



Subject:	City Recovery: update on key enterprise and employability initiatives
Date:	9 December 2020
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in March 2020, the work programmes to support the delivery of targets under the Growing the Economy and Working and Learning pillars of the Belfast Agenda and the Inclusive Growth Strategy were agreed. Since then, the council has adopted its recovery plan "Belfast: Our Recovery" which sets out its guiding principles and key priorities to support the city to recover from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2	Given the current circumstances and the specific ongoing challenges for Belfast residents and local businesses, the purpose of this report is to update Members on the current status of a number of council-led initiatives to deliver against the priorities of the Belfast: Our Recovery plan.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the work undertaken to date by the Economic Development and Employability and Skills teams to deliver against the Council’s recovery plan “Belfast: Our Recovery”</li> <li>• Approve the budget to support the EmTech MIT conference in May 2021.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that, at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 4 March 2020, approval was given for the delivery of the Growing the Economy and Working and Learning work plans for the current financial year. These work plans were developed as part of the council’s contribution towards the commitments identified under these themes within the Belfast Agenda, and to the corporate plan, as well as supporting the council’s ambitions to deliver inclusive growth.</p>
3.2	<p>This report takes account of the work that has been further developed to support the city recovery plan, Belfast: Our Recovery – focusing on job retention and creation, business support and skills development. The recovery plan highlights the ongoing impact that COVID-19 is having on our people and city in a variety of ways, with recent statistics highlighting the significant economic challenges for the city to overcome;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contraction in economic output for 2020 likely to be in the region of 12.7% (up from 9.6% in UUEPC’s original forecasts in April 2020). At a local council level, the reduction in Belfast is expected to be around 10.6%</li> <li>• The latest results from InterTradeIreland’s Business Monitor illustrates the impact of COVID-19 and how this has had an impact on growth plans and preparatory work in anticipation of EU Exit. Prior to the pandemic, 57% of Northern Ireland firms say they were in growth mode; this has now dropped to 22%. Meanwhile, the number of businesses that are in decline has jumped from 8% and now stands at 46%. The monitor reveals that only 18% of firms have made EU Exit preparations</li> <li>• The latest results from the Ulster Bank PMI signalled a stagnation of business activity across the local private sector as new business, backlogs of work, and new orders from abroad and staffing levels all fell again. Meanwhile, business pessimism</li> </ul>

increased in October with Northern Ireland again the only area of the UK to predict a fall in output over the coming year

- Sectors reporting the most significant decline in consumer spend include arts and culture, hospitality, leisure, tourism and transport sectors alongside professional and real estate and retail and wholesale
- The impact on the labour market in Belfast and regionally is highlighted by redundancies being at their highest level since 2013 and 44,100 people furloughed in Belfast at its peak. Since January, there have been more than 1,100 redundancies from Belfast-based business, principally in the manufacturing and retail sectors
- There have been significant increases in claims for unemployment benefits amongst Belfast workers aged 25-29 years old (157%), followed by 40-44 age group (146%)
- 8,900 people in Belfast are claiming self-employment support allowance (SEISS)
- In terms of labour market demand, there has been a 57% reduction in job vacancies from last year.

3.3

The recovery plan highlights how the council will invest and work with city partners to protect and create jobs and support Belfast residents access much needed employment. The work of Economic Development and Employability and Skills teams cuts across a range of the pillars within the recovery plan, specifically addressing deliverables that contribute to:

- Our Economy – supporting businesses to build resilience and protect and create jobs
- Our City – supporting the safe reopening of the city centre and arterial routes
- Our Communities – supporting businesses in our neighbourhoods and retaining jobs and reskilling residents for employment
- Our Digital Innovation – developing the skills of individuals and businesses to support the City's economic recovery.

3.4

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, officers have been working closely with local residents, businesses and delivery partners across the city to adapt the support available to ensure that it remains relevant and effective. This report aims to provide some examples of how we continue to work to respond to the key areas affected by COVID-19, to ensure that businesses can once again thrive and provide much needed employment opportunities and vibrancy to local communities.

