

Appendix 1: Draft Response

Consultation on an Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland (Economy 2030)

Belfast City Council (the Council) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the development of an Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Given the growing trend towards greater globalisation and economic uncertainty, there is an opportunity and pressing need to develop new integrated approaches to ensure that the region remains competitive on an international scale, that we continue to attract investment and that we connect economic growth and social wellbeing.

Overview and alignment of ambitions

We believe that there are real benefits that can be achieved by adopting a place-based approach to inclusive growth. We also consider that there is an opportunity to maximise the synergies of local and regional ambitions by developing productive and collaborative working relationships between central and local government.

The Council's first community plan (Belfast Agenda) currently out to consultation. It includes a number of ambitious and challenging targets for economic and social growth. These include:

By 2035, we will:

- Belfast will be home to an additional 70,000 new residents
- Our urban economy supports 50,000 more jobs
- There will be a 50% reduction in the life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods
- Every young person leaving school has a destination that fulfils their potential.

We have also committed to deliver on a number of priority targets over the next four years. By 2021; together with our city partners we will:

- Create 15,000 new jobs
- Attract £1billion of private sector Foreign Direct Investment
- Support 4,000 small business start-ups
- Reduce the gap between Belfast's economic inactivity rate and the NI average
- Double the economic value of out-of-state tourism
- Welcome 1.5m overnight tourist stays per year.

This is supported through the delivery of a number of city strategies including the City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (2015-2030), the Employability and Skills Framework (2015-

2025), International Relations Framework (2016-2021), Integrated Tourism Strategy (2015-20), and the Belfast Local Development Plan, which is also currently out for public consultation.

Clearly there is alignment in our ambitions for growth and we would be keen to work closely with government departments to understand how Belfast can make a meaningful contribution to deliver the regional economic milestones.

The consideration of an 'Industrial Strategy Partnership' to advise and assist with the implementation of the Strategy is encouraging in that it will involve government, local government, industry, third sector and trade union representatives. We are keen to input to this.

Inclusive, Sustainable Growth

While there are clear signs of recovery in the Belfast economy, a number of economic challenges remain. These include an over reliance on public sector jobs; an under-developed business start-up environment with low entrepreneurship levels; a workforce which is strongly divided between the highly educated and the unskilled; and an ageing city urban infrastructure that requires significant investment if it is to meet the demands of a twenty-first century economy.

The Council has previously stressed the importance of addressing the employability and skills challenges as this is a brake on city and regional competitiveness. We are encouraged that enhancing education, skills and employability is included as a one of the pillars for growth. However, we consider that there is a need for greater collaboration between and engagement between the Department for Education and the Department for Economy to ensure that limited resources are utilised to best effect.

The Council's approach to inclusive economic growth focuses not only on stimulating economic growth and creating jobs through investment in infrastructure and service provision, but also in ensuring that as many people as possible have access to those jobs through employability and skills initiatives. Tourism is a prime example as a key economic and employment sector for Northern Ireland and should be referenced within the regional Industrial Strategy; particularly as many of the priority sectors included are high tech and unlikely to create opportunities for those furthest from the labour market – tourism has a vital role in creating these opportunities. We believe that this approach supports the outcomes based approach, working across government and with local government and businesses to take a fresh approach to the economic growth ambitions of the region; particularly as we adapt to planning within a new global economic environment.

External engagement and input

The Council is establishing an Economic Growth Forum to bring together key influencers, business leaders and agencies to challenge and drive the development of a successful city region economy. Our intention is that this Forum will inform an effective economic strategy for Belfast and the city-region, which supports and complements the regional Industrial strategy. It will build a coherent and evidence-based approach to improving city competitiveness, job creation and support for business. It will deliver long-term strategies for key growth sectors, as well as export-led strategies to support business growth. Alongside the expertise and guidance provided as part of our involvement in the 100 RC initiative, there is the potential for these senior level strategic advisors engage with the Economic Advisory Group in order to strengthen the city-regional alignment and delivery.

Place-based approaches to deliver regional growth

It is timely to compare this NI draft strategy with the recently announced Draft UK Industrial Strategy, particularly given the intention to establish Ministerial Forums with each of the Devolved Administrations comprising of all relevant UK Government Departments and the Devolved Administration. These Ministerial Forums will consider how the UK Industrial Strategy can best address key productivity barriers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A key element of the draft UK Industrial Strategy is that it seeks to further reinforce and strengthen the role of cities and localities in driving growth through a strong devolution agenda. This permeates through the draft UK Strategy and explicitly includes a commitment to explore 'further devolution deals for our largest cities' where they will increase economic growth and ongoing work with Scottish and Welsh cities to secure City Deals. Belfast City Council would welcome the opportunity to input to this process.

