

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast
City Council**

5th August, 2022

CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in hybrid format, both in the Council Chamber and via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 10th August, 2022 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters

- (a) Apologies
- (b) Minutes
- (c) Declarations of Interest

2. Restricted Items

- (a) Year End Finance Report 2021-22 (Pages 1 - 6)
- (b) A Bolder Vision Update
- (c) Update on Major Events (Pages 7 - 14)

3. Requests to Present

- (a) Translink - Lagan Junction to Yorkgate Track Renewal (Pages 15 - 18)
- (b) Ulster University - Belfast Campus Update (Pages 19 - 22)

4. **Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure**

- (a) DfC Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation (Pages 23 - 82)

5. **Growing Business and the Economy**

- (a) Update on Belfast-Dublin Economic Corridor (Pages 83 - 86)
- (b) Business Start up and Growth: Future Resourcing and Proposed Interim Approach (Pages 87 - 96)
- (c) Improving Employability Outcomes: Focus on Young People at Risk (Pages 97 - 102)

6. **Strategic and Operational Issues**

- (a) City Centre All Party Area Working Group (Pages 103 - 104)
- (b) Invest NI Review - Call for Evidence (Pages 105 - 112)

7. **Issues raised in advance by a Member**

- (a) Request for Presentation: Community Finance Ireland - Councillor Heading

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1, 2, 3, 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Subject:	Request to Present: Translink
Date:	10 August 2022
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development
Contact Officer:	Carolyn Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the Committee to receive a presentation from representatives of Translink regarding the Central Area Track Renewal.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Members of the Committee are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree to receive a presentation from representatives of Translink at the Special Meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in September. •
3.0	Main report
3.1	As part of its Communication Plan around the Central Area Track Renewal Strategy, Translink will be consulting widely with key stakeholders, including elected representatives, passengers and local residents, to provide information on potential impact and appropriate mitigation measures.
3.2	Correspondence has been received from Translink (Appendix 1) requesting an opportunity to make a presentation to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on the Lagan Junction to Yorkgate Track Renewal Project.
3.7	<p><u>Finance & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix 1 – Correspondence received from Translink

Councillor Ryan Murphy
Chair, City Growth and Regeneration Committee
Belfast City Council
Belfast City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS

23rd June 2022

Dear Councillor Murphy,

Re: Request to present to BCC City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Translink is currently putting in place plans for a major £30m refurbishment of existing rail infrastructure in Central Belfast through a project called the Lagan Junction to Yorkgate Track Renewal.

Central Area Track Renewal (CATR) is the overall strategy for renewal of track infrastructure in the centre of Belfast and the first element of CATR works was successfully carried out through the renewal of Lagan Junction during 2020.

The Lagan Junction to Yorkgate Track Renewal Project is the second element of this strategy and the location is from Lagan Junction (where the Bangor line meets the Belfast line) to the north side of Yorkgate Station over Dargan Bridge.

A complete renewal at this location as well as signalling upgrades will ensure high safety standards and operational performance are maintained, in turn helping to increase the reliability of the service and reduce future maintenance. As one of the busiest sections on the network, it has significant strategic importance as the gateway to Belfast from the Derry-Londonderry and Larne lines.

Engineering works are due to take place during a 72-hour line closure in October and throughout the Christmas holiday period at the end of this year when there is typically less passenger demand, with schools and many workplaces closed. This will be followed by four weekend closures during January and February 2023. Night-time working will also take place from summer 2022 until summer 2023.

As part of our Communications Plan, we will be consulting widely with key stakeholders, including elected representatives, passengers, and local residents to provide information on potential impact and appropriate mitigation measures and we would also welcome the opportunity to present to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on this project.

www.translink.co.uk

I will be guided by the Committee as to the most appropriate means of engagement and would be happy to provide a written presentation for the Committee to consider in the first instance.

I trust that the Committee will consider this request and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

John Gourley

John Gourley
Project Manager, Translink

Cc. Councillor Spratt (Vice Chair)



Subject:	Request to Present: Ulster University Belfast Campus Update
Date:	10 August 2022
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development
Contact Officer:	Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the Committee to receive a presentation from representatives of Ulster University on the opening of the Belfast Campus.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree to receive a presentation from representatives of Ulster University on the opening of the Belfast Campus at the September meeting of City Growth & Regeneration Committee.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Members will be aware that the relocation of the Ulster University campus to the city centre is of strategic importance not only to Belfast but the region as a whole. It is estimated the project will generate £1.4bn overall regeneration impact on the region's economy and supports Council priorities as set out within the Belfast Agenda and the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS).
3.2	By way of context and background Ulster University, in September 2021 began their phased handover and onboarding to the new Belfast campus, welcoming their first cohort of staff and students to the city centre. This phased process of completion, handover and onboarding, continued in controlled phases throughout the previous academic year. The University is now in the final phase of preparing to open the new campus, welcoming 15,000 students and staff this September.
3.3	Council officers have continued to work with the University along with various stakeholders to support the successful opening and opportunities to maximise the inclusive regeneration impacts of the campus, including through the Community Campus Regeneration Forum, which is chaired by Council and with representation from UU, CQ BID, DfI, DfC, Translink and local communities. It has been widely recognised that whilst the campus relocation will act as an energiser / catalyst to the wider city, the city centre in terms of its physical and social environment will need to adapt to seamlessly integrate the University and the volume of people it will draw in.
3.4	The influx of the staff and students to the city centre will have multiple positive impacts including increasing vibrancy and economic opportunities, and the University have been working with a number of stakeholders including Translink to promote and install a sustainable and active travel ethos from the start, as well as with Council in terms of other connectivity and active travel initiatives including the recent installation of the Active Travel Hub in Cathedral Gardens adjacent to the entrance of the Campus. The University have also been in ongoing engagement with local communities, and it is recognised that this must be maintained to ensure issues around parking or other social issues are mitigated and tackled and community / student relations are upheld.

3.5	<p>There is alignment here also with the principles of A Bolder Vision (ABV); promoting well being, prioritising walking, cycling and public transport, creating lively, safe and green streets and removing barriers to movement between the city centre and surrounding communities and the proposed ABV catalyst projects notably Belfast Streets Ahead 3. The development of Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation within the area will increase the city centre population and provide enhanced vibrancy through increased footfall, along with further proposals that are currently being developed in terms of improving the adjoining public realm and development of open space (utilising developer contributions) which will also consider adjacent communities. Council's future development plans for Cathedral Gardens will also play a key role as a strategic open space for the wider area and Ulster University. There is however further work to be carried out including the Fredrick Street Junction improvement works, and issues surrounding vulnerability, safety and cleansing that continue to be addressed through a number of forums. Further details on the governance approach to the city centre including vulnerability, safety and cleansing is covered on a separate agenda item within the City Centre All Party Working Group paper.</p>
3.6	<p>The University have requested to present to Committee, to brief Members on the positive impacts of the new campus, the migration plans to enable a controlled opening and the management of the sustainable transport approach, and the work ongoing to address the wider area issues including any community concerns and ongoing engagement.</p>
3.7	<p><u>Finance & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents attached</p>
	<p>None</p>

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Subject:	DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme Update
Date:	10 th August 2022
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director, City Regeneration & Development
Contact Officer:	Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues To update Committee on the ongoing DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme including an Extension of Time to the Programme and the reallocation of underspends.
2.0	Recommendations The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the current status of the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, including the findings of the Mid-Term Evaluation Report & associated brochure. A presentation will be made to Committee providing an overview of the various projects.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note that an Extension of Time has been granted for the Castle Place Kiosk and the Entries Phase 2 projects to the 31st December 2022. Note the current level of underspend within the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme and reallocation of funding to the Bolder Vision.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The CG&R Committee have received regular updates and provided approvals relating to the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, providing updates on the £4.039m capital programme including providing approvals on time and budget implications. In August 2021 Members were updated on the Extension of Time to the programme to September 2022, and Members agreed that any further underspends realised within the Programme are reallocated under delegated authority to the Director of City Regeneration & Development to meet any additional costs incurred on previously agreed and committed projects with updates on these reallocations to be brought to this Committee at a future date.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Main Report</u></p> <p>The majority of the programme is now complete, or due to complete by the end of September 2022 with the project status overview as Appendix 1 of this report. As a condition of the Letter of Offer from DfC Evaluation Reports are required on a quarterly basis, and on the completion of the projects. To this end the draft mid-term evaluation report and associated brochure are as attached in Appendix 2 & 3 of this report with summary findings as below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 88% of businesses surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied that the funding enabled them to take measures to enhance public confidence in returning to the businesses. 70% of businesses reported turnover returning to at least 70% of pre-covid 19 levels. 67% of those surveyed agreed that they were satisfied with the interventions delivered. 60% of those surveyed agreed/strongly agreed that the interventions delivered would encourage people to live, work and invest in the area. 57% of businesses reported footfall levels had returned to at least 70% of pre-Covid 19 levels
3.3	<p>The report also includes case studies, photos and statements from a number of the businesses and community groups supported through the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme and a presentation will be provided to this Committee meeting.</p>

3.4	<p>In total through this Revitalisation Programme the Council were able to support and deliver a large range of projects, many of which were aligned to the emerging Bolder Vision work promoting better use of outdoor and public space, testing alternative uses of streetscape and providing creative approaches to environmental improvement works. To enable the quick roll out of the projects Council worked flexibly to enable Café Pavement Licenses to come forward at pace, and dedicated resource to assist groups through the statutory processes of Planning, Road Orders, Street works Licenses and utility connections. A summary overview of the projects delivered below:</p>
3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants to Businesses to purchase equipment to help them to continue to trade or trade safely <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Over £800k in support to 454 small business grants to help SME's to deliver hand sanitisers, signage, safety equipment & control measures to manage social distancing;
3.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants to Business Cluster and Community Groups for physical interventions and streetscape improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ £1.1m to 51 Business Cluster & Community Grant (BCCCG) capital schemes. This included a top up of £450k Councils non-recurring reallocation in 2021 to meet the demand of the scheme. ○ Funding to 35 Community Groups and 16 Business Clusters. ○ 7 projects delivered within the city centre and 44 projects delivered outside the city centre. ○ 16 Community Gardens and Facilities refreshed and redeveloped to attract greater outdoor use including facilities for supporting mental health & sensory spaces. ○ 8 outdoor hospitality locations. ○ 27 shop frontage improvement and local area environmental schemes. ○ 9 grants aligned to upgrading and expanding sports facilities including walking paths and improving outdoor facilities. ○ Given the success of this project, and as agreed through SP&R in June 2022, Council have committed a further £600k of funding (including 10% for Integrated Design Team Support) for a further phase of the BCCG's. Officers are currently working through the process to roll this funding out in Autumn 2022 to support a further 20-25 projects.

3.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Interventions and Streetscape Improvements (Council Led & BID Led) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Four major city centre streetscape projects to test and pilot how we better use the city's streetscape. ○ Castle Place - Reallocating on-street parking to facilitate a pavement extension and closing one lane to traffic to implement the first stage of the High St cycle scheme. Bringing forward an iconic city centre location and kiosk structure to attract footfall and dwell time ○ Union St – pedestrianizing Union St and building out parklets to enable businesses to utilise additional outdoor space. This approach has encouraged additional businesses to take up vacant space on the street. ○ Warehouse Lane/Exchange Place – An Entries type approach to draw attention and use to the city's entries including lighting, iconic artwork and covered outdoor space for hospitality. ○ Brunswick St – closing a section of Brunswick St to deliver an outdoor leisure and hospitality venue, bringing forward a pilot for how the designs of Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5 can transform the area permanently. ○ Linenhall St – Reallocation of on-street parking bays to deliver parklets, facilitating dwell time, business spill out and additional green infrastructure on the street. ○ Adelaide St – due to the approach taken through this Revitalisation Programme, additional funding was secured from DfI to deliver the Adelaide St project. Working with DfI to realign the street, including removing on-street parking bays to facilitate pavement extensions, prioritising public transport and delivering innovative structures with historical references, additional green infrastructure, along with additional seating and cycling parking infrastructure. ○ The Linenhall St, Brunswick St and Adelaide St projects all form early pilot schemes aligned to A Bolder Vision and the intention to bring forward the Linen Quarter Sustainable District. ○ Church Lane – Artistic cross-street lighting scheme to reinforce the pedestrianised feel to the street. Council continues to work with DfI to ensure better implementation of this pedestrianised control zone. ○ Iconic lighting interventions within the Linen Quarter, Cathedral Quarter and BID One Business Improvement Districts. ○ The Entries Phase 2 – bringing forward the next phase of the Entries project to Sugarhouse Lane, Patterson's Place and Wine Cellar St. Phase 1 of the
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	<p>Entries won the CBRE Ireland Excellence in placemaking Awards 2021 and this approach will be further implemented through future phases.</p>
3.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Led Interventions to Encourage People Safely Back into the City <p>Council directly delivered schemes to encourage people back into the city include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hand sanitisers introduced at key locations across the city centre. ○ Social Distance signage and management of touch points and public seating. ○ An enhanced cleansing operation. ○ Enhanced Christmas Animation to promote footfall and visitors through the 2020 Christmas period ○ A targeted marketing campaign operated across social media, radio, TV and press channels to promote Belfast as a safe and vibrant place to visit. ○ A Belfast Gift Card delivered in conjunction with BID One and the retailers during the Christmas period to encourage spend and footfall within this key retail period.
3.9	<p>Council Led Sustainable & Active Travel Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Two new Active Travel Hubs delivered at Cathedral Gardens and Queens University Belfast. ○ A modernised Belfast Bike Fleet. ○ Additional Belfast Bike docking locations. ○ An e-cargo bike pilot scheme. ○ 10 covered cycle stands delivered across the Council Estate. ○ This strand of the programme has attracted additional funding through the DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure fund for 21/22, delivering secure cycle stands, additional covered cycle stands and cycle repair kits as reported to this Committee in June 2022. Additional proposals for 22/23 to further expand on the Active Travel Enabler projects are also under development.
3.10	<p>Some of the feedback received also reflected on the wider societal and cleansing issues that are currently been experienced within the city centre and reflected that while the Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme had a positive impact within the immediate locality more work is required to be done at pace to address these wider issues. Further details on the governance approach to the city centre including vulnerability, safety and cleansing is included within the City Centre All Party Working Group paper as included within the agenda for this Committee Meeting.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Programme Learnings</u></p>

	<p>The overall findings from the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme show successful implementation of the projects, targeting business and community groups to operate and recover successfully from the pandemic while delivering extensive green infrastructure and active & sustainable transport initiatives. In total the programme delivered over 535 grants to businesses and community groups, over 70 physical interventions & streetscape improvements delivering over 1200 items of street furniture & cycle infrastructure, 188 public hygiene items and over 65 marketing and animation events.</p>
3.12	<p>In addition to this, the successful development and implementation of this £4.039m programme has led to additional funding been allocated from Council, DfI and DfC & private investment through the BIDs. This programme has directly led to the attraction of a further £2.3m of support to deliver the interventions as outlined within this report, contributing to the delivery of the Councils wider objectives in the delivery of the Future City Centre Programme and A Bolder Vision.</p>
3.13	<p>The programme has also helped to inform emerging projects and programmes in the form of the Council's Supporting Viable Business Destinations Programme, and the 'Vacant to Vibrant' Programme. The delivery of this programme also helped to shape and inform our input to the MAG High Streets Taskforce Living Craft Kit as reported to this Committee in February 2022 specifically in terms in the strength of developing the capacity for delivery by partners (including community / business groups) to assist in the delivery of interventions and programmes of work, and the longer lasting benefits of local projects developed for and by local groups.</p>
3.14	<p>Rolling out this programme has involved an extensive resource across Council departments and demanded a more flexible approach to how the Council delivers support and services within a very challenging environment.</p>
3.15	<p>The Programme has been extended a number of times, and this has been the experience of all of the Councils delivering out the Programme on behalf of DfC. These extensions have been required due to the ongoing NI Executive restrictions through the various stages of the pandemic, an escalation in global material supply costs and demand placed on the contractor and supply chain restricting availability of resources.</p>
3.16	<p>The Statutory Processes have also led to a number of delays within the Programme. While flexibility was quickly implemented in the Pavement Café Licensing and Planning processes the time required to work through changes to road infrastructure led to a lot of projects over-</p>

	<p>running, bringing uncertainty in terms of delivery and supply chain costs and commitment. This, in part, has been due to the number of agencies and departments required to consent to a scheme but also the resource constrictions of regional departments requiring a considerable amount of time to mobilise to support local projects on a large-scale programme.</p>
3.17	<p>These findings are reflected within the Mid-Term Evaluation Report as included within Appendix 1 of this report. The report references:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There was evidence of strong partnership working and relationships that were developed and which will be sustained. The strength of delivery partners such as the BIDs and the BCCG's applicants in delivering local solutions for local needs was highlighted. ○ A particular strength has been in the implementation of local projects through local organisations and buy in and ownership of the projects delivered. ○ The value of working with local organisations, knowing what the specific needs of the area are to enable a proper co-design process, and the commitment to longer-term operation of the project as well as promoting wider pride in the regeneration and upkeep of the areas. Acknowledgement that some groups will require additional support although this support will inevitably lead to capacity building within the areas. ○ The need for a flexible approach to delivery, both in terms of support to build capacity but more so through the statutory process. This level of commitment to flexibility should be incorporated within the Terms of Reference / Letter of Offer prior to undertaking a programme of this scale. Longer term the programme brings into light the role of Local Authorities in delivering local infrastructure and regeneration decisions.
3.18	<p><u>Extension of Time</u></p> <p>Two elements of the programme remain uncompleted and at risk of over-running the September 2022 programme deadline and as such DfC have granted an extension to these elements of the Programme to December 2022. These projects and ongoing mitigating measures are outlined below:</p>
3.19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Castle Place Kiosk: following a challenge to the initial planning approval amendments have been made to the kiosk designs and Design & Accessibility Statement. It is planned that the amendments will go to the Planning Committee in September 2022.

