

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 10th June, 2015

MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hargey (Chairperson);
Aldermen Kingston and McGimpsey; and
Councillors Attwood, Beattie, Craig, Dudgeon,
Graham, Hanna, Howard, Kyle, Magee, Magennis,
McAteer, McDonough-Brown, Newton,
Ó Donnghaile and O'Hara.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;
Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mrs. S. Toland, Lead Operations Officer/
Head of Environmental Health; and
Miss L. Francey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were recorded.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th May were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st June.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Presentations

Translink & Transport NI

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 22nd April, it had been suggested that a presentation from representatives of Transport NI should be delivered to a meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in order that they could deliver their Spring Report. At that meeting, it was agreed that an invitation be extended also to representatives of Translink which would enable Members to consider a range of strategic transport-related issues which were relevant to the City. It was reported that Mr. T. Reid, Director for Policy, Strategy and Legislation Division (DRD), Mr. K. Monaghan, Eastern Divisional Manager at Transport NI, Mr. B. O'Neill, Belfast North Section Engineer, Mr. G. McKibbin, Belfast South Section Engineer, and Mr. B. Gilpin, Head of Operational Support & Planning at Translink, were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairperson.

Mr. Reid explained the need for significant investment in Northern Ireland's public transport system and the key role that Belfast played as the key economic driver for the region. He outlined the progress which had been made with Belfast Rapid Transit, the Great Victoria Street Transit Hub and outlined the proposed changes to the York Street Interchange.

Mr. K. Monaghan outlined the principal aspects of Transport NI's Programme of Works for the forthcoming year. He advised the Committee that, while funding had not yet been established for the Knock Road (A55) widening scheme, it was in a procurement-ready position should funding become available. He also stated that road improvements to the south section of the Belfast City Centre Ring, between Sandy Row and Cromac Street, would be significantly smaller in scale compared to what had originally been proposed and that these would proceed only if additional funding was identified. He highlighted the vastly reduced budget that the Department was working within with regards to routine maintenance costs which had resulted in a skeleton service of repairing road defects, clearing gullies and cutting grass verges and trees to maintain visibility. The Chief Executive informed Members that officers would be meeting with officials from the Department for Regional Development to discuss routine maintenance, such as grass cutting across the City, the following week.

Mr. B. Gilpin provided the Committee with an overview of Translink's plans to integrate and modernise ticketing systems across its services, the expansion of park and ride facilities across the City, continuous frequency enhancements to core routes, the importance of the Goldline coach network which brought people into Belfast, the progress of the Belfast Rapid Transit preparation throughout the East and West of the City and the anticipated increase in footfall from the Ulster University's relocation from Jordanstown.

The Members drew the attention of the officers from Transport NI and Translink to several matters, a number of which are set out hereunder:

- what arrangements were in place for rapid response when vehicles broke down on the Westlink causing the traffic to come to a standstill;
- the progress on a number of residential parking schemes across the city;
- whether the proposed bridge for the York Street Interchange could be a few metres lower, as the current proposals placed the road in front of a number of houses;
- the low level of grass cutting and gully clearing which had been taking place due to budget cuts;
- the Cycling Strategy;
- the Belfast Plan;
- the recent removal of security and closure of the terminal at the Dundonald Park and Ride site;
- whether Translink had encouraged those commuters from Bangor/Holywood to use the train while NI Water was carrying out long-term work in Mersey Street;

- whether the Boyne Bridge could be considered for removal from the plans for the new Transport Hub in Great Victoria Street;
- how the west Belfast Black Taxis would be incorporated into the Belfast Rapid Transit plan; and
- whether a number of alleyways could be adopted by Transport NI.

