



Subject:	Update on Belfast Smart District Programme
Date:	21st April, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Deborah Colville, City Innovation Manager
Contact Officer:	Mark McCann, City Innovation programme lead

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To provide the Committee with an update on the development of the Belfast Smart District programme, including the commencement of a first phase to leverage and maximise innovation opportunities for the city, communities and businesses building on the new Weavers Cross regeneration.
1.2	The report seeks the Committee's approval for a number of the programme's first initiatives.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: i. note the rationale for an urban innovation accelerator at Weavers Cross, the four proposed objectives and the near term opportunities;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. approve a letter of support for the £10m Belfast bid to the UKRI Net Zero Mobility Hub for a Resilient Future; iii. approve development work with Ulster University and others on a health innovation hub proposal at Weavers Cross; iv. note the development of CODI and plans to develop a funding bid that may include Smart Dublin as a partner; v. note the work on a potential £10 million bid to DSIT's Open Network Ecosystem competition. Members are asked to approve in advance Council's role in any bid, with details to be shared and approved at June committee; and vi. approve the proposed governance and resourcing arrangements for the Urban Innovation Accelerator.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>The Smart Belfast urban innovation framework (2022 to 2026) was approved by Committee in November 2022. The aim of the framework is to foster greater collaborative innovation between government (both local and regional), industry, SMEs, academia, and our communities. Smart Belfast is about encouraging these partners to work together to harness the power of digital technologies to develop policy solutions to urban challenges.</p>
3.2	<p>The agreed framework places great emphasis on the importance of 'place' for urban innovation and the role of the Belfast Smart District (an area that is geographically coterminous with the city centre). The Smart District is about grounding urban innovation initiatives in 'real-world' opportunities in which they can be developed, tested, and scaled.</p>
3.3	<p>A compelling opportunity that falls within the Smart District is the Weavers Cross regeneration. Cities across the world have used similar large-scale transport regeneration schemes as a catalyst for a wider urban innovation and economic growth (eg, London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, King's Cross, and Dublin's Smart Docklands). A multi-partner innovation urban accelerator at Weavers Cross has the potential to radically accelerate Belfast's Smart District ambitions. Such an urban innovation accelerator will leverage the planned investments by Translink and its partners to generate significant additionality for the wider city, communities, SMEs and both local universities.</p>
3.4	<p>Staff from the Council's City Innovation Office have been developing a joint proposition with Translink, industry partners and our universities to map out what such an accelerator would look like; the immediate opportunities that it can bring to Belfast; and the steps required to deliver it. It is proposed that the Urban Accelerator would have four main objectives:</p>

- I. Supporting urban place-making in our city centre**
- II. Fostering inclusive innovation for communities**
- III. Supporting economic growth through innovation**
- IV. Encouraging next generation digital Infrastructure**

3.5 The proposition has proven immediately attractive to partners, funders, industry and researchers. There are already a number of immediate opportunities that have the potential of bringing substantial funding directly to the City:

(a) Net Zero Mobility Hub for a Resilient Future

3.6 Queen's University is working with city partners including the Council on a £10 million bid to URKI to establish a national Net Zero Mobility Hub at Weavers Cross. This would establish a UK research hub in our city centre to support collaborative innovation between the universities, industry and government. Members are asked to agree to our continuing involvement and to providing an letter of support for the bid from the Council.

(b) Health Innovation Health Hub

3.7 The City Innovation Office and Weavers Cross partners are working with Ulster University to develop a proposal that aims to accelerate innovation for the city's high growth medtech companies. The Weavers Cross location is an idea location, both in terms of easy access to travellers passing through the new station, and also its close links to inner city communities (Markets, Donegall Pass, Sandy Row, and Lower Falls). There is an opportunity to avail of a 'meanwhile use' location for healthcare professionals, SMEs and university researchers to trial innovative health care technologies with local communities and travellers. Ulster University are exploring funding opportunities and there is the potential to grow this to a multi-city, cross border proposition. Members are asked to approve work with Ulster on the development of this proposal.

