



Report to: Voluntary Transition Committee/ Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Subject: Transfer of Functions: Urban Regeneration

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	There are a number of strands of work being taken forward at present to prepare for the transfer of several new functions to the Council as part of the Local Government Reform (LGR) programme. A number of these functions are closely related including urban regeneration and community development, statutory planning and local economic development responsibilities. The introduction of the new Community Planning framework will also be a significant factor when considering a future regeneration policy development.
1.2	Initial work has focussed on developing a baseline position for these functions insofar as the information that can be verified at this stage. This has begun to identify some of the key strategic issues which need to be given focused consideration in moving towards transfer. In relation to urban regeneration, this includes the need to effectively balance business continuity at point of transfer on 1 st April 2015 with the opportunity to deliver a 'transformed' and integrated place shaping agenda over the longer-term (i.e. from 2017).
1.3	The transfer of a range of functions as part of LGR, including responsibilities for regeneration and statutory planning, offers an unprecedented opportunity for the Council to address these challenges in a more co-ordinated and productive way. The Council will be able to lead the development and implementation of localised policies which stimulate investment, create jobs and support sustainable growth in the local economy. As a result the new Council will be able to pro-actively influence investment, tourism, development and regeneration across the city.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The Department of the Environment expect each of the 11 new Councils, as part of their new statutory planning function, to develop and adopt new local Development Plans for their area by 2017. Development Plans apply regional policies at the local level, setting out the policy framework and land use proposals that will be used to guide development decisions within the local area.

2.2	The statutory planning policy context for Belfast will be set out in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP), which is due to be published before the transfer of the planning functions in 2015. This new BMAP, on adoption, will formally replace the existing Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 as the statutory Development Plan for the City. Although yet to be adopted, the significant delay in formally approving BMAP means that it is already dated.
2.3	Whilst many of the localised neighbourhood-level policies may still be considered relevant, the economic circumstances have changed significantly since BMAP policy was drafted. It is therefore recognised that those elements of the plan relating to the City Centre in particular are in need of review and policies revised to account for the economic downturn, changes to consumer patterns, the high level of vacant properties and take account of emerging projects planned for the city such as the relocation of the University of Ulster.
2.4	As a result of the LGR the Council will have responsibility for the development of an overarching Strategic Planning Framework for the City and a more specific Local Plan Policy document. Although the Council cannot formally commence the preparation of these Development Plan Documents in advance of 2015, Planning Service wish to undertake early pilot work with the Council and the Department for Social Development (DSD) to develop a policy framework which fully integrates planning, regeneration and economic development.
2.5	This will be a significant departure from current arrangements and represents a new approach to planning development and regeneration in NI which has not been possible due to related functions being dispersed across a number of departments and agencies. This has however been more common practice for a number of successful cities across the UK and Ireland, including Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dublin.
2.6	To successfully deliver this new Strategic Policy Framework it is proposed that the Council secures independent specialist support, with international experience in strategic planning, to supplement existing officer knowledge. This would provide a high-level focus to develop a shift towards a new, integrated development and regeneration approach based on a clear strategic agenda.
2.7	Given the changed economic context within Belfast and the number of significant developments proposed in the City, the initial focus for this work would be on the 'core city' area. This would provide a strategic context for proposals and emerging regeneration projects including: the proposed University of Ulster Campus; potential BBC relocation; the opportunity for enhanced accessibility through rapid transit; the integrated transport hubs; emerging plans for City Gateways (such as the Northern Corridor and Shaftesbury Square) and issues associated with the development of the Harbour Estate (City Quays, Titanic Quarter etc). Developing integrated proposals for the 'Centre City' also aligns with the emerging recommendations from the Belfast City Masterplan Review.
2.8	The appointed consultants would also be tasked with developing an approach that addresses thematic challenges including, city centre living, repopulation, student housing and capturing the benefit of regeneration for the communities of Belfast. The specific objectives would focus on securing economic growth, capturing benefits for residents, addressing quality of life issues and creating neighbourhoods of choice. This work in turn would provide a policy basis for developing similar regeneration plans across other areas of the City. An outline

	of the proposed Terms of Reference for this work is set out in Appendix 1
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3	Resource Implications
3.1	Within this context, a budget of £250,000 is requested from the £2m non-recurrent convergence budget agreed by the VTC and SP&R for the procurement of consultants to support the development of a functional and integrated approach to urban regeneration in the longer term. This is based on the experience from other cities who have undertaken similar work and will allow early work to be undertaken to set the strategic context for a range of future initiatives.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	Proposals developed for the future delivery of a transferred and transformed urban regeneration function will be subject to full Equality and Good Relations screening.

