

# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 9th December, 2020

## REMOTE MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

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

Also attended: Councillor Kyle.

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;  
Ms. E. Henry, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism; and  
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

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

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings of 11th and 24th November were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st December, subject to the following amendments of the minutes:

- Under the heading 'NI High Street Taskforce and Future City Centre Programme' to provide that the All-Party Forum, convened following its special meeting held on 2nd August, 2019, to secure the continued operation of the Harland and Wolff Shipyard, be reconvened to engage with local stakeholders, retail units and Trade Unions in order to inform the NI High Street Task Force that had been proposed by the Northern Ireland Executive; and
- Under the heading 'Department for Infrastructure Roads - Autumn Report' to provide that the Council write to the Department for Infrastructure to ask for clarity on its position on increasing sustainable transport in Belfast.

### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor T. Kelly declared an interest in relation to item 2.a) Finance Update, in that a family member was on the Board of the community group of Coffee Culture.

### **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.

The Committee noted the contents of the report which had been presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in November.

### **Update on City Events Programme 2021/2022**

The Committee was informed of the proposed approach to delivering events in the remainder of the current financial year and the proposed programme of events for 2021/22, which would be delivered and/or supported by the Council's City Events Unit, together with options for how best to safely deliver events in the context of ongoing COVID-19 and inclusive of budget implications. This included the option for a phased approach to spring events in the form of a City Centre Animation Programme and Creative Installation Programme, with St Patrick's Day festivities spread out over a 4-day period.

During discussion, Members highlighted the requirement for partnership working from the UEFA.

During further discussion, the Director of Economic Development confirmed that, in relation to St. Patrick's Day, outdoor events had been scheduled across the city, including the use of Parks. He highlighted that plans were flexible to redesign and schedule.

In relation to the use of plastic cups at the Belfast Marathon, the Director advised that he would liaise with the organisers on the issue.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the proposed approach to St Patrick's Day in 2021 and agreed to option 2, as outlined in the report;
- Agreed to the annual programme of Events for 2021/2022 as set out in appendix 1, subject to final approval of departmental budgets;

- Noted the update on the Belfast Titanic Maritime 5 year Strategy and agreed to option 2 as the preferred option for 2021; and
- Noted the update on the UEFA Super Cup (August 2021) and agreed to the use of the City Hall for the provision of a dinner.

### **Housing Led Regeneration Update**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an update on the progress of the housing led regeneration work which had been undertaken, which included information on the strategic sites assessment work.

During discussion, the Director of City Regeneration and Development explained further the process, next steps and the resources that had been put in place to continue the work on strategic site assessments, including a city wide approach. She advised that further information would be provided as the work progressed.

In response to a Members question in relation to the Development Brief process for the Inner North West (Northern Cluster) sites, the Director of City Regeneration and Development highlighted that the lands were in the ownership of both the Council and the Department for Communities and the evaluation would be undertaken by Council officers and officials from the Department for Communities and the recommendation would be brought back to the Committee for information, as well as via the Department for Communities governance process.

The Committee noted the contents of the report, in particular:

- 1) The updates in respect of the ongoing housing led regeneration work, including the strategic site assessments;
- 2) The proposals for a City Centre Living Vision document for existing and future residents as set out in the report; and
- 3) Housing had been identified as a key priority by the Community Planning Partnership, as well as in the Council's Recovery Framework in the context of working with partners to bring forward strategic development opportunities. And to further note that the Belfast Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission had highlighted house building as being a critical lever for driving inclusive economic growth.

The Committee also noted that, in relation to the Development Brief process for the Inner North West (Northern Cluster), the evaluation would be undertaken by officers from Belfast City Council and officials from the Department for Communities. The recommendation would be brought back to Committee for information, as well as via the Department for Communities governance process.

### Presentation

#### Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) - Housing Programme and City Centre Waiting List

The Chairperson introduced Ms. F. McGrath, Head of Place Shaping, Belfast Region, and Ms. J. Hawthorne, Regional Manager, Belfast Region, to the Committee and they were admitted to the meeting.

Ms. McGrath provided a presentation to update the Committee on the City Centre Latent Demand Waiting List. She advised that this indicated that there was a high demand for social housing and highlighted the pending development opportunities within the City Centre. Ms. McGrath then provided an update in relation to the existing Common Landlord Areas (CLAs).

She highlighted that, as of March 2020, the Belfast Waiting list was 10,819, with 8,413 of the applicants in housing stress. She informed the Committee that, in relation to the Current Social Housing Programme: 175 homes had been completed since March 20 and 962 homes were currently on site.

She explained the drivers for change and how they linked with Council objectives such as the Belfast Agenda's growth in population target and the Council's Local Development Plan ambition of 20% affordable housing. She highlighted the potential of continuing to work with the wider public sector, including Belfast City Council, to identify public sector land opportunities. She advised that the NIHE post Covid-19 recovery would focus on housing opportunities to include City Centre living, also incorporating apartment living as part of mixed use and mixed tenure schemes.

She provided information on existing CLA's and the City Centre Latent Demand Test and highlighted that, in March, all applicants and transfers had been written to, in order to ascertain expressions of interest in city centre living. An update was provided in relation to the level of interest received. Ms. McGrath highlighted that the city centre latent demand list would not replace an option for housing in other areas, rather be an additional option. She explained that applicants could continue to register an interest in City Centre Living and they would be written to again as developments come forward.

In relation to the City Centre Schemes, she reminded the Committee that major new developments were proposed including Sirocco/Waterside, Tribeca and Council/DfC lands.

