

Draft Investment Programme 2012-2015

Consultation Feedback Report

DRAFT



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1. Background

The draft **Investment Programme for Belfast 2012 – 2015** set out what Belfast City Council aimed to do, both on its own and with others, to help Belfast cope with the economic downturn. It explained why the Council was investing in the city and where and how it hoped to do this.

The 44 page document set out a number of key commitments including:

- Investing £150 million on physical improvements to buildings, places and spaces
- Investing over £34 million to support the local economy and to help local people develop skills and work experience to make it easier for them to get jobs
- Investing over £29 million to support local communities and neighbourhoods to help make places more attractive where people can feel safe and be more active
- Saving £20 million by 2015 by running the Council more efficiently

Conscious of the impact of the economic downturn was having on local families, businesses and communities, the draft Investment Programme called for joint working across all sectors, organisations and communities, to bring together the resources needed to make Belfast a competitive, inclusive and successful city. It also sought to capitalise on Belfast's growing reputation internationally – stating that now was the time to invest in our city, particularly if we want to sustain our growth and vibrancy and build on the positive developments of the past two decades.

However, the Council's Elected Members were keen that local people, communities and partner organisations had an opportunity to influence the strategic thinking of Council and its investment decisions. The draft Investment Programme was therefore opened to public consultation to enable local people and organisations an opportunity to comment on the draft programme and influence its content before being agreed by Council. The consultation also sought views on how the Council could work partnership to deliver the commitments, plans and programmes in the Investment Programme

The Draft Investment Programme was formally launched by Belfast City Council on 2nd February 2012 at an event in the Waterfront Hall and was followed by a number of local community launches across Belfast. The consultation on the draft investment Programme ran for a period of 12 weeks, closing on 27th April 2012. At the request of a number of respondents, we extended the consultation to Wednesday 2nd May 2012.

This report provides an overview of the consultation process and highlights the key issues that were raised.

"This programme has been developed and supported by all six of the political parties on Belfast City Council. It's our commitment to address the economic downturn in Belfast [and] represents the biggest single demonstration of our unity and commitment to serve the people of Belfast in the most effective and efficient way. Our aim is to make our great city even better".

Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources committee, Councillor Deirdre Hargey

"It is clear from the strategy launched today that Belfast City Council aims to make the most of the once in a lifetime opportunity we now have to promote Belfast and Northern Ireland on a world stage. "The Council is showing true leadership in bringing forward a comprehensive investment strategy at a time that remain challenging for everyone. The initiative and commitment to investment it has shown is evidence of what can be gained from taking a strategic approach to tackling the issues that impact most on our society."

Extract form First Minister, Peter Robinson speaking at the launch on 2nd February 2012

2. The Consultation Process

A number of mechanisms were used to ensure that consultees had an opportunity to engage with the Council and submit their views:

- The Draft Investment Programme was launched at a public event and promoted widely in the press;
- Five local community launches in each of the key areas of the city (additional local events were also held as requested). The format for the launches included an open question and answer session.
- An information document explaining the Investment Programme and the commitments, plans and programmes within it was made available at all the vents and also on request. The document was also available on the Council's website.
- A questionnaire to help elicit views and ideas was placed on the Council's website for download and subsequent hard copy submission using a freepost service or returned electronically by email. Respondents were also able to submit general comments in writing or in email.
- An article and feedback slip was included within the March – April edition of City Matters, the Council's resident magazine which is circulated to all households in the Belfast district council area.
- A focused consultation was held with the Council's Youth Forum and other youth groups from across the city people – this included creating a young people's version of the plan to facilitate discussion.
- The Council uses facebook and twitter – any comments posted on these social media sites about the Investment Programme were also fed into the consultation process.
- A separate EQIA was also conducted and circulated to organisations on our Equality list and statutory agencies.

