intelligence (LMI) that will drive the work of the partners, particularly the linkages between employment/unemployment and deprivation as well as barriers to accessing a job (e.g. childcare, skills). Develop rich sources of intelligence that will drive delivery and focus resources
- Engage the key anchor institutions to understand likely demand (particularly Belfast Trust and Belfast Harbour) and to develop targeted interventions, focusing particularly on LTU/economically inactive
- Explore how council interventions can add value to the DfC offer – particularly the Employment Academies model which is extending into new areas (including transport and logistics) and exploring emerging areas of work (including sustainable construction and technology)
- Co-design interventions that can help move people back into work as quickly as possible – this will be particularly important for the ‘new unemployed’
- Review the progress of specific interventions regularly to understand what is working and to share insights with partners.

3.9 In addition to the Local Labour Market Partnerships, the Department for the Economy (DfE) is currently exploring the potential of establishing ‘local skills forums’, as part of their new skills strategy. This is set to go to consultation in early 2021, with implementation planned from Autumn 2021. There are clearly synergies between employability and skills. However we are aware that DfE is further behind DfC on progressing their local governance approaches and, for that reason, officers are proposing to move forward with the employability approaches for now and consider how these can be brought together down the line – once we have had a chance to demonstrate the value of local approaches.

3.10 In our engagement with DfC, we have underlined how this work is wholly consistent with the Community Planning approach and is a good example of developing a partnership approach to address an entrenched challenge that requires input across a range of organisations. As part of the work to look at the existing Community Planning structures, we have

been working closely with the Strategic Hub to consider how Employability NI can align to any proposed revision of the Community Planning Partnership and the respective Boards. The Deputy Secretary from DfC presented an update on Employability NI at the 27 October meeting of the Community Planning Partnership.

Financial and resource implications

- 3.11 No specific additional financial contribution required from council at this point. It is expected that we will make available our initiatives such as Employment Academies as part of the solution to create employment opportunities in key sectors.
- 3.12 DfC have indicated that they will be willing to consider resource support for the management and administration of the partnerships. Details of support available are currently being finalised. In the interim, we are working to refocus existing staff resources to support this important programme of delivery, pending a wider review of resources.

Equality implications/rural needs assessment

- 3.13 One of the key advantages of this approach is that it will enable us to target resources on specific groups, including those with particular access issues and barriers that currently prevent them from accessing training and employment opportunities.
- 3.14 DfC proposes to establish Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships in all council areas in the course of the coming financial year.”

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development explained further the design stages of the initiative and highlighted that the details of setting targets for performance were still being considered. He pointed out that further updates would be brought back to the Committee in due course.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Market Licence Requests

The Committee was reminded that anyone wishing to operate a market or car boot sale within Belfast must apply to Belfast City Council for permission to do so and, depending on the scale and nature of the event, it might need authorisation from the Committee to take place.

The Director of Economic Development advised that applications of this scale had recently been received on behalf of three proposed markets, namely:

- Weekly (Saturday morning) car boot sale in Makro car park, Kingsway, Dunmurry;
- Monthly food and produce market in CS Lewis Square; and
- Trade Local market in the run-up to Christmas at 'We are Vertigo' building, Queen's Road, Titanic Quarter.

However, since the report had been published, the application for a licence from Trade Local market at the 'We are Vertigo' building had been withdrawn.

He explained that, in keeping with the current NI Executive regulations, external markets were currently permitted to operate, subject to appropriate risk assessments being in place. As part of the approval process for any market, as a condition of granting a licence, officers requested evidence of support from the land owner, considered the implications on adjacent properties and activities and ensured compliance with all relevant regulations and statutory requirements. For these markets, this would include consideration of guidelines and additional restrictions in place as a result of COVID-19.

He reported that the Weekly car boot sale, at Makro Car Park, Dunmurry was proposing to start at 8am each Saturday and be off site for 13.45pm. Officers had already received confirmation from the car park owners of their permission for the event to take place. At this stage, the event organisers were working on the basis of having around 50 spaces at the event, potentially attracting up to 100 cars as the market developed.

