

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 8th December, 2021

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Aldermen Dorrian and Kingston; and
Councillors, Brooks, Donnelly, Ferguson, Gormley,
Hanvey, Howard, Hussey, T. Kelly, Long, Lyons, Maskey,
McLaughlin, McMullan and O'Hara

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mrs. W. Langham, Project Director, Belfast Destination Hub;
Ms. E. Henry, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were recorded for Councillors Beattie, Heading and Whyte.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee of 10th November were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st December.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Donnelly declared an interest in relation to item 3(d) – European Social Fund Match Funding Requests – Proposed Council Contributions, in that, he worked for Upper Springfield Development Trust, which had applied for funding, and he left the meeting while the item was being considered.

Correspondence Received – Public Realm Projects

The Director of City Regeneration and Development drew the Members' attention to two items of correspondence which had been received in response to letters sent, on behalf of the Committee, to the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Infrastructure.

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 8th December, 2021**

She reminded the Members that, at its meeting in August, the Committee had agreed to write to the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to public realm projects within the city centre, specifically in relation to ensuring that the outworkings of the Bolder Vision were adequately captured and addresses within public realm scheme designs, and that a number of capital schemes had been progressing through design without an holistic overview of a modern transport plan.

She reported that a response had been received on behalf of the Minister for Communities, from the Acting Director, Belfast Regeneration, and on behalf of the Minister for Infrastructure, from the Private Secretary to the Minister.

She highlighted that the response on behalf of the Minister for Communities outlined awareness of the challenges that the BRT2 preferred options posed to the public realm and the city centre environment and that a meeting, with both Ministers for DfI and DfC, had been scheduled to take place in January 2022 to discuss the issues and agree a way forward.

She outlined, to the Committee, the response received on behalf of the Minister for Infrastructure and pointed out that the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan would be collaboratively developed with the Department and the five relevant councils, and that the initial focus would be based on the city centre and would consider changes to walking, cycling, transport and road networks.

The Committee noted the correspondence.

Restricted Presentation

Belfast Destination Hub

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during following presentation as, due to the nature of the item, 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.

The Project Director delivered a presentation to the Committee regarding the Belfast Destination Hub. She reported that the name Belfast Destination Hub had been replaced by Belfast Stories, and that plans were in place for a branding exercise to be undertaken, once the concept design had been completed.

She provided the Members with an update on the following areas:

- Belfast Region City Deal;
- Strategic alignment;
- Tourism growth;
- Belfast Stories business case and programme;
- Procurement strategy;
- Sustainability;
- Equality framework;

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 8th December, 2021**

- Consultation and engagement;
- Social value; and
- Communication plans.

The Committee noted the presentation.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following five 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.

Belfast Destination Hub Update

The Strategic Director of Planning and Place provided the Committee with an update on the progress which had been made on Belfast Stories (formerly referred to as Belfast Destination Hub) outline business case and programme.

The Committee agreed to:

- Note the progress update and programme;
- Note that the design stage of the project was proceeding at risk ahead of the receipt of BRCD funding, to ensure that the opening date of early 2028 remained on programme;
- Note the progress on the Belfast Story Collection Framework and to receive a presentation on the Framework early 2022; and
- Note the plans for the press announcement planned for December 2021.

Housing Led Regeneration

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on various housing led regeneration matters.

The Committee agreed:

- to use the scheduled date for the Special City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 26 January 2022, to hold a Committee Workshop on Housing Led Regeneration which would cover key areas of the work strands including the city-wide Strategic Site Assessments Phase 2;
- to note the report which had been considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting of 24 September

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 8th December, 2021**

2021, regarding work undertaken to seek an institutional investor/development partner to partner Council in the delivery of housing led placemaking regeneration utilising the Council's land assets and the agreement to undertake a soft market testing exercise and subsequent Expression of Interest, in order to engage the market in respect of the identified assets;

- to note the update on progress around Phase 2 of the Strategic Site Assessments (city wide Strategic Site Assessments), including the work of the Housing Led Regeneration Delivery Group within the structure of the Community Planning City Development Board;
- to note that a separate report was being brought to this Committee in respect of the DfC consultation on an Intermediate Rent product and the importance of this in the context of housing led regeneration and the need for mixed tenure housing;
- to note the update on the Inner North West Development Brief, and that Council and DfC were in dialogue with those Housing Associations who had responded to the Brief in order to work through issues identified through the process to deliver residential led development of these sites;
- to note the update in respect of the City Centre Living Vision; and
- that one Member from each of the six parties represented on the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, accompanied by officers, would undertake a study visit to Newcastle (subject to prevailing COVID and travel restrictions) with a focus on regeneration projects, including city centre living and the institutional investor/Council partnership approach to delivery.

