



Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Update on Investment Programme Consultation
Date of meeting:	22 nd June 2012
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1.0 Purpose

1.1 To update Members on the outcome of the recent consultation on the Council’s Draft Investment Programme 2012-2015, to highlight key issues and any implications for the revising the document and to present proposals for how the Council should publicly feedback the results of the consultation.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Draft Investment Programme was formally launched on 2nd February 2012, followed by a number of local community launches across Belfast. As Members were keen that local people, communities and partners had an opportunity to influence the strategic thinking of Council and its investment decisions, the draft Programme was opened to public consultation to enable local people and organisations an opportunity to comment on it and influence its content before being formally agreed by Council. The consultation also sought views on how the Council could work partnership to deliver the Programme.

2.2 The consultation ran for a period of 12 weeks, closing on 27th April 2012. A number of mechanisms were used to ensure that people had an opportunity to submit their views, including:

- 5 local community launches in each geographical area of the city (and additional events as requested)
- An on-line questionnaire was available on the Council’s website for download. Respondents could either email the completed document or post in using a freepost service. Respondents could also choose to submit general comments electronically or by post.
- An article was published in City Matters with a pull-out feedback slip and freepost address
- A focused consultation event held with young people

2.3 The Programme was also presented to the council’s Section 75 Consultative Forum and a briefing session held for Council employees. A total of 107 individual responses were received representing a broad mix of organisations, sectors and geographies. Comments were also posted on the Council’s social media pages.

Type of Response:	Numbers
Survey Responses	33
Written Responses (non survey)	20
Public comments by City Matters	50
Public comments by email	1
Employee Comments	3

2.4 This report provides a summary of the key findings from the consultation responses and highlights the key issues and implications for the Investment Programme and Council generally. The report also outlines options for how the Council should feedback the findings from the consultation process, which includes a draft ‘Consultation Feedback Report’ which it is recommended should be published on the Council’s website (the draft report is attached at appendix 1).

3.0 Summary of the Consultation Responses

3.1 This section provides a summary of the responses generated by each of the key consultation methods; namely through the questionnaire, City Matters, written and email responses, community launches and workshop with young people. It should be noted that, across all responses, feedback relating to specific issues has been fed into the relevant processes for developing the work-streams and projects related to the Investment programme. For example, ideas and proposals for projects relating to the Local Investment Fund have been fed into the discussion of the Area Working Groups. Comments made about process and communication have also been part of the consideration around the process for prioritising projects and ensuring the effectiveness of the programme moving forward.

Questionnaire Responses:

3.2 A total of 33 questionnaires were returned. The overwhelming majority of those responding to the survey were supportive of the Council's plans and approach, with many commending the council for its leadership and vision, particularly in this time of economic uncertainty. Table 1 below sets out the quantitative analysis of the "yes/no" responses to the questionnaire and shows that the majority of people were supportive of the Programme and agreed with the commitments, principles and approach:

Table 1.	Yes		No	
	Count	%	Count	%
Do you agree with the key commitments, projects and programmes outlined in our Investment Programme 2012-2015?	30.5	92%	2.5	8%
Do you agree with the principles which underpin the Investment Programme?	31	94%	2	6%
Do you think this Programme will help address the challenges that Belfast faces over the coming years?	29	90%	3	10%
Do you think the commitments, projects and programmes will help promote equality of opportunity and/or promote good relations?	28	93%	2	7%

(Note % figures are based on the no. of responses to individual questions as some respondents did not answer all questions)

3.3 Encouragingly, even the small number who indicated disagreement, were generally in support of the Investment Programme and 'welcomed' its publication. The reasons for recording disagreement seem to stem from concerns about the difficulty of affecting change in deprived communities or the perceived lack of emphasis in some areas (such as the environment) rather than objections to the Programme per se.

3.4 The questionnaire provided space for respondents to offer detailed comment which generated significant comment, ideas and suggestions – these have been collated, along with comments and ideas from the other response mechanisms, by thematic area and by group and have been forwarded to the relevant Council Department for information and action as required.