Successful cities have become the main source of both national and global economic productivity. A successful Belfast city-region is vital to the future wellbeing of everyone living in Northern Ireland. Belfast provides key networking and connectivity functions for the region as a whole. Belfast is the regional employment hub, with over 30% of all jobs based in the city and with 58% of people travelling from outside the Belfast City Council area to work in the city. Therefore the economic growth created within Belfast is distributed across the region.

Other city regions are growing at pace and recent studies show the impact of the city region approaches in effectively attracting foreign investment, small business clustering, matching skills to employers needs connecting people to opportunity, and putting in place vital infrastructure necessary to compete. This is evidenced by the UK Government's promotion of the Northern Powerhouse and the investment in high speed rail projects (HS2 and HS3), and on the island of Ireland with the significance of Dublin as the engine for growth for the rest of the country. It is important that the connections between cities (e.g Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Newry and Dublin) and key economic

drivers, such as the Eastern Corridor, are strengthened if the economic benefits and associated growth are to be delivered.

Belfast has its own functional metropolitan economic area extending to the adjacent councils of Lisburn & Castlereagh, Mid and East Antrim, Antrim and Newtownabbey, and Ards and North Down, accounting for over 51.6% of the total population of Northern Ireland, 57% of all jobs and 57% of the region's GVA. Creating a city-region focus at this scale will better enable the economic milestones outlined in the draft Industrial Strategy to be achieved.

Belfast is therefore a vital asset with the most potential to drive the regional economy. However, in terms of growth and productivity the statistics show that Belfast is not maximising its potential, and consequently lags behind other cities in the UK, Europe and other developed countries. If current levels of performance are maintained Belfast and, in turn, Northern Ireland will fall further behind its global competitors.

We would like to see a much stronger commitment, in this draft strategy, to working with local councils as the facilitators and drivers of local and inclusive economic growth. In short, we would also like to take this opportunity to redesign how we work and to create a new collaborative partnership between central and local government to stimulating and securing inclusive economic growth.

Role of Local Government

Belfast City Council and its Elected Members have set out ambitious targets for supporting the continued investment in the city and stimulating the economic growth and prosperity of Belfast and the wider city region. The Council is currently delivering £400million+ physical investment programme including, including:

- £185m capital programme currently being delivered across the city
- £105m Leisure Transformation Programme – to enhance leisure services and facilities across the city
- £27m Belfast Investment Fund – to support landmark capital schemes
- £18.8m City Centre Investment Fund – to support projects that will revitalise city centre
- £9m Local Investment Fund – to support community-based regeneration projects
- £4m Social Outcomes Fund – to support Social Enterprise Growth

It will be important that we seek to align and maximise the synergies with the investment priorities for the city and seek to integrate, where possible, with established Council funding streams.

The Council is already working in partnership with central government to deliver a number of regional priorities including its recent designation as the delivery agent for a range of capital projects funded under a number of external initiatives including Building Successful Communities (BSC), Urban Villages (UV) and the Social Investment Fund (SIF). These requests recognise both the successful track record of the Council as a delivery agent for capital projects and also the uniquely placed role of the Council as a civic leader in the city.

The Council has a demonstrable track record in delivering and supporting major projects over the last five years – Belfast Waterfront; Girdwood Community Hub; Innovation Factory; and many others – all of which impact across the ambitions in the draft Industrial Strategy.

Specific opportunities for collaboration

The Council has identified a number of priority areas where we would wish to work collaboratively with government departments to co-design and deliver on the pillars for growth identified in the draft NI Industrial Strategy and thereby maximise our ability to achieve the economic milestones contained within the document. These are summarised below and focus on areas where local government could develop its role to lead, coordinate, or facilitate by applying local knowledge expertise, experience and resources in partnership with Government and key stakeholders.

Key Pillars	Overview of Priority Asks and Co-Design Opportunities
Accelerating Innovation and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Harnessing innovation to drive growth – use of information technology and better data management to support future economic growth. The SMART Cities approach is both scalable and transferable to other cities and towns across the region. The Council is currently working with partners to develop a ‘Smart Belfast’ Framework and would welcome the opportunity to work with government departments to further development this - Maximising assets/clusters to accelerate growth – Belfast is home to a number of assets (Catalyst Inc, Innovation Factory etc.) that act as a focal point for innovation and investment. It is critical that investment is focused on developing these assets in order to support future economic growth - Enhanced economic development powers – with the transfer of enterprise powers to local authorities, Belfast City Council is committed to improving both the volume and value of business starts in the city. We recognise the need for collaboration with a range of partners