Ms. McGrath summarised the Shared Future 'Housing for All' work which had been undertaken by the NIHE, which included a five Year Good Relations Plan and Good Neighbour Agreements. She pointed out that allocations were still assigned to those applicants with the highest points.

She advised that a list showing the current social housing programme had also been issued to the Committee for information.

Ms. J. Hawthorne provided an overview of the repairs and maintenance that had been undertaken in Belfast.

She advised that repairs on NIHE properties had continued throughout the Pandemic and they had received 10% less calls for response maintenance repairs. She informed the Committee that there was a backlog in relation to change in tenancy repairs and explained that supply issues had added to the delays, however, she pointed out that contractors had now been asked to do additional work.

In regards to planned maintenance, she explained that the work plan had been suspended from March and resumed in August which included plans for 1500 bathrooms/kitchen replacements in Belfast, 1500 properties to be double glazed and the NIHE intended to deliver the work by the end of the financial year.

During discussion, Members highlighted the importance of Shared Space Housing and objective need. Ms. Hawthorne explained that objective need was enshrined in the Statutory Housing Selection Scheme, in that the NIHE was committed to allocate all housing on the basis of need.

In response to a Members question regarding the recent Housing Statement by the Minister for Communities, in relation to building more social homes, Ms. McGrath advised that the NIHE was keen to start building again and it would also still work closely with Housing Associations to provide for such a programme.

The representative's answered a range of questions in relation to housing demand, quota guidelines, city centre living, green space, timeframe for repair back log and damp issues, retrofit of existing stock, carbon efficiencies, rent prices in the city centre, space standard and apartment living, land availability, support of sustainable transport.

In regard to the changes to the housing selection scheme and its review, Ms. Hawthorne advised that an announcement by the Department for Communities was imminent.

One Member questioned what percentage of the Latent Demand Waiting List were Wheelchair needs groups, Ms McGrath advised that she would respond with figures in due course. Ms. Hawthorne provided further information on the work of the Complex Needs Officer who dealt with the welfare adaptation requirements for individual households.

The Committee noted the contents of the presentation by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive with regard to the establishment of a new City Centre Waiting List, together with an update on their Housing Programme and their repairs backlog and retrofit programme and that, where relevant, the NIHE would provide further information on the issues raised.

## **Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure**

### **Future City Centre Programme - Lighting Strategy**

The Committee was reminded that the Future City Centre (FCC) Programme had been developed in line with the Belfast Agenda, the Local Development Plan, the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the Cultural Strategy (A City Imagining), and had been informed by the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS).

The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that the Programme was continuing to evolve in the context of COVID-19 and given the range of challenges facing the city centre.

She reminded the Committee that it had approved the Future City Centre Programme in February 2019, which included the 'Luminous city – A Lighting Strategy for Belfast', which had been presented to the Committee in September, with approval granted to proceed with public consultation via the Council's online engagement platform Citizen Space for a 6 week period over October and November. She reported that officers had also engaged with key Section 75 groups through the Council's Equality and Diversity Team.

It was reported that the public consultation closed on 23rd November and final amendments had been incorporated into the final document (Appendix A). In terms of delivery, lighting interventions were embedded across a range of projects currently being developed, with the strategy document informing and guiding these.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that projects were also emerging through the DfC-funded Revitalisation Programme which incorporated lighting features at Castle Place, Adelaide Street, Brunswick Street, James Street South, Union Street and Exchange Place. Entries Phase 2 would also incorporate innovative approaches to lighting, for which designs were in development.

She pointed out that work was also ongoing to bring forward stand-alone lighting projects in 2021-22 and beyond and officers would continue to profile the strategy to stakeholders as a key document to consult when designing and delivering any and all types of lighting across Belfast.

The Committee noted the progress of 'Luminous City: A Lighting Strategy' for Belfast and approved the final document as outlined at [Appendix A](#).

### **Future of the City - Proposed Members Workshop**

It was reported that the Covid-19 pandemic had opened up a debate around urbanisation and the future path cities would take. It was recognised, however, that how cities performed going forward would be critical, particularly in terms of responding to the current Covid crisis and the associated economic, social and environmental challenges. Recent research had highlighted that the coming years were likely to see significant disruption to cities and that there was a need for cities to consider now how they became 'future fit'.

The Committee was reminded that there were a number of priority areas of focus for the Council, as set out in the Council's Recovery Framework, including, for example, the City Deal, the Future City Centre Programme, Housing Led Regeneration, Resilience, Digital and Innovation, Connectivity and Active Travel, Economic Led Programmes.

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy suggested that a workshop be held with Party Group Leaders and Members of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, on the Future of the City and the priority areas of focus, including the role that Council and other partners could play.

He also advised, at the request of Councillor Heading, the Council, at its meeting in December, had agreed that an All-Party Forum on City Centre be convened. It was proposed that the forum consisted of representatives of each party through nominations from party group leaders, Trade Union officials, relevant business representative organisations and relevant departmental representation.

The Committee:

- agreed that a workshop be held for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and Party Group Leaders to consider the Future of the City in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated social, economic and environmental challenges, and noted that further details of the proposed workshop would follow; and
- noted the composition of a Retail Forum, following the request of Councillor Heading and agreed by Council on Tuesday, 2nd December, to establish an All-Party Forum on City Centre Retail.

### **Growing Business and the Economy**

#### **Tourism Update - 10 Year Plan**

The Committee considered the following report:

##### **“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

- 1.1 At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in August 2020, it was agreed that a ten year tourism plan for Belfast would be developed. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the current status of the plan and direction of travel in advance of a full draft being presented in March 2020 for consideration and subsequent public consultation.**

2.0 **Recommendations**

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and agree the current direction of travel for the emerging ten year tourism plan.

