

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 10th August, 2022

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Alderman Dorrian; and
Councillors, Beattie, Bunting, Duffy, Ferguson,
Hanvey, Heading, Hussey, T. Kelly, Lyons,
Maskey, McLaughlin, Murray, Nelson, O'Hara,
Spratt and Whyte.

Also present: Councillors de Faoite and Flynn.

In attendance: Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee of 8th and 22nd June were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th July.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following three items was restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following five items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Year End Finance Report 2021-22

The Committee considered the Quarter 4 financial position for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee which included a forecast of the year end outturn and a summary of the financial indicators together with an executive summary.

The Committee noted the report and the associated financial reporting pack.

A Bolder Vision Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development, and the Senior Development Manager, provided the Committee with an update on the A Bolder Vision strategy and action plan that included details of the ongoing engagement with the Ministers for Community and Infrastructure.

By way of presentation, the Senior Development Manager outlined the following key elements of the initiative:

- Background;
- Consultation;
- Action plan;
- Key move 1: Creation of a civic spine with a focus on people;
- Key move 2: Reimagine the inner ring and end car dominance;
- Key move 3: Promote city centre living;
- Key move 4: Embrace the River Lagan and waterfront;
- Delivery; and
- Finalisation.

The Committee noted the progress to date on the A Bolder Vision Strategy, including the emerging interventions under the Four Key Moves and the update on the Ministerial and Chief Executive discussions regarding the Donegall Place and Royal Ave element of the Civic Spine Key Move.

Update on Major Events

The Director of Economic Development provided the Committee with an update on the proposed programme for international events as part of the city's Cultural Strategy and Tourism Plan.

He outlined the financial implications of the events and sought approval to proceed as required.

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor Hanvey,

That, should Belfast be shortlisted as a potential host to Eurovision 2023, the Council would immediately engage with Ministers in order to progress and seek support to submit a full bid to host the event.

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On a recorded vote, ten Members voted for the proposal and seven against and it was declared carried.

<u>For 10</u>	<u>Against 7</u>
Alderman Dorrian; and Councillors Bunting, Hanvey, Hussey, T. Kelly, Murray, Nelson, O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.	Councillor Murphy (Chairperson); and Councillors Beattie, Duffy, Ferguson, Heading, Maskey and McLaughlin.

The Committee further agreed:

- To note the content of the report and the proposed programme of international events as part of an overall strategic approach to tourism and cultural development;
- To note the progress and the associated bid costs for the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann; and
- To Retrospectively approve expenditure costs in relation to attendance at the 2022 Fleadh Cheoil in Mullingar in August 2022.

Requests to Present

Translink - Lagan Junction to Yorkgate Track Renewal

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from representatives of Translink at its Special Meeting in September.

Ulster University - Belfast Campus Update

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from representatives of Ulster University on the opening of the Belfast Campus at its meeting in September.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

DfC Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation

The Director of City Regeneration and Development informed the Committee that the majority of the Department for Communities Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme had been completed.

She reported that there had been £4.019M of funding which had been invested in the following strands of the programme:

- Signage and dressing;
- Physical interventions and streetscape improvements;
- Access and connectivity;
- Animation, lighting and marketing; and

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- Sustainable and active travel measures.

She explained how the funding had been distributed through various grant initiatives directly to businesses to purchase equipment and encourage people back into the city and pointed out that an additional £600K which had been agreed by Council to deliver another phase of funding would commence in autumn.

She outlined various projects which had benefited from the Business Cluster and Community Grants across the city and a number of projects which had been undertaken across the city centre, which included the provision of outdoor seating, greenery, parklets, games areas and performance areas.

She referred to the Council led sustainable and active travel measures and highlighted the improvements, which included 400 modernised Belfast Bikes, 10 covered cycle stands and additional docking stations, delivery of the active travel hub at QUB, and the scheduled launch of the active travel hub in Cathedral Gardens in September which has received revenue funding for a temporary two year period from the PHA and Ulster University and the proposals to further expand on the Active Travel Enabler projects which were under development.

She referred to feedback which had been received and to the impacts, benefits and learnings of the programme and, in response to a question from a Member regarding improvements of the public realm and pedestrianisation, she stated that A Bolder Vision could incorporate some of the learnings.