	<p>Following the initial planning approval, a contract is in place to deliver the works and materials are ready for fabrication pending the Planning Committee decision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entries Phase 2; Officers continue to work with DfI Officials to finalise the last details to enable the works to continue on Sugarhouse Entry. These include a drainage survey and a roof access survey of an adjacent building. Pending successful resolution of these final items it is expected that the works could be complete within 6-8 weeks.
3.20	Finance & Resource Implications
	<p>All costs associated with this paper will be met from the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Capital Programme.</p> <p>Reallocation of Underspend</p> <p>As agreed at the CG&R meeting in February 2022 it was agreed that the Director of City Regeneration and Development would reallocate any underspend realised within the programme to meet any additional costs on previously agreed and committed projects. To this end an underspend of £11,781 has been reallocated to meet additional costs realised within the DfI & DfC contributions to the Bolder Vision budget lines of this programme. A full update on the Bolder Vision will be presented in a separate paper to this Committee meeting.</p>
3.21	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
	<p>Equality of opportunity and good relations, and disability duties screening is complete on the overall programme with mitigating actions agreed and implemented.</p>
4.0	Appendices- Documents attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Project Status Overview</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Mid-Term Evaluation Report</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Mid-Term Evaluation Report Brochure</p>

Appendix 1 - DfC Covid19 Revitalisation Programme - status overview

Programme Headline Category	Project	RAG	Status
Revenue funding	Additional Street Cleansing & Neighbourhood Safety		Complete
	Belfast Gift Card		Complete
Enhanced Christmas Offering including animation, lighting and marketing	Marketing & branding		Complete
	Animation		Complete
	Feature Lighting Linen Quarter		Complete
	Feature Lighting BID One		Complete
	Feature Lighting Cathedral Quarter Bid		Complete
Signage & Dressing	Public Safety signage and messaging		Complete
	Public messaging and communication		Complete
	Adelaide Street - parklet and public realm		Complete
Physical Interventions & Streetscape Improvements	Covid-19 Business Grants (up to £2.5k)		Complete - 445 businesses have claimed their funding allocations funding with an underspend of £58k
	Business Cluster & Community Grants (capital grants £10 - £25k)		In progress: 51 applications approved; Officer liaising with organisations to support delivery/progress statutory approvals.
	Entries Phase 2		In progress – Statutory process with DfI ongoing
	Union Street Pedestrianisation		Complete.
	Cathedral Quarter - Exchange Place/Warehouse Entry		Complete.
	Castle Place Hub		In progress: Amended planning application to be submitted September 2022

	Linen Quarter Hub		Complete.
Access & Connectivity	Linen Quarter Parklets		Completed
	Linen Quarter Boardwalk		Complete
	DfC and DfI Budget allocation for Bolder Vision Phase 2		In progress – Stages relevant to this programme complete by September
	City Wide Parklets		Complete
Sustainable active travel initiatives	Connectivity Scheme in Church Lane area		Complete
	Replacement/upgrade of Belfast Bikes		Complete
	Expanding Belfast Bike network		In progress - Order placed for 4 new docking stations (as agreed CGR May)
	Electric Bike Trial <i>[E-cargo delivery pilot]</i>		Complete
	Covered Citywide cycle stands		In progress – units ordered and pending delivery for installation
	Expanding Sustainable Transport Hub network <i>[Cathedral Gardens ATH; QUB Cycle Hub]</i>		Complete
Monitoring & Evaluation	UU Study allocation		Complete
	Monitoring & evaluation of the Revitalisation Programme		In progress - procurement scoping; reliant on programme completion

Covid 19 Recovery Revitalisation Fund Mid Term Evaluation Report

Prepared for Belfast City Council

By Eos Community Consulting CIC

June 2022



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through its Covid 19 “Our Recovery Strategy”, Belfast City Council recognised that in order to recover from the pandemic, there would need to be a range of sustained and creative interventions which would increase footfall and spend in the city centre and increase connectivity in local neighbourhoods and with the wider city.

The Council received £4.039m capital funding through the Department for Communities Revitalisation programme to support a variety of projects and programmes across the city. These projects which were identified and led by community organisations and local businesses were intended to address health and safety concerns, to encourage people to re-engage with community and city life, and to provide clear and visible changes in the local area.

The funding provided the Council and local Business Improvement Districts and community organisations with the chance to harness people’s renewed interest in spending time outdoors, and in walking and cycling. Most importantly the funding meant that businesses and community organisations could be supported to re-open safely and with confidence, and to adapt how they operated to suit the changed times.

The initiatives supported were many and varied and were located across the city. With the overarching aim of promoting recovery from the pandemic, the projects provided new and/or improved community spaces, innovative solutions for socialising outdoors, attractive streetscapes and much more.

60% survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that improvements undertaken through the programme would encourage people to live, work and invest in this area¹

90% of participating² businesses reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the improvements to their businesses³.

67% of People⁴ agreed that they were satisfied with the interventions taken by the council to respond to safety issues raised by the Covid-19 pandemic

70% of businesses (75 of 107 respondents⁵) reported turnover returning to at least 70% of pre-Covid 19 levels following council interventions in the area

In May 2022 Belfast City Centre footfall was 15% higher than in May 2019 (prior to the pandemic)

¹ Combined responses from business and public surveys and BCCG monitoring (n=241)

² Businesses which responded to the survey which received a grant from council (n=96)

³ The question asked was “to what extent are you satisfied that the funding enabled businesses to take measures to enhance public confidence as a result of safety issues raised by the pandemic?”

⁴ Based on combined responses of business survey and public survey (n=212)

⁵ Online feedback survey for businesses June 2022

2 PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES⁶

1. To support each district council to develop a costed Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Plan by September 2020. **This objective has now been met.**
2. By August 2020, each district council will have established or identified a suitable stakeholder engagement forum to support the delivery of its Covid-19 Revitalisation Plan. **This objective has now been met.**
3. To support each district council to deliver its Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Plan by March 2021. **This objective has now been met.**
4. By March 2022, 80% of businesses in scheme areas agree that the improvements to their businesses and other Capital purchase projects would encourage people to live, work, visit and invest in the area (by council). **Objective on target to be met by March 2023 - Currently 48% businesses**
5. By March 2022, 80% of people using the scheme areas agree that the improvements to the area would encourage people to live, work, visit and invest in the area (by council). **Objective on target to be met by March 2023 - Currently 60% people**
6. By March 2022, council schemes funded through this Programme will have positively impacted on efforts to see footfall levels returning to a level which is at least 70% of levels recorded prior to the public health crisis. **This objective has been met – in May 2022 footfall was 15% higher than in May 2019**
7. By March 2022, surveys completed by traders indicate that council schemes funded through this Programme will have positively impacted on efforts to see sales figures returning to a level which is at least 70% of levels recorded prior to the public health crisis. **This objective has now been met.**
8. By March 2022, attitudinal surveys indicate 80% of the public are satisfied with the measures taken in the Scheme areas to respond to safety issues raised by the Covid-19 pandemic. **This objective is on target to be met by March 2023– currently at 67%**
9. By March 2022, attitudinal surveys indicate 70% of the public are satisfied with walking facilities in the Scheme area. **As schemes to improve walking facilities had not been completed this question was not asked for the mid-term evaluation, it will be included in the final evaluation**
10. By March 2022, attitudinal surveys indicate 60% of the public agree that they are satisfied with cycling facilities in the Scheme area. **As schemes to improve cycling facilities had not been completed, this question was not asked for the mid-term evaluation, it will be included in the final evaluation**
11. By March 2022, attitudinal surveys indicate 40% of the public agree that measures taken in the Scheme area would encourage people to change from car use to more environmentally friendly choices such as walking and cycling for journeys of under two miles. **Objective on target to be met by 2023 – currently at 37%**

⁶ Progress towards achievement of these objectives has been measured at a point in time when not all projects are complete and there remains low awareness and limited impact to date.

12. By March 2022, grant fund measures in the Scheme area to demonstrate the benefits of low-emission fuel options. **Not applicable to this action plan**
13. By March 2022 the scheme area will have an increase in land used for active travel (i.e. extended footways, cycle ways, connecting pathways) which connects people with key services and ensures accessibility for all including those with disabilities. **This objective is on target to be met by March 2023** as the final projects to be delivered bed into their areas and full impacts are realised.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Eos Community Consulting CIC was commissioned by Belfast City Council to produce a mid-term and final evaluation report on the Covid 19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme.

The programme, which encompasses funding received through the Department for Communities (DfC), Department of Environment, Agriculture and Rural Affairs (DEARA), and Department for Infrastructure (DfI) took an outcomes-based approach to supporting businesses and communities in the city to continue to address or recover from the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic.

The evaluation methodology was as follows:

- Review and analysis of the grant documentation and end of project monitoring reports for Business/Community Cluster grant recipients
- One to One Interviews with project leads in the Business and Community Cluster grants
- One to One interviews with Council Officers who led delivery of interventions by Council
- One to One interviews with Business Improvement District (BID) Managers
- Analysis of end of project monitoring data received from businesses which received grant aid through the programme
- An online survey open to businesses in the city (110 responses)
- An online public survey promoted via the Council's social media (102 responses)
- Review of Springboard footfall monitoring as baseline information
- Collation of the findings of the above to illustrate how the programme objectives were met and how the interventions contributed towards the outcomes defined for the programme

3.1 REPORT STRUCTURE

This mid-term evaluation report aligns with Central Government Departments' preferred evaluation methodology of Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA). The body of the report is structured around the three core elements of OBA:

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Is anybody better off?

For ease of reporting back on the variety of activity supported through the programme, we have categorised activity into the following strands

- Grants for businesses to purchase equipment to help them continue to trade or to trade safely
- Grants for Business and Community clusters for small capital projects
- Grants to the Business Improvement Districts
- Council led physical interventions and streetscape improvements
- Council led initiatives to encourage people safely back into the city
- Council led active travel measures

Each strand is assessed separately in each section of the report for what was delivered, how well it was delivered and the impact achieved.

4 HOW MUCH DID WE DO?

- 3 stakeholder engagement forums established
- 457 businesses⁷ and 32 business/community clusters benefitting from grants
- £1.652m allocated through grants for businesses (£800k business grants, £564k grants to BIDs £288k business community cluster grants)
- £1.91m spent on other interventions by council
- Other interventions by type: Public Information / Marketing/ Animation/ Events/ Additional street cleansing
- 54 Physical Interventions & Streetscape Improvements/ Reimagined Public Spaces
- £2.52m allocated to Physical Interventions & Streetscape Improvements/ Reimagined Public Spaces including £288k of business and community cluster grants
- £699k spent on interventions to support cycling/walking initiatives
- 5 interventions to support cycling initiatives
- 1 intervention to support walking initiatives

4.1 GRANTS FOR BUSINESSES TO PURCHASE EQUIPMENT TO HELP THEM CONTINUE TO TRADE OR TO TRADE SAFELY

Belfast-based businesses, social enterprises and charities were invited to apply for funding for up to 100% of costs for capital items associated with Covid-19 adaptations such as

- changes to internal and external layouts to help with social distancing
- sanitisation stations
- signage, awnings or canopies
- collection and delivery points
- outdoor seating or heating and barriers

£916,206 of funding and 490 grants were awarded to businesses in the city to enable them to trade safely during the pandemic, or re-open safely post lockdown.

36 of those businesses awarded funding chose not to proceed with their grant resulting in total grant aid paid to businesses of £811,716

4.2 GRANTS FOR COMMUNITY/BUSINESS CLUSTERS FOR PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS AND STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS

The Business Cluster and Community grant scheme was aimed at Belfast based not-for-profit/community groups, business collaborations and partnerships to carry out environmental

⁷ 454 Grant recipients plus 3 Business Improvement Districts

improvement schemes, through capital grants of between £10K-£25K. The focus of the scheme was Belfast's arterial routes, urban villages and local communities and the city centre

£288k of funding and 32 grants were awarded to business/community clusters for small capital projects which could create or enhance local spaces for the use of the community. Local business clusters and BIDs to the opportunity in a variety of ways reclaiming and creating local spaces which benefited their local area and its residents.

- **Ballynafeigh Community Association, South Belfast** created a parklet type space outside their premises.
- **Bank Square Traders, City Centre** benefited from outdoor seating, lighting and floral displays that sparked a bit of life into the square and encouraged the people to visit the space.
- **Beanies Convenience Store, Business Cluster Group, North Belfast**, benefited from signage and lighting that improved access to the premises.
- **Belfast Boat Club, South Belfast** provided an outdoor space with gazebos, benches and seating.
- **Big Belmont Traders, East Belfast** benefited from additional shop front signage and lighting.
- **Cairde Ard Eoin, North Belfast** improved the appearance of a dark unwelcoming outside space through a heritage project that included story boards, seating and lighting.
- **Castle Street Traders, City Centre** benefited from new signage, awnings and lighting which improved the appearance of business in an attempt to increase footfall.
- **Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum, North Belfast**, created a community garden on an unused interface area improving the appearance of the land and increasing community activity.
- **Colin Trust, West Belfast** provided additional seating, benches and extra bins as this outdoor space became increasingly popular as people as restrictions eased.
- **Donovan Rossa GAC, West Belfast** designed a newly surfaced walking route and outdoor gym equipment at their site to enable people to increase their health and well-being.
- **East Belfast Mission, East Belfast**, provided outdoor seating and canopies for cover to enable them to open and operate from outside when it was safe to do so.
- **Eastside Partnership, East Belfast**. Focused on a heritage-based wayfinding initiative which included murals that encouraged visitor interest and gave the community a sense of civic pride.
- **Fountain Street Plaza, City Centre** created a covered parklet area, to enable traders to open and members of the public to feel safe when using.
- **Greater Village Regeneration Forum, South Belfast** created a sensory community garden with seating from a space that was overgrown and unused.
- **Hannahstown Community Association, West Belfast** benefited from improvements to an outdoor seating area.
- **Lagmore Youth Group, West Belfast** benefited from a marquee on unused land within a Church grounds that enabled them to operate and offer a safe space for young people.
- **Maritime Trust, City Centre**, provided a cinema screen on containers that would encourage visitor activity whilst walking along the Maritime Mile.
- **Mornington Community Centre** completed renovation works to the back of the building to able the community activity to take place.
- **North Belfast Working Men's Club, North Belfast** improved a run-down outdoor space with new surfacing improved disabled access and an outdoor pavilion.
- **Orpen Shopping Centre, South Belfast** benefited from surfacing improvements and signage that provided better access to the premises.
- **Patrick Sarsfields GAC, West Belfast** created a community garden and soft land scaping in an unused area on the site to encourage community activity and environmental activities.
- **Portview Trade Centre, East Belfast** provided outdoor seating and lighting at the new established Banana Block which enable them to open the new establishment.

- **Roar and Explore, Business Cluster Group, West Belfast** benefited from signage, lighting and very colourful seating that enable customers to utilise outside space or socialise with others.
- **Sailortown Regeneration Association, North Belfast**, created a covered parklet space for community events.
- **Saints Youth Club, West Belfast**, designed and created a tranquil and well used space that included, surfacing, seating and wildlife cameras
- **Sans Souci Residents Association, South Belfast**, created a route of greenery that included creative planting from Stranmillis to Malone Road.
- **St James Farm West Belfast** provided seating, benches, a chicken coup and polytunnel to increase activity in the community farm.
- **St Johns Pre School, West Belfast** provided a new outdoor space with play facilities in an under used area within the pre-school grounds.
- **The Linen Quarter BID, City Centre** benefited from a parklet space on Brunswick Street enabling Traders to operate and the public to socialise.
- **Townsend Enterprise Park, West Belfast**, improved the outside of their building with a covered canopy and public realm improvements.
- **Upper Springfield Development Trust, West Belfast improved** a derelict space providing planting and greenery.
- **Workwest, West Belfast** improved a very run-down outdoor space with surfacing, seating and planting.

4.3 GRANTS TO THE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS FOR PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS AND STREET SCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

The three Business Improvement Districts – Belfast One, Destination CQ BID and Linen Quarter BID - led stakeholder engagement with local businesses to identify and drive a variety of projects in the city centre. With combined funding of £564k the BIDs delivered parklets, and lighting projects and created new or improved outdoor social spaces in the city.

