

Belfast City Council Draft Response to Draft Programme for Government 2011-2015 Draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021

Outline Response – Version 1.0 30 January 2012

Introduction

The Council commends the NI Executive on its clear commitment to continue to invest during this period of economic austerity, a commitment which the Council shares as set out within the recently launched Belfast Investment Programme 2011-2015.

This Investment Programme sets out the Council's clear ambitious for the city and the collective leadership of our Elected Members in agreeing a shared vision for the Council as it moves into its new electoral term; stating the need for strong city leadership and the willingness to work in partnership to ensure continued investment in the city.

The Council recognises that creating a competitive and sustainable city requires the effective and strategic utilisation of all the city's resources and asset base. This places an even greater emphasis on the need to develop innovative and new ways in which partners can work together at a local, city and regional level to deliver and maximise the benefits of key strategic investments and the effectiveness of local delivery arrangements.

The Council therefore welcomes the opportunity to consider and input into the draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2011-2015 and the draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) 2011–2021. It is clear that these documents are interrelated and will collectively shape the future direction of public investment within Northern Ireland. The Council believe that collectively these documents present a huge opportunity to redesign how we work, to break through silos, to integrate our collective energy and resources, and to create a new collaborative partnership between central and local government.

The Council's response is set out in two parts; the first is an Executive Summary of the main issues contained within the Belfast City Council response and the second deals with the more specific comments linked to the priorities and objectives as set out within the two documents.

The Council wish to work in partnership with the NI Executive and government departments at every opportunity to deliver on the ambitious and challenging priorities set out within these documents and to maximise the level of investment in the economic, social and physical fabric of Belfast.

Part 1: Executive Summary

The main comments from Belfast City Council can be summarised as follows:

- The Council commends the NI Executive on its clear commitment to continue to invest during this period of economic austerity, a commitment which the Council shares.
- Given the clear synergies between the NI Executive's and Council's own investment priorities, request that the Belfast investment programme be supported by the NI Executive and specifically incorporated within the PfG and ISNI
- The Council wishes to work in partnership with NI Executive to identify and develop joint delivery models and to align and integrate resources where possible to ensure delivery.
- The PfG and ISNI need to commit resources to the identified investment projects for Belfast.

- A proposal to establish a 'Belfast Delivery Forum' and 'Implementation Plan' which ensures that capacity exists across all agencies and disciplines to ensure delivery of key investment projects.
- A request for greater focus to be given to creating a set of policy instruments to maximise the benefits of our cities in supporting the economic recovery of Northern Ireland.
- Support a new urban development programme as part of the next wave of EU funding programmes (2014-2020)

Priority 1: Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future

- A request to work with the NI Executive and DETI to maximise the economic benefits of the potential investment in enhancing the City's broadband infrastructure as recently announced by the UK Chancellor George Osborne.
- The need to explore alternative forms of finance for major capital schemes and a request for the Executive to put in place the necessary regulatory requirements to allow councils to explore these options.
- The need to consider the future supply of appropriate office accommodation for large scale investments and a request to urgently review this and to consider how future supply might be incentivised in the current climate.
- A proposal to establish a ministerial working group to look at town and city centre regeneration issues, as has happened in the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament
- Request that recognition is given to Belfast's role as the regional driver and that an appropriate interface is put in place across government to coordinate policy and address the challenges presented in delivering key strategic projects, particularly the relocation of the University of Ulster into Belfast City Centre.
- Identification of the opportunities presented by business tourism and the associated need for adequate investment in providing needed infrastructure e.g. integrated conference and exhibition facilities for conferences of an international scale.
- Identification of the opportunities presented by the renewables sector and the need for a targeted strategy for its future development. This might include the establishment of an Enterprise Zone for renewables in the Belfast Harbour/North Foreshore area of the city
- Request that consideration be given to allocating further investment in the provision of public transport as an overall percentage of the investment in roads infrastructure.

Priority 2: Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Wellbeing

- Seek the support of the NI Executive and relevant government departments to deliver the actions emerging from the Belfast Strategic Partnership's 'Framework for Action on Life Inequalities 2011-2015'.
- Seek further discussions with NI Executive and the Department of Finance and Personnel in pursuance of integrated approaches to address poverty and social inequalities within Belfast and the wider region.
- Advocate that the co-location and integration of public services should be considered as a key service delivery model of the future.
- Suggest that the new Public Health Strategy for Northern Ireland should be considered as a key building block for the draft PFG and ISNI.

- Welcome the creation of the Social Investment Fund and request that consideration be given to Belfast City Council securing representation on any governance structure put in place to over the administration of the fund.
- Request that a budget be included in the PfG and ISNI for the delivery of the Belfast rapid transit system which will play a key role in supporting local economies, linking businesses with markets and linking communities and people with potential employment opportunities.

Priority 3: Protecting our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities

- Advocate for greater level of funding for the development of critical waste infrastructure within Northern Ireland
- Advocate that further consideration be given to the potential to create a single waste disposal authority within Northern Ireland.
- Suggest that incremental targets for both reductions in greenhouse gas omissions and air quality standards be included.
- Request that the Department of Regional Development's pilot initiative to roll-out electronic vehicle infrastructure be included in the draft PfG and ISNI.
- Request that consideration be given to the potential inclusion of a Belfast based public bike hire scheme as part of the PfG and ISNI investment priorities linked to sustainable transport.

