



Belfast City Council

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| Report to: | Development Committee |
| Subject: | Belfast City Council Response to the Economic Downturn |
| Date: | 11 March, 2009 |
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Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this report is to highlight the “Development” perspective on the Council’s response to the economic downturn.

Members are aware that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 6 February, 2009 agreed the overall approach as presented and undertook to hold a special meeting in March to consider the issue further.

Attached as Appendix 1 is a paper focusing on the particular contribution the Development Committee and Department can make.

It is imperative that Belfast City Council takes comparison of the current economic situation in the locality, monitors the trends and impacts and acts expediently and wisely in addressing the issues emerging.

There is both the necessity and opportunity for Belfast City Council to use the current challenge to “place-shape” for the future. Belfast City Council must exercise strong civic leadership at this time and actively manage the situation in partnership with other relevant bodies and groupings.

It must be recognised that whilst the focus is presently on the immediate future for our local economy in light of the scale and depth of the economic crisis, Council should not abandon its medium to longer term plans. Projecting ahead and planning for growth and sustainable development should still be pursued as part of the overall city-wide development agenda. In context this means that whilst Council should certainly seek to make adjustments and changes to services or initiatives as appropriate, the overall goals and strategic objectives articulated in the Corporate Plan Value Creation Maps, City Investment Strategy and other thematic plans still deserve recognition.

A different economic climate represents a new context in which to operate, which may require a veering off the original course for whatever period that is necessary, to underpin and stabilise the local economy. Continuous monitoring, analysis and assessment is essential for Council so that we are keeping up-to-date with trends and challenges which need Council's attention.

The attached paper emphasises the Development Department's perspective as a prime example of what Council can do to respond positively to the current economic challenges.

Key actions are outlined under the following headings:

- Leadership
- Economic Development
- Planning and Regeneration
- Community Services
- Culture & Arts
- Tourism
- Events
- Waterfront/Ulster Halls
- Estates
- Cost Cutting/Transformation.

These are the anchors suggested for the new Departmental Plan. Members are asked to endorse these as the key drivers for next years work. The Departmental Plan will of course also deal with the complete work of the Department, but Members are asked to agree to a strong emphasis being placed on these responses.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Committee consider the issues identified, agree the particular Development actions outlined and consider any other appropriate actions, as required.
2. The Committee agree to the setting up of a joint officer / member task group to monitor and develop the work.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1. 'How can the Development Committee & Department respond to the challenges and chart a path across recession, towards recovery?'