# STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE



Sub	ject:	Recovery Programme					
Date	<b>)</b> :	19 June 2020					
Rep	orting Officer:	Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive					
Contact Officer:		Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Finance & Resources Nigel Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services Alistair Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy					
Rest	ricted Reports						
Is th	is report restricted?		Yes	N	lo X		
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?							
Afte	After Committee Decision						
	After Council Decision						
Some time in the future							
Neve	ever						
Call-in							
Is th	e decision eligible fo	or Call-in?	Yes	N	lo		
1.0	Purpose of Report	or Summary of main Issues					
1.1	The purpose of this	report is to inform Elected Members of the high	h level ¡	proposals	that the		
	Council is both deliv	ering and coordinating on behalf of other partne	ers in or	der to su	pport the		
	city and its communities to recover from the Covoid-10 pandemic.						
2.0	Recommendations						
2.1	The Committee is as	sked to:					

- (i) note that the Committee will receive a presentation on the key elements of the Council's recovery plan for the city as set out within this report;
- (ii) note the immediate focus and energy on supporting the safe reopening of the city
- (iii) note the reopening of St George's Market on Friday 3rd July and Smithfield Market on Monday 22 June; and
- (iv) note work is underway with central government to identify potential funding available to support recovery efforts.

# 3.0 Main report

# Context

- 3.1 In the midst of the pandemic, authorities are rightly focused on minimising the human cost, providing relief to their communities and delivering essential day-to-day services. Another major challenge for the Council and city partners is to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on their local economies, so that businesses can once again thrive and provide employment opportunities and vibrancy to local communities and the city centre.
- 3.2 It is evident that there will be lasting structural changes to the city's economy, its infrastructure, its environment and to its communities, and will likely result in financial and economic uncertainty for some time. To thrive, we must reimagine the future now and act together to deliver it.
- 3.3 The crisis has shone a spotlight on vulnerabilities within key systems and the structures of our economy and society, however, some benefits will be felt by the city from the behaviour change required by the response to the crisis (such as less car usage, flexible working arrangements, more community interaction, support for front line workers). It is important that we understand what these are, and how feasible it is to sustain these behaviours, appropriately, and over time.
- The Covid 19 crisis presents a reset moment for Belfast's economy and society, and whilst we will seek to build upon our strengths as a city, we will seek to be innovative, explore the art of the possibility and try to mobilise and reposition for a sustainable and inclusive future.
- 3.5 The Covid-19 crisis has mobilised and energised the community and voluntary sector who have been providing community support over the past 12 weeks. Knowledge of the sector, relationships and networks have strengthened significantly in a short space of time and there

is a real opportunity to build upon this and reimagine our neighbourhoods as the city plans its response, rebuild and recovery.

# NI Executive – five phase plan

The overarching context for the council interventions is the "Pathway to Recovery" issued by the Northern Ireland Executive on 12 May 2020. This incorporates a five step decision-making framework towards relieving all of restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The framework covers a number of areas including retail; work; education, family and community; travel and sport, culture and leisure activities.

- The council is only one of a number of organisations that has a stake in the recovery planning. While we have a direct delivery role in some areas, we also have a significant place shaping and leadership role in ensuring that there is a resourced and coordinated response to the recovery plans. In this context, we have been leading on an integrated approach to city recovery with the key government partners and wider statutory, community and business partners.
- The recent announcements made by the NI Executive has heightened the urgency in relation to bringing forward proposals and practical interventions (e.g. introducing social distance measures, signage and wayfinding etc) to support the safe reopening of the city.
- This reports outlines the immediate work and planning underway as well as the medium-longer term ambitions to support the rebuild and recovery of the city in a sustainable way.

## **Guiding Principles**

Officers from across the Council have been working to develop a Council recovery plan which is underpinned through by a set of guiding principles.