The officials from Transport NI answered a number of the queries and undertook to advise the Council of its response in relation to those matters which required further examination. The Chairperson thanked the officials from Transport NI and Translink for attending and they left the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Lagan Canal Trust

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 22nd April, it had agreed to defer consideration of an increased request for funding from the Lagan Canal Trust in order to invite a representative from the Trust to make a presentation to the Committee. The Director of Development reminded the Committee that, since the change of the Council's boundary on 1st April, the percentage of the Lagan Canal within Belfast had risen from 18% to 22%. He added that the Trust was seeking a contribution from Belfast City Council of £37,963.20, £42,281.80 and £42,563.84 over the next three financial years. It was pointed out that, in 2014/2015, the former Council had contributed a sum of £17,341 to the Trust, which had been based on the fact that 18% of the canal lay within the then Council boundary. The Committee was advised that the Chief Officer of the Lagan Canal Trust, Ms. B. Turnbull, was in attendance and she was admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairperson.

Ms. Turnbull outlined the work which had been undertaken by the Trust to date and explained that the Trust wished to reopen all twenty-seven locks along the River Lagan and that four of those lay within the Belfast boundary. She explained that the Trust had applied for £1.8m of funding through the EU LIFE programme on Climate Change Adaptation in December 2014 and that that application had now been progressed to the next stage which was due in July 2016.

She explained the difficulties which the Trust had faced as a result of recent government budget cuts, despite having reduced their staffing costs to just one officer and one administrative post. She explained that, in order to attract more funding to fulfil the Trust's objectives, they needed to have staff who could dedicate their time to applying for funding through various streams and programmes.

In response to several Members questions as to why the amount requested from the Council had more than doubled for each of the next three years, Ms. Turnbull stated that since the boundary changes on 1st April, an increased section of the River Lagan now fell within the Belfast area. She explained the amount the Trust had requested from all four contributing councils had increased significantly due to the fact that the Trust had been operating on a predicted budget for 2009 for the past 5 years and that, despite letting 3 staff Members go, remaining staffing costs were increasing by 1% each year. She explained that the funding the Trust had received from DCAL had also been

decreased by 11% this year and Ms. Turnbull reiterated that, in order to draw down more funding for the project, hiring additional staff to apply for various streams of funding was now essential. The Committee thanked Ms. Turnbull for attending and she left the meeting.

The Chief Executive pointed out to the Members that, as the Departmental budgets had already been agreed, if the Committee agreed to accede to the increased funding request from the Trust that this would impact upon other agreed expenditure and that this decision would then have to be referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 19th June.

After discussion, the Committee agreed, subject to the Lagan Canal Trust providing a more detailed breakdown of their business plan, to accede to the request from the Trust and thereby provide funding of £37,963.20 in 2015, £42,281.80 in 2016 and £42,563.84 in 2017 (a total of £122,808.84 over the three year period) subject to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approving the additional expenditure as it had not been included in the budget.

Belfast Agenda

Committee Workshop - Agenda

The Chief Executive outlined plans to hold a workshop for all Members of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee. She stated that discussions would be based on the recent conversations around the development of the Belfast Agenda and would seek Members' views on the priorities regarding the long term vision and outcomes for the Committee. Specifically, it was proposed that the workshop would follow the following format:

1. Clearly define the role of the City Growth & Regeneration Committee in supporting the delivery of the Belfast Agenda. This would include raising awareness and understanding the population outcomes contained in the emerging Belfast Agenda and how the Committee could influence those given the resources available under their remit;
2. Undertake an exercise to draft priority actions which would form part of the 4 year priority action plan, as part of the Belfast Agenda;
3. Identify key partner organisations that would be needed to tackle multi-agency issues; and
4. Further define the working relationship with the Area Working Groups, working towards an outcomes based approach to understand causes, priorities and action at a local level.

The Committee agreed to hold a planning workshop in the City Hall during the month of August for the development of a committee work plan as described above.

Employability & Skills Strategy - Implementation

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on progress on the draft employability and skills framework and to advise on proposed next steps.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the update on the employability and skills framework, including the proposed next steps which will be presented to SP&R on 19 June
- Note and agree the action plans (to be developed) and the proposed monitoring and reporting arrangements through the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

3.0 Key Issues

3.1 Members will be aware that the council has been working with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) to develop a framework for action on employability and skills issues. A draft framework has now been developed and it identifies a number of areas of focus, and suggests a number of headline targets based on skills attainment and employment rate increases, in order to focus action and measure impact of agreed initiatives.

