



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast Employability and Skills Strategy and Action Plan
Date:	14 April, 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen Director of Development ext 3470
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Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that, at the December 2008 meeting of the Development Committee, they agreed that, in order to maximise the impact of the Council's interventions in the employability field, efforts should be focused on working with key partners on a Belfast Skills and Employment strategy.

A draft of the strategy was presented at the March 2010 Development committee. Members asked that consideration of the report be deferred to allow further discussion of the report through party briefings. These are currently being undertaken.

Key Issues

The partners working on the Belfast Employability and Skills strategy met on 22 March 2010 to consider the draft report. At that meeting, a number of key issues were raised. These included:

- A need to ensure that the employability skills strategy is aligned with an overall economic strategy for the city
- A need to consider prioritisation of certain issues or target groups
- The key issue will remain the integration with other activity – avoiding duplication and overlap
- Broad acceptance of validity of the “city strategy” model approach (as used in the rest of UK)
- A need to consider integration of social clauses in contracts – important to lead by example in public sector – reach and exceed employability targets (e.g. through Titanic Quarter Memorandum of Understanding (MoU))
- A need to ensure that activities sit within the wider context – issue is not necessarily lack of provision at mainstream and community level but are all activities optimally effective?

One key issue from Belfast City Council's perspective is the upcoming call for projects under the European Social Fund (ESF). Members will be aware that, in the past, four externally-managed projects were given support for two of their three years duration. It will be important to identify whether Council wishes to take a more strategic approach for this wave of projects, setting the priorities rather than being asked to match-fund other activities.

Partners asked for additional time to allow further consideration of the report. It was also suggested that contact needs to be made with key departments at a senior level (particularly DEL and DSD) to ensure buy-in to the proposed approach.

The draft plan will be revised to take account of these issues and will be considered at a workshop which is scheduled to take place in May/June (date to be confirmed).

Members are also encouraged to input into the draft report – through the party briefings or through direct contact with the relevant officers. Committee will also be invited to attend the workshop in May/June.

Resource Implications

No resource implications at present.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee notes the proposals within the draft plan and input their issues and comments through the party briefings.

It is also recommended, further to approval, that Committee members be invited to attend the workshop.

Decision Tracking

Further to approval updates on progress will be presented to a future meeting of the Development Committee.

Time frame: October 2010

Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key Abbreviations

DEL – Department for Employment and Learning

DSD – Department for Social Development

MoU – Memorandum of Understanding

ESF – European Social Fund

Documents Attached

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