Priority 4: Building a Strong and Shared Community

- Council desire to work with the NI Executive and all relevant statutory and community stakeholders to build a strong and shared community and promote equality and good relations.
- Advocate the need for a concerted and inter-agency approach to addressing historic physical and non physical barriers within the city and their contribution to division and segregation.

Priority 5: Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services

- The Council welcomes and remains committed to taking forward local government reform and ensuring the effective and efficient transfer and integration of important new place-shaping functions.
- The Council would wish to explore with NI Executive and DFP the types of financial mechanisms which could be utilised to enable local government fund specific elements of reform on an 'invest to save' basis.
- Commend that the transfer of functions be rates neutral at point of transfer to local government.
- The Council recognises the strategic significance of Planning in supporting economic development and regeneration activity and wish to work with NI Executive and DoE to ensure that planning can deliver against the ambitious targets set out within draft PfG and ISNI.
- The Council would wish to explore with the NI Executive and government departments the potential for greater integration/co-design and co-location of public services at the local level.
- Support for the commitment to explore the implementation of social clauses for government capital schemes, urging a dialogue across government to maximise the potential impact of these

Part 2: OVERARCHING COMMENTS

A summary of the key overarching issues as identified by Belfast City Council is included below for reference.

- i) **Investment Priorities** - The Council welcomes the NI Executive's identified investment priorities as set out within the draft PfG, ISNI and Economic Strategy and view all three documents as an opportunity for the Council to provide high level strategic support and commitment to central government for much needed improvement in resource management within Northern Ireland.

The Council believe that the challenge of delivering on the priorities set out within the PfG and the related documents will be the responsibility of a range of stakeholders, not least the Council. A strong strategic partnership between central and local government will therefore be essential and should provide the groundwork for a balanced, two tier government approach which will be necessary to assist any economic and social recovery. The Council will work with the NI Executive and government departments to identify and develop joint delivery models and to align and integrate resources where possible.

Many of the key priorities within the three documents complement and align with the Council's own priorities for Belfast. These priorities have recently been set out in two key planning documents for the Belfast region, the "**Belfast Investment Programme 2012 – 2015**" and the "**Belfast Masterplan**". We note that a commitment is set out within the draft PfG and ISNI that the NI Executive will support the delivery of the 'One Plan' for the regeneration of the North West and would ask that a similar commitment of support is provided for these key strategic plans for Belfast.

- ii) **Belfast Investment Programme 2012-2015** - As a demonstration of our commitment to action and to investing in the city and supporting the economic recovery of Belfast, the Council has recently released for consultation its own **Investment Programme for the period 2012-2015**. This Programme has consensus from all political parties and has buy-in from a wide range of partners from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. Speaking at the recent launch of the draft Investment Programme, the First and Deputy First Ministers stated their clear support for the investment commitments of the Council including £150million in capital schemes across the city, £34million in supporting economic growth/recovery and £29million in local communities and neighbourhoods.

The Council recognises that the provision of modern infrastructure is critical to the future success of Belfast and will underpin the revitalisation of our local economy. The Council's Investment Programme sets out a package of proposed measures which seeks to help grow the local economy, support businesses, help people into employment and provide the economic infrastructure necessary for future growth. Similar objectives are also reflected in the draft PfG, ISNI and Economic Strategy.

In creating its draft Investment Programme, the Council has looked closely at the plans of other bodies including the draft PfG, ISNI and Economic Strategy, to ensure that the projects and programmes outlined align closely with the objectives of central government.

- iii) **Belfast Masterplan** - The Belfast Masterplan sets out our high level vision for the next ten years and highlights what we need to focus on in terms of city infrastructure and relationships to create a competitive, connected, inclusive Belfast. The key objectives under our Masterplan are:

- **The centre city** - A vibrant and dynamic centre city which supports regional economic growth
- **The neighbourhood city** - Neighbourhoods which provide the focus for community, social and environmental sustainability

- **The accessible and connected city-** Enhancing the accessibility and connectivity internationally, regionally and locally
- **The learning city-** Harnessing the power of cutting edge research and development and third level education
- **The eco city -** Clean technology, renewable energy and efficiency will drive growth in the economy and reduce costs for businesses and households.

iv) **Partnership** – the Council wish to work in partnership with the NI Executive and government departments at every opportunity to deliver on the challenges set out within the draft PfG, ISNI and Economic Strategy. These documents present a huge opportunity to redesign how we work, to break through silos, to integrate our collective energy and resources, and to create a new collaborative partnership between central and local government.