	<p>involved in this area of work and are committed to developing greater cooperation among partners in order to make progress against the stated ambitions within the Belfast Agenda.</p>
Enhancing Education, Skills and Employability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design and implement an employability pipeline model – we have committed to developing a coherent employability pipeline, focusing on those furthest from the labour market. We recognise the need to engage with the Department for the Economy and the Department for Communities – with other partners – to make this intervention effective and improve outcomes - Potential devolution of funding – in line with our work on the City Deals approach, we would be keen to work with government to support local employment and skills development including any opportunities presented by the Apprenticeship Levy.
Driving Inclusive, Sustainable Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusive Growth Programme – our Belfast Agenda contains an explicit commitment to inclusive growth. We are keen to work with government to ensure that there is a shared articulation of this commitment across all agencies - Supporting business start-up /growth, entrepreneurship & innovation – given the transfer of some economic development functions to councils in 2015, and taking account of the need to see a step-change in business start-up and productivity performance, the Council is keen to work with government and other delivery partners to develop targeted approaches against agreed targets, and to avoid duplication - Circular Economy – we recognise the opportunities presented to transform our approach to waste management; supporting economic growth, innovation and job creation.
Succeeding in Global Markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belfast is the regional magnet for FDI and has in place many of the assets required by investors in terms of skills and infrastructure. We want to work with government to ensure that investment continues to be focused on maintaining these assets in order to ensure a pipeline of investment opportunities, particularly given market volatilities that may present in the coming years

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are in the process of developing a new Festivals and Events Strategy: this will look at how the Council and its partners can invest to maximise the value of events, as part of a wider programme of city promotion and tourism development. Belfast has committed to work with partners to help bring the Rugby World Cup 2023 and is exploring a joint bid for European Capital of Culture 2023 - New World Class Visitor Attraction – the Council wishes to work in partnership to bring forward a second major world class tourism attraction (the Belfast Story) to the region which will give visitors new reasons to holiday and stay longer in Northern Ireland.
<p>Building the Best Economic Infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in infrastructure to support the growth of Belfast as the regional driver – we consider that the growth ambitions in this strategy will only happen if investment is [prioritised on a number of major infrastructure schemes. This may include the need for an Infrastructure Plan for City-Region and Economic Corridors – linked to the regional framework - Agree prioritisation and joint financing models to bring forward the key schemes outlined in the City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy (including new Tourism Infrastructure, North East Quarter, Belfast Streets Ahead, East Bank, North Foreshore, Grade A Office Space and Hotels) - Digital Connectivity – while connectivity is of a good quality, it is critical that investment continues to future-proof the digital infrastructure if the high growth ambitions of this strategy are to be achieved. This is also essential to support social inclusion and inclusive economic growth.

Comments on Specific Consultation Questions

Question 1 – Do you agree with the proposed vision for the Northern Ireland economy? In particular, do you agree with the twin emphasis on competitiveness and inclusiveness

The Council believes that an ambitious strategy that works for everyone is essential to growing the Northern Ireland economy. A forward and outward looking approach that builds on strengths and addresses our persistent economic challenges will be essential to position Northern Ireland globally.

The Council believes that rebalancing the economy by encouraging private sector investment and supporting market diversification is essential for generating sustainable growth, increasing productivity and creating diverse and well paid jobs not only in Belfast but across the region. Central to this is improving the skills and employability levels. It is important that as many people as possible benefit from growth and the city's success – extending well beyond the city boundaries.

There is clear alignment of the ambitions contained in the draft Industrial Strategy and the Belfast Agenda. We want to work alongside our partners including government departments to ensure delivery and bring significant benefit to the wider city-region.

We believe that adopting a place-based approach to the draft regional Industrial Strategy would provide the opportunity to maximise the synergies of local and regional ambitions by redesigning the productive and collaborative working relationships between central and local government. This would enable areas to build on the economic strengths while also enhancing connectivity and access across Northern Ireland and further afield in order to ensure the benefits of economic growth are felt across the region.

In an increasingly competitive global environment, the Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland must remain relevant and take account of the changing economic environment such as the impact of the EU Referendum and the new US Presidency, the increasing move towards technology and SMART solutions and the growing commitment to devolution in the UK.

Question 2 – Do you agreed with the proposed five Pillars for Growth?

The economy doesn't operate in isolation and we note that the five pillars are inter-dependent and mutually supportive. Therefore, the Council is broadly in agreement with the proposed pillars. Given the persistent challenges around economic inactivity and the skills levels /gap within Northern Ireland it is encouraging that education, skills and employability is identified as one of the five pillars.

Adopting the outcomes-based approach requires a whole systems approach across each of the proposed programmes and actions. Therefore it is essential that the Industrial Strategy is truly connected and co-ordinated with other policies and strategies; particularly in terms of tourism, education, skills and infrastructure. In the final strategy, we would like to see a much clearer description as to how progress will be monitored and managed across the various departments to ensure that all five pillars are delivered successfully.

Given the economic uncertainties as a result of the EU Referendum result, the strategy must be agile enough to adapt to circumstances as soon as possible when the direction of travel has more clarity.

Finally, it will be essential that there is clarity provided as to the resources to be allocated to delivery of this strategy. Otherwise, the objectives set out in the strategy will not be realised.