3.0 **Main report**

3.1 Members will be aware that at a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in August 2020 it was agreed that a new ten year tourism plan was to be developed. The purpose of this plan is to:

- Deliver on the tourism priorities set out in the *Belfast Agenda* recognising the importance of tourism to *Growing the economy* and *City Development*.
- Align to the ten-year cultural strategy, *A City Imagining*, in order to ensure that tourism development supports cultural development and is based upon an authentic and sustainable Belfast offer.
- Support economic and social recovery in the context of COVID-19 including stabilisation, recovery and growth with the opportunity to build back better.
- Provide strategic context to the Belfast Region City Deal that sets out wider city priorities to ensure Belfast's appeal internationally and ability to attract out of state visitors.

3.2 **Tourism Growth Pre Covid-19**

In August 2019 Belfast City Council agreed a new ten year cultural strategy, *A City Imagining 2020-2030*, to drive transformation in the city. For the first time, the scope of this strategy brought together under one compelling vision a number of areas including tourism, culture, heritage, arts, events and festivals.

3.3 *A City Imagining* acknowledges that whilst Belfast has enjoyed relative growth in tourism over recent years that in turn has supported regional development, it is necessary to continue to support sustainable tourism development and job creation. Belfast's first community plan, the *Belfast Agenda*, also articulates the importance of delivering a culturally vibrant city both for residents and visitors as well as acting as an attractive driver for inward investment. It is anticipated that citywide investment in a culturally vibrant place will support changing perspectives of Belfast as a place to visit, live, work and invest. In order to continue to build on the value of out-of-state tourism and welcome

more overnight stays in our visitor accommodation it is essential that we collaborate with our tourism sector to evolve, broaden, deepen and expand the tourism offer currently available in Belfast.

3.4 Despite significant growth and the success of flagship projects such as Titanic Belfast there is still a gap in scale and maturity of the local industry when compared with other regions. Notably, Northern Ireland lags behind UK regions and Republic of Ireland with respect to tourism as a driver for job growth. However the positive trajectory in place before Covid-19 had identified tourism growth as both feasible and a necessary part of inclusive economic growth. The challenge of any tourism development plan will be to create a sustainable model that continues to support the growth that is essential for city success and the creation of jobs.

3.5 Belfast tourism and hospitality sectors directly supports 19,300 jobs, one third of the sector in Northern Ireland. Key tourism sectors such as Accommodation & Food Services, Arts, Entertainment & Recreation and Transportation will be impacted by COVID-19 however if Belfast's recovery from the pandemic is managed then the growth potential remains high. The hospitality sector is an employment-intensive one, supporting a disproportionate number of jobs compared with the average sectoral GVA: jobs ratio. Between 2013 and 2019 employment in Accommodation and Food Services in Belfast increased by 18.2 percent, compared with 8.5 percent growth in the city's total employment.

3.6 It was in this context that Tourism NI set the ambitious target of doubling the value of the tourism industry to £2 billion by 2030. A key element of this opportunity further reinforced by ambitions of the Belfast Region City Deal was getting a bigger share of the international visitors coming to the island of Ireland to travel to Belfast and the Belfast region.

3.7 Impact of Covid-19

While the full impact of Covid-19 is as yet unknown what is clear is that recovery will require new and innovative approaches in an increasingly competitive market. As the regional driver, Belfast will be hugely significant to this growth ambition, both in terms of visitor spend and the creation of new jobs. It is therefore imperative that our city break destination is developed in a strategic way which

maximises the economic benefits which can be derived from tourism for local industries, businesses and communities, as well as increasing visitor numbers and spend and improving overall satisfaction levels.

3.8 In advance of the development of the tourism plan, Ernest and Young were commissioned to assess the potential impact of COVID-19 on the city. The report recognises Belfast's role in regional tourism:

- Belfast is an important attractor for international, high value tourists to the region.
- Belfast's share of out of state tourism spend has been significantly higher than the NI-wide share (83% v 72%).
- Spending by tourists in Belfast has outpaced the NI average, growing by 20% year on year compared to 4.5% regionally.
- Belfast has grown at a faster rate than the rest of NI mainly because of its attractiveness in two high value markets – city breaks and business tourism.

3.9 The report also sets out a number of scenarios depending on the length of the pandemic and recovery trajectory. The most protracted scenario estimates that job losses could be as significant as 5,500 in 2020 and continuing into 2021, 2022 and beyond. From this report there are a number of short term actions aligned to Tourism NI's work, including more effective reach into all-island and GB markets and the need for a more flexible approach to supporting tourism businesses through the crisis. However below is set out a series of recommendations specific to Belfast and need for stabilisation, recovery and longer-term growth.

3.10 Develop tourism supply in Belfast to foster a sustainable economic model creating jobs and improving local quality of life

1. Bring forward renovations or upgrading of tourism facilities during quiet time to support the economy and improve the quality of the tourism offer in Belfast.
2. Pursue planned City Deal investments following a dynamic model based on regularly updated visitor numbers and visitor behaviours.
3. Focus on the development of resilient tourism attractions (e.g. mix of outdoor and indoor spaces, online content, attractive to locals) and mitigate the impacts for the most impacted sectors (e.g. business tourism).

4. Launch a wide consultation with key stakeholders and locals regarding the role tourism should play in a city like Belfast (e.g. urban regeneration, housing, sustainability, jobs, social inclusion, international attractiveness).
5. Identify ways for Belfast or specific attractions within the City to be distinguished internationally (e.g. awards, UNESCO, travel guides).