- Ensuring public health and safety
- Adopting a phased and managed approach to the transition through emergency response, rebuild and sustained recovery.
- Adopting a place based approach to the re-opening of our neighbourhoods.
- Accelerating economic recovery and enabling businesses to reopen effectively
- Accelerating elements of the Belfast Bolder Vision, which seeks to take forward a shared approach to creating a more attractive, accessible, safe & vibrant city centre.
- Enhancing civic pride to attract local people and visitors

#### **Council's Approach to Recovery**

- 3.11 At the meeting of the Party Group Leaders on 5 June 2020, a report was presented to all members, setting out the proposed approach to city recovery on a phased basis, namely Response: Rebuild: Recovery. This acknowledged the need for an immediate response which -- kicked in immediately following lockdown as well as the requirement to rebuild a new economy in a very different economic climate, maintaining a focus on sustainable and inclusive growth.
- 3.12 In addition to the phased approach, a series of complementary interventions are to be delivered in each of the- phases, across a number of work areas, namely:
  - (i) City Reopening
  - (ii) Social and community development
  - (iii) Economic development
  - (iv) Environmental development
  - (v) Digital transformation, Innovation and Smart Belfast
- 3.13 Additionally, there is significant programme of work underway to support these interventions and ensure organisational and operational readiness in terms of our staff, services, assets, facilities and processes.
- 3.14 While the final shape of the recovery plans is still emerging, and will clearly be shaped and informed by Elected Members, some emerging areas of work and initial emerging plans on a page is attached at **Appendix 1**. The following sections of the report outlines the emerging programme of work for Members' consideration.

#### (i) Reopening the City

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3.15 City & Neighbourhood Services, in conjunction with officers from City Regeneration and Development, Economic Development and Corporate Communications are progressing the delivery of a number of initiatives that will support the re-opening phase of recovery, while

also contributing to longer term regeneration objectives for the city that will ensure sustainable and resilient recovery.

It is proposed to reopen St George's on Friday 3rd July and Smithfield Market on Monday 22

June this takes account of traders views and demand and the mobilisation work required at both venues to ensure social distancing measures are in place.

3.17 The immediate focus of reopening the city is being taken forward in conjunction with key city statutory and business partners, and it is this collaboration and political will that is required to re-establish confidence in the city to support business to reopen and to contribute to the longer term resilience and inclusive growth of the city. There are a number of strands of work being taken forward in parallel including:

# 3.18 Clean, Green, Attractive and Safe

- Working with Dfl and DfC to provide additional public spaces through the re-allocation of road and civic spaces to facilitate social distancing, queueing and for the provision of businesses to operate effectively outside their own footprint.
- Providing enhanced city cleansing regimes focusing on cleaner city streets, touch points and public infrastructure such as benches, bins and public toilets;
- Imaginative use of open and civic spaces particularly those in public ownership to support retail and hospitality sectors.
- Consideration of temporary use of public spaces in the short-term for cafes, restaurants and outdoor space to facilitate SDM.
- Providing city ambassadors to provide information to the public and to assist in managing public spaces and pinch points.
- Ensuring the continued consideration and delivery of infrastructure & measures to take account of equality for vulnerable users of the city.
- Expanding this approach to arterial routes, urban villages and local communities;
- Marketing and branding to provide clear messaging and city marketing, implementing a city confidence mark (Appendix 2) and a unified approach to the visual quality of the temporary interventions.

# Enabling access and supporting connectivity

- Consideration of adopting our current Belfast Bikes model and reinstating the scheme with initial focus on prioritising the busiest sites and introduce enhancing cleansing and sanitising regime at doc stations.
- Provision by DFI of temporary pop-up cycle lanes and additional cycling infrastructure and storage facilities to encourage sustainable transport and to trial potential longer term interventions, the implementation of 20mph zones, and working closely with Translink to ensure the delivery of an effective public transportation system;

- Progressing with the work of the Bolder Vision for Belfast Connectivity Study; promoting active and sustainable travel, removing severance to neighbourhoods and the domination of the car, and providing a healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environment.
- This work will also enable the delivery of the ambitions of the DfI Minister, and council officers are working closely with the newly appointed DfI Walking and Cycling Champion to develop short, medium and long term interventions to realise these ambitions.