Question 3 – Do you agree with the proposed economic milestones?

We welcome the broad range of milestones, covering issues including jobs created, qualifications achieved and private sector output grown. However, while the strategy focuses on achieving inclusive growth, there are no clear milestones that reflect this.

Developing economic milestones that define and encompass the inclusive growth agenda are complex and a balanced approach is required. We would encourage an economic milestone for 2030 to reflect a continuum of commitment to achieving the ambition such as that contained in the Belfast Agenda; namely that every young person leaving school has a destination that fulfils their potential. Belfast City Council is exploring appropriate measurements for inclusive growth: we would be keen to ensure that other government partners buy into this approach.

Further clarity on the economic milestones for 2030 would be helpful in terms of whether the milestones are exclusive of each other and enabling further constructive engagement, for example:

- By 2021 - create 50,000 new jobs across Northern Ireland;
- By 2030 - create 80,000 new jobs and create 80,000 jobs in the knowledge economy

It is also worth noting that, given the dominance of micro and small businesses (96% of businesses in Belfast); combined and renewed efforts will be required to support the growth of indigenous business to enable them to grow specifically in export markets to deliver on the export milestone by 2025.

Question 4 – Do you agree with the importance of continuously benchmarking NI against other small advanced economies?

The Council is supportive of continuously benchmarking NI with other small advanced economies. Benchmarking evidence and expert experience combined will support the work of the NI Executive to drive improvements and increase the competitiveness of our cities and region as a whole. The key lessons from best practice are useful points for reference for the growth of the regional economy in Northern Ireland.

We would be supportive of the work of the Economic Advisory Group informing this approach. Our recently-established Belfast Economic Growth Forum could provide a useful platform for engagement with the EAG, focusing on the role of cities within the growth agenda and looking at how Belfast's role as economic driver for the region can be maximised. Given the focus on knowledge economies, it is likely that cities are key drivers of these benchmarks and that investment is focused on these key assets, as a means of fuelling growth in the wider economy.

Question 5 – Do you agree that the Industrial Strategy should now move towards a rebalancing focus?

The Council is supportive of growing the private sector. The Belfast Agenda also recognises that rebalancing the economy by encouraging private sector investment is essential for generating sustainable growth, increasing productivity and creating diverse and well paid jobs. It is also important that as many people as possible benefit from this growth and the city's success which necessitates the importance of removing barriers to employment including improving skills and employability levels.

Rebalancing Northern Ireland's economy will take a multi-faceted approach and we would suggest that this draft industrial strategy needs to expand beyond its focus on a sectoral growth strategy if this goal is to be achieved. This will need sub-regional strategies, governance and support mechanisms to deliver many aspects of this goal. Differentiation of approach will be needed on a geographic basis, as well as on a rural/urban level, if impact is to be maximised. The challenges and levers of change across Northern Ireland are not homogeneous, and therefore different interventions and approaches will be required at a local level. It is therefore essential that mechanisms are put in place to enable place-based solutions.

Whilst Northern Ireland has a population of 1.8million, a regional Assembly and nine newly formed government departments, there has to be a specific economic focus on cities and in particular Belfast to drive specific aspects of this growth agenda in a way that will benefit the wider region to achieve

the desired outcomes. Belfast still needs to grow to compete and its future competitiveness and ability to compete against other cities will impact on regional prosperity.

We support the need to rebalance the economy from the public to the private sector and encourage growth and employment in high value industries where NI has the ability to compete globally. However, further detail in terms of the analysis underpinning the strategy would be helpful in relation to the following:

- **Employment figures:** it is unclear from the current draft what the breakdown of job types is. We would suggest that the use of the 'Better Jobs Index' in the future will allow a more detailed analysis of the value-added of specific sectors and may also allow further analysis of the links between jobs growth and productivity improvements
- **Exports:** the export figure appears positive but is likely to be dominated by exports to ROI – a more detailed analysis of destinations would be useful. Given the uncertainties regarding the impact of Brexit on trade, as well as the potential of trade barriers to USA, it will be important to keep these figures under review and to consider the impact on support systems to businesses seeking to grow their export base.

Question 6 - Do you agree that our Industrial Strategy should support sectors where Northern Ireland is world class or where we have the potential to be world class?

The Council supports the need to concentrate on sectors with world class potential. It is also important that this is kept under review and updated regularly to take encourage innovation in new emerging industries and that resources are focused to support those sectors that will generate the best return for the region. This aligns to commitments contained in the Belfast Agenda which highlights the need for long term growth strategies for those key sectors which will drive city-region growth and competitiveness; the importance of sector-specific support and the value of supporting the SME sector to develop globally-competitive products and services.

The Council pleased to note that the work of the MATRIX Panels have been taken account of in providing the evidence base for market opportunities and the recognition given to the case studies which includes the ambition to grow the cyber security to support over 5,000 jobs.