3.2 The draft framework was presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 22 May 2015. Members asked that the report be deferred for consideration at the 19 June meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. This was principally to allow them to receive more information on requests for match funding for European Social Fund (ESF) which had been included in the same report. This will be presented separately to SP&R Committee.

3.3 The framework suggests that, in order to ensure that all activities are focused on building skills levels and generating greater alignment between skills demand and supply, a series of targets should be established. Suggested targets are:

- To increase the employment rate in the city to at least 72% by 2025 (current rate is 67.6%). This will mean

moving an estimated 17,500 Belfast residents into work over 10 years – 1,750 per year

- To reduce the proportion of the working age population with no qualifications from the 2012 baseline of 23% to between 9% and 12% by 2025. This means reducing the number of people with no formal qualifications by around 22,000
- To increase the proportion of the working age population with level two qualifications and above from the 2012 baseline of 64% to between 76% and 79% by 2025. This would mean providing 40,000 additional people with qualifications at level 2 or above
- To increase the proportion of the working age population with level 4 qualifications and above from the 2012 baseline of 28% to between 37% and 39% by 2025. This would mean up to 30,000 additional people with level 4 qualifications and above.

3.4 The next stage in the process is to consider how this framework can be moved towards implementation, in conjunction with a number of key partners. While Belfast City Council has ambitions and a significant political commitment to address this issue, it has very limited resources at this point in time. It is therefore critical that members give careful consideration to how our resources are used most effectively to deliver on the ambitious targets and to encourage partners to commit to collaboration in the long-term. Partners have suggested that they see the council as playing a pivotal role in both the coordination of governance and in the coordination of delivery. To do this will require the commitment of dedicated resources to broker these partnerships and to convene parties around the key challenges.

3.5 As part of the formal process of securing buy-in to the framework and ensuring that it is focused on the relevant priorities to make a difference in this complex environment, it is proposed that a 12 week public consultation exercise is undertaken. In that period, officers will continue to engage with partners in order to maintain some momentum in the process. There are also opportunities to host a number of focused engagement events with a range of partners, such as the Belfast Strategic Partnership to raise awareness of the proposals and to ensure buy-in to the process.

3.6 The draft framework is to be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19 June 2015. Subject to their endorsement and council ratification, the public consultation exercise will commence in July 2015. A report on the

outcomes of the consultation exercise and the proposed actions will be presented to the October meeting of the SP&R Committee, and to the City Growth Committee for information.

3.7 Once the broad framework is agreed, it is proposed that the action plans and progress against targets will be reported back through the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and that this Committee will be responsible for endorsing future programmes of work.

3.8 **Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no defined financial allocations within the draft framework – these will be developed as part of the action planning process. Resources will have to be secured from partner agencies, as well as looking at council resources required for the delivery of priority activities.

3.9 **Equality or Good Relations Implications**

The framework is to be equality screened.”

During discussion, it was agreed that the Director of Development would incorporate a Member’s comments on community planning into the final document before it went out for consultation and that he would circulate the full ESS report to the Members of the Committee.

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

City Centre Regeneration Strategy - Framework for Car Parking

The Committee considered the undernoted report and appendix:

“1.0 **Summary of main Issues**

1.1 At their meeting in May, Committee agreed to the commissioning of a framework and action plan aimed at improving traffic flows into and around the city, and city centre car parking within the context of the emerging City Centre Regeneration Strategy and Investment Plan. It was also agreed that the scope of this work would be circulated to the Committee.

2.0 **Recommendations**

2.1 To note the scope of work for the development of the city centre car parking framework and action plan as set out in Appendix 1.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

3.2 Post LGR, Council now operates 30 off-street car parks with approximately 2,200 car parking spaces previously operated by the DRD. 15 of these car parks are within the city centre, which equates to approximately 1,300 car parking spaces mainly around the inner ring road. It is estimated that the Council now operates around 11% of the off street car parking spaces in the City Centre or around 6.5% of all city centre parking that is available (on and off-street, private and public).