5	Recommendations
5.1	It is recommended that Members: Approve the procurement of independent expert support estimated at £250,000 (from the agreed £2m non-recurrent convergence budget) towards pilot work with Planning Service and DSD to develop an integrated and functional approach to the future development and regeneration of the city.

6	Appendices
6.1	Appendix 1- Terms of Reference for Independent Expert Support

7	Decision Tracking
7.1	If approved, procurement to be commenced in December 2013.

8	Key to Abbreviations
	LGR – Local Government Reform BMAP – Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan DSD – Department for Social Development VTC – Voluntary Transition Committee

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Appendix 1

SPECIFICATION: BELFAST CENTRE CITY REGENERATION STRATEGY AND INVESTMENT PLAN

Background – Local Government Reform, Planning and Regeneration

On 1 April 2015, Belfast City Council will assume responsibility for a range of functions previously carried out by Government Departments. A number of these functions are closely related and include urban regeneration and community development, statutory planning and local economic development responsibilities. Alongside this, a new Community Planning framework will also be introduced as part of the comprehensive Local Government Reform (LGR) programme.

This offers an unprecedented opportunity for the Council to address the development challenges within Belfast in a more co-ordinated and productive way. The Council will have a new ability to directly lead the development and implementation of localised policies which stimulate investment, create jobs and support sustainable growth in the local economy, pro-actively influencing investment, tourism, development and regeneration, addressing local requirements and focussing on local opportunities or issues.

Some initial work has been completed to date and has begun to identify some of the key strategic issues associated with the new functions that need to be given focused consideration in moving forward. The delivery of a transformed regeneration service for Belfast, for example, is viewed as a long-term objective (2017+), with immediate work focussing on transitional arrangements that will maintain business continuity at point of transfer. However, the Council have already begun work towards a future regeneration agenda in parallel with this transitional work. This will help provide a composite understanding of the scope of functions to inform decisions around strategic policy context, delivery structures and alignment of resources, etc.

As well as early work required to develop a new regeneration policy framework and model for the future, the new Council is also expected as part of their statutory planning duty to develop and adopt an updated local Development Plan for their area by 2017. Although the Council cannot formally commence the preparation of these Development Plan Documents in advance of 2015, Planning Service have expressed an interest in undertaking early pilot work with the Council and the Department for Social Development (DSD) to look at a more co-ordinated and productive way to update the policy framework with full integration of planning, regeneration and economic development.

This will be a significant departure from current arrangements and represents a new approach to planning development and regeneration in NI which has not been possible before now due to related functions being dispersed across a number of departments and agencies. The Council are therefore seeking to appoint additional support to develop a Strategic Regeneration and Investment Plan to help transform the planning and urban regeneration functions in Belfast in the longer-term. The appointed consultants will be independent experts, with international experience in strategic planning and provide a high-level focus to develop, challenge and support a shift towards a new, integrated development and regeneration approach based on a clear strategic agenda.

Belfast 'Centre City' Context

Belfast's 'Centre City' is an emerging economic priority for the Council and the City in terms of regeneration. This is the crucible of the regional economy and is the most important

economic space in the Region. The Masterplan's emerging strategy for this 'Centre City' seeks to develop a broader approach based around functionality, cohesion and, given the pace and quantum of development of recent years, making the Centre City work and function better as a sustainable mixed use location.

In statutory planning terms, the official Development Plan for the City is Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 (adopted in 1989). However, this outdated policy is set to be replaced by the end of the year when the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) is formally adopted. Although yet to be adopted, draft BMAP has held significant weight in terms of development management for a number of years given the outdated adopted policy. The significant delay in approving BMAP means however that it too is now considered dated in certain areas. Whilst many of the localised neighbourhood-level policies may still be considered relevant, the economic circumstances have changed significantly since BMAP policy was originally drafted in 2003/04.