Belfast is the top global destination for financial technology investments and Europe's leading destination for software development & technology support investment (fDi Markets 2015). Its key growth sectors have been identified in the draft Industrial Strategy where Northern Ireland has world class capabilities: Financial Services/Technology, Legal Services, Digital/Creative Technologies including cyber security, Life and Health Sciences and Advanced Manufacturing and Materials Engineering.

There are some notes of caution that need to be factored into considerations around the degree of focus on those sectors where Northern Ireland has world class capabilities:

- The need to secure Northern Ireland's position as world class as a sector matures through its life cycle. The region must remain agile, outward focused and innovative, with an eye to emerging needs and market changes
- It will be important to encourage successful sectors to utilise local supply chains and consideration should be given to incentivising this which would help deliver against the inclusive growth agenda.
- Northern Ireland is the second fastest growing Knowledge Economy region in the UK. However, in reality, the majority of that activity takes place in the key cities – and within specific locations within those cities. Policy and investment decisions need to ensure an ongoing focus on these locations in order to maintain this positive position
- Belfast is successfully participating in the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities programme and our intention is to focus on economic resilience. We believe this is a real opportunity for the city and the region and we would be happy to work closely with Government to deliver and share recommendations from this work.

Question 7 – Five Pillars for Growth

Do you agree with:

- **what we want to achieve**
- **what we plan to do to deliver**
- **how we plan to measure progress**

Pillar 1 - Accelerating Innovation and Research

Do you agree with:	
(i) what we want to achieve;	YES
(ii) what we plan to do to deliver	We broadly agree with the plan to deliver; however, it will be necessary to consider the implications of Brexit for EU funded research
(iii) how we plan to measure progress	YES

The Council supports the ambitions around enterprise and entrepreneurship. We believe that there is a need for focused investment to encourage entrepreneurship from an early age and would be keen to work with government to look at how this can be done more consistently.

The Council is currently working with partners to deliver a 'Smart Belfast' framework and would welcome the opportunity to work with central government to further develop this approach.

The Council believes that investment in infrastructure to encourage and support innovation including innovation hubs / co-working space is essential. There are opportunities to look at how this can be achieved – including in partnership with the private sector. Such infrastructure can also provide a 'soft-landing' space for new FDI and can therefore encourage collaboration between local and international businesses. The Council would reference by way of good practice the recent investment in a new Innovation Factory within the city.

Given the success demonstrated by the region's universities in accelerating research and innovation in a variety of fields, we consider that the role and contribution of academia should be strengthened in this strategy. We also consider this support needs to be underpinned by appropriate resource allocations in order to ensure that the institutions remain globally competitive.

We welcome the commitment to additional investment to support high growth potential spin outs from the research base. Since April 2015, Councils have had statutory responsibility for supporting business start-ups. To deliver the Belfast Agenda we are aiming to deliver a step change to make new businesses starting up and those who wish to grow more productive and competitive. This will require new ways of working with government, universities, business and the third sector. We already support college and university-based start-ups through our Belfast Enterprise Academy and we would be keen to work with partners to expand this activity.

Pillar 2 - Education, Skills & Employability

Do you agree with:	
(ii) what we want to achieve;	YES
(iii) what we plan to do to deliver	<p>We broadly agree; however we would stress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the need for continuing research into industrial and technological trends to help create the right educational environment - continued investment in education and skills - the importance of a greater collaboration across key partners focusing on economy, education and health to maximise resource and impact
(iii) how we plan to measure progress	YES

The need for a more collaborative approach working with a range of stakeholders and cross departmental working is essential to address the complexity of the employability and skills issues facing the region. In supporting those furthest from the labour market, the Council would highlight that health related issues are among the biggest barriers to entering employment, and it would therefore be important that Department of Health is also engaged as a key partner.

Research indicates that in future only one in six jobs will require no or low skills in future therefore this will be a key area of investment to ensure sustainable economic growth. The importance of early intervention and engagement with schools is key to deliver ‘an *education system that provides our young people with the right skills*’. This directly aligns to the Belfast Agenda ambition that all young people leaving school will have a destination that fulfils their potential by 2035. We consider that there is a need for greater collaboration between the Department for Education and Department for the Economy to maximise the resource and impact of skills training. A significant proportion of the skills budget is currently being utilised to fund essential skills training, supporting individuals who have not achieved basic skills levels after twelve years of primary and secondary education.

Effective careers education and advice along with a joined up approach between government, industry/business and education will be essential to ensure that skills training and investment is targeted and appropriately joined up to maximise impact. Consideration may also be given to

encouraging a 'lifelong learning' culture to enable a more flexible and adaptable workforce to meet the changing needs of the economy in future.