Following discussion, the Committee further agreed that a report would be brought back to the Committee in relation to the actual costs of trips undertaken by or on behalf of the Committee.

Quarter 2 Finance

The Strategic Director of Planning and Place outlined to the Members the Quarter 2 financial position for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee which included the Council's overall financial position, the Committee financial position 2021/22, a summary of the financial indicators and an executive summary.

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

European Social Fund (ESF) Match Funding Requests – Proposed Council Contributions

(Councillor Donnelly, who had declared an interest in this item,
left the meeting for the duration)

The Director of Economic Development asked the Committee to consider the provision of Council match funding to the projects which had been selected through a

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 8th December, 2021**

recent transparent application process for Call 3 European Social Fund (ESF) projects, subject to funding availability.

The Committee agreed to approve the match funding contributions to the projects which had been recommended for approval.

(Councillor Donnelly, who had declared an interest in this item returned to the meeting at this point in proceedings)

City Centre Meanwhile Uses

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an report on the potential city centre sites to be considered for a meanwhile use as part of the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA)/JP Corry design competition.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed to:

- to note the analysis of the Council owned city centre sites in terms of potential meanwhile use for the RSUA Open Belfast Design Competition;
- to note that a further report on Housing Led Regeneration was being brought to this Committee, which included an update on the strategic site assessments work and the institutional investor approach, as agreed at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in September 2021, in respect of identified Council assets, which would include Corporation Street; and
- that the Council-owned lands at Site 10 would be recommended for a temporary meanwhile use as part of the RSUA/JP Corry Open Belfast Design Competition process, and that a report would be brought back to the Committee, prior to progressing with the winning design.

Regenerating Places & Improving Infrastructure

TEO High Street Task Force - 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 TEO High Street Task Force ‘Call for Evidence’ exercise.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to:

- **Note that the final draft response to the TEO High Street Task Force Call for Evidence will be submitted to DfC**

as the secretariat for the High Street Task Force in line with the closing date on 6th December 2021.

- Note that as part of the Call for Evidence process a workshop is being held in Belfast on 6th December 2021.
- Agree the final draft consultation response of the 6th December as the Council's final response pending Council ratification.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 At the meeting of the City Growth & Regeneration Committee on 10th November 2021 Members were updated on the then recently launched High Street Task Force Call for Evidence which is the first stage of an ongoing public engagement process, and forms part of the work of the Task Force in identifying the challenges and issues that our high streets face.
- 3.2 The report presented to Members in November highlighted that The Executive Office launched the High Street Task Force 'Call for Evidence' on 25th October 2021. The Committee subsequently agreed that *officers prepare a draft response which would be brought via Party Leaders Forum on 25th November, with the final response brought back retrospectively to the Committee, at its meeting in December.*
- 3.3 As agreed by Committee, the draft response to the Call for Evidence was presented at Party Leaders Forum on 25th November 2021. Party Leaders were largely content with the response although requested a small number of additions This involved the need for relevant legislation to address vacancy and dereliction such as the Dilapidations Bill, as well as ensuring adequate reference to meeting accessibility needs and working with IMTAC. In addition, it was highlighted that whilst we direct efforts to diversify the high street retail should be supported to ensure its sustainability especially in the context of Belfast as a capital city. Other issues were discussed in terms of car parking and accessibility. The additional points agreed by Party Leaders have been incorporated in the final draft response.
- 3.4 As part of the Call for Evidence, a series of six workshops were conducted to allow in-person views to be heard and discussed. A workshop was held in Belfast on 3rd November at the Hilton Hotel. Due to issues, including attendance a rescheduled workshop is taking place on 6th December. At the time of writing this report a number of Council officers have registered to attend this event, as well as promoting and

encouraging attendance with a wide group of stakeholders. Due to the timing of publishing this report, officers will provide a verbal update of key discussion points at the Committee meeting.