3.3 It has been estimated that more than 100,000 people commute into the city each day and approximately 50% of them use private cars or vans, and so require parking facilities. There has been little change in this pattern between the 2001 and 2011 census. There is a perception that city centre parking is expensive and limited. The situation is not helped by the variety of parking operators, different charges between sites and a lack of real time parking information on inner city parking facilities. This means that often parking is confusing, that occupancy of the total available spaces is relatively low but that parking spaces can be hard to find, leading to significant volumes of traffic flow as vehicles search between car parks for spaces.

3.4 The main factors that the city car parking framework needs to consider are:

- The Economy – This further divides into the needs of shoppers, traders, and commuters. Shoppers and traders are both keen that it is as simple as possible to get from the car to the shops. Commuters are more concerned with the price of parking though it still needs to be within walking distance of their work. In simple terms, well designed parking is perceived as favourable for the economy. However the balance between making the city more accessible to those that are going to spend money in the city centre and contribute to the city and increasing the level of general traffic needs careful consideration.**
- The Environment – high levels of slow moving traffic are associated with undesirable environmental effects such as noise and air pollution and an unpleasant environment for people, particularly the inner city communities but also those visiting the city. Parking needs to be designed to reduce congestion and**

minimise unnecessary traffic flow such as that caused by having to search for parking.

- Financial – There are costs and incomes associated with running car parks. The Council has an additional asset in the form of car parks but will need to determine the best use for these spaces and if its car parks are to be profitable, cost neutral, or subsidised to support other city objectives.
- Regeneration – the role of car parking and car park assets to support regeneration and the economic vitality of Belfast. The location and nature of car parks may not necessarily be aligned to demand or in the optimum location in terms of recent or proposed development(s) Future land use planning and the delivery of major regeneration schemes will therefore need to be considered in this context. Redevelopment proposals may also mean consideration of alternative use options for existing car parks in order that the regenerative impacts of particular development schemes are maximised, whilst ensuring alternative provision that best meets demand. In addition, any new regeneration schemes will need to be considered in the context of the demand and supply of car parking or alternative transport options in order to best support development proposals.

3.5 It should be noted that several studies/projects have already been completed on the current situation and various metrics are available. The development of a framework for city car parking will take account of the existing evidence base and where practicable, this information will be made available to the successful consultant. However, there are gaps in the availability/accessibility of information; for example, the Council currently lacks data about the usage patterns of the car parks that have transferred. Unless DRD are able to provide reports on usage patterns, the Council will need to gain experience in current usage before it can predict the impact of any changes. Engagement with key stakeholders is therefore critical throughout this study.

3.6 The work in all stages would need to be developed with input from key stakeholders such as the Department for Regional Development (DRD); Translink NI (Metro, NI Railways, and Ulsterbus); private operators and parking providers; local businesses; enforcement agencies and the public. Given the regional significance of the city and the need to ensure that the city's infrastructure delivers as the main gateway for the region, Tourism NI and airport/port operators should also be key stakeholders. As Council is estimated to have

responsibility for only 6.5% of the city's car parking it is likely that the car parking framework will include recommendations that may need to be driven forward at the level of the NI Assembly. However, this should not constrain the recommendations being proposed especially if they will encourage people into the city and support local businesses and the development of the city.

- 3.7 During development of the framework, work will continue to ensure the smooth delivery of the Council's new off street car parking function including the development of options for the future of the enforcement contract with DRD/NSL. Work will also continue to identify any quick wins with regard to the use of the Council's car parks.
- 3.8 During the discussion at the previous meeting, Members raised wider issues including arterial route parking and residents parking schemes. These issues will be considered as part of a separate workstream.
- 3.9 **Financial & Resource Implications**
The cost of developing a parking framework and action plan is likely to be in the region of £50k and will be met from existing budgets.

Equality or Good Relations Implications

Equality and good relations issues will be considered in the development of the framework and improvement plan. It is noted that the Shadow Council had previously passed a motion in relation to child and family friendly car parking provision which will be considered in the development of the framework. The Council's Consultative Forum has also been approached and suggestions have been made with regard to mobility considerations."