The strategic context, particularly in economic terms, is therefore in need of review and policies revised to account for the economic downturn, changes to consumer patterns and significant changes in land use arising from a number of developments proposed within the Centre City. These include the proposed University of Ulster Campus in the north of the City Centre; potential BBC relocation; the opportunity for enhanced accessibility through rapid transit and proposed Great Victoria Street Transport Hub; proposals for the development of City Gateways and issues associated with the development of the Harbour Estate, City Quays and Titanic Quarter.

In regeneration terms, the economic conditions and the reality of a slow recovery makes the prospect for attracting significant investment for large schemes difficult, suggesting a renewed approach to stimulating regeneration in the city is needed. Similarly, changing demographics and the impact of new technologies (such as internet shopping) mean that primary retail centres are under significant pressure, needing to re-define their primary role and functions. Belfast City Centre needs to respond to this changing context, repositioning itself for the future through long-term and sustained delivery of regeneration. This requires a robust approach to delivery from both the bottom up and the top down.

To assist with this Belfast City Council is taking a lead on the development of a Centre City Regeneration Strategy and Investment Plan that will establish a local framework for taking forward the future planning, development and regeneration of the City's economic core. Building on existing policy documents and strategies as well as the history of regeneration in the City, this work should develop a strategic policy context and articulate investment priorities, key actions and outcomes for the Centre City. The appointed consultants will also be tasked with developing an approach that addresses thematic challenges in respect of city centre living, re-population, student housing and capturing the benefit of regeneration for the communities of Belfast. The specific objectives would focus on securing economic growth, capturing benefits for residents, addressing quality of life issues and creating neighbourhoods of choice.

Developing integrated planning, regeneration and economic development proposals for the City Centre and its Gateways will address a gap in the existing regeneration policy framework and will provide a strategic foundation for developing future policy, proposals and regeneration activity for other areas of the City. Undertaking this developmental work in an integrated and co-ordinated way with planning and economic development is essential to harness the opportunity offered under LGR for the Council to maximise the potential for

urban regeneration and development in the City. The process undertaken to develop these integrated planning and regeneration proposals is also important.

The Centre City Regeneration Strategy and Investment Plan

This brief describes consultancy services required to work with the Council's Development Department to produce a vision, development strategy and investment framework for Belfast's Centre City Corridor for the next 10 years. This work should take a holistic approach to the delivery of regeneration within the City and should build upon existing policies and strategies, most notably the draft City Masterplan Review and the Council's Investment Strategy.

As part of LGR the Council will also inherit a range of non-statutory regeneration masterplans and development schemes from DSD. This work needs to be brought together with the existing Council policies, subjected to critical review and consolidated into a new vision for the City Centre. Ambitious but realisable goals should be set and a high-level Strategy and Investment Plan developed to articulate of the City's vision for the next 10 years.

The multi-disciplinary consultant team appointed also need to look at UK comparators and other European and international cities with the status and quality that Belfast aspires to, asking what do those cities have that Belfast currently lacks, learning from their success whilst also highlighting the unique selling points Belfast possesses.

In addition, consideration should be given to the process undertaken by urban authorities in comparable cities to deliver an effective and integrated approach to planning and regeneration, highlighting any implications this may have for the Council's future policy framework, governance and service delivery models. There are numerous examples of where unitary authorities have developed a very functional approach to discharging their regeneration and planning responsibilities, with a number of delivery models apparent. This should offer the opportunity to learn from best practice examples based on a strong strategic context, a clear focus on the desired outcomes and projects needed to deliver their agenda.

In summary the Centre City Strategy and Investment Plan will:

1. Establish an aspirational strategic vision for Belfast's Centre City for the next 10 years, building upon and refreshing the existing policy framework;
2. Assimilate the wide body of work undertaken in recent years within Belfast, including work undertaken by DSD and other regeneration partners, with both a geographic and thematic focus;
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the challenges facing the City and Regional economies and identify opportunities to deliver significant benefit through well targeted investment;
4. Undertake a desktop review of the key components for success of a number of comparable UK, European and international cities, identifying factors for success;

5. Deliver an ambitious but realistic 10 year economic and spatial plan for Belfast's 'Centre City' including investment priorities, key actions and outcomes;
6. Consider specific developments proposed within the City Centre, identifying the role the Council should play in maximizing the benefits of investment and to minimize any potential adverse impacts; and
7. Set out a delivery plan, learning from best practice examples to recommend models and processes that can be deployed to assist the delivery of the strategy, recognising the challenges that present themselves in attracting increased investment.