General Written and Email Responses:

3.5 Twenty-one respondents chose to submit general responses rather than complete the questionnaire. These tended to be from public bodies or community and voluntary organisations and were in the form of detailed written documents with additional supplementary information or evidence also provided to demonstrate key points. For example; the correlation between health and deprivation; the impact of division on society or how community engagement can support better outcomes. The detailed responses and summaries have been forwarded to the relevant council Department for further consideration as appropriate; the key themes and suggestions are also reflected in the overall analysis.

3.6 All but one of the non-survey responses were supportive of the Investment Programme, with the majority of those offering to work in further partnership with the Council to help deliver the ambitions set out within the Investment Programme. The only exception was an email comment received from a resident

who disagreed with any Council investment unless it “*will be at a nil cost to the ratepayer*”.

City Matters Responses

- 3.7 A feature article on the draft Investment Programme was included in City Matters (April – June 2012) – the council’s resident magazine that is circulated to all households in Belfast. Readers were given the opportunity to return comments using a tear-out slip and freepost service. A total of 50 comments were received and provide a snapshot of what ordinary local residents think (whereas the questionnaire and written responses tend to reflect the views of organisations and community groups/representatives).
- 3.8 As with the questionnaire responses, the majority of comments via City Matters were positive and supportive:

I think the Investment Programme is wonderful. Bringing Belfast to life and making me proud to reside here.

Am happy with the priorities identified in this ever increasingly harsh environment, it is good to see 'value for money' & priority/target so we know as rates money is being well spent.

I am extremely happy with the efforts of the city Council. I feel that money is being spent in the right areas attracting both business and tourism which is essential in NI staying afloat in these times.

Over-all it looks like money well spent very commendable.

- 3.9 Of the 50 comments received via City Matters, only one respondent openly questioned the Investment Programme, with 4 other respondents raising concerns about the cost of rates. However, conversely, another respondent stated that they would be “*Happy to pay the increase in rates if it is put back into the city and offers everyone a better quality of community life.*”
- 3.10 A number of respondents specifically welcomed the focus on young people; whilst others singled out the importance of parks, playgrounds and community gardens or the focus on the economy, arts, culture and tourism. Others used the opportunity to comment on other Council services – this included praise and commendations especially in relation to recent events such as Titanic Belfast as well as raising individual matters of concern e.g. dog fouling. These have been collated and have been forwarded to the relevant Department / Service for information.

Community Launches:

- 3.11 Following the public launch of the Draft Investment Programme at the Waterfront Hall, five local community launches were held in each of the key geographical areas of the city (North, South, East, West and Greater Shankill). Additional local events were also facilitated as requested. Representatives from each of the political parties and senior Council officers attended each event which consisted of an informative presentation followed by an open question and answer session. A note was taken of the questions and answers from each session. The key issues emerging from these open feedback sessions can be summarised as follows:

- Generally, the document was well received and welcomed by many of those who spoke or asked questions. Many of those who spoke expressed their commitment to work with the Council or be involved in ongoing engagement. The desire and importance for ongoing engagement with communities was a recurring theme.
- Other key themes that emerged related to how the Programme could support young people and socially deprived communities. There was interest in the use of social clauses and a strong focus on using the Programme to generate positive messages to provide a hopeful future for young people.
- There was significant interest in the type of jobs, apprentices and work placement opportunities – specifically how they will be developed, whether they will be low skilled / low paid jobs and whether they will benefit / target local people living in social deprived areas and how they could lead to meaningful long term employment.
- Area specific issues featured in the feedback questions, including the desire for more support for local independent business and retailers. Many of those voicing opinions also felt it was critical that the

physical projects actually lead to improved quality of life and delivered local community benefits.

