

Development Committee

Wednesday, 13th May, 2009

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor M. Browne (Chairman); and
Councillors Attwood, Campbell, Convery, Cunningham,
Ekin, Humphrey, B. Kelly, Kyle, Lavery, C. Maskey,
McCarthy, McCausland, Mhic Giolla Mhín, Rodgers
and Stoker.

In attendance: Ms. M. T. McGivern, Director of Development;
Ms. C. Taggart, Community Services Manager;
Mr. T. Husbands, Head of City Events and Venues; and
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor D. Browne) and Councillor Crozier.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th 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 5th May, subject to the omission of the minute under the heading "Core Cities" which, at the request of Councillor Crozier, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

Core Cities

The Director informed the Committee that Councillor Crozier had advised her that, due to an emergency, he would be unable to attend the meeting. Accordingly, he had requested that consideration of the item regarding the Core Cities Group be deferred for one month.

Following discussion, during which the Director informed the Members that the cities of Cardiff, Edinburgh and Glasgow, which had also been invited to become associate members of the Group, were still considering the matter, it was

Moved by Councillor McCausland,
Seconded by Councillor Campbell,

That the Committee agrees to defer for one month consideration of the minute of 20th April under the heading "Core Cities", which had been taken back for further consideration at the Council meeting on 5th May.

On a vote by show of hands, eight Members voted for the proposal and four against and it was accordingly declared carried.

Council's Transport Policy Review

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

In August 2008, Atkins consultants were appointed to review and update the current Council's Transport Policy to help support the Council's civic leadership role for this important City and regional issue. The Policy seeks to provide the Council with a basis for facilitating the promotion and introduction of sustainable transport approaches or initiatives in respect of both Council operational activity and transportation generally.

The overall approach to the review was to build on the success of the existing Policy, develop a refined understanding of effective current policy and identify best practice. The work sought to provide an effective up-to-date Policy which would begin to integrate internal operational transport initiatives and actions with the broader policy aspirations for more sustainable approaches to transportation.

The Council requires an up-to-date, coherent Transport Policy in order to consistently engage in transport policy developments, such as the reviews of the Regional Development and Transportation Strategies, and influence specific policies or strategic transport infrastructure initiatives planned for the region. In parallel with this engagement there is also increasing recognition that the Council must continue to address and manage the transportation implications of existing operational activity across the organisation. Council has already accepted reducing the City's impact on climate change and improving air quality as a Key Objective within the 2008-2011 Corporate Plan.

A cross departmental steering group comprising Council officers was set up to oversee the revision of the current Transport Policy and the following stages were carried out in the first phase of the review:

- a review of the current Policy and the Environmental Policy package;
- background research and consultation with a range of stakeholders including Council officers, Elected Members, the private sector, statutory bodies and community/voluntary bodies; and
- a review of existing travel patterns and practices within Belfast City Council

The first phase of the review was completed in December 2008 and a report of the findings submitted to Committee in December. The Committee endorsed the consultant's conclusions from their initial work that the current vision and objectives of the Transport Policy remained broadly valid but would benefit from being updated and more effectively aligned with the Council's emerging approach and objectives within the Corporate Plan. The second phase involved the following stages:

- the refinement of Policy options for a strategic Council Transport Policy
- the initial exploration of the potential options for a draft Workplace Travel Plan to address the organisational transportation implications for the Council.

Key Issues

This report outlines the proposed Draft Transport Policy for the Council which incorporates a recommendation in respect of the proposals for the move towards the development of a Workplace Travel Plan to integrate the actions to address the transport implications of the organisation, including the potential operational, efficiency and sustainability benefits arising from a coordinated planed approach. Both documents are available on Modern.gov

Draft Transport Policy

The Draft Transport Policy is appended for consideration by Committee as the basis for an adopted revised Transport Policy. The revised and updated vision for the Policy is detailed below:

'To support and promote the development of a modern, safe, accessible and integrated transportation system to enhance the connectivity for Belfast and its wider regions, which benefits the environment; supports sustainable development; and enhances the quality of life of all those who live, work, visit and do business in the City.'

The proposed new strategic objectives for the Policy are outlined below aligned with their associated Council corporate themes. It should be noted that, for the purposes of the Transportation Policy, the additional theme in relation to the City centre has been introduced in recognition of the pivotal role the centre has for transportation infrastructure, services and interchange at a City and regional level.

Key Theme: City Leadership - Proposed Strategic Objective 1

'To provide a strong civic leadership role for the promotion of a modern, safe, accessible and integrated transportation system for the City of Belfast and its wider regions.'

Key Theme: Regeneration Growth and Prosperity –
Proposed Strategic Objective 2

‘To support the sustainable economic development of Belfast to ensure the future prosperity of Belfast City and its wider regions and to facilitate the continued development of its economic and physical regeneration through achievement of economic, tourism, leisure, good relations, environmental, educational and health objectives for the City.’

Key theme: Environmental Responsibility –
Proposed Strategic Objective 3

‘To secure the long term viability of Belfast City and its environment by seeking to ensure that all transportation arising from the wider proposals take into account and mitigate against their adverse impact on the environmental and the quality of life of local neighbourhoods’

Key Theme: People and Place - Proposed Strategic Objective 4

‘To support local people and communities by ensuring a community plan approach that integrates transportation to enhance connectivity for local neighbourhoods by making them safer, healthier and more inclusive’.

Key Theme: Value for money customer focused services -
Proposed Strategic Objective 5

‘To seek to ensure that Belfast City Council services and facilities are accessible by sustainable modes of travel, such as walking, cycling and public transport’.

Key Theme: An organisation fit to lead and serve –
Proposed Strategic Objective 6

‘To promote the positive effects of sustainable travel and to lead by example by implementing sustainable travel initiatives within its own organisation’.