### 3.11 Developing a ten-year plan

The emerging ten-year tourism plan has taken into consideration these initial recommendations alongside the existing commitments outlined in the Cultural Strategy that identified the four areas where Council could make the most difference:

- Increasing the coherency of the Belfast experience
- Supporting quality authentic product
- Developing skills
- Improving how the city is marketed

### 3.12 The approach

The past two decades have given rise to a number of trends within tourism development. This has included the popularity of approaches such as cultural tourism, green tourism or local tourism. What each of these approaches and associated models have in common is an increasing awareness that sustainable forms of tourism must respect the local context and support the economic, social, environmental and cultural values of a place.

3.13 This ultimately leads to a more circular model. In the context of Belfast, even before COVID-19, this is a complex proposition. The city requires further growth with a clear international agenda and need to continue to attract and grow out of state visitors. The new 10 year tourism plan seeks to set out how this growth can be achieved in a sustainable and inclusive way recognising that the city's greatest asset is its people.

3.14 The plan will set out a shared vision for tourism in the city and will be supported by 4 strategic themes and a number of catalyst projects. The draft strategic themes are:

- **Grow Belfast**
- **Experience Belfast**
- **Position Belfast**
- **Sustainable Belfast**

**3.15** Each theme is supported by an evidence based body of work and research.

**3.16** *Strategic theme 1: Grow Belfast*

This theme will focus on the role of tourism in city recovery including the need for stabilisation of the tourism sector and the requirement for further growth in Belfast. This will include:

- **Strategic context and evidence based proposition that Belfast acts as a catalyst for the region.**
- **Measurement of the attractiveness of the city as a destination and how this plays a key role in maximising the economic impact of each visitor by increasing average length of stay and daily spending levels.**
- **Priority areas for investment e.g. catalyst projects.**
- **Broadening of economic measures to include areas such as brand value.**
- **Introducing social, cultural and environmental measures to better understand and advocate for the true value of responsible tourism growth.**
- **Clear advocacy position on key challenges e.g. air access or visitor levy.**

**3.17** *Strategic theme 2: Experience Belfast*

- **Included within the ten year plan will be an interpretive development framework for tourism in Belfast that will:**
- **include experiences that can be brought to life through the development of an optimal mix of ‘anchor’ and ancillary products that get people into an area and keep them there**
- **focus on encouraging international visitors to immerse themselves actively in the locale, interacting with people, engaging the senses and learning the history and stories of the places.**
- **be about delivering immersive moments that inspire tourists not only to share their experience with others but also make them want to return to the city.**

**3.18 How we will do this?**

- Complete a mapping exercise which maps our existing tourism assets against the city's 'Belfast brand' and Tourism NI 'Embrace the Giant Spirit' brand.
- Assessment of quality, market fit and sustainability of existing products.
- Develop a combination of thematic and geographical clustering.
- A gap analysis of potential experience based products. The gap analysis should review what is missing from the tourism offer generally taking into consideration issues such as seasonality, immersive experiences, events and festival animation, and opportunities to meet local people for instance.

**3.19 *Strategic Theme 3: Position Belfast***

A critical dimension to any tourism development plan is understanding the market and how the brand operates in this space. In order to develop an effective strategy there also needs to be consideration of the brand architecture for the city and the region. The result should be clarity of roles and responsibilities for agencies working in this field including Council's own role and city partners such as Visit Belfast and Tourism NI. The ten year plan will set out a dynamic model for city positioning that can respond to key markets including:

- Business Tourism and sub-sectors within this group.
- Leisure tourism target markets including - geographic considerations and the visitor journey.
- Belfast's position as a gateway destination.

**3.20 This theme will also take forward a new approach that pushes beyond traditional marketing methods towards enabling the people creating the Belfast experience to tell their story. Therefore the approach will be narrative driven and the new plan will set out areas of support on:**

- How do we tell Belfast stories? How do we enable people to tell their Belfast story?
- How do we create an emotional connection with visitors?
- How do we make local stories resonate internationally?

**3.21** This plan will bring forward actions that support an effective way a working outlining how:

- Branding is about relationship. Communications requires dialogue moving away from single direction channels.
- It's no longer about a digital revolution, data is what drives the visitor economy.

**3.22** *Strategic theme 4: Sustain Belfast*

This theme will be driven by recommendations emerging from the benchmarking completed as part of Global Destination Sustainability Index. Members will be aware that Belfast signed up to this benchmarking following Committee approval in August 2020. The Global Destination Sustainability Index is the world's leading benchmarking and performance Index for cities, their events and their visitor economy. Its purpose is to engage, enable and inspire cities to become more sustainable places to visit, meet and thrive in. In addition to benchmarking a city's environmental strategy and social sustainability performance, the GDS-Index assess criteria that are industry specific: industry supplier support (restaurants, hotels, conference centres) and convention bureau strategy and initiatives. Alongside benchmarking it helps destination management organisations, convention bureaus, key industry associations suppliers and clients to develop effective strategies and practices in support of sustainability goals.

**3.23** Since 2019, over 60 cities have started the process of benchmarking and assessment. The goal is to have 300 cities collaborating by 2023. The Index is based on 69 Indicators broken down into four categories:

- City Environmental Performance
- City Social Performance
- Supplier Performance
- Destination Management Performance

**3.24** Belfast has now completed initial benchmarking and a series of recommendations are in draft form and will be included in the 10 year plan. A number of these relate to Visit Belfast's role as the Destination Management Organisation (DMO). In addition to long-term plans, there are, however several short term recommendations that Council should consider including:

**3.25 Council assets**

- Supporting the ICC (as the city's Congress Venue) to achieve accreditation.
- Embed tourism in city emergency planning.