- 3.5 In keeping with the timetable set out by TEO, the final draft response will be submitted by the 6th December 2021.**

Members should note that the 14 themes identified within the Call for Evidence document, along with 46 associated questions are reflected across the ongoing programme of work aligned to the focus of this Committee including its priorities and Committee Plan, as well as alignment to other Council led programmes and priorities. In drafting responses officers drew on a number of plans, projects, programmes and strategies for example:

- **Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) and associated Masterplans**
- **Future City Centre Programme and the key pillars within that focusing on:**
 - **Regeneration and Connectivity**
 - **Business and Investment**
 - **City Centre Vibrancy**
 - **Position the City to Compete**
 - **Digital Innovation**
 - **Clean, Green and Safe underpinned by Policy Legislation and Market Intelligence**
- **A Bolder Vision and Connectivity Programme**
- **10 Year Tourism Strategy**
- **Cultural Strategy - A City Reimagining**
- **Vacancies Programme**
- **Tactics, Regeneration, eg, Entries Project**
- **Revitalisation Programme**
- **Strategic Acquisitions**
- **City Centre Living**
- **BRCD Including Belfast Stories**
- **Belfast Innovation City / SMART**
- **Business and Community Cluster Grants**
- **Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations**

- 3.6 Although the above mentioned programmes, projects and strategies are not an exhaustive list in terms of where officers drew evidence from, it demonstrates that Council has an extensive intelligence base from strategy development through to programme and project implementation on areas**

which have a direct impact on the vitality and sustainability of our high streets.

- 3.7** It is also relevant to highlight the synergies of the work of the Community Planning Partnership: City Development Board, which has a priority theme of the Future City Centre Programme as well as citywide regeneration and development including arterial routes / neighbourhood centres. Aligned to the approach which Council has taken, officers are now coalescing with CPP partners to develop a robust and strong collaborative delivery focused action plan which could help address themes coming from this Call for Evidence and as mentioned above priority areas of this Committee and Council.

3.8 Financial & Resource Implications

None associated with this report.

3.9 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None associated with this report.”

In response to a request by a Member, the Director of City Regeneration and Development agreed that she would forward an addendum to the Council’s response, pending Council ratification, in relation to question three of the call for evidence, to reference the Council’s motion on Clean Air Strategy in relation to changing legislation.

The Committee agreed:

- To note that the final draft response to the TEO High Street Task Force Call for Evidence had been submitted to DfC as the secretariat for the High Street Task Force in line with the closing date on 6th December 2021;
- To note that, as part of the Call for Evidence process, a workshop had been held in Belfast on 6th December 2021; and
- To the final draft consultation response of the 6th December, including the aforementioned addendum, as being the Council’s response pending Council ratification.

**Just Eat Belfast Bikes Strategic Review –
Screening Update**

The Director of Economic Development provided the Committee with an overview of the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To update Members on the equality screening of the delivery of Belfast Bikes and make recommendations for a way forward.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- To proceed with the four stations to be funded by the Department for Infrastructure outlined at 3.5, and the 15 stations;
- Agree to the phased Equality Screening and that additional criteria are included the scoring matrix.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

The Belfast Bikes scheme was launched in 2015 as part [Belfast City Council's physical investment programme](#). The Department for Regional Development provided initial capital funding for the scheme as part of their Active Travel Demonstration Projects budget. The scheme launched with a network of 30 docking stations and 300 bikes. The scheme has been operated by NSL continually since inception using bikes and supporting infrastructure from Nextbike GmbH. The scheme currently operates with 400 bikes and 48 docking stations.

3.2 Strategic Review

It was agreed to undertake a comprehensive strategic review of the Just Eat Belfast Bikes scheme and make recommendations for the future management, operation and potential expansion of the scheme at CG&R committee in January 2019. Intelligent Transport Services were commissioned in May 2019 to carry out the strategic review of the scheme. Stakeholder engagement and a public survey was carried out in August/September 2019 and an elected member's workshop was held on the 27th August 2019.