The Committee:

- Noted the current status of the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, including the findings of the Mid-Term Evaluation Report and associated brochure;
- Noted that an Extension of Time had been granted for the Castle Place Kiosk and the Entries Phase 2 projects to the 31st December 2022; and
- Noted the current level of underspend within the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme and reallocation of funding to the Bolder Vision.

Growing Business and the Economy

Update on Belfast-Dublin Economic Corridor

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a progress update on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor**

(DBEC) and work on a development plan, strategy and action plan to deliver on the partnership's objectives.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to;

- **Note the contents of this report and progress to date to develop the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 At its meeting on 12 January 2022 Members were provided with an update on progress to support the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor including progress on the creation of a development plan and ongoing work on developing a strategy and action plan. Members noted the progress to date and endorsed the developmental plans of the partnership.

3.2 Since the last committee update the Development plan for the partnership has been completed. The strategy and action plan will be finalised in September 2022. Belfast City Council continues to act as lead partner on contract management alongside a project steering group made up of partnership representatives. The work to date has made a number of recommendations to support the ongoing development of the partnership including:

- **A phased development timeline up to 2030. In the short term from 2022-2024 priorities include set up of initial partnership personnel, consideration of legal structures, and identification of funding options.**
- **DBEC should remain an informal partnership model in the short term, together with an MOU, with a view to exploring independent legal status for the partnership in the future. This will be funded initially through council contributions.**
- **DBEC should be established with a bottom-up governance structure, largely based on the current existing structure. This includes a board of 12 growing to 16 in the long term to include private sector representatives.**
- **The partnership should be housed at a single location with staff and resources to lead and manage delivery of the partnership aims.**
- **Key areas of focus should include Research and Development, Trade and Investment, Skills and Infrastructure and Connectivity.**

- 3.3 Stage 2 includes the development of a strategy for the partnership. The strategy aims to articulate a vision for the partnership to enable sustainable economic growth across the region. This part of the project will undertake a review of the economic context and key emerging work areas at a local and regional level and their potential to impact the region, and assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to achieving sustainable economic growth across the region. This will provide an evidence base for action, identifying areas of focus for the partnership to address future opportunities and address any gaps in existing provision.**
- 3.4 Stage 3 includes the development of an action plan. This aims to build on the foundations of the development plan and strategy. This piece of work will prioritise key areas of work for the partnership aligned with the key thematic areas to 2030. The action plan aims to clearly define the role of DBEC and other partners in delivering key actions and will identify new areas for collaboration, it will also identify potential opportunities to access funding and resources to deliver on the objectives of the partnership.**
- 3.5 All stages of this work have been informed by extensive stakeholder engagement including workshops with DBEC partners and one to one meetings with stakeholders and strategic partners.**
- 3.6 It is expected that the final draft of the development plan, strategy and action plan will be presented to the members of the political advisory group for consultation and feedback. The meeting will take place at the end of September, date to be confirmed.**
- 3.7 Based on the recommendations of the development plan it has been agreed that a dedicated resource is put in place to support the delivery of the strategy and action plan for the partnership. This resource will include two dedicated positions which will be located in Newry and Mourne District Council as they are currently hold the chairing role, the positions will be responsible to the partnership. It is intended that the recruitment process will commence in August with the staff being in place by November.**
- 3.8 In tandem with work on the development plan, strategy and action plan officials from partner councils have continued to identify collaborative opportunities, in addition to engaging with external stakeholders to further the aims of the partnership. Belfast City Council officials have met with**

representatives of Special EU Programmes Body, Intertradelreland, the Irish Government's Shared Island Unit, in addition to a range of business representative organisations to identify joint interventions and potential opportunities to access funding.

- 3.9 In June 2022, the partnership applied to the Irish Government's Shared Island Local Government Development Fund for funding to conduct a feasibility study on regional innovation centres. This funding is aimed at supporting cross-border local authority partnerships develop proposals for joint capital projects.
- 3.10 Belfast City Council have also partnered with Dublin City Council and Cork County Council to make applications for grants under this fund. The application with Dublin City Council is in relation to the circular economy and with Cork on Harbour facilities. These applications are being evaluated and allocations are expected to be announced in August.
- 3.11 The Peace Plus programme has also been identified as a potential source of funding relevant to the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor. In particular Theme 2, Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation and Theme 6, Building and Embedding Partnership. Funding calls under these thematic areas are expected to open in the Autumn.