# 3.20 (ii) Supporting and Enabling Community Recovery

While there clearly remains an immediate need to continue to provide emergency support, looking ahead it will be important that we work collaboratively and harness the energy of our communities and city partners, ensuring greater co-ordination and innovation in addressing the specific issues that communities face across the city. As we move forward, there is a need to build community confidence, capacity and resilience across neighbourhoods through a range of programmes of support.

- 3.21 The benefit and potential impact of this approach is clearly demonstrated through the community response hub established by the Council to support residents during the coronavirus pandemic. Working with DFC and a range of community, voluntary and statutory partners the hub provides assistance to Belfast residents, including the coordination and distribution of 40,000+ food parcels to shielded and vulnerable people across the city. In addition, we provide advice on jobs and benefits, practical assistance such as collecting prescriptions and offering emotional support to anyone who may be feeling anxious during these uncertain times.
- The community hub is also helping to coordinate the distribution of £965,000 funding (£479,300 from the Council and £485,700 from the Department for Communities) to support vulnerable individuals and families within communities across the city.

#### Area Working Model & Developing Area Recovery Plans

3.23 Close ongoing engagement throughout the COVID-19 response has demonstrated the value of our newly established area-working model and has resulted in strong and meaningful relationships between Council officers and community partners. As we move forward, there is a need to build upon this, capturing emerging needs and priorities within Area Recovery Plans, jointly developed and implemented with partners, which inform future investments, utilisation of assets, service provision and thereby support community recovery and the delivery of improved outcomes for people at a local and citywide level.

- 3.24 The strength of Belfast's vibrant communities and supporting sectors has been at the forefront in many respects, with many examples of partnership working to address urgent community needs, in localities and across the city. There has been significant learning as a result of the Covid-19 emergency response both internally within Council and based on feedback from community partners, which should be considered as we plan our recovery:
  - Ability to be responsive to need and empowering communities;
  - Meaningful and highly effective relationships between Council and community partners to aid agile service delivery;
  - Creating opportunities for engaging/supporting more volunteering in communities;
  - Ability to share information quickly between different statutory and C&V organisations;
  - Opportunity to embed area-working concept both internally/externally with partners.
- 3.25 The emerging recovery plan also seeks to explore and accelerate key enabling and supporting interventions including, for example:
  - Explore opportunities to align grant funding streams to support recovery efforts subject to members consideration and approval
  - We need to collectively understand community capacity and structures and how partners in the community, voluntary and social enterprise sectors will need to be supported to maximise their contribution to community recovery and wellbeing improvement.
  - Maintain focus over the coming months to enhance our community-services provision.
  - Working with partners to explore how we can maximise the social value of our procurement spend and encourage 'buying local' initiatives.
  - Implementation focused employability and skills programmes including, reskilling and employment academies to enable local people to access job opportunities.
  - Support local enterprise/business models including social enterprises and co-operatives.
  - Supporting local tourism development across the city.
  - Engage with Departments, SEUPB (Peace Plus), and others to develop our connected communities' pathways model.
  - Continue to work with DFC and other partners to overcome obstacles to housing development across tenures and to identify financial models to unlock housing market.

Work with partners to develop a long term revised and sustainable funding model for VCSE sector.

# (iii) Economic Recovery

Officers have been revising some of the planned activity to support new start-ups and existing small businesses as well as our employability and skills support. This work has not only been about re-focusing some areas of activity but also reviewing how the activity is delivered, given the inability to undertake any face-to-face engagement. Emerging areas of work in order to take account of the economic changes include:

