

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 12th May, 2021

REMOTE MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson);
The High Sherriff, Councillor Long;
Aldermen Dorrian and Kingston; and
Councillors Beattie, Donnelly, Gormley,
Hanvey, Heading, Howard, T. Kelly, Lyons,
Maskey, McLaughlin, McMullan, O'Hara
and Spratt.

Also attended: Councillors Baker, Groogan and Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for the inability to attend was reported on behalf of the Deputy Chair, Councillor Murphy, and Councillors Ferguson and Whyte.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 14th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th May.

Declarations of Interest

In relation to item 5.a) Department for Communities (DfC) COVID19 Revitalisation Programme Update, Councillor Donnelly declared an interest in that he was an employee of the Upper Springfield Development Trust, and Councillor T. Kelly declared that her husband was an employee of the Greater Village Regeneration Trust, as both organisations had been in receipt of Business Cluster grants.

Matters Referred Back from Council

Motion - Extension of the Belfast Bikes Scheme

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 4th May, the following motion on Extension of the Belfast Bikes Scheme, had been proposed by Councillor Baker and seconded by Councillor McAteer:

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“This Council:

Acknowledges the record-breaking month for the use of Belfast Bikes, with 30k journeys made in March this year, and commends once again the scheme and our officials working on it.

Recognises that it must continue to promote and invest in the positive environmental, economic and social benefits of cycling and pedestrianisation throughout our city.

Calls on Council officers to carry out a scoping exercise to examine the further extension of Belfast bikes, beyond the city core and further out into communities across the city.

Agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister Nicola Mallon to reiterate the need for working in support of investment into the required protected cycle lane network in our city and communities, to support the further rollout of the Belfast Bikes Scheme extending its reach and accessibility throughout the city.”

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the Motion had been referred without discussion to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

The Director of Economic Development highlighted that a report on the Strategic Review of Bikes would be submitted to Committee in June and the item to be considered later on the agenda “*DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme Update – Reimagining the Public Realm and Connectivity/ Active Travel*”, also considered project funding within the DfI Sustainable and Active Travel element of the Revitalisation Programme.

During discussion, Members debated concerns regarding the amount of cycle lanes in North and West Belfast, in comparison to the rest of the city and discussed the safe cycling provision and supporting infrastructure that should be brought forward as a priority for the city.

After discussion, the Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- agree that a report on how this motion would be facilitated, resourced and managed would be submitted to a future meeting when resources became available and write a letter to the Minister for Infrastructure as outlined, to include consultation with communities before implementing further infrastructure; and
- Note that the Strategic Review of Belfast Bikes Scheme would be submitted to the Committee in June.

Presentation

Supporting Business start-up and growth in Belfast

The Director of Economic Development reminded the Committee that the Council had the statutory responsibility for a range of business support activities since 2015, principally focusing on business start and support for key target groups. He advised that the Council also provided a wider range of support services to businesses, working closely with Invest NI and other partners to focus activities in line with the ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda, particularly around job creation, new business starts and business growth.

The Chairperson introduced Dr. K. Bonner, Senior Economist, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre, and Prof. M. Hart, Deputy Director, Enterprise Research Centre and Aston Business School, to the Committee and they were admitted to the meeting.

Mr. Hart provided background to the 'entrepreneurial deficit' in Northern Ireland, as measured by enterprise and business start-up activity. He stated that, whilst recent years had seen record levels of start-up in the UK in an international context, levels had remained static in Northern Ireland, accompanied by low business birth rates – Belfast being the exception.

He provided an overview of the project, and advised that, in light of the evidence-base review, the findings sought to set indicative ambitious 'stretch' targets based on the comparative data; make recommendations for a potential re-boot in light of revised targets; and develop a budget and highlight all resources needed for revised business start-up support in Northern Ireland.

Mr Hart explained the current model for business start-ups and suggested that a more tailored approach for businesses may be more appropriate. He illustrated a fragmented landscape, and described current start up support in Belfast, together with the following need for the development of new targets which included, within 3-5 years:

- An additional 5,200 individuals engaged in the very early stages of setting up their own business (self-employment and registered businesses);
- Increased survival rates – 80% after two years compared to 45-50% currently; and
- More start-ups that survive and scale - 4-fold increase – ~2% currently to 10%.

He explained the resources required to make this happen and concluded that, with the current annual budget and existing infrastructure, the pre-start to business plan stage support could continue to be provided in an efficient manner but would not be sufficient to achieve the recommended targets.

He suggested that additional funding would be required and resources to: develop access to a benchmarking tool; specialist post-start workshops on digital and new

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technologies; employee engagement; intellectual property; exporting; supply chain support and innovation; and building networks of businesses at a similar stage.

He highlighted that, in light of the targets and required resources for an enhanced NI start-up programme, it was estimated that the cost would be £5,000 per individual or business entering the programme. He pointed out that mentoring was a key requirement and the new 'Help to Grow' government scheme to support businesses would help the gap for intermediate business assistance.

During discussion, the representative's answered a range of questions in relation to help for the self-employed, existing schemes and the need for tailored approaches, social impact agenda, post start-up schemes, evaluation of the 'Go For It' scheme, how to progress survival rates of new businesses, where to find financial assistance, and collaborative working with other enterprise agencies. Mr. Harte highlighted the importance of business survival rates past three years.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their informative presentation, and they retired from the meeting.

The Director of Economic Development drew the Members' attention to the following report which had been published alongside the presentation which outlined the current status of business start-up support research and recommendations for the future:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the council has had statutory responsibility for a range of business support activities since 2015, principally focusing on business start and support for key target groups. The council also provides a wider range of support services to businesses, working closely with Invest NI and other partners to focus activities in line with the ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda, particularly around job creation, new business starts and business growth.**
- 1.2 Since the transfer of functions, officers have been working to improve the effectiveness of the support provided to achieve the substantial shift that will be required to meet the targets set out in the Enterprise Framework. The framework aims to increase the number of new businesses and make existing businesses more productive and competitive.**
- 1.3 The current collaborative programme to support business start-up – the Northern Ireland Business Start Up Programme (Go for It) – is scheduled to run until 2023. Given the lead-in times required to inform any future intervention and secure support across partner councils, Belfast City Council took the lead in undertaking research to inform the future measure and**

model required to deliver business start-up support across the region.

1.4 This report sets out some of the key findings from the research by the team from the Enterprise Research Centre and the programme of work to be completed by the Enterprise and Business Growth team to begin to address some of the recommendations.

2.0 **Recommendations**

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the recommendations and proposed way forward set out in the future provision of business start-up support research;
- Agree to council officers working in partnership with the 10 other councils, DfE and Invest NI to address the recommendations in relation to future business start-up measures and delivery models; and
- Consider and approve the following allocations from the existing 2020/2021 Enterprise and Business Growth budget:
 - £90,000 to support the delivery of services to support the Social Enterprise and Cooperative Sector.
 - £31,109 to support the delivery of a regional collaborative project which supports digital transformation in existing business over an 18 month period
 - £65,000 to support the delivery of the Way to Scale initiative in partnership with Catalyst Inc and Invest NI which will commence in September 2021
 - £10,000 to support the development of a Fintech strategy in partnership with Fintech NI.