Key Theme: Belfast City Centre –
Proposed Strategic Objective 7

‘To support the sustainable economic development of Belfast City centre, as a key regional asset – to seek to provide an urban environment that supports a more dynamic and competitive centre and to improve its presentation and environmental quality as befits a first class European city.’

The key objectives/priorities for each Key Theme have been differentiated within the appended Draft Transport Policy between external policies (those outside the control of the Council) and internal policies (those within current Council activities). The Committee is requested to consider the Draft Transport Policy and, if appropriate, agree the revised vision alongside the vision and strategic objectives detailed above.

Workplace Travel Plan

The implications of the Council's organisational transport impacts arising from operational and fleet activities were considered as part of the review and the Draft Transport Policy. The work highlighted the range of activities with direct and indirect transport impacts and the necessity for a coordinated approach to guide the process of aligning this activity with corporate and strategic transportation policy objective for the Council.

The recommendation arising from the work was that the Council should move towards the adoption of a formal Workplace Travel Plan to encourage travel by more sustainable modes and address the potential for operational and efficiency improvements. This approach would also align with the with the Council's corporate objectives of 'better leadership' and 'better care for Belfast's environment'.

The draft Workplace Travel Plan provides a basis for the exploration of a formal Workplace Travel Plan for the Council. The Committee is requested to consider the approval of the principle of a Workplace Travel Plan approach as an integral element of a Council Transportation Policy.

The development of a Workplace Travel Plan will have operational and resource implications. The approval of the Travel Plan approach is sought on the basis that the future resource implications are brought before the appropriate Committee for approval in the context of an integrated plan, including the evaluation of whether or not the Council may seek to appoint a full-time Travel Plan Co-ordinator with responsibility for developing, implementing and monitoring the Council's travel plan policy.

Resource Implications

There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. The future potential resource implications arising from the revised Transport Policy implementation, including the Workplace Travel Plan, will be brought before the appropriate Committee for future consideration in parallel with the relevant specific implementation activities.

Recommendations

Members are requested to:

- 1. consider the Draft Transport Policy and, if appropriate, agree the revised Policy in line with the vision and strategic objectives detailed in the body of the report.**
- 2. endorse the principle of a Workplace Travel Plan approach for the Council and the refinement of the implications arising from the integration of this element within the Transportation Policy.**

Decision Tracking

- 1. Following ratification the draft Transport Policy will be formalised into a policy document for the Council.**

Time frame: August 2009. Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

- 2. Following ratification work will be initiated on the Workplace Travel Plan concept to further refine the potential operational and resource implications with a report brought back to the appropriate Committee.**

Timeframe: October 2009. Reporting: Shirley McCay.”

In answer to a Member's question, the Director indicated that the need to create a post of Travel Plan Co-ordinator had been identified by the Consultant who had been appointed to facilitate the development of the Plan. However, she was not, as yet, convinced that such a post was necessary. She assured the Committee that, when the Workplace Travel Plan had been completed, a report would be presented which would contain any staffing implications.

Following discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided by the Director regarding the post of Travel Plan Co-ordinator, adopted the Draft Transport Policy, a copy of which is available on Modern.gov, and agreed that a Workplace Travel Plan approach be an integral element of the Council's Transport Policy.

Departmental Plan 2009/2010

The Director submitted for the Committee's approval the Development Departmental Plan for 2009/2010. She pointed out that the Plan identified the actions, initiatives and events planned for the Department during that period and that the main purpose of the Plan was to gain Committee approval for key projects, initiatives and resources required for the year. It would be supplemented by a series of more detailed business plans prepared by the separate Units within the Department which would link into and align to the Department Plan. She advised the Members that an update report regarding the Plan would be submitted to the Committee on a quarterly basis and, since many involved key issues, specific reports concerning those matters would be submitted to the Committee for approval.

In answer to a Member's question regarding the absence of financial information against some actions in the Plan, the Director indicated that this was because the budgets for those issues had been agreed previously or because no expenditure would be incurred, other than staff time, in the current financial year or because the amount required was not yet known, in which case a report would be presented to a future meeting.

Following further discussion, the Committee approved the Departmental Plan for the period 2009/2010 as set out overleaf:

**D
910**

**Development Committee,
Wednesday, 13th May, 2009**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

**D
912**

**Development Committee,
Wednesday, 13th May, 2009**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

**D
914**

**Development Committee,
Wednesday, 13th May, 2009**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

**D
916**

**Development Committee,
Wednesday, 13th May, 2009**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

**D
918**

**Development Committee,
Wednesday, 13th May, 2009**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

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**D
920**

**Development Committee,
Wednesday, 13th May, 2009**

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within the Agenda Pack**

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**D
922**

**Development Committee,
Wednesday, 13th May, 2009**

**The Departmental Plan can be viewed by opening Appendix 1 of Item No. 4
within the Agenda Pack**

Renewing the Routes

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

This report provides an outline of the ongoing activity in respect of the Falls Road Renewing the Routes Action Plan, an update on progress and provides the context for the proposed variation in the previously agreed budget allocation.

The variation in the budget involves a suggested reallocation, within the ‘cleaner, greener, safer’ theme, towards the development of an alternative project that would contribute to the same overall objectives.

Key Issues

Update on Activity

A significant element of the work within the Falls Road part of the IDF Programme is focussed on improvements to commercial properties.

The ‘Commercial Improvement Programme’ on Falls is well underway with 67 properties completed as part of the Lower Falls and Lower Springfield Road phases. Works are currently underway at 34 properties between Broadway to La Salle Gardens. Consultation has commenced for the 51 properties targeted as the first part, of what will be two phases, of commercial improvements in the Andersonstown area.