Appendix 1

Scope of work to develop a city centre car parking framework

Short term

Car parks hand over

- Ensure the smooth hand over of the existing infrastructure and contract commitments.
- Develop options for the future delivery of enforcement to replace/continue the DRD/NSL contract.
- Draft policies, procedures and guidance where necessary.

Quick wins

- Produce a parking guide for the city to promote what is available and dispel persistent myths.
- Identify and implement options for Family Friendly (pushchair) use and in response to the results of an equality screening.
- Consider extending free parking days to align with Council's major events.
- Consider incentives to encourage people to use car parks rather than neighbourhood streets.

Data gathering

- Produce a detailed report of the location, capacity and usage of car parking; the current and potential income from the Council's car parks; and their proximity to alternative car parking or different means of travel. This will consider traffic flows (at different times of the day) and look at car and other forms of transport as well as assets. It will also consider the impact of upcoming major developments such as the Rapid Transit System, Transport Hub and the Royal Exchange redevelopments.

Medium term

Council car parks

- Develop a policy for the council car parks. This will consider issues such as: Parking prices; encouraging alternatives; DRD lease and buy back of car parking; use by third parties; etc.
- Develop options for live information about parking availability available via apps and/or better signage etc to better manage traffic flows around the city.

City wide parking

- Establish a partnership with other city centre parking stakeholders. As a minimum, private car park operators, DRD/Road Services, the business community and people with mobility considerations.
- Review overall parking supply and demand within the city with a view to reducing long stay parking availability while supporting alternative options such as public transport.
- Consider options such as 'tidal parking', e.g. opening up unused private car parks for weekday parking, etc.
- Consult with various government departments on their requirements for leased spaces within the city centre.

Long term

(As per the City Centre Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan)

- Review the existing evidence base in the city to inform the framework and action plan. This will include identification of key stakeholders, existing transport & accessibility strategies and a review of current provision alongside any recent or planned interventions within the city. This will then inform decisions round
 - Whether we should aim to reduce the number of fragmented, open air car parks and relocate appropriate capacity into multi-storey facilities arranged around the Inner Ring Road.
 - Reduce congestion by a number of options eg directing drivers from the main approaches to available spaces by comprehensive real-time parking information, better uptake of park and ride etc

The approach to be used

In developing the detail of these stages, it is expected that the following approaches will be used:

- Engaging with key stakeholders and clearly identifying their concerns/issues and suggestions for solutions. In particular concerns over:
 - accessibility and mobility;
 - traffic flow and congestion (both in terms of typical congestion levels and travel time variability);
 - the availability of parking (short and long term) including issues of pricing;
 - potential implications for the different economic sectors within the city; and
 - exploration of the potential environmental and social/residential impacts.
- Categorising potential action into those:
 - that are within the remit of the Council to pursue.
 - that key partners can implement utilising existing legislative and statutory frameworks.
 - that can only be addressed in the longer term with changes to these statutory frameworks, or with significant investment, or via policy shifts such as opportunities to further integrate land use and transit through a shared plan or strategy.

- **Thorough research to identify options and determine the longer term implications for implementing action in terms of:**
 - Improving traffic flow, or better demand management (peak travel periods) to deliver predictable travel times, and reduce congestion on main roads.
 - Parking management and parking supply, allocation and pricing. Re-designating areas for parking.
 - Introducing Access Management (restrict vehicle access to certain zones), linked to a set of complementary measures such as those above.
 - Mobility Management and alternative transport arrangements such as Active Travel.
 - Modify the existing infrastructure.
 - Introducing new infrastructure.
- **Identification of the key policy levers to aid the introduction of ideas such as those listed above.**
- **Ensuring that the recommendations made are developed within the strategic context of city-wide regeneration and development plans. This includes the Belfast City centre Regeneration Strategy & Investment Plan, the various travel plans (e.g. Belfast Metropolitan Travel Plan, BCC Transport Policy etc), the Tourism Strategy, the Investment Programme, etc.”**

In response to a Member’s question, the Director of Development advised that the timescale for completing the framework would be approximately eight months, with two months for the procurement process and six months for the consultation work to be completed.

