



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Consultation response – draft Northern Ireland Executive Economic Strategy: “Priorities for sustainable growth”

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Northern Ireland Executive’s draft economic strategy “Priorities for Sustainable Growth” was launched for consultation in November 2011. The closing date for submissions to the consultation is 22 February 2012.
1.2	The draft strategy identifies the twin goals of rebuilding and rebalancing the economy. It contains a long-term vision to 2030 to create “an economy characterised by a sustainable and growing private sector, where a greater number of firms compete in global markets and there is growing employment and prosperity.”
1.3	The draft economic strategy has been developed by a sub-committee of the Executive, chaired by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It is based on analysis of global best practice on issues such as stimulating innovation and R&D (research and development); investment in skills and employability, connections to the global economy, developing economic infrastructure and encouraging business growth.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The draft strategy builds on Northern Ireland Executive’s Economic Strategy: Consultation on Priorities for Sustainable Growth and Prosperity in February 2011. This underlined the need for export-led growth as the best means of increasing employment and wealth in Northern Ireland and the improving the overall competitiveness.
2.2	The draft strategy includes a framework for economic growth, built around the rebuilding and rebalancing themes. It includes a range of short, medium and

	<p>long-term priorities for growth within which specific activities are identified. The rebuilding theme focuses on increasing private sector productivity while the rebuilding theme is based on creating employment in export focused sectors.</p>
2.3	<p>The key priorities under the rebalancing theme are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stimulating innovation and creativity - Improving employability and the level, relevance and use of skills - Competing in the global economy - Encouraging business growth - Developing economic infrastructure
2.4	<p>The key priorities under the rebuilding theme are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving employment opportunities and employability - Promoting employment
2.5	<p>The draft Belfast City Council response to the document is attached as Appendix 1. It includes a range of general comments on the draft strategy as well as a number of specific points around the issues of business growth; investment and infrastructure; skills development and management and governance.</p>
2.6	<p>Some of the major issues outlined in the draft response include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A broad welcome for the draft strategy and a request that the Council's investment programme is supported by the Northern Ireland Executive and specifically incorporated within the economic strategy - A request that recognition is given to Belfast's role as the regional driver and that an appropriate interface is put in place across government to coordinate policy and address the challenges presented in delivering key strategic projects, particularly the University of Ulster - A welcome for the acknowledgement that Belfast and Derry/Londonderry have a specific role to play in the economic competitiveness of the region and a proposal to support a new urban development programme as part of the next wave of EU funding programmes (2014-2020) - The need to consider the future supply of appropriate office accommodation for large scale investments and a request to urgently review this and to consider how future supply might be incentivised in the current climate - The need to explore alternative forms of finance for major capital schemes and a request for the Executive to put in place the necessary regulatory requirements to allow councils to explore these options - A proposal to establish a ministerial working group to look at town and city centre regeneration issues, as has happened in the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament - Identification of the opportunities presented by the renewables sector and the need for a targeted strategy for its future development. This might include the establishment of an Enterprise Zone for renewables in the Belfast Harbour/North Foreshore area of the city - Support for the commitment to explore the implementation of social clauses for government capital schemes, urging a dialogue across government to

	<p>agree a framework for their management and monitoring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A request that the capital schemes identified in the investment programme as well as the wider programme of public and investment initiatives are given urgent attention by the relevant government departments and agencies, and that efforts are focused on expediting their progress through the necessary administrative and statutory approvals processes.
2.7	<p>The draft economic strategy has been issued for consultation alongside the Programme for Government (2011-2015) and the Investment Strategy (2011-2021). The closing date for responses to these documents is also 22 February. Draft Belfast City Council responses to these are to be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in February. The Programme for Government's number one priority is "growing a sustainable economy and investing in the future" while the Investment Strategy focuses on "supporting economic recovery and growth" so there is a clear alignment between all three documents.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	No specific resource implications attached to this report.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	All documents will be subject to EQIA.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the consultations on the draft Programme for Government, Investment Strategy and Economic Strategy - Note the attached draft response to the draft Economic Strategy and agree that it should be submitted to the Northern Ireland Executive, subject to any comments and amendments required.

6	Decision Tracking
	There is no decision tracking attached to this report.

7	Key to Abbreviations
	EQIA – Equality impact assessment

8	Documents attached
	Appendix 1 - Economic strategy, draft Belfast City Council response.