The DBEC partnership are currently scoping out potential collaborative initiatives that would align with these thematic areas under Peace Plus, in preparation for funding calls.

- 3.12 Members will be updated with further progress on the strategy and action plan at a later date.
- 3.13 **Financial and Resource Implications**

The activities outlined within this report will be resourced from the 2022/23 Enterprise and Business Growth budget. Applications for grants under the Shared Island Fund do not require a matching financial contribution from council's, however, in-kind staff time will be required.

- 3.14 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

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.”

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The Committee noted the content of the report and the progress to develop the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.

**Business Start up and Growth: Future
Resourcing and Proposed Interim Approach**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the future funding landscape for economic development activity, with a specific focus on the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

1.2 The report also sets out a proposed interim approach supporting to business start-up, pending confirmation of funding from a range of external sources to deliver a new model of support. In addition, it details a proposed intervention to encourage more growth-focused and scaling businesses, building on a successful partnership model.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note and endorse the interim approach to business start-up support from April 2023
- Note and endorse the proposal to invest in the Way to Scale programme up to a maximum of £40,000
- Note the update on Shared Prosperity Fund, including challenges and opportunities presented for the council and other local partners.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Business Start-Up support

At the April 2022 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members were advised of the work that was under way to revamp the approach to business start-up post-2023. All 11 councils jointly commissioned an outline business case which presents future options to enhance the quality of the support provided to businesses, in line with our ambitions as set out in the Belfast Agenda. The report noted that there was still a significant programme of work to do to seek the additional financial resources required to deliver this new programme of activity and to ensure that it can be operational once the current programme concludes in March 2023.

Members were advised that a report setting out further detail on the proposed approach as well as the financial and operational implications will be presented at a future meeting of this committee.

- 3.2 The end of March 2023 marks something of a perfect storm. It is the final date for expenditure of EU funding (ERDF and ESF). It is also a break point in the current delivery contract for the Go for It programme. Other important context points include the ongoing Review of Invest NI (referenced elsewhere in the reports) and the lack of clarity over their future areas of focus, including the level and nature of support that they allocate to new and growing local businesses. Finally, while the EU replacement funding – Shared Prosperity Fund – is technically operating from April 2022, the Investment Plan that must be developed to identify priority interventions is not likely to be completed until October 2022, with resources only being released after that point. While there have been positive engagements with the team at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) regarding the prospect of accessing resources through the Shared Prosperity Fund, there is no guarantee that the level of resources required to support delivery will materialise.**
- 3.3 The implications for councils at this point is that they are being forced to explore a number of scenarios to ensure that there is no break in the delivery of support to new start businesses (this has been a statutory responsibility of councils since 2015). One scenario includes extending the current delivery contract on the Go for It programme on a short-term basis, until there is greater clarity on the financial position to support a new programme and until the commissioning process for delivery of the enhanced programme is completed. The current contract has a break clause at the end of March 2023. However the existing contractor must be advised of the intention to extend the contract by 30 September 2022. Councils have therefore been engaging to seek to agree a way forward given the current financial uncertainties.**
- 3.4 The Northern Ireland Business Start Up Programme (NIBSUP) – also called Go for It – has been delivered since September 2017. NIBSUP is currently funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Invest NI and 11 Councils. Councils have contributed 20% of costs while ERDF and Invest NI resources have made up the remaining 80% contribution.**

3.5 Each Council has a dedicated statutory job creation target (325 for Belfast). The statutory legislation currently measures this through the number of business plans generated via Go for It (although this will change in the future). Given the statutory nature of the target, it is essential that there is a mechanism in place to support delivery. Due to the lack of clarity on SPF and other resources, it is proposed that Belfast City Council aligns with the other 10 councils to extend the current contract provision for a maximum of one year. In parallel, work will continue to progress the enhanced approach to business start-up and growth support set out to this Committee in April 2022, with the ambition of phasing the new interventions in as resources are firmed up. Discussions are ongoing on the precise nature of the programme content, particularly the marketing budget which is likely to be scaled back from previous allocations. The increased budget requirement from Council resources will require a prioritisation of funding in line with Committee priorities and this will be factored into the estimates process in the coming months.

3.6 **Business growth and scaling support**

One of the key challenges identified through the enterprise framework is the need to encourage more businesses to scale and grow to turnover £3m+. This is also reflected in the 10X Economy vision which identifies the need to drive up the rate of new business starts and create an environment that actively supports entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into viable businesses.

