



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	BCC Response to the draft Programme for Government, the Draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland, and the draft NI Economic Strategy
Date:	Friday 17 February 2012
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1.0	<u>RELEVANT BACKGROUND</u>
1.1	On 17 November 2011, the First Minister and deputy First Minister published the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015 and draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. In parallel, the Department of Trade and Investment (DETI) DETI released the draft NI Economic Strategy for consultation.
1.2	<p>The draft Programme for Government 2011-2015 (PfG) sets out the high level objectives and actions of the NI Executive over the next four years which focuses on the following key priority areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future - Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Well-Being - Protecting Our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities - Building a Strong and Shared Community - Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services
1.3	The draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021 (ISNI) sets out the NI Executive and central government's investment priorities over the next decade. The Investment Strategy seeks to provide a modern and efficient infrastructure which will act as a stimulus to create a growing and sustainable economy, and delivering high quality and efficient public services.
1.4	<p>The draft Economic Strategy for Northern Ireland seeks to improve the economic competitiveness of the economy by increasing employment and wealth opportunities for all. The draft strategy includes a framework for economic growth, built around the rebuilding and rebalancing themes. It includes a range of short, medium and 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> <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 <p>The key priorities under the rebuilding theme are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving employment opportunities and employability - Promoting employment

1.5	It is clear that the three documents are interrelated and will collectively shape the future direction of public investment within Northern Ireland. Given the clear linkages and synergies between the draft PfG and ISNI and the Council's own Investment Programme, a combined response to both documents has been prepared and is attached at Appendix 1 for Members consideration.
1.6	The Development Committee had given detailed consideration to the draft NI Economic Strategy on 7 February and a draft Council response is attached at Appendix 2 for Members consideration. As the Economic Strategy seeks to deliver against a number of the key priorities identified within the draft PfG and ISNI including growing a sustainable economy, supporting economic recovery and growth, and rebalancing and rebuilding the economy, the draft Council response attached at Appendix 1 incorporates the relevant points raised in the draft response to the Economic Strategic (Appendix 2)
<i>Draft Council response to PfG and ISNI</i>	
1.7	The draft Council response to the PfG and ISNI set out at Appendix 1 is a companion piece to the Council's own investment programme seeks a firm commitment from the NI Executive to include the Investment Programme within the PfG and ISNI and to enable us to jointly maximise the potential opportunities for greater alignment and integration of resources/efforts to ensure key investment priorities for the city area delivered. A commitment to work in partnership and integrate resources to ensure effective delivery within Belfast is the underpinning tenet of our response.
1.8	<p>The response provides an Executive Summary of the main issues raised as well as a number of specific comments linked to the priority areas identified within the draft PfG and ISNI. An overview of the key points outlined in the draft response include:</p> <p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council commends the NI Executive on its clear commitment to continue to invest during this period of economic austerity, a commitment shared by the Council as set out within the Councils Investment Programme. • A request that the Belfast Investment Programme be supported by the NI Executive and specifically incorporated within the PfG and ISNI • The Desire of the Council to work in partnership with NI Executive to identify and develop joint delivery models and to align and integrate resources where possible to ensure delivery. • The PfG and ISNI need to commit resources to the identified investment projects for Belfast. • A proposal to establish a 'Belfast Delivery Forum' and 'Implementation Plan' which ensures that capacity exists across all agencies and resources to ensure delivery of key investment projects. • A request for greater focus to be given to creating a set of policy instruments to maximise the benefits of our cities in supporting the economic recovery of Northern Ireland. • Support a new urban development programme as part of the next wave of EU funding programmes (2014-2020) <p>Priority 1: Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A request to work with the NI Executive and DETI to maximise the economic benefits of the potential investment in enhancing the City's broadband infrastructure as recently announced by the UK Chancellor George Osborne. • 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. • 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. • 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

- 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 relocation of the University of Ulster into Belfast City Centre.
- Identification of the opportunities presented by business tourism and the associated need for adequate investment in providing needed infrastructure e.g. integrated conference and exhibition facilities for conferences of an international scale.
- 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
- Request that consideration be given to allocating further investment in the provision of public transport as an overall percentage of the investment in roads infrastructure.

Priority 2: Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Wellbeing

- Seek the support of the NI Executive and relevant government departments to deliver the actions emerging from the Belfast Strategic Partnership's 'Framework for Action on Life Inequalities 2011-2015'.
- Seek further discussions with NI Executive and the Department of Finance and Personnel in pursuance of integrated approaches to address poverty and social inequalities within Belfast and wider region.
- Advocate that the co-location and integration of public services should be considered as a key service delivery model of the future.
- Suggest that the new Public Health Strategy for Northern Ireland should be considered as a key building block for the draft PfG and ISNI.
- Welcome the creation of the Social Investment Fund and request that consideration be given to Belfast City Council securing representation on any governance structure put in place to over the administration of the fund.
- Request that a budget be included in the PfG and ISNI for the delivery of the Belfast rapid transit system which will play a key role in supporting local economies, linking businesses with markets and linking communities and people with potential employment opportunities.

Priority 3: Protecting our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities

- Advocate for greater level of funding for the development of critical waste infrastructure within Northern Ireland
- Advocate that further consideration be given to the potential to create a single waste disposal authority within Northern Ireland.
- Suggest that incremental targets for both reductions in greenhouse gas omissions and air quality standards be included.
- Request that the Department of Regional Development's pilot initiative to roll-out electronic vehicle infrastructure be included in the draft PfG and ISNI.
- Request that consideration be given to the potential inclusion of a Belfast based public bike hire scheme as part of the PfG and ISNI investment priorities linked to sustainable transport.

Priority 4: Building a Strong and Shared Community

- Council desire to work with the NI Executive and all relevant statutory and community stakeholders to build a strong and shared community and promote equality and good relations.
- Advocate the need for a concerted and inter-agency approach to addressing historic physical and non physical barriers within the city and their contribution to division and segregation.

Priority 5: Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council welcomes and remains committed to taking forward local government reform and ensuring the effective and efficient transfer and integration of important new place-shaping functions. • The Council would wish to explore with NI Executive and DFP the types of financial mechanisms which could be utilised to enable local government fund specific elements of reform on an 'invest to save' basis. • Commend that the transfer of functions be rates neutral at point of transfer to local government. • The Council recognises the strategic significance of Planning in supporting economic development and regeneration activity and wish to work with NI Executive and DoE to ensure that planning can deliver against the ambitious targets set out within draft PfG and ISNI. • The Council would wish to explore with the NI Executive and government departments the potential for greater integration/co-design and co-location of public services at the local level. • Support for the commitment to explore the implementation of social clauses for government capital schemes, urging a dialogue across government to maximise the potential impact of these
1.9	As recommended by Members at the recent SP&R delivery workshop on 3 February and recent discussions in regards to the development of the Council's own Investment Programme, in responding to the draft PfG, ISNI and Economic Strategy, the Council will request to meet with the NI Executive, the First and Deputy First Minister and other relevant Ministers to discuss the Investment Programme and shared investment priorities for the City.

3.0 Resource Implications

There are no financial or human resource commitments contained within this report.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 Members are asked to:
- i) consider the contents of this report:
 - ii) consider the draft Council response attached at Appendix 1 to the draft PfG and ISNI and provide any feedback which they may have;
 - iii) consider the draft Council response attached at Appendix 2 to the draft Economic Strategy and provide any feedback/comments which they may have
 - iv) agree that the revised Council's responses, taking account of any amendments made by Members, be submitted to OFMDFM and DETI

5.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft BCC response to draft PfG and ISNI

Appendix 2: draft Council response to draft Economic Strategy