The Committee:

1. noted the scope of work for the development of the city centre car parking framework and action plan; and
2. agreed that the Lead Operations Officer/Head of Environmental Health incorporate into the scope some additional comments on the local communities which bordered the City Centre car parks which were largely used by commuters.

Tourism & Events

Integrated Tourism Strategy

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Summary of main issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the status of the Belfast Integrated Tourism Strategy (2015-20) and to present the agreed year 1 action plan in line with strategy priorities for Members’ information.
- 1.2 The strategy and associated year one action plan were approved at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the 22nd May 2015. Progress against the strategy and action plan will be presented to and considered by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee throughout the duration of the strategy.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- Note the strategy outline and priority actions for year one
 - Note and agree the proposed monitoring and reporting arrangements through the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

3.0 Key Issues

- 3.1 The Integrated Tourism Strategy was approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in May 2015 following a 12 week consultation process.
- 3.2 The strategy was developed in tandem with the City Centre Regeneration Strategy and Investment Plan and the proposals are aligned to support the future economic growth of the city. The key driver is the commitment to double the value of tourism by 2020 to a total of £870million annually.
- 3.3 In order to plan delivery of the priority activities identified in the strategy, there has been some preliminary development work undertaken by officers from Belfast City Council, in conjunction with partners from Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and Visit Belfast. A summary of the Tourism Strategy and Year One Action have been circulated for Members’ information. Some of the activities in which the Council will play a lead role include:
- Developing the City Narrative and Place Positioning Strategy
 - Working with Visit Belfast and Tourism NI to develop a new city visitor pass for 2016/17

- Development of conference subvention scheme with Visit Belfast and Tourism NI to support the development of business tourism in the city, in advance of the opening of the Belfast Waterfront Convention and Exhibition Centre
 - Collaboration with DEL and other partners to develop and deliver a leadership programme for key hospitality representatives – to encourage excellence within the sector
 - Work with private developers and the hotel sector to bring forward new hotel developments in the city, in line with projected demand
 - Further work to develop products around the ‘Beyond Peace’ narrative, in line with the tourism strategy ambitions.
- 3.4 All partners will continue to meet regularly as a working group, which will be chaired by Belfast City Council. This group will have collective responsibility to oversee delivery of the strategy and the individual actions as set out in the current action plan. The working group will also be responsible for establishing appropriate targets and milestones for each work stream and for ensuring that progress is achieved. Progress against targets will be reported back through the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Committee will be responsible for endorsing future programmes of work.
- 3.5 **Financial and Resource Implications**
Activities identified will be resourced from the agreed Departmental budget allocations for the current financial year. Activities for future years will need to be considered as part of medium term financial plans.
- 3.6 **Equality or Good Relations Implications**
The Integrated Tourism Strategy has been screened out. Actions and initiatives that are developed to take forward the Strategy will be equality screened in line with Belfast City Council policy.”

In response to a Member’s question, the Director of Development highlighted that there were a number of proposals currently being developed by different parties with regard to the visual arts and a possible municipal art gallery and undertook to submit a report to the Committee on 12th August detailing the various discussions which were ongoing.

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Operational Issues

**Consultation Response - DCAL Community Festivals
Fund Policy & Guidance Framework**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to agree a response to the consultation document from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) for their Community Festivals Fund Policy and Guidance Framework. The policy outlines the purpose and objectives of the community festivals fund and the principles and assessment criteria that councils must adhere to when administering the fund. The full document has been circulated to Members.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the draft Belfast City Council response which has been circulated to Members
- Approve the submission of this response to the consultation exercise, subject to council ratification.

3.0 Main report

3.1 DCAL provides Belfast City Council with funding towards the community festivals fund, which is then match funded and administered through the Council's Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit. This year, the value of DCAL's letter of offer to Belfast City Council is £75,900. The fund is very competitive, and we receive a large number of applications for a diverse range of festivals run by arts, heritage, community, sports and other organisations. In the first of two rounds of applications for festivals running in this financial year, 55 applications were received. These requests totalled more than £380,000. 14 applications were recommended for funding.