3.0 **Main report**

3.1 Members will be aware that the Council has developed and delivered a range of interventions to address the challenges around low levels of business start-up, innovation, competitiveness and productivity, in addition to putting in place support to enable businesses to overcome the more recent challenges associated with Covid 19 and the UK's exit from the EU. The programme of work delivered by the Enterprise and Business Growth team contributes towards

the commitments identified under the Growing the Economy theme within the Belfast Agenda, the priorities set out in the recovery plan and our ongoing commitment to supporting inclusive economic growth.

3.2 The aim of this report is to set out some of the key findings from the research undertaken on behalf of the team by the Enterprise Research Centre. The research identifies a number of priority interventions required to meet local and regional ambitions and targets and sets out proposed activity to be undertaken by the Enterprise and Business Growth team to begin to address some of the recommendations.

3.3 Aligned to this research, the report also seeks to set out some new areas of work to be delivered in the 2021/22 financial year. These proposals have also been shaped and informed by the City Deal proposals, including the investment in digital connectivity, infrastructure, and innovation. They include enhanced support for new and alternative business models (including social enterprises and cooperatives), support for companies to transform their business using new digital technologies, and interventions to increase the number of 'scaling' businesses.

3.4 Future business start-up support

Members will be aware that, as part of the transfer of functions and Local Government Reform, responsibility for business start-up and support for under-represented groups in terms of enterprise support transferred to councils. Since the transfer of functions in 2015, we have been working with other councils across the region as well as local delivery partners to put in place a range of support which is aimed at engaging new entrepreneurs and supporting them to develop the skills and capabilities to start their own business.

3.5 Our Enterprise Framework sets a vision for the city as a great place to start and grow a business. Its vision is for Belfast to be 'recognised for its diverse community of entrepreneurs, who benefit from a comprehensive, planned and coherent system of enterprise support, which fulfils their needs at all stages of the business growth life-cycle'.

3.6 Levels of entrepreneurial activity are a vital sign of a successful economy and research shows that successful cities are those that have a dynamic business base, supporting productivity through increased innovation, competition and job creation. However, across official measures, Northern Ireland's start-up activity lags the UK and

the other 11 regions. Belfast's rates as among the lowest in NI.

- 3.7** The prevailing poorer performance in Northern Ireland indicates a clear need for the councils and their key enterprise partners to relook at how we currently measure and provide business start-up support and identify how we can fundamentally change existing support to put in place provision that create a step change in performance.
- 3.8** These issues have also recently been highlighted in research conducted by FSB and UU which suggests that current approaches are not achieving the desired outcomes to increase the rate of business start-ups. Within their recent Economic Recovery Action Plan, DfE have also acknowledged the need to work in conjunction with DfC and the councils to set targets for business start-up support.
- 3.9** The research led by Belfast City Council proposes an alternative approach for Northern Ireland and Belfast to measure and articulate business start progress, providing indicative targets for business start delivery based on the region's ambitions, resources and learning from comparable successful regions. The findings will enable us to make recommendations to DfE/DfC on the most appropriate measure for reporting on business start-up performance which is based on a model of delivery that sets out to achieve our ambitions as a council.
- 3.10** The report recommends a more focused approach to support, establishing a series of targets relating to business start-up and survival. The approach will include:
- Strong, multi-layered campaign to drive a broader spectrum of individuals towards the start-up support – with support in place to reflect their needs
 - Change in the focus of the support to enhance business survival rates
 - Tailored support to increase the number of scaling businesses.
- 3.11** Based on these recommendations, officers have engaged with each of the other councils across the region to explore the appetite for a consistent approach across all areas. We will now commence engagement with DfE on the findings of the research particularly in relation to revising metrics for business start-up support – a commitment that has been included in their Economic Recovery Action Plan. In partnership with the other councils, we will also work to

develop an engagement plan which will be used to demonstrate the benefits of changing the approach, recognising the statutory responsibilities of council aligned with work that is already being delivered by our partners. In parallel, work will be undertaken to develop a business case for investment and costed options for the new approach, to ensure that there is provision in place once the current programme ends in March 2023.

3.12 Developing new business models: support for social enterprise and co-operatives

Members will be aware that, over the last number of years, the council has significantly increased its support for organisations exploring new or alternative business models, including social enterprises and co-operatives. Currently, interested individuals or organisations are able to access a range of support including idea generation sessions, skills development workshops, 1-2-1 mentoring best practice visits and networking sessions.

3.13 Within the last year, through this support we delivered an enhanced programme of activity which engaged 325 individuals in awareness events and webinars and recruited 45 participants providing them with 1-2-1 mentoring to support the development of new social enterprises and cooperatives. To date, this has resulted in the creation of 41 new jobs.

We put in place additional support in response to the specific needs of organisations recognising that the set-up of a co-operative is often a lengthier and more complicated journey. This included a series of webinars which engaged 93 individuals in addition to support for developing legal documents for 4 new co-ops, providing 20 days of additional mentoring to 6 co-operatives and recorded and published one podcast focussed on cooperative development.

3.14 One of the early challenges that both co-ops and social enterprises faced in the early part of last year was that many of them were not eligible for the mainstream government support. To overcome this, we established a support fund through which we were able to provide support more than £100,000 financial assistance to 47 organisations across the city.

3.15 Within this financial year, we will continue to raise awareness of social enterprises and cooperatives as viable business models and will extend our support services to assist more

businesses in the sector to start up and overcome the ongoing challenges of Covid 19. We will work to engage a minimum of 300 individuals and organisations through our awareness activities and aim to support a minimum of 45 organisations to establish a social enterprise or cooperative. We have been working with the sector and representative bodies including SENI, Cooperative Alternatives and Trademark to identify how we can enhance our support, in addition to looking to other cities to identify what has worked well. As a result of this engagement, we propose enhancing our existing provision, to include the following:

3.16

- **Organising Social Economy Belfast Week in August 2021:** this will work with sector partners and organisations to raise awareness of the social enterprise and co-operative sector in the city, highlighting the positive impact of the sector and the support available. In addition to Social Economy Week, we will also work throughout the year to pilot interventions with young people with a focus of raising awareness of the sector with young people across the city and engaging them to help overcome issues within the areas they live.
- **Go Social Incentive Fund:** this will be delivered as a pitching competition. It will be targeted at innovative businesses that require support, particular at the start-up and early development stages. The total available fund will be in the region of £60,000 and it is expected that a minimum of 6 organisations will be supported
- **Support to enhance the capacity of the sector aligned with the council's inclusive growth ambitions and draft social value policy.** This element will include undertaking research across the sector to enable us to further tailor our support to help increase the number of social enterprises and co-operatives accessing public procurement opportunities.