# 3.27 Response Phase (first six months)

- Focus will be on job retention and business survival
- Pivoting our business support offer to include a greater focus on support for digital transformation and business resilience/recasting business models and will develop a supporting information campaign to increase awareness of the offer.
- Developing a new business information line (launched 8 June 2020) to support businesses that have any queries around re-opening in particular – engagement between environmental health and economic development teams to ensure a coherent approach.
- Seeking to secure additional support from the Northern Ireland Executive to support businesses to re-open safely, particularly retail businesses.
- Prioritising the mapping and zoning of the city centre and the arterial routes to identify targeted interventions required to support business recovery while ensuring that social distancing can be managed in the public realm.
- Developing and implementing an enhanced cleansing regime and develop signage and wayfinding information. This will include the "confidence mark" to be rolled out.
- Exploring the potential of deploying "business ambassadors" in core areas as a first point of contact for the public, providing information on issues such as operating times; additional cleansing provision and provision of sanitising equipment; specific measures being undertaken to help the public stay safe
- Working with Dfl to explore opportunities to undertake environmental enhancements in the public realm, and to deploy additional street furniture to potentially facilitate access to additional facilities for local businesses, taking account of social distancing both instore and on the street.

- Working with businesses and city partners to consider imaginative uses of open and civic spaces, taking account of the need for ongoing management.
- Exploring opportunities to enhance access and connectivity to our key retail and business locations and work with businesses to co-ordinate opening hours etc, taking account of ongoing challenges with public transport
- Maintaining focus on educational underachievement, we will work with the Department for Education and the Education Authority to re-scope our GCSE support programme, in line with the changed school timetable.
- Re-scoping employability interventions to enable remote delivery and to take account of the changing demand across sectors.

# 3.28 Rebuild phase (up to 12 months)

- Development of a targeted marketing campaign for "staycations" focusing on the domestic audience – working in collaboration with Visit Belfast, Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland
- Exploring the potential for an employer incentive scheme to focus on the long-term unemployed/economically inactive. This is likely to focus on key and emerging growth sectors.
- Ongoing flexible support programme for business resilience: scaling-up of existing support, with move away from job creation to job retention in first instance. Ongoing focus on digital support, including alignment to emerging City Deal Digital strand.
- Development work to re-model business start-up support: assuming an increase in demand as a result of redundancies—packaging support including services and facilities at the Innovation Factory. Also expanding current start-up support programme for economically inactive, working in conjunction with DfC.
- Investment in digital re-reskilling programme: developing targeted initiatives across the board to take account of general technical skills as well as vocational-specific skills, in line with the changing job market.
- Continue support for social enterprises and cooperatives, taking account of reductions in grant funding and supporting community organisations to explore new business operating models.
- Working with DfE and colleges to support and encourage apprenticeships, particularly in new vocational areas, linked to the city's growth.

- Developing a culture and tourism recovery plan ensuring that the economy recovery work is balanced with investment in quality of life for residents and attraction for visitors.
- Revamping the employment academies programme to target new growth areas including logistics, green recovery and upskilling in social care.
- Scaling up educational underachievement investment support, with a view to reducing the attainment gap for young people in our schools.
- Working with DfC to mobilise the principles around the Employability NI model, focusing on the "local labour market partnerships"—this means taking an agreed approach to helping move people back into employment, ensuring that a focus is maintained on address inequalities in the labour market.
- Informing and shaping the regional economic strategy
- Building capacity among local businesses to avail of City Deal support and to inform future delivery.

# 3.29 Recovery phase (up to 36 months)

- Working on a long-term restructuring/reset of the economy to be informed by the work of various institutions and areas of work including the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission; City Deal; Climate Commission; Belfast-Dublin Economic Corridor.
- Move forward on the plans for development and delivery of the proposals for 2023 and the UNESCO City of Music.
- Supporting delivery of the Belfast Destination Hub and wider City Deal projects including alignment of skills and business engagement opportunities.
- Developing a new model of business tourism, taking account of changing patterns of attendance and engagement (integrating digital and onsite conferencing).
- Developing a long-term tourism development plan for the city including economic modelling, experience-based product development and local tourism framework.
- Developing a new model for the delivery of business start-up and growth, ensuring enhanced co-ordination and leading to the creation of more innovative and exportfocused businesses.
- Leading the work of the local labour market partnership to ensure co-ordination of employability and skills investment, helping more people into better jobs.
- Progressing the Strategic Sites Assessment work to help deliver on increased city centre living and wider housing and city growth ambitions.