3.5

#### Supporting local businesses

Local businesses have been significantly impacted by the macro-economic developments as a result of COVID-19. The Recovery Plan highlights our commitment to supporting these

	businesses to build resilience to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 so that they can protect jobs can create new jobs in the future.
3.6	Since March 2020, the council has pivoted all of our initiatives to ensure that businesses were able to get access to vital advice and guidance to support them through the pandemic. These supports include a range of one to one mentoring which is flexible to meet the needs of businesses across all sectors and access to webinars focussing on topics including business resilience, future planning, digital transformation, accessing procurement opportunities and preparing to deal with changes brought about as a result of Brexit. This year to date, 352 businesses have accessed this range of support. We have also put in place a range of financial support for new businesses (£120,000 allocated), social enterprises and cooperatives (£100,000 allocated) and have administered funding for existing businesses to adapt their operations to comply with COVID requirements and enable them to continue operating safely (£800,000 allocated, using resources secured from the Department for Communities (DfC)).
3.7	In addition to this, we recognise that with challenges come many opportunities, so we continue to work to encourage our entrepreneurs and innovators to start up during the pandemic and look for opportunities to grow and scale. This year to date, we have supported over 400 individuals to start a business.
3.8	From 16 to 22 November this year, we once again celebrated Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) by hosting a series of online events to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs and support existing businesses across the city. We put in place these events with our partners in a bid to inspire local entrepreneurs to take that first step to starting their own business, by providing honest and inspirational insights from successful entrepreneurs on their path to success as well as practical advice and guidance for start-ups to grow and build their presence online.
3.9	Across this week 280 individuals were engaged. Events included; Start Up Stories, Inspiring Entrepreneurs events, setting up an online shop, writing a great 60-second pitch, and sessions focussed on cooperative development including 'Co-operative Journey: from ideas to Co-operatives' and 'Funding Co-operatives: community shares and loanstock'.
3.10	Recognising the impact of the ongoing restrictions on local businesses, we have developed a new platform to enable them to promote their products and engage new customers online.

	<p>During Global Entrepreneurship Week, we launched the Buy Belfast Christmas Market which will run until the 20<sup>th</sup> December. Over 180 businesses have virtual stalls through the platform to date and include those making sweet treats, arts and crafts, accessories and jewellery, beauty, antiques, theatre vouchers and much more.</p>
3.11	<p>The aim of the initiative is to support small businesses through this challenging time, giving them an opportunity to engage new customers. It's also good for consumers who want to shop local and provides one platform to enable them to do so. The virtual market will be used as an opportunity to test the appetite for and viability of a more permanent platform to support local businesses to sell their products online. In addition to managing the platform, we have also invested a significant amount of resources in raising awareness of the platform (search "Buy Belfast Virtual Christmas Market" on Facebook). The site went live on 20 November and by 25 November it had registered more than 3,700 users.</p>
3.12	<p>Based on research and engagement with our partners we know that many businesses have not made any preparations to deal with the operational implications of the UK's exit from the EU. Working with the team at the Innovation Factory, we are currently undertaking research to measure the potential impact of Brexit on businesses across the city, and to understand what the legislation means for businesses operating in different sectors. This will enable us to understand what support we may need to put in place to support our local businesses. This research is expected to be completed in early December. In the interim, we have put in place two Brexit readiness events to try and engage those businesses that haven't already started making preparations, and refer them to support services through Invest NI and Intertradelreland. The first two events are focussed on services and goods movement and will include insights from key experts such as PWC, DfE, the Trader Support Service and Arthur Cox. Following the completion of the research, the committee will be provided with an update on recommendations and proposed next steps for this support.</p>
3.13	<p><u><a href="#">EmTech MIT Europe conference 2021</a></u></p> <p>The Committee approval on 4 March 2020 included authorisation to support events and conferences across the city which contribute to the ambitions of the Belfast Agenda, raise the profile of the unit and increase the number of businesses across the city accessing support services.</p>
3.14	<p>EmTech is a series of live events brought forward by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where technology, business, and culture converge. They showcase emerging</p>