The Council welcomes the focus given within the draft ISNI to joining-up and co-locating services and would seek to work with the NI Executive to explore what opportunities may exist for collaborative projects within Belfast. The Council has been ahead of the game on this in many respects, in working with other agencies to develop a ‘one-stop-shop’ approach to service provision such as the Grove Health and Well-being Centre.

v) **Belfast Delivery Plan** – the Council would highlight the need for an effective implementation plan for Belfast which ensures that capacity exists across all agencies and disciplines to make key projects happen and to deliver on the significant investment commitments as set out within the draft PfG, ISNI and Economic Strategy. The Council would advocate for the establishment of an inter-departmental, politically led, **City Delivery Forum** (a guiding coalition) which could develop and oversee a forward work plan which prioritises and supports the delivery of key investment projects within the city. This delivery plan would seek to map out the potential investment workflows and timelines emerging from the PfG, ISNI, the Council’s own Investment Programme and other key private sector investment projects, identify and secure the necessary capacity and resources required to ensure delivery.

The Council would highlight the previous success of the ‘New Belfast Group’ which had been established to oversee the delivery of a £300million investment programme in Belfast including the Belfast Sewers Project, the Belfast Streets Ahead initiative and the M1 Motorway and Westlink project.

vi) **Resource commitments** – The Council’s own Masterplan has identified a number of priority transformational projects which will have beneficial effects at a citywide and regional level. Whilst a number of these are referred to within the draft PfG and ISNI, the Council is would be concerned that specific resources have not been assigned to them. For example:

- redevelopment of University of Ulster’s York Street Campus
- introduction of Belfast Rapid Transit System
- redevelopment of Belfast City Centre North East Quarter (i.e. Royal Exchange)
- delivery of 5 major public realm schemes across Belfast
- redevelopment of Crumlin Road Gaol (*ISNI, page 34*)
- potential development of a new Integrated Transport Hub and Interchange on the existing Europa Bus Centre and Great Victoria Street railway station

The Council believe that such projects are key economic priorities for the city and would request that an action plan and specific budget line (resources) be identified within the PfG and ISNI. The Council would be keen to work with the NI Executive to explore the possible alignment/integration of resources to enable projects to happen.

- vii) **Alternative Funding Sources** – It is important to recognise the ability of local government to borrow to invest, a power which can be utilised by the Council to help deliver some of the identified investment priorities for the city. Furthermore, the Council has carried out a number of exploratory studies to identify and examine alternative financial instruments which could be utilised by the Council and/or its partners to deliver the investment priorities for the city and wider region (e.g. Tax Increment Financing, Local Asset Back Vehicles, Joint Ventures with the private sector etc). The Council would wish to work with the NI Executive, the Strategic Investment Board and other key partners to ensure that all available funding sources are utilised to maximise the level of investment into both Belfast and Northern Ireland. The Council would welcome further dialogue with Northern Ireland Executive regarding the necessary regulatory requirements to allow councils to explore these options as a way forward in the current era of funding restraint within the public sector. We would also welcome a discussion on how EU funding mechanisms such as JEREMIE and JESSICA could be levered in this context
- viii) **Future of EU Structural Funds 2014 -2020** – In a period when capital expenditure is going to be reduced it will be important to maximise potential funding from Europe. The Council is aware that the NI Executive are considering the future direction and potential delivery models for EU Structural Funds for the period 2014-2020 (which is understood to be in the region of 3.76billion Euros). Whilst the NI block allocation of this funding is still to be negotiated and agreed, the Council would strongly advocate for, and seek the support of the NI Executive, for the inclusion of a strong urban dimension to any future European funding programmes, given the clear role of cities as key regional economic drivers.
- ix) **Urban Policy** – An urban policy agenda is considered essential to enable the key urban centres to develop coherent strategies to spearhead regeneration and sustainable transport and a compelling quality of life agenda for the continued development of our towns and cities. The Council would commend that greater focus be given within the PfG, ISNI and Economic Strategy on creating a set of policy instruments to maximise the benefits of our cities in supporting the economic recovery of Northern Ireland.

Part 2: COMMENTS ON PRIORITY AREAS

Priority 1 – Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future

The Council will have an important role to play in helping to develop the economic environment required to stimulate growth and investment in the city. Belfast, as the largest city in Northern Ireland, plays an important role as a key driver of regional economic growth. We are committed to working with the NI Executive and our partners in all sectors to rebuild a strong and competitive local economy which will be critical to the success of the city and wider region. The Council's own Investment Programme seeks to stimulate the local economy, create employment opportunities and provide the economic infrastructure to ensure future competitiveness.

The Council recognises that the challenges facing the Northern Ireland economy are significant. The draft PfG makes clear that the potential for recovery and growth will depend upon effective partnership working between the public and private, voluntary and community sectors. The Council is committed to working with government departments, agencies and the private sector to contribute towards the targets set out in these key regional strategies.

The Council welcomes the NI Executive's recognition of the importance of Belfast to regional prosperity and would commend that a commitment of support for the Council's Investment Programme 2011-2015 for the city be included in the draft PfG and ISNI similar to that included for the 'One Plan' for the regeneration of Derry/Londonderry.

i) Job Creation, Employability and Skills Development

How can the Council help to deliver?