3.2 The last review of the community festivals fund was carried out in 2012. This review acknowledged the positive outcomes of the fund, but it also highlighted a number of shortcomings. Some of the key recommendations included the following:

- DCAL should have a clearer, defined ambition and purpose for the fund
- The fund should not be used to support large tourism-driven festivals
- DCAL should set more specific objectives for the fund

- Councils should dedicate more resources to training and support for project applicants
- The applications process should be simplified and standardised
- More applications should be encouraged from deprived areas.

3.3 The new framework – as set out in the consultation document – has the following objectives:

- To support the community and voluntary sector in promoting equality and targeting poverty and social exclusion
- To enable communities to celebrate their cultural identity
- To enhance community relations
- To enable partnership working between the community and voluntary sector and local Councils
- To improve the capacity of community festivals by providing support and training in addition to funding towards the cost of events.

3.4 Under the new approach, local authorities will be required to:

- Weight assessments in favour of applications for festivals taking place in the top 10% of the most deprived wards in their Council area
- Weight assessments in favour of applications from festivals which target the socially excluded
- Publish their assessment criteria and application process for making awards
- Demonstrate how festivals have targeted poverty, social exclusion and equality
- Provide match funding equal to the amount of grant provided by the Department. If Councils decide not to provide match funding, the Department will retain the right to redistribute surplus funding as appropriate to other areas
- Decide on whether or not to fund a festival and the level of funding. Each council will operate an appeals procedure
- Provide advice and assistance to help build capacity in festival organisations
- Undertake a festivals training needs analysis. Councils will have flexibility to allocate a proportion of the budget to training and consultancy support for festivals
- Provide an annual report detailing the festivals supported, the awards made and an assessment of the impact in the community

- Ensure compliance with all relevant legislative and audit requirements.
- 3.5 DCAL have requested responses to a series of questions as part of the consultation exercise. The proposed Council response has been circulated to Members.
- 3.6 The key elements of the Council’s response include:
- The objectives of the fund should be more focused than are currently set out in the policy and guidance framework
 - There should be more focus on improving the quality of festival provision
 - There should be further consideration of the definition of “festival” and of “community” in order to help potential bidders understand whether they might meet the criteria and to differentiate the fund from other sources
 - Targeting festivals in the top 10 per cent most deprived wards may exclude previous grant recipients and further clarification is required around targeting socially excluded people and how this can be defined
 - Additional funding is required to meet the targets – applications are always significantly oversubscribed in Belfast
 - The proposal to set a target around training undertaken may not be measurable or achievable and may present a barrier to small festivals
 - Attracting visitors to the area should not be an assessment criterion.
- 3.7 **Financial and Resource Implications**
There are no immediate impacts from the consultation response. However, any change to the festival fund may impact on future finances.
- 3.8 **Equality or Good Relations Implications**
There are no negative implications and the fund provides an opportunity to promote good relations and equality.”

In response to a Member’s suggestion, the Committee agreed that the Council’s response should include a request that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure should seek to provide evidence of community benefits which were associated with the Community Festivals Fund.

The Committee adopted the recommendations, subject to the foregoing addition.

Sister Cities Management

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 Members will be aware that one of the key commitments in the Council’s Investment Programme 2012 - 2015, is that the Council will work with city partners to promote Belfast proactively on the international stage to attract trade and investment, increase visitor and student numbers and build the networks necessary to support growth.**
- 1.2 Over the past two years, work has been undertaken to develop and deliver an International Relations Framework and Action Plan that seeks to shape how city stakeholders can work together in a stronger and purposeful way, to maximise the economic impact for Belfast as a whole.**
- 1.3 This framework and a two year action plan were agreed by Members at the August 2013 Development Committee. An update report was presented to the Development Committee on 13th May 2015. The purpose of this report was to seek Members’ approval to explore opportunities and implications of putting in place partnership-based management arrangements to guide and support the respective work programmes to oversee and support the formal Sister City Relationships with Boston and Nashville. A separate report will be brought back on the relationships with Chinese cities at the appropriate time.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members:**
 - Agree to the proposal to undertake a planning visit to Boston in late summer 2015, to take forward opportunities for Belfast – Boston collaboration.**
 - Grant approval for the Lord Mayor to attend along with appropriate officers.**
 - Note progress with respect to re-convening the relevant partners from the Belfast – Nashville steering group, to identify opportunities for collaboration between the cities.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