The Belfast Agenda recognises the need to encourage employability & skills for those furthest from the labour market and the need to upskill those already in employment. The Belfast Employability & Skills Framework (2015-2025) includes a number of relevant actions and the Council would be keen to input to the development of programmes/approaches identified in the draft Strategy such as:

- Proactively support those furthest from the workforce, removing barriers, providing access to skills and encouraging participation
- Design & implement an 'employability pipeline' model and establish an Employability Forum in each council area
- Support businesses wishing to upskill their workforce.

Aligning skills provision with economic priorities is welcome and the work on the Northern Ireland Skills Barometer is commended. The Council would be keen to engage with the Department on a sub-regional analysis of the Skills Barometer to focus efforts and maximise the resources and ensure that efforts are appropriately aligned and directed to achieving the regional ambitions and addressing the relevant gaps.

We welcome the commitment to an expanded Apprenticeships provision, particularly focusing on the key growth sectors identified within the strategy. We consider that this will require a significant cultural change to broaden the appeal of vocational and professional learning. We also consider that the Apprenticeships provide opportunities to create pathways and progression routes through work-based learning: this can be an important element of securing inclusive economic growth.

Pillar 3 - Inclusive Sustainable Growth

Do you agree with:	
(iii) what we want to achieve;	YES
(iv) what we plan to do to deliver	We broadly agree and Council would be keen to ensure that collaborative and innovative approaches are adopted to further develop the commitments.
(iii) how we plan to measure progress	YES – we believe that business start-up levels are a key barometer of a city's competitiveness levels. We would be keen to be involved the development and use of the 'better jobs index'

We believe that local government has a key role to play in driving inclusive, sustainable growth; particularly through the development of community plans and in supporting community level engagement. One of the key economic challenges in Belfast is economic inactivity and the social exclusion this creates for residents within the city. This is a persistent challenge for the city which requires a radical approach. Further clarity would be helpful in terms of the action to “provide support for communities and individuals facing disadvantage”. Consideration needs to be given to what will be done differently to deliver a change resulting in ‘inclusive growth’. We believe that there are opportunities to look at innovative approaches through social innovation and co-production models.

The limited references to tourism are a missed opportunity throughout the strategy. While we acknowledge that the Northern Ireland Tourism Strategy is being developed, tourism is a key economic and employment sector for Northern Ireland and therefore should be referenced in the regional Industrial Strategy. Many of the priority sectors referenced are high tech and are unlikely to create opportunities for those furthest from the labour market therefore tourism has a vital role in driving inclusive growth and creating employment opportunities.

The reference to working closely with local councils, education colleges and schools to provide support for entrepreneurs at all stages is noted. Our experience suggests that Invest NI currently provides a good service for businesses once they become established and the Council has a history of delivering entrepreneurial support at pre and early enterprise stages and for which we have statutory responsibility. We would welcome further discussion to ensure effective management and alignment and would like to explore the potential for further enhancing economic development powers and resource at a council level to support enterprise and business growth.

We welcome the recognition of the Innovation Factory within the strategy. The Council made this investment as a means of supporting inclusive growth: increasing the number of high growth start-ups and small businesses. We note the commitment to develop new “enterprise parks” and “digital hubs”. We would be keen to explore opportunities for co-investment in these initiatives in relevant locations in Belfast.

The complexity of the employment and business support environment creates barriers for provision and makes it difficult to clearly identify gaps in provision. To resolve this position, the Council has established an Enterprise Forum. While this structure is in its infancy, it has the commitment from all partners to not only share information in order to improve signposting but also to look how resources can be channelled to address the deficit in business start up numbers and also to look at how business competitiveness and productivity can be enhanced.

Given our statutory responsibility for social economy support, the Council would welcome working with the Department to create a joined up approach to supporting future social enterprise development.

We consider that the step-change required in the business start-up levels and in the attitude to starting a business will require significant investment across all of the curriculum, from primary school upwards. This cultural change will require sustained investment over a period of time – beyond traditional funding cycles – and we would welcome the opportunity to explore with government departments how this investment can be achieved.

The Council welcomes the commitment to developing the circular economy. The proposals provide an opportunity for entry to the labour market and those with low skills levels while supporting and expanding the manufacture base in NI. Designed well, the circular economy offers a considerable opportunity to rebalance the economy; however, to have maximum impact it may need supported by policy and/or economic instruments to stimulate changes in business practices/ business models.

The Council is supportive of the data development agenda and is keen to be involved in this process, in particular the development and use of the ‘better jobs index’. It would be useful to see further details on the proposals for this.

Pillar 4 - Succeeding in global markets

Do you agree with:	
(iv) what we want to achieve;	YES
(v) what we plan to do to deliver	We broadly agree with the content; however, we would suggest that the role of tourism is strengthened as a key driver
(iii) how we plan to measure progress	YES

We recognise that our international ambitions rely on strong collaboration with a range of partners including the Executive Office, Invest NI, universities, further education colleges and a range of bodies with shared ambitions to attract investment, tourism, conferences, students etc.