Digital Transformation

- 3.17** While the council has been providing support to businesses for some time to move them online and help them look at how new technologies can enhance their business, we witnessed unprecedented demand over the last year as businesses were forced to do more in this space. This digital engagement is unlikely to drop back as businesses re-open. Indeed, we see that there will be an increasing interest across all sectors, moving beyond digital marketing and online selling towards digital transformation. In light of the growing demand, the 11 councils recently submitted a joint bid to Invest NI to access

funding to deliver a pilot initiative over an 18-month period, focusing on digital transformation support for SMEs. This programme offers more intensive support than the existing digital programme available through the council, focusing on supporting access to new digital technologies such as Immersive Tech, Artificial Intelligence and machine learning.

- 3.18 198 businesses across the region will access support through a range of specialist workshops, events, mentoring and aftercare over the period of the programme (18 in the Belfast City Council Area). The total cost of the intervention across the region is £1,241,542, which is being supported by match funding from ERDF/Invest NI of £899,320, therefore the remaining match funding required by each council is £31,109. The programme will be managed by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council on behalf of the 11 councils, with support from each of the respective council areas through a collaborative agreement.

Scaling and Sector Growth

- 3.19 One of the key challenges identified through the enterprise framework and the future business start-up research is the need to encourage more businesses to scale and grow to turnover of more than £3million. Following the success of the Way to Scale Initiative delivered over the last 3 years in partnership with Catalyst Inc and Invest NI, officers have been working to develop the offering for businesses with growth ambitions and potential.
- 3.20 Through the delivery of this work to date, 40 businesses have been engaged in a programme of support designed to change CEO behaviour and develop high growth strategy. Outcomes include projected turnover increase of £18 million; 193 new jobs created, and 411 jobs supported / sustained.
- 3.21 The 2021/22 programme will support up to 60 individuals to participate on a series of workshops that will help to transform their businesses. 10 of the 60 participants will progress through to participate in the full Way to Scale Programme. This will involve a one week residential at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Entrepreneurship Development Programme; peer-to-peer workshop series with Catalyst Inc designed to maximise peer learning and address real-time business challenges; and a Go to Market residential in Boston which focuses on go to market strategies and tactics. It is proposed that this programme is supported with funding of £65,000 to maximise the take-up by Belfast-based

businesses. This represents around 30% of the overall project costs – the other contributions will come from Invest NI, Catalyst Inc and the businesses themselves.

- 3.22** In addition to putting in place support to enable more businesses across the city to scale, we are also working to increase the number of businesses starting and developing in key growth sectors. One of the key growth sectors over the last number of years has been Fintech. In the course of the last year, we have been working in partnership with Fintech NI and Invest NI to identify opportunities to support the local Fintech ecosystem. A recent UK wide review of Fintech identified Northern Ireland as one of the top 10 Fintech clusters and recommended the development of a 3-year strategy to support the continued growth of the ecosystem here. The strategy will aim to identify the challenges and opportunities for scaling Fintech businesses here, including focusing on how partners can collaborate to support the growth and development of the sector.
- 3.23** Due to the direct alignment with the work of the Enterprise and Business Growth team, Employability and Skills team, the Belfast Region City Deal, and the priorities of the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission, it is recommended that Belfast City Council contributes £10,000 to the strategy's development. Additional investment will come from other local authorities as well as Invest NI.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.24** The development of the research to inform the Future Provision of Business Start-up Support in Northern Ireland has been resourced from the 2020/21 financial budget for the Economic Development budget. The financial implications of any new areas of investment will be factored into the 2021/22 budget including:
- £90,000 to support the Social Enterprise and Cooperative Sector
 - £31,109 to support the delivery of a regional digital transformation programme
 - £65,000 to support the delivery of the Way to Scale initiative in partnership with Catalyst Inc and Invest NI
 - £10,000 to support the development of a Fintech strategy in partnership with Fintech NI.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.25 The unit is currently 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 this activity.”**

During discussion, one Member requested further information in relation to Co-op and Social Enterprise targets and the importance of raising awareness of the co-operative option. One Member also suggested that similar workshops to those outlined under 3.21 of the report would be useful for Co-op representatives.

The Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the recommendations and proposed way forward set out in the future provision of business start-up support research;
- Agree to council officers working in partnership with the 10 other councils, Department for the Economy and Invest NI to address the recommendations in relation to future business start-up measures and delivery models;
- Approve the following allocations from the existing 2020/2021 Enterprise and Business Growth budget:
 - £90,000 to support the delivery of services to support the Social Enterprise and Cooperative Sector.
 - £31,109 to support the delivery of a regional collaborative project which supports digital transformation in existing business over an 18 month period
 - £65,000 to support the delivery of the Way to Scale initiative in partnership with Catalyst Inc. and Invest NI which will commence in September 2021
 - £10,000 to support the development of a Fintech strategy in partnership with Fintech NI.
- Note that an update would be provided to the Committee in June in relation to targets for the Co-ops and Social Enterprise model, and raising awareness of, and capacity building for Co-op representatives be examined for the future.

Request to Present

Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and Translink

It was reported that a request had been received from the Department for Infrastructure (Roads) to seek a date in which it could present its Spring 2021 update to Members, and correspondence had also been received from Translink to update

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Members on its low and zero emission buses which they intend to roll out across the city over the course of the coming months and years.

The Special Meeting, scheduled for Wednesday, 23rd June, had been provisionally set for the Committee to receive these two presentations.

The Members of the Committee recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Agree to receive presentations from the Department for Infrastructure (Roads) and Translink at its Special Meeting on 23rd June.
- Agree to request that presentations are provided in advance on the meeting; and
- Request that DfI provide an update on the Safe Cycle Network in the City, segregated cycle infrastructure, removal of parking bays, and the reallocation of roads, and that Ms. L. Loughran and Mr. A. Grieve also be invited to attend.

Restricted Items

Department for Communities (DfC) Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme Update – Reimagining the Public Realm and Connectivity/ Active Travel

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an update on the progress of the physical elements of the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, which included propositions on how to proceed with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Sustainable and Active Travel elements of the fund.

She provided an update under the following headings:

- Re-Imagining the Public Realm – City Centre Interventions;
- DfI Sustainable and Active Travel Fund - E-cargo bike pilot, Active/Sustainable Travel Hubs, City-wide covered cycle stands, Belfast Bikes; and
- DfI Response to Questions on Segregated and Pop-Up Cycle Lanes.

The Strategic Director reminded Members that the report was restricted, however, he advised that the restriction would be lifted in relation to the section on the Belfast Bikes, once the decisions had been ratified by the Council, at its meeting in June.