The Council believe that there is need for specific, targeted interventions to ensure that people in all parts of Belfast have the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to apply for and secure jobs particularly our young people (16-24) who have been badly impacted by the economic downturn. The Council is committed to looking at how we, as a large employer in the city, can provide job opportunities and extend employment opportunities by supporting those who are unemployed or disadvantaged in the labour market to tackle the barriers to work that they face.

Over the next three years the Council will:

- Invest in the development of **bursaries** to help those aged 16-24 into further education, training and employment;
- work with local partners to deliver **targeted employability initiatives** across the city,
- work with partners on the **Belfast Social Clause Delivery Forum**, ensuring that government contracts contain appropriate social clauses to support employment and apprenticeship opportunities that can be easily managed and monitored;
- work with DEL and Belfast Metropolitan College to deliver on the targets set out in their successive employment and skills strategies and set up a city-wide Employability and Skills Steering Group to maximise the significant resources available across government and other agencies;
- provide **work placement, apprenticeship and internship** opportunities within Belfast City Council for graduates and young long-term unemployed and disabled persons; and
- deliver **employment opportunities** at no additional cost to the ratepayer.

ii) Infrastructure Investment

How can the council help to deliver?

Councils are ideally placed to identify and develop key sub-regional infrastructure projects. The Council will work collaboratively with the NI Executive and government departments to further develop the city's infrastructure to promote growth and inward investment. The Council's own

investment programme contains a number of investment projects which will help support key growth sectors including tourism, the creative industries, green technology and renewables. For example:

- a £20million integrated convention and exhibition centre at the Belfast Waterfront Hall;
- an £8million Green Economy Business Park at the North Foreshore;
- an £8million Innovation Centre at Springvale; and
- a £4million Digital Hub for Belfast

Broadband infrastructure – The Council will work with the NI Executive and DETI to maximise the economic benefits of the recent announcement made by the UK Chancellor, George Osborne, that Belfast would be one of ten cities to share £100 million investment in superfast broadband and Wi-Fi infrastructure. Becoming a ‘super-connected’ city will not only support the continued economic growth and competitiveness of Belfast and will provide a platform to encourage foreign direct investment and enhancing the city’s tourism offering.

Maximising the Impact of PfG and ISNI

- **Capital Investment** - Whilst the draft PfG and ISNI identifies a number of infrastructure projects which the Council believe are key economic priorities for the city (e.g. redevelopment of Belfast City Centre North East Quarter, redevelopment of Crumlin Road Gaol, Belfast rapid Transit etc) we note with concern that specific resources have not been assigned to ensure their delivery. These include:

The Council would be keen to work with the NI Executive to explore the possible alignment/integration of resources to enable such projects to happen. The value of this approach has already been demonstrated through the success of joint projects such as Titanic Belfast, MAC and Lyric.

- **Office accommodation** – the Council believe that there is a need for a concerted approach to addressing the current lack of ‘grade A’ office space within Belfast which will be necessary to accommodate any Foreign Direct Investment in the city. There is therefore a need to identify creative solutions around office space to ensure alignment between investment agenda and provision of appropriate, available business space.
- **City Centre degeneration** – The Council would commend that a greater focus be given within the PfG and ISNI to addressing the significant degeneration experienced by of our key towns and cities as a result of the economic downturn, the rise in online retailing and out of town shopping.

The Council would highlight the stark findings of a recent Department for Business Innovation and Skills report entitled “*Understanding High Street Performance*” (Dec. 2011), which indicated that a third of high streets are “degenerating or failing” with town centre vacancy rates on the increase. Would highlight also the findings of the recently published ‘*Portas Review (Dec 2011)*’, an independent review into the future of our high streets. This report recommended the planning system should have an “explicit presumption” in favour of town centre development; a relaxation of the planning restrictions that apply to changes of buildings’ use; introduction of free controlled parking schemes to increase access to town centres and high street shopping facilities and greater use of other legislative levers such as Business Improvement Districts, rates relief to create the right conditions to support businesses. Against this backdrop, new benchmarks and expectations in terms of value, service, entertainment and experience must be put in place if town and city centres are to remain vibrant.

The Council would recommend that the NI Executive should follow the lead set by the the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly in establishing a Ministerial Working Group to

address this issue and that there should be greater collaborative working across departments and other agencies to ensure that the broad spectrum of issues are addressed in a holistic manner and that the vibrancy of town and city centres is consolidated and enhanced.

- **University of Ulster relocation** - Need to recognise the potential role of the relocation of the University of Ulster campus into Belfast City Centre as a key economic driver for the city. The location of two universities in the city centre creates direct opportunities for local businesses but, more importantly, also creates the possibility of clustering of scientific and research expertise. The Council believe that an appropriate interface needs to be put in place across government (i.e. Belfast Delivery Forum as referred to earlier) to coordinate policy and address the challenges presented in delivering key strategic projects of this nature in a timely and structured manner.

iii) Encouraging business growth and competitiveness in key growth sectors

How can the Council help to deliver?