**3.26 Supporting the supply chain**

- Developing a tiered certification strategy for suppliers (this would be in partnership with TNI) and set goals for certification.
- Funding support to help / incentivise suppliers achieve 3<sup>rd</sup> part accreditation
- Food sustainability training for suppliers.
- Provision of tools and templates to help suppliers create and implement their own sustainability policies.

**3.27** All four of these strategic themes will be underpinned by the need to support inclusive economic growth and to differentiate the Belfast offer in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. Therefore a fifth strand to the plan will consider the importance of key strategic opportunities that could bolster investment in the sector in order to support recovery and future growth. These will be catalyst projects or programmes such as:

**3.28 *Cultural Initiatives and Campaigns***

Commitment to long-term initiatives contained in cultural strategy including signature Belfast events, 2023 International Year of Culture and UNESCO City of Music.

**3.29 *Infrastructure***

Delivering the tourism pillar of the Belfast Regional City Deal including Destination Hub focusing on:

- Commitment to inclusive growth, ensuring the economic benefit of the Belfast Destination Hub development is spread across and connected into the rest of the city.
- Commitment to the creation of secure and sustainable employment and skills development.
- Commitment to local engagement and participation to ensure that Belfast residents are actively engaged and supported to access opportunities throughout the development and realisation of the project.

**3.30 *Bringing the Belfast Experience to life***

Delivering a long-term fully integrated visitor experience model for the city that includes:

- Adopting a place-based approach to the development of our neighbourhoods through local tourism framework and investment that supports product development, jobs creation and destination management.

**3.31 Next steps**

A full draft plan will be presented to Committee in March 2021. Subject to approval this plan will then complete a public consultation.

**3.32 Financial & Resource Implications**

There are no new financial implications. The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2020/21 budget for the Culture and Tourism section of the Economic Development division of the Place and Economy Departmental budget in line with existing approvals.

**3.33 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

The cultural strategy, *A City Imagining* has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). The tourism plan will be subject to a further equality screening.”

The Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism, provided a presentation on the development of the Tourism Plan, which included an update on: The story so far; the challenge; the approach; and the process.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and agreed to the current direction of travel for the emerging ten year tourism plan.

**City Recovery - Update on key enterprise and employability initiatives**

The Committee considered the following report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**1.1 At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in March 2020, the work programmes to support the delivery of targets under the Growing the Economy and**

Working and Learning pillars of the Belfast Agenda and the Inclusive Growth Strategy were agreed. Since then, the council has adopted its recovery plan 'Belfast: Our Recovery' which sets out its guiding principles and key priorities to support the city to recover from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2 Given the current circumstances and the specific ongoing challenges for Belfast residents and local businesses, the purpose of this report is to update Members on the current status of a number of council-led initiatives to deliver against the priorities of the Belfast: Our Recovery plan.

## 2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the work undertaken to date by the Economic Development and Employability and Skills teams to deliver against the Council's recovery plan 'Belfast: Our Recovery'
- Approve the budget to support the EmTech MIT conference in May 2021.

## 3.0 Main report

3.1 Members will be aware that, at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 4 March 2020, approval was given for the delivery of the Growing the Economy and Working and Learning work plans for the current financial year. These work plans were developed as part of the council's contribution towards the commitments identified under these themes within the Belfast Agenda, and to the corporate plan, as well as supporting the council's ambitions to deliver inclusive growth.

3.2 This report takes account of the work that has been further developed to support the city recovery plan, Belfast: Our Recovery – focusing on job retention and creation, business support and skills development. The recovery plan highlights the ongoing impact that COVID-19 is having on our people and city in a variety of ways, with recent statistics highlighting the significant economic challenges for the city to overcome;

- Contraction in economic output for 2020 likely to be in the region of 12.7% (up from 9.6% in UUEPC's original forecasts in April 2020). At a local council level, the reduction in Belfast is expected to be around 10.6%

- The latest results from InterTradeIreland's Business Monitor illustrates the impact of COVID-19 and how this has had an impact on growth plans and preparatory work in anticipation of EU Exit. Prior to the pandemic, 57% of Northern Ireland firms say they were in growth mode; this has now dropped to 22%. Meanwhile, the number of businesses that are in decline has jumped from 8% and now stands at 46%. The monitor reveals that only 18% of firms have made EU Exit preparations
- The latest results from the Ulster Bank PMI signalled a stagnation of business activity across the local private sector as new business, backlogs of work, and new orders from abroad and staffing levels all fell again. Meanwhile, business pessimism increased in October with Northern Ireland again the only area of the UK to predict a fall in output over the coming year
- Sectors reporting the most significant decline in consumer spend include arts and culture, hospitality, leisure, tourism and transport sectors alongside professional and real estate and retail and wholesale
- The impact on the labour market in Belfast and regionally is highlighted by redundancies being at their highest level since 2013 and 44,100 people furloughed in Belfast at its peak. Since January, there have been more than 1,100 redundancies from Belfast-based business, principally in the manufacturing and retail sectors
- There have been significant increases in claims for unemployment benefits amongst Belfast workers aged 25-29 years old (157%), followed by 40-44 age group (146%)
- 8,900 people in Belfast are claiming self-employment support allowance (SEISS)
- In terms of labour market demand, there has been a 57% reduction in job vacancies from last year.