During discussion, Members raised concerns in relation to the location of Belfast Bikes and the lack of provision in some areas of the city, together with the impact of health inequality. It was highlighted by a number of Members that the level of cycling infrastructure investment in North and West Belfast was disproportionate to that of the other parts of the city and that cycling provision should be brought forward to address the greatest need and not allocated geographically. It was also highlighted that, although some quadrants of the city had large elements of cycling infrastructure, this was not

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representative of the coverage of the total geographical area with significant areas with little to no infrastructure.

The Directors answered a range of questions in relation to the locations of the proposed new bike stations, the need to link active travel sites across city, secured city centre cycle cage and city wide cycle stands, active travel hubs, pavement café licences and the impact on accessibility together with the reporting of issues, eCargo bike trial and eScooter legislation. The Director for City Regeneration and Development highlighted that further information would be brought into the Committee following the completion of the proposed procurement activities relating to covered cycle stands including type and locations of the covered cycle stands including the secure cycle unit option.

The Strategic Director advised that feedback would be provided to the Customer Hub Team regarding the signposting of how the public could report issues in relation to pavement café licenses.

In relation to the response from DfI regarding the linear meters of segregated and pop-up cycle lanes that had been developed in the city since 2016, at the request of a Member, it was suggested that the Committee write to the Department to express the Council's disappointment in the Departments lack of ambition and ability to prioritise the provision of segregated or pop cycle lanes, cycle infrastructure and road reallocation, extended pavements and pedestrianisation access in the past year, in comparison to the progress and work undertaken by other cities. Further suggestions for inclusion in the letter included the importance to progress such works in consultation with local communities and businesses directly impacted by the interventions, and also a request for an update on eScooter legislation and the need for the trial of eScooters to progress in Belfast as soon as possible.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the updates on the DfC Revitalisation Programme projects contained within this paper and note also the continued importance of the use of streets and spaces to assist businesses and communities as part of a wider programme of work focused on Reimagining the Public Realm;
- Agree to the allocation of the project funding within the DfI Sustainable and Active Travel element of the Revitalisation Programme, as outlined in the report;
- Note that these approvals would not be subject to call-in to enable the procurement process to commence and complete within the timeframe of the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme;
- Note the response from DfI following questions raised at the November 2020 Special Meeting of the Committee in relation to cycle lanes;
- Feedback to be provided in relation to the signposting of how the public could report issues regarding pavement café licences; and
- Write to the Minister for Infrastructure to express the Council's disappointment in the Departments lack of ambition and ability to

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capitalise the modal change brought forward through the pandemic year. The letter should express Members concerns regarding the low level of provision of segregated or pop-up cycle lanes, cycle infrastructure and road reallocation, extended pavements and pedestrianisation in the past year in comparison to the progress and work undertaken by other cities. Members agreed to ask the Minister to prioritise these interventions, while also highlighting the importance to progress such works in consultation with local businesses and communities that would be directly impacted by the schemes, and to also request an update on eScooter legislation and that the trial of eScooters to progress in Belfast as soon as possible.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Department for Communities' Access and Inclusion Programme 2021-22

The Director of Economic Development informed Members that the Council had been invited to apply for and administer the Department for Communities' (DfC) Access and Inclusion Programme 2021/22 on behalf of Belfast based arts, culture (including leisure) or heritage organisations.

He advised that the deadline to submit an application for funding to the Department was 18th June and DfC intended to formally launch the programme as a competitive process on 24th May.

He highlighted that the Department for Communities' Access and Inclusion Programme aimed to:

- Improve access to arts, culture (including leisure and active recreation) and heritage venues across NI for people with disabilities; and
- Increase participation in arts, culture (including leisure), heritage, and active recreation activities by people with disabilities.

He outlined that the Council oversaw the assessment and recommendation of projects via a competitive open call internally and externally and was responsible for delivery of all projects in receipt of funding.

He advised that the Tourism, Culture Heritage and Arts Unit managed the 18/19 and 19/20 Access and Inclusion Programme within Belfast and received support for 24 projects with total value of £412,554, of which five were Council projects. In 2020/21, they administered 11 grants, total value £185,443.

He pointed out that Capital works and equipment costs were eligible under this programme and maximum grant remained at £30,000, and projects must be completed on or before 31st March, 2022. He highlighted that the two new requirements proposed for this year were:

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- Applications for Council owned venues must be supported by an accessibility audit either completed by a qualified Council official or an accredited body. Applications for third party owned venues must have the endorsement of the Council; and
- Applicants must commit their own financial resources, minimum 10% of project cost.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to grant permission for Council to apply for, promote, assess and manage DfC's Access and Inclusion Programme 2021/22.

Sustainable Travel - Notice of Motion Update

The Committee considered the following report and associated appendices:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the status of the Notice of Motion regarding taxis in bus lanes since the previous reports to this committee in February 2020 and May 2020. In May 2020 it was agreed that a further report would be brought before this Committee in respect of the Notice of Motion to agree the Council position.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- **Note the background to the Notice of Motion in relation to Sustainable Transport: Taxis in Bus Lanes and previous Committee decisions; and**
- **Agree the Council's position in respect of the Notice of Motion and the proposed letter to the Minister of Infrastructure as set out below.**

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 At the Council meeting on 3rd February 2020, the motion as below was proposed by Councillor Groogan and seconded by Councillor O'Hara. In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), this was referred to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee for consideration:

‘This Council supports the promotion and expansion of sustainable transport in Belfast as a critical step in addressing the dangerous levels of air pollution and congestion across the City and in the context of our climate emergency.

With the appointment of a new Minister for Infrastructure, the Council should ensure that the Minister is clear about our commitment to sustainable transport options and the need for urgent action on climate.

Therefore, the Council agrees to write to the Minister to state that the Experimental Traffic Control Scheme Permitted (Taxis in Bus Lanes), which was proposed by her Department, does not have the Council’s support and to urge her to not progress this further, instead focusing efforts on further measures to enhance the provision of public transport, cycle infrastructure and pedestrian priority in the City.’

- 3.2 At the meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 4th March 2020 after discussion, it was moved by Councillor McLaughlin and seconded by Councillor Donnelly:**

‘That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the motion to enable a report to be submitted to its next monthly meeting providing details of any research/data available on the impact on air quality, traffic congestion etc. of permitting all taxis to operate in bus lanes.’

- 3.3 At the May 2020 CG&R Committee meeting, a report was provided to Members outlining the findings of a report commissioned to provide research and data from other cities in their approach to permitting, or not permitting taxi’s in bus lanes. Under the Chief Executive Delegated Authority procedure that was in place at that time for Committee reports, it was agreed, that in line with Members comments on the Committee paper, that a further report should be brought back into the CG&R Committee for discussion and to agree the Council position in respect of the Notice of Motion.**

- 3.4 The May 2020 Committee Paper and associated appendices are included as Appendix 1 of this report and summarised below.**

Context

- 3.5 The use of bus lanes in Belfast is determined by the Department for Infrastructure, and therefore any decision to allow taxis in bus lanes requires approval from the**

Department. Bus lanes are operational across certain hours of the day and permitted taxis can use them. Currently, Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs) are not currently permitted to use bus lanes. Permitted taxis are:

- Class B taxis displaying white/yellow roof signage
- Class D taxis displaying internal signage.