Cathedral Quarter BID

- Pedestrianisation of Union Street including the installation of parklets, awnings and feature lighting
- Artwork and a feature lighting scheme in Exchange Place to improve the vibrancy, connectivity and safety of the entry
- Installation of retractable canopy over pedestrianized area of Warehouse Lane to support outdoor dining and arts/cultural events, as well as enhanced lighting and greening.
- Installation of artwork and feature lighting at entrance of Warehouse Lane to improve the appeal of the area
- CQ Walking Poem: A placemaking/wayfinding scheme applying individual verses of a poem as artistic installations across various locations within the CQ area, encouraging tourists and visitors to complete the poem by exploring the area.
- Feature Lighting
- Belfast gift card promotion
- Seasonal activities and theming

Belfast One

- Lighting scheme in Church Lane to connect Anne Street and High Street
- Feature lighting
- Belfast gift card promotion
- Seasonal activities and theming

Linen Quarter BID

- Linen Quarter Hub which included parklet schemes in Linenhall Street and Bedford Street
- Feature lighting
- Belfast gift card promotion
- Seasonal activities and theming

4.4 COUNCIL LED PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS AND STREET SCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

⁸**A Bolder Vision** is an ambitious blueprint to explore a shared approach to creating a more attractive, accessible, safe and vibrant city. Developed jointly by Belfast City Council, Department for Communities and Department for Infrastructure, the vision is built on the principles of:

- promoting wellbeing for all
- prioritising walking, cycling and public transport
- creating lively, safe and green streets
- removing barriers to movement between the city centre and surrounding communities

The Recovery Strategy for the city links closely with A Bolder Vision. Through the Recovery and Revitalisation Programme, the Council was able to take forward environmental improvement and revitalisation schemes in Castle Place, the Entries and Adelaide Street. These significant capital projects could be considered to be demonstration projects for **A Bolder Vision** as they illustrate what can be achieved when new and creative thinking is applied to familiar places.

4.5 COUNCIL LED INITIATIVES TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE SAFELY BACK INTO THE CITY

Marketing and Messaging

Funding of £598k which was directly managed by the Council and included grants of £75k to the 3 BIDs) supported a range of interventions including safety messaging and animation programmes.

- Management of COVID-19 related public information perspective, in the first three months of lockdown.
- Management of COVID-19 related information from an internal communications perspective.
- Development of an internal and external marketing approach in the early days of reopening.

⁸ <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/boldervision>

- Creation of #staysafebelfast, reopening videography and the stay safe confidence mark which gained great exposure on shop windows and from the media.
- Signage throughout the city centre to encourage social distancing.
- Media relations management of enforcement issues.
- Stakeholder engagement.
- Phased communication and marketing plans to support the reopening of the city.

The Council's communications team delivered several 'mini' campaigns from March 2020

- Stay Safe Belfast – a suite of activities, a reopening video for social, a 'confidence mark' window sticker for businesses to reassure customers they are following Covid 19 guidelines, signage creation across the city centre and suburbs, branding of sanitisers and PR.
- Publicising the helpline for business advice and employment programmes support (testimonial led) (PR and digital led)
- Recovery Revitalisation Grant (PR and digital led)
- Belfast Community Helpline and community hub - phone line and food service for those who were shielding (mail drop – to all homes and campaigns – campaign turned around in 1 week)
- Belfast Believes – A Christmas digital and PR campaign to instil hope and goodwill.

Enhanced Animation

Through £200k of funding for enhanced animation, the Council awarded grants to a number of organisations

- Each Business Improvement District was awarded £25k to enable theming of particular periods around Autumn, Halloween, and Christmas into the New Year.
- 4 large grants to Sailortown, Great Shankill Partnership, Pobal and Greater Village Regeneration Trust supported large neighbourhood Christmas events
- 14 micro grants were awarded for smaller events with funds ranging from £1500 to £3000 for Santa visits, and Christmas lighting-based events.
- Cahoots (NI) was commissioned to develop and deliver ***Christmas at the Grimm Hotel***. This was an immersive walk-through experience for the family or 'bubbles' of friends to enjoy as a Festive treat. The installation was conceived and constructed on a large scale and comprised a number of self-contained performance spaces linked by corridors

4.6 COUNCIL LED SUSTAINABLE AND ACTIVE TRAVEL MEASURES

£510k of funding was focused on measures to encourage and facilitate walking and cycling in the city. With particular emphasis on cycling, the programme delivered, a further £189k focused on connectivity in the city.

- A refresh of the Belfast Bikes (replacement of 400 bikes) and extension of the Belfast Bike network (450 new bikes).
- 10 Covered cycle stands to provide the infrastructure for bike storage across the city

- Delivery of two Active Travel Hubs at Queens University and Cathedral Gardens providing access to bicycles as well as a community resource to encourage the uptake of active travel and support long term modal change
- An e-cargo bike trial which is exploring the potential for e-bike based delivery services (both business to business and business to consumer) in the city centre

5 HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?

- 52.7% of funding was allocated through grants schemes for businesses (19.8% businesses and 13.9% BIDs, 7% business/community clusters)
- 33.8% of funding was allocated to other interventions
- 28% of funding was allocated to Physical Interventions & Streetscape Improvements/ Reimagined Public Spaces projects (7% funding was through business/community cluster grants)
- 88% of businesses reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the improvements to their businesses⁹.
- 67% of People¹⁰ agreed that they were satisfied with the interventions taken by the council to respond to safety issues raised by the Covid-19 pandemic
- 37% of people¹¹ agreed or strongly agreed the interventions taken by the council would encourage active travel

78% respondents to the Belfast Residents Survey indicated that the Council had responded very well or well to the challenges of providing service during the pandemic.

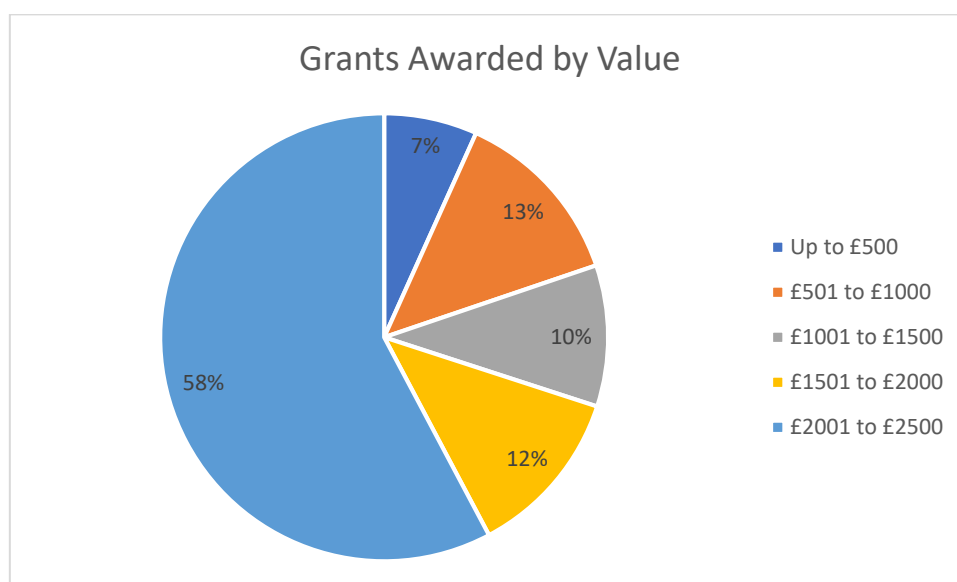
⁹ Survey of Businesses June 2022 the question asked was “to what extent are you satisfied that the funding enabled businesses to take measures to enhance public confidence as a result of safety issues raised by the pandemic?” (n=110)

¹⁰ Based on combined responses of business survey and public survey (n=212)

¹¹ Based on the combined response of business survey, public survey and BCCG monitoring returns (n=240)

5.1 GRANTS FOR BUSINESSES TO PURCHASE EQUIPMENT TO HELP THEM CONTINUE TO TRADE OR TO TRADE SAFELY

Of 900 applications received 490 were awarded funding. The minimum grant award was £500 up to a maximum of £2500, and the profile of the value of the grants awarded is illustrated by the graph below. More than half (58%) of grants awarded were for between £2000 and £2500, and 1 in 5 awards was for less than £1000



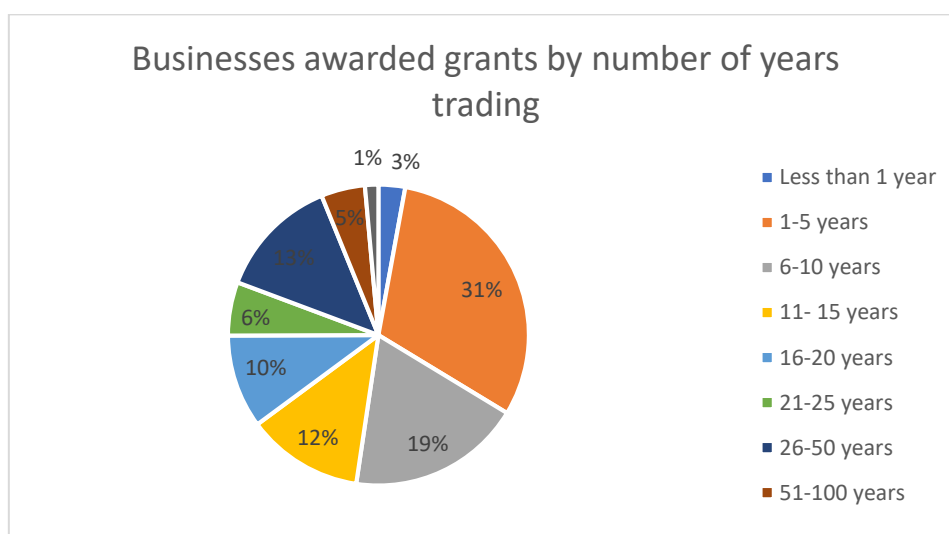
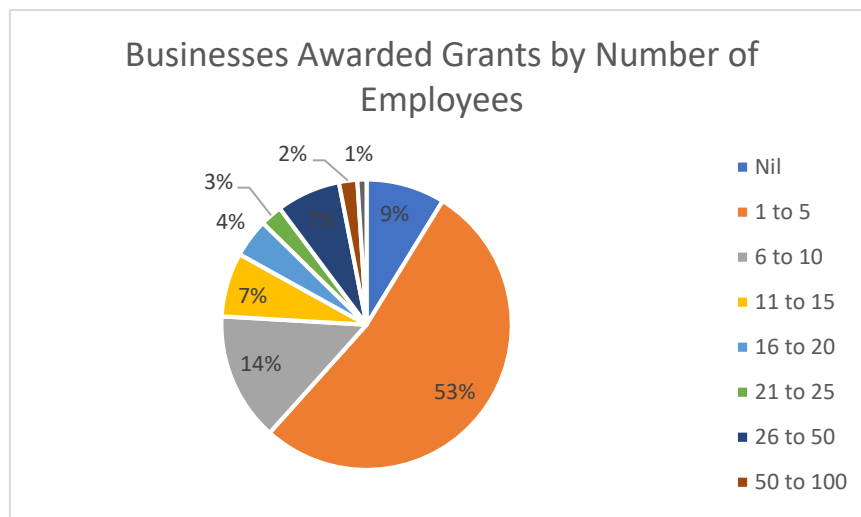
More than half (53%) of businesses which accessed the funding which were micro-enterprises with between 1 and 5 employees.¹² 34% of the businesses awarded grants had been trading for less than 5 years.

Funding was invested in items ranging from hand sanitising stations to perspex screens, and IT equipment to fogging machines, whatever equipment businesses found they needed in order to continue to trade through and beyond the pandemic. As businesses were already under pressure, many would not have had the resources to purchase these items without funding. And without these items they would not have been able to trade safely.

Feedback from businesses in response to the grant scheme was overwhelmingly positive. As part of the monitoring process, grant recipients were asked “What would have happened if the funding was not available?” to which 47% responded that they would not or could not have purchased the equipment and their business would have been affected, and more than 1 in 4 commented that they would have struggled.

110 businesses responded to an online survey in June 2022 of whom 92% had received grant aid through the programme. 88% respondents identified that they were satisfied that the improvements to their business and other interventions addressed safety concerns raised by the Covid 19 pandemic.

¹² 9% of businesses awarded funding stated they had 0 employees. It is not clear from the data whether this is due to sole traders (who technically do not have employees) availing of the scheme or if this value has been entered in error.



The comments below from businesses which received grant aid point to the importance of this investment of funding to ensure the survival of many businesses in the city.

I would not have been in the position to make this purchase. This would have resulted in the business suffering due to customers not wanting to visit and having them feel safe in the environment. Thankfully with the funding this has helped massively

If we had not received the funding we would not have been able to implement some, if not all of the systems we have now been able to put into place to protect both the customers and our staff. Ultimately we would put all of these things into place but would not have been able to do it as quickly or as professionally as we have been able to thanks to the funding.

We would have had to either delay opening or have a restricted service. We had been surviving on furlough and had practically zero income. We already had to have deep cleaning and enhanced cleaning regimes along with PPE and sanitiser costs and we would have been in a position where we were afraid to spend further money when we were facing a long wait for income to restart. Our business would have seriously struggled and been put under great pressure.

If this funding opportunity hadn't been available, our business would have struggled to reopen. The decision to reopen can only be made knowing we have the correct infrastructure in place to keep our staff and public safe. The cost of buying these items would have delayed us in opening, therefore not creating employment for our staff and free lance artists, and also delaying the opportunity for live entertainment happening for the wider public. Items would have been bought, but at a much later date when we would have felt financially secure to invest our money into the items.

Our business would have struggled - the free-standing hand sanitising stations are a very visible precaution that gives everyone confidence that they are entering a clean and hygienic environment. ... We are delighted with the support we have received and the positive outcome the grant has delivered for us at this difficult time.

We would have struggled to purchase the items all at one time therefore the introduction of the changes, measures and procedures put in place would have been delayed and some may not have been introduced at all.

We would not have been able to purchase the items that enable us to provide a safer environment for our activities. It would have limited the services that we would be able to offer. We would have struggled to do all the things we had planned for in terms of community events and outdoor activities, as well as promote online connection too.

Some of the purchases would have been made, but we would not have returned to the footfall levels as quickly and would have had weaknesses in track and trace procedures.

I feel that our customers may not have felt comfortable coming in without this support. If we didn't have this support I fear we may not have spent the money for these items at a time with low cash reserves and uncertainty. [sic]

My business would have struggled -- I would not have purchased the equipment without this support -- my business would definitely have struggled as a result of not getting this funding

We would have struggled to provide such a high degree of confidence to staff members being on site, we had no budget and would have had difficulty in purchasing the equipment outside of the help.

We would not have made the purchase. We are only making enough to keep the shop afloat.

By accessing this funding it has greatly helped us prepare our premises and business to deal with the new Covid restrictions and compliance that is now needed to deal with members of the public on a face to face basis, while still socially distancing

However, it should be noted that there is some less positive feedback:

As we have more than 3 shops in the Belfast area not all benefited from the funding. A joint council approach would have made it easier for a business with shops located across NI. Each council had different terms and conditions.

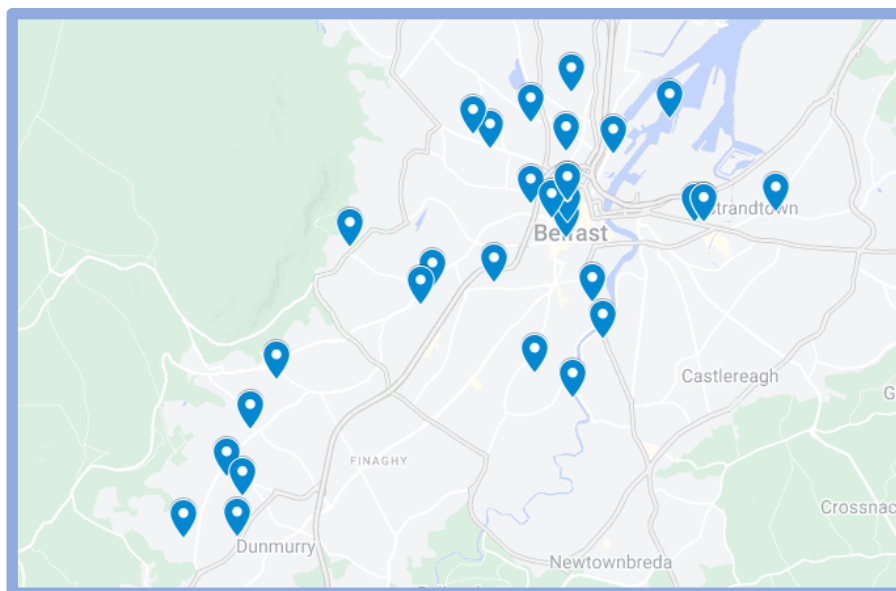
The funding while it helped was not substantial enough to have impact and without staff having to return to their place of work the city have serious challenges

5.2 GRANTS FOR BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY CLUSTERS FOR PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS AND STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

The performance of our shops and café has far exceeded expectation following lockdown and we have seen improvements that will help both sides of the businesses to recover. While we knew this grant would increase footfall and spending in store our expectations were far exceeded in regards the success of this increase.