3.7 A key component of this strategy is to encourage more companies to scale up and achieve high growth, in turn creating more employment opportunities for all and inspiring more companies to realise these growth ambitions. Following the success of the recent Way to Scale Initiative in partnership with Catalyst Inc and Invest NI, officers have been working to develop further interventions to complement Belfast City Council's core Enterprise and Business Growth Support and Employability and Skills Programmes. Way to Scale provides support across a number of areas including internationalisation, access to finance, business modelling and sales strategy support for those businesses with the ambition to scale.

3.8 Through last year's programme, 40 businesses accessed support through a series of workshops and events with leading entrepreneurs from MIT in Boston. A further 9 companies progressed on to the Entrepreneurship

Development Programme at MIT in Boston, and a one week residential in Boston to develop market strategies and build network support to realise the growth ambitions of their businesses.

3.9 Early feedback from the Way to Scale Initiative has demonstrated transformational results for the participating businesses. It is guided by REAP initiative (Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Programme) which is also developed by MIT and helps regions to develop and shape their business support ecosystem to accelerate the number of growth-focused businesses. The emerging ambition for the Northern Ireland team is to create more and better IDEs (Innovation Driven Enterprises) and the current focus is on reviewing the enterprise support system to ensure that this can happen and to measure impact.

3.10 Building on the feedback from last year, it is proposed to support the Way to Scale programme for 2023 to support a new cohort of companies participate. The programme will be delivered in partnership with Catalyst Inc. and Invest Northern Ireland. The overall cost of the programme will be £180,000. Given the alignment with the ambitions set out in the enterprise framework, it is recommended that this is supported with Council funding of £40,000 to maximise the take-up by Belfast-based businesses. Invest NI, Catalyst Inc and the participating companies will cover the remainder of the costs.

3.11 Update on Shared Prosperity Fund

In April 2022, the funding prospectus for the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) was released. It confirms that the three investment priorities and associated objectives are:

1. Communities and place

- Strengthening our social fabric and fostering a sense of local pride and belonging, through investment in activities that enhance physical, cultural and social ties and access to amenities, such as community infrastructure and local green space, and community-led projects
- Building resilient, healthy and safe neighbourhoods, through investment in quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in, through targeted improvements to the built and natural environment and innovative approaches to crime prevention.

2. Supporting local business

- **Creating jobs and boosting community cohesion, through investments that build on existing industries and institutions, and range from support for starting businesses to visible improvements to local retail, hospitality and leisure sector facilities**
- **Promoting networking and collaboration, through interventions that bring together businesses and partners within and across sectors to share knowledge, expertise and resources, and stimulate innovation and growth**
- **Increasing private sector investment in growth-enhancing activities, through targeted support for small and medium-sized businesses to undertake new-to-firm innovation, adopt productivity-enhancing, energy efficient and low carbon technologies and techniques, and start or grow their exports.**

3. People and skills

- **Boosting core skills and supporting adults to progress in work, by targeting adults with no or low-level qualifications and skills in maths, and upskilling the working population, yielding personal and societal economic impact, and by encouraging innovative approaches to reducing adult learning barriers**
- **Reducing levels of economic inactivity through investment in bespoke intensive life and employment support tailored to local need. Investment should facilitate the join-up of mainstream provision and local services within an area for participants, through the use of one-to-one support, improving employment outcomes for specific cohorts who face labour market barriers**
- **Supporting people furthest from the labour market to overcome barriers to work by providing cohesive, locally tailored support including access to skills**
- **Supporting local areas to fund gaps in local skills provision to support people to progress in work, and supplement local adult skills provision.**

3.12 It details a series of 52 ‘eligible interventions’ for Northern Ireland. These include things like:

- **Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets**
- **Support for local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities**
- **Support for active travel enhancements and measures to improve connectivity in the local area**

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- **Increasing investment in research and development at the local level**
- **Research and development grants supporting the development of innovative products and services, with a particular focus on low carbon goods and environmental services, and climate resilience**
- **Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems and supporting businesses at all stages of their development to start, sustain, grow and innovate, including through local networks.**
- **Support for growing the local social economy, including community businesses, cooperatives and social enterprises**
- **Supporting economically inactive people to overcome barriers to work by providing cohesive, locally tailored support including access to basic skills**
- **Interventions to increase levels of digital inclusion, with a focus on essential digital skills**
- **Green skills courses targeted around ensuring we have the skilled workforce to achieve the government's net zero and wider environmental ambitions, with a particular focus on vulnerable or low-income groups who will be disproportionately affected by climate change.**

3.13 The Prospectus confirms that: 'The UK Government will take a role in convening partners from across Northern Ireland to develop the UKSPF Investment Plan, considering the investment interventions across the three investment priorities...We will refine the plan in consultation with stakeholders in a way that reflects the needs of Northern Ireland's economy and society'.