Completed projects also include the restoration of the decorative category B1 listed railings at St Comgall’s and Tourism Signs (installed at 7 key locations on the Falls Road, in conjunction with the Tourism Unit, including Carnegie Library, Dunville Park, St Mary’s University College, Royal Victoria Hospital, City Cemetery, Falls Park, Milltown Cemetery and Bog Meadows). Environmental and landscaping works to West Circular Roundabout have also been completed in time for most of the planting to be in bloom.

The Broadway ‘Soffits and Sills’ Environmental Project was completed at the end of last year and saw the enhancement of the structural detailing on residential properties contributing to the revitalisation of this busy route.

The feature lighting scheme has been completed on two of the Falls Road's historic buildings of architectural merit: Falls Road Carnegie Library and St Mary's University College. This programme is nearing completion as the project commissioned for the International Wall reaches the final stages with the official switch-on planned for May 2009.

As part of the 'cleaner, greener, safer' theme consultants have designed a two part project for the B listed Milltown Cemetery railings and entrance. This project will secure the restoration and reinstatement of the entrance gate and two pedestrian gates combined with refurbishment and repainting the decorative railings.

Proposed Variation in Budget Allocation

The agreed Falls IDF Action Plan included a proposal to develop a project for Dunville Park. The potential for environmental improvements to the Park boundary was identified as part of the environmental and open space improvements within the Plan. The proposed works sought to improve the entrance and railings as part of a medium term environmental improvement for Falls and Grosvenor Roads.

The context for the proposed works has changed since the adoption of the IDF Action Plan and ongoing scoping work for the project has identified issues that make it unfeasible to pursue the proposed works within the programme timescales. The Department for Social Development, in conjunction with the Council, are currently progressing work towards an economic appraisal for the Dunville Park. This work is developed in consultation with the Greater Falls Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership and several designs have been produced through a series of consultations with community groups whilst agreement has been reached on the broad scope of the project. The timeframes involved in developing the economic appraisal and detailed works make it impractical to proceed with the envisaged works.

In order to ensure the Council is in a position to develop a viable scheme for the expenditure of the approved resources it is suggested that Committee considers the reallocation of resources to alternative environmental improvement works on the Falls Road to the St Peter's Cathedral area. There are no additional financial implications arising from the reallocation and the proposed works would provide similar benefits to the agreed scheme.

Resource Implications

There are no additional financial implications arising from the reallocation.

Recommendation

Members are requested to approve the reallocation of £30,000 from the 'cleaner, greener, safer' theme to support the development of an environmental improvement project in the St Peter's Cathedral area of Falls Road.

Decision Tracking

Following ratification detailed designs will be produced for installation.

Time Frame: Match 2010. Reporting officer: Shirley McCay

Key to Abbreviations

IDF: Integrated Development Fund."

Following discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendation contained within the foregoing report.

Culture and Arts Unit

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that the Culture and Arts Unit brings regular progress reports to Members. The purpose of this report is to advise Members of progress with respect to:

1. Celebration in 2013 of the 400th Anniversary of Belfast's First Charter
2. Update on Lyric Theatre

Key Issues

1. **Celebration in 2013 of the 400th Anniversary of Belfast's First Charter**

The town of Belfast was formerly established by the grant of a charter by James I on 27th April, 1613. This is a crucial date in the City's history and the Council may consider marking the anniversary in a suitable manner and enabling citizens to join in celebrating a shared history.

The establishment of civic governance (including the establishment of a Corporation), political representation and the regulation of markets through charters was a crucial part of the process.

The 400th Anniversary in 2013 is only four years away and, should the Council decide to celebrate the anniversary, there will be a need to set up a clear process to ensure good planning, maximum effectiveness and use of resources to establish greatest benefit. This is an opportunity to address perceptions and sensitivities through shared learning and activity using a 'Good Relations' approach, i.e., allowing a process of consultation and learning. Engagement in such a process will allow Belfast to take ownership of its history, provide regional leadership and bring in the best expertise, both locally and internationally.

A number of towns across Northern Ireland received charters in 1613, including Limavady, Coleraine and Strabane, and there is an opportunity for Belfast to work positively on the commemoration with a range of the new Councils post RPA.

The celebration would also provide an excellent opportunity to establish partnerships with key relevant statutory agencies.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is actively engaged in a related research programme and is eager to work with the Council in the delivery of a symposium. NIEA is already collaborating on a book, due to be published within the current financial year, dealing with the history of Belfast from an archaeological perspective. Queen's University Belfast is also investigating a major multi-author publication associated with the 1613 anniversary.

To establish process, it is proposed that a symposium be held on 4-5 November, 2009 in the Ulster Hall. The programme will include five leading speakers. Several leading academics from the USA, Great Britain and Ireland have indicated a willingness to participate. These include representatives from the native community in Virginia USA, the leading expert on sixteenth and seventeenth century colonisation in the north Atlantic world (who has a book on the subject in the press and has worked both in the US and Northern Ireland) and a local professor specialising in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The topics of urbanisation and public perceptions of history will also be considered.

A full costing for the symposium will be brought to the June Committee meeting.

2. Update on Lyric Theatre

As Members will be aware, at the Council meeting on December 2007 the Lyric Theatre was awarded £1.25 million towards its capital development through the Cultural Legacy Fund. The cost of the capital project is £17.8 million, of which over 95% has already been raised, with the aim to source the final 5% whilst the Theatre is being built. It is notable that nearly £4 million of the total has been raised from private funds/non-public agencies. Since being awarded the grant, the Lyric has been liaising with Belfast City Council and has provided updates on a regular basis. From December 2008 to present, the Lyric has focused on a number of key areas, including design development, business planning, value engineering, stakeholder consultation, site clearance, enabling works and fundraising. The Lyric project is subject to the Government's Gateway Review Programme and all key stages in the capital programme have to be signed-off by their investment decision makers. The Lyric has successfully completed a 'level 3' health check.

