



Subject:	Working & Learning Update
Date:	9 th October 2019
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update elected members on the programme of work being delivered in the 2019/20 financial year under the Working and Learning pillar of the Belfast Agenda. The work programme supports the inclusive growth ambitions of the Council by addressing barriers to progression, focusing upon educational underachievement and supporting residents to access employment and/or upskilling opportunities.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The committee is requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the content of the report and progress achieved to date on the 2019/20 work plan to support the delivery of the Working & Learning strands of the Belfast Agenda; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the ongoing work to inform the future strategic direction of the employability and skills work programme, supporting the ambitions of inclusive growth and Belfast Agenda commitments.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that, at the Committee meeting on the 6th March 2019, approval was given for a series of activities that would support the commitments made under the Working and Learning pillar of the Belfast Agenda. Through this work programme, the council is directly contributing towards the Belfast Agenda to better connect people to economic opportunities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing educational inequalities and increasing skill levels Connecting local residents to employment opportunities across a range of sectors Addressing barriers to employment Supporting young people to progress through coherent pathways into employment, education and/or training.
3.2	<p>This work programme mirrors the commitments of the Council within the Inclusive Growth Framework in relation to employability and skills. It sets out how the Council is proactively working to address the barriers preventing city residents from accessing economic opportunity and to address the challenges of poverty and deprivation, focusing on the role of skills development and sustainable job creation as a way out of poverty.</p>
3.3	<p>However members should be aware that the extent to which Council alone is able to make an impact in this area is limited by its statutory powers and by available resources (both financial and staff resources). In order to achieve a step change, partnership working with government departments and employers is crucial. Strategic opportunities presented through the Belfast Region City Deal and Community Planning provide mechanisms through which the Council can better influence regional policies to ensure that provision is aligned to local needs. Moving forward, the Council's role in this area will require a combination of direct delivery interventions, where opportunities exist for investment, as well as a wider influencing role to champion the needs of the city within a regional context.</p>
3.4	<p>Recognising the importance of buy-in from other organisations, officers are working closely with partners to refresh the Employability and Skills Framework which was developed in 2015 and which served as a pre-cursor to the commitments within the Working and Learning theme of the Belfast Agenda. The refreshed framework will allow a greater degree of focus, ensuring that supply meets demand in terms of new employment opportunities. This will include</p>

	<p>exploring how the Council can work strategically with key employers to develop and deliver interventions that will create sustainable job opportunities for Belfast residents. A critical element of this work will include a commitment to supporting inclusive growth through our employment and skills interventions.</p>
3.5	<p>In parallel with these planned activities, there is a significant degree of work already under way on the delivery of the 2019/20 Working & Learning work plan. Progress to date (since April 2019) indicates that nearly 1750 Belfast residents have been supported, of which almost 650 have positively progressed into employment, education and/or training – 590 of these into employment alone. An update on the key elements of the Working and Learning work plan is outlined below:</p>
3.6	<p><u>Supporting access to employment</u></p> <p>The largest area of intervention through the employability and skills work programme is focused upon supporting Belfast residents into employment or into better employment. The spectrum of support provided through Council activities and/or funded projects provides a pathway of intervention geared towards supporting residents to positively progress, at their own pace, into a positive destination.</p>
3.7	<p>Tailored support for those furthest from the labour market is provided through five European Social Fund (ESF) projects, whose client groups include unemployed, economically inactive, young people (NEETs) and those with disabilities. Across these projects, over 1200 Belfast residents have accessed support to date, of which over 445 have entered employment, a further 35 participants have progressed into further education. The council is a match-funder of these projects: the majority of the funding is provided by Department for Communities (DfC) and ESF.</p>
3.8	<p>One of our key tailored interventions is the suite of Employment Academies that we operate. The structure of these varies from programme to programme but they are generally employer-led interventions designed to fill identified employment opportunities. Employers are involved in the design of the training and offer a guaranteed job interview or ring-fence employment opportunities for the specific target groups – principally the economically inactive.</p>
3.9	<p>This year we have extended delivery of Employment Academies across a number of sectors including construction, hospitality, transport, health and social care, childcare and leisure. Feedback from employers, including sectoral representative bodies, is very supportive of this model of delivery. Key employers engaged through academies include Translink, GLL, Belfast Health & Social Care Trust, as well as a broader spectrum of small employers.</p>

Academies continue to be focused upon supporting residents into employment, however further work has been undertaken this year to increase the scale of our upskilling academies supporting residents to develop high level skills to move into better-paid employment. To date our academies have supported 244 Belfast residents, of whom 146 have progressed into employment or better employment (this is in addition to the figure in section 3.7). Average into-employment rates for academies is 65% which compares favourably to European Social Fund provision at 41% and regional employability programmes such as Steps to Success at 31%.

