

APPENDIX 1



Renewing the Routes Programme
Evaluation
Final Report
Executive Summary



December 2009

Executive Summary

I. Background

The Renewing the Routes Programme is an innovative regeneration intervention targeted at the Arterial Routes and surrounding communities within Belfast to act as a catalyst for social, economic and community renewal. The genesis of the Renewing the Routes Programme lay in the increasing concern evident from the mid 1990's as to the future of the key arterial routes into the City. The growing sense of once thriving areas being in social, economic and physical decline encouraged the Council and others to consider a strategic intervention focussing on the key entry routes and the surrounding communities.

Development work undertaken by the Council and its statutory and community partners in the period 2000-2004 allowed the Council to identify and agree 10 priority routes. Agreement and consensus building, which was critical to the development of the Programme, was achieved through a combination of negotiation and discussion informed by the use of an assessment matrix which considered physical, environmental, economic and social factors. This planning phase allowed the partners to agree the outline aims and supporting objectives for the Programme as, to facilitate Economic Development; to tackle Social Exclusion; to promote Physical and Environmental Development and to promote Creativity.

Since 2004 the Programme has facilitated the investment of approximately £6 million¹ invested across the key routes including the Lower Antrim Road; York street/York Road; Mid-Donnegal Road; Lower Newtownards Road; Falls Road; Lower Crumlin Road; Lower Ormeau Road; Shankill Road; Albertbridge Road; Upper Springfield Road. This investment has acted as a catalyst for the delivery of a range of a diverse range projects which were implemented over the programme period including: 376 shop front improvements; Lighting schemes; Environmental improvements; Public realm work; Public Art projects; Community Arts projects; Landscaping and planting of trees, shrubs and flowers; Façade cleaning and improvements to existing railings; alleygating schemes; and installation of tourism signage.

¹ IDF £3.8, BCC £1.1, BLSP £280,000, Urban II approx £447,000 ,all excluding revenue funding and additional funds from BCC and joint schemes with BRO/DSD

II. The Evaluation Objectives

As the current phase of the Renewing the Routes Programme is scheduled to come to an end in March 2010, the Council agreed the need for an independent evaluation of the Programme. In November 2009 Blueprint Development Consultancy Ltd was appointed to undertake the evaluation in response to a public tendering process. The outline evaluation approach agreed included, desk research, a review of Programme documents and a consultation process with stakeholders and beneficiaries. It was intended that the evaluation would assess the outcomes and impacts associated with the Programme, set within the context of the changing funding and structural environment and informed by best practice from other initiatives. It was also intended that the review would assist the Council consider the most appropriate framework to support the Council's locally focussed regeneration work post 2010.

III. Key findings

Partnership Working

The impetus for the work of Renewing the Routes was provided by the core partners (BCC, the Northern Ireland Hosing Executive, NIHE, The Belfast Regeneration Office, B.R.O. and the Belfast Area Partnerships, BAP's). Through time, this core team was enhanced by engagement with the Department for Regional Development (DRD, Roads Services) and the community Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships. The evaluation has demonstrated that the key partners have bought into the concept and the model of delivering the Renewing the Routes Programme. This partnership has operated successfully at both a strategic and operational level and has levered additional funds to be invested through the overall Programme. The consultation exercise also identified the leadership role provided by the Council as vital to the success of the Programme and identified a need to convene the partnership at the concept stage for the routes to identify any potential difficulties at the outset and to ensure that all the partners are fully engaged throughout the process.

Programme Management

Day to day management of the Renewing the Routes programme is the responsibility of a dedicated Belfast City Council staff team comprising: a Manager, 2 Designated Officers, and 4 assistants including a monitoring officer.

The posts are a mixture of permanent (2 officers seconded from within BCC) and 4 fixed term contracts, due to end by the end of March 2010.

The staff team takes responsibility for the full regeneration project/ programme cycle planning, developing, implementing, communication and monitoring. The staff team also coordinate the input and the application of expertise from other staff within Belfast City Council as required. As set out below the skills and input of the Team has been instrumental in the success of the overall Programme

The Policy Context

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 Council objectives set out in the 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

Moving forward the Programme, as with all regeneration activity, faces a more challenging environment of reduced budgets, efficiency savings and set within the Council's objective of seeking to maintain existing investment priorities on a reduced rate base. However, the Review of Public Administration offers an opportunity for the Programme to be embedded and developed in a new context with an enhanced role for the Council in leading on Community Planning and urban development in the City.

