



Subject:	Engagement with Ministers
Date:	10 June 2020
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director City Regeneration and Development 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"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To advise Members of ongoing engagement with Ministers in the context of priorities aligned to the CG&R committee plans and emerging Covid-19 recovery plans.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to note: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The correspondence with the DfI, DfC and DfE Ministers.• Party Group Leaders met with the Minister for Infrastructure on the 2nd June in relation to active travel and social distancing measures.• A meeting with Minister Hargey and Party Group Leaders is to take place in the very near future

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Minister for Economy has been contacted via SOLACE in relation to funding for the safe re-opening of businesses and revitalisation of city centres in line with funding available in England as well as the refocusing of ERDF spend to support local businesses.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Members will be aware that a number of priorities as set out within the agreed CG&R Committee plan are closely aligned to the work of various central government departments. This has required close working between the Council and the Departments concerned, and given the issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is recognised that this collaborative working will be more critical than ever, particularly as we move towards a City Recovery Plan.
3.2	The Chief Executive contacted the Minister for Communities and Minister for Infrastructure in the context of ongoing collaborative work, highlighting the desire of the Council to work closely with their respective Departments, particularly given the immediate COVID-19 pandemic situation, as well as longer term recovery proposals set within an ambition of rebuilding a better city from an environmental, economic and social community cohesion/ perspective.
3.3	Members will be aware that a meeting with the Minister for Infrastructure and Party Group Leaders took place on 2 June 2020 in relation to walking and cycling provision, and the aspirations of both the Department for Infrastructure and the Council in this regard. A separate report is being presented to this committee regarding the Dfl proposals but it is to be welcomed that the Minister embraced the principle of working in partnership with the Council to achieve city recovery (including arterial routes) and was receptive to the proposals and ideas put forward by Members.
3.4	Initial proposals to the Department for Infrastructure include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorsing The Bolder Vision Connectivity Study and to commit to the next phases, including jointly bringing forward short, medium and long term interventions focused on reimagining our spaces and active travel; Working with businesses, as part of a wider stakeholder group, as they seek to reopen, addressing issues on social distancing, travel options and infrastructure / connectivity; Working on finding a solution to the requirements for our water infrastructure to support the ambition in the LDP;

- Supporting progression of work on a higher speed rail connection between Belfast and Dublin;
- Expediting the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Strategy based on active and sustainable travel, and collectively progressing our Local Development Plan;
- Consider making a capital contribution towards the “Reconnecting Open Spaces, Peace IV Project”, as well as other key priority projects in our city to improve connections to local communities and to expand the sustainable transport network.

3.5

Minister Mallon did point out that her budget would need to be increased to enable the significant investment needed.

A meeting is also being arranged with Minister Hargey and Party Group Leaders. The initial correspondence with Minister Hargey highlighted the desire to continue to work collaboratively with DfC on a range of issues, including:

- Endorsing The Bolder Vision and committing the next phases, noting the DfC ask to ensure that its scope explicitly includes the surrounding communities;
- Requesting that DfC are closely involved in the work of all stakeholders on short term measures to support social distancing measures and active travel;
- Considering immediate issues around the imaginative use of civic spaces and DfC assets to assist businesses and the public, and to help give confidence to the safe re-opening of the city including an urgent review of licensing legislation;
- Working closely to help future proof the long term viability of the city centre through amplifying the diversification of uses, including more housing, use of public spaces and improvements to public realm;
- Exploring how we can work together to recast the priorities of the Future City Centre Programme in terms of activities focusing on sustainable development of the city Centre. Includes issues to address vacancies; city centre vitality, city centre living; positioning the city to compete and policy and legislative issues;
- Highlighting the UK Future High Street Fund (as available in England) aimed at regenerating town and city centres, and the potential for a similar scheme here;
- Seeking to work closely with DfC on measures to address the shortage of housing supply across the city, in particular the supply of mixed tenure residential housing in the city centre; and the enhanced opportunities arising from a collective approach to public sector lands;
- DfC support to ensuring that the Government Office Relocation Programme gives strong weight to regeneration benefits and impact;

<p>3.6</p> <p>3.7</p> <p>3.8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requesting the Department’s adoption of Masterplans aligned with the Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy, which will support bringing forward development and inclusive economic growth opportunities. <p>On behalf of the 11 councils, NILGA has recently written to the Minister for the Economy Diane Dodds MLA to clarify the position with ERDF funds and to ask for flexibility in how they are utilised – focusing on job retention rather than job creation at this time. The Minister responded by noting that her Department was in discussions with Invest NI on “utilising the remaining funds by offering the councils an opportunity to come up with a collaborative project to help alleviate the impact of Covid-19 on small and micro businesses in local council areas”. Officers are currently working with counterparts in other council areas to explore the most expedient and beneficial method for drawing down these resources, given the pressing current need.</p> <p>The Chief Executive – in her capacity as the SOLACE representative on the Economic Recovery Task Force – has written to Minister Dodds to ask her to consider allocating resources to local authorities to support the work of re-opening our town and city centres. On 24 May 2020, the UK High Streets Minister Simon Clarke MP announced the establishment of the “Reopening High Streets Safely Fund”. This fund utilises ERDF funding to support a range of activities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to develop an action plan for safe re-opening of local economies • Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely • Business-facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely • Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely. <p>The request to Minister Dodds asked her to consider the introduction of a similar scheme in Northern Ireland. As the Northern Ireland Executive makes its announcements regarding the progressing along the “Pathway to Recovery” set out on 12 May 2020, local businesses will be looking to their councils to support them in managing the public realm, ensuring coherent and consistent messaging around opening and the safety of local places, and providing practical support and guidance to ensure compliance with the regulations.</p>
<p>3.9</p>	<p><u>Finance & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>No financial implications at this stage.</p>

3.10	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> No implications at this stage.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None