In relation to the monthly food and local produce market, CS Lewis Square, he advised that, as part of their proposals to animate Connswater Community Greenway and CS Lewis Square, Eastside Partnership was proposing to organise a monthly market featuring local food and produce. Indicative operating hours were 2pm-5pm (original request was 1pm to 5pm but officers considered that the earlier start could have a negative impact on St George's Market). Organisers had proposed the first market for Saturday, 21st November, with the next being a two day market proposed for Saturday, 12th and Sunday, 13th December. Organisers were currently working on the basis of attracting 30-40 traders at each monthly market.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development answered Members' questions in relation to the application process and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Agreed to grant the licence for the running of a weekly (Saturday) car boot sale within the grounds of the Makro car park in Dunmurry, subject to compliance with all relevant legal and statutory requirements;
- Agreed to grant a licence to EastSide Greenways for the running of a monthly market in C.S. Lewis Square, subject to compliance with all relevant legal and statutory requirements, and due to the time-frame of the proposed market, agreed, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (2) (b), that the decision would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that the decision was deemed to be a case of special urgency; and

- Noted that, since the report had been published, the application for a licence from Trade Local market at the 'We are Vertigo' building had been withdrawn.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Car Clubs

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 Following discussion at the Planning Committee of the 13th October 2020 a request was raised to bring forward an update on the development and current active use of car clubs to be brought to the November City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:-

- 1) Note the current position regarding the provision of Car Clubs in Belfast when compared with the rest of the UK and Ireland;**
- 2) Note the statistics from established Car Club areas across the UK and Ireland; and**
- 3) Note the role of the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and Local Development Plan in effecting modal shift and demand management within the city**

3.0 Main Report

Background & Current position

3.1 A Car Club is a membership based service that provides members with convenient and affordable access to vehicles 24/7/365. A member of a Car Club can:

- **Book a car online or on the phone, weeks ahead or with just a few minutes' notice;**
- **Unlock a car in their neighbourhood, parked in a designated parking bay; and**
- **Pay automatically from their account. Costs typically range from £4 to £8 per hour, (including fuel, insurance and maintenance) whilst mileage fees start at £0.15/ mile.**

The annual membership for Belfast's *Enterprise CarClub* is currently £20.

- 3.2 Car clubs in Northern Ireland are fewer and less well established than in other parts of the UK and Ireland. *Enterprise CarClub* is currently the only operator offering a Car Club service in Belfast. In contrast, cities like Bristol and Brighton, which have a well-established and vibrant city centre residential presence, also have embedded Car Club provision after successful campaigns to change parking attitudes & behaviours. Both the Belfast Agenda and Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) aim to accelerate city centre living through the reimagined and resurgent transformation of underutilised prime city centre land. The Bolder Vision for Belfast, a jointly commissioned DfI, DfC and BCC report outlines the key principles for connectivity within the city including prioritising integrated walking, cycling and public transport and end the dominance of the car.
- 3.3 A number of Build to Rent and mixed-use schemes have received planning approval with zero parking requirement, that being contingent upon a Green Travel Plan which include requirement for provision of Car Club spaces and subsidised membership for future occupiers, as set out in their respective S76 Planning Agreement. However, these schemes have not been constructed to date, and thus there is limited intelligence available to gauge the success of Car Clubs in Belfast. However there are a number of data sets available based on established Car Club initiatives across the UK and Ireland.
- 3.4 It is anticipated that once the permitted schemes are constructed, and occupied, the presence of and demand for Car Clubs within Belfast will expand considerably – matched by the City Centre living, which is clearly a key objective for the City Council through the Belfast Agenda, emerging Local Development Plan and the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy.