3.3 The recovery plan highlights how the council will invest and work with city partners to protect and create jobs and support Belfast residents access much needed employment. The work of Economic Development and Employability and Skills teams cuts across a range of the pillars within the recovery plan, specifically addressing deliverables that contribute to:

- Our Economy – supporting businesses to build resilience and protect and create jobs

- **Our City** – supporting the safe reopening of the city centre and arterial routes
- **Our Communities** – supporting businesses in our neighbourhoods and retaining jobs and reskilling residents for employment
- **Our Digital Innovation** – developing the skills of individuals and businesses to support the City's economic recovery.

**3.4** As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, officers have been working closely with local residents, businesses and delivery partners across the city to adapt the support available to ensure that it remains relevant and effective. This report aims to provide some examples of how we continue to work to respond to the key areas affected by COVID-19, to ensure that businesses can once again thrive and provide much needed employment opportunities and vibrancy to local communities.

**3.5** **Supporting local businesses**

Local businesses have been significantly impacted by the macro-economic developments as a result of COVID-19. The Recovery Plan highlights our commitment to supporting these businesses to build resilience to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 so that they can protect jobs can create new jobs in the future.

**3.6** Since March 2020, the council has pivoted all of our initiatives to ensure that businesses were able to get access to vital advice and guidance to support them through the pandemic. These supports include a range of one to one mentoring which is flexible to meet the needs of businesses across all sectors and access to webinars focussing on topics including business resilience, future planning, digital transformation, accessing procurement opportunities and preparing to deal with changes brought about as a result of Brexit. This year to date, 352 businesses have accessed this range of support. We have also put in place a range of financial support for new businesses (£120,000 allocated), social enterprises and cooperatives (£100,000 allocated) and have administered funding for existing businesses to adapt their operations to comply with COVID requirements and enable them to continue operating safely (£800,000 allocated, using resources secured from the Department for Communities (DfC).

**3.7** In addition to this, we recognise that with challenges come many opportunities, so we continue to work to encourage

our entrepreneurs and innovators to start up during the pandemic and look for opportunities to grow and scale. This year to date, we have supported over 400 individuals to start a business.

- 3.8 From 16 to 22 November this year, we once again celebrated Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) by hosting a series of online events to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs and support existing businesses across the city. We put in place these events with our partners in a bid to inspire local entrepreneurs to take that first step to starting their own business, by providing honest and inspirational insights from successful entrepreneurs on their path to success as well as practical advice and guidance for start-ups to grow and build their presence online.
- 3.9 Across this week 280 individuals were engaged. Events included; Start Up Stories, Inspiring Entrepreneurs events, setting up an online shop, writing a great 60-second pitch, and sessions focused on cooperative development including 'Co-operative Journey: from ideas to Co-operatives' and 'Funding Co-operatives: community shares and loanstock'.
- 3.10 Recognising the impact of the ongoing restrictions on local businesses, we have developed a new platform to enable them to promote their products and engage new customers online. During Global Entrepreneurship Week, we launched the Buy Belfast Christmas Market which will run until the 20th December. Over 180 businesses have virtual stalls through the platform to date and include those making sweet treats, arts and crafts, accessories and jewellery, beauty, antiques, theatre vouchers and much more.
- 3.11 The aim of the initiative is to support small businesses through this challenging time, giving them an opportunity to engage new customers. It's also good for consumers who want to shop local and provides one platform to enable them to do so. The virtual market will be used as an opportunity to test the appetite for and viability of a more permanent platform to support local businesses to sell their products online. In addition to managing the platform, we have also invested a significant amount of resources in raising awareness of the platform (search 'Buy Belfast Virtual Christmas Market' on Facebook). The site went live on 20 November and by 25 November it had registered more than 3,700 users.

- 3.12 Based on research and engagement with our partners we know that many businesses have not made any preparations to deal with the operational implications of the UK's exit from the EU. Working with the team at the Innovation Factory, we are currently undertaking research to measure the potential impact of Brexit on businesses across the city, and to understand what the legislation means for businesses operating in different sectors. This will enable us to understand what support we may need to put in place to support our local businesses. This research is expected to be completed in early December. In the interim, we have put in place two Brexit readiness events to try and engage those businesses that haven't already started making preparations, and refer them to support services through Invest NI and Intertradelreland. The first two events are focused on services and goods movement and will include insights from key experts such as PWC, DfE, the Trader Support Service and Arthur Cox. Following the completion of the research, the committee will be provided with an update on recommendations and proposed next steps for this support.
- 3.13 EmTech MIT Europe conference 2021
- The Committee approval on 4 March 2020 included authorisation to support events and conferences across the city which contribute to the ambitions of the Belfast Agenda, raise the profile of the unit and increase the number of businesses across the city accessing support services.
- 3.14 EmTech is a series of live events brought forward by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where technology, business, and culture converge. They showcase emerging technologies with the greatest potential to change our lives. Above all, they provide access to the most innovative people and companies in the world. Aisling Events has recently acquired the EmTech MIT Europe franchise, which will bring the conference to Belfast in May 2021 virtually followed by live events in 2022 & 2023 with full conference at ICC Belfast. The virtual event in May 2021 will bring together Europe's brightest and best technology leaders, researchers, and innovators for inspiration, insight, and connection.
- 3.15 Bringing this conference to Belfast will enable unparalleled access to the most brilliant minds in science and technology from all across the world. Events in other areas have featured speakers such as Marc Benioff of Salesforce, Google's Yasmin Green and Reid Hoffman of

LinkedIn. The conference is designed to give attendees the tools necessary to learn how to harness new technologies to build or maintain a competitive business advantage, increase revenue, ensure security, and make the best hires in a changing workforce and also to gain clear business insights in order to chart business strategy.

