



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Renewing the Routes Review Updates
Date:	13 January 2010
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Background Information

The report provides a summary of the finding from the external review of the current Renewing the Routes activity. On the basis of previous Committee approval dated 12th August, 2009 external consultants (Blueprint Development Consultancy Ltd) were appointed to assess the potential for securing the capacity of the Council to carry out targeted local regeneration activity beyond the current Renewing the Routes activity scheduled to be completed by the end of March 2010.

The Renewing the Routes work has, with Committee approval, continued to evolve in response to challenges identified and funding secured on the basis of the original detail scoping and prioritisation. In response to the pilot objectives the type of activity carried out has been varied, encompassing direct implementation, plan development, consultation and partnership development. It was proposed that the review of the Renewing the Routes consider the future capacity for the Council both in terms of the revenue funding for staff resources and the dedicated capital resources available for local regeneration projects.

Key Issues

The Renewing the Routes Team is regarded as a specialist team which has developed considerable expertise, a notable commitment to its work and the ability to deliver at high level both in local regeneration planning and implementation. Over a relatively short period of time the Unit has raised the profile of the Council and the City and has delivered a range of tangible physical results across the City.

The Team is recognised as a valuable resource for the Council and the City. The contribution of the Team is evident both in terms of the direct delivery of projects and the development of partnership activity, including the sourcing of additional funding. The Team has continued to deliver on plan development, consultation, partnership development, project coordination and direct project implementation.

The changing economic environment and regeneration challenges will require the work of the Team to continue and perhaps expand. The transformation of local environments and the support of local regeneration initiatives will continue to dominate with perhaps a greater role to deliver ongoing coordination across functional areas within the Council, influenced by sustained engagement with key external stakeholders. The Review of Public Administration includes the transfer to local authorities of the responsibility and delivery of Regeneration responsibilities alongside the powers of Wellbeing and Community Planning. Belfast City Council has the opportunity now to build on and improve the current local regeneration resource to be ready to support these enhanced functions through the commitment to the continued delivery of focussed local regeneration activity.

There is a clear need to continue the types of local interventions to support the delivery of a number of Council thematic objectives in addition to the continued delivery of a platform for engagement with community and statutory bodies through effective partnerships. The activity also continues to uniquely demonstrate the Council's commitment to address local regeneration issues through projects developed with a range of key local stakeholders and economic sectors. An element of the activity would be directly related to the wider role for the Council in the regeneration of Belfast and the place shaping agenda, albeit at a distinct and recognisable local level within the different communities. However, this activity cannot be continued successfully without adequate resources and a longer term commitment.

The important and very visible local regeneration activity has been carried out with a limited temporary staff resource which flexibly adapted to the evolution of the project from the pilot activity funded by Brighter Belfast. It is acknowledged that the current ambitious IDF implementation programme has meant that the Team is considerably overstretched and has been unable to focus on the ongoing planning and developmental activity for future focussed activity. Equally, within the context of the pressures facing the Council over the coming period and the drive of internal reforms, it is increasingly important that the Team clearly articulates the value added in delivering the Council agenda and core objectives.

Finally in the context of the Review of Public Administration, the Council has a choice, either to commit to the continuation of a unique and successful local regeneration approach or withdraw to a position of being on the edge, isolated from the potential for direct delivery and the transformation of local environments. Active delivery requires a specialist Team, within the Department, to ensure that the Council has the capacity to develop and deliver action plans that offer the potential to transform local areas and embed the activity through coordinated action with engaged stakeholders. This locally focussed activity would support the Council's strategic leadership role at the City and Regional level.

Impact

Over the period since 2004, the Team has continued to develop its role and remit, internally and externally, working closely with the internal and external partners as well as the private sector.

In a relatively short period of time, the Team has moved from a pilot concept, promoted as part of Brighter Belfast to a fully functioning team, delivering a wide range of visible outputs on behalf of the Council.

As outlined in detail in the review document summary attached as Appendix 1 the Team has developed the capacity for delivery of a range of tangible improvements across the city. The review identified a range of positive aspects inherent in the work of the Team:

These include:

The evaluation has demonstrated that the key partners have bought into the concept and the model of delivering the Renewing the Routes activity.

This partnership has operated successfully at strategic and operational levels and has levered additional funds to the overall programme.

The consultation exercise identified the leadership role provided by the Council as vital to the success of the programme.

The Renewing the Routes programme can be seen to have been and continues to complement the relevant regional and city development strategies and policy drivers, including the objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Plan.

The programme clearly complements the work of the relevant Government Departments and their agencies, in particular the Belfast Regeneration Office and NIHE, reflecting the very positive working relationship evident in the planning and delivery of the programme.

The consultation process clearly highlighted the very positive response to the programme from partners and beneficiaries.

The interviews highlighted the local impact, the planning and implementation, the very positive the role of the Council and the close partnership working on the ground.

The programme was perceived to have been effective, efficiently executed and a "template" for other such initiatives.