- 3.12 Members communicated the opportunity presented by the Local Investment Fund at the area launches, outlining that groups should get in touch with their local elected representatives with any ideas and proposals. Any specific project proposals made to Members subsequent to the launch have been fed into the Area Working Groups for consideration. Members are considering the process for moving forward the local Investment Fund as part of the agenda for their meeting on 22 June and feedback from the consultation has informed recommendations about process and communication relating to the Fund.

Focus Group with Young People:

- 3.12 A focused consultation was held with the Council's Youth Forum and other youth groups from across the city people – this included creating a young people's version of the plan to facilitate discussion with young people. The findings from this focus group, and a pre-focus Group with a cross section of the Council's Youth Forum, illustrated how important these issues were to young people. Key issues emerging from the focus group work with young people were:

- Young people are interested and want to be kept informed – but messages need to be simple, clear and relevant. Also need to ensure that information reaches young people. They want to know what is available (events, festivals and funding etc)
- They have major concerns about access to training and employment and how to ensure skills are accessible and relevant. The focus on formal qualifications presents difficulties for many young people, therefore the bursaries and placement opportunities must be accessible to young people at all levels. Incentives for young people to stay at school or further education was also a key issue.
- Young people were particularly interested in their local amenities – suggesting that more engagement with young people was needed to ensure facilities were interesting, relevant and affordable. The importance of young leadership programmes was noted and how youth volunteering could be better supported and lead to employment opportunities.
- Mental wellbeing and safety were also highlighted as important with young people suggesting that more imaginative and long term support was needed.
- A number of practical suggestions and comments were made – which have been incorporated within the feedback analysis and passed to council services as relevant.

Briefing Session for Council Employees:

- 3.13 An information session was held with Council employees as part of the communication and consultation process. It followed a similar format to the community launches and was very well attended. Representatives of the Council's trade unions attended, highlighting the desirability of investment and job creation. Feedback on the session with a comprehensive list of questions and answers has been communicated to employees. The views of council employees broadly reflected those of local communities – many expressions of support, particularly in terms of how it could help support and improve the quality of life for young people, older people and other vulnerable members of the community. Employees also acknowledged the challenges ahead in terms of implementation.

4.0 Key Findings from the Consultation

- 4.1 The overwhelming response to the consultation on the draft Investment Programme was positive – with numerous respondents commending the council for its leadership and vision. Throughout all methods of feedback, the overwhelming majority of respondents were supportive of the Programme – the commitments, projects and programmes and the underlying principles. Whilst there were a number of requests for clarification as well as a wide range of ideas and suggestions offered, they did not detract from the overall support for the Programme. **The Council should therefore view the consultation responses as an endorsement of the draft Investment Programme and move to finalise it.**

It is great to see an ambitious plan for the city.

We get a sense of energy, excitement and commitment from this Investment

Overall, we commend BCC for compiling this Investment Programme and feel it offers a detailed framework for supporting economic growth in the foreseeable future.

We believe the Investment Programme represents a very real and exciting opportunity for key stakeholders to come together to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of individuals, communities and the city as a whole.

We commend the City Council for this visionary programme to enhance the economic, social, educational, cultural and sporting opportunities for the benefit of all of the citizens of Belfast and the wider region which it serves.

An ambitious plan that is to be welcomed in this difficult economic climate.

I think the Investment Programme is wonderful. Bringing Belfast to life and making me proud to reside here.

- 4.2 The consultation generated a high level of interest, with many respondents providing detailed comments and suggestions. A list of all the ideas and suggestions has been forwarded to the relevant Service or Department. Any ideas relating to local projects or the Local Investment Fund have been forwarded to the appropriate Area Working Group.
- 4.3 Many respondents indicated that they would be keen to work in partnership with the Council, and highlighted the projects, skills, knowledge and experience they had which would help council to deliver the Programme. These 'expressions of interest' have been collated and circulated to the relevant council Departments.
- 4.4 There were also a number of requests for clarification. A significant portion of these related to queries about how the programme will be prioritised, implemented and monitored, and how the Council will continue to engage and involve local people, communities and partners. It is important, that in keeping with the commitments made at the community launches, the finalised Programme explains the processes which the Council is currently developing to ensure it can effectively deliver the Investment Programme commitments and that steps are taken to regularly communicate progress and keep people informed.
- 4.5 An analysis of all the consultation responses indicates that respondents generally placed strong emphasis on the importance /need for:
- Leadership, vision and ambition
 - Genuine collaboration to deliver the programme
 - Early and ongoing engagement and involvement of local communities and partner organisations
 - Clarity around the prioritisation of physical projects and the allocation of resources
- 4.3 Based on the feedback received, some changes to the document's current format are recommended. These are outlined under 'Recommendations and Next Steps' below.

