



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Independent Review of Economic Policy – Belfast City Council Draft Response
Date:	11 March 2009
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Relevant Background Information

In December 2008, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster MLA, launched the independent review of economic development policy (IREP) and established an independent panel to undertake the review.

The panel is chaired by Professor Richard Barnett, Vice Chancellor of the University of Ulster. The other members of the panel are Professor Brian Ashcroft, University of Strathclyde and a Board Member of the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland; Dr Graham Gudgin, from the Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge, and Oxford Economics; Professor Michael Moore, from Queen's University but currently working in Harvard University; and John Wright, former international banking Director and current Chairman and non-executive director of a number of companies in the UK and overseas.

As part of their consultation, the panel launched a call for evidence in January 2009. The deadline for submission of evidence was set as 27 February 2009.

Key Issues

The draft Belfast City Council response is attached as Appendix 1.

This incorporates a number of key issues including:

- Belfast is the regional driver and, as such, requires distinct and focused support to ensure its continued development and growth
- Belfast City Council is concerned that the terms of the review are limited to DETINI and Invest NI only. There are a wide range of other bodies involved in economic development policy – including local authorities. Unless account is taken of the whole spectrum of economic development support, the review risks being incomplete.

- Belfast City Council is disappointed by the proposals for the transfer of economic development responsibilities as part of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) and is ambitious to undertake additional activities
- We are concerned at the lack of opportunity for elected member input into Invest NI and consider that there is merit in adopting the English model where council leaders have a role in the deliberations of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)
- We consider that there may be a need to consider the approach and targets of the Small Business Support Programme – and other support initiatives – in light of the economic downturn
- There is a mismatch between the economic policy and approach of government departments – DETI, DEL and DARD. This is evidenced in the skills mismatch apparent across Belfast’s communities. Unless targeted action is taken, this will act as a brake on Belfast’s future growth.

Given the tight deadlines, the draft response in Appendix 1 was submitted to the panel as Belfast City Council’s contribution to the debate. However we have made the panel aware of the fact that this has not yet been endorsed by our politicians and that we will send the final version to them once this happens.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note and endorse the content of the report

Documents Attached

Appendix 1: Belfast City Council response and evidence for the review of economic development policy
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Abbreviations

DETI – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment DEL – Department for Employment and Learning DARD – Department for Agriculture and Rural Development RPA – Review of Public Administration RDA – Regional Development Agency
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