In effect there were 6 main types of consultation responses:

- Completed questionnaires (online and hard copy);
- Alternative written submissions;
- Comments via City Matters feedback slip;
- Comments via facebook and twitter
- Outcome from public consultation events; and
- Outcome from engagement with young people.

A briefing session was held for Council employees, who were also encouraged to submit comments and ideas .

3. Consultation Responses Received

A total of 107 individual responses were received representing a broad mix of organisations, sectors and geographies.

Type of Response:	Numbers
Survey Responses	33
Written Responses (non survey)	20
Public comments by City Matters	50
Public comments by email	1
Public comments by facebook etc	tbc
Employee Comments	3

Sector Breakdown:	
Voluntary & Community Sector	32
Statutory & Public Bodies	16
Residents	54

Overall	
Area (if known)	Numbers
North	20
South	16
East	23
West	6
Greater Shankill	2
City Centre	5
Citywide / Regional	25

Resident Responses – City Matters	
Area (if known)	Numbers
North	11
South	9
East	21
West	4
Greater Shankill	1
City Centre	2

4. Key Views – Overall Consultation Exercise

An analysis of all the consultation responses indicates:

- The overwhelming majority of respondents were supportive of the Investment Programme.
- Many “welcomed” its publication and commended the Council for its vision. *“An ambitious plan that is to be welcomed in this difficult economic climate”.*
- Encouragingly, even the small number of respondents to the survey who did not agree with the statement questions, were still generally in support of the Investment Programme and ‘welcomed’ its publication. The reasons for recording disagreement seem to stem from concerns about the difficulties of affecting change in deprived communities or the perceived lack of emphasis in some areas (such as the environment) rather than objections to the Programme per se
- Only one respondent was completely opposed to the IP: *“I oppose any investment decisions which the Council will make unless it can show that they will be at a nil cost to the ratepayer. Local Government should not be a charity.”*
- The majority of Belfast residents who submitted comments about the Investment Programme welcomed the investment and were supportive of the approach taken by council. Whilst the majority were complimentary about the Programme, some (less than 10%) did question the cost of rates and the desirability for these to be lower.
- Almost all of the responses from organisations, whether they were voluntary, community or public bodies, indicated that they would be keen to work in partnership with the Council, and highlighted the projects, skills, knowledge and experience they had which would help council to deliver the Programme. These ‘expressions of interest’ have been collated and circulated to relevant Council Department.
- Respondents also offered many ideas and comments including suggestions for projects, joint working initiatives or ideas on how to support implementation. A list of all the ideas and suggestions has been forwarded to the relevant Service / Department. Any ideas relating to local projects or the Local Investment Fund have been forwarded to the appropriate Area Working Group. These are currently being considered in more detail along with how we can support the ideas relating to collaborative working.
- The views of council employees broadly reflected those of local communities, with employees keen to know how the Programme could help support and improve the quality of life for young people, older people and other vulnerable members of the community. Employees also acknowledged the challenges ahead in terms of implementation
- Respondents also raised a number of issues relating to the implementation of the plan, including:
 - The importance / need for early and ongoing engagement and involvement of local communities and partner organisations
 - The need for greater clarity around the prioritisation of physical projects and the financial breakdown and allocations across projects / areas
 - The importance of leadership and genuine collaboration to deliver the programme

The following table provides an indicative list of recurring key themes which have emerged from the consultation. This is based on the frequency with which these issues issued appeared, and although

it should be noted that these issues were often repeated and re-iterated by respondents, it does provide an indication of the perceived importance and strength of feeling amongst respondents.