On Monday 9 March, 2009 construction work started on the new build with an estimate of 96 weeks until completion, with the build due to be finished in early 2011. Since the Lyric has been closed, three productions have toured Northern Ireland and they have also developed an Education and Outreach programme which has been piloted in schools and communities throughout Belfast and Northern Ireland.

Resource Implications

Proposed activity will be resourced from within the Culture and Arts Unit current staffing and allocated budget.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members:

1. agree in principle to the hosting of a symposium to be held on 4 and 5 November, 2009, to engage a wide range of stakeholders in an informed discussion about mechanisms for the commemoration in 2013, as well as addressing issues of colonisation in the Atlantic world, urbanisation and the myths and reality of our past, subject to a full costing being presented at the June Committee;

2. grant permission to approach other Councils whose towns also received their charters in 2013 with a view to possible collaborations; and
3. note the update on the Lyric Theatre.

Decision Tracking

Action:

1. A full budget breakdown of costs for the proposed symposium for the Celebration in 2013 of the 400th Anniversary of Belfast's First Charter will be brought to the June Committee meeting.

Timeframe: June 2009 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay.

Abbreviations

RPA – Review of Public Administration.”

During discussion, the Director indicated that, if the Committee agreed to the organisation of a symposium to discuss means of commemorating the 400th anniversary of the awarding of Belfast's Charter, she would submit a report to the next monthly meeting which would outline the costs and which would include suggestions for possible events which could be held to celebrate the anniversary.

In response to a Member's question regarding the Lyric Theatre, the Director indicated that the Theatre's constitution prevented seats being set aside for specific organisations on its Board. As a result, none of the public bodies which had provided financial assistance towards the construction of the new Lyric building were represented currently on the Board. However, the Board of the Theatre had indicated that it would be establishing an advisory group on which those organisations would be represented.

Arising from discussion in this matter, the Director undertook to enquire why the Education and Outreach Programme which had been undertaken by the Lyric Theatre had not involved any of the schools in Inner South Belfast.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided by the Director and adopted the recommendations contained within the report.

Culture Night 2009

Councillor B. Kelly declared an interest in this matter in that her brother was a member of the Belfast Culture Night Committee, which had submitted the request for funding, and retired from the meeting whilst the matter was under discussion.

The Director of Development informed the Committee that a request had been received for the Council to provide a sum of £25,000 towards a project to organise a Culture Night in Belfast on 25th September, in order to coincide with a series of similar Nights which would be taking place in other European cities. This amount had been requested due to the fact that the Arts Council of Northern Ireland had already agreed to provide a similar sum.

It was intended that the Culture Night would be a free, City centre-based, family-focused event which would involve arts and cultural providers, the hospitality industry and local businesses in which organisations would invite the public to participate in events, talks and tours.

The organisers, the Belfast Culture Night Committee, had indicated that the event would:

- (i) raise the public's awareness of Belfast as a thriving cultural centre;
- (ii) attract positive media coverage for arts and culture in Belfast;
- (iii) advance the Council's aim of developing cultural tourism activity and enhancing the quality of the visitor experience; and
- (iv) raise the profile of arts and cultural organisations and provide them with a platform to showcase their work to new audiences.

She reported that, prior to the request from the Belfast Culture Night Committee being received, the Council had been undertaking research into a similar concept known as "Light Night", which took place in a number of cities across Britain and was supported by the Association of Town Centre Management. In addition, a number of European cities, such as Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin and Milan, had organised Culture Nights and approximately 100,000 people had participated in the 2008 event which had been held in Dublin.

During discussion in the matter, several Members pointed out that, whilst they were supportive of the event, they believed that it should be taking place across Belfast rather than in the City centre only and that the publicity for Culture Night should target those persons who did not normally attend arts and culture events.

In response, the Director indicated that she would advise the Culture Night Committee of the remarks, with which she was in agreement. However, she explained that the main reason that events were not being proposed to be held throughout Belfast was because the organisations which were involved were City centre-based.

Following further discussion, the Committee noted the comments which had been provided by the Director, agreed to provide a sum of £25,000 towards the costs of the Belfast Culture Night 2009 and requested that the Belfast Culture Night Committee be advised of the Development Committee's views about the organisation of any future activities on a City-wide basis.

Belfast Business Survey

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

In January 2009, a survey of 500 businesses in Belfast was commissioned by Belfast City Council. The aim of this survey was to gather information on the companies (number of people employed, turnover, key markets etc.), to identify their key growth challenges for the coming year and to identify the particular support that they may need and that may be provided by Belfast City Council or other business development support agencies.

The survey sample was representative of the geographical location of the City’s business community as well as the company size structure.

It is anticipated that this survey will be undertaken on an annual basis. The next survey will be undertaken in January 2010.

Key Issues

The key findings of the survey were:

- More than half (54%) of the companies surveyed told us that they did not have a formal, written business plan. While economic growth was almost a given over the last few years, the current times make it much more challenging for companies to survive and make a profit. It is therefore all the more important that they spend some time refining their product, identifying their markets, considering their marketing plan and identifying where their finances will come from.
- Only 45% of the companies interviewed told us that they were selling into the public sector. Given the disproportionately large size of the public sector in Northern Ireland, this could be construed as a missed opportunity. One of the key actions in the economic downturn response was to increase the number of small businesses accessing Council procurement opportunities. In partnership with the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, we have organised an event on ‘Sustainable Procurement Opportunities’ as part of Waste Week on 4 June 2009.
- One third of the companies that we spoke to do not expect their business levels to change in the coming year, while equal percentages expressed themselves as optimistic about growth prospects as those who did not expect to see any growth in the coming year.