	<p>technologies with the greatest potential to change our lives. Above all, they provide access to the most innovative people and companies in the world. Aisling Events has recently acquired the EmTech MIT Europe franchise, which will bring the conference to Belfast in May 2021 virtually followed by live events in 2022 &amp; 2023 with full conference at ICC Belfast. The virtual event in May 2021 will bring together Europe's brightest and best technology leaders, researchers, and innovators for inspiration, insight, and connection.</p>
3.15	<p>Bringing this conference to Belfast will enable unparalleled access to the most brilliant minds in science and technology from all across the world. Events in other areas have featured speakers such as Marc Benioff of Salesforce, Google's Yasmin Green and Reid Hoffman of LinkedIn. The conference is designed to give attendees the tools necessary to learn how to harness new technologies to build or maintain a competitive business advantage, increase revenue, ensure security, and make the best hires in a changing workforce and also to gain clear business insights in order to chart business strategy.</p>
3.16	<p>The conference is expected to engage 300 participants from an elite pool of local and global C-suite executives, Directors and research professionals. As well as providing opportunities for learning and development of our local talent and organisations, the combination of local content and leadership, with the best global content, will attract senior leaders from across Europe and beyond to Belfast and provide opportunities to position Belfast as a leading location for tech talent, leadership, and services, as well as enable opportunities for local companies to develop new partnerships and business across the globe.</p>
3.17	<p>Supporting this conference provides an excellent opportunity for Belfast City Council to highlight the work it is doing to develop the city's Innovation and Digital districts aligned with the ambitions of the Belfast Region City Deal, in addition to enhancing the city's start up culture and establishing Belfast as a centre of excellence for tech and, in particular, for Fintech.</p>
3.18	<p>The total cost of hosting the conference will be £120,000. Given the alignment with the ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda and the Belfast Region City Deal, it is recommended that this is supported with funding of £20,000 from the council to maximise the take-up by Belfast-based businesses and to ensure appropriate levels of promotion of the city and its key investments. Other partners supporting the event include Invest NI, QUB, Ulster University and private sector partners.</p>

3.19

Employability and Skills Support

Since March 2020, officers have been working on a series of practical and policy initiatives in order to enhance the delivery of employability and skills support in the city. One of the key initiatives is Employability NI. A detailed report on this was presented to the November meeting of this committee. Officers consider that this approach has the potential to drive coordination and support resource alignment across government partners, and ultimately improve outcomes for participants and for employers engaging with the various interventions.

3.20

Members will also be aware of some of the key interventions that the council has designed and delivered in recent years. While the first six months of the pandemic have been extremely challenging in the labour market, there have been some successes in recent months as we have levered key relationships in order to generate employment opportunities, particularly focusing on those furthest from the labour market. Some of the key current and emerging opportunities include:

- Collaboration with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust for a series of opportunities. These include the design and delivery of a Nursing Assistant Employment Academy in preparation for open recruitment of Nursing Assistant posts. This Employment Academy was designed for those further back in the labour market who would otherwise not have applied, for example those with caring experience in an unpaid capacity or without the qualifications needed. Referrals for the Employment Academy followed targeted city-wide engagement with key employability stakeholders such as Council community services staff, ESF projects, community organisations, JBO frontline staff etc. who ensured that the right people were targeted with good initial job-matching to ensure a 'fit' between the job role and the aspirations and qualities of the person. As a result, 30 people completed this Employment Academy in mid-November and so far 20 people have been interviewed by Belfast HSC Trust, with interviews ongoing and outcomes expected in December
- In addition to the Employment Academy route, officers have used a differentiated approach with for those who are newly-unemployed with relevant paid work experience and/or qualifications to apply for the BHSCT Nursing Assistant posts directly, given that there are 116 vacancies at present. This involved organising an employability stakeholders' workshop to provide providers with access to key HR and operational staff within Belfast HSC Trust who provided a walk-through of the job roles, details on how to support people to apply and the practicalities of what to expect at interview.