Exploring with partners the potential to bring forward proposals around potential free port. Working with the Belfast Digital Innovation Commissioner and the Digital and Innovation Partnership to prepare a joint response to the UK government consultation on the potential to establish freeports, that are innovative hubs, boost global trade, attract inward investment and increase productivity.

#### (iv) Environmental Recovery

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The current pandemic has demonstrated the importance of good planning for major risks to our city. One such risk is climate change. To this end, we've set up an internal Climate Plan Programme Board, chaired by Commissioner for Resilience, Grainia Long. This group will be responsible for working together to take forward our work on sustainability and climate.

3.31

The city's draft Resilience Strategy has a vision to 'transition Belfast to an inclusive, low-carbon climate resilient economy', so it's critical that council plays its part. The programme board brings together colleagues from across council to agree ways to improve the organisation's impact on the environment and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

3.32

As a Council we are adapting to a 'new normal', we want to rebuild and recover in a more sustainable and inclusive way. Being resilient to climate change, reducing our carbon footprint stimulating a sustainable economy is going to be critical and are key priorities moving forward. Some areas of focus include:

- Explore with partners the potential to bring forward a housing retrofit programme to address energy efficiency and fuel poverty.
- Accelerate the development of a climate mitigation and adaptation plan and identify and progress immediate quick wins.
- Develop options paper to minimise the impact of air and noise pollution post Covid-19 to inform the development of a new Air Quality Action Plan for Belfast.
- Incentivise reduced car use, promote & support use of public transport.
- Accelerate site assessment in support of the One Million trees programme in context of wider NI Executive commitment to 18 million trees.
- Commence and complete energy review for Council.
- Work with partners to explore opportunities to accelerate sustainable/smart transport and mobility programmes (including electric vehicle infrastructure).

(v) Digital Transformation, Innovation and Smart Belfast

Digital innovation has been critical in addressing many of the challenges emerging from the pandemic. We must acknowledge the role of the public sector in helping to support local innovation. It is also important that we build upon the digital and innovative strengths of both our universities and the active role of their new (and existing) research centres. as well as the programmes of work linked to Smart Belfast, Belfast Region City Deal and the recently appointed Digital Commissioner for the city

- The Covid-19 crisis has not negated the economic and technological challenges previously 3.34 identified by partners. In fact the crisis has amplified these challenges and accelerated the time scales against which they need to be addressed.
- There exists an opportunity to accelerate elements of the city's digital and innovation roadmap and seek to bring forward a pipeline of catalytic projects (e.g. Innovation/smart districts, potential free super ports, a revised approach to supporting tourism and green stimulus through use of new technologies) that will strengthen the city's foundations and support our recovery efforts going forward.
- 3.36 Working with partners, the Council seeks to accelerate opportunities emerging from the Belfast Region City Deal and Smart Belfast to support our recovery efforts. We are investing in digital reskilling, upskilling and business transformation initiatives which is crucial to ensure that all of society benefits from this investment and opportunity. In conjunction with partners we have designed an ambition programme that will:
  - Proactively address digital skills gaps experienced within the general economy to optimise economic recovery (targeted reskilling programmes)
  - Support businesses to utilise digital technology to adopt business model; minimise the economic impact of Covid-19 by helping them to normalise their business operations, where possible, through remote working and developing approaches to generate income i.e. e-commerce.
  - Develop the digital skills capacity of residents to improve their future employability and create a more resilient workforce aligned to an increasingly digitalised economy.
  - Targeting approaches to ensure those sectors and/or communities/client groups at most risk are prioritised and supported through ours actions.