3.14 The first meeting of the Partnership Group that will have responsibility for shaping the Investment Plan took place in early July. It involved representatives from the VCSE sector, business bodies, tertiary education representatives and local government representatives (two SOLACE representatives have been invited to attend). At this point, there are no representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive Departments but it is expected that these will be in place for future meetings. The group is chaired by Sue Gray from the Cabinet Office. It is expected that the Investment Plan will be shaped over the coming three months and that it will be complete by October 2022. While there is a small core Partnership Group, DLUHC have committed to working with all the representatives on that group to support wider engagement on the plan. This will include political engagement – possibly organised through NILGA – as well as local area engagement involving a range of partners. DLUHC

are open to all requests for local engagement and acknowledge the specific concerns of the VCSE sector, given the reliance on ESF funding by many of those organisations.

- 3.15** The Partnership Group is responsible for agreeing the overall 'split' across the three priority areas as well as agreeing the route to market for each of the agreed areas of activity. This might include open calls for projects, small grant schemes or commissioning public bodies to implement specific interventions that they have responsibility for.
- 3.16** The SPF budget settlement for Northern Ireland will be £127million over the three-year period, starting April 2022 (although no expenditure can be approved until the Investment Plan is finalised). This settlement includes an allocation of around £20million for Multiply – a targeted intervention to improve numeracy skills among key groups. As such, the overall figure available for spend (excluding Multiply) is in the region of £100million over the three years.
- 3.17** There is an indicative annual budget settlement over the three-year period of the programme and this is set out as:
- 2022/23 - £19million
 - 2023/24 - £33million
 - 2024/25 - £74million.
- 3.18** DLUHC have acknowledged that this may not be possible to allocate the £19million this year given the delays in the planning timeframes for this programme so they have committed to exploring whether there may be an opportunity to carry forward any unspent funds from this year into future years of the programme.
- 3.19** Some of the key areas for concern for Belfast City Council from the proposed approach include:
- Loss of income to the council for the work on business start-up and growth: at present, Belfast City Council accesses in the region of £500,000 annually through ERDF resources to support its start-up and growth activities – and has done so for the last 20+ years. The ERDF resources had also been used to lever match funding from other sources such as Invest NI. The new approach to funding means that none of these resources are guaranteed so there is an immediate loss of income to councils for their work in these areas. The loss of income from ERDF will have a significant impact on the ability of the Enterprise and Business Growth team to deliver their

support to new start-ups, social enterprise and co-operatives and growing businesses and to bring forward innovation interventions to support key growth sectors and help new businesses to access and benefit from new investments such as City Deal

- **Impact on community-based training organisations:** at present, funding allocations through ESF average around £25million annually across Northern Ireland – almost £15million of which is allocated to Belfast-based projects alone. Based on the figures above (average £33million per annum) and the breadth of potential activities that are likely to be covered under the three themes of the Investment Plan, it appears likely that there will be a significant reduction in income for those organisations. In terms of the outreach and engagement work that the council relies on to drive participants towards its Employment Academies, this is a concern. However it may also represent something of an opportunity to re-shape interventions and ensure that they are targeted at those in most need of support.

3.20 There may also be some opportunities with the new fund, namely:

- **Broader spectrum of areas eligible for support – including activities to support Communities and Place – very much in keeping with council support for local regeneration**
- **Potential to use Labour Market Partnerships to focus the investment in local areas, in line with strategic assessments that can help prioritise areas where spend can deliver maximum effectiveness**
- **Potential to influence the programme design through the local government representatives – making spend more effective in local areas.**

3.21 **Finance and Resource Implications**

The proposed approach to the Go for It support will be reported back to the Committee at a future date.