Overall Assessment

In relation to the overall assessment, the Consultants used the evaluation criteria of effectiveness, economy and efficiency to come to conclusions in relation to value for money as outlined in the appended executive summary.

This external assessment of the overall programme demonstrated that the Renewing the Routes programme has made a significant impact on commercial properties, local communities and other property owners along the routes, with the majority taking part in the programme and benefiting from commercial or environments improvements.

The Renewing the Routes programme was recognised as being a catalyst in stimulating activity and investment from partner agencies. The role of Belfast City Council's local regeneration activity in providing leadership was identified as vital in stimulating this co-operation and investment. The Renewing the Routes operating model was considered to be working well, the research and consultation undertaken as part of this review demonstrated the effectiveness and efficiency of this model. Furthermore the partnership with external agencies such as NIHE, DRD Roads Service and DSD was considered to have worked well and have produced tangible results.

This in-house team was identified as an asset for the Council that should be sustained in further phases of Renewing the Routes in recognition of the demonstrated skill and expertise in developing, planning, and implementing a broad range of local regeneration projects.

Finally in terms of the results and impact of the work, it is useful to highlight the six national and local awards gained by the Unit reflecting the Council's contribution and the efforts being made to deliver an effective and recognisable local regeneration function.

The review report also highlights a significant level of achievements in relation to the leverage of additional funding which the Team has secured – in total over £4.5m of capital representing a ratio of 4:1 in terms of the original £1.1m Council investment.

Moving Forward

The challenges for local regeneration will not diminish over the next number of years. The challenges facing communities across the City necessitates the Council refocusing efforts in relation to regeneration at all levels across the City. To do this effectively means maintaining the existing capacity and continuing to develop the unique resource that has already achieved so that the Council can identify and address the challenges that remain.

This review has indicated the level of significant achievements over the past five years and also the need now to put in place a commitment and framework for future action. In relation to this the issues previously identified now need to be resolved. Namely:

- The need to identify and consolidate an appropriate staff team and move from the temporary fixed term posts to a more permanent commitment
- The need to identify core funding for local implementation project activity that could support bids for external resources to supplement activity.

In the Executive Summary of the review the Consultants identify five recommendations in relation to the potential for the continuation of the programme and modification or potential areas of future activity that may need to be addressed:

1. We would recommend that Belfast City Council continues with the operational model developed for the Renewing the Routes programme, including the current partnership arrangements and the current delivery mechanisms
2. The aims and objectives of the Renewing the Routes programme need to be refined to better reflect the outcomes of the programme and to ensure that they are achievable and measurable.
3. As a part of the planning for the next phase of the Renewing the Routes programme there will be a need to measure the impact of the programme, by establishing baselines at the outset of the programme and measuring changes from these baselines as a direct result of the inputs and resources expended on the projects.
4. The broader partnership team of the Renewing the Routes programme should be convened at the concept stage for each of the routes and maintained for the duration of the activity.
5. The Renewing the Routes programme staff team should work with Belfast City Council's Corporate Communications team to develop a communications strategy which will work alongside the programme to publicise the work both at local community and on a wider level throughout Northern Ireland.

The Department has been able to identify revenue and capital resources from the re-alignment and amalgamation of existing budgets which could potentially support the retention of a local regeneration team. It should be noted that the potential provision would provide a more modest ongoing project implementation budget when compared to the current levels of IDF expenditure. Whilst a significant reduction in terms of available implementation budget the provision of core funding would be more meaningful on the basis of the longer term Council commitment to the activity and cumulative impact as works continued.

This potential for resource provision has been identified within the ongoing estimates process and would be subject to final decisions in relation to the overall Council budgets. In essence the £329,000 implementation project budget identified could be equated to the original level of annual commitment provided as the original catalyst under the Brighter Belfast initiative.

Resource Implications

The additional financial implications arising from the proposed establishment of the Renewing the Routes Team has been included in the Departmental estimates through the re-alignment and amalgamation of existing budgets. The final resource cost for the staff element will be subject to assessment by the Business Improvement Service. An allocation of £120,000 in addition to the existing Council staff commitment for the Officer posts and £329,000 for project delivery has been identified, subject to budget estimates.

Recommendations

Members are requested to:

- endorse the recommendation of the external consultants in respect of the continue with the operational model developed for the Renewing the Routes programme, including the current partnership arrangements and the current delivery mechanisms;
- note the ongoing work within the Department to provide base resources to continue the activity subject to budget estimates; and
- note the intention for the detailed assessment by Business Improvement Service in respect of the staffing arrangements to be brought back to Committee.

Decision Tracking

Following Committee approval:

The recommendations in respect of the proposed review of existing renewing the routes activity by Business Improvement Service to be brought back to Committee for consideration.

Timeframe: February 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley Mc Cay.

Key to Abbreviations	
IDF	Integrated Development Fund

Documents Attached	
Appendix 1	Renewing the Routes Review Executive Summary