5.0 Recommendations and Next Steps

Investment Programme – Revisions

- 5.1 It is recommended that Council should view the consultation responses in the round as an endorsement of the draft Investment Programme and move to finalise the Programme, taking on board the feedback received and using this to guide the continuing development of projects and programmes. Amendments to the document are recommended as follows:
- i. Explain and elaborate the Council's approach to environmental issues – demonstrating the Council's commitment to the environment and sustainable development and how it underpins much of our work and strategic decisions needs to be more clearly articulated within a revised document. It will also be possible to give more visibility to the council's work in this area through the corporate plan.
 - ii. Include more detail on the monitoring and evaluation, including specifying how we will report and feedback and the mechanisms we will use. Proposals on how this should be done will be developed and brought back to Committee. These will be developed in line with the continuing development and

implementation of the communications plan.

- iii. Include or signpost an explanation of the process for prioritisation and community engagement, as currently being progressed through the Area Working Groups and SP&R Committee

Investment Programme – Public Feedback

- 5.2 In keeping with good practice and our commitment to keep people informed, Council will be expected to publish the findings from the consultation on the Investment Programme and, in due course, also provide a formal response to the consultation – i.e. setting out what it has done or will do in as a result of the issues raised by those responding to the consultation.
- 5.3 A draft feedback report is attached as appendix 1 which provides a summary of the consultation process and submissions received. It is recommended that this is published on the council website as soon as possible – Members are asked to approve the attached draft for publication.
- 5.4 The consultation generated a high level of interest, with many respondents providing detailed comments, issues, ideas and suggestions which have been forwarded to the relevant Department. It is recommended that an update on the Council’s response to these – perhaps using a ‘Question & Answer’ format – should be developed and placed on the Council website at a later date once we have had an opportunity to consider and respond to the detailed comments and finalise the draft plan. This will provide the Council with an opportunity to clarify and respond to various issues and suggestions in more detail.

6.0 Equality & Resource Implications

- 6.1 A separate EQIA consultation exercise was undertaken in tandem with the public consultation on the draft Investment Programme. Key issues emerging from the responses relate to:
 - Demonstrating that we have based decisions on good evidence
 - Effective consultation with local people
 - Ensuring that the needs of specific S.75 groups are effectively taken into consideration and pro-active steps taken to ensure outreach and secure measurable impact in delivering the Programme. Specific examples about the impact on people with disabilities were noted and will be fed into the on-going development of programmes and projects.
- 6.2 A question relating to equality of opportunity was included within the consultation questionnaire, which generally elicited a positive response with the view being that the Programme would help promote good relations and equality of opportunity. Some respondents did acknowledge that good relations and addressing the legacy of the past was a complex and challenging area; others pointed out the linkages between deprivation and a divided society. However, it was clear that the Investment Programme was a step in the right direction. In moving forward, it will be important to ensure that equality and good relations are systematically addressed within the IP implementation processes, including the work of the Areas Working Groups.

7.0 Decisions Required

Members are asked to:

- i. Note the key findings from the consultation process;
- ii. Approve the publication of the Draft Consultation Feedback Report on the Council’s website;
- iii. Endorse the recommended approach to revising the Investment Programme, with full revised document to be brought back for approval in August

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft (Public) Feedback Report.