Issue	Frequency
Importance / need for partnership and collaboration (including requests / offers to work in partnership)	60
Importance / need for more consultation, local community involvement and engagement	45
Welcome Plan / Commends Council / Sends out positive message/ Good start & potential	40
Balanced investment supported but important that all parts of the city / local areas benefit (and importance of addressing areas of need)	28

Respondents also frequently highlighted the following issues as important or indicated their support for :

- Importance of Leadership – long term vision, sustainability and value for money
- The underlying principles (and how they will be used to drive /support implementation)
- Balanced Investment
- Commitment to people, communities and neighbourhoods
- Health & Wellbeing (with a focus on mental wellbeing or early years)
- Good Relations - Recognising legacy of conflict / importance of creating shared space and avoiding duplication or encouraging segregation
- Interfaces – importance / welcome the focus
- Prioritising economy projects that provide greatest impact on job creation / sustainable jobs
- Environmental / digital technology sectors
- Tourism, arts & culture etc
- Creative Sector
- Bursaries and Work Placements etc
- Social Clauses
- Environmental issues – e.g. greater emphasis and reference to avoiding EU fines

A question relating to equality of opportunity was included within the consultation questionnaire, which generally elicited a positive response with the view being that the Programme would help promote good relations and equality of opportunity. Some respondents did acknowledge that good relations and addressing the legacy of the past was a complex and challenging area; others pointed out the linkages between deprivation and a divided society. However, it was clear that the Investment Programme was a step in the right direction. In moving forward, it will be important that Council ensures that equality and good relations are systematically addressed within the implementation processes, including the work of the Areas Working Groups.

A separate EQIA consultation exercise was undertaken in tandem with the public consultation on the draft Investment Programme. Key issues emerging from the responses relate to:

- Demonstrating that we have based decisions on good evidence
- Effective consultation with local people
- Ensuring that the needs of specific S.75 groups are effectively taken into consideration and pro-active steps taken to ensure outreach and secure measurable impact in delivering the Programme. Specific examples about the impact on people with disabilities was noted.

The following sections provide a more detailed summary of the findings from each of the consultation mechanisms.

4.1 Key views and Summary of the questionnaire responses

The on-line questionnaire asked respondents whether they:

- i. agreed with our key commitments, projects and programmes;
- ii. agreed with the principles;
- iii. whether it would help address the challenges facing Belfast;
- iv. whether it would help promote equality of opportunity; and,
- v. sought ideas about how the Council could work in partnership to deliver the Programme

A total of 33 questionnaires were returned. The overwhelming majority of those responding to the survey were generally positive and supportive of the Council’s plans and approach, with many commending the council for its leadership and vision, particularly in this time of economic uncertainty:

It is great to see an ambitious plan for the city.

We get a sense of energy, excitement and commitment from this Investment

Overall, we commend BCC for compiling this Investment Programme and feel it offers a detailed framework for supporting economic growth in the foreseeable future.

Table 1 below sets out the quantitative analysis of the “yes/no” responses to the questionnaire and shows that the majority of people were supportive of the Programme and agreed with the commitments, principles and approach (Note % figures are based on the no. of responses to individual questions as some respondents did not answer all questions) :

Table 1.	Yes		No	
	Count	%	Count	%
Do you agree with the key commitments, projects and programmes outlined in our Investment Programme 2012-2015?	30.5	92%	2.5	8%
Do you agree with the principles which underpin the Investment Programme?	31	94%	2	6%
Do you think this Programme will help address the challenges that Belfast faces over the coming years?	29	90%	3	10%
Do you think the commitments, projects and programmes will help promote equality of opportunity and/or promote good relations?	28	93%	2	7%

Encouragingly, even the small number who indicated disagreement, were generally in support of the Investment Programme and ‘welcomed’ its publication. The reasons for recording disagreement seem to stem from concerns about its ability to actually affect change in deprived communities or the perceived emphasis in some areas rather than objecting to the Programme per se.

Has the potential to make measureable improvements [and] welcome the partnership approach. However such an approach has been adopted in the past....How will this be different from previous initiatives?

There should be more emphasis on sustainability in the wider sense...it should be tackling the economic and environmental challenges together to create a more resilient city

The questionnaire provided space for respondents to offer detailed comment. This generated significant comment; all ideas and suggestions have been collated, along with comments and ideas from the other response mechanisms, and are being considered by the relevant Council Department.