- 3.6 In 2017 a 12 week trial was undertaken by DfI, permitting Class A taxis access to bus lanes in Belfast. In 2018 DfI proposed an Experimental Traffic Control Scheme (Taxis in Bus Lanes). The Dept. advertised its Intention to Proceed on June 13, 2018 with a 21 day statutory period for representations. However, due mainly to the level of response to the advertisement of the proposal and also the absence of a Minister in 2018 the implementation of the planned 6 month (with a likely further 6 months) Experimental Traffic Control Scheme (not exceeding 18 months) did not proceed.
- 3.7 The Local Development Plan (LDP) Draft Plan Strategy includes the Strategic Policy (SP) 6 Environmental Resilience which emphasises the need for improved accessibility to sustainable transport modes and reduced reliance on car use. Furthermore, it highlights the need to improve sustainable transport links with commuter towns to protect the health of the city. It is noted that sustainable connectivity *'...is vital to social inclusiveness and improves the ability of local communities, in particular disadvantaged or vulnerable groups, to access employment and important services such as healthcare, education, shopping and leisure.'*
- 3.8 The LDP draft strategy sets out the Council's strategy and policy direction of supporting integration of sustainable transport networks and land use to improve connectivity, reduce traffic volumes and promote sustainable patterns of mobility. It proposes that such an approach will enable the development of a compact, walkable city that is connected to high quality public transport and active travel networks.
- 3.9 'Future Proofed City' Belfast Resilience Strategy includes a number of key areas of focus, one of which is Connectivity. The Resilience Strategy sets out the aspiration of creating a Sustainable Transport Plan that will *'... develop cycle, pedestrian and public transport networks that will support ongoing initiatives to reduce traffic and less sustainable forms of travel, both into and within Belfast.'*
- 3.10 The Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) has a stated policy to create a Green, Walkable,

Cyclable Centre. It alludes to a number of current and planned schemes that would have the cumulative effect of rebalancing the scale of tarmac to greenspace across the city, including the Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT), Belfast Streets Ahead, Belfast Bikeshare Scheme, and transformation of the Inner Ring.

- 3.11 The May 2020 Committee report included a chronology and recap of previous reports to the CGR Committee between 2017 and 2018 in relation to taxis using bus lanes. It also detailed the key findings from a Jacobs UK Ltd benchmarking study which had been commissioned to understand whether similar authorities permit ‘taxis’ to use bus lanes, and to engage with the local authorities to establish the rationale for their decision. This benchmarking study looked at eight other similar authorities in the UK. All eight of the benchmarked authorities allowed Hackney Carriages into the bus lanes (public hire) but only four of the authorities permitted Private Hire Vehicles access. The main reason PHVs were not permitted was due to the significant number licensed in an authority, as this was deemed to hinder the effectiveness of bus lanes.**
- 3.12 The study highlighted that some cities have set a numerical limit to the number of hackney carriage while other cities allow market forces to dictate the numbers. It was noted that the benchmarking report had provided little evidence to inform the impacts of taxis using bus lanes on the numbers of people who cycle in the city, or on air quality. None of the benchmarked authorities had measured the air quality impact from taxis using bus lanes. However, Nottingham City Council felt that this was a valid reason for not allowing PHVs to use bus lanes.**
- 3.13 The report by Jacobs set out the following reasons for prohibiting and reasons for allowing PHVs in bus lanes:**

Reasons for prohibiting PHVs in bus lanes and Reasons for allowing PHVs in bus lanes

- 1. Congestion - PHVs in bus lanes may increase congestion, making it harder for buses to keep to their timetable and making them a less attractive modal choice. Historical reasons – PHVs permitted in bus lanes since bus lanes were introduced.**
- 2. Enforcement difficulties - difficult to distinguish between a PHV and an ordinary car. May lead to private cars also using bus lanes. Lower fares – e.g. people with a disability who require door to door service should not have to pay extra to travel the same**

journey if their journey requires a diversionary route due to a bus gate

3. Financial implications – Installation of new signage & road markings. Enforcement and administration of PCNs. Most efficient use of road space - Bus lanes often remain empty for significant amounts of time during the day and when buses are not operating.
4. Air Quality – Perceived negative impact on air quality

3.14 In line with the Notice of Motion as set out above Members are being asked to indicate how they wish to progress in terms of the proposal to write to the Minister.

3.15 Financial & Resource Implications

None associated with this report

3.16 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None associated with this report.”

During discussion, Members debated the issues associated with the Notice of Motion including the potential impact of increased vehicles in shared bus/cycle lanes, the need for segregated cycle provision, the impact the motion would have on hackney and public hire vehicles and the consequences for the public of less convenient travel. One member suggested the need for better transport options and the need to reduce the impact of vehicles on air pollution.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor O’Hara,
Seconded by Councillor Hanvey,

That the Members of the Committee agree to adopt the motion – Sustainable Transport in the name of Councillor Groogan and seconded by Councillor O’Hara as set out in the report.

On a vote, seven Members voted for the proposal and ten against and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the contents of the report; and
- Note that the proposed Motion – Sustainable Transport, as set out in the report, would not be taken forward.

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Future of the City and the Role of the City Centre

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in December 2020, it had agreed that a workshop would be held for Committee Members and Party Group Leaders to consider the Future of the City in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated social, economic and environmental challenges.

The Strategic Director advised that there were a number of priority areas of focus for the Council, as set out in the Council's Recovery Framework, including, for example, City Deal, Housing Led Regeneration, Resilience, Digital and Innovation, Connectivity and Active Travel, and Economic Led Programmes.

He highlighted that the workshop would provide the opportunity to discuss these priorities and to consider the future role of the city centre and arterial route areas in creating investment, jobs and opportunities for the city and its communities.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note the proposed Members Future of the City Workshop scheduled for Tuesday, 25th May 2021, and agree the proposed agenda outline as outlined at Appendix 1.

Department for Infrastructure Traffic Management Proposals

Members of the Committee were informed of the following Department for Infrastructure (DfI) consultations relating to local traffic management proposals within the city:

Henry Place – Proposed Accessible Parking Bays

DfI proposed to provide an accessible parking bay in Henry Place. Waiting would be limited in the proposed bay, 'Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, 2hours, no return within 1 hour'. This accessible parking bay would provide an additional facility for motorists with limited mobility in the vicinity of Clifton Street Doctors Surgery and Towerview Sheltered Housing.