The Council recognised that the city's arterial routes, urban villages and local communities and the city centre provided an opportunity to deliver environmental improvement schemes that would support business operation and recovery and enable local communities to deliver capital projects that would encourage people to live, work, visit and invest in the local areas.

33 BIDs and Business Cluster Partnerships across the city were awarded funding through the Business and Community Cluster Grant Scheme.



22 of 26 respondents¹³ agreed or strongly agreed that footfall in their area has increased as a result of this project

23 of 25 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of the project the appearance their area had improved

In end of project monitoring forms, grantees were asked about the success and/or impact of their project:

The Project has been very successful in permitting unused land to now be fully functional and used on a daily basis for exercise and social interaction.

¹³Data based on review of BCCG monitoring data

The creation of an outdoor dining area enabled the club to continue trading through periods when Covid-19 restricted the use of indoor facilities. This was vital in helping the club finances and providing a normal service to our members and the wider community

The purchase of these items has been helping to revitalise our shops and cafe fronts and has encouraged customers to visit once restrictions were gradually lifted. Footfall has increased by at least 70%-80% of levels recorded prior to Covid-19 pandemic. Likewise, sales have returned to 70-80% of sales prior to Covid 19 pandemic. In some instances, in our shops these levels have exceeded and the results of this grant has exceeded expectations.

This programme has brought much needed clearing and tidying up of a few sites within the local community which are used frequently and were an eyesore for quite some time.

The site has been transformed from a derelict, unsafe, unused space into a community parklet which is safe, usable and aesthetically attractive.

Measurable impact

This has allowed us to host a number of events which would not of been possible prior to the works being completed.

This is the first time Ballyhackamore's heritage has ever been celebrated across its streetscape. For example, before this project very few people were aware of Ballyhackamore's rich horticultural heritage.

The project has enabled Lagmore to have its first youth facility built and ran for the benefit of the huge youth population that the area has. The project will see the new facilities open and available to the community 7 days a week.

The physical and environmental improvements have created a new welcoming environment for customers and visitors of the centre. The new seating areas encourage people to sit and relax; and the new stands encourage them to cycle to the centre, which both have a direct impact on improved mental health and well-being.

Lower Malone is a much greener area with a variety of unusual trees and shrubs planted along the road, wildflower seeds planted around trees brought out 20 volunteers to clear and sow. People stop and talk and take walks along the road.

Case Study: Ballynafeigh Parklet

Ballynafeigh Community Development Association is based on the Ormeau Road in South Belfast. Its imposing building opposite Ormeau Park has been at the heart of the community for decades, but when the pandemic struck it, like other community buildings across the city, was forced to close.

As BCDA prepares to re-open its premises to the public, the bespoke parklet in front of the building is a way to extend the community connections which happen inside the building to the outside. It provides not just a place to sit, but also meeting point, a starting point for a walk or a cycle, or a resting place to enjoy a takeaway coffee. Enjoyed by old and young alike it transforms what was just a wide pavement into a community space in the truest sense of the term.

5.3 GRANTS TO THE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS FOR PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS AND STREET SCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

The three Business Improvement Districts in the city centre – Belfast One, Cathedral Quarter and Linen Quarter – worked in collaboration with the Council and central government departments to deliver a number of projects in the city centre including:

- Connectivity scheme in Church Lane
- Exchange Place revitalisation
- Warehouse Entry revitalisation
- Union Street Pedestrianisation
- Linen Hall Street and Bedford Street Parklets
- Linen Quarter boardwalk
- Brunswick Street Social Space
- Feature lighting in each of the three BID areas

The grant aid provided through the Covid-19 Recovery and Revitalisation Programme enabled the BIDs to engage with their membership, to develop and facilitate stakeholder forums which would shape delivery of the various projects and to oversee implementation of the projects.

Creating a more European style city centre, with alfresco dining, better cycle lanes and more pedestrian access will attract more visitors. So basically, continue to support local businesses in this way in the city. There's great opportunity here to create a thriving, buzzing Belfast.

(comment from member of the public)

Case Study: Brunswick Street Social Space

The new social space (Flaxx) in Brunswick Street, was delivered through funding to the Linen Quarter Business Improvement District. It has transformed a neglected and misused square into a contemporary space where people can meet, partake of some refreshments, and enjoy the entertainment on offer.

This innovative development which includes the pedestrianisation of Brunswick street, the installation of outdoor seating, lighting and a small stage will provide a relaxing environment with on-site hospitality until 11.00pm seven days a week. Located in the heart of a busy commercial district it will give office workers and visitors to the city a vibrant and comfortable space to rest a while.

It is anticipated that spaces like this will bring vibrancy to parts of the city centre where people don't usually spend much time and act as a catalyst for more regeneration in the surrounding areas.

5.4 COUNCIL LED PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS AND STREET SCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

In response to Covid-19 guidance and the requirement to provide more pavement space to facilitate social distancing, Belfast City Council brought forward a number of Placemaking

schemes to enhance areas across the city which included extending the pavement area along Adelaide Street, the development of the Castle Street hub and the Belfast Entries project.

The interventions which reimagined public spaces enabled Council, stakeholder groups and communities to change how people use the city centre and local neighbourhoods. These projects serve to demonstrate how things can be done differently. As well as addressing immediate concerns resulting from the pandemic, they are also, to an extent, pilots for the delivery of the ambitions of A Bolder Vision.

The works are creating safer, greener, more attractive and more people-friendly streets in the city centre that promote active travel and give pedestrians more pavement space for socially distanced walking, sitting and outdoor dining.

At the time of the mid-term evaluation these works are not yet complete and therefore their effectiveness and impact are difficult to assess at this time. Further examination at the final report stage will provide more information.

Reception of these projects by businesses and by the general public is currently mixed, but as time passes and awareness increases this may change.

I believe the ideas were good but need to go further and, in some cases, executed poorly (member of the public)

5.5 COUNCIL LED INITIATIVES TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE SAFELY BACK INTO THE CITY

The marketing approach focused on highlighting enabling access and enhancing connectivity, supporting businesses, creating confidence and trust, and creating a safe, attractive and clean environment.

This included the delivery of successful (in terms of reach and engagement) marketing campaigns - Stay up to date with council services - Stay safe Belfast - Bin collections - Cemetery information - Business advice - Recycling information - Helpline for businesses - COVID-19 Belfast Community Helpline and community hub (mail drop - to all homes and various digital campaigns) – Reopening of assets - Employment programmes support (testimonial led) - Keeping the city pretty - COVID-19 Recovery Revitalisation Grant - Incentives for social enterprises and co-operatives.

Following the campaigns:

- 178 businesses engaged in business support programmes
- 576 businesses engaged in webinars
- 107,407 food parcel deliveries made to vulnerable Belfast residents
- Web searches in July 20 increased by 53% vs July 2019 - visitors finding content relevant - bounce rates and % exits dropped
- www.belfastcity.gov.uk/covid19 page attracted 118,750 visitors
- PR campaign on city recovery generated over 1000 pieces of coverage across online, print and broadcast
- Majority of businesses used the stay safe Belfast window sticker.

The enhanced animation programme facilitated:

14 community Christmas events

128 performances of Christmas at the Grimm Hotel which were attended by 2834 people. In addition the project supported 17 artists and guides, and 8 volunteers.

5.6 COUNCIL LED SUSTAINABLE AND ACTIVE TRAVEL MEASURES

It is considered that there are 3 pillars which underpin the likelihood of increasing active travel and in particular cycling – infrastructure, access to bikes and programming and information. In the main the interventions supported through the Recovery Revitalisation Programme have focused on the second and third of these.

The hubs increase the profile of sustainable transport in their areas, providing a local focus for walking and cycling promotion. New cycle hubs at Queens and Ulster University campuses provide university staff and students, as well as the wider community with a drop in advice and information service, access to bikes through retail and leasing schemes as well as repair services.

The cycle hub at Queens was delivered in partnership with the University and has received an overwhelmingly positive response from both staff and students.

The hub at Cathedral Gardens received additional funding through the Public Health Agency and Ulster University will provide local families with access to affordable bikes alongside programming, training and events to build confidence and overcome barriers preventing people from walking and cycling. In addition, a refresh of the Belfast Bikes and the planned addition of e-bikes provides the infrastructure across the city centre to encourage cycling around the city.

Comments from the public about the active travel measures include:

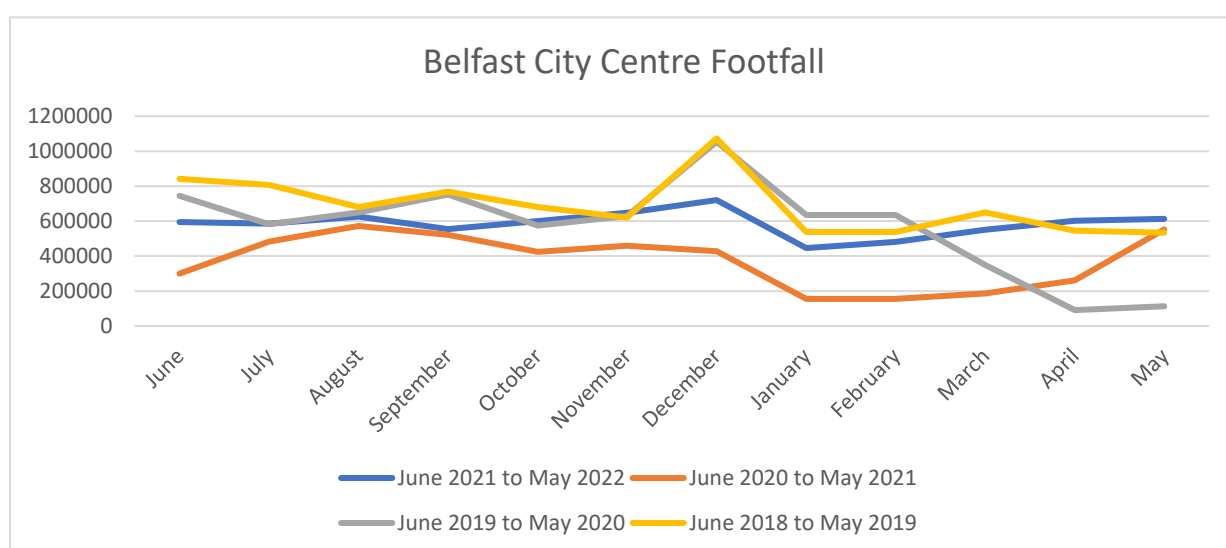
How is success being evaluated? A lot of works seems so random...(Adelaide St structures) . Why make CC internally accessible without having safe, segregated network of cycle lanes so residents can commute to centre. That would have been public money better spent.

I see improvements in the city centre - very welcome. Thank you. The cycling and street improvements are not as visible in West Belfast. Cycling round the 'park centre roundabout' would not encourage me to cycle into the city centre. I would be terrified!

I think the funding in community and social spaces and environmental things such as bike lanes is a fantastic thing and really needed in Belfast. There is much more work to be done but we are heading in the right direction. More trees, bike lanes and pedestrian areas are needed.

6 IS ANYBODY BETTER OFF?

- 48% of businesses (52 of 110 respondents¹⁴) agreed that the improvements to their businesses and other council interventions would encourage people to live, work, visit and invest in the area
- 60% of people¹⁵ agreed that the council's interventions would encourage people to live, work, visit and invest in the area
- 70% of businesses (75 of 107 respondents¹⁶) reported turnover returning to at least 70% of pre-Covid 19 levels following council interventions in the area
- 57% of businesses (55 of 96 respondents) reported footfall levels had returned to at least 70% of pre-Covid 19 levels following council interventions in the area
- 37% respondents¹⁷ agreed or strongly agreed that the measures taken would encourage people to choose to travel on foot or by cycle rather than by car for short journeys



	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
2021/2022 as % of 2018/2019	70%	73%	92%	72%	88%	104%	67%	83%	89%	85%	111%	115%
2021/2022 as % of 2019/2020	80%	101%	96%	74%	104%	103%	68%	70%	76%	158%	661%	545%

Between 2019 and 2021 there was a 10% increase – from 9% to 19% - in people who use walking as their most frequent method of travel for leisure activities. There was also a 1% increase in people who use cycling.¹⁸

When asked about the likelihood of using different modes of travel into the city centre, 21% said they were more likely to walk and 6% that they were more likely to cycle.¹⁹

¹⁴ Online feedback survey for businesses June 2022 (n=110)

¹⁵ Combined responses from business and public surveys and BCCG monitoring (n=241)

¹⁶ Online feedback survey for businesses June 2022 (n=110)

¹⁷ Combined responses from business and public surveys and BCCG monitoring (n=240)

¹⁸ Belfast Residents Survey 2021

¹⁹ Belfast Residents Survey 2021

6.1 GRANTS FOR BUSINESSES TO PURCHASE EQUIPMENT TO HELP THEM CONTINUE TO TRADE OR TO TRADE SAFELY

I would have lost my business. I have been able to find other freelance work to keep my retail business. Thank you for your help!

The focus of expenditure of the grant aid provided to businesses fell into three broad categories:

- Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and other measures to enable safe operation. This includes hand sanitiser stations, Perspex screens etc
- Technology to enable businesses to pivot or to facilitate working from home. This included laptops and tablets as well as software and other equipment
- Awnings and outdoor seating to facilitate an increase capacity or to safely (and more comfortably) manage social distancing and queuing

Overall, the feedback from funded businesses indicates that the grant aid was instrumental in their ability to operate safely and with confidence, their ability to sustain employment and in some cases the survival of the business.

The business would have struggled possibly resulting in more of a reduction of employed part time staff (when furlough not applicable). Without these fixtures and covid signs screens we would have made a significantly larger loss than at present.

I would not have made the purchases and I probably would of [sic] closed

We would have had to reduce the services we were able to offer during the lockdown and would not have reasonably been able to facilitate some staff working from home.

My business had to close all doors, this allowed me to reopen and get customers back with proper social distance and equipment. We have now reopened, if we had to close for any longer we would have had to close our doors for good.

As part of the monitoring for these grants, businesses were asked, how has accessing this funding supported their business?

It has helped/will help footfall into my shop as it allows protection from the rain for people window shopping. It also encourages people to wait for entry when we are at capacity due to social distancing rather than leave.

Accessing this funding has allowed us to purchase a Vox Tour Guide Audio System. The purchase of the system allows us to provide a world class experience for our guests and significantly increase the capacity of our walking tours while adhering to social distancing regulations and health and safety best practice. Overall, this will hasten our return to pre-Covid levels of guests on our tours and allow us to provide group tours again, subject to the recovery of the overall tourist industry of course.

The funding has enabled the company to increase employee and consumer confidence by providing a safer environment in which to work/shop and hopefully therefore maintaining footfall and revenue during this pandemic.

We have found that by accessing this grant we have been able to implement changes and new procedures which will help make our store both safer and more inviting to potential customers in light of the Covid 19 pandemic.

This funding has enabled us to purchase vital outdoor furniture and a new awning to make our outdoor seating area more appealing to customers. We have been unable to have customers sit inside our coffee shop for most of the past year due to Covid 19 and we hope that when we are able to re-open customers will have confidence to visit our newly refurbished outdoor area where the risk of the spread of infection is greatly reduced.

The grant has helped to extend our cafe area outside. Due to covid social distancing, we have reduced our seating capacity by 50% indoors to maintain the 2-meter rule. This money has enabled us to put more tables and chairs outside to help increase some lost revenue and also facilitate the service of customers who are more comfortable sitting outdoors during the pandemic.

It should also be noted that the impact of this funding was not just for the businesses themselves but also the individuals who were able to benefit from the continued service

The funding enabled our organisation to get much needed support out to vulnerable families in North Belfast

6.2 GRANTS FOR BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY CLUSTERS FOR PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS AND STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

With funding made available through the business and cluster grant we are able to make our farm accessible and safe for all visitors far and wide in a period in our lives when peoples mental health and physical well-being was being stretched to their limits

When considering the question “is anybody better off?” in regards, to the local community projects, it is important to highlight the social value of the projects supported. Aswell as aesthetic improvements, projects contributed to improved health and well-being, addressed social isolation and encouraged local volunteering and participation.

Projects described their impact as:

Everyone talking about the new Saints - Once people start to use it more often and the day-to-day users benefit from using it we will also be in a better position to give a more rounded feedback

Our café has been a real community hub and has tackled social isolation by providing a safe space for individuals in our community to meet safely and without fear of Covid-19 transmission.

This project has given the community something to look forward to and they have been excited to see the finished areas. The local churches were extremely humbled and happy with the work they received and sent cards and letters of thanks. This project has also enabled the local Men's Shed to get involved and they have really enjoyed being a part of this. In addition, we also had community service placements involved in some community work which was also a chance for them to put back something positive into their own community.