4.2 Key views and Summary of written and email responses

Twenty-one respondents chose to submit general responses rather than complete the questionnaire. These tended to be from public bodies or community and voluntary organisations and were in the form of detailed written documents with additional supplementary information or evidence also provided to demonstrate key points. For example, additional information was provided on the correlation between health and deprivation, on the legacy of the conflict and the impact of division on society or how community engagement can support better outcomes.

The detailed responses and summaries have been forwarded to the relevant council Department for further consideration as appropriate; the key themes and suggestions are also reflected in the overall thematic analysis.

All but one of the non-survey responses were supportive of the Investment Programme, with the majority of those offering to work in further partnership with the Council to help deliver the ambitions set out within the Investment Programme. The only exception was an email comment received from a resident who disagreed with any Council investment unless it “*will be at a nil cost to the ratepayer*”.

We commend the City Council for this visionary programme to enhance the economic, social, educational, cultural and sporting opportunities for the benefit of all of the citizens of Belfast and the wider region which it serves

We welcome the Council's emphasis on collaborative working. We look forward to building on the already productive relationship which exists between our two organisations.

We welcome the Belfast Investment Programme and particularly the coordinated political approach to the challenges facing the city

The commitments outlined [in the Investment Programme] are to be welcomed. We believe this comprehensive approach is needed to increase jobs, tackle poverty, inequality and deprivation and promote a positive and vibrant city.

it is great to see an ambitious plan for the city & we look forward to working with Councillors and Officers to implement

4.3 Key views and Summary of City Matter responses

A feature article on the draft Investment Programme was included in City Matters (April - June 2012) – the council’s resident magazine that is circulated to all households in Belfast. Readers were given the opportunity to return comments using a tear-out slip and freepost service. A total of 50 comments were received and provide a snapshot of what ordinary local residents think (whereas the questionnaire and written responses tend to reflect the views of organisations and community groups/representatives).

As with the questionnaire responses, the majority of comments via City Matters were positive and supportive.

I think the Investment Programme is wonderful. Bringing Belfast to life and making me proud to reside here.

Am happy with the priorities identified in this ever increasingly harsh environment, it is good to see 'value for money' & priority/target so we know as rates money is being well spent.

I am extremely happy with the efforts of the city Council. I feel that money is being spent in the right areas attracting both business and tourism which is essential in NI staying afloat in these times.

Over-all it looks like money well spent very commendable.

Of the 50 comments received via City Matters, only one respondent openly questioned the Investment Programme and a further 4 respondents also raised concerns about the cost of rates e.g. “Bring down rates – can’t afford them”. However, conversely, another respondent stated that they would be “Happy to pay the increase in rates if it is put back into the city and offers everyone a better quality of community life.”

A number of respondents specifically welcomed:

- the focus on young people
- the importance of parks, playgrounds and community gardens
- the focus on the economy, arts, culture and tourism.

Others used the opportunity to comment on other Council services – this included praise and commendations especially in relation to recent events such as Titanic Belfast as well as raising individual matters of concern e.g. dog fouling. These have been collated and have been forwarded to the relevant Department / Service for information.

4.4 Key views which emerged from local community launch events

Following the public launch of the Draft Investment Programme at the Waterfront Hall, five local community launches were held in each of the key geographical areas of the city:

- Shankill – Wednesday 8 February in Argyle Business Centre
- East – Thursday 9 February in Belmont Tower
- West – Friday 10 February in An Chultúrlann
- North - Wednesday 15 February in Crumlin Road Gaol
- South – Thursday 16 February in Olympia Leisure Centre

Additional local events were also facilitated as requested.