- The same is true for anticipated profit margins - while 40% of companies expected that these would remain the same as last year, 27% felt that they would increase, while 30% thought that they would decrease.
- 48% of Belfast businesses suggested that they expected to invest in their company in the coming year. This suggests that they want to proactively pursue growth for the business. However, with more than 50% suggesting that there will be no investment in the business, it does give some cause for concern that the adverse conditions may hit them all the harder if they are not prepared to meet the challenge.
- Companies that were exporting were more optimistic about sales prospects in international than local markets. Given the rising value of the Pound to the Dollar and the Euro, there is some opportunity for local companies to present cost-effective supply options to businesses trading in these currencies.
- 72% of Belfast companies expect to maintain their 2008 employment levels in 2009, 20% expect to recruit more employees, while 8% of businesses expect to have to make redundancies. However, more than half of companies told us that they did not recruit in 2008 and therefore it is unlikely that there will be any major employment growth in the coming year.

Key challenges for 2009

- Companies identified two key challenges for the coming year: the prevailing global economic environment and the potential rise in overheads, supplier costs and rates. It is clear that many of these matters are largely outside of their control. However, by taking a more planned and strategic approach to their growth, they can minimise the impact of these issues on their future development.

Support required

- Almost 80% of the companies participating in the survey suggested that they were not accessing any Government support at present. There is a raft of initiatives available from Local and Central Government as well as private providers to help companies grow. We will work with the business support network to make companies aware of the support available and to help them access that support.

- When asked what specific areas they needed further support on, the companies suggested that these were sales development, strategic planning, financial management and access to public sector procurement. The Economic Development Unit activity as part of the Departmental Plan demonstrates that we will endeavour to re-shape our business support services in the coming year to address these areas and will work with our other partners in the enterprise arena to encourage them to do the same.
- Over 75% of businesses surveyed told us that Belfast was a good place to do business in. Those less positive about the city said that their main concerns were regarding transport infrastructure and government regulation.

Recommendation

It is recommended that members note the content of this report.

Decision Tracking

A further survey will be undertaken in early 2010 and the its findings will be presented to the Development Committee in due course.

Timeframe: April 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Arising from discussion in this matter, several Members pointed out that the Streets Ahead Project in the City centre was causing difficulties for small businesses which were located in the areas of the City where work was being undertaken and that this had been exacerbated by the fact that, following the completion of work, utility companies had dug up the newly-laid paving in order to undertake work to underground services.

In response, the Director indicated that the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce had requested the Council to discuss this matter with the relevant Government Departments. However, there were problems with ensuring that utility companies reinstated surfaces to the same standard which had been in place prior to the work being undertaken and it would be necessary for legislation to be introduced to amend this situation. In addition, the Council had been in discussion with the contractor which was carrying out the work to ensure that signs were erected to explain why the work was being undertaken and to direct customers to the businesses affected by the work.

Noted.

Economic Development

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this report is to advise Members of a number of developments including:

1. West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council – Enterprise Regeneration Plan;
2. Invitation to participate in summit on Job Creation and Workforce Development; and
3. Participation in Welfare to Work Convention and visit to City Strategies projects.

Key Issues

1. West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council – Enterprise Regeneration Plan

The West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council (WBGSEC) was established in August 2006 as a direct result of recommendations made in the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Force report.

The aim of the Enterprise Council was to bring greater coherence to the promotion and support of local businesses. It was tasked with a number of issues, namely:

- Developing the local small business economy;
- Developing an entrepreneurial and networking culture through the effective implementation of a series of networking initiatives;
- Ensuring the implementation of the Task Force recommendations which focus on assisting the existing business base and ensuring the successful implementation of a range of activities and measures identified by the two Task Forces;
- Reviewing any policy and regulatory issues affecting the success and development of small businesses;
- Acting as a forum at which current policies can be reviewed from the perspective of local business; and
- Considering relevant proposals and lobbying for appropriate change.

In December 2008, the Enterprise Council launched a plan identifying seven key development proposals for the area. In March 2009, they launched 'A new approach to enterprise regeneration in West Belfast and Greater Shankill'. This document was circulated to key stakeholders for comment and consideration.

The document makes a number of key proposals. These include:

1. Creation of a new body to give impetus and focus to the implementation of a comprehensive series of regeneration and enterprise initiatives;
2. Re-location of a Government Department or Agency employing at least 200 people to the west Belfast and greater Shankill area;
3. Development of three 3 or 4 star hotels in the area along with development of Invest NI Forthriver site;
4. Establishment of Business Incentive Zones offering differential benefits such as relaxation of planning; abolishment of rates and stamp duty; 100% capital allowances and enhanced marketing and development subsidies;
5. Establishment of a range of support initiatives to stimulate the development of more start-up businesses and to encourage the growth of micro-enterprises; and
6. Development of a three year action plan, in conjunction with Invest NI, including a sales proposition for the area.

Some of the key observations that we would make with regard to this piece of work include:

- The document includes a significant level of analysis and detail and this provides a logical framework for the recommendations;
- The implementation of the recommendations will require significant political support from both sides of the community in the two areas if it is to progress;
- In addition to the political support, the Enterprise Council will need to garner support from a lot of organisations in order to progress these proposals. Given the existing range of organisations in the area that are currently engaged to some extent and in some way with the activities in this plan, there may be a need to rationalise some of the support services currently available;

- From the point of view of the statutory services, it is important that the organisations with whom we work are representative of the wider economic regeneration community. If the Enterprise Council is to gain support for this plan, it will be essential to ensure that this support is in place;
- Belfast City Council is supportive of the arguments for a dedicated agency to promote economic development in a specific area and there are examples of how this has worked. However, there are other areas in the City that have similar development challenges and we feel that a City-level approach may be more appropriate;
- It will be important to ensure that there is synergy and clarity of purpose with other organisations working in this arena and that they are all pulling together in the same direction - otherwise there is the risk of duplication and ambiguity. This will lead to disenchantment on the part of the community and confusion on the part of the statutory services;
- We consider that there is limited discussion on access to other parts of the City, West Belfast and Shankill are an integral part of the City of Belfast and citizens of these communities can benefit from development opportunities taking place across the City.