3.16 The conference is expected to engage 300 participants from an elite pool of local and global C-suite executives, Directors and research professionals. As well as providing opportunities for learning and development of our local talent and organisations, the combination of local content and leadership, with the best global content, will attract senior leaders from across Europe and beyond to Belfast and provide opportunities to position Belfast as a leading location for tech talent, leadership, and services, as well as enable opportunities for local companies to develop new partnerships and business across the globe.

3.17 Supporting this conference provides an excellent opportunity for Belfast City Council to highlight the work it is doing to develop the city's Innovation and Digital districts aligned with the ambitions of the Belfast Region City Deal, in addition to enhancing the city's start up culture and establishing Belfast as a centre of excellence for tech and, in particular, for Fintech.

3.18 The total cost of hosting the conference will be £120,000. Given the alignment with the ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda and the Belfast Region City Deal, it is recommended that this is supported with funding of £20,000 from the council to maximise the take-up by Belfast-based businesses and to ensure appropriate levels of promotion of the city and its key investments. Other partners supporting the event include Invest NI, QUB, Ulster University and private sector partners.

3.19 Employability and Skills Support

Since March 2020, officers have been working on a series of practical and policy initiatives in order to enhance the delivery of employability and skills support in the city. One of the key initiatives is Employability NI. A detailed report on this was presented to the November meeting of this committee. Officers consider that this approach has the potential to drive coordination and support resource alignment across government partners, and ultimately improve outcomes for participants and for employers engaging with the various interventions.

**3.20** Members will also be aware of some of the key interventions that the council has designed and delivered in recent years. While the first six months of the pandemic have been extremely challenging in the labour market, there have been some successes in recent months as we have levered key relationships in order to generate employment opportunities, particularly focusing on those furthest from the labour market. Some of the key current and emerging opportunities include:

- **Collaboration with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust for a series of opportunities. These include the design and delivery of a Nursing Assistant Employment Academy in preparation for open recruitment of Nursing Assistant posts. This Employment Academy was designed for those further back in the labour market who would otherwise not have applied, for example those with caring experience in an unpaid capacity or without the qualifications needed. Referrals for the Employment Academy followed targeted city-wide engagement with key employability stakeholders such as Council community services staff, ESF projects, community organisations, JBO frontline staff etc. who ensured that the right people were targeted with good initial job-matching to ensure a ‘fit’ between the job role and the aspirations and qualities of the person. As a result, 30 people completed this Employment Academy in mid-November and so far 20 people have been interviewed by Belfast HSC Trust, with interviews ongoing and outcomes expected in December**
- **In addition to the Employment Academy route, officers have used a differentiated approach with for those who are newly-unemployed with relevant paid work experience and/or qualifications to apply for the BHSCT Nursing Assistant posts directly, given that there are 116 vacancies at present. This involved organising an employability stakeholders’ workshop to provide providers with access to key HR and operational staff within Belfast HSC Trust who provided a walk-through of the job roles, details on how to support people to apply and the practicalities of what to expect at interview.**
- **Officers are now working with Belfast HSC Trust to schedule Employment Academies to meet the workforce needs of other occupational areas**

including the co-design of an Employment Academy aligned to recruitment of Social Care entry-level posts in early 2021 as well as upskilling academies for those at entry level positions to gain a 'better job' in Belfast HSC Trust as part of a skills escalator model. It is envisaged that a calendar of Employment Academies for Belfast HSC Trust – in tandem with the independent Social Care sector – can be identified across each year, providing a rolling programme of vacancies.

3.21 Officers are working with other Community Planning Partnership members to co-design Employment Academies for identified workforce demand. Emerging areas of work include:

- **Belfast City Council:** Officers are working with Corporate HR to ring-fence 25% of General Operative vacancies for an Employment Academy, targeting under-represented groups and leading to a guaranteed interview. These opportunities have an expected go-live timeframe of February/March 2021. Officers will also undertake brokerage to ensure the full spectrum of employability stakeholders in the city have an insight into these roles in the run-up to open recruitment so that they can match people within their programmes and prepare them for this recruitment exercise. Officers intend to use this as a platform to build further pathways to Council job opportunities such as through Employment Academies that target the residents of the city who would most benefit from this support while undertaking targeted brokerage for open recruitment exercises. In addition to this, work is underway to co-design an Upskilling Employment Academy for 10 Council staff which targets those at entry level positions with the opportunity to gain a lorry licence with the aim of gaining a 'better job' as a lorry driver
- **Education Authority:** Officers are re-visiting previous engagement with this employer, focusing on employment opportunities in a number of roles including bus driving jobs. In the initial phase of delivery, this workforce demand will be matched with those who are nearing the end of achieving their bus licence through a Bus Driving Employment Academy that we ran earlier in the year but who have not been able to access a job (primarily as opportunities were put on hold due to COVID-19).

After this, opportunities will be widened out to target other groups including those who are newly unemployed and in precarious employment as well retaining a focus on Inclusive Growth target groups such as those who are currently economically inactive/long-term unemployed

- Officers intend to undertake scoping with other CPP members to identify employment opportunities and create pathways for residents to access these jobs through Employment Academies and other relevant interventions including Jobstart (6 months paid work), Work Experience Programme (13 weeks with £10 per day benefit top-up), Apprenticeship Incentives etc.

**3.22 Logistics & Transport sector opportunities**

Officers have engaged with the full range of job brokerage services across the city to promote immediate higher-skilled vacancies for those who are newly unemployed. These include 40 Customs Officers posts required as part of Brexit preparations.