The Consultation Process

The consultation process clearly highlighted the very positive response to the Programme from partners and beneficiaries. The former through 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.

There was a very positive response to the question of continuation balanced with a need to revisit the intent, and further encourage greater integration, synergy and prioritisation. The analysis of the questionnaires from beneficiaries presented below also highlights the positive impact of the Programme.

Combined this offers a very positive platform on which to build the next phase of the Programme.

IV. Conclusions

An Overall Assessment of the Programme

We have used the following evaluation criteria to come to our conclusions in relation to value for money:

Effectiveness: The Renewing the Routes programme has met its objectives over the life time of the project. The effectiveness of the Renewing the Routes Programme has also been recognised by the range of national and local awards won by the programme since its inception, these include:

- Belfast City Council Making a Difference Award (MAD) for Building Bridges May 2009.
- West Belfast Partnership Board Environmental award, October 2009.
- BURIA Award for Best Practice in Regeneration, November 2009.
- Recognition of the “Gaelgradam Loch Lao” held by Forbairt Feirste for the use of Irish Language in street signs, December 2009.
- Highly commended at the Local Government Award, London, March 2008

Economy; we would conclude that the Renewing the Routes programme is being delivered in an **economic manner**, that is, **the most appropriate inputs have been secured on a least cost basis.**

Efficiency: We believe that there is sufficient evidence that the Renewing the Routes total expenditure of **@£6 million** has achieved the maximum possible levels of output and impact. **It is also notable that this investment provides significant leverage set against the Council’s initial support of £1.1 m.**

This in turn allows us to conclude that on the basis of the indicators of efficiency, economy and effectiveness the Renewing the Routes Programme has provided value for money.

Aims & Objectives

The aims of the Renewing the Routes programme were as follows:

- To facilitate Economic Development
- To tackle Social Exclusion
- To promote Physical and Environmental Development
- To promote Creativity

These aims were supported by a series of objectives. **In broad terms the aims and objectives were achieved.** However it is our opinion that the original aims and objectives were too broad and in some instances too ambitious, possibly reflecting the original aspirations for a more comprehensive EU funded programme and the innovative nature of the activity. We have concluded that it would be vital in future phases of the Renewing the Routes programme that Belfast City Council take action to measure outcomes and impact, as this will provide the evidence base for intervention, and will also show where intervention has made a significant change to the area.

The Renewing the Routes programme will deliver a range of successful projects across 10 arterial routes with expenditure totalling @£6m million. The projects range from: commercial improvements; installation of new lighting schemes; refurbishing and cleaning facades of buildings; new streetscapes; new street furniture; new landscaping; hanging baskets; community and public art projects and new tourism signage. .

Our assessment of the overall programme has 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.

Partnership Working

The Renewing the Routes programme has acted as a catalyst in stimulating activity and investment from its partner agencies, which are: NIHE; DRD Roads Service and DSD. **The role of Belfast City Council's local regeneration activity in providing leadership has been vital in stimulating this co-operation and investment.**

The Renewing the Routes operating model is working well, the research and consultation undertaken as part of this evaluation has demonstrated the effectiveness and efficiency of this model.

Furthermore the partnership with external agencies such as NIHE: DRD Roads Service and DSD have worked well and have produced tangible results.

Programme Management

Aligned to this has been the importance of the Renewing the Routes in-house staff team who have co-ordinated projects and liaised skilfully between partners and funders. **This in-house team represents an asset for the Council and should be sustained in further phases of Renewing the Routes as they have demonstrated skill and expertise in developing, planning, and implementing a broad range of local regeneration projects.** The internal co-operation with other Council departments, such as the technical support from the staff of the Planning and Project Management Unit, and the expertise provided by the staff of Culture and Arts, and Parks and Leisure Services, has been essential in implementing the broad range of projects across the 10 priority routes. This coordination of activity has been supplemented by the work with the Health and Environmental Services Department to target discretionary activity towards the target regeneration areas.

Moving forward

Based upon the research analysis and assessment to date, we would recommend that the Council's investment in a Renewing the Routes type Programme and in house staff team is continued based upon its success and effectiveness.

The changing environment and uncertainty as the Council moves into 2010 and 2011 suggests that the coming year should be seen **as a transition period** as an opportunity to build upon the success of the Programme, revisit its original purpose and plan for post 2011 while continuing to work on the ground. How the Programme might evolve in the short to medium term is discussed below in Section 9 of the report.