- Officers are now working with Belfast HSC Trust to schedule Employment Academies to meet the workforce needs of other occupational areas including the co-design of an Employment Academy aligned to recruitment of Social Care entry-level posts in early 2021 as well as upskilling academies for those at entry level positions to gain a 'better job' in Belfast HSC Trust as part of a skills escalator model. It is envisaged that a calendar of Employment Academies for Belfast HSC Trust – in tandem with the independent Social Care sector – can be identified across each year, providing a rolling programme of vacancies.

3.21

Officers are working with other Community Planning Partnership members to co-design Employment Academies for identified workforce demand. Emerging areas of work include:

- Belfast City Council: Officers are working with Corporate HR to ring-fence 25% of General Operative vacancies for an Employment Academy, targeting under-represented groups and leading to a guaranteed interview. These opportunities have an expected go-live timeframe of February/March 2021. Officers will also undertake brokerage to ensure the full spectrum of employability stakeholders in the city have an insight into these roles in the run-up to open recruitment so that they can match people within their programmes and prepare them for this recruitment exercise. Officers intend to use this as a platform to build further pathways to Council job opportunities such as through Employment Academies that target the residents of the city who would most benefit from this support while undertaking targeted brokerage for open recruitment exercises. In addition to this, work is underway to co-design an Upskilling Employment Academy for 10 Council staff which targets those at entry level positions with the opportunity to gain a lorry licence with the aim of gaining a 'better job' as a lorry driver
- Education Authority: Officers are re-visiting previous engagement with this employer, focusing on employment opportunities in a number of roles including bus driving jobs. In the initial phase of delivery, this workforce demand will be matched with those who are nearing the end of achieving their bus licence through a Bus Driving Employment Academy that we ran earlier in the year but who have not been able to access a job (primarily as opportunities were put on hold due to COVID-19). After this, opportunities will be widened out to target other groups including those who are newly unemployed and in precarious employment as well retaining a focus on Inclusive Growth target groups such as those who are currently economically inactive/long-term unemployed



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Officers intend to undertake scoping with other CPP members to identify employment opportunities and create pathways for residents to access these jobs through Employment Academies and other relevant interventions including Jobstart (6 months paid work), Work Experience Programme (13 weeks with £10 per day benefit top-up), Apprenticeship Incentives etc.</li> </ul>
3.22	<p><u>Logistics &amp; Transport sector opportunities</u></p> <p>Officers have engaged with the full range of job brokerage services across the city to promote immediate higher-skilled vacancies for those who are newly unemployed. These include 40 Customs Officers posts required as part of Brexit preparations.</p>
3.23	<p>Sectoral engagement is also underway through Logistics UK and Road Haulage Association to confirm workforce support needs across the logistics sector. This sector is experiencing continued demand across warehousing and driving occupations due to COVID-19 and Brexit. Again, Officers have created the flexibility of differentiated approaches that meet the needs of both employers and residents, from those who are economically inactive to those who are newly unemployed or whose employment is precarious through to young people who are eligible for an Apprenticeship.</p>
3.24	<p><u>Social Care sector opportunities</u></p> <p>Work is ongoing with the wider independent Social Care sector to deliver bespoke Employment Academies to meet ongoing job demand. This includes residential care and domiciliary care for older people through to support work within organisations working with those who are experiencing disability, homelessness etc.</p>
3.25	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The EmTech MIT Europe conference will be resourced from the 2020/21 Economic Development budget associated with contributions to events and conferences, agreed by the Committee on 4 March 2020. This allocation was previously agreed by this Committee. All other activities outlined within this report will be resourced from the 2020/21 Economic Development and Employability and Skills budgets agreed by this Committee on 4 March 2020.</p>
3.26	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Each of the proposed projects referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. The unit is currently</p>

	undertaking a process of equality screening on the overall work programme, this will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of each project.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	None