The scope of the review considered the following steps:

- Assessment of the current network;
- Review of scheme objectives;
- Review of operations;

- Future expansion; and
- Financial sustainability.

3.3 Future expansion

Included in the Strategic Review were recommendations in relation to the future expansion of the scheme. These findings were the result of extensive stakeholder engagement, public survey and engagement with elected members. A summary of findings is included below.

- There are gaps in the network along arterial routes and local centres in the North, West, South and East of the city. Investment in new stations should be carried out to increase network coverage and ensure social inclusion.
- Additional capacity is needed in the northern section of the city centre to service the new Belfast UU campus and the Tribeca development and in the east to service the Sirocco development. This should be funded through developer contributions.
- An assessment of the current network identified a number of existing stations which are under used and should be either relocated or reduced in size and used for expansion of new stations.
- Requests have been made from neighbouring councils and expansion into adjoining areas should be considered through partnership funding.

3.4 A summary of future expansion as presented to June Committee including potential relocations and complementary measures are outlined by area and included at Appendix 1. Areas for expansion had been selected by identifying gaps in the network along with feedback from the public survey and elected member/stakeholder consultation. It was acknowledged that further work would be needed to determine exact locations and consider those against the Site Expansion Matrix and it was proposed that this should be discussed and agreed through the Area Working Groups meetings. These proposals were phased over a two-year period to take account of the significant lead time and resource requirement required for an expansion. The costs were based on analogous estimates from our previous expansions of the network. In some instances, site specific conditions can result in savings or additional expense.

3.5 Members agreed at the CG&R Special Meeting in November 2020 to allocate £330k of £749k of DfI Blue and Green Infrastructure funding allocation to replenishing the Belfast

Bikes fleet. Members also agreed to carry out feasibility work to inform the allocation of £310k of this element of the fund for additional citywide infrastructure to support the cycling network with proposed measures to include covered cycle stands (to be provided within existing programmes of work or within existing Council assets); an electric bike trial; expansion of the Belfast Bike Infrastructure and Active /Sustainable Travel Hubs. At CG&R on 12th May 2021 it was agreed that an additional four Belfast bikes docking stations would be deployed using DFI Active Travel funding. This expansion highlighted the following four sites

- Antrim Road, Waterworks**
- Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre**
- Olympia Leisure Centre**
- Kennedy Shopping Centre**

3.6 A recommendation was also made within the report relating to a matrix for the selection of new docking stations. The criteria contained within the Site Expansion Matrix are detailed below.

- Employment Destinations**
- Residential**
- Public Transport**
- Public Amenities**
- Resident Requests**
- Existing Usage at nearby stations**
- Gaps in Network**
- Survey Feedback**
- Cycle Infrastructure**
- Land that is either owned or managed by Belfast City Council or where express permission to situate a biking dock in already in place.**

3.7 During discussion at CG&R in June a number of proposals were made and debated by elected members. These are listed below

- Agree to add both levels of air pollution and access to car/van as per census data 2011/21 when updated to the Expansion Criteria.**
- Agree to add additional criteria including Health Inequalities as part of the scoring matrix on expansion.**

3.8 Call-in

As members will be aware, the decision was subject to call-in and was referred to Counsel for opinion. Subsequently the

call-in was found to have merit on both procedural and community impact grounds.

An opinion was received with regard to the inclusion of existing cycle infrastructure within the Site Expansion Matrix which is detailed below.

‘Given the clear evidence that the current cycle infrastructure is poor in North and West of the City, the inclusion does have the result that decisions taken on that basis will have an adverse impact on those inhabitants of those sections of the district.

The next question is whether any adverse effect is disproportionate. In assessing this matter, I note the evidence that the infrastructure in north and west Belfast is particularly poor. Whilst I appreciate that the matrix applies equally to all locations, the practical effect of the decision would be that the areas of north and west Belfast would score lower than other areas because of the poor existing infrastructure. That would have a disproportionate effect as it would result in those inhabitants being less likely to be able to benefit from the expansion of the Scheme.’

- 3.9 In summary this directs that the inclusion of the criteria of existing cycling infrastructure must be removed from the site expansion criteria.
- 3.10 Following the call-in it was agreed at CG&R in September 2021 that an equality screening would take place with initial findings reported back to Committee to allow a decision to be made on future investment in the scheme.