Research & Intelligence

- 3.5 CoMoUK (Collaborative Mobility UK) has 20 years' experience of research and development in the shared transport sector. The charity organisation provides information about Car Clubs around the UK and supports the development of Car Clubs. CoMoUK publishes annual data

on car clubs operating in England, Scotland and Wales. Their datasets show that the car sharing sector has grown consistently since its inception and a number of other key findings in Scotland for 2019/20 include:

- **Membership:**
 - Car club membership in Scotland in 2020 increased by 27% compared with 2019 membership figure.
 - The number of individual, private members has increased by 11%.
 - The number of corporate members has increased by 54%.
 - 50% of all car club members are aged between 25 - 44.
- 48% of car club cars are either electric or hybrid vehicles
- 98% of car club cars are low emission zone compliant
- Since joining a car club:
 - 16% of members walk more
 - 10% Cycle more
 - 26% have reduced their private car use
- 6,700 private cars have been disposed of

3.6 The CoMoUK 2017/18 annual survey for England and Wales produced these key findings:

- **Reduced private car ownership and usage**
 - Members disposed of 4,747 vehicles since joining a car club, using the 783 available car club vehicles provided by the three operators.
 - Long term members decreased their annual household mileage by 793 miles.
 - 8.4 years old was the average age of vehicles disposed of in the last year by members.
 - 6.1 private cars are displaced by each car club car
- **Enhanced modal shift**
 - 68% of members use another shared mobility service other than a car club.
 - After joining a car club, members completed 3,832 more walking and cycling trips.

- Increased usage of environmentally friendly cars
 - 36% of the car club fleet is either hybrid or electric
 - 43% less carbon from tailpipe emissions compared to the average UK car
- Improved car safety
 - 86% of the car club fleet has achieved the NCAP 4 or 5 Star safety standard.

Key Considerations

3.7 Modal Shift & Demand Management

The current Belfast roads infrastructure is at capacity, with a further 19% predicted increase in car journeys by 2030 based on current usage patterns. There is a recognition that modal shift and demand management will be essential to keep the city 'flowing' while addressing the issues of air pollution and the climate emergency. Effecting this change will require a suite of interventions, solutions and behavioural change. A number of policy and strategy documents have identified measures to bring this forward although further work and action is required including an updated Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and implementation of planning control through the Local Development Plan.

3.8 The Belfast *Car Parking Strategy and Action Plan 2019* identifies the level of car parking provision as 'a key demand management tool'. The strategy states that the availability of car parking provision should be sufficiently restrained so as not to undermine sustainable and active travel options, while simultaneously limiting traffic levels and traffic congestion.

3.9 The strategy also discusses the impact of car parking provision on city centre vitality and viability. It notes that the continued over-allocation of car parking in the city centre is likely to encourage less sustainable travel modes. The number of spaces provided overall in Belfast is considered to be high compared to other cities of similar size, however the provision is fragmented and imbalanced across the city centre.

3.10 The *Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (2015)* includes a suite of Management Measures to counter issues like over allocation of surface car parking. The measures are designed to rationalise and consolidate parking provision in the city

centre to complement other traffic management measures and support economic vitality. The plan proposed imposing maximum parking standards to developments that restrict the number of Private Non-Residential (PNR) spaces that can be provided. It also proposed restricting the number of parking spaces provided at new residential developments by imposing maximum parking standards.

3.11 Section 76 (S76) Planning Agreement

The concept of Car Clubs as a prerequisite for planning permission is still in its infancy in Belfast. The practice is much more established in planning authorities in the UK and Ireland where Car Clubs have been secured through the planning process for several years. Car Clubs are one of a number of options that a prospective developer may use to mitigate a reduction in the usual parking standards for a site. In Belfast, the Council's Planning Service has been open to reduced parking levels, particularly in sustainable locations. It is one of a number of viable alternatives to the private car in the city centre that offer inherently more environmentally sustainable solutions. However, this is subject to mitigation through 'green travel measures' such as requiring developers to provide subsidised travel cards to residents or to make provision for a Car Club.

