



Subject:	Supporting Business Start Up and Growth in Belfast
Date:	6 April 2022
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"/>
Some time 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 provide members with an update on activity in 2021/2022 to support the development of new and existing businesses across the city through the Enterprise and Business Growth team. The report sets out key priority areas of work for the 2022/23 financial year, seeking approval for new areas of activity to support delivery of the targets under the Growing the Economy pillar of the Belfast Agenda. It also includes an update on progress to develop a new Economic Strategy for Belfast.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the Council's performance and contribution to delivering against Belfast Agenda ambitions to grow the Belfast economy, focusing on the current support for Business Start-up and Growth • Note the ongoing work on the Belfast Economic Strategy and agree to receive future updates on this work in the new electoral term • Note and agree the priority work areas for the 2022/23 financial year • Agree attendance by the Lord Mayor, Chief Executive and Director of Economic Development or nominees at the New York New Belfast Conference in June 2022 and approve the associated budget allocation of £6,000 from existing resources.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>At the meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 12 May 2021, members approved a programme of targeted support for new and existing businesses in Belfast, to be delivered by the Council's Enterprise and Business Growth team. This work focuses on the statutory responsibilities that the council has around business start-up and entrepreneurship for key groups as well as social enterprise support. This is part of a much wider programme of activity that a number of teams across the council are engaged in to support businesses in the city.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Overview of 2021/22 activity</u></p> <p>The activity undertaken is developed in partnership with a range of organisations including Invest NI, Catalyst and Local Enterprise Agencies. Match funding to support delivery is secured through a series of letters of offer which contain contractual commitments in terms of businesses engaged, business improvements supported and jobs created. A detailed overview of performance is set out in Appendix 1 but highlights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprise awareness activity: engaged 760 individuals through a range of activities. Some specialist support work undertaken with female entrepreneurs and student start-ups • Start a business activity: 279 new jobs created through the Go for It support, with 75 businesses receiving additional follow-on mentoring and financial support • Support for Social Enterprise and Co-operatives: 56 organisations were supported with one-to-one mentoring, advice and guidance, including six new co-operatives. We have recently applied to Social Enterprise NI to be recognised as the region's first "Social Enterprise Place"

- Business growth supports: 327 businesses engaged in a range of business support workshops and 357 have been supported through one-to-one engagement to help them to implement growth strategies and become more resilient
- Innovation Factory: now at 70% occupancy, the operator has ambitious plans to increase those numbers in 2022/23. The centre has seen a high level of interest from new firms in sectors including TV/film, digital, engineering and green tech. Over the year, 84 businesses engaged in masterclasses at the centre. As part of their social and economic regeneration activity, over 30 work placements have been facilitated by IF customers over recent months, a series of school engagement activities have taken place and 10 local people have been trained as Digital Champions
- Scaling and growth: in partnership with Catalyst and Invest NI, the Way to Scale programme supported 60 individuals to participate on a series of bootcamps to transform their businesses and support them to scale and grow to turnover of more than £3million. 10 were supported to participate in a one week residential at MIT and access a peer-to-peer workshop series with Catalyst and a Go to Market residential in Boston which focuses on go to market strategies and tactics
- City Vibrancy: In January 2002, we launched the Vibrant Business Destinations programme in partnership with DfC. To date, there have been 17 enquiries in relation to the programme and officers are engaging with businesses to support them with the expression of interest process. We also continue to support City Regeneration and Development colleagues to develop and deliver the Vacant to Vibrant programme
- We have invested in new technology solutions to enable us to track the impact of our investment and carry out regular evaluations of our programmes in order to measure their effectiveness. We have also re-launched a bi-annual Belfast Business Survey in conjunction with Belfast Chamber. We are currently analysing responses from over 400 businesses and these insights will be shared with our partners to build a collective understanding of the needs of businesses in the city and agree on priority interventions to address these needs.

3.3

The coming financial year is a year of both opportunity and challenge and this will shape the programme of work to be carried out. Opportunities such as Belfast Region City Deal investment, the development of Innovation City Belfast and the outworking of the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission provide critical context pieces for the work. However, the economic analysis indicates that, while the impact of COVID-19 may not have been as

significant as originally anticipated, the wider cost of living rises and associated implications for businesses will impact on their profitability and may constrain investment. This year will also see the conclusion of some of our most significant business support interventions funded through these mechanisms with limited clarity on the new funding instruments such as Shared Prosperity Fund.

3.4 Belfast Economic Strategy

Recognising the opportunities and challenges identified above, work is currently underway to develop an Economic Strategy to support sustainable and inclusive growth in Belfast for the period 2022-2030. The strategy will clearly articulate the role of Belfast in the regional economy and will identify a series of key propositions to build on areas of competitive advantage in a rapidly changing global business context while ensuring that structural challenges are addressed and environmental issues considered, in order to drive sustainable and inclusive growth. It will align with the ambitions set out in the 10x Economic Vision and, like 10x, it will focus on how we can maximise the return on our investments to secure transformational change that can benefit all residents.

3.5 The timeline for the strategy will be to the period to 2030. However, given the volatility of the current economic environment, it will include short/medium and longer-term priorities for action and associated resource requirements. The strategy is being led by a project steering group of council representatives who are working to ensure the strategy takes account of the council's wider priorities. Additional engagement will take place with elected members in the new term.