- The Council recognises the importance of securing additional foreign direct investment and export-led growth as a means of rebalancing the local economy and will continue to work with our partners in Invest NI to maximise inward investment opportunities. The Council will work also with our enterprise partners to encourage new businesses start-ups and will continue to implement a range of targeted business support programmes which seek to help businesses in Belfast enhance their own competitiveness and growth potential.
- **Tourism** - Recognising the importance of the tourism sector the Council has developed an Integrated Strategic Framework for Belfast Tourism which we will deliver over the next three years. We will ensure that all parts of the city benefit from the potential growth in tourism over the coming years. Key to this framework will be support for the marketing and visitor servicing activities of the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, the development of Belfast's tourism product and investment in the city's culture and arts sectors.

The Council has established a Tourism Forum which brings together the sector's key stakeholders to ensure a coordinated and informed approach to the development of the sector. Although this is still in the early stages of development, it has been useful in ensuring policy and funding alignment to maximise the impact of investment and to ensure targeting of resources. The Council would encourage the relevant government departments to continue their engagement with this forum.

The recent MTV event and the upcoming Titanic celebrations as well as the City of Culture, World Police and Fire Games and Tall Ships demonstrate the importance of event tourism to economic growth in the city and wider region. The MTV event and associated Belfast Music Week generated **£22million** of spend in the local economy. With these other major events in the pipeline, it is important to develop a coordinated approach to their promotion and development, in order to maximise the return to the local economy.

The Council will work with central government to ensure the maximise the potential benefits and economic impact of the range of key events to happen across Northern Ireland over the next 2-3 years including the 'Our Time, Our Place' initiative in 2012 and other key events over the next.

Maximising the Impact of PfG and ISNI

- **Business tourism market** - represents a significant opportunity for growth in the coming years which needs to be stimulated through appropriate investment in necessary infrastructure. The Council believe that the current infrastructure and facilities in the city to support this market are inadequate with limited capacity to facilitate many conferences of an international scale. The Council believe that there is a clear need for integrated conference and exhibition facilities and

has submitted an application to secure potential European funding to extend the current provision at the Waterfront Hall. If this project is realised, it will be a significant contributor to the growth of this sector and will have an impact beyond its immediate location in terms of business and employment generated. The Council would wish to explore with central government and DETI the potential for part funding of such a facility which will be a significant contributor to the growth of the business tourism market within Northern Ireland.

The Council would urge the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that this and the other major capital schemes identified in our investment programme are given urgent attention by the relevant government departments and agencies and that efforts are focused on expediting their progress through the necessary administrative and statutory approvals processes.

- **Renewable Energy Sector** – The Council considers there to be significant growth potential in this sector and feel that this requires a targeted strategy for the future development of the sector.

There is an imperative to seize the opportunities to ensure that Belfast can take a lead and establish the city and wider region as a global centre of excellence in this growing sector. We have considerable assets which provide a stable basis from which to develop the sector and would encourage the Northern Ireland Executive to explore the opportunity to create an Enterprise Zone for renewables in the Belfast Harbour/North Foreshore area of Belfast.

The Council is already exploring the potential of developing a “green business park” at the city’s former landfill site at North Foreshore and would welcome the opportunity to explore with the NI Executive and DETI any potential scope to link this into the ISNI. This will provide an opportunity for clustering of secondary and tertiary companies to service the larger businesses in the adjacent area.

- **Rail and Road Infrastructure and investment** - The budget for roads infrastructure is approximately 10 times that of public transport, (£11960m v £196m 2011-2014). The Executive and the Department for Regional Development may wish to consider if this is an appropriate balance of resources. Previous experience shows that investment in the road infrastructure brings more cars onto the road, ultimately increases carbon dioxide emissions, and does not encourage a modal shift onto public transport.

Priority 2: Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Wellbeing

Quality of life in Belfast is vital to the well-being of citizens and attracting visitors, investors and students and is the bedrock of economic growth. Central to this is equal access to opportunities, improved health and wellbeing for people from deprived communities and a reduction in health inequalities.

i) Reducing life inequalities and tackling disadvantage

How can the Council help to deliver?

Belfast Strategic Partnership for addressing life inequalities - The Council recognise the importance of taking inter-sectoral approach to addressing the root causes of ill-health and to reduce life inequalities within Belfast and the wider region. Working in partnership with the Public Health Agency and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT), the Council has jointly established a joint Belfast Health Development Unit for the city with co-located members of staff from each of the agencies working together on joint programmes. In pursuance of securing further alignment and integration of activities, the Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP) for addressing life inequalities has been established with senior representation from the key statutory, voluntary and community sectors. The BSP has developed a 'Framework for Action on life inequalities (2011-2015)' which includes joint inter-agency work on mental health, alcohol and drug related health issues, life-long learning and early years. The Council would commend that this framework be taken into consideration when moving forward.

The Council recognise the need for greater alignment between regional and local interventions if real and sustainable outcomes are to be achieved and would commend that the Belfast Strategic Partnership may provide an opportunity to assist in the cascade of desired outcomes/outputs.