The International Relations Programme for 2015 – 2016 contains activities which can deliver on the aims and objectives set out in the International Relations Framework across the priority target markets and areas of work.

3.2 In line with these aims and objectives, a series of emerging activities are set out below, focusing on the linkages with Boston and Nashville, currently the only two US-based sister city linkages that Belfast has in place.

3.3 Boston

- Members should note that the Mayor of Boston has completed the process of setting up a Belfast – Boston steering group. This now comprises of five voluntary members chaired by a politician, including two business, one clergy and one third sector representative.
- Based on approval by Members at the May meeting, the Chair of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and Officers are undertaking a process to identify interested stakeholders within the different sectors outlined within the Belfast Boston Sister City Agreement. A list of potential interested steering group members will be presented to Committee in due course for consideration and endorsement. This will take place over the summer period.
- Since the exploratory civic visit to Boston, undertaken by the Lord Mayor in April 2015, opportunities have arisen for concrete cooperation with the City of Boston. The Lord Mayor has been approached by the North Eastern University in Boston to become the official education partner under the Sister Cities Agreement. Specifically, the University wishes to collaborate with Belfast City Council and relevant stakeholders to develop a youth transformation initiative looking at the challenges facing young people in both cities. The detail of this proposal has still to be developed and costed.
- Following on from the Council's involvement in hosting two recent visits from the Boston Police and judicial system, there is interest from both to engage with Council and its stakeholders should the youth initiative proceed.
- Other work being undertaken by the Lord Mayor, includes several working sessions by Skype with Mr John Cullinane, original founding member of the

- Friends of Belfast network in Boston. John is a world expert in assisting cities in positioning and selling themselves globally. He has been assisting the Lord Mayor and the Chief Executive in developing Council's new Positioning Strategy and City Narrative.
- Finally, conversations have been ongoing between the Lord Mayor, Officers and Invest NI in Boston with a view to exploring the benefit of hosting an inward trade and academic mission from Boston around the Connected Health & Life Sciences sector.

3.4 In order to make progress with the above areas of mutual interest within the Sister Cities Agreement, it is proposed that a second working visit to Boston is undertaken by the Lord Mayor and an Officer in late summer/early autumn. This would be an opportunity to meet again with partners to refine thoughts around work with the Boston Police, the North Eastern University and Invest NI, and also to meet the new Belfast Boston steering group to agree concrete plans for future cooperation.

3.5 Nashville

Members will be aware that there has been a Sister City relationship between Belfast and Nashville for some years. Activities of those partners working on Belfast – Nashville initiatives were previously co-ordinated through a steering group and the council's Tourism Development Unit historically provided the secretariat for this group, given the original focus on cultural linkages. Partners have been working independently on their linkages and there are a number of mature partnerships which continue to function without any requirement for City Council support. There are a number of new potential opportunities for collaboration that have recently emerged. In order to clarify these and identify a role, if any, for Belfast City Council, a meeting has been arranged for mid-June with stakeholders keen to engage in Nashville.

3.6 The purpose of the meeting will be to understand the scale and scope of current linkages and to identify whether there is any added value in taking a wider perspective on those linkages, through a city partnership steering group. A further report will be presented to Members with regard to this in due course.

3.7 Financial & Resource Implications

A budget of £150,000 has been set aside for the delivery of the Council's International Relations Framework and Action Plan.

3.8 Equality or Good Relations Implications

The International Relations Framework has been equality screened.”

During discussion, a Member suggested that external groups which were based in Belfast should be encouraged to use and promote the Sister Cities relationships wherever possible.

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Chairman