Resource Implications

None.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the content of this report and agree that these observations can be submitted as Belfast City Council's comments on the Enterprise Council document.

2. Invitation to participate in summit on Job Creation and Workforce Development

An invitation has been received by the Lord Mayor to attend a New York City Global Partners Summit on 24-26 June 2009 on 'Job Creation and Workforce Development'. The invitation, which was issued by Mayor Bloomberg, is extended to a group of no more than four people from the City.

The programme will focus on how cities can develop and maintain a dynamic workforce that links to cities' local economic development goals. It will include discussion on how global cities are taking a lead on workforce development issues by implementing innovative policies, building new partnerships and training workers for the jobs that economies need. There will also be a visit to a Workforce Careers Centre that connects businesses with a skilled workforce and provides employment services to the city's adult jobseekers.

This event is part of a wider programme of engagement by New York City Global Partners to expand the city's interaction with other leading cities and has evolved from the city's Sister City programme. Fifty cities are targeted for these events. Previous topics covered have included health and climate change; governing a diverse city, technology and tourism development. Forty global cities took place in last year's event.

In light of the Council's plans to develop a citywide employability and skills strategy, it is considered that this event would provide a useful insight into best practice from elsewhere. Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has been involved in a number of best practice visits to USA and other locations in the past and they have found that these are useful. It may be appropriate to invite representatives from DEL to participate in this event, subject to DEL meeting the necessary costs.

Resource Implications

Participation at this event is free of charge and all hospitality costs at the event are also paid for by the event organisers. Each participant is expected to pay their travel and accommodation costs. It is estimated that this will cost £1500 per participant i.e. £3,000.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Lord Mayor (or nominee) and one officer attend the event and that two representatives from DEL be invited to participate.

3. Participation in Welfare to Work Convention and visit to City Strategies projects

Members are advised that the Welfare to Work Convention is the largest UK annual event for employment, skills and tackling child poverty. This year's event takes place in Liverpool on 16-17 June. The key themes for 2009 include:

1. Responding to rising unemployment;
2. Delivering integrated employment and skills;

3. Improving delivery for all: partners working together; and
4. Tackling disadvantage and child poverty.

The Convention works through a mix of plenaries, case-studies and policy seminars. There are 80 different sessions and over 150 speakers spread across two days.

Members are reminded that, at the December 2008 meeting of the Development Committee, agreement was sought to open discussions with DEL and other key skills and employability partners in order to develop an agreed skills and employability strategy for Belfast. Work on this programme is progressing and through the establishment of a Belfast Employment and Skills Board we are currently exploring opportunities that may exist for Belfast to replicate the existing UK template in respect to 'City Strategies'. The first meeting of the group is due to take place on 21st May, 2009.

As part of the strategy development process we wish to invite guest speakers to meet with the Board and to undertake best practice visit(s) to one or more of the UK cities involved in the 'UK City Strategies' process. It is therefore recommended that we invite all organisations participating on the Board to attend the Welfare to Work Convention in Liverpool in June. In doing so this will not only provide Belfast with a chance to join a UK network of cities which are all attempting to address city employability and skills problems specific to their own boundaries, but will create valuable opportunities to network with a wide range of local authorities who have already engaged in the city strategies process.

In addition to attending the Convention it is recommended that we undertake a best practice visit to Liverpool and Manchester to meet and discuss with policy makers and the programme deliverers of City Strategies.

It is suggested we undertake this best practice visit at the same time as the Convention in order to ensure cost savings. It is proposed that delegates would be invited to attend the Welfare to Work Convention on 16th June (all day) and 17th June (am only); and to visit Liverpool on 17th June (pm) and Manchester on 18th June (am).

Although it is recommended the full Board be invited it is unlikely that all individuals will be able and/or willing to do so. It is therefore expected that only a small group (a maximum of 10) will engage in this exercise. It is also suggested that the Chair and/or Deputy Chair of the Development Committee be invited to participate on this visit and to attend future meetings of the Employment and Skills Board.

Resource Implications

It is expected that the costs for travel, accommodation and participation in the conference will cost £800 per delegate.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report;
- Approve the request to invite all members of the Belfast Employment and Skills Board to attend the Welfare to Work Convention and/or the Best Practice Visits to Liverpool and Manchester;
- Approve the budget of £8,000 to cover the conference, travel and accommodation costs for a maximum of 10 persons; and
- Approve the attendance of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman at the Convention and/or the Best Practice Visits and future Employment and Skills Board meetings.

Decision Tracking

N/A

Abbreviations

DEL – Department for Employment and Learning
WBGSEC – West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council”

Following discussion, the Committee agreed that:

- (i) the observations set out in the report be submitted as the Council's comments on the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council's Enterprise Regeneration Plan, on the understanding that it is made clear to the organisation that the Council was not endorsing the Plan but simply making observations on its contents;
- (ii) the Lord Mayor (or his nominee), together with one officer, be authorised to participate in the Job Creation and Workforce Development Summit due to be held in New York in June. In addition, the Committee agreed that the Department for Employment and Learning be invited to appoint two representatives to attend the Summit, subject to that Department meeting the necessary costs;

- (iii) the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), two officers from the Development Department and two representatives only from the Belfast Employment and Skills Board be authorised to attend the Welfare to Work Convention in Liverpool and undertake visits to the City Strategies Project in Liverpool and Manchester, subject to the conference, travel and accommodation costs not exceeding £4,800 in total; and
- (iii) the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman be authorised to participate in future meetings of the Belfast Employment and Skills Board.

