

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 27th November, 2019

SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hargey (Chairperson); and
Councillors S. Baker, Brooks, Flynn, Garrett,
Graham, Heading, T. Kelly, McLaughlin and
O'Hara.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Development; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Aldermen Kingston and Spence and Councillor Whyte.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor O'Hara declared an interest on the basis that a family member was employed by Co-Operative Alternatives.

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy declared an interest in that a family member was employed by the NOW Group.

However, as neither organisation was seeking support from the Council, they were not required to leave the meeting.

Presentations

The Director of Development reminded the Committee that it had granted approval previously for a number of social enterprise/co-operative sector organisations to attend a future meeting in order to outline the extent of their work.

He drew the Members' attention to the publication in 2019 of the Re-Balancing the Economy Report and the Co-Operatives UK Annual Report, which had highlighted the significant contribution made by social enterprises and co-operatives, respectively to the Northern Ireland economy. He then provided an overview of the work which the Council had undertaken to date in support of that sector and pointed to the Social Enterprise and Co-operative Action Plan, which had been formulated in the context of the Belfast Agenda, the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the Enterprise Framework for Belfast, and had been approved by the Committee on 11th September.

The Committee then received presentations from the following organisations:

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Social Enterprise NI

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. C. Jess, Director of Social Enterprise NI, to the meeting.

Mr. C. Jess informed the Committee that social enterprises were defined as being businesses with primarily social objectives, whose surpluses were principally reinvested in the business or in the community, rather than creating profit for shareholders and owners.

He explained that Social Enterprise NI acted as the representative body for social enterprises and social entrepreneurs across Northern Ireland. The organisation provided its members, irrespective of their size or experience, with an opportunity to have their views publicised, to learn from one another and to collaborate with the public and private sectors.

He highlighted the contribution which social enterprises were making to the economy of Northern Ireland and pointed out that, between 2013 and 2018, the number of organisations had risen from 473 to 843, employee numbers had risen from 12,200 to 24,860 and turnover had grown from £592m to £980m. He highlighted also the challenge faced by the fact that approximately 70% of leaders of social enterprises were currently aged between 45 and 64 years and confirmed that Social Enterprise NI had, as part of its increasing education and awareness work, recently appointed a Young Ambassador. Mr. Jess concluded by providing an update on Social Enterprise NI's current activity, which included engagement with Political Parties and Government departments.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Trademark

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. S. Nolan and Ms. A. McLarnon, representing Trademark and the Belfast Cleaning Society respectively to the meeting.

Mr. Nolan reported that Trademark, which was a member of the Worker Co-operative Network, assisted in the development of community-owned and worker-owned co-operatives. The organisation was a supporter of the Belfast Cleaning Society and was a founding member of the co-operative development body, Co-operative Alternatives.

He explained that worker co-operatives were beneficial in that they built wealth at a local level, met employment needs and outperformed conventional investor owned enterprises. Their survival rates also exceeded those of conventional enterprises and local economies which had higher densities of co-operatives had higher levels of economic equality, resilience and social cohesion. He outlined the nature of the financial and institutional support which was required to develop co-operatives and highlighted the fact that the establishment in 2005 by the Scottish government of a co-operative development sector to assist sustainable co-operative businesses had resulted in a three-fold increase in the number of worker co-operatives since 2015.

Ms. McLarnon outlined the background to the establishment in 2011 of the Belfast Cleaning Society cross-community workers co-operative. The number of workers/owners

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had risen subsequently from five to fourteen and would rise to nineteen as a result of the co-operative having secured a major contract recently. She pointed out that the organisation was a living wage employer and highlighted its success in attaining in 2016 a Living Wage Champion award, in recognition of its support for the Living Wage movement.

She concluded by pointing out that the Belfast Cleaning Society was working with Trademark, the European Confederation of Industrial and Service Co-operatives and other stakeholders across Belfast and Northern Ireland to establish an all-island network of co-operatives.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Co-operative Alternatives

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. T. O'Hara and Mr. G. Bell, who were Board members of Co-operative Alternatives, to the meeting.

Ms. O'Hara informed the Committee that Co-operative Alternatives, which had been established in 2013, was Northern Ireland's leading co-operative development body and that it was guided by the co-operative values of democracy, equality, equity and solidarity with the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and care for others. The organisation's primary objectives were to:

- support the development of co-operatives and community benefit societies and contribute to the creation of a co-operative economy;
- provide services and business support to enterprises and projects which value people and the environment as much as profit;
- provide information and share resources and encourage co-operation amongst co-operatives nationally and internationally;
- promote the co-operative business models by educating, researching and publicising; and
- work in collaboration with the wider social economy and the third sector.

She explained that Co-operative Alternatives supported sectors such as craft and artisan food, creative industries, housing and renewable energy and provided details of regional co-operative support programmes and local council programmes. She concluded by outlining the economic, financial and legislative challenges faced by those wishing to establish a co-operative and by highlighting the economic, financial and cultural benefits which could be derived, if successful.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

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Now Group

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. M. Monaghan, Chief Executive, NOW Group, to the meeting.

Ms. Monaghan informed the Members that the NOW Group was a social enterprise which supported people with learning difficulties and autism into jobs with a future, as well as offering training, transition and volunteering opportunities. She explained that, of the 1,000 people who would be supported in 2019, at least 100 would secure paid employment and a significant number would gain accredited qualifications. In terms of its social impact for this year, every £1 invested which was invested by the NOW Group would generate £15 in social value.

She provided details of a number of successful initiatives which had been established by the NOW Group, such as the Loaf catering academy, four cafes, a corporate catering, a pottery and a consultancy business. She highlighted also the benefit of the JAM (Just a Minute) card initiative for those with a learning difficulty, autism or communication barrier and stressed that further work was needed to make the City centre more JAM card friendly.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Chairperson