While recognising the role of the region in the global context; the role of cities should also be recognised as key to attracting commercial, economic and academic interest. There is value in highlighting the distinct and unique features of the region's cities and places which have successfully attracted international trade, investment, students and visitors in order to strengthen the position of the region as a whole. The Council's and city's experience and extensive networks, both locally and internationally, would therefore be a useful asset in delivering the ambition of building our international reputation. We welcome the new International Trade Plan for Northern Ireland and would be keen to work with government partners to look at how the enhanced international presence can not only help export performance but also support the international profiling of the city and the region as an investment location. We are currently developing materials to support this and are keen to work closer with Invest NI and partners in this regard.

We agree with the sharpened trade and investment proposals, focusing on "profit-centred" inward investment opportunities. Many of these existing investments are based in Belfast and we are keen to work with government and the private sector to ensure that there is adequate and appropriate investment in infrastructure such as Grade A accommodation and high-speed broadband, as well as ongoing investment in higher levels skills, as a means of consolidating the positive profile of Belfast as an investment location in growing markets.

The Economic Advisory Group's recently-published Competitiveness Report states that Northern Ireland's performance has improved in the previous 5 years in terms of FDI job creation and that Northern Ireland businesses are becoming more externally focused. Indeed, the attractiveness of Belfast as a business investment destination is already evidenced through accolades such as:

- Belfast is the number 1 destination for financial technology investments (FT Fdi Markets 2016)
- Belfast is Europe's leading destination for new software development projects (FT FDI Markets 2015)
- Belfast named as the most Business Friendly City of its size and is in the Europe's top 10 cities for business friendliness of any size (FT FDI Cities of the Future 2015 and 2016)

The Belfast Agenda recognises the value of working collaboratively with city partners to offer a holistic support, advice and incentive service to attract and secure business start-up, growth and foreign owned investment in the city.

Accelerating investment in Belfast will require greater collaborative campaigns at regional and local levels to enhance the region's attractiveness and to focus on the distinct advantages at a sub-

regional level. Local Councils can play a vital role in supporting this work in terms of investment, skills and sectoral support for businesses.

We believe that the role of Tourism could be strengthened as it is responsible for in excess of 5.2% of GDP in Northern Ireland and supports approximately 43,000 jobs; 17,000 of which are in Belfast alone. Belfast has become a popular European city destination and the weakness of Sterling over recent months has boosted the city's appeal. In addition, the new Belfast Waterfront as a global convention centre and the plans to reduce Corporation Tax will demand an increase in hotel accommodation - CBRE reports that there are currently 27 hotel developments (3747 bedspaces) in the planning process in Belfast to meet the projected demand. This not only serves to support the ambition to be a location of choice to visit but also has significant employment and economic potential.

We support the commitment to "Invest in experiences and products infrastructure that will give external visitors new reasons to holiday and stay longer in NI". The City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy identified the need for a second major visitor attraction in Belfast to complement Titanic Belfast to further significant boost to the region as a major tourist destination. Consequently, we look forward to continuing to work with Government in the development of the new "Belfast Story" Visitor Attraction.

The significant benefits and success of a collaborative approach between central/ local government and the private sector has already been proven with the success of the Titanic Signature Project which has experience record visitor numbers and was recently winning 'World Leading Tourism Attraction' at the prestigious World Travel Awards. Titanic Belfast is making a significant contribution to the regional economy and to a positive profile of Northern Ireland across the world.

Delivering events of scale provide a significant opportunity to showcase Northern Ireland on the global stage. The Giro d'Italia was a huge success securing 56m global viewing audience and over 227,000 spectators over 3 days across the region. More recently, Belfast welcomed the Tall Ships Races 2015 which attracted 520,000 visitors over the 4 day event and reported an economic impact of £17m. Building on this success, Belfast has committed to work with partners to help bring the Rugby World Cup 2023 to the island of Ireland and is exploring a joint bid with Derry City and Strabane District Council for European Capital of Culture 2023.

Pillar 5 - Building the best economic infrastructure

Do you agree with:

(i) what we want to achieve;	YES; and would ask that the more holistic term waste management replaces the reference to waste disposal
(ii) what we plan to do to deliver	We broadly agree; however we would emphasise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the need for a collaborative approach to identifying the infrastructure investment to support the growth of Belfast - the importance of Belfast city centre as a regional gateway, an investment location and key driver for economic growth - the York Street Interchange proposal to be recognised as a key infrastructure project for the region - the importance of digital connectivity and infrastructure for economic growth
(iii) how we plan to measure progress	YES; however, there is scope to consider additional metrics such as journey times on main economic corridor routes or access to market

The Council strongly believes that if Belfast and Northern Ireland is to compete on a global scale there is a need for targeted investment in the physical, economic and social infrastructure of the city-region. Having modern infrastructure in place will enable and support economic growth and ensure that the city-region remains competitive in terms of being an attractive place to live, work and invest. It is also important in terms of supporting future development and plans for growth.