3.22 The Way to Scale programme was included as part of the Enterprise and Business Growth budget for 2022/23, as presented to this Committee on 6 April 2022. This budget was included as part of the estimates that were approved by this Committee on 12 January 2022.

**3.23 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

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.”

The Committee agreed to defer the decision to note and endorse the proposal to invest in the Way to Scale programme up to a maximum of £40,000, agreed to endorse the interim approach to business start-up support from April 2023 and granted approval to extend the current contract on the Go for It programme on a short-term basis, if required, until greater clarity on future funding of the provision had been established.

**Improving Employability Outcomes:
Focus on Young People at Risk**

The Director of Economic Development provided the Committee with an update on development work which had been undertaken on the Bridges to Progression initiative which was funded through the Belfast Labour Market Partnership.

He reported that the Labour Market Partnership had been focused on four main strategic themes and, under the theme 'No-one Left Behind', officers had been exploring the potential for interventions to support the transition of young people into employment, education or training and had co-designed a bridging intervention which aimed to increase the positive outcomes for young people.

He outlined the Skills for Life and Work training programme and the key findings from engagement with providers and young people.

He stated that, having explored a range of potential approaches, a £90K allocation from the Labour Market Partnership budget had been proposed, to be ringfenced for Belfast based Skills for Life and Work providers, and that officers would work with providers to identify those young people at highest risk of falling out of provision and would use the resources to support and encourage retention.

He listed the Skills for Life and Work providers and outlined the range of activities provided, which officers would manage in partnership with the providers through an agreed application process on behalf of those young people identified.

He reported that, subject to Council endorsement, officers would undertake assessment of the applications for funding and that a report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee which would outline the outcomes and learnings from the approach.

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the proposal to managing the funding distribution, until its meeting in September, in order that greater detail would be provided on the allocation of resources and service provision.

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Strategic and Operational Issues

City Centre All Party Area Working Group

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on the proposals for a City Centre All Party Working Group and emerging wider city centre governance structures.

She reported that details of the City Centre All Party Working Group, which would include the draft Terms of Reference, would be presented to the Party Leaders' Consultative Forum at its meeting in August and would subsequently be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

She outlined the proposed role of the City Centre All Party Working Group and provided an overview of the proposed Terms of Reference.

She informed the Committee that, in response to the emerging city centre issues and ongoing related work strands, a review had been undertaken of the existing mechanisms for engagement and improved governance in order to bring together the various city centre related facets and ensure synergy whilst avoiding duplication and silo approaches. She referred the Committee to the draft governance proposals which had been appended to the report and included:

- Future City Centre Leadership Group;
- Strategic Leadership Group – Complex Lives;
- Multi Agency Operational (tasking) Group – Clean, Green, Inclusive and Safe;
- Cleanliness Task Force; and
- City Centre Coordination Group – Internal Officer Group.

The Committee:

- Noted the proposals for a City Centre All - Party Working Group, which would be considered in detail by Party Leaders at the Party Leaders Consultative Forum on 11 August and following this to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19th August for approval;
- Noted the emerging wider city centre governance proposals in the context of various independent priorities, including vulnerability, cleanliness, safety and the long-term regeneration and diversification of the city centre;
- Agreed that officers would bring a report back to the Committee that would outline the Council's powers of vesting; and
- Agreed that officers would undertake to explore the establishment of a Communities of Interest Working Group.

Invest NI Review - Call for Evidence

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Update Members on the review of Invest NI that is currently underway, chaired by Sir Michael Lyons
- Set out details of proposed input to the review on behalf of Belfast City Council.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the ongoing review of Invest NI, including the scope and timelines
- Note and agree the proposed response from Belfast City Council, attached as Appendix 1
- Note the likelihood of further engagement between the Review Team and the Council as the review progresses and in advance of its October 2022 publication.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Key Issues

The Independent Review of Invest NI was announced by the Minister for the Economy, Gordon Lyons, on 26th January 2022. The objective of the Independent Review is ‘To provide an independent assessment of Invest NI’s efficiency and effectiveness and, looking forward, its capacity to strategically align with and operationally deliver the 10X Economic Vision’.

3.2 The Review Panel is chaired by Sir Michael Lyons. He is joined by Dame Rotha Johnston and Maureen O’Reilly, an independent economist. Members will recall that Sir Michael Lyons previously chaired the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission which produced its ‘Reset for Growth’ report in June 2021. He will re-engage with Commission members for a year one review session in September 2022.