DfI also proposed to introduce two limited waiting parking bays in Henry Place. The restriction would limit parking to 'Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, 2 hours, no return within 1 hour'. This proposal would deter all day parking and create a turnover of available spaces that would benefit local businesses and patients attending the doctors' surgery.

Gardiner Place – Proposed Double Yellow Lines

DfI proposed to introduce double yellow lines in Gardiner Place which would prohibit waiting at all times. This proposal would improve traffic progression at this location.

Hollywood Road – Proposed Limited Waiting Restrictions

DfI proposed to amend the limited waiting restrictions in Hollywood Road. The proposed restriction would limit parking to 'Monday to Saturday, 8am

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to 6pm, 1 hour, no return within 1 hour'. This would create a greater turnover of available spaces that would benefit local businesses.

Lockview Road and Lucerne Parade – Proposed Waiting Restrictions

Dfl proposed to amend the limited waiting restrictions in Lockview Road and Lucerne Parade. It was proposed to amend a section of the existing single yellow line waiting restriction outside the shops in Lockview Road to a limited waiting restriction. The proposed restriction would limit waiting, 'Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, 1 hour, no return within 1 hour'. This proposal would create a greater turnover of available spaces that would benefit local businesses. Dfl also proposed to extend the existing 15m double yellow line corner restriction by 11m in Lucerne Parade. This proposal would improve traffic progression and road safety at this location.

Stranmillis Embankment – Proposed Limited Waiting Restrictions

Dfl proposed to introduce limited waiting restrictions in Stranmillis Embankment. The restriction would limit parking to 'Monday to Saturday, 8am to 6pm, 4 hours, no return within 2 hours'. This would deter all day parking and create a turnover of available spaces that would benefit local businesses.

It was reported that the proposals had been developed in response to requests from members, residents or businesses and when implemented should deliver benefits including traffic progression, road safety, improved accessibility for motorists with limited mobility and improved customer access to local businesses.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to note the five proposed schemes.

Growing Business and the Economy

Employability NI Update and European Social Funding (ESF) support

Members of the Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- **Update members on progress in regard to the Belfast Inclusive Labour Market Partnership (LMP) and the emerging priorities to be considered as part of the action plan for 2021/22**
- **Update members on performance of the five ESF projects in receipt of council match funding and request continuation of council support for the remaining two years of the projects, subject to relevant assurances.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- **Note the update on Employability NI and the Belfast Labour Market Partnership;**
- **Agree to consider the draft Action Plan at the June 2021 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee; and**
- **Note and approve the match funding requests of £240,000 for the European Social Fund projects for the financial year 2021/22 and agree, in principle, to committing the £240,000 allocation for the final year of project delivery (2022/23), subject to satisfactory monitoring and formal confirmation of the funding from DfE, as well as budget availability within the core budget agreed through the 2022/23 revenue estimates process.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Employability NI

Members will be aware that Employability NI is the new approach to helping unemployed individuals to get back into work. It is led by the Department for Communities but is intended to be a cross governmental approach to co-designing a sustainable future strategic employment offer, providing a tailored level of support proportionate to need. It has been designed in order to:

- **Deliver a reduction in economic inactivity and long-term unemployment to bring NI closer in line with UK rates**
- **Provide increased support for those further from the labour market such as those with health conditions (esp. mental health) and disabilities**
- **Create a mechanism for government to collaborate with councils and other Departments to offer local solutions.**

3.2 The governance of the Employability NI Programme includes 11 Labour Market Partnerships – one in each council area. These partnerships are responsible for:

- **Providing leadership and leading on the integration of services**
- **Developing local area plans including setting targets for performance**
- **Managing devolved funding and its delivery**
- **Managing arrangements for the evaluation of local interventions.**

3.3 DfC has encouraged local councils to make progress on the establishment of the Labour Market Partnerships in their respective areas, based on a suggested range of representatives. The Partnerships will be responsible for the development and oversight of a local action plan: initially this will be a one-year plan but, following this initial year, the Department will welcome three year action plans. The Belfast Labour Market Partnership has now been established and has met on two occasions. It is chaired by the council and includes senior representation from the following organisations:

- **Department for Communities**
- **Department for Economy**
- **Invest NI**
- **Advice Sector**
- **VCSE Panel**
- **Belfast H&SC Trust**
- **Belfast Metropolitan College**
- **Belfast Chamber of Commerce**
- **CBI People & Skills Forum**

3.4 At present, officers are working on the details of the strategic assessment. This will provide the intelligence to underpin decision-making and inform the priorities for action. It will take cognisance of key issues such as:

- **Supply-side perspective including an analysis of current structure and composition of labour market, taking account of short-term impacts arising from Covid-19 as well as long-term structural challenges around economic inactivity, long term unemployment and geo-spatial deprivation.**
- **An analysis of labour market demand including the short-term demand pinch-points (such as logistics, social care and construction), sectors experiencing a skills mismatch (such as digital) and opportunities that can be built upon (such as the green economy).**
- **High-level map of provision including the performance of existing interventions.**

- 3.5** The LMP will utilise the strategic assessment to agree an Outcomes Based Accountability baseline for Belfast and identify themes for improving Belfast’s labour market which will then be detailed in an Action Plan submitted to the Department for Communities in June 2021. DfC has confirmed that they were successful in securing budget for the work of the LMPs through the recent budget round. The details of the budget allocations to each council area are currently being finalised. The allocations are based on population and relative levels of deprivation and, as such, it is expected that Belfast City Council will attract the largest budget settlement across the 11 council areas.
- 3.6** The advantages to working with DfC on Employability NI include:
- Ability to target employability interventions in line with need, ensuring a more inclusive approach to economic growth
 - Enhanced level of insights on the localised nature of employability and inactivity challenges – and ability to tailor resources in line with need
 - A more responsive series of employability interventions – with enhanced progression and employment outcomes for those engaging in the activity
 - The potential to move towards a more formal strategic leadership role for council in this area of work.
- 3.7** With specific regard to the Belfast Agenda and the Inclusive Growth commitments, the following are important to note:
- Any interventions or activities within the LMP Action Plan will involve voluntary participation rather than mandatory engagement. It will be reliant on building a trusted network of referral points and creating a seamless approach to engaging with individuals who often present with very complex needs.
 - The focus will be on those further back in the labour market including the long-term unemployed and economically inactive. This challenge is going to be even more significant in a post-Covid economy – where jobs numbers are significantly reduced
 - Given the reasons behind our economic inactivity problem in Belfast, it is likely that there will be a significant focus on health-related economic inactivity. This will require a much better way of working with the Health Trust and other health partners

- A critical element will be to consider how it can be outcomes-based (i.e. progressing in training/towards or into employment) while focusing on what is right for the individual. Given the range of organisations that are likely to be involved in delivery of this service, there are likely to be some challenges in getting this right.