(c) Citizens Opportunities for Digital Innovation (CODI)

3.8 CODI is a key strand of work in the new Smart Belfast framework. Successful urban collaborative innovation requires the direct involvement of 'end users' (ie, the individuals and communities that live and work in the city) in the development of new public services and programmes. CODI recognises that there are a core set of capabilities and resources that communities must have to order to collaborate meaningfully on such end-user co-design. The ambition is to work with our academic partners and others to create a shared resource that would be available to any city partner working with communities on innovation projects.

3.9	Weavers Cross presents an opportunity to develop CODI with local communities focused on local challenges particularly in relation to neighbourhood health and urban mobility.
3.10	Members are asked to note the City Innovation Office is currently developing a funding proposal to support this community programme and has been engaging extensively with partners including the potential of building shared resources with Smart Dublin which is developing a similar approach to working with communities in inner city Dublin.
(d) SME Mobility Innovation Zone	
3.11	This zone would be a managed environment that allows SMEs to develop and trial innovative solutions with an initial focus on mobility and on health. Connected Places Catapult have developed a similar approach with Network Rail and University of Bristol at Bristol Temple Meads and there is strong evidence that it could be successfully replicated here in Belfast for our companies. The City Innovation Office is exploring opportunities to leverage Belfast Region City Deal funding to support SME involvement in such a zone.
(e) Open Network Ecosystem (ONE) Competition	
3.12	On 27th March, DSIT opened a £80 million competition to deploy and trial Open RAN technologies in urban environments. The aim of the competition is to help diversify the UK's mobile equipment supplier base by inviting new vendors to run their technologies in the real world. This is an opportunity for Belfast to demonstrate that it is an ideal location for digital innovation, while at the same time deploying some of the most advanced wireless technologies in the world.
3.13	DSIT has indicated that they will make up to £10 million available per location and are particularly interested in demonstrators at high demand locations such as transport hubs. (Weavers Cross will deal with over 20 million passengers each year.)
3.14	The City Innovation Office has convened discussions with BT, Translink, Queen's University, and Digital Catapult UK. There is broad agreed that most of the elements for a strong Northern Ireland bid are present; however, any bid will be complex and the timeline for submission (24 May) is a challenging one. Members are asked to note that exploratory work will continue on this bid. Given that there is no SPR committee in May, Members are asked to approve in advance Council's role in any bid, with details to be shared and approved at the Committee meeting in June.

3.15	<p>The City Innovation Office is exploring collaboration with industry and university partners on an 'urban data and AI lab' that would bring the latest in AI and data analytics to our city that would be accessible to SMEs, researchers, and public bodies. This would seek to manage and explore large quantities of urban data to support better decision-making and development of new innovative products and services for transport, climate programmes, etc. A proposal will be presented to the Committee meeting in June.</p> <p>Making It Work</p>
3.16	<p>Members should note that if the projects described above were to proceed, the Weavers Cross urban innovation accelerator would attract over £25 million of urban innovation funding to the city. The approach will continue be driven by third-party funding opportunities and in-kind contributions with the expectation that there will be limited resources elsewhere. The Council's City Innovation Office will support the development and delivery of the Programme and draw upon the Smart District budget allocated previously agreed by Committee.</p>
3.17	<p>A group, jointly chaired by officers from the City Innovation Office, Belfast City Council and Translink and including a range of city partners, will act as a formal Urban Innovation Accelerator board to drive this work. The board would seek approval from each of its respective partner organisations on any new proposals and opportunities. Members are asked to approve the involvement of Belfast City Council officers on this board and note the role of the City Innovation Office in supporting its work.</p>
<p>Financial and Resource Implications</p>	
3.18	<p>As noted in the body of the report individual initiatives will proceed based on a mix of funding and co-investment from partners.</p>
3.19	<p>Resourcing costs for programme development and delivery have been identified in the existing City Innovation team budget.</p>
3.20	<p>Resources for activities associated with the Belfast Region City Deal will be subject to business case development through the city deal process.</p>
<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</p>	
3.21	<p>A public consultation and Equality Screening was previously carried out as part of the full consultation process on the Smart Belfast Urban Innovation Framework.</p>
4.0	<p>Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>