The key points highlighted are as follows;

- A greater balance between implementation and planning which will be facilitated by access to a reduced budget which will more closely reflect the original BCC budget prior to the IDF investment. This would provide the Team with an opportunity to review the original aims and objectives of the Programme, identify through engagement with Members and the community the most appropriate areas for investment, either building upon those areas where work has been successful but can be enhanced or target new areas which up until now have not had an opportunity to be considered.

With less pressure to implement the Team would have the opportunity to consult and revisit the original priority areas and those areas which did not receive funding utilising the original assessment matrix, utilised successfully during phase 1 and 2 updated to reflect current circumstances. Here the intelligence and learning offered by SNAP, the Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships, increased GIS information and the Council's place shaping activity could be utilised effectively.

An internal review process would allow the Team an opportunity to present a new action plan setting out proposed areas for investment as options to Members for discussion and approval as soon as possible.

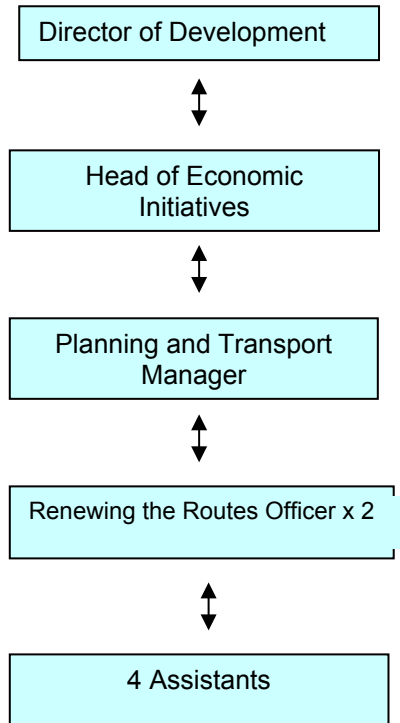
- Greater integration with the Council's activities and programmes with complementary activity evident within the Development Department and across the Council. This would continue one of the cornerstones of the Programme that is internal and external partnership working seeking to attract funding and resources to the Council's investment and finally;
- Greater synergy with proposed strategic investment initiatives across the City, with Renewing the Routes providing the essential targeted local activity. This may be considered as a medium term priority reflecting the proposed changes arising from the Review of Public Administration.

Combined the above would allow the Council to play an even more significant role in local regeneration activity.

V. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Continuation

We would recommend that Belfast City Council continue with the operational model developed for the Renewing the Routes programme, including the current partnership arrangements and the current delivery mechanisms. The current operational structure comprises the following:



The posts are a mixture of permanent (2 officers seconded from within BCC) and 4 fixed term contracts, funded to the end of March 2010. The staff team takes responsibility for developing, planning, implementing, communication and monitoring. The monitoring required by the range of external funders (statutory and European) has contributed to the diversity of programme measures and the approach may need to be modified to reflect the Council's internal requirements.

We would recommend that this structure is continued in the transition phase through the implementation phase of the Review of Public Administration with a view to establishing a more permanent staffing structure once the full implications of the potential transfer of functions are assessed and structural implications for the Council considered. Belfast City Council's Business Improvement Service will be undertaking a more detailed review of the staff and structures aspects as part of a parallel process which will build on the results of this evaluation report.

The details of the posts should be evaluated by the Council Business Improvement Service to determine the most appropriate grade and the details of the potential appointments taking account of the broader implications of the Review of public Administration.

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 core team with a more modest ongoing budget for the continued implementation of projects. This has been achieved within the estimates process and would be subject to final decisions in relation to the overall Council resources.

Recommendation 2 Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the Renewing the Routes Programme need to be revisited to better reflect the intended outcomes of the Programme and to ensure that they are achievable and measurable.

Recommendation 3 Prioritisation

As set out above, the Team through a process of analysis, discussion and consultation present a revised action plan with options setting out the proposed programme of work in the short term leading to a more comprehensive programme as the implications of the R.P.A and the opportunities for investment at a City level become more evident .

Recommendation 4 Establishing an Evaluation Framework

As a part of the planning for the next phase of the Renewing the Routes Programme there will be a need to measure the outcomes and 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. This can be informed by the monitoring arrangements and activities currently in place.

Recommendation 4 Programme Management

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. This will ensure the full engagement of each agency from the outset and should identify the priorities and any potential difficulties at the earliest opportunity.

A key aspect of this will be the continued leadership offered by the BCC
Renewing the Routes team.

Recommendation 5 Profile

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.