3.12 The S76 agreement is the vehicle that Planning uses to secure Car Clubs (as well as other planning obligations). It places a legal obligation on the developer (landowner) and successors in title to provide the Car Club or agreed form of sustainable mitigation measure. The S76 agreement provides a legally binding document which provides the specific mitigation measure to be incorporated by the developer. In relation to Car Clubs this can include the requirement for a 'Car Club Strategy' which would include the number of Car Club permanent parking spaces, incentives for use and the developers obligations to subsidise and promote the Car Club to residents. This strategy is approved by the BCC Planning Service in collaboration with the Department for Infrastructure.

3.13 Finance and Resource Implications

There are no finance or resource implications associated with this report.

3.14 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

Equality or Goods Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment were not considered for this report however will need to be addressed for future Car Club provision applications, or related policy or strategy documents."

Proposal

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

Resolved - That the Committee agrees that the Council explore buying into a car club scheme for staff in carrying out their duties, and engage with other public sector bodies to encourage the utilisation of car clubs or similar to minimise the requirement for public sector car parks that could be better utilised for other opportunities aligned with the Belfast Agenda and the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the current position regarding the provision of Car Clubs in Belfast when compared with the rest of the UK and Ireland;
- Noted the statistics from established Car Club areas across the UK and Ireland;
- Noted the role of the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and Local Development Plan in effecting modal shift and demand management within the city; and
- Agreed that the Council explore buying into a car club scheme for staff in carrying out their duties, and engage with other public sector bodies to encourage the utilisation of car clubs or similar to minimise the requirement for public sector car parks that could be better utilised for other opportunities aligned with the Belfast Agenda and the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Investment Strategy.

Ministerial response to Public Realm at Shankill Gateway and Frederick Street

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in August, it had agreed to issue a letter to the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Infrastructure outlining the Committee's concerns regarding the enhancement of junctions and improving walking and cycling connectivity as part of the Shankill Gateway Public Realm Scheme, which was being progressed by the Department for Communities (DfC).

The Director of City Regeneration and Development explained that the original designs which had been submitted for planning approval, following extensive community and statutory engagement, had included alterations to the junction by removing unnecessary road infrastructure and removing additional pedestrian crossing locations while increasing pavement space and introducing additional green landscaping. However, the design were superseded immediately prior to the granting of planning approval and without wider consultation, with a design that maintained the layout of the current junction.

She advised that the letter to the Minister raised concerns that this change did not address the issues presented by the hard infrastructure layout of the inner ring. It further highlighted that the approved design did not take into account the collective Council, DfI and DfC 'Bolder Vision for Belfast' which provided for prioritisation of integrated walking, cycling and public transport and the need to address severance and barriers to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities.

The letter to the Minister had advised that, whilst Council was supportive of the investment to enhance this location, it was felt there was an opportunity to bring greater benefit than the current scheme design proposes, particularly in terms of safe pedestrian and cycle movements, and reducing severance through this key junction.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an overview of the response from the Belfast Regeneration Directorate on behalf of the Minister for Communities (copy available at [Appendix 1](#)).

She highlighted that DfC had commenced to discharge some of the planning conditions associated with the planning condition for the scheme (under planning application LA04/2019/0200/F). She also explained that, following on from the launch of the Bolder Vision for Belfast, a jointly commissioned and endorsed report by the Council, DfC and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI), Council officers were engaging with officials from both Departments through a Junctions Working Group to bring forward and accelerate the delivery of improved connections at the Inner Ring Junctions under the agreed principles of the Bolder Vision.

She advised that, through this group, and with regard to the current proposals for the Shankill Gateway Public Realm Environment Improvement scheme, there remained concerns that the opportunity to address this junction during a current capital works scheme would be missed, and that it was unclear as to when, or how the junction improvement works would be delivered.

She highlighted that, since the report had been published, a response from the Minister for Infrastructure had also been received which advised that whilst the scheme initially included a new layout to improve pedestrianisation, cycling and public transport facilities, this required more detailed consideration of the consequential impact on the road network. Therefore, in order not to delay the planning approval, the planning application only included the current junction layout. However, the Minister advised that her officials were continuing to consider alternative junction layouts in conjunction with DfC and the Council with a view to making future improvements to this junction.