Services required

The Council is seeking to procure external support to the Council's senior managers to provide specialised skills and expert knowledge that are not currently available within the Council. Tenders are invited from urban practitioners who can demonstrate and evidence significant experience in the field of urbanism and a strong, practical understanding of long term, strategic approaches to city development. International experience in urban master planning, city development strategies or urban economic development and regeneration is essential.

Successful organisations must demonstrate, and evidence an understanding of working with a wide range of communities and stakeholders in an urban environment. They will have the ability to deliver strategic documents, across a range of mediums that convey complex information through clear text and images.

The commission will require a multi disciplinary collaborative approach and will include the following tasks:

- **Stage 1- Baseline**
 - a) The assimilation and critiquing of a wide body of work undertaken over recent years with a geographic and thematic focus.
 - b) The identification and plugging of any gaps in the intelligence necessary to ensure a robust baseline, including an examination of the adequacy of the physical infrastructure of the city particularly supply of suitable floorspace required to support economic growth, movement and public realm (including its management), etc.
 - c) A concise articulation of the Centre City's function as the pre-eminent driver for the economic growth of the City and Region and the priorities that emerge from that role.
 - d) A brief desk top review of the key components for success of a number of comparable international cities identifying factors for success currently absent in Belfast that are capable of realisation. This might include organisational arrangements; marketing and promotion activity; physical infrastructure assets; and business and sector strengths.
 - e) Examination of funding and delivery mechanisms which can be deployed to assist delivery of the strategy, focusing in particular on innovative financial models, routes to increasing private sector investment and partnership approaches available to the local authority.

- f) An exploration of the ways in which the Centre City's growth can positively influence the wider City, particularly adjacent areas suffering from multiple forms of deprivation.
 - g) Engagement with key stakeholders by sector and geography to obtain their input advice and involvement, including private and public sector partners, the community and voluntary sector and City's residential community.
- **Stage 2 – Strategy and Investment Plan**
 - a) The identification of step change objectives and ambitions and articulation of the vision for the Centre City building on the existing policy framework.
 - b) Deliver an over-arching ambitious but realistic 10 year economic and spatial plan for Belfast's Centre City.
 - c) The identification, through desk research and site visits, of preferred sites for supporting infrastructure and economic growth within the City Centre, based on a gathering and alignment of existing information of all potential development sites within the study area.
 - d) A delivery plan identifying key actions to be taken to achieve the vision, ambitions and objectives outlined in the Plan, including mechanisms that can be deployed to assist realisation of the Strategy, focusing in particular on innovative financial models and partnerships available to the Council.
 - e) The production of a document that is visual, succinct, realistic but ambitious and flexible to changing economic circumstances. An overarching pamphlet style executive summary should also be prepared. The preparation, design and publication of the documents will require work with the Council's Corporate Communications team to ensure a consistent corporate approach.
 - **On-going Tasks**
 - a) Coordinating engagement with the various stakeholders - including convening and facilitating engagement.
 - b) Reporting to monthly Steering Group meetings and working on a day to day basis with relevant Council's Officers.
 - c) Authoring documents comprising technical reports and a desk top published reports, including drafts for internal consideration and for public consultation.

Contract Reporting and Contact Requirements

The Council will establish a project Steering Group, led by the Development Director, with relevant professional and technical experience from supporting Council teams. This will include appropriate representation from DSD and Planning Service. The client will be supported by the Urban Development Manager and other senior officers from across the Council

Suppliers will be required to submit progress updates to the Project Manager (frequency to be negotiated with successful contactor) and will be required to attend monthly Steering Group meetings and any other relevant internal and external meetings as needed.

The contract is for a maximum period of **six** months, from **1st February 2014 to 1st August 2014**. The outputs of this contract shall be received and agreed by the Project Group no later than this date to allow for final review and appropriate sign-off.

The consultant shall include in the Proposal Document a timetable showing key stages to complete the project within this timescale including milestones and outputs. Any proposed

variation to this timetable, and the reasons for it, should be included in the tender submission.

Payment

Payment will be made in two stages with a third of the total amount being made available following a successful mid-point review. Payment of the remainder of the contract value will be triggered by the achievement of all agreed outputs, as set out in the project plan, by the project deadline.

The Council reserves the right to conclude any subsequent contract at any time if, in the reasonable opinion of the Council, the details set out in this specification and the supplier's method statement is not being fulfilled.