- **Active Belfast Partnership** – Over the next three years, Belfast City Council will invest £3.5m in delivering health and well-being programmes which seek to address health inequalities across the city. These initiatives will be delivered through the Active Belfast Partnership (including representatives from Belfast City Council, Public Health Agency, the Belfast Health Trust, DSD and Sports NI) and are likely to include:
 - better use of local parks and leisure facilities including promoting free access to leisure centres for those people in the most deprived areas;
 - the creation of more community gardens and allotments, the development of a 'Growing Your Own' food programme; and
 - the further roll-out of outdoor gyms.
- **Delivery of local community provision and support** – It is important to note that the Council already provides a number of key local level services which help to increase the sustainability and resilience of local communities e.g. skills development, anti-poverty work, advice provision, integrated health and social care provision, food safety initiatives etc.
- **Poverty and Social Inequalities Framework** - Over the next three years Belfast City Council will implement the actions within our Poverty and Social Inequalities Framework to ensure that our services are accessible, that we target our resources more effectively and that we work in partnership with other lead government departments to deliver on the ground projects that will support our citizens e.g. helping to reduce fuel poverty through our fuel stamps initiative, working with the Department of Finance and Personnel to maximise the potential uptake of rates relief support etc.

Maximising the Impact of PfG and ISNI

- **Co-location and integration of services** - The Council would welcome further discussions with the NI Executive and government departments to explore the potential for co-locating and integrating public services at the local level – possibly building upon the approach taken to the development of the Grove Well Being Centre in North Belfast.
- The new Public Health Strategy for Northern Ireland will provide the new framework for health priorities in Northern Ireland and therefore needs to be considered as a key building block for the draft PfG and ISNI.

ii) Social Investment Fund

How will the Council help to deliver?

- The Council would commend OFMDFM's commitment to establishing the Social Investment Fund with its aims of increasing quality of life, reducing poverty, improving employment opportunities and addressing dereliction.
- Given the strong synergies between the objectives of the Fund and the Council's own Investment Programme, the Council would be keen to work with OFMDFM to ensure that delivery priorities are aligned and maximum benefit and impact is realised through our combined investment in the city.
- The Council would recommend that the Social Investment Fund should result in change that people can see, touch and feel at a local level rather than the establishment of structures and development of plans. There is an abundance of plans, concepts, strategies and priority lists and the focus now needs to switch to prioritisation and delivery.
- In its response to the draft Social Investment Fund proposals, the Council highlighted the need to ensure that the emerging investment plans for the 4 designated investment zones within Belfast are considered as a whole and are complementary. It will be important that the plans are both physically and thematically connected, balanced, and promote mobility within and across the city.
- As 50% of the focus of the programme is in the greater Belfast area, the Council has requested that consideration be given to Belfast City Council representation on any governance structure put in place to oversee the delivery of the Fund (e.g. proposed Ministerial Committee).

iii) Integrated Transport Infrastructure and improved public transport

Maximising the Impact of PfG and ISNI

- **Belfast Rapid Transit** - The Council would request that a budget commitment be included in the draft PfG and ISNI to ensure the delivery of the Belfast Rapid Transit Scheme. The Council believe that this scheme provides a real opportunity to improve the public transport infrastructure across the city and will help to regenerate and open up new development opportunities along its routes. It will play a key role in supporting local economies, linking businesses with markets and linking communities and people with potential employment opportunities.

The Council would request the NI Executive to take forward the planning and design for the potential extension of the rapid transit network to ensure an equitable high quality public transport system is implemented throughout the city.

Priority 3 – Protecting our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities

i) Waste

Maximising the Impact of PfG and ISNI

- **Waste management infrastructure** – The Council would commend that the PfG and ISNI should include a firm financial commitment to support the provision of adequate waste infrastructure regional waste infrastructure which would ensure the more sustainable management of waste, particularly municipal waste. The Council notes with concern the significant reduction in the level of central funding support from £200million in the last comprehensive spending review period to around £2million in the current. This shift appears to be at odds with the significant government investment in waste infrastructure in England through the national infrastructure plan.
- **Single waste disposal authority** - The Council believes that dealing effectively with waste treatment and disposal has now become a regional infrastructure issue and would request that consideration be given to addressing this critical challenge within the draft PfG and ISNI.

The increasing complexity of waste treatment and the challenge of procuring and developing facilities of a scale that is economic and will contribute to the necessary robust regional network of waste management facilities clearly increases the value of moving towards a single waste plan and single waste disposal authority. Such an arrangement would also enable NI to cope with the inevitable continual change in environmental standards and other legal requirements governing waste management including potential significant Landfill Allowance Scheme and other European fines linked to statutory waste and recycling targets.

- **Waste targets** – the Council would suggest that in addition to the inclusion of household waste targets, the PfG and ISNI should include other important types of waste such as industrial or commercial waste, which form a large and critical proportion of Northern Ireland's waste.

