



Belfast City Council

Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Belfast Masterplan Review

Date: 14 October 2009

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Relevant Background Information

The Council commissioned a Masterplan for Belfast in 2003 to provide a framework for the development of Belfast for the period to 2020. The Belfast Masterplan was published in April 2004 and provided a strategic development framework for Belfast, based on the consideration of the economic, social and environmental issues in the City.

The adopted Belfast Masterplan provides the Council with a strategic vision for the future regeneration and growth of the City. The Masterplan also provided the basis for Council engagement in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, strategic development sites such as Titanic Quarter and the various regeneration strategies published by the Department for Social Development. The analysis also supported the Council's regeneration initiatives such as 'Renewing the Routes' and has been adopted by a number of external organisations and consultants in the development of strategies and proposals for the continued development of the City.

Key Issues

In the period since the formulation of the Masterplan in 2003/04, there has been considerable change to the economic, social and environmental context for the development of Belfast and the wider region exacerbated by the current economic downturn. In addition, the proposed Review of Public Administration and the transfer of responsibilities, including local land use planning and regeneration functions, provide new opportunities for the Council to shape the longer term development of Belfast.

The five years since adoption have also seen the development of a number of new strategies, including the City Centre Masterplans and the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks which the Department for Social Development commissioned for each of the five Partnership Board areas. These strategic documents have been commissioned to focus on specific initiatives or areas of the City and do not provide the coherence that would harness the potential synergies and contribute to the sustainable development of Belfast. This changing economic context and the emerging competing strategies for different parts of the City have highlighted the need for the Council to have a coherent and up to date vision for the future development of Belfast to inform ongoing work and to provide the critical strategic basis to prepare for the transfer of the new statutory planning functions outlined in the recent Planning Reform consultation.

The review of the current Belfast Masterplan offers the opportunity to establish the strategic vision for the City. This review and updated strategic position would facilitate continued Council engagement with strategies such as the proposed Strategic Regeneration Frameworks and provide a mechanism for influencing the strategic regeneration/development initiatives planned for the City. The development of a robust strategic spatial plan for the future development of the City will be a critical component of both the community planning and statutory land use planning functions that will be required to be developed under the Review of Public Administration processes.

Following the consideration of the proposal by Committee, the approach to the Masterplan review has been modified to reduce the scope of the originally proposed review and internalise some of the processes. The principal impact of the proposed change in approach will be in the sourcing and management of multi-disciplinary inputs and the consultation arrangements.

The proposal for the review process is for an internal project team to coordinate the detailed development of the Masterplan and commission the appropriate independent specialist consultancy to supplement existing Council resources. This will be carried out through a number of separate individual contracts rather than through the award of a single contract to a multi-disciplinary consultancy. The consultancy support will focus on the areas of economic development, transportation, spatial planning and sustainable regeneration. The emphasis will be placed on addressing the areas of change and the elements of the Masterplan that require clarification or refinement based on the experience since the original adoption.

The proposal will also necessitate a change in the approach to the consultation with a reduction in the level of facilitated consultation and an emphasis on group-based sessions. The proposed review will also take account of existing relevant consultation work, including that carried out by third party organisations, with the formal engagement focussed on key stakeholders and Members. The scope of the consultation will therefore be more limited with internal elements being coordinated by the project team and carried out on a City-wide, and, where appropriate, thematic basis as opposed to the original intention for area specific and focussed consultation.

The change in the approach will change the emphasis and shift the balance of resource allocation to increase the utilisation of reallocated internal resources. This shift in resources combined with the changes proposed for the consultation will reduce the cost of the proposed review in terms of the externally commissioned work. Subject to the completion of the procurement for the individual elements of the specialist support and the reallocation of internal staff resources, it is projected that the cost of the review could be reduced to £37,000.

The review of the current Belfast Masterplan offers the opportunity to revisit the strategic vision for the City. This review and updated strategic position in addition to facilitating the continued engagement with external strategies offers the opportunity to initiate work on important elements of the future community planning and reformed planning processes for which the

Council will have statutory responsibility.

Resource Implications

The review of the Belfast Masterplan will be carried out through the procurement of a range of specialist consultancy support rather than through a single commission, in combination with the reallocation of existing internal staff resources. The current Departmental budgets include provision for the procurement of the external support required for the Masterplan Review.

Recommendations

Members are requested to approve the proposed review of the Belfast Masterplan and the procurement of specialist support up to the value of £37,000.

Decision Tracking

Draft Masterplan review to be reported back to Committee for consideration.
Timeline February 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

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