



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Future City Investment
Date:	15 April 2011
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1.0 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 Council at its meeting of 4 April 2011 unanimously passed the following motion proposed by Councillor Newton:

“This Council recognises that it maximises the impact which its investment in the city will have in future years by aligning its corporate priorities with those identified by the Northern Ireland Executive at a regional level. Such alignment will present opportunities for collaborate working and will increase the potential amount of funding available for investment.

Accordingly it was agreed the SP&R should give detailed consideration to the development of a citywide investment plan involving key partners from government departments/agencies and the private sector and to work towards the hosting of a major city investment conference at the end of the year to launch the plan.”

2.0 Key Issues

- 2.1 Previous analysis of the competitiveness of Belfast has regularly identified the lack of coherence in city governance as a major handicap given the number of agencies operating to single issue agendas together with the fact that government departments have a regional focus which at times does not fully recognise the role of Belfast as the regional economic driver. The current economic crisis is an opportunity to bring some coherence as there is a real incentive to make best use of limited resources for a shared city agenda. Furthermore the regional driver argument for Belfast has the opportunity to gain further traction via the new Regional Development Strategy. This will need strong leadership at Assembly level to argue the case for an urban development policy and ensure government department resources are targeted to

where the greatest regional return will occur. The Council will also have to better articulate the arguments that show that investment in Belfast brings advantage to people living outside the city.

3.0 Actions so far

- 3.1 Belfast City Council has improved considerably as an effective organisation over the past number of years in terms of collectively managing its people and its money and in regard to planning and delivering services and projects. The biggest improvement gains have been realised where people work across Council, Committee and Departmental boundaries to exploit the full potential of the organisation's resources and expertise. The Council has extended this principle beyond the Council itself to deliver on a collaborative agenda and to benefit the citizen as initiatives such as the Grove Wellbeing Centre, Connswater Greenway, emergency planning and community safety demonstrate.
- 3.2 The Council has also sought to use its financial resources through the City Investment Fund to pump prime, enable and bring over the finish line a number of city wide infrastructure projects such as the Titanic Signature Project, the Lyric and the MAC. Moving forward, the Council will need to consider how it might also contribute to capital projects occurring at a neighbourhood or local level to ensure that a balanced portfolio of investment is created at both a citywide and neighbourhood level.
- 3.3 Over the last number of months, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has also turned its mind to consider how the Council might contribute to a greater focus on delivery across the city and endorsed a Shaping Belfast 2011-2015 paper which outlined a number of key actions the Council would develop to move forward. A copy of this paper is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 3.4 The Committee has also recognised the need for strong political leadership for the city and commenced a series of cross party ministerial briefings to explore how government departments are moving forward with strategic investments such as Rapid Transit, Girdwood, Royal Exchange, stadia development, neighbourhood investment and waste disposal. These conversations also explored proposals for Local Government Reform and the potential for the return of 'Place Shaping' powers such as Planning and Comprehensive Development powers to Councils subject to the appropriate checks and balances. A planning pilot for Belfast is being considered and the DSD are also examining how future investment in the city centre might be financed, which the Council will need to consider in due course.
- 3.5 Following on from these bilateral meetings with Ministers, officers have been meeting with Departmental officials to establish what resources have been made available to Departments as a result of the recently announced budget agreed by the Assembly. This includes the £110million available for stadia development at Windsor, Ravenhill and Casement and consideration around the potential that the relocation of the University of Ulster campus from Jordanstown to York Street might have for city centre regeneration.
- 3.6 Finally the Council as part of its Masterplan process has facilitated a number of discussions with the private sector, community representations and government departments/agencies. The

Masterplan itself will provide a valuable focus for discussion on city priorities and investment moving forward.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 The motion passed by the Council calls for the development of a citywide Investment Plan and the hosting of a major city investment conference towards the end of next year. Given the developments outlined above, this would be a timely initiative and it is recommended that a report be brought to the June meeting of the Committee to outline various options on what this conference might look like.

Members may like to discuss at Committee their expectations for such a conference and the outcomes they would like to see coming from it.

5.0 Documents Attached

Appendix 1: Report to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 4 March 2011 – *Shaping Belfast 2011-2015*