During discussion, the Senior Development Manager provided illustrations of the changes to the proposed Shankill Gateway Public Realm Environment Improvement scheme.

Proposal

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

That the Committee agrees to respond in writing to both the Department for Infrastructure and Department for Communities and reiterate concerns around this major junction scheme progressing without provision for pedestrian and cycling priority, as previously envisaged within the scheme designs that were subject to public consultation'.

Following a vote, thirteen Members voted for the amendment and five against and it was declared carried.

After discussion, the Committee:

- 1) Noted the response from the Minister for the Department for Communities at Appendix 1 and the additional response which had been received from the Minister for the Department for Infrastructure, since the report had been published;
- 2) In relation to the Shankill Gateway Public Realm Environment Improvement Scheme, agreed to respond in writing to both the Department for Infrastructure and Department for Communities and reiterate concerns around this major junction scheme progressing without provision for pedestrian and cycling priority, as previously envisaged within the scheme designs that were subject to public consultation. The Committee noted that the correspondence should highlight that the alternative scheme proposals provided the opportunity to promote active travel, help lessen the impact of the inner ring road on connections to communities, and aligned with the principles of the agreed Bolder Vision Connectivity Study. The Committee also expressed concerns that the opportunity to make impactful change would be missed if it was not realised now;
- 3) Noted that the Frederick St/Great Patrick St catalyst junction improvement scheme was currently on hold pending the outcome of the York Street Interchange Review but highlighted the need to progress with this scheme as soon as possible; and
- 4) Noted that the Department for Infrastructure would be attending the Special Meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 24th November.

Ministerial Advisory Panel: NI Infrastructure Commission

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy provided an update on the findings of the Department for Infrastructure's Ministerial call for evidence in relation to a potential Infrastructure Commission for Northern Ireland.

He reminded the Committee that, in September 2020, the Minister for Infrastructure undertook a Call for Evidence to establish the need and support for, and role of, a potential Infrastructure Commission for Northern Ireland. As reported to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in September, due to the timescales involved, Council officers had provided a draft response to the Call for Evidence, subject to Committee and Council approval. He stated that the Belfast Commissioner for Resilience, Grainia Long; the Belfast Digital Innovation Commissioner, Jayne Brady; and Solace, (represented by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's Chief Executive) had also provided evidence to the panel on 7th September.

He advised that the Council response to the call for evidence was attached at [Appendix A](#), and, following stakeholder and consultee engagement, a report had now been published capturing the findings of the Ministerial Advisory panel ([Appendix B](#)).

The Committee noted:

- That the Ministerial Advisory panel had recommended that an Infrastructure Commission, with a clear remit and the support of the entire Northern Ireland Executive, should be established as soon as practical; and
- The further findings of the Ministerial Advisory panel regarding the role and remit of an Infrastructure Commission for Northern Ireland, as set out in the Ministerial Advisory Panel Report.

Ministerial Response to East Belfast Depot

The Committee was reminded that on 4th March it had considered the findings of the East Belfast Depot report which undertook a site search process to identify suitable locations for a potential relocation of the East Belfast Depot.

The site search process identified a number of potential sites, however, all of them had been discounted on the basis that they did not meet the operational requirements of the public transport network. Specifically a number of identified potential sites were located further from the primary transportation corridors that the depot served, and would perform worse than the existing depot, in terms of the key commercial consideration of minimising 'dead mileage'.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that, at its meeting on 4th March, the Committee had granted approval for a letter to be issued to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that the findings of the site search and the operational requirements of Translink be given further consideration in the context of the impact of the current depot location on neighbouring residential amenity.

She highlighted that, in response, the Minister had confirmed receipt of the site search report and had advised that she would respond to the findings set out in the report in due course.

During discussion, in response to a Member highlighting the time taken to issue correspondence to Ministers, it was acknowledged that there had been some delay due to other pressures but the Committee was assured that the correspondence would be followed up on.

After discussion, the Committee noted the response from the Minister for Infrastructure ([Appendix 1](#)) in relation to the East Belfast Depot Site report previously undertaken by the Council.

Chairperson