3.6 While the strategy will be led by Belfast City Council, the engagement of and alignment with the work of key partners across the public, private and third sectors will be central to its effectiveness. This partnership approach is a key feature of the strategy development process and will be reflected in the propositions for action, given the disparate range of responsibilities across a large number of organisations. To that end, we have been engaging with the Community Planning team to explore how the engagement work undertaken can feed into the ongoing development work on the Belfast Agenda refresh. It is expected that the vision and objectives developed through the strategy work will be used as the basis of the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Growth Pillar of the Belfast Agenda Refresh. Following the development of the strategy, a series of work will be undertaken to re-focus areas of work aligned with the key priority actions identified. This will further inform the work of the Enterprise and Business Growth Unit.

3.7

Overview of proposed activity for 2022/23

While we will continue to deliver on commitments regarding start-up and growth as set out in our various funding agreements with partners, there are a number of new areas of programme development and delivery that will focus our work for the coming year. These include:

- **Starting a Business:** Working with the other councils across the region, Invest NI and DfE we aim to bring forward plans to revamp the approach to business start-up post-2023. We have recently concluded an outline business case which presents future options to enhance the offer in line with our ambitions as set out in the Belfast Agenda. Based on the findings to date, a significant programme of work will be required to seek the additional financial resources required to deliver this new programme of activity and to ensure it is in place for the conclusion of existing supports in April 2023. A report with further detail on this proposed approach as well as the financial and operational implications will be presented at a future meeting of this committee
- **Social Enterprise and Co-operative Development:** In 2022/23, we will refresh our social economy action plan based on ongoing research that has been taking place with the sector. Across the year, we will enhance the programme of financial incentives for the sector and increase the levels of community outreach. A report with further detail on these proposals will be presented to the committee at a future date
- **Growing a Business:** Responding to both the opportunities and challenges generated as a result of climate change, we will engage closely with the Climate and Waste teams to identify opportunities to help businesses to become more environmentally sustainable. Based on the recommendations of the new Music Strategy, we will also be working in partnership with the Tourism and Culture teams to develop interventions to support new and existing businesses within our thriving music sector
- **Support to Scale and Grow:** Working with the City Innovation team, we are piloting interventions to access future opportunities through Challenge Funds, particularly for those businesses in growth sectors. We will also continue to work in partnership with Catalyst Inc and Invest NI to build on previous activity to enable businesses to scale and grow to a turnover of more than £3million. We are currently re-scoping this activity aligned with the ambitions of Innovation City Belfast
- **Investing in Belfast:** This year, we will focus on refreshing our City Investment Service to ensure that it provides the right support to new and potential investors in the city and complements the work of partners such as Innovation City Belfast. We will also

work to build on our partnerships in London and Dublin to identify new opportunities to profile the city for investment and will explore opportunities for strategic city partnerships aligned to our growth sectors. We will also support a range of sector development initiatives to build clusters based on our existing strengths in areas such as Fintech, Regtech and MedTech. We will continue to work with our seven partner councils along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor to identify business and new collaborative opportunities. 2022 will see the conclusion of the development plan, strategy and action plan for the partnership which will set out the long-term plans to deliver economic prosperity across the region. A total of £15,000 is required to support the development of the partnership in the 22/23 financial year. This budget will be held by Newry Mourne and Down District Council and allocated to partnership activities. We will also fund a range of events to promote these areas of work, based on a series of criteria to demonstrate alignment with agreed priorities. We will establish an independent panel to assess these relevant applications, with a maximum financial allocation of £10,000 to relevant events.

3.8

Attendance at New York New Belfast event

The New York New Belfast (NYNB) conference has taken place in New York in June each year over the last decade. The event showcases the best of Belfast business, education, tourism, and cultural offer to a wide audience of NYC and US influencers and decision makers. This year's event will take place on 23 and 24 June 2022. It will focus solely on a Business and Investment theme profiling, in particular, Belfast's capacity and potential in the field of FinTech.

3.9

It is expected that the event will attract up to 150 US-based delegates. The opening event will be hosted by Mayor of NYC Eric Adams or Governor Kathy Hochul and an invitation has been received for the Belfast Lord Mayor to co-host this. In addition, there will be a series of presentations from Belfast and NYC-based business organisations and a number of side meetings with relevant political and business representatives.

3.10

Given the significant process in the city since the last New York New Belfast in-person event, it is proposed that the council agrees to attendance by a number of representatives to articulate the focused investment narrative, including City Deal, Belfast Innovation District and the 10x commitments at regional government level. The Committee is asked to agree to the attendance of the Lord Mayor, Chief Executive and Director of Economic Development

	<p>or nominees. The cost of travel and accommodation is estimated to be £6,000. The budget for this visit is covered as part of the annual budget for International Relations activities.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The Enterprise and Business Growth activities outlined within this report will be resourced through the existing Enterprise and Business Growth budget for 2022/23. This was included as part of the estimates that were approved by this Committee on 12 January 2022 and totals £1 261, 353.</p>
3.12	<p>The costs associated with attendance at NYNB will be resourced as part of the annual budget for International Relations. This was included as part of the estimates that were approved by this Committee on 12 January 2022.</p>
3.13	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The unit is currently undertaking a process of equality screening on the overall work programme. This will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of this project.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix 1: Detail on 2021/22 Enterprise and Business Growth activity