The impact of such a facility as improved by this grant cannot be underestimated. The immediate community knows something about the Club's history which has been part of Danube Street since 1893. Encouraged by this support we have developed a new website, published a history and revamped the Great Hall which is now in use for weddings, anniversaries, baptism celebrations and Saturday events and music.

I think the easiest measurement from the community is that park users have increased, outdoor dining as a result of these new benches, picnic tables has also increased. People feel comfortable using the outdoor space as a shared space also.

And specifically, in regard to community participation:

Community participation has been central to our successful project. Throughout the planning stages our community stakeholders were fully involved in the planning and design of all aspects of the project. This has evoked a sense of ownership and our stakeholders have maximised all the potential opportunities for community participation

This project has allowed different groups to come together to get involved in a common aim to improve and make better their community. It allowed people who perhaps wouldn't get the opportunity to come together, to do so and build relationships and community relations.

70 different individual volunteers have been involved including overseas students and 2 recent overseas arrivals, foreign nationals, Simon foy for 18-22 year olds (both staff and clients), Nexus staff, Spar staff, Harrison's hotel - all have participated in preparing, planning, maintaining. Many other local residents and organisation have joined in litter picks, painting old walls and watering plants.

Case Study: Sans Souci Residents Association

The residents of Sans Souci in South Belfast felt that the Malone Road had lost its appeal as place to walk. Dominated by concrete and commercial premises the local residents felt the area lacked colour and greenery, and from this the Malone Gateway Project was born.

Mobilising volunteers who included residents, university students and the staff of local businesses, the Malone Gateway is a community planting project stretching from Methodist College to the Queens Elms. Supported by local businesses, and implemented by local people, trees, shrubs and plants have been placed at a number of locations along the road.

Not only has the project brought a splash of colour, and improvements in the environment in the area, it has also improved relationships between the businesses in the area and local residents. There is now a shared sense of owning and caring for the local environment to make it a pleasant space for everyone.

6.3 PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS AND STREET SCAPE IMPROVEMENTS (COUNCIL LED AND BID LED)

The environmental improvements and streetscape improvements implemented in Belfast through this programme contribute to increased footfall and vibrancy. This in turn contributes to the success of local businesses. However, there are additional benefits of investments such as those which have been seen through this programme. The parklets create safe spaces for social connections, the lighting schemes deter those with negative intentions and therefore increase the senses of safety, pedestrianisation of areas of the city and increased cycling add to feeling of welcome in the city.

6.4 COUNCIL LED INITIATIVES TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE SAFELY BACK INTO THE CITY

It is of note that 46% respondent businesses reported a return to the levels of turnover seen for same period in 2019. In addition, there are businesses which report an increase in footfall and/or turnover

Our footfall is consistently exceeding 2019 levels, however your multiple-choice answers do not give this option. (we are currently seeing an average of approx. 133% of 2019 numbers).

Our turnover is much greater in 2022 than it was in 2019 but there is no option to record this in the survey. The main reason for this is a major redevelopment of the restaurant during lock down.

Q8 and Q10 didn't provide an option to state turnover has increased which has for our business. Overall, we are very pleased with the grant which made a contribution to recent success. Thank you.

6.5 COUNCIL LED SUSTAINABLE AND ACTIVE TRAVEL MEASURES

Awareness of the importance of well-being is probably one of the more far-reaching outcomes of the Covid 19 Pandemic. Throughout lockdown people were encouraged to regularly get outdoors and to walk, run and cycle. For many, having formed these habits, they are keen that they continue. Investing in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure then, has been an important part of the Covid Recovery Strategy.

7 LEARNING FROM THE PROGRAMME

7.1 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

It is often the case that the success of a project or programme depends on the quality of relationships underpinning its delivery. Throughout the programme, there are elements of strong partnership working and of relationships that were developed because of the programme but will be sustained beyond its current iteration. By way of example, representatives of the BIDs identified how they valued the partnership approach taken by the Council and departments throughout the programme; business clusters which applied for funding for specific projects are continuing to work together and planning future initiatives.

7.2 THE VALUE OF WORKING WITH AND THROUGH LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

A particular strength of this programme has been in the implementation of local projects through local organisations. Local businesses and community organisations know their neighbourhoods and areas best and are best placed to identify and address local need. This understanding of the area – which applies equally to the city centre BIDs as to the organisations outside of the city centre – was a way to ensure that there was buy in and ownership of the projects delivered. This buy in should not be underestimated in the context of investment of public funding which is often met with more resistance and scepticism. By contrast, what Belfast City Council has achieved through this programme is a cohort of organisations across the city who both understand and have benefited from the revitalisation investment.

7.3 THE VALUE OF FLEXIBILITY

Grant recipients, and in particular the business and community cluster grants, valued the flexibility shown by the Council in the implementation phase of the programme. Rapidly increasing costs and supply chain delays were just two of the issues which many projects encountered between application stage and implementation. Grantees welcomed the support from the Council and the ability to amend projects where necessary but still deliver the intended outcomes.

7.4 TIMING

There were a number of issues around timing of the programme. The lead time between application and approval/payment was a factor in several of the grants awarded not being taken up. The businesses in question had had to act quickly and make purchases, and as the funding could not be claimed retrospectively, they did not avail of the grant. The lead time between approval and release of initial funds for some projects led to challenges in terms of being able to access materials/items from suppliers.

7.5 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT IN TANDEM

In different elements of the programme delivery there is evidence of investment by the Council being a catalyst for other public and private sector investment. This shared commitment to regeneration is a valuable aspect of this programme and one which the Council, and the Departments, should continue to foster and support.

7.6 VALUE OF ENGAGING A DESIGNER EARLY IN THE PROJECT

The inclusion of support from a professional design team was of real benefit to the cluster grant projects. This professional expertise encouraged projects to consider elements they may not have identified themselves and to maximise the use of space, natural light and landscaping in their designs. The designers brought a knowledge and expertise which added value to the projects.

The changes surpassed what we initially thought that we could do. This was due to the input from Chris Upson, whose architectural advice we followed.

Access to the OGU design team was extremely beneficial and their idea of a landscaped mound will enhance the RiverBox experience. We were able to use their concept drawings to engage with the landowner, who are now developing the mound at their own cost.

We benefitted from the services of an architect paid for by BCC. With his expertise we were able to make the very most of the little outside space we had at the nursery. We now have an enclosed playground for the children.

7.7 BENEFITS WHICH GO BEYOND THE PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

The projects supported through this programme, and in particular the business/community cluster projects, had benefits and impacts which go beyond the improvement of a physical space. For many of the projects, volunteer hours added value to the project by undertaking some of the physical labour, for others, the project has created spaces such as community gardens or planted areas which local people now volunteer to maintain. Many projects created outdoor community spaces providing people with somewhere they can confidently and safely meet up with others. In addition to the benefits of being outdoors, emotional health and well-being is known to be improved by connecting with others and by volunteering, elements which underpinned many of the projects supported.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At this interim stage, the impacts of most the projects supported through the Covid 19 Recovery Revitalisation fund have yet to be fully realised. Many of the projects have only been in situ for a few weeks and awareness is slowly growing and a lot of the projects have landed within a very complex social and economic environment defined by wider global issues as well as some very specific local issues, however the majority of feedback reports on the significant positive impact that the programme has had in terms of allowing businesses to reopen safely and to adapt to the changing environment, allowing community groups to invest in wide range of outdoor facilities promoting better use of the outdoors, promoting sustainable and active travel and improving mental health provision. While the statutory and community partners are actively addressing the immediate socialite and cleansing issues of the city the projects delivered within this programme will have a much greater benefit in terms of enabling the city to recover and to deliver on the longer-term ambitions of the city. The final evaluation report will be better placed to define the impact of the capital investments and to identify the difference made in both the city centre and in local communities.

It is clear however that the investment of funding made through the Council is valued both by businesses and by local communities. Organisations which were supported across the different strands of funding reported their gratitude for the opportunity it gave them to survive during the pandemic and to thrive as the city emerged from the crisis. Already, the benefits, including increased volunteering and health and well-being benefits far outweigh simply the physical interventions. In six months' time when the final evaluation report is completed it is anticipated that there will be clear evidence of the positive impact of the programme.

The wider programme attracted an additional £2.3m of investment from the public and private sectors. Significant benefit was unlocked through partnership working, building capacity and a sense of ownership in local communities and businesses enabling a quick roll out of high impact projects. further work is required to introduce further flexibility into the statutory system to enable the delivery of the transformation change that so many of our communities and businesses want to see coming forward at pace.

The Covid 19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme





The Covid 19 Recovery Revitalisation Fund

In order to recover from the pandemic, Belfast City Council recognised that there would need to be a range of sustained and creative interventions which would reshape how the city is used, to increase footfall and spend in the city centre, and to increase connectivity in local neighbourhoods and with the wider city whilst prioritising public safety.

The Council received £4.039m capital funding through the Department for Communities Revitalisation Programme to support a variety of projects and programmes across the city. These projects which were identified and led by community organisations, the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and local businesses were intended to provide the public with confidence that measures have been put in place to ensure their safety and to encourage people to re-engage with community and city life, and to provide clear and visible changes in the local area.

The funding provided the Council and local businesses with the chance to harness people's renewed interest in spending time outdoors, and in walking and cycling. Most importantly the funding meant that businesses and community organisations could be supported to re-open safely and with confidence, and to adapt how they operated to suit the changed times.

The Covid 19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme had 4 broad strands

- Grants for businesses to purchase equipment to help them continue to trade or to trade safely
- Grants for community/business clusters for small capital projects
- Grants to the Business Improvement Districts for small capital projects
- Council led initiatives to encourage people safely back into the city

The initiatives supported were many and varied and were located across the city. With the overarching aim of promoting recovery from the pandemic, the projects provided new and/or improved community spaces, innovative locations for socialising outdoors, attractive streetscapes and much more.

67% respondents to surveys undertaken after the improvements agreed that they were satisfied with the interventions taken by the Council to respond to safety issues raised by the Covid-19 pandemic

60% of survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that improvements undertaken through the programme would encourage people to live, work and invest in this area.



Bedford Street
Parklet

Open for Business

Building confidence was key to the reopening of the city as it emerged from the pandemic. Through the funding, the Council was able to develop a communication and marketing campaign which would support the business sector and encourage shoppers to return.

To help people feel safe and confident to re-enter retail outlets within the city centre it was important to demonstrate effective management of social distancing requirements, management of queuing and pedestrian flows. Through signage and branding about social distancing measures, the campaign increased the confidence of people coming to the city. City safety messaging encouraged the use of masks, keeping a safe distance and effective hand washing techniques.

Vital to the success of this initiative was effective engagement with businesses and stakeholders from across the city to explore what steps were needed to encourage safe social distancing and for existing businesses to reopen effectively. #staysafebelfast and the stay safe confidence mark provided clear, simple and visible evidence of the commitment of city businesses to the safety of their customers, as did the placement of hand sanitising units in key areas which were wrapped with city branding.

What began as a programme of actions to provide public information, as time went on became a mechanism to instil confidence in residents, consumers and visitors.



City Centre
signage

88% of businesses surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied that the funding enabled them to take measures to enhance public confidence as a result of safety issues raised by the pandemic.

Covid Recovery Grants

Belfast City Council awarded over £800,000 in grants to more than 450 businesses in the city. The purpose of the grants was to support businesses to re-open or continue to operate safely during and after the pandemic.

Businesses ranged in size from small local shops to much larger service organisations, from the relatively new to the well established. What all the businesses who sought and secured support had in common was the need to take proactive steps to ensure their customers and staff had confidence in their safety.

Funding was invested in items ranging from hand sanitising stations to perspex screens, and IT equipment to fogging machines, whatever equipment businesses found they needed in order to continue to trade through and beyond the pandemic. As businesses were already under pressure, many would not have had the resources to purchase these items without funding. And without these items they would not have been able to trade safely.

The funding investment has helped to secure the sustainability of businesses across the city which can now begin to thrive again.



Outdoor dining and socialising

Hospitality has been one of the sectors most affected by lockdown and government restrictions throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Restrictions ranged from forced closures and limits on opening hours, to rules on the number of people that could meet indoors and table-service requirements. While forced closures and restrictions impacted customer demand and business revenues, hospitality businesses continued to face fixed costs such as property and staff costs. Support schemes specifically targeted to the hospitality industry included the *Eat out to Help Out* Scheme and a temporary cut to VAT.

In spite of our inclement climate, outdoor dining has become increasingly popular, in part due to the increased safety many people feel whilst socialising outdoors, and in more ventilated, space. Temporary changes to alcohol licensing and planning law for pavement cafe licences made it easier for restaurants and cafes to seat and serve customers outdoors, which has meant they could somewhat offset restrictions on the numbers of people they could have indoors.



Fountain Plaza

The Fountain Plaza project involved the installation of large parasols, privacy screens and planters on the pavement area on Fountain Street. The creation of this outside dining space enabled the restaurant to trade at 50% capacity while still adhering to social distancing requirements. Since the scheme has been implemented it has rejuvenated the area, with other businesses also using their outside spaces to make Fountain Plaza a vibrant place to be and encourage people into the area to socialise.

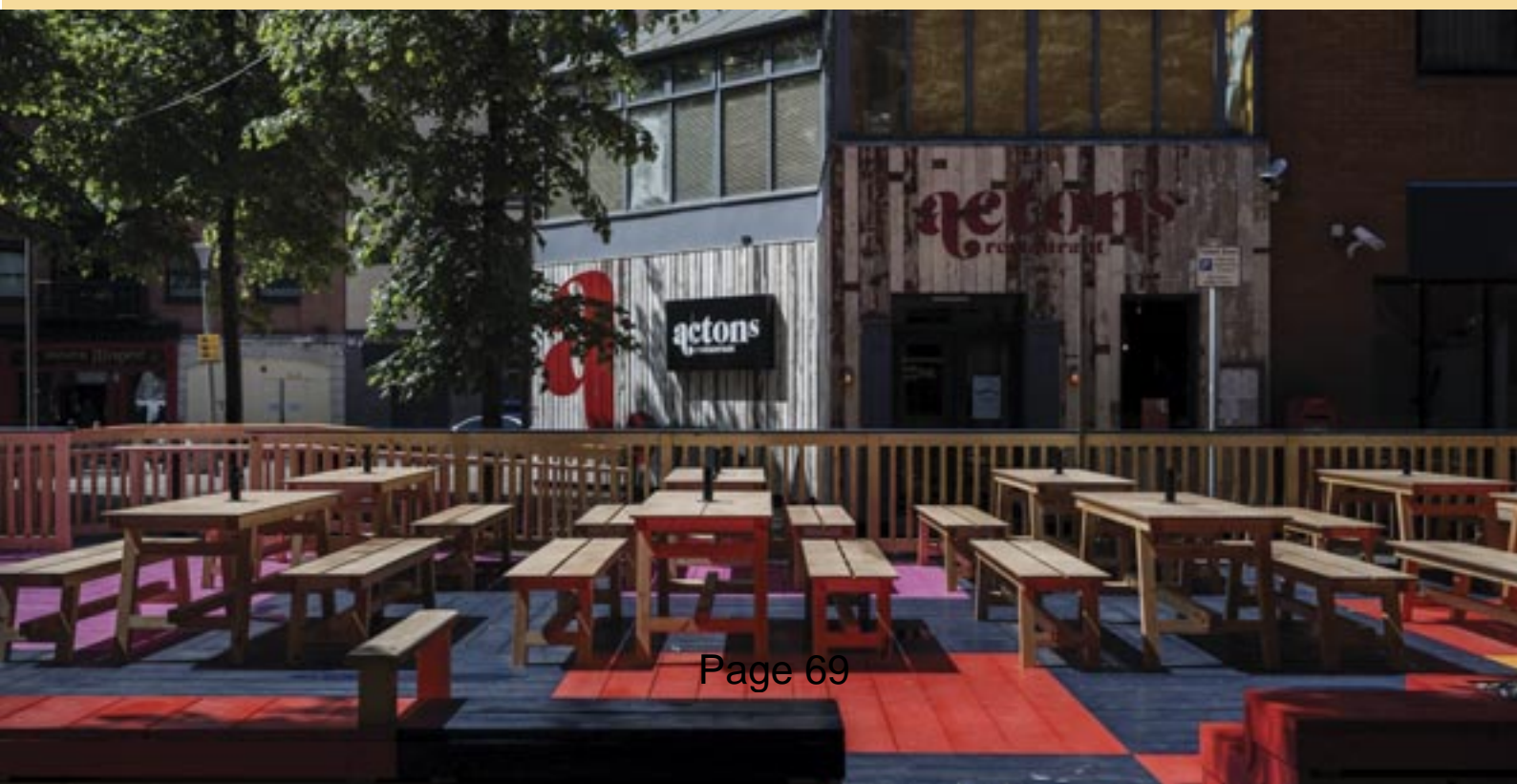


Flaxx Social Space, Brunswick Street

The new Flaxx Social Space in Brunswick Street, which was delivered through funding to the Linen Quarter Business Improvement District, has created a contemporary space where people can meet, partake of some refreshments and enjoy the entertainment on offer.