Whilst recognising that the stated incremental targets set out within the PfG and ISNI for recycling of household waste is in line with the EU Waste Framework Directive, they are above the targets as set out within the current NI Waste Strategy. The Council would commend that any revised recycling targets and timescales are clearly communicated to local councils to ensure adherence.

ii) Environmental Health

Maximising the Impact of PfG and ISNI

- The Council welcomes the renewed emphasis on community health care service provision in the draft ISNI, and would emphasise the role that councils can have, working with the healthcare sector, in developing a 'one stop shop' approach to healthcare, leisure and community service provision in a wider context. Examples such as the Grove Wellbeing Centre should not be 'one-offs', but as always these need to be properly costed, resourced in partnership and made sustainable. The Council would wish to explore with the NI Executive and government departments the potential for future collaborative, multifunctional facilities.
- **Greenhouse gas** – the PfG and ISNI should include incremental targets for greenhouse gas reductions. The Council would note the recent Committee on Climate Change Report which suggested that legislative targets could assist Northern Ireland deliver more sustainable greenhouse gas emissions. Setting emission reduction targets could be helpful to reduce emissions from agriculture, road transport, homes, public sector and power sectors, whilst driving economic efficiencies in each sector. The Council believe also that there is potential growth potential for Northern Ireland in this area by supporting the transformation to a low carbon green economy, encouraging innovation while at the assisting with job creation.

- **Air-Quality** – the PfG and ISNI should include incremental targets for achieving national and European health-based air quality standards, as set out within the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

iii) Sustainable Transport

Maximising the Impact of PfG and ISNI

- The Council welcome the commitment in the PfG to dedicate £500million towards the promotion of more sustainable modes of transport and would commend that further detail is included on the types of initiatives/programmes which DRD will be taking forward to promote sustainable modes of transport and attach related milestones as appropriate.
- **Electric vehicle infrastructure** – the draft PfG and ISNI should include the commitment and funding by the Department for Regional Development to pilot the roll out of electric vehicle infrastructure (i.e. ecar initiative) across Northern Ireland. The use of electric vehicles, ideally powered by electricity from renewable sources, is an excellent way to reduce carbon emissions from transport and will contribute to the climate change, air quality and noise objectives as set out within the draft PfG and ISNI
- **Public bike hire scheme** – the Council would commend that consideration be given to the introduction of a public bike hire scheme for Belfast city centre. The Council has already undertaken a joint piece of work with DRD to consider the viability of such a scheme within Belfast subject to the necessary funding being secured. The public bike scheme has already been highly successful in other key cities such as Dublin, Paris and London and has extended cycling as an alternative sustainable means of transport.

Priority 4 – Building a Strong and Shared Community

Belfast City Council welcomes the priority given within the draft PfG and ISNI to building a strong and shared community within Northern Ireland. The Council recognise that promoting equality and good relations is key to improving the quality of life for everyone in the city and we will ensure that fairness, equality and respect are at the heart of everything that we do – values that are central to our policy and underpin all of our activities. Despite the economic challenges currently faced by the city, the Council believe that Equality and Good Relations are central to economic regeneration, attracting talent, sustaining inward investment, generating significant tourism and tackling poverty.

i) Good Relations

How can the Council help to deliver?

The Council believe that good relations and community cohesion remain vital ingredients for the city's future development. The Council has published its second Good Relations Plan for the city in 2011 which sets out a vision for Belfast for the next 3 years as we strive to make Belfast a better place in which to live, work, socialise and do business.

Through our Good Relations Plan, the Council will facilitate a partnership approach from a number of agencies including statutory, voluntary, community and faith based groups to effect change in our city and address issues such as sectarianism and racism. There are four themes that this plan will be based on that will help us achieve this. They are:

- Securing shared city space
- Transforming contested space
- Developing shared cultural space
- Building shared organisational space

These themes reflect the current challenges that the city faces as it continues with the process of transformation and the Council would wish to work with the NI Executive to take a concerted approach to addressing these challenges.

ii) Interfaces

How can the Council help to deliver?

- Belfast City Council welcomes the inclusion of a specific commitment to seek local agreement to reduce the number of 'peace walls'.
- As a result of the conflict, Belfast has over 80 peace walls or interfaces, by far the greatest number anywhere in NI. Erected originally to improve security, they remain almost 40 years later and have contributed to the perpetuation of the cycle of division and segregation. The inefficient use and duplication of services and facilities, significant urban blight and poverty are all characteristics of divided areas. Physical and psychological barriers between communities make travel around parts of the city difficult and have resulted in people avoiding certain areas perceived to be unsafe.
- The Council's recently adopted strategy and action plan on the issue of physical barriers complements the commitments now being made in the draft PfG and ISNI and we would like to work with the NI Executive to ensure that this work is developed in unison with our central government colleagues. The Council's strategy and plan will focus on those areas where communities do wish to move towards a transformation and reduction in interface barriers.
- The milestones listed for 2012 – 2013, and beyond, are in line with the goals that the Council has set itself for engagement on the issue of physical barriers. The milestones will only be met if there is cross-departmental cooperation and an inter-agency approach to develop and delivery of local action plans for individual areas.

Priority 5 – Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services

The Council is working hard to strike the right balance between continuing to invest in the city to stimulate the economy and providing value for money services. We recognise that this is a challenging time for businesses and households across the city and we therefore keep our expenditure under review to minimise the burden to ratepayers. The Council will continue to deliver its efficiency programme and secure a further £4million of savings by 2014 which will be reinvested in providing important services.

i) Local Government Reform

How can the Council help to deliver?