3.3 Sir Michael has significant experience across the public sector, including local government. In 2007, he undertook an extensive inquiry into the functions and funding of local government: ‘Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future

of local government'. He is currently Chair of the English Cities Fund.

- 3.4** The Panel has been taking views from a range of key stakeholders since its establishment, meeting with more than 280 stakeholders through 70 engagement sessions. They have also undertaken a public consultation on the review. The current timetable for completion of the report is October 2022.
- 3.5** As part of their engagement work, the Panel met with Party Group Leaders in early July 2022. They had an extensive discussion on a number of key areas, principally focusing on the efficiency and effectiveness of Invest NI in its role as the main economic development agency in NI and also looking at whether Invest NI was appropriately and adequately resourced and structured to support the delivery of the 10X strategy.
- 3.6** In addition to the engagement with members, the Review Panel has confirmed that it would be keen to receive further written responses from key partners. Given the importance of the working relationship with Invest NI and the need to ensure that the organisation is structured in a way that can support the future economic growth of the city, it is proposed that the response set out in Appendix 1 is submitted to the Review Panel, reflecting the Council's views on key areas of opportunity and challenge. It covers a number of key points, namely:
- Need to consider current budget alignment – supportive of focus on FDI but need to enhance support for entrepreneurship and innovation in support of 10x ambitions
 - Commitment to building a stronger collaborative engagement between councils and Invest NI in order to enhance the referral process for businesses seeking to access support across both organisations
 - Need to enhance commitments around sustainable and inclusive growth – and ensure that these are reflected in overall budget allocations as well as in ways of working – using influence to encourage positive behaviours among client businesses
 - Need to explore place-based approaches to investment – good examples of how this works in other locations
 - Concerns at impact of recent budget cuts and apparently arbitrary approach to how these have been implemented – specific areas of concern around

support for accelerator and proof of concept support that will have a detrimental impact on local businesses.

3.7 Belfast City Council has a strong working relationship with Invest NI. This is focused on a number of areas:

- **Collaboration on FDI and positioning: we work closely with Invest NI on key target markets and showcase the city as an investment location to prospective investors. The Council takes the lead (with other public and private sector partners) on the physical infrastructure investments to support FDI**
- **Supporting the indigenous businesses: the council has developed a good referral process with Invest NI. This means that companies progressing from our start-up and early-stage growth support can move into a more formal relationship with Invest NI as a client business, thereby accessing a suite of support to help in their future growth. We also work collaboratively with Invest NI and other partners (e.g. Catalyst) on joint initiatives such as Way to Scale – our targeted scaling intervention for companies that have significant growth potential**
- **Reframing start-up and growth support: one of the key areas of work at present for the council is our plan to significant rescope the support for business starts. The ambition is to increase the overall number of start-ups as well as increasing the number of growth-focused, job-creating companies, including those that have the potential to scale. Invest NI has traditionally match-funded this activity (alongside council and ERDF resources). Our collective view is that this support needs to be revamped, with better outreach and engagement for potential entrepreneurs, moving towards a strong support offering that is commensurate with the potential of the business to grow and create jobs. Both Invest NI and the Department for Economy (DfE) have worked closely with the councils to date and consider that this new approach aligns with the 10x ambition and is in keeping with their wider plan to overhaul the support system for local businesses, based on the REAP (Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Programme) model that has been developed at MIT**
- **City Deal development: Invest NI is DfE's lead agency on the City and Growth Deals. They have established a team to support the progress of the business cases for key investment projects.**

**3.8 Equality and Good Relations Implications/
Rural Impact Assessment**

No specific equality or good relations implications/negative rural impact.

3.9 Financial and Resource Implications

No specific financial and resource implications associated with this report.”

The Committee agreed to:

- Note the ongoing review of Invest NI, including the scope and timelines;
- Note and agree the proposed response from Belfast City Council; and
- Note the likelihood of further engagement between the Review Team and the Council as the review progresses and in advance of its October 2022 publication.

Issues raised in advance by a Member

**Request for Presentation: Community Investment
Finance Ireland – Councillor Heading**

Councillor Heading outlined his proposal for the Committee to receive a presentation from Community Investment Finance Ireland Group in order to learn about its work and functions

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from Community Investment Finance Ireland.

Chairperson