- 3.23** Sectoral engagement is also underway through Logistics UK and Road Haulage Association to confirm workforce support needs across the logistics sector. This sector is experiencing continued demand across warehousing and driving occupations due to COVID-19 and Brexit. Again, Officers have created the flexibility of differentiated approaches that meet the needs of both employers and residents, from those who are economically inactive to those who are newly unemployed or whose employment is precarious through to young people who are eligible for an Apprenticeship.

**3.24 Social Care sector opportunities**

Work is ongoing with the wider independent Social Care sector to deliver bespoke Employment Academies to meet ongoing job demand. This includes residential care and domiciliary care for older people through to support work within organisations working with those who are experiencing disability, homelessness etc.

**3.25 Financial & Resource Implications**

The EmTech MIT Europe conference will be resourced from the 2020/21 Economic Development budget associated with contributions to events and conferences, agreed by the Committee on 4 March 2020. This allocation was

previously agreed by this Committee. All other activities outlined within this report will be resourced from the 2020/21 Economic Development and Employability and Skills budgets agreed by this Committee on 4 March 2020.

**3.26 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

Each of the proposed projects referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. The unit is currently undertaking a process of equality screening on the overall work programme, this will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of each project.”

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development explained further the potential benefits of sponsoring the EmTech event and highlighted that data suggested that these type of event led to Foreign Direct Investment. In response to a Member's request, he also advised that a report would be submitted to a future meeting to outline the potential economic impact of the EmTech Conferences anticipated for 2022 and 2023.

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Dorrian,  
Seconded by Alderman Kingston,

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendation in relation to the EmTech MIT conference in May 2021.

**Amendment**

Moved by Councillor Lyons,  
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the support outlined for the EmTech MIT conference in May 2021, until January, so that further information on the event could be provided.

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

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor Dorrian and seconded by Alderman Kingston was thereupon put to the meeting when thirteen Members voted for the proposal and two against and it was declared carried.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- Noted the work being undertaken to date by the Economic Development and Employability and Skills teams to deliver against the Council's recovery plan "Belfast: Our Recovery"; and
- Approved the budget of £20,000 to support the EmTech MIT conference in May 2021, and noted that a report would be submitted to a future meeting to outline the potential economic impact of the EmTech Conferences anticipated for 2022 and 2023.

### **Request for reduced off-street parking charges during Christmas**

It was reported that correspondence had been received from Belfast City Centre Management Company (BCCM) which outlined a proposal to discount charges in Council run off-street car parks in the lead up to Christmas.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that officers had consulted with various stakeholders to gauge the levels of support for reducing off-street parking levies. The feedback was summarised as follows:

- The private sector would not be introducing additional parking discounts as they were down on income already this year. They pointed out that discounts typically led to congestion issues and they were not in favour of off-street car park charges being discounted;
- A DfI Ministerial decision was required in relation to on-street car parking changes, although officials indicated that they were not supportive of the proposal due to previous congestion issues. DfI had also removed substantial numbers of on-street spaces to date to accommodate safe distancing and promoted active and sustainable travel. However, there were ongoing discussions between DfI, the Council and the Belfast Chamber of Commerce to discuss the 'red barriers' and the cordoned off on-street car parking;
- Views expressed on behalf of businesses indicated that they were not supportive of discounting public parking due to congestion issues and the potential impact on private MSCP operators;
- Previously, free parking on Council car parks had led to congestion, circulating traffic etc. and was therefore not subsequently encouraged. Council car parks were typically cheaper per hour and had historically attracted all-day parkers, although this user was likely to have changed; and
- Translink normally introduced fare incentives to promote public transport at Christmas, however, it didn't look like this would be financially supported this year, although they were more supportive of promotion of public transport than supplemented car parking proposals.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that, based on the engagement carried out to date, the discounting of the Council's off-street car parking facilities could be counter-intuitive at this time and could have a negative impact on the public transportation provision, the private-sector car-parking provision and potentially lead to additional congestion and connectivity issues.

However, she highlighted that city centre accessibility was a key priority going forward in terms of encouraging people to use the city centre and, to that end, it was proposed that a joined up approach be agreed for the New Year, in conjunction with DfI, Translink, the Council, city centre businesses, the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, BIDs and BCCM. This would also include consultation with the City Reopening External Stakeholder Group and private car park operators to better understand the need, demand and impacts of reviewing the pricing structure for Council operated off-street car parking for 2021.

During discussion, a Member highlighted that he had liaised with some businesses which concurred with the position as outlined in the report. A further Member requested that a Review of the Car Parking Strategy be considered as part of the Committee's Work Programme for 2021/22.

After discussion, the Committee:

- 1) Noted the request from Belfast City Centre Management for discounted parking charges at council car parks, and agreed to decline the request at this time, based on the feedback and information provided within the report;
- 2) Recognised that city centre accessibility was a key priority going forward in terms of encouraging people to use the city centre, and to that end, agreed to a joined up approach for the New Year, in conjunction with DfI, Translink, the Council, city centre businesses, Belfast Chamber, BIDs and BCCM; and
- 3) Agreed, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (a) (2) (c), that the aforementioned decisions would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that an unreasonable delay could be prejudicial to the Council's or the public's interest.

#### **Additional Item - Upgrade of Belfast Bikes**

The Committee noted that, in relation to the upgrade of Belfast Bikes which had been agreed at its meeting of 24th November, an open call for charities, social enterprises and co-operative's in Belfast which might wish to receive the old bike stock, in the form of a donation, would be issued in due course.

Chairperson