The Council welcomes the commitment set out within the draft PfG and ISNI to move forward local government reform within Northern Ireland and to establish the 11 new Councils, with enhanced powers, by 2015. The Council remains fully committed to delivering local government reform and to ensuring the effective and efficient transfer and integration of important new place-shaping functions such as planning and regeneration within the Council.

Maximising the Impact of PfG and ISNI

- **Resourcing reform** – whilst recognising that local government will be required to fund the large proportion of the reform programme, the Council would wish to explore with the NI Executive, Department of Finance and Personnel and Department of Environment, the types of financial mechanisms which could be brought forward to enable local government to fund specific elements on an ‘invest to save’ basis.
- Consideration should be given to the possible establishment of a ‘Challenge Fund’ administered by DOE, from which monies could be made available to councils to fund critical elements of the reform programme including necessary capacity building initiatives.
- The Council would further suggest that consideration be given to putting appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure that transferring functions are rates neutral at point of transfer to local government.

ii) Planning

How can the Council help to deliver?

- The Council recognises the strategic significance of Planning in supporting economic development and regeneration activity and would wish to work with the NI Executive and DoE to bring affect to planning reform and to ensure that the planning system is fit-for-purpose and can deliver against the ambitious targets set out within the draft PfG and ISNI. The Council is already in active discussions with the Belfast Area Planning Office to explore how appropriate resources and capacity can be made available to enable critical investment projects for the city to be delivered. It would be the intention to extend such discussion to other statutory and private sector stakeholders within the context of the proposed development of a Belfast Delivery Forum.

iii) Community planning

How can the Council help to deliver?

- The Council is concluding a community planning pilot, funded by the BIG Lottery Fund, which looked at the theme of health in the city – a key outcome has been a framework for tackling life inequalities developed through the Belfast Strategic Partnership. The pilot is culminating in a conference at which the Minister for the Environment will speak.

- There has been a significant amount of learning from this pilot and the Council is keen to build on the momentum that has been created and ensure sustainability for the model of community planning which is emerging. The Council believe that outworking of this pilot could inform emerging guidance from DoE on community planning and would be keen to work with officials to take this forward.
- The Council sees potential for community planning to enhance the implementation of our own investment programme which is premised upon partnership and greater alignment between other government strategies and investment priorities.
- The Council believe that the key issues going forward include the necessary commitment of government departments to participating in community planning; resources for on-going development of the process and for delivery of new models of working; alignment of plans and of planning and resource allocation cycles; and the potential for single outcome agreements.
- The effectiveness of the community planning process and the delivery of improved outcomes will be dependent upon the strength of relationships between councils, departments and other public bodies. There should be a shared commitment to align plans and resources to address identified needs. The Council would therefore recommend that any legislation brought forward by the Department introduces a statutory duty, similar to other jurisdictions, on relevant public bodies and statutory agencies to participate and contribute to the community planning process

iv) One public estate

How can the Council help to deliver?

- Councils play a key role in addressing some of the societal issues highlighted under this priority through the development of closer integration and delivery between core council functions such as leisure and wider public health services. In recent years, the co-location of services has proved successful (e.g. the Grove Health and Well Being Centre) in delivering innovative and sustainable outcomes.

This is an area of working that the Council would like to further develop, in conjunction with other key services such as libraries and youth services. Co-location will and should be a vital aspect of government efficiency savings over the lifetime of this PfG.

- As a potential enabler for this, the Council would highlight the recent development of the 'One Public Estate' approach in Great Britain. In simple terms, the model is based on the concept of place-based asset management whereby local public service providers collaborate on developing, managing and using their land and buildings as a collective resource across an area.

It seeks to forge new collaborative partnership approach to the planning and delivery of public services with a clear and collective understanding of the needs of local communities and how users want to access public services. The approach seeks to deliver savings combined with better social, economic and regenerative outcomes. The Council would be keen to work with the NI Executive and government departments to explore the potential for greater integration of services at the local level.

v) Social Clauses

How can the Council help to deliver?

The Council welcomes the clear commitment within the draft PfG and ISNI to explore the potential extension of the use of social clauses extend the potential use of social clauses for government capital schemes. The Council has some experience of these through the Titanic Quarter and consider that there have been many lessons learned which should be disseminated across government. Consideration needs to be given to the content of the clauses as well as their management and monitoring. This needs to be done in the context of difficult market conditions for

private sector employers and needs to include innovative approaches, for example, to help apprentices complete their apprenticeship across a number of schemes. Although the current focus is on capital schemes, we welcome proposals to extend social clauses to all government contracts. We acknowledge that consideration is currently being given by the Department for Environment (DoE) to allowing councils to take account of non-commercial clauses in awarding contracts and are open to considering how this can be done in the context of our capital programme and wider partnership projects.

The Council will continue to work with key partners on the Belfast Social Clause Delivery Forum, to take this important issue forward and ensure that all opportunities are maximised to enable young people and the long-term unemployed to access valuable employment and training opportunities at a time of particular difficulty in the training and jobs market.

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