This pillar appears light in terms of the infrastructure in supporting economic growth and connectivity e.g. investment in office space etc to accommodate future growth and the investment in roads, rail and transport to improve access and connectivity. We had hoped to see much more on significant projects to boost connectivity across the region including road connection to Londonderry/Derry, East to West connections, the York Street Interchange, Rapid Transit Scheme and the Transport Hub.

The importance of the city centre as a regional gateway, an investment location and key driver for economic growth cannot be overlooked. It is the face we present to the world and provides the impetus to those thinking of investing, living and starting businesses here. Its success drives the prosperity of the whole city and region.

The Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy sets out our ambition for the continued growth and regeneration of the city core and its surrounding areas up until 2030 and sets

the key drivers change and investment priorities. It seeks to deliver transformational change by co-ordinating major capital projects mobilising available funding to address areas of market failure.

It is recognised that the York Street Interchange proposal will alleviate a significant bottleneck at the M2/Westlink junction which adversely impacts on city centre traffic volumes and congestion on a daily basis. The Council believes that this scheme is critical in supporting regional economic growth and competitiveness, accommodating 100,000 vehicles each day – mostly commuters to and from Belfast – as well as connecting freight /haulage transport through the port of Belfast to the strategic road network throughout the wider region. Given the significance of this scheme to supporting the regional economy and improving connectivity between Belfast (and Port) to the rest of the region, the Council believes that this £160million scheme should be explicitly referenced as a key infrastructure project.

The Council would want to work with government to agree prioritisation and joint financing models to bring forward the key schemes outlined within the Strategy which will impact on the prosperity of both the city and the wider region and would request that these investment opportunities find expression in the emerging NI Industrial and Investment Strategies.

- The **North East Quarter (Royal Exchange)** – would seek to develop a partnership with the private sector to ensure delivery of high quality investment into this currently underdeveloped but key strategic gateway into the city. The project will integrate the mixed use plans with Belfast city centre's wider retail, leisure and cultural offer and link the established Victoria Square and CastleCourt shopping centres.
- **Delivery of Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3** – £32million regeneration scheme which will revitalise the city centre, creating new streetscape, open space and connect with other key developments including the Ulster University scheme. The Council has already committed £5m contribution towards the redevelopment of Cathedral Gardens.
- **East Bank** – working with partners, including the private sector to maximise the investment potential of this key development area (which includes Queen's Quay and Sirocco). There is an opportunity to attract significant investment and jobs into this area and to reconnect what was once a thriving industrial site with the city centre, Titanic Quarter, the Harbour as well as to the adjoining neighbourhoods and communities.
- **North Foreshore** – 340 acres (138ha) former landfill site. Largest regeneration site in Belfast. £9.5million infrastructure investment nearing completion (part ERDF funded) and future potential around cleantech hub/environmental resource park and private sector lead commercial leisure/mixed use scheme (200acres). £20m investment in new Film Studio currently underway.

- Addressing the deficit of **Grade A office accommodation** – recent studies indicate that the pipeline of supply is inadequate to meet future demand. The Council understands that there are some structural and financial barriers impacting investment decisions and is keen to look at how the public and private sector can work together to bring forward these investments which are critical to ensuring the future economic success of the city and the wider region.

Digital infrastructure and connectivity is important for driving economic growth and competitiveness and enhancing the region's international connectivity and proposition as an investment location. It is also critical for the development of the knowledge-based and technology start-ups. The region also has a strong record of staying at the forefront of communications technology and it is therefore a core element of the economic infrastructure. It is critical that this infrastructure is future-proofed to ensure that it remains a significant selling point to investors. We welcome the commitment to a new Digital Infrastructure Strategy and would be keen to ensure that this focuses not only on coverage but also on speed and reliability. Likewise, we consider that there is much to do to help small businesses in particular to understand how technology (in particular superfast broadband) can change their business model and make them more productive. Given our engagement with SMEs, we would be keen to work with government partners to roll out appropriate awareness-raising and business transformation initiatives.

The Council has been selected to join the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities who will support the city to create its first resilience strategy. This work will draw upon world-class expertise to explore the long term critical social, environmental and economic resilience issues in the city including unemployment, social unrest, energy, transport systems and water management. This is a key opportunity for the region to benefit from this expertise and the Council would wish to work in partnership with central and local government to bring this work forward and share any emerging learning and new approaches.

The Council would also welcome input to the development of an Energy Strategy. We will work with partners to better manage energy usage across the city's public estate and support better acquisition, management and finance of energy. We will build opportunities with partners, including the private sector and local communities, to encourage investment and deployment of renewable sources in order to make the city more attractive to investors.