Focus on young people

3.10 High levels of educational underachievement in Belfast coupled with high percentages of youth unemployment mean that there is a need for targeted interventions for affected young people. Over the last year, the Council has been increasing its level of investment and direct intervention within this area. Key activities and achievements within the last six months include:

- Procurement and launch of a citywide GCSE revision programme, aimed at supporting young people at risk of not achieving a C grade in English and/or Maths. This approach builds upon successful delivery models operating in parts of the city, ensuring provision is accessible across Belfast. In the 19/20 academic year up to 365 young people will be supported
- Over 250 young people have been supported through our youth interventions, providing a range of support including career advice, work experience opportunities and intensive supports for young people at greatest risk of disengaging from the education and/or labour market. Intensive support is currently provided to 65 young people with complex needs and challenges and, to date, over 50% of the young people have positively progressed into employment, education and/or training
- Work is about to get under way on a new Citywide Youth Support Programme. This programme focuses on providing a flexible programme of support tailored towards the needs of young people, helping them more towards training or employment outcomes. This initiative will operate alongside existing provision, recognising that a combination of interventions are often required to make an impact on a young person's life.

Strategic Engagement/Partnership working

3.11 Officers are continuing to work in partnership with government departments and wider stakeholders to facilitate better alignment between regional employment and skills programmes and the needs of the Belfast labour market. Key areas of work underway includes:

- Engagement on new employability programme – Employability NI: Officers are currently working with Department for Communities in their redesign of future into-work support. This provision will replace the current employability programmes such as Steps to Success. Whilst the proposed delivery model is still emerging, there is a clear focus for the department on local models of delivery with flexibility aligned to employer and participant need. The potential role of the Council in its future implementation is being explored and will be brought back for members’ consideration at a future meeting. To help inform this approach, a number of test and learn pilots are being undertaken. These include looking at how the business start-up support can be better aligned with employability support and exploring better approaches for employer engagement
- Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD): work is underway to refine the design of the employability and skills programme, aligned to employment opportunities arising from the 22 BRCD projects.
- Belfast Agenda Working & Learning Board: Officers are working with community planning partners to develop collaborative interventions focused on a number of key issues including tackling educational inequality.

3.12 In addition to the above joint working is taking place with a range of stakeholders to pool resources for maximum impact. For example new areas of work include the delivery of a Northern Ireland Apprenticeship week, commencing 3rd February 2020. The Council in partnership with the Department for the Economy, Belfast Metropolitan College and apprentice providers will undertake a series of activities to promote apprenticeships to employers, young people and parents. This is particularly important given the low take-up of apprenticeships in Belfast and the need to address the skills gaps at levels 3 and 4 (A level and BTEC level), as identified in the Belfast skills barometer.

3.13 Supporting Inclusive Growth
 The Inclusive Growth Framework presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources (SP&R) Committee on 20 September 2019 outlines the Council’s vision and commitments to supporting inclusive growth. The employability and skills work programme directly contributes towards inclusive growth by better connecting local residents to economic opportunity, removing barriers to participation, increasing skill levels and creating coherent pathways for progression. Whilst much of this activity is outward focused, Officers have also been working internally to develop ways of maximising the social and economic impact of the Council’s procurement and planning functions.

3.14	<p>In partnership with Corporate Procurement Services, Officers are considering the options for the implementation of a social value procurement framework. Approaches being developed take into account best practice from elsewhere, central government ambition to evolve their existing 'Buy Social' approach and any potential cost implications of this approach.</p>
3.15	<p>Members will be aware of the draft Developer Contributions Framework which has been brought to the Planning Committee. This framework include an option to seek contributions from developers to address employability and skills challenges in specific areas. Officers have commenced engagement with a number of key developments including Waterside and Tribeca. Whilst developer contributions are commonly used across the UK, they have not really been used to date in the Northern Ireland market. To ensure that the Council's approach to developer contributions, in the context of employability and skills, is sufficiently ambitious whilst not discouraging development, officers have commissioned technical support to inform our approach, best upon best practice. The outcome of this work will be presented to members at a future meeting.</p>
3.16	<p><u>Intelligence & research</u></p> <p>As highlighted previously, one of the biggest challenges within the Belfast labour market is the persistently high levels of economic inactivity. Despite significant levels of investment in this area, the levels of economic inactivity have not dramatically changed in recent years. To better understand the challenges and barriers facing this cohort and inform future interventions, the Council and Urban Villages are undertaking research in this area. Delivered through primarily Urban Village areas in Belfast, the study will get a first-hand account from this client group as to the barriers they face. It will also ask questions about the awareness and experience of interventions and will explore what measures might encourage individuals to engage in support programmes. Research findings are expected later this year and will be reported to members in early 2020.</p>
3.17	<p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The activities outlined within this report are resourced from the existing 2019/20 budget for the Employability & Skills section of the Place & Economy Department budget approved at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 6 March 2019.</p>
3.18	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessments</u></p> <p>Equality screening data is gathered on a regular basis for all of the council's employability interventions. The most recent review has indicated a broad spectrum of participation across our employability programmes. However, officers constantly review participation and take</p>

	action to encourage participation amongst specific client groups (e.g. additional outreach and engagement support for identified groups). It is important to note that participation on Council interventions is done on a voluntary basis.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None