Equality Screening

- 3.11 A staged equality screening is progressing and builds on the equality screening of the Belfast Bike Scheme carried out in 2013/14. This original equality screening identified the potential to improve equality of opportunity in relation to those with a disability, those with dependants and women. The following mitigations and actions were taken:
- As one of four Active Travel Demonstration Projects of the DfI (previously, DRD) Active Travel Initiative, an important element of the Active Travel Strategy is to encourage local authorities to promote more walking and cycling in the communities they serve and to recognise the need to include people of all abilities.

- The design and the colour of the bikes are subject to the potential sponsor of the scheme. However, the design and colour of the bikes must take into consideration the symbolism of political opinions and have a ‘neutral’ appearance. This has been actioned through the sponsorship and bike provider specifications. The decision about sponsorship is taken in line with Council’s policies regarding specific products.
- Members of IMTAC and Disability Action were consulted in the stakeholder workshops. They attended site visits and influenced the locations for the docking stations.
- During the development and extension phase, consultation took place with representatives from communities and groups directly affected by the scheme i.e. in areas of potential locations of docking stations
- Considerations such as mobility issues and the potential of introducing special bikes such as trikes/e-bikes will continuously influence the development of the scheme.
- Within the action plans for the scheme ‘try it’ events have been hosted including some targeted at underrepresented groups such as people with a disability and women
- Tied in with Sustrans events such as Women in Cycling, cycle proficiency training and bike club programmes; also had a number of separate events in schools.
- Users have to sign up to the Terms & Conditions of using the Public Bike Share Scheme and Health & Safety Regulations are paramount using the scheme. It is noted that this may result in some limitations in usage, such as in terms of age.

3.12 As this is an existing programme we have taken an approach to screen at appropriate stages of delivery based on the information available. The current draft screening takes into account the strategic review of the Belfast Bikes in 2019 and new policy developments, for example, A Bolder Vision for Belfast, Sustrans Policy on Public Bike Hire Schemes (2019) and the Belfast Cycle Network (June 2021). While the objectives of the scheme remain unchanged; it is noted that the primary objective of the Belfast Bike Scheme in 2013 was described as: to achieve a sustainable low cost transport system to service key locations in Belfast City Centre, and the scheme has expanded to include additional areas

surrounding and outside the city centre where funding and demand have supported such expansion.

3.13 Work to date on the draft equality screening indicates the potential differential impacts on women, those with disabilities, those with dependents and those who are older. Given the diversity of issues experienced, it also notes the need to further investigate the potential impact on those from different racial groups in Belfast, as well as those with disabilities in order to better understand the potential impacts. This information and health data will be considered to inform future development of the scheme subject to feasibility. Further analysis is also being undertaken into the incorporation of the additional location assessment criteria to ensure clarity of definition and application of assessment.

3.14 **Financial & Resource Implications**

As set out to Committee in June 2021, based on the historic revenue from bike hire and the expected revenue from sponsors it is estimated for the financial year 21/22 that the Belfast Bikes scheme will require a subvention of £244,280 to cover its cost of operation. This subvention was included in Place & Economy departmental estimates for the financial year 21/22.

3.15 An investment of approximately £525,000 is required to fund the recommended expansion of the network in this phase with further investment required for subsequent phases. This funding has been secured via in year underspend.

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

We have taken an approach to screen at appropriate stages of delivery based on the information available.”

The Committee agreed to:

- proceed with the four undernoted stations to be funded by the Department for Infrastructure:
 - Antrim Road, Waterworks;
 - Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre;
 - Olympia Leisure Centre; and
 - Kennedy Shopping Centre.

- proceed with the 15 stations outlined in the expansion proposals; and

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 8th December, 2021**

- the phased Equality Screening and that additional criteria would be included the scoring matrix.

**Department for Communities Consultation:
Intermediate Rent Development of Policy and Model**

The Director of Planning and Building Control explained that, in a statement to the NI Assembly in November 2020, the Minister for Communities had set out an ambitious housing programme and had introduced new housing options that included Intermediate Rent in support of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement aims of assisting eligible households into affordable housing and help meet the affordable housing obligations of Policy HOU5, as set out in the draft Belfast Local Development Plan 2035.