Rates Relief Review

The Director reminded the Committee that the Minister for Finance and Personnel had indicated that he intended to introduce, as part of the Assembly's response to the economic downturn, a Small Business Rates Relief Scheme. She indicated that, before finalising the details of the Scheme, the Minister had consulted a number of organisations, including the Council, concerning the proposals.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the undernoted document be submitted as the Council's official comments on the proposals for a Small Business Rates Relief Scheme:

"Background

1. **Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the current consultation on the proposed Small Business Rates Relief Scheme.**
2. **Similar to the Northern Ireland government departments, the council is conscious of its obligations to support businesses and individuals during the recession. As such, we have developed and agreed an action plan of measures that are within our remit and that may help alleviate the difficulties created by the current economic climate.**
3. **This is a draft response in the absence of political endorsement through our decision-making processes. It is anticipated that this response will be ratified by Council at its meeting on 1 June 2009. Once this happens, we will make staff within the Rating Policy Division aware of the situation and will note any changes from this draft.**

General comments

4. **Based on the consultation paper issued in March 2007, we understand that relief is to be paid automatically to business premises with a NAV of less than £5,000 and to Post Offices with a NAV of less than £12,000. We also understand that there will be two 'bands' within each of**

these categories: small businesses with a NAV of £2,000 or less will benefit from a 50% reduction on their rates while those businesses whose NAV is £5,000 or under will benefit from a 25% reduction. Meanwhile, post offices with a NAV of £9,000 or less will avail of a 100% reduction and those whose NAV is £9,000-£12,000 will receive a 50% relief. It is not clear if vacant properties within the qualifying NAV limits will also benefit.

5. The consultation paper suggests that these costs are based on 2008-2009 poundages and on current valuations which will need to be updated as the scheme will be introduced following the re-valuation of non-domestic properties in 2010.
6. While we are wholly supportive of the objective of this exercise, namely to 'reduce the burden of rates on our smaller businesses', we are uncertain whether the proposed scheme, as it stands, will make a significant impact on target businesses in Belfast.
7. Given the structure of the proposed scheme, this will lead to a reduction in rates for smaller non-domestic properties. This does not always mean that those benefiting will be small businesses. Large businesses with a number of small properties could also benefit.
8. We also consider that, given the £5,000 threshold for businesses and the £12,000 threshold for Post Offices, the number of businesses that can benefit from the scheme within our area is likely to be negligible. If this is the case, we feel that the scheme may disappoint small businesses who are not eligible for rates relief, under the terms of this proposed scheme. Further information is required from Rating Policy Division to allow us to more fully assess the impact on Belfast.

Views on the estimated financial impact of the scheme and the proposed NAV thresholds

9. We have found it difficult to give a detailed response of the potential impact of the scheme given the absence of supporting information in the March 2009 consultation paper.
10. We feel that it would have been useful to have had access to details on the number of 'eligible businesses' by electoral ward as well as some analysis of the financial impact of the subsidy, again broken down by electoral ward.

11. Such a breakdown of information would allow us to make a considered analysis of the impact of the proposed scheme and may have allowed us to make some suggestions as to possible alternative approaches that may enhance its impact.
12. A brief analysis of NAV levels within our more deprived areas suggests that the number of businesses that might benefit from this scheme could be marginal. Furthermore, there is no proof that the scheme will target those companies (or even sectors) that are finding the recession particularly difficult as opposed to those whose businesses have not been significantly affected by the downturn.

Views on the estimated impact on section 75 groups

13. We do not anticipate that the proposed scheme would adversely affect any section 75 groups within our area. However in the absence of Ward level information it is difficult to be definitive.

Views on the estimated impact on rural areas

14. On the basis of the information currently available there is a possibility that the proposed scheme may have a disproportionately larger impact in rural areas than in urban areas such as the Belfast City Council area.
15. With regard to small businesses in urban areas, property values (and thus NAVs) are generally higher in the city than in the rural areas. In light of this, the number of businesses in Belfast whose NAV will fall below the proposed thresholds to enable them to benefit from some relief may well be small.
16. Similarly, we estimate that the majority of Post Offices in the Belfast City Council area are now housed in larger stores and therefore they are unlikely to benefit from the proposed scheme. The figures in table 6 of the consultation paper confirm this assumption (albeit that there is no breakdown for council area). A significant majority of the post offices located in rural areas (93%) will receive relief under the proposed scheme; almost 40% of those in urban locations will not be eligible for relief.

Views on the impact on deprived areas

17. Although the Belfast City Council area has 8 out of the top 10 most deprived electoral wards in Northern Ireland, it is unclear that the proposed scheme provides targeted support for small businesses located in these areas.
18. However, in the absence of any analysis of eligible businesses by electoral ward and of the cumulative financial impact of the relief scheme in those areas, it is difficult to make an assessment of the impact.
19. A random sample of the NAV rates for businesses located in some of our most deprived wards suggests that only a small percentage of retail companies located in those areas would be eligible for the proposed scheme, based on the current thresholds.