This innovative development which includes a pedestrianised section, the installation of outdoor seating, lighting and a small stage will provide a relaxing environment with on site hospitality until 11.00pm seven days a week. Located in the heart of a busy commercial district it will give office workers and visitors to the city a vibrant and comfortable space to rest a while.

Already popular, it is anticipated that spaces like this will bring vibrancy to parts of the city centre where people don't usually spend much time and act as a catalyst for more regeneration in the surrounding areas





Linenhall Street Parklet



Bedford Street Parklet

Spaces to rest and enjoy

Parklet (n) a small seating area or green space created as a public amenity on or alongside a pavement, especially in a former roadside parking space (Oxford English Dictionary)

Across the city centre and beyond, parklets are providing visitors with an inviting spot to take a seat, grab a coffee and watch the world go by. Some are located near small hospitality businesses and provide an outdoor “extension” to their dining areas, others are a spot for an office worker’s packed lunch or a takeaway coffee. These little resting points which can be found in Bedford Street and Linenhall Street add character to the streetscape of the city.



Ballynafeigh Parklet

Ballynafeigh Community Development Association is based on the Ormeau Road in South Belfast. Its imposing building opposite Ormeau Park has been at the heart of the community for decades, but when the pandemic struck, it, like other community buildings across the city, was forced to close.



As BCDA prepares to re-open its premises to the public, the bespoke parklet in front of the building is a way to extend the community connections which happen inside the building to the outside. It provides not just a place to sit, but also meeting point, a starting point for a walk or a cycle, or a resting place to enjoy a takeaway coffee. Enjoyed by old and young alike it transforms what was just a wide pavement into a community space in the truest sense of the term.







7



8



9

- 1 Sailortown Parklet, City Centre
- 2 Adelaide Street
- 3 St James' Farm, West Belfast
- 4 Refresh Cafe, Newtownards Road
- 5 Union Street seating area
- 6 Roar and Explore, Dunmurry
- 7 O'Donovan Rossa GAC Belfast
- 8 The River Box, Titanic Quarter
- 9 Portview, East Belfast
- 10 St John's Nursery, Falls Road



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10

Community Spirit and Volunteering

The Covid 19 pandemic had a huge impact on communities, but not all of those impacts were negative. Across the city, as people found themselves furloughed or no longer losing time to a daily commute, they had more time to volunteer in their local areas. The Business Cluster and Community Grants Programme provided the financial support for local projects which then enabled local people and groups to make changes in their community.

Sans Souci Residents Association

The residents of Sans Souci in South Belfast felt that the Malone Road had lost its appeal as place to walk. Dominated by concrete and commercial premises the local residents felt the area lacked colour and greenery, and from this the Malone Gateway Project was born.

Mobilising volunteers who included residents, university students and the staff of local businesses, the Malone Gateway is a community planting project stretching from Methodist College to the Queens Elms. Supported by local businesses, and implemented by local people, trees, shrubs and plants have been placed at a number of locations along the road.

Not only has the project brought a splash of colour, and improvements in the environment in the area, it has also improved relationships between the businesses in the area and local residents. There is now a shared sense of owning and caring for the local environment to make it a pleasant space for everyone.



Planting at the Spar on the Malone Road

Lower Malone is a much greener area with a variety of unusual trees and shrubs planted along the road, wildflower seeds planted around trees brought out 20 volunteers to clear and sow. People stop and talk and take walks along the road. A rampage by a vandal this week brought out the local community to fix and replant. (Sans Souci Residents)



*We have created a social space for the community which will encourage growing activities to take place as well as educational activities.
(Patrick Sarsfields GAC)*

Volunteers planting out new beds at Patrick Sarsfields GAC

North Belfast Working Men's Club

Lockdown restrictions had had a negative effect on membership at North Belfast Working Men's club, so in order to get members back, an outdoor area was created with furniture, planting and landscaping, to create an attractive and useable outdoor space. Other improvements included enhancements to the bowling green and new tarmac and ramped access.

The funding has enabled the club to provide disabled access to an underused but unique resource. More importantly, it has energised club members who, having missed the club during lockdown, volunteered their time to clean, to lay stones and to paint as part of this project

Having enabled better access to the Club, and now facilitating more and better family events, the Club Trustees have seen more people attending the club from across age groups. As more people become aware of this valuable community resource, which there is nothing similar to in the surrounding area, the number of users and bookings has increased helping to sustain the club, which had been at risk of closing, into the longer term.



A Sense of Place

By uncovering and highlighting elements of local history, many of which were long forgotten, community projects can reconnect residents with their local heritage. Through the revitalisation funding, little used spaces provided a canvas to tell local stories and to create spaces which are owned and used by local people.



Ballyhackamore Street Art Installations

The aim of this project was to celebrate Ballyhackamore's rich heritage and modern-day personality through street art, and to create a revived sense of identity for the neighbourhood.

The four art installations and complementary motifs are the first time Ballyhackamore's heritage has ever been celebrated across its streetscape. Before this project very few people were aware of Ballyhackamore's rich horticultural heritage. The 'Lamplighter' installation beside Kirkpatrick Presbyterian Church depicts a lamplighter tending to his lamp with flowers glowing from the centre. The artist that worked on this piece has also installed four smaller flower motifs throughout Ballyhackamore, all relating back to the nursery which once stood where Bloomfield Collegiate is now located.



By celebrating the area's heritage across its streets, the project engages the wider public with these fascinating stories and acknowledges Ballyhackamore's unique, and often forgotten, identity as a village rather than simply an arterial route into Belfast City Centre.

In addition, the project has acted as a catalyst for further development and led to further street art installations funded by local businesses, as well as initiatives to remove unsightly graffiti.



The Flax Street Courtyard Local History Regeneration Project

The Flax Street project centred around a local history project explaining the story of the Mill industry and based on 'The women who made Belfast'. The project allowed the group to highlight the women and the significant role they played in the local area. A number of history boards were installed telling the stories of the Mills and the part the local women played in their development.

The wider community and local groups were fully involved in the planning and design of all aspects of the project. This gave local residents and groups ownership which can now be seen in how well used the space is. Lighting was installed, transforming the area from a dark, unwelcoming and unused space into a warm and inviting space for all users. Planters helped to transform the look and feel of the area, and the local nursery children now use these to learn about plants and herbs. Seating was installed which is used by local groups at lunch time and youth groups in the evening, as well as being a meeting point for local people.

The community, including children and youth groups now view and use the area as a space of their own.



*We believe that our project has been very successful in bringing about the changes we wanted to achieve. What was once a dark and unused courtyard yard has now been transformed in a bright, safe and well used community area, the change has been nothing short of remarkable.
(Cairde Ard Eoin)*



Enhancing Community Facilities

A large part of the Covid Recovery Plan was in enabling existing community facilities to build on the positive changes which had resulted from the pandemic. These included a greater interest in spending time outdoors, regular exercise and an increased appreciation of the value of community.

Outside of the city centre, the programme supported projects which enhanced existing community facilities. This included community gardens, new pathways and benches, a semi permanent youth structure and more. The purpose of all of these investments was to strengthen communities as they emerged from covid. The projects provide spaces where people can come together as a family, as friends or as a community. They connect people in very urban areas with nature, and they provide space for people to connect with one another. Such projects are a vital element of the recovery and revitalisation of the city.

Saints Youth Club

The new community garden at Saints Youth Club is truly owned and valued by the young people who regularly attend the centre. Including benches, landscaping and safety fencing, perhaps the most important element of the garden is the planters and flower beds.

Young people who come to the centre have a freedom in this new outdoor space which they don't have when indoors in the youth centre. They are learning new skills in planting and growing plants and vegetables and herbs. They are promoting their garden to the local community, asking for support and donations and committing to giving the produce they grow back to their local community.

The wellbeing benefits of the garden are already being seen by youth workers who describe how the young people thrive in the garden and how the connection with nature can be grounding for those who might be struggling.





Lagmore Youth Project

Lagmore had a large waste ground that was left empty and rubble lying everywhere. Thanks to the grant a new temporary facility has been constructed on the waste site and caters for over 100 people per day morning, noon and night 7 days a week with a further waiting list of young people already on a waiting list to access the new facilities we hope to be able to offer even more services when the new academic school year begins. (Lagmore Youth Project)



Patrick Sarsfields GAC

We have been able to create two tranquil areas that people can use when visiting the club either as members, spectators, visitors or local community. (Sarsfields GAC)

The project has been and will continue to be a great success and a positive initiative brought into our community to continue to promote positive mental health and wellbeing to all with the help of the funding from this grant the farm will continue to be a great source of community development and involvement. (St James' Farm)



St James' Farm

Sustainable Travel

Awareness of the importance of wellbeing is probably one of the more far-reaching outcomes of the Covid 19 Pandemic. Throughout lockdown people were encouraged to regularly get outdoors and to walk, run and cycle. For many, having formed these habits, they are keen that they continue. Investing in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, has been an important part of the Covid Recovery Strategy.

New cycle hubs at Queens and Ulster University campuses provide students and faculty with access to secure cycle parking and repair. The hub at Cathedral Gardens will also provide local families with access to affordable bikes and encouragement to cycle in the local area. In addition, a refresh of the Belfast Bikes and the planned addition of e-bikes provides the infrastructure across the city centre to encourage cycling around the city.



Belfast Bikes at Ormeau Park



The River Box, Maritime Mile

The River Box

The River Box is a new three story audio visual experience on the Maritime Mile. With benches and picnic tables, and a large LED screen it is a new attraction in the Titanic area. And conscious of how many people now travel the Maritime Mile by bike, the new installation includes a bespoke cycle rack.

The first of its kind in the area, the cycle rack is both functional and instagrammable. With the Titanic Centre as a backdrop it will become a go to point for cyclists in the area and provide a place to rest, to meet others and to enjoy the occasional entertainment which is on offer.

The bike rack is much needed and can be replicated across the Maritime Mile establishing the waterfront as a great place to cycle with good bike infrastructure in place. Now in situ ... we see that it is getting great use. (Maritime Belfast Trust)

The Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme invested over £4m of funding in the city to deliver the projects listed below

Physical interventions and streetscape projects

- **Ballynafeigh Community Association, South Belfast**, parklet type space
- **Bank Square Traders, City Centre**, outdoor seating, lighting and floral displays
- **Beanies Convenience Store, Business Cluster Group, North Belfast**, signage and lighting
- **Belfast Boat Club, South Belfast**, an outdoor space with gazebos, benches and seating
- **Big Belmont Traders, East Belfast**, additional shop front signage and lighting
- **Cairde Ard Eoin, North Belfast**, heritage project including story boards, seating and lighting
- **Castle Street Traders, City Centre**, new signage, awnings and lighting
- **Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum, North Belfast**, a community garden
- **Colin Trust, West Belfast**, additional seating, benches and extra bins
- **Donovan Rossa GAC, West Belfast**, newly surfaced walking route and outdoor gym equipment
- **East Belfast Mission, East Belfast**, outdoor seating and canopies
- **Eastside Partnership, East Belfast**, heritage based wayfinding initiative
- **Fountain Street Plaza, City Centre**, covered parklet area
- **Greater Village Regeneration Forum, South Belfast**, a sensory community garden
- **Hannahstown Community Association, West Belfast**, improved outdoor space
- **Lagmore Youth Group, West Belfast**, a marquee on unused land to offer space for young people
- **Maritime Trust, City Centre**, a cinema screen on containers on the maritime mile
- **Mornington Community Centre**, renovation works to the back of the building
- **North Belfast Working Men's Club, North Belfast**, improved outdoor space
- **Orpen Shopping Centre, South Belfast**, surfacing improvements and signage
- **Patrick Sarsfields GAC, West Belfast**, a community garden and soft land scaping
- **Portview Trade Centre, East Belfast**, outdoor seating and lighting
- **Roar and Explore, Business Cluster Group, West Belfast**, signage, lighting and seating
- **Sailortown Regeneration Association, North Belfast**, a covered parklet space
- **Saints Youth Club, West Belfast**, improved outdoor space
- **Sans Souci Residents Association, South Belfast**, creative planting project
- **St James Farm West Belfast**, seating, benches, a chicken coop and polytunnel
- **St Johns Pre School, West Belfast**, a new outdoor space with play facilities
- **The Linen Quarter BID, City Centre**, parklet space on Brunswick Street
- **Townsend Enterprise Park, West Belfast**, improved the outside of their building
- **Upper Springfield Development Trust, West Belfast**, improved a derelict space
- **Workwest, West Belfast**, improved outdoor space
- **Cathedral Quarter BID, City Centre**, Union Street Pedestrianisation
- **Cathedral Quarter BID, City Centre**, Cathedral Quarter/Warehouse Entry
- **Linen Quarter BID, City Centre**, 3 parklets, Flaxx social space and interactive lighting at Brunswick Street, tree wrap lighting at Blackstaff Square
- **Belfast One BID, City Centre**, Church Lane and Bank Square lighting schemes, mural and planting at Cole's Alley

Initiatives by Council to encourage people back into the city centre

- Public Safety signage and messaging and communication
- Feature Lighting in each of the three Business Improvement Districts
- Christmas animation programme

Sustainable And Active Travel Projects

- Replacement/upgrade of Belfast Bikes
- Covered Citywide cycle stands
- Expanding Belfast Bike network
- Electric Bike Trial
- Expanding Sustainable Transport Hub network



For more information and a full list of supported businesses and projects contact invest@belfastcity.gov.uk



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Subject:	Update on Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor
Date:	10 August 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Cathy Keenan, Enterprise and Business Growth Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a progress update on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) and work on a development plan, strategy and action plan to deliver on the partnership's objectives.
2.0	Recommendations

2.1	<p>The Members of the Committee are asked to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the contents of this report and progress to date to develop the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>At its meeting on 12 January 2022 Members were provided with an update on progress to support the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor including progress on the creation of a development plan and ongoing work on developing a strategy and action plan. Members noted the progress to date and endorsed the developmental plans of the partnership.</p>
3.2	<p>Since the last committee update the Development plan for the partnership has been completed. The strategy and action plan will be finalised in September 2022. Belfast City Council continues to act as lead partner on contract management alongside a project steering group made up of partnership representatives. The work to date has made a number of recommendations to support the ongoing development of the partnership including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A phased development timeline up to 2030. In the short term from 2022-2024 priorities include set up of initial partnership personnel, consideration of legal structures, and identification of funding options. DBEC should remain an informal partnership model in the short term, together with an MOU, with a view to exploring independent legal status for the partnership in the future. This will be funded initially through council contributions. DBEC should be established with a bottom-up governance structure, largely based on the current existing structure. This includes a board of 12 growing to 16 in the long term to include private sector representatives. The partnership should be housed at a single location with staff and resources to lead and manage delivery of the partnership aims. Key areas of focus should include Research and Development, Trade and Investment, Skills and Infrastructure and Connectivity.
3.3	<p>Stage 2 includes the development of a strategy for the partnership. The strategy aims to articulate a vision for the partnership to enable sustainable economic growth across the region. This part of the project will undertake a review of the economic context and key emerging work areas at a local and regional level and their potential to impact the region, and assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to achieving sustainable</p>

	economic growth across the region. This will provide an evidence base for action, identifying areas of focus for the partnership to address future opportunities and address any gaps in existing provision.
3.4	Stage 3 includes the development of an action plan. This aims to build on the foundations of the development plan and strategy. This piece of work will prioritise key areas of work for the partnership aligned with the key thematic areas to 2030. The action plan aims to clearly define the role of DBEC and other partners in delivering key actions and will identify new areas for collaboration, it will also identify potential opportunities to access funding and resources to deliver on the objectives of the partnership.
3.5	All stages of this work have been informed by extensive stakeholder engagement including workshops with DBEC partners and one to one meetings with stakeholders and strategic partners.
3.6	It is expected that the final draft of the development plan, strategy and action plan will be presented to the members of the political advisory group for consultation and feedback. The meeting will take place at the end of September, date to be confirmed.
3.7	Based on the recommendations of the development plan it has been agreed that a dedicated resource is put in place to support the delivery of the strategy and action plan for the partnership. This resource will include two dedicated positions which will be located in Newry and Mourne District Council as they are currently hold the chairing role, the positions will be responsible to the partnership. It is intended that the recruitment process will commence in August with the staff being in place by November.
3.8	In tandem with work on the development plan, strategy and action plan officials from partner councils have continued to identify collaborative opportunities, in addition to engaging with external stakeholders to further the aims of the partnership. Belfast City Council officials have met with representatives of Special EU Programmes Body, Intertradelreland, the Irish Government's Shared Island Unit, in addition to a range of business representative organisations to identify joint interventions and potential opportunities to access funding.
3.9	In June 2022, the partnership applied to the Irish Government's Shared Island Local Government Development Fund for funding to conduct a feasibility study on regional

	innovation centres. This funding is aimed at supporting cross-border local authority partnerships develop proposals for joint capital projects.
3.10	Belfast City Council have also partnered with Dublin City Council and Cork County Council to make applications for grants under this fund. The application with Dublin City Council is in relation to the circular economy and with Cork on Harbour facilities. These applications are being evaluated and allocations are expected to be announced in August.
3.11	The Peace Plus programme has also been identified as a potential source of funding relevant to the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. In particular Theme 2, Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation and Theme 6, Building and Embedding Partnership. Funding calls under these thematic areas are expected to open in the Autumn. The DBEC partnership are currently scoping out potential collaborative initiatives that would align with these thematic areas under Peace Plus, in preparation for funding calls.
3.12	Members will be updated with further progress on the strategy and action plan at a later date.
3.13	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The activities outlined within this report will be resourced from the 2022/23 Enterprise and Business Growth budget. Applications for grants under the Shared Island Fund do not require a matching financial contribution from council's, however, in-kind staff time will be required.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>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 project.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	None