Representatives from each of the political parties and senior Council officers attended each event which consisted of an informative presentation followed by an open question and answer session. A note was taken of the questions and answers from each session. The key issues emerging from these open feedback sessions can be summarised as follows:

- Generally, the document was well received and welcomed by many of those who spoke or asked questions. Many of those who spoke expressed their commitment to work with the Council or be involved in ongoing engagement. The desire and importance for ongoing engagement with communities was a recurring theme.
- Other key themes that emerged related to how the Programme could support young people and socially deprived communities. There was interest in the use of social clauses and a strong focus on using the Programme to generate positive messages to provide a hopeful future for young people.
- There was significant interest in the type of jobs, apprentices and work placement opportunities – specifically how they will be developed, whether they will be low skilled / low paid jobs and whether they will benefit / target local people living in social deprived areas and how they could lead to meaningful long term employment
- Questions about area specific issues or local physical projects also featured in the feedback questions, including the desire for more support for local independent business and retailers. Many of those voicing opinions felt it was critical that the physical projects actually lead to improved quality of life and delivered social / community benefits.

At the local events, the Elected Members communicated the opportunity presented by the Local Investment Fund, outlining that groups should get in touch with their local elected representatives with any ideas and proposals. Any specific project proposals made to Members subsequent to the launch have been fed into the Area Working Groups for consideration. Members are considering the process for moving forward the local Investment Fund and feedback from the consultation has informed recommendations about process and communication relating to the Fund.

4.5 Key views which emerged from the Consultation with Children & Young People

As a number of the issues within the draft Investment Programme had the potential to impact directly on young people, Councillors felt it was important to engage directly with young people. This was also highlighted by many of those attending the local community launches. Therefore, as part of the consultation process, a focused consultation was held with the Council's Youth Forum and other youth groups from across the city people.

To ensure that our engagement was meaningful and relevant to young people, a pre-workshop focus group with a representative sample of the Council's Youth Forum members was undertaken. As a result of this we prepared a shortened and more young person friendly version of the document to facilitate discussion and to help focus the workshop on those matters that are most likely to affect or interest young people.

The work with the Council's Youth Forum and the workshop illustrated how important these issues were to young people. Key issues emerging from the focus group work with young people were:

- Young people are interested and want to be kept informed – but messages need to be simple, clear and relevant. Also need to ensure that information reaches young people. They want to know what is available (events, festivals and funding etc)
- They have major concerns about access to training and employment and how to ensure skills are accessible and relevant. The focus on formal qualifications presents difficulties for many young people, therefore the bursaries and placement opportunities must be accessible to young people at all levels. Incentives for young people to stay at school or further education was also a key issue.
- Young people were particularly interested in their local amenities – suggesting that more engagement with young people was needed to ensure facilities were interesting, relevant and affordable. The importance of young leadership programmes was noted and how youth volunteering could be better supported and lead to employment opportunities.
- Mental wellbeing and safety were also highlighted as important with young people suggesting that more imaginative and long term support was needed.
- The cost of transport and accessing services, facilities and events was also highlighted as an area of concern.
- A number of practical suggestions and comments were made – which have been incorporated within the feedback analysis and passed to council services as relevant.

A copy of the Draft Investment Programme has also been sent to all post-primary schools and further and higher education colleges / universities in the Belfast area for information and comment. The Investment Programme, with its emphasis on skills, employability and the support for culture, leisure and positive mental well-being, was seen as a positive development particularly for young people and one which should provide better opportunities for them people and help to create a better and more optimistic future. The need for more joined-up working was seen as key.

4.6 Key views which emerged engagement with Employees

An information session was held with Council employees as part of the communication and consultation process. It followed a similar format to the community launches and was very well attended. The views of council employees broadly reflected those of local communities – employees welcomed the ambition and investment in the city and the vision and leadership displayed by Council.

However, employees keen to know more about how the Programme would be implemented and actioned and in particular how it could help support and improve the quality of life for young people, older people and other vulnerable members of the community. Employees acknowledged the challenges ahead in terms of implementation.

The Council's trade unions also attended the briefing and highlighted the desirability for investment and job creation.

Councillors took the opportunity to recognise the hard work of staff and committed to holding a similar session again in a year's time to review progress and learning.