Views on the outcome of the Regulatory Impact Assessment

20. We agree that there is a risk of deadweight and that the impact of this relief on a company's survival may be negligible.
21. With regard to equity and fairness, it is suggested that the wider small business scheme would have a moderately more beneficial impact on urban areas. However we would contest this suggestion and our initial analysis indicates that the impact of this scheme in the Belfast City Council area is likely to be minimal. As previously mentioned, we feel that we could present a much more considered response if we were to have a more detailed breakdown at electoral ward level of the eligible businesses and figures indicating the financial impact of the relief scheme.
22. With regard to the small business impact test, we would contend that an automatic scheme based on valuation data is 'a price worth paying' only if it makes an impact on those businesses that the scheme aims to target. In the absence of more detailed information we would contend that the impact of the current scheme may well be minimal for those businesses located in the Belfast City Council area.

Conclusion

23. We understand that, following research and analysis undertaken by ERINI in March 2008, they concluded that there was 'no compelling economic justification for the introduction of a small business relief scheme in Northern Ireland' and that 'the benefits that would be generated by such a scheme would be inadequate to justify its costs'.
24. While we appreciate that the current economic climate is different from when that research was undertaken, we are uncertain that the proposed scheme will have any significant impact on eligible businesses. Moreover – particularly for businesses located within the Belfast City Council area – we consider that only a small percentage of businesses in the area will be eligible for the scheme.
25. We feel that, in the absence of any detailed breakdown of the number of eligible businesses and the amount of relief to be gained by those businesses, it is difficult for any party to make a response on this matter. Such a breakdown would have allowed us to consider the geographical impact of the proposed scheme across the city and to see how it could fit within a wider package of business support schemes and services provided by central and local government agencies.”

Markets Unit

Friends of St. George's Market Association

The Director informed the Members that the recently established Friends of St. George's Market Association had secured funding of £37,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to assist in the promotion of the Market.

She explained that the money would enable the Association to organise between November 2009 and May 2010 a series of events and exhibitions. These would include tours of the building and information sessions regarding the history of St. George's Market and its traders. The Association also intended to promote the development of St. George's from a local market to an arena for local musicians.

Noted.

2008 Belfast Tourism Monitor

The Committee agreed to receive at its next monthly meeting a presentation on the findings of the 2008 Belfast Tourism Monitor. In addition, the Committee agreed that expenditure not exceeding £4,000 be incurred in connection with the production of a Tourism Facts and Figures Booklet for the 2008 year.

Support for Sport Event Funding

The Committee considered the following requests for assistance which had been received under the Support for Sport Scheme in relation to events and promotions:

<u>Organisation/Event</u>	<u>Summary of Event and Amount Requested</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>
National Balmoral Show Jumping Championships	Funding in the sum of £10,000 in relation to the holding in July of Ireland's only five-day National Show Jumping Championships event	Offer support of £8,000
Under 18 North Belfast News Cup	Funding in the sum of £8,820 in relation to the holding in August of this event, which is in its third year	Offer support of £2,490
Christopher Shaw Cup	Funding in the sum of £4,650 in relation to the holding in August of this event for persons aged between 12 and 18 years, which is in its sixth year	Offer support of £390
European Federation of American Football Senior Flag Football 2009 European Championships	Funding in the sum of £10,000 in relation to the holding in September of this event which will involve both male and female teams from Great Britain, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, France, Finland, Italy, Holland, Austria and Spain. Flag Football is a non-contact version of American Football	Offer support of £9,000

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Pride of Place Competition 2009

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Pride of Place competition has been supported by Belfast City Council for a number of years. Officers in Health and Environmental Services have taken the organisational lead, with support from Community Services staff in the selection and preparation of entrant groups. Given the focus of the competition and the cessation of the Brighter Belfast funding stream, it is now proposed to transfer the overall responsibility for both organising and selecting the groups for the competition to Community Services.

Established in 2003 and hosted by Co-operation Ireland, Pride of Place is an all-Ireland competition which aims to recognise and celebrate the vital contributions that community groups make to society. The competition focus is on people coming together to shape, change and enjoy all that is good about their area. It gives community groups the opportunity to showcase specific pride initiatives, whether social, environmental or heritage-related, which will have long lasting and positive impacts on their society.

Key Issues

Each year, several categories are defined and entries invited and all entrants must be nominated by their local authority. In previous years entrants nominated and sponsored by Belfast City Council have enjoyed considerable success. Winners are announced at a high-profile awards ceremony, hosted by a previous winning council each autumn. The 2009 awards ceremony will be held in Newcastle, County Down on the 21st-22nd November.

The 2009 Pride of Place Cities Competition allows a maximum of 5 entries per Council, subject to defined categories and rules. Community Services Section have identified four suitable groups:

North Belfast Whispers, Wandsworth Community Association and Star Neighbourhood in the Geographical category and Failte Feirste Tuiar in the Enterprise category.

Resource Implications

Financial

The cost per entrant is £500, with a maximum of five entrants per Council (one per category) and four suitable entrants have been identified for Belfast. Should the Members agree to enter the 2009 competition, it is proposed that the Council pay the entry fees and

travel and accommodation expenses relating to the attendance of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the Director of Development (or their nominees) together with a maximum of three persons per external project (depending on the number of tickets allocated by Co-operation Ireland), at the awards ceremony. The total cost is estimated at £5,000 including subsistence, travel and accommodation for one night, this would be funded from existing budgets.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

1. Approve the transfer of responsibility for the Pride of Palace competition from Health and Environmental Services to Community Services.
2. Approve the entry of the following groups in the Pride of Place Cities competition 2009:
 - a. North Belfast Whispers;
 - b. Wandsworth Community Association;
 - c. Star Neighbourhood; and
 - d. Failte Feirste Tuiar.
3. Approve the attendance of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and the Director of Development (or their nominees) together with a maximum of three persons per external project (with a maximum of twelve in total) at the Pride of Place 2009 awards ceremony and approve the payment of the entrants' fees, travelling, attendance and subsistence allowances in connection therewith.

Decision Tracking

N/A”

The Committee adopted the foregoing recommendations.

Chairman