3.8 Proposed approach for LMP

Based on our recent engagement with DfC – and taking account of the pressing nature of the unemployment challenge – officers consider that the best way forward on this is to:

- Engage with stakeholders such as QUB on the underpinning labour market intelligence (LMI) that will drive the work of the partners, particularly the linkages between employment/unemployment and deprivation as well as barriers to accessing a job (e.g. childcare, skills). We are working to develop rich sources of intelligence that will drive delivery and focus resources
- Engage with LMP members to understand likely demand and to develop targeted interventions, focusing particularly on LTU/economically inactive
- Understand how local level insights and engagement can make the delivery of existing interventions more effective
- Explore how council interventions can add value to the LMP – particularly the Employment Academies model which is extending into new areas (including transport and logistics) and exploring emerging areas of work (including sustainable construction, green economy and technology)
- Co-design interventions that can help move people back into work as quickly as possible – this will be particularly important for the ‘new unemployed’
- Review the progress of specific interventions regularly to understand what is working and to share insights with partners.

3.9 In our engagement with DfC, we have underlined how this work is wholly consistent with the Community Planning approach and is a good example of developing a partnership approach to address an entrenched challenge that requires input across a range of organisations. As part of the work to look at the existing Community Planning structures, we have embedded the Belfast LMP within the Community Planning Partnership governance and the respective Boards.

- 3.10 Officers will update members at the June 2021 Committee as the detail of the Action Plan emerges, and in advance of the formal submission to DfC.**

ESF Match Funding

- 3.11 Members will be aware that the council has previously given in-principle commitment to match fund five European Social Fund (ESF) projects over the current funding period. The five projects are:**

- LEMIS+ consortium
- Workforce Learning
- USEL
- Specialisterne
- Springboard.

- 3.12 These projects are currently entering year four of what was originally expected to be a four year delivery timeframe. However, the Department for the Economy has recently confirmed that the funding is to be extended for another year, ending in the next financial year. While the last year was undoubtedly challenging for all organisations working to help people into work, collectively these organisations engaged with 1411 participants and helped 596 individuals to find a job (against a target of 2664 people engaged and 579 into employment – note: figures to end December 2020 only).**

- 3.13 ESF projects and other community-based engagement and training are key elements of the pipeline of support for the Employment Academies work. DfE has confirmed that funding levels allocated to each of the five supported projects will be maintained into year four of delivery and has also officially confirmed that ESF will be extended for another year (to 2022/23). It is therefore proposed that the council maintains its previously-agreed match funding contributions for this financial year (2021/22), with total funding of £315,518 (£240,000 Belfast City Council and £75,518 Urban Villages funding (UV funding to Springboard, Workforce and LEMIS+ projects only)). The funding allocations from council as well as indicative participant numbers and job outcomes for the individual projects are detailed below:**

Organisation	Overall budget 2021/22	Council financial allocation 2021/22	Participant nos (est.)	Job outcomes (est.)
Springboard	£340,983.10	£27,244.55	Engage with 130 participants	52 participants into employment

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Workforce	£241,536.00	£54,699	Engage with 120 economically inactive and unemployed participants	26 participants progress into employment
USEL	£965,589.80	£50,000	Engage with 50 participants who are unemployed or economically inactive living with a disability	Support 15 participants to enter employment upon leaving the programme
Specialisterne	£74,188.75	£9,080	Engage with 7 participants who are unemployed /economically inactive and disabled (including autism)	Support 1 participant to enter employment upon leaving the programme
LEMIS+/Belfast Works	£3,070,421	£98,966	Engage with 2,375 participants	487 participants to enter employment per year

3.14 Given DfE's official commitment to run the programme for one more year, it is also proposed that the committee gives in-principle approval for the levels of match funding set out above to be committed to the projects in the next financial year. These allocations will be subject to satisfactory monitoring and formal confirmation of the core funding from DfE, as well as budget availability.

3.15 Financial and resource implications

Employability NI/Labour Market Partnerships

No specific additional financial contribution required from council at this point. It is expected that we will make available our initiatives such as Pathway to Enterprise and Employment Academies as part of the solution to create employment opportunities in key sectors experiencing employment demand across the coming year.

DfC has confirmed that it will provide resource support for the management and administration of the partnerships, alongside budget for programme delivery. Details of support available are currently being finalised. In the interim, officers are working to re-focus existing staff resources to support this important programme of delivery.

European Social Fund

£240,000 allocation within the Employability & Skills budget for 2021/22 with a renewal of this £240,000 for 2022/23. The £240,000 set aside within this financial year was part of the overall Committee budget approved by SP&R Committee on 22 January 2021. The allocation for next financial year will be subject to satisfactory monitoring and formal confirmation of the core funding from DfE, as well as budget availability as agreed through the estimates process.

Equality implications/rural needs assessment

- 3.6 One of the key advantages of this approach is that it will enable us to target resources on specific groups, including those with particular access issues and barriers that currently prevent them from accessing training and employment opportunities.**
- 3.17 Labour Market Partnerships will be established in all council areas.”**

During discussion, Members suggested additional Membership to the Belfast Labour Market Partnership. The Director of Economic Development advised that he would submit the suggestions to the Partnership and report back to Committee. He also explained further the target setting process by the recipients of the ESF Funding.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the update on Employability NI and the Belfast Labour Market Partnership;
- Agree to consider the draft Action Plan at the June 2021 meeting of the Committee;
- Note and approve the match funding requests of £240,000 for the European Social Fund projects for the financial year 2021/22 and agree, in principle, to committing the £240,000 allocation for the final year of project delivery (2022/23), subject to satisfactory monitoring and formal confirmation of the funding from the Department for the Economy, as well as budget availability within the core budget agreed through the 2022/23 revenue estimates process; and

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- Note that, in relation to the suggested additional representation on the Belfast Labour Market Partnership, namely the Labour Relations Agency, Trade Union and the Economic Research Institute, the Director of Economic Development will report back on the engagement and outcome once they have been considered by the Partnership.

Strategic and Operational Issues

**Review of Belfast Agenda and
maintaining focus on delivery**

The Members of the Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is update the committee on the recent reconfiguration of the Belfast Agenda Delivery Boards and the proposed approach and timeline for refreshing the city’s community plan and the role of Members in helping shape this.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- (i) Note the reconfiguration of the Belfast Agenda Delivery Boards as set out within this report;**
- (ii) Note the clear alignment and synergies between the Boards and work of the Committee;**
- (iii) Note the role of Elected Members in inputting and shaping the refresh of the Belfast Agenda over coming months; and**
- (iv) Note the role that Elected Members will play in refreshing the community plan detailed in section 3.9.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Reconfiguration of Belfast Agenda Delivery Boards

Members will be aware, that in order to ensure that the vision and ambitions set out within the Belfast Agenda (community plan for the city) are translated into action and mobilised city partners to support delivery, four cross-sectoral delivery Boards had been formed (i.e. Growing the Economy and City Development | Working and Learning | Living Here | Resilience and Sustainability). The Committee will have received regular

updates on the programmes and achievements being released through the BA Delivery Boards, particularly from a Working and Learning and Growing Economy & City Development Boards.