5. Belfast City Council Interim Response to the consultation

To be updated after SP&R Committee – 22nd June 2012

The overwhelming response to the consultation on the draft Investment Programme was positive – with numerous respondents commending the council for its leadership and vision. Throughout all methods of feedback, the overwhelming majority of respondents were supportive of the Programme – the commitments, projects and programmes and the underlying principles. Whilst there were a number of requests for clarification as well as a wide range of ideas and suggestions offered, they did not detract from the overall support for the Programme.

It is great to see an ambitious plan for the city.

We get a sense of energy, excitement and commitment from this Investment

Overall, we commend BCC for compiling this Investment Programme and feel it offers a detailed framework for supporting economic growth in the foreseeable future.

We believe the Investment Programme represents a very real and exciting opportunity for key stakeholders to come together to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of individuals, communities and the city as a whole.

We commend the City Council for this visionary programme to enhance the economic, social, educational, cultural and sporting opportunities for the benefit of all of the citizens of Belfast and the wider region which it serves.

An ambitious plan that is to be welcomed in this difficult economic climate.

I think the Investment Programme is wonderful. Bringing Belfast to life and making me proud to reside here.

Belfast City Council, therefore, views the consultation responses as an endorsement of the draft Investment Programme and will move to implement the Programme. Some amendments to the document will be undertaken as follows:

- i. We will explain and elaborate the Council’s approach to environmental issues – demonstrating the Council’s commitment to the environment and sustainable development and how it underpins much of our work and strategic decisions needs to be more clearly articulated within a revised document. Through the Council’s corporate plan, it will also be possible to give more visibility to the council’s work in this area
- ii. We will include more detail on the monitoring and evaluation, including specifying how we will report and feedback and the mechanisms we will use. These are currently being developed in line with the continuing development and implementation of the Programme’s monitoring and communications plan.
- iii. We will include or signpost an explanation of the process for on-going prioritisation, community engagement, and communication about all aspects of the programme.
- iv. We will include reference to Belfast as a WHO “Healthy City” under the Belfast Snapshot page.

The consultation generated a high level of interest, with many respondents providing detailed comments, issues, ideas and suggestions which have been forwarded to the relevant Department. A further update on the Council’s response to these will be developed and placed on the Council website once we have had an opportunity to consider and respond to the detailed comments.

The Council will continue to work to implement the Programme and deliver on our commitments to the city. We are conscious; however, that there are a number of challenges ahead and that much more work is required in collaboration with our many communities and partners if we are to truly achieve the

ambition articulated in the draft Programme. We appreciate the suggestions and comments made by respondents and will work to address the issues raised.

Annexe A: List of Respondents (Organisations only):

Organisation
Arts Council of Northern Ireland
Belfast Area Partnerships
Belfast City Centre Management
Belfast Healthy Cities
Belfast Metropolitan College
Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau
Carrick Hill Residents Association
Cathedral Quarter Trust
Cave Hill Conservation Campaign
Charity Sólás
Community Relations Council
Cromac Regeneration Initiative
Disability Action
Donegall Pass Community Forum
Early Years
East Belfast Partnership
Folktown Community Interest Company
Greater Shankill Partnership
Invest NI
Lighthouse Ireland
Ligoniel Village Neighbourhood Partnership
Lytic Theatre
MAG (<i>Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture & the Built Environment</i>)
May Street Presbyterian Church
Mornington Community Project
Multimedia Heritage
North Belfast Partnership
North Belfast Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland
NIACRO
Northern Ireland Co-operative Forum
Northern Ireland Tourist Board
Ormeau Enterprises Ltd
PIPS
Queen Street Studios
Sandy Row Community Forum
Shop Mobility
South Belfast Partnership
Springvale Learning
Tonnta Community Interest Company
Ulster Garden Villages Ltd
University of Ulster
West Belfast Partnership
Women's Support Network