She reported that the consultation on an Intermediate Rent policy and model had been launched on 18th October and that, although the Council was supportive of the delivery of the new product, it had not been possible to provide a definitive view on the specific product proposed until there was a better understanding on how the model would be delivered in practice.

She referred the Members to a draft response which set out a number of aspects of the proposals that officers believed merited further consideration, which included:

- The need for new affordable housing product(s);
- The need for a single programme operator;
- Funding mechanisms;
- Construction and quality standards;
- Setting the appropriate rent level; and
- Deliverability.

She advised the Committee that Council officers were due to meet with DfC officials on Friday, 10th December 2021 to discuss the consultation proposals and that any required amendments to the response which might arise following the meeting would be reported back to the Committee at its meeting in January for approval, in advance of the submission of the final response.

The Committee noted the Intermediate Rent Development of Policy and Model Consultation document and approved the draft response to the consultation for submission to DfC, in advance of the 14th January deadline.

Growing Business & the Economy

Jobs and Skills Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on a number of existing and planned interventions to improve skills and**

help people find a new or better job, focusing on key target groups and those furthest from the labour market.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the range of existing and planned interventions to improve skills and help people find a new or better job, focusing on key target groups and those furthest from the labour market
- Note the job outcomes delivered by some of the key interventions
- Note the planned developments and activity for the coming months, including the development activity in new areas of work.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Members will be aware that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the economy of the city with labour market volatility where demand hugely outstripping supply in a number of sectors (tech and digital; logistics and health and social care) while other sectors are much more vulnerable (hospitality; retail).

3.2 Despite the volatility, council officers have been working closely with our stakeholder partners and with employers in key sectors to support the delivery of a range of interventions to help those furthest from the labour market to find sustainable employment in those sectors where demand has remained strong or is beginning to recover. This work has meant that, from April-September 2021, we have been able to bring 427 people on to our Employment Academy programmes across a range of sectors, with 202 currently on the waiting list for upcoming programmes. This level of demand – both from employers as well as those looking for a job or a better job – represents a significant increase on figures from previous years, as previously flagged at the October meeting of this committee.

3.3 Of those who started an Employment Academy since April 2021, 176 people have completed and 132 have secured employment so far. This represents an into-work rate of 75%. Of the 251 people still going through a programme, 92 are already in work and are receiving support, qualifications or licences needed to access a better job. These include Level 3-5 qualifications (e.g. in childcare sector, allowing staff to move to supervisory roles) and specific vehicle licences to

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 8th December, 2021**

help existing drivers progress to better-paid driving roles, including those within public sector organisations such as Belfast City Council.

- 3.4** The ‘Take the Next Step’ event in St George’s Market on 9 November attracted over 450 people and gave residents a chance to find out more about the upcoming employment academies and to register interest to participate as well being able to apply directly for vacancies. Employers across a range of sectors were in attendance, and feedback has been very positive, with 90% reporting that they were very satisfied and 10% reporting that they were satisfied. While the full job outcomes as a result of this event are yet to be completed, we have already had confirmation of 20 people that have started a new job following the event while 202 people have been referred to a future employment academy programme. The breakdown of interest is detailed below:

<u>Employment Academy</u>	<u>Interested as of 11th Nov</u>
Construction	10
Business	16
Haulage/Bus Driving	112
Taxi driving	30
Leisure	15
Childcare/Playwork	19
TOTALS	202

- 3.5** A further ‘Take the Next Step’ event is being planned for the New Year (restrictions permitting). This is likely to feature planned programmes including:

- Construction Employment Academies for the Belfast Transport Hub
- Business Services Employment Academy
- Fibre Splicing Employment Academy
- Social Care Employment Academies
- Transport Employment Academies

3.6 Green Economy

While the Academies represent short, employer-focused, into-employment interventions, the team has also been engaged in a wider range of jobs and skills-related activities – always with the aim of supporting inclusive growth. One of the emerging areas of work is in the retrofit sector. We have recently been successful in a bid to the Community Renewal Fund to establish a vocational curriculum offer as there is currently no skills provision in this field. Work is at an advanced stage to develop a retrofitting qualification from level 2 through to level 5, with local training organisations and