- 3.2 As the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have begun to emerge, there is a need to understand how our city economy and communities are likely to be impacted by COVID-19, and what we need to focus on to rebuild in the coming months and years. Clearly, the pandemic is not over and there will need to be sustained efforts to protect the safety and health of our citizens, while at the same time balancing the need to stabilise and rebuild our economy and city. In this context, and as part of the review of the Belfast Agenda, there is a need to take stock and reassess the focus of Community Planning and the work of the Boards over the coming weeks and months. This is not to say that the ambitions and commitments set out within the Belfast Agenda should not remain at the core of our work. However, in order to address challenges that will continue to emerge as a result of the pandemic we may need to pivot our collective focus and seek to prioritise and accelerate key interventions and programmes.
- 3.3 The Community Planning Partnership agreed that there is greater alignment and fit between the focus of the Working and Learning Board (e.g. Skills development educational attainment), and economic focus of the exiting Growing the Economy and City Development Board. This approach provides the opportunity for the development of policies and interventions to create a skills pipeline that is intrinsically linked to economic development policy as well as demand and labour market intelligence. It also provides the opportunity for the development of a focused City Development Board that would examine the key priorities needed to drive city wide regeneration and development.
- 3.4 In summary, it was agreed that the Working and Learning Board and the Growing the Economy strands of the Belfast Agenda are brought together into a single board (i.e. Jobs, Skills and Education Board) alongside the creation of a standalone City Development Board.

Focus of Boards

- 3.5 The key areas of focus for the Boards, as agreed by the Community Planning Partnership are set out below and clearly align with the work of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee. The Boards provide a platform to create enhanced collaboration and provide a focus on action and delivery.

Each of the Boards are examining and defining the specific deliverables that will be progressed in the context of community planning, enhancing the potential for collaborative gain, and the development of an 18-24 months+ action plan.

3.6 Jobs, Skills and Education Board

1. **Enterprise & Business Growth** - We are aware of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on many of our local businesses, social enterprises, co-operatives, and employees. Important that we strengthen the current system and bring forward an integrated approach to supporting businesses, sustaining jobs and creating new employment opportunities within the city including the arterial routes and key neighbourhood economic hubs. We will seek to adopt an inclusive approach to innovation and broaden the participation in and benefits from an innovative economy.
2. **Supporting tourism, culture, arts, entertainment and hospitality** - The prolonged and uncertain nature of the pandemic and the range of measures and restrictions brought forward has had a devastating impact upon the vitality and functionality of these sectors – key economic and employment drivers for the city and wider region. It will be important that we seek to protect and rebuild these important sectors (like many other sectors) during and emerging from the pandemic.
3. **Skills and Employability** – Working across partners to ensure local people gain the necessary skills to remain in or enter the local workforce. We will also work with employers to better match the demand for and supply of skills and provide a responsive and targeted approach to providing employability support for those furthest removed from the labour market. We will also seek to identify and maximise digital pathway opportunities to increase skills development and access to employment.
4. **Educational Underachievement** – There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has further widened many of the inequalities which already existed across the city and has adversely impacted upon vulnerable people and families. Seeking to alleviate educational inequalities and underachievement within the city will continue to shape our plans and delivery over the coming years.

3.7 City Development Board

- 1. City Regeneration and Investment – We will work in partnership to identify and unlock major regeneration schemes for the city and maximise the associated benefits of such investment for local people and communities.**
- 2. Housing Led Regeneration – Maximising the opportunities to continue to work with partners to explore and identify opportunities for the strategic use of public and private land assets and funding mechanisms to accelerate housing development, including city centre living and deliver mixed-tenure homes across the city. Significant housing stress exists across the city and there is an opportunity to consider how we can bring forward schemes which contribute to the growth ambitions set out within the Belfast Agenda and create sustainable communities (mixed-use developments providing community infrastructure, amenities, and open/green spaces).**
- 3. Access, Connectivity & Active Travel – Alongside the need to bring forward a long-term transportation plan for the city, there is a need to focus on joint objectives and a targeted delivery approach across partners to accelerate opportunities to enhance accessibility, connectivity and active travel across the city. This is not only important to connect people to employment opportunities and investment hubs, but is important from a climate resilience perspective and will also create healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environments that promote health and emotional wellbeing.**
- 4. Future City Centre Programme – The scale of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the future viability of the city centre is clearly challenging, with retail and hospitality industries in particular suffering. A thriving city centre is critical in terms of jobs and economic recovery for the city as whole, and for the wider region. It is clear that Belfast, in line with other cities need to consider the purpose of the city centre and how it can adapt to becoming a multi-purpose location, combining retail and hospitality with business, residential, cultural, community and other facilities, alongside new ways of working and embracing innovation and digital technology. The NI Executive have established a new High Street Task Force and it will be important that the Board consider the key challenges and opportunities.**

3.8 Belfast Agenda Review

Members will note that there is a legislative requirement and timescale for review of the city's community plan (Belfast Agenda) which is required by November 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption on normal working arrangements have understandably impacted upon the timescales for the review of community plans across local government. A detailed report outlining the planned process, including significant engagement and co-design with communities, city partners and elected Members. Attached at Appendix 1 is the copy of the detailed report considered and agreed by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. In summary, the co-design approach we adopt needs to be flexible to reflect the outcome of prior engagement ensuring we listen to and reflect the specific needs of each area of the city.



3.9 Role of Elected Members

Elected Members will be engaged at each stage of the review process through the All Party Working Group on Community Planning. In addition, it is recommended that all Elected Members will have the opportunity to shape the priority framework and plans for the new 4 year period through Party Group briefings. In addition, Elected Members will also be supported by our Marketing and Communications team who will be provide ongoing support via a communications toolkit to enable them to engage their constituents to make their voices heard.

3.10 While the specifics regarding engagement events will be finalised with partners, it is expected that there will be a series of thematic and/or local-area virtual workshops. This will provide a further role for Elected Members to provide a leading role within their communities to shaping the city's future plans.

3.11 Financial & Resource Implications

Any financial implications arising from this report will be covered from existing budgets. The review process will involve the participation of all community planning partners, who will need to commit their resources to the review process and the agreed action plans.

3.12 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

There are no equality, good relations or rural need implications in this report.”

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:

- Note the reconfiguration of the Belfast Agenda Delivery Boards as set out within this report;
- Note the clear alignment and synergies between the Boards and work of the Committee;
- Note the role of Elected Members in inputting and shaping the refresh of the Belfast Agenda over coming months; and
- Note the role that Elected Members will play in refreshing the community plan detailed in section 3.9 of the report.

Chairperson