



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast Employability and Skills Strategy and Action Plan
Date:	9 March 2010
Reporting Officer:	John Mc Grillen Director of Development ext 3470 Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Economic Development Manager, ext 3427

Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that, at the December 2008 meeting of the Development Committee, Members were informed of research that had been undertaken on skills and employability issues in Belfast. They agreed that, in order to maximise the impact of the Council's interventions in this field, efforts should be focused on working with key partners on a Belfast Skills and Employment strategy.

Key Issues

The first meeting of the group took place in May 2009. Partners invited to participate included senior representatives from:

- Department for Employment and Learning
- Belfast Metropolitan College
- Alliance of Sector Skills Councils
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
- University of Ulster
- Business in the Community
- Federation of Small Business
- Department of Education
- Workforce Development Forum
- Queen's University Belfast
- North Belfast Partnership (on behalf of BAPs)
- Confederation of British Industry
- Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce

Members were asked at the outset to commit to the process for a time-bound period.

At each meeting, papers were presented on issues of interest including skills, worklessness, disadvantaged communities and people and partnership building. Partners inputted into the papers and a structured discussion around the key issues took place at each meeting. Following the discussions, a draft paper has now been collated and is being circulated among all partners for additional input and endorsement.

The draft Belfast Employability and Skills Strategy and Action Plan aims to deliver a significant improvement in the working age employment rate in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, particularly for specific target groups including long-term unemployed, lone parents and adults with low skills levels. It also aims to enhance employment opportunities for graduates in higher-end jobs in order to improve the Gross Value Added (GVA) levels of the City.

A draft of the Plan is attached in Appendix 1.

Two priority areas for action are identified and an associated list of activities is noted for each area. These are:

Priority 1: Connecting people and jobs

- Linking workless people and vacancies to improve the employment rate
- Tackling barriers to work
- Assisting workless people – particularly those on incapacity benefit – access employment opportunities across Belfast
- Making effective use of social clauses in public procurement
- Supporting social enterprises which address barriers to employment
- Supporting graduates to access employment opportunities in the Belfast economy.

Priority 2: Enhancing the level of skills in the most disadvantaged communities

- Tackling the lack of basic skills and qualifications to improve employability and reduce worklessness
- Meeting the skills needs of sectors and growth opportunities essential to support economic expansion.

In order to deliver these priorities, it will be important to secure buy-in from the key partners – particularly the Department for Employment and Learning. To this end, further meetings will be held to tie down responsibility for the actions and to identify and encourage participation by relevant organisations.

In terms of governance, it is proposed that an employability and skills board is established to oversee and steer the direction of the strategy.

Although defined resources have not yet been confirmed for each of the activities, it is proposed that partners try, where possible, to adapt their mainstream budgets and activities to focus on the identified priorities.

Resource Implications

No confirmed resources from Belfast City Council at present. Proposed resources will be included in 2010-2011 Departmental Plan, to be presented to Committee in April 2010.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the content of this proposed Strategy and Action Plan and agree the proposed priority actions, as a basis for collaboration with partners across the City.
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Decision Tracking

If recommendation is approved, updates on progress will be presented to a future meeting of the Development Committee.
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Time frame: October 2010

Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key to Abbreviations

BAPs – Belfast Area Partnerships

Documents Attached

Appendix 1: Draft Belfast Employability and Skills Strategy and Action Plan

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