Subject:	Business Start Up: future resourcing and proposed interim approach
Date:	10 August 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update members on the future funding landscape for economic development activity, with a specific focus on the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).
1.2	The report also sets out a proposed interim approach supporting to business start-up, pending confirmation of funding from a range of external sources to deliver a new model of support. In addition, it details a proposed intervention to encourage more growth-focused and scaling businesses, building on a successful partnership model.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note and endorse the interim approach to business start-up support from April 2023 • Note and endorse the proposal to invest in the Way to Scale programme up to a maximum of £40,000 • Note the update on Shared Prosperity Fund, including challenges and opportunities presented for the council and other local partners.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Business Start-Up support</u></p> <p>At the April 2022 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members were advised of the work that was under way to revamp the approach to business start-up post-2023. All 11 councils jointly commissioned an outline business case which presents future options to enhance the quality of the support provided to businesses, in line with our ambitions as set out in the Belfast Agenda. The report noted that there was still a significant programme of work to do to seek the additional financial resources required to deliver this new programme of activity and to ensure that it can be operational once the current programme concludes in March 2023. Members were advised that a report setting out further detail on the proposed approach as well as the financial and operational implications will be presented at a future meeting of this committee.</p>
3.2	<p>The end of March 2023 marks something of a perfect storm. It is the final date for expenditure of EU funding (ERDF and ESF). It is also a break point in the current delivery contract for the Go for It programme. Other important context points include the ongoing Review of Invest NI (referenced elsewhere in the reports) and the lack of clarity over their future areas of focus, including the level and nature of support that they allocate to new and growing local businesses. Finally, while the EU replacement funding – Shared Prosperity Fund – is technically operating from April 2022, the Investment Plan that must be developed to identify priority interventions is not likely to be completed until October 2022, with resources only being released after that point. While there have been positive engagements with the team at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) regarding the prospect of accessing resources through the Shared Prosperity Fund, there is no guarantee that the level of resources required to support delivery will materialise.</p>
3.3	<p>The implications for councils at this point is that they are being forced to explore a number of scenarios to ensure that there is no break in the delivery of support to new start businesses</p>

	<p>(this has been a statutory responsibility of councils since 2015). One scenario includes extending the current delivery contract on the Go for It programme on a short-term basis, until there is greater clarity on the financial position to support a new programme and until the commissioning process for delivery of the enhanced programme is completed. The current contract has a break clause at the end of March 2023. However the existing contractor must be advised of the intention to extend the contract by 30 September 2022. Councils have therefore been engaging to seek to agree a way forward given the current financial uncertainties.</p>
3.4	<p>The Northern Ireland Business Start Up Programme (NIBSUP) – also called Go for It – has been delivered since September 2017. NIBSUP is currently funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Invest NI and 11 Councils. Councils have contributed 20% of costs while ERDF and Invest NI resources have made up the remaining 80% contribution.</p>
3.5	<p>Each Council has a dedicated statutory job creation target (325 for Belfast). The statutory legislation currently measures this through the number of business plans generated via Go for It (although this will change in the future). Given the statutory nature of the target, it is essential that there is a mechanism in place to support delivery. Due to the lack of clarity on SPF and other resources, it is proposed that Belfast City Council aligns with the other 10 councils to extend the current contract provision for a maximum of one year. In parallel, work will continue to progress the enhanced approach to business start-up and growth support set out to this Committee in April 2022, with the ambition of phasing the new interventions in as resources are firmed up. Discussions are ongoing on the precise nature of the programme content, particularly the marketing budget which is likely to be scaled back from previous allocations. The increased budget requirement from Council resources will require a prioritisation of funding in line with Committee priorities and this will be factored into the estimates process in the coming months.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Business growth and scaling support</u></p> <p>One of the key challenges identified through the enterprise framework is the need to encourage more businesses to scale and grow to turnover £3m+. This is also reflected in the 10X Economy vision which identifies the need to drive up the rate of new business starts and create an environment that actively supports entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into viable businesses.</p>

3.7	A key component of this strategy is to encourage more companies to scale up and achieve high growth, in turn creating more employment opportunities for all and inspiring more companies to realise these growth ambitions. Following the success of the recent Way to Scale Initiative in partnership with Catalyst Inc and Invest NI, officers have been working to develop further interventions to complement Belfast City Council's core Enterprise and Business Growth Support and Employability and Skills Programmes. Way to Scale provides support across a number of areas including internationalisation, access to finance, business modelling and sales strategy support for those businesses with the ambition to scale.
3.8	Through last year's programme, 40 businesses accessed support through a series of workshops and events with leading entrepreneurs from MIT in Boston. A further 9 companies progressed on to the Entrepreneurship Development Programme at MIT in Boston, and a one week residential in Boston to develop market strategies and build network support to realise the growth ambitions of their businesses.
3.9	Early feedback from the Way to Scale Initiative has demonstrated transformational results for the participating businesses. It is guided by REAP initiative (Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Programme) which is also developed by MIT and helps regions to develop and shape their business support ecosystem to accelerate the number of growth-focused businesses. The emerging ambition for the Northern Ireland team is to create more and better IDEs (Innovation Driven Enterprises) and the current focus is on reviewing the enterprise support system to ensure that this can happen and to measure impact.
3.10	Building on the feedback from last year, it is proposed to support the Way to Scale programme for 2023 to support a new cohort of companies participate. The programme will be delivered in partnership with Catalyst Inc. and Invest Northern Ireland. The overall cost of the programme will be £180,000. Given the alignment with the ambitions set out in the enterprise framework, it is recommended that this is supported with Council funding of £40,000 to maximise the take-up by Belfast-based businesses. Invest NI, Catalyst Inc and the participating companies will cover the remainder of the costs.
3.11	<p><u>Update on Shared Prosperity Fund</u></p> <p>In April 2022, the funding prospectus for the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) was released. It confirms that the three investment priorities and associated objectives are:</p> <p>1. Communities and place</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening our social fabric and fostering a sense of local pride and belonging, through investment in activities that enhance physical, cultural and social ties and access to amenities, such as community infrastructure and local green space, and community-led projects • Building resilient, healthy and safe neighbourhoods, through investment in quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in, through targeted improvements to the built and natural environment and innovative approaches to crime prevention. <p>2. Supporting local business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating jobs and boosting community cohesion, through investments that build on existing industries and institutions, and range from support for starting businesses to visible improvements to local retail, hospitality and leisure sector facilities • Promoting networking and collaboration, through interventions that bring together businesses and partners within and across sectors to share knowledge, expertise and resources, and stimulate innovation and growth • Increasing private sector investment in growth-enhancing activities, through targeted support for small and medium-sized businesses to undertake new-to-firm innovation, adopt productivity-enhancing, energy efficient and low carbon technologies and techniques, and start or grow their exports. <p>3. People and skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boosting core skills and supporting adults to progress in work, by targeting adults with no or low-level qualifications and skills in maths, and upskilling the working population, yielding personal and societal economic impact, and by encouraging innovative approaches to reducing adult learning barriers • Reducing levels of economic inactivity through investment in bespoke intensive life and employment support tailored to local need. Investment should facilitate the join-up of mainstream provision and local services within an area for participants, through the use of one-to-one support, improving employment outcomes for specific cohorts who face labour market barriers • Supporting people furthest from the labour market to overcome barriers to work by providing cohesive, locally tailored support including access to skills • Supporting local areas to fund gaps in local skills provision to support people to progress in work, and supplement local adult skills provision.
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3.12	<p>It details a series of 52 “eligible interventions” for Northern Ireland. These include things like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets • Support for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities • Support for active travel enhancements and measures to improve connectivity in the local area • Increasing investment in research and development at the local level • Research and development grants supporting the development of innovative products and services, with a particular focus on low carbon goods and environmental services, and climate resilience • Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems and supporting businesses at all stages of their development to start, sustain, grow and innovate, including through local networks. • Support for growing the local social economy, including community businesses, cooperatives and social enterprises • Supporting economically inactive people to overcome barriers to work by providing cohesive, locally tailored support including access to basic skills • Interventions to increase levels of digital inclusion, with a focus on essential digital skills • Green skills courses targeted around ensuring we have the skilled workforce to achieve the government's net zero and wider environmental ambitions, with a particular focus on vulnerable or low-income groups who will be disproportionately affected by climate change. 	
3.13	<p>The Prospectus confirms that: “The UK Government will take a role in convening partners from across Northern Ireland to develop the UKSPF Investment Plan, considering the investment interventions across the three investment priorities...We will refine the plan in consultation with stakeholders in a way that reflects the needs of Northern Ireland’s economy and society”.</p>	
3.14	<p>The first meeting of the Partnership Group that will have responsibility for shaping the Investment Plan took place in early July. It involved representatives from the VCSE sector, business bodies, tertiary education representatives and local government representatives (two SOLACE representatives have been invited to attend). At this point, there are no representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive Departments but it is expected that these will be in place for future meetings. The group is chaired by Sue Gray from the Cabinet Office. It is expected that the Investment Plan will be shaped over the coming three months</p>	

	<p>and that it will be complete by October 2022. While there is a small core Partnership Group, DLUHC have committed to working with all the representatives on that group to support wider engagement on the plan. This will include political engagement – possibly organised through NILGA – as well as local area engagement involving a range of partners. DLUHC are open to all requests for local engagement and acknowledge the specific concerns of the VCSE sector, given the reliance on ESF funding by many of those organisations.</p>
3.15	<p>The Partnership Group is responsible for agreeing the overall “split” across the three priority areas as well as agreeing the route to market for each of the agreed areas of activity. This might include open calls for projects, small grant schemes or commissioning public bodies to implement specific interventions that they have responsibility for.</p>
3.16	<p>The SPF budget settlement for Northern Ireland will be £127million over the three-year period, starting April 2022 (although no expenditure can be approved until the Investment Plan is finalised). This settlement includes an allocation of around £20million for Multiply – a targeted intervention to improve numeracy skills among key groups. As such, the overall figure available for spend (excluding Multiply) is in the region of £100million over the three years.</p>
3.17	<p>There is an indicative annual budget settlement over the three-year period of the programme and this is set out as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022/23 - £19million • 2023/24 - £33million • 2024/25 - £74million.
3.18	<p>DLUHC have acknowledged that this may not be possible to allocate the £19million this year given the delays in the planning timeframes for this programme so they have committed to exploring whether there may be an opportunity to carry forward any unspent funds from this year into future years of the programme.</p>
3.19	<p>Some of the key areas for concern for Belfast City Council from the proposed approach include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of income to the council for the work on business start-up and growth: at present, Belfast City Council accesses in the region of £500,000 annually through ERDF resources to support its start-up and growth activities – and has done so for the last 20+ years. The ERDF resources had also been used to lever match funding from

	<p>other sources such as Invest NI. The new approach to funding means that none of these resources are guaranteed so there is an immediate loss of income to councils for their work in these areas. The loss of income from ERDF will have a significant impact on the ability of the Enterprise and Business Growth team to deliver their support to new start-ups, social enterprise and co-operatives and growing businesses and to bring forward innovation interventions to support key growth sectors and help new businesses to access and benefit from new investments such as City Deal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on community-based training organisations: at present, funding allocations through ESF average around £25million annually across Northern Ireland – almost £15million of which is allocated to Belfast-based projects alone. Based on the figures above (average £33million per annum) and the breadth of potential activities that are likely to be covered under the three themes of the Investment Plan, it appears likely that there will be a significant reduction in income for those organisations. In terms of the outreach and engagement work that the council relies on to drive participants towards its Employment Academies, this is a concern. However it may also represent something of an opportunity to re-shape interventions and ensure that they are targeted at those in most need of support.
3.20	<p>There may also be some opportunities with the new fund, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader spectrum of areas eligible for support – including activities to support Communities and Place – very much in keeping with council support for local regeneration • Potential to use Labour Market Partnerships to focus the investment in local areas, in line with strategic assessments that can help prioritise areas where spend can deliver maximum effectiveness • Potential to influence the programme design through the local government representatives – making spend more effective in local areas.
3.21	<p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The proposed approach to the Go for It support will be reported back to the Committee at a future date.</p>
3.22	<p>The Way to Scale programme was included as part of the Enterprise and Business Growth budget for 2022/23, as presented to this Committee on 6 April 2022. This budget was included as part of the estimates that were approved by this Committee on 12 January 2022.</p>

3.23	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> <p>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 project.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	None

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Subject:	Improving employability outcomes: focus on young people at risk
Date:	10 August 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Sinéad O'Regan, Employability and Skills Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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☐
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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

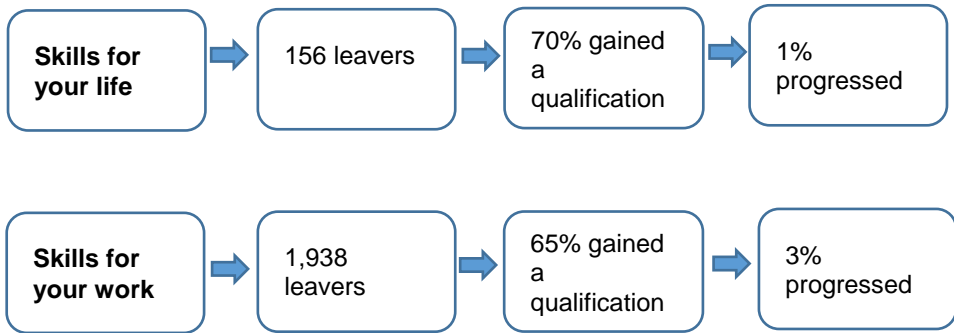
Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update Members on development work undertaken on the Bridges to Progression initiative funded through the Belfast Labour Market Partnership Note the agreed funding based on the outcome of the pre-agreed application process that existing contract holders can make on behalf of young people.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the development work on the Bridges to Progression initiative

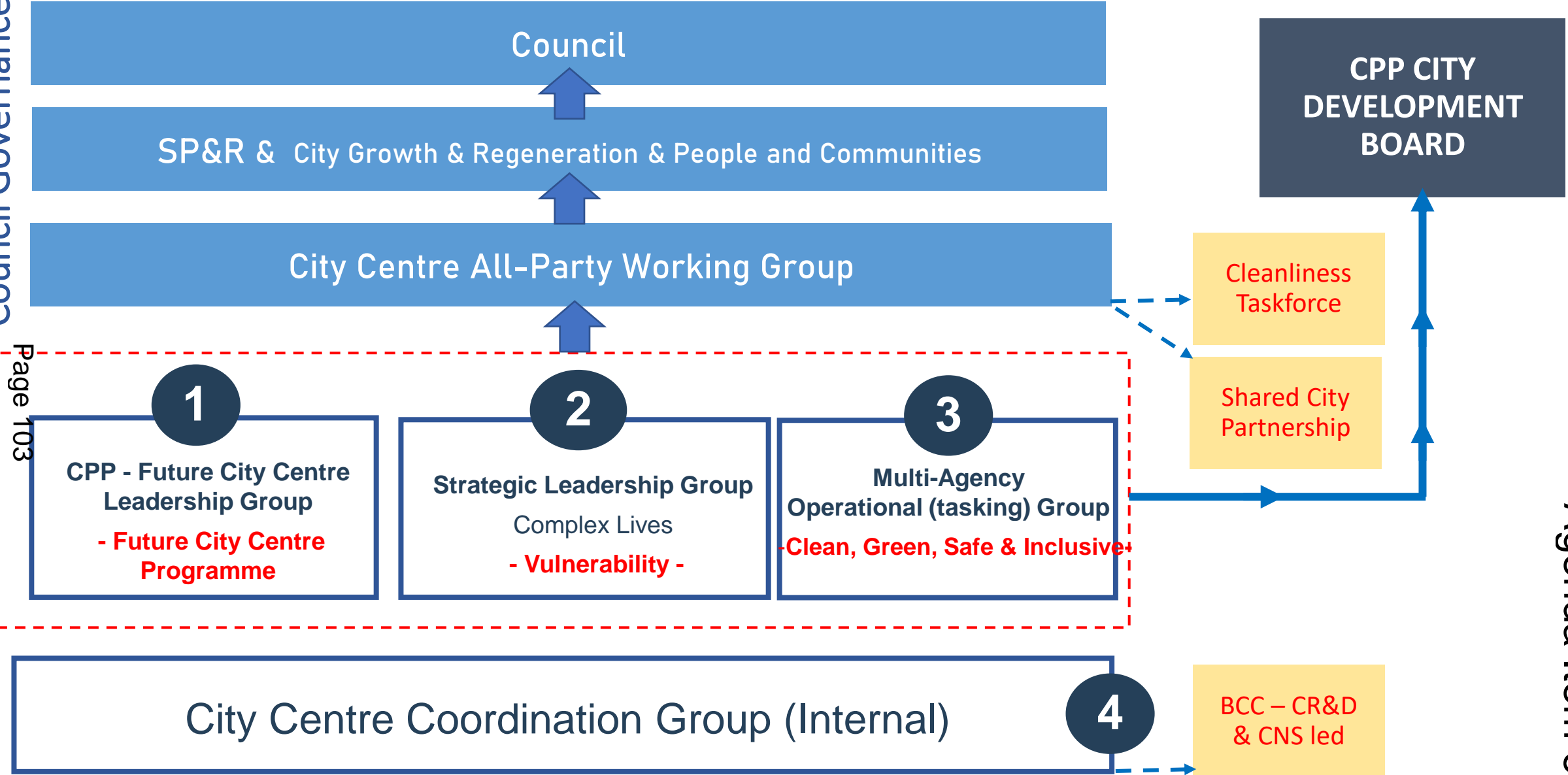
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the proposal to manage the funding distribution in partnership with Skills for Life and Work providers through an agreed application process on behalf of those young people identified.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that the Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) represent a cross-governmental approach to co-designing a sustainable future strategic employment offer. Belfast LMP is focused on four main strategic and cross-cutting themes: Quickly Back to Work; Increasing opportunities; No-one left Behind and Catching-up. Under the theme No-one Left Behind, officers have been exploring the potential for interventions to support the transition of young people in danger of becoming the next cohort of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in the city.</p>
3.2	<p>The genesis of this interventions stemmed from analysis which identified that the positive outcomes for participants engaging in Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work programme (TfS/SfL&W) programmes in Belfast was less than 3% (see below). This meant that less than 1 in 30 of the young people engaging on those interventions was entering a positive destination (employment/further training) at the end of the programme. In order to understand the reasons behind this performance, officers have been engaging with providers across the city and have co-designed a bridging intervention that aims to increase the positive outcomes for young people.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Funding and Outcomes of Training for Success, DfE, December 2020</p>  <pre> graph LR A[Skills for your life] --> B[156 leavers] B --> C[70% gained a qualification] C --> D[1% progressed] E[Skills for your work] --> F[1,938 leavers] F --> G[65% gained a qualification] G --> H[3% progressed] </pre> <p>The flowchart displays two parallel processes. The top process, 'Skills for your life', starts with 156 leavers, of whom 70% gained a qualification, and 1% progressed. The bottom process, 'Skills for your work', starts with 1,938 leavers, of whom 65% gained a qualification, and 3% progressed.</p>
3.3	<p>Skills for Life and Work is a training programme for young people who want to develop their skills and get ready for work. The programme is aimed at 16-17 year olds who have left school (extended up to 22 years for those with disability and 24 years for those who qualify under the</p>

	Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) (2002)). As of January 2022, 1178 young people had signed up to Skills for Life and Work regionally with almost half (44%) within the Belfast area. Engagements rates consistently show a disproportionately higher level of participants coming from North and West Belfast which together account for 70% of all Belfast participants.
3.4	One of the key findings of our engagement was that, while the positive outcome rate for those who complete the programme is relatively high, there is a high drop-out rate within Skills for Life and Work and this accounts for the poor performance in the overall outcomes. Having identified this challenge, Bridges to Progression has been developed to work alongside the existing provision by providing extra support for those participants at risk of early exit from the programme in order to retain their engagement and enhance their prospects of a positive outcome.
3.5	The consultation with all Skills for Life and Work providers in the city identified that the young people on the programme are those already furthest removed from labour market and experiencing multiple barriers such as addiction, homelessness, familial problems and young parenthood. These are significant contributory factors to the high attrition levels. Our engagement work also identified the fact that these young people have been disproportionately negatively impacted during Covid-19 pandemic and are now exposed to the cost of living crisis which is placing additional pressures day to day pressures on them and potentially impacting their ability to positively engage in these and other employability interventions.
3.6	Having explored a range of potential approaches, it is proposed that an allocation of up to £90,000 from the Labour Market Partnership budget will be ringfenced for Belfast-based Skills for Life and Work providers. Officers will work with providers to identify those young people at highest risk of falling out of provision and will use the resources to provide the support that they need to encourage retention. This pilot programme will target at least 120 young people at risk, supporting them through at least 10 hours contact time. In addition, officers will explore how we can enhance the exposure of young people to the world of work by engaging with employers to provide access to work tasters and new entry pathways, in line with the areas of interest of those young people engaging in the programme.
3.7	<p>The Skills for Life and Work providers that this support will specifically work with are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academy Hair & Beauty Training School • Belfast Metropolitan College • Belfast Central Training

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bryson FutureSkills • Dairyfarm/People 1st • Impact Training • Rutledge Training • Springboard Opportunities • Springvale Training
3.8	<p>Given the complexity of participants' needs, flexibility is key to be able to provide an authentic person-centred approach. So, while the average cost is £750 per person given the level of resources available and the KPIs expected, in-built agility to pivot towards the needs of each young person may mean that more resources are required for one person and less for another. Activity can range from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health support and counselling • One-to-one coaching • Housing support and advice • Team building • Self-esteem and confidence building • Childcare and parenting support • Travel • Breakfast and lunch clubs • Additional or flexible training approaches and learning support • Essential skills or ESOL • Addiction services – gambling, alcohol, drug use etc.
3.9	<p>This is not an exhaustive list and actual activity and interventions will be agreed using a person-centred approach. Officers will manage this in partnership with Skills for Life and Work providers through an agreed application process on behalf of those young people identified. To ensure added value, Bridges to Progression funds will not be used for any delivery expected within the Skills for Life and Work contract that providers hold with DfE. Additionally, providers will only access Bridges to Progression funds for activities that cannot be sourced otherwise.</p>
3.10	<p>Subject to council endorsement, officers will undertake assessment of the applications for funding in line with the approach detailed in this report. A report will be presented at a future meeting of this committee outlining the outcomes and learning from this approach.</p>

3.11	<u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u> The Department for Communities will undertake equality screening of LMP interventions.
3.12	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> It is proposed that a total of £90,000 funded through Labour Market Partnership is allocated to Bridges to Progression.
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	None

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1

CPP -Future City Centre
Leadership Group

- Future City Centre
Programme



- **Core Focus:** Future City Centre Programme (regeneration & development | connectivity | innovation & digital | vibrancy | business & investment | CGIS)
- **Co-Chaired** by Cathy Reynolds and Simon Hamilton
- **Linkages:** City Development Board and Community Planning Partners

2

Strategic Leadership Group

Complex Lives

- Vulnerability -



- **Core Focus:** Vulnerability & Homelessness
- **BCC Lead(s):** Chief Executive (John Tully, David Sales)
- **Strategic Leadership Group** - Multi-Agency (CEO level), chaired by BCC CX)
- **Linkages:** Complex Lives | City Centre Tasking | Multi-Agency Support Hub

3

Multi-Agency
Operational (tasking) Group

-Clean, Green, Safe &
Inclusive



- **Core Focus:** Clean, Green, Safe and Inclusive Action Plan (CGIS)
- **BCC Lead(s):** Chief Executive (David Sales)
- **Multi-Agency** including Central Gov agencies & business community
- **Linkages:** Cleanliness Task Force | DFC | DFI | BIDs | Chamber | City Development Board

4

City Centre
Coordination Group

- Internal-



- **Core Focus:** Internal coordination & alignment | City Centre Members Group
- **Co-Chaired** by Cathy Reynolds and David Sales
- **Linkages:** Vulnerability | CGIS & Multi-Agency Tasking | Future City Centre



Subject:	Invest NI review – call for evidence
Date:	10 August 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update Members on the review of Invest NI that is currently underway, chaired by Sir Michael Lyons Set out details of proposed input to the review on behalf of Belfast City Council.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the ongoing review of Invest NI, including the scope and timelines Note and agree the proposed response from Belfast City Council, attached as Appendix 1

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the likelihood of further engagement between the Review Team and the Council as the review progresses and in advance of its October 2022 publication.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Independent Review of Invest NI was announced by the Minister for the Economy, Gordon Lyons, on 26th January 2022. The objective of the Independent Review is “To provide an independent assessment of Invest NI’s efficiency and effectiveness and, looking forward, its capacity to strategically align with and operationally deliver the 10X Economic Vision”.</p>
3.2	<p>The Review Panel is chaired by Sir Michael Lyons. He is joined by Dame Rotha Johnston and Maureen O’Reilly, an independent economist. Members will recall that Sir Michael Lyons previously chaired the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission which produced its “Reset for Growth” report in June 2021. He will re-engage with Commission members for a year one review session in September 2022.</p>
3.3	<p>Sir Michael has significant experience across the public sector, including local government. In 2007, he undertook an extensive inquiry into the functions and funding of local government: “Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government”. He is currently Chair of the English Cities Fund.</p>
3.4	<p>The Panel has been taking views from a range of key stakeholders since its establishment, meeting with more than 280 stakeholders through 70 engagement sessions. They have also undertaken a public consultation on the review. The current timetable for completion of the report is October 2022.</p>
3.5	<p>As part of their engagement work, the Panel met with Party Group Leaders in early July 2022. They had an extensive discussion on a number of key areas, principally focusing on the efficiency and effectiveness of Invest NI in its role as the main economic development agency in NI and also looking at whether Invest NI was appropriately and adequately resourced and structured to support the delivery of the 10X strategy.</p>
3.6	<p>In addition to the engagement with members, the Review Panel has confirmed that it would be keen to receive further written responses from key partners. Given the importance of the working relationship with Invest NI and the need to ensure that the organisation is structured in a way that can support the future economic growth of the city, it is proposed that the</p>

	<p>response set out in Appendix 1 is submitted to the Review Panel, reflecting the Council's views on key areas of opportunity and challenge. It covers a number of key points, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to consider current budget alignment – supportive of focus on FDI but need to enhance support for entrepreneurship and innovation in support of 10x ambitions • Commitment to building a stronger collaborative engagement between councils and Invest NI in order to enhance the referral process for businesses seeking to access support across both organisations • Need to enhance commitments around sustainable and inclusive growth – and ensure that these are reflected in overall budget allocations as well as in ways of working – using influence to encourage positive behaviours among client businesses • Need to explore place-based approaches to investment – good examples of how this works in other locations • Concerns at impact of recent budget cuts and apparently arbitrary approach to how these have been implemented – specific areas of concern around support for accelerator and proof of concept support that will have a detrimental impact on local businesses.
3.7	<p>Belfast City Council has a strong working relationship with Invest NI. This is focused on a number of areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration on FDI and positioning: we work closely with Invest NI on key target markets and showcase the city as an investment location to prospective investors. The Council takes the lead (with other public and private sector partners) on the physical infrastructure investments to support FDI • Supporting the indigenous businesses: the council has developed a good referral process with Invest NI. This means that companies progressing from our start-up and early-stage growth support can move into a more formal relationship with Invest NI as a client business, thereby accessing a suite of support to help in their future growth. We also work collaboratively with Invest NI and other partners (e.g. Catalyst) on joint initiatives such as Way to Scale – our targeted scaling intervention for companies that have significant growth potential • Reframing start-up and growth support: one of the key areas of work at present for the council is our plan to significantly rescope the support for business starts. The ambition is to increase the overall number of start-ups as well as increasing the number of growth-focused, job-creating companies, including those that have the potential to scale. Invest NI has traditionally match-funded this activity (alongside council and ERDF resources). Our collective view is that this support needs to be revamped, with

	<p>better outreach and engagement for potential entrepreneurs, moving towards a strong support offering that is commensurate with the potential of the business to grow and create jobs. Both Invest NI and the Department for Economy (DfE) have worked closely with the councils to date and consider that this new approach aligns with the 10x ambition and is in keeping with their wider plan to overhaul the support system for local businesses, based on the REAP (Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Programme) model that has been developed at MIT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Deal development: Invest NI is DfE's lead agency on the City and Growth Deals. They have established a team to support the progress of the business cases for key investment projects.
3.8	<p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Impact Assessment</u></p> <p>No specific equality or good relations implications/negative rural impact.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>No specific financial and resource implications associated with this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix 1 - Response to Invest NI Review

Appendix 1 – Response to Invest NI Review

Draft response

Belfast City Council is delighted to have been engaged in the consultation process to inform the Invest NI review. This has provided us with an opportunity to discuss key areas relating to the efficiency and effectiveness of Invest NI in its role and also to consider if Invest NI is appropriately and adequately resourced and structured to support the delivery of the 10X Economy. Following internal discussions relating to these matters we wish to highlight a number of key areas for opportunity and challenge through the review.

While ongoing engagement with Invest NI and Belfast City Council has been positive, the current approach to engagement is largely transactional, there is limited sense of a shared view of priorities and an associated allocation of resources to bring this forward. There is also a need for greater role clarity, there is an opportunity to use this review to reframe the roles and responsibilities across the economic development support system, in order to ensure clarity both for businesses and for delivery partners. This should also include a focus on common goals and objectives related to supporting inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Through the review there is an opportunity to reflect on how Invest NI intend to support the “inclusive growth” ambitions set out in Programme for Government and emerging 10X. There is a need for Invest NI to enhance commitments around sustainable and inclusive growth and ensure that these are reflected in overall budget allocations as well as in ways of working. There are also opportunities for Invest NI to use their role to encourage positive behaviours among client businesses.

This also presents an opportunity for Invest NI to review the need to explore place-based approaches to investment. While Invest NI has local contacts, there is no clear approach to shared planning on a local level. With falling levels of government finance, we believe a concerted effort is required to move to a new partnership between central and local government to design and resource an economic recovery plan which prioritises investment in critical local/regional infrastructure such as water, waste, roads, telecoms, skills and innovation. This investment in physical infrastructure must sit alongside the development of an ambitious and outward looking industrial strategy, offering incentives for firms to innovate and invest in new technology, facilitating supply chain collaboration, stimulating local demand,

focusing on high value sectors and incentivising employees and employers to reskill and upskill. Together, these measures have the capacity to shape the long-term resilience of Northern Ireland's firms and our regional economy.

The current budget alignment should be a key consideration through the review process. In recent years FDI investment has been a key part of jobs growth and investment, and while we are supportive of Invest NI's focus on FDI we would suggest that there is a need to review the balance and potentially enhance the level of resource and support for entrepreneurship and innovation aligned with the ambitions of 10X Economy. Consideration should also be given to the level of resource to support activity to drive export sales, the levels of businesses exporting in Belfast is relatively low and the current volume of activity is significantly lower than other regions.

In relation to budgets, we would also wish to take this opportunity to raise our concerns relating to the impact of recent budget cuts and the apparent arbitrary approach to how these have been implemented. Our specific areas of concern around support for accelerator and proof of concept support that will have a detrimental impact on local businesses, and it is unclear that 10x has been a consideration in this decision making, therefore through the review there are opportunities to better align the organisational structure to the 10X ambitions.

In more recent times councils have been progressing work to significantly rescope support for business start-ups. Our ambition is to increase the overall number of start-ups as well as increasing the number of growth-focused, job-creating companies, including those that have the potential to scale. Invest NI has traditionally match-funded this activity (alongside council and ERDF resources). Our collective view is that this support needs to be revamped, with better outreach and engagement for potential entrepreneurs, moving towards a strong support offering that is commensurate with the potential of the business to grow and create jobs. Both Invest NI and the Department for Economy (DfE) have worked closely with the councils to date and consider that this new approach aligns with the 10X ambition and is in keeping with their wider plan to overhaul the support system for local businesses, based on the Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Programme model that has been developed at MIT.

Belfast City Council would like to use this opportunity to highlight the need for Invest NI to commit to working in partnership with councils to overhaul current delivery models to enable the development of an ecosystem which creates an environment in which innovative local start-ups can flourish. We would also request that Invest NI through the review maintain their commitment to match-funding shared priority investments and support ongoing discussions

with DfE to revisit the funding settlement for councils in the delivery of local economic development activity. Invest NI's role in relation to this programme of work should be a key consideration through this review.

We welcome the opportunity to provide an official response to the review and in doing so wish to highlight the strong working relationship Belfast City Council has with Invest NI and the ongoing willingness to work together to support future delivery across a range of areas including:

- Collaborating on FDI and city positioning in key target markets to showcase the city as an investment location to prospective investors
- Providing support for indigenous businesses through ongoing referrals to enable new businesses to progress through supports and delivering joint initiatives such as Way to Scale in partnership with Invest NI and Catalyst
- Reframing start-up and growth support to develop a new approach which aligns with the 10X ambition and is in keeping with wider plans to overhaul the support system for local businesses
- Ongoing work to develop the City and Growth deals through the provision of support to progress of the business cases for key investment projects.

Belfast City Council is keen to continue to work with Invest NI to build on the strength of our ongoing relationship to deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth across the City and wider region.

Should you wish to pick up on any of the issues identified within this response, please do not hesitate to get in contact.

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