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#### (v) City Regeneration and Development

While the full impact of Covid-19 is yet to be fully understood, council officers are continuing to engage with a range of stakeholders to progress previously agreed prirotiires and programmes of work to establish the city to continue to grow in line with our inclusive growth agenda. A number of key strands of work are already established that will facilitate effective recovery and position the city for longer term sustainable, inclusive growth. These work strands will be continually reviewed and adapted as required, and include;

## City Centre Living

Prioritising the delivery of the Strategic Sites Assessment Phase 1 to bring forward residentialled, mixed use, mixed tenure opportunity development sites within the city centre as previously approved by Council in December 2019 and 2020. Officers continue to work to bring forward the first opportunity as part of Phase 1 of the SSA work Phase 2 of the SSA work aims to identify residential led opportunities across the city wide public sector estate.

# **Progress the Future City Centre Programme**

- In February 2020, Members of the CG&R committee approved the emerging 'Future City Centre Programme' (FCC) which builds on the key findings and recommendations outlined in the Belfast City Centre Retail Analysis, and aims to create a dynamic and experiential destination for users of the city centre and bolster Belfast as NI's dominant retail and leisure destination. The Programme included a number of priority themes including Physical Regeneration & Environmental Improvements, City Centre Vitality, Positioning the City Centre to Compete, Addressing Vacancies and Policy & Legislation
- The programme is however being recast in the context of Covid-19 to ensure that it addresses 3.40 not only challenges to the retail and leisure sector but the city centre as a whole. Some specific projects being progressed include:
  - Public realm catalyst projects- historic developer contributions have been committed to 5 city centre streets through the 5C's scheme (design team appointed), while other catalyst projects are being developed in conjunction with DfC and DfI including the Fredrick Street, York Street Junction, and Belfast Streets Ahead (BSA) phases 3 & 5 (design team procurement commenced May 2020).
  - Entries & Lanes- work is continuing to transform a number of city centre pedestrian lanes. The work, due to complete late summer 2020, will enhance permeability and wayfinding through the city centre and promote local heritage and culture.

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- Cathedral Gardens work is continuing on site to deliver a multi-functional family-friendly pop up park and is expected to complete during summer 2020.
- Lighting Strategy work is almost complete on a Lighting Strategy for Belfast which will guide future delivery of all types of lighting across the city. A number of innovative lighting pilot projects have also been designed, with installation due to complete summer 2020.
- Addressing vacancies- mapping out and tracking vacancy levels across the primary retail core, and bringing forward proposals for meanwhile use to support independents, community infrastructure, and the cultural and arts sector; as well as supporting the longer term establishment of a retail, leisure and tourism narrative to understand the emerging market behaviours and specifically the medium and long term impact of Covid-19.
- Digital Innovation- it is recognised that digital innovation is likely to be a key enabler of recovery and consideration is being given to how data, analytics, complementary digital platforms and marketing can be used to aid short-long term recovery for businesses.

#### Financial and resource implications

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Members will note that the Department for Communities intend to shortly bring forward a 'Revitalisation Plus' £10million regional fund to enable councils to bring forward specific proposals to support city centre recovery. Whilst the specifics of the fund is still to be released council officers are working with departmental colleagues to identify the potential scale of funding for Belfast and the potential to align with the emerging recovery plans outlined above.

3.42

Officers are also continuing to lobby the Executive Departments for funding to assist with recovery and in particular to align with funding that is available for local authorities in England. This includes the UK £50million High Street Fund to support the safe reopening of high streets. The UK government has also recently made an urgent call for ideas of 'shovel ready' infrastructure projects in England to aid economic recovery. Suggestions for projects include modernising town centres, road, rail and cycle infrastructure and skills and training.

3.43

When further clarity becomes available on funding to be made available a report will be brought back to Committee for Members consideration. Additional Council funding to support the recovery plan will need to be considered as part of the proposed financing strategy which is also being considered at this meeting.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.44 Equality screening will be undertaken as part of the ongoing workplans and delivery activity.

4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached			
	•	Appendix 1	Emerging draft recovery programme – plans on page	
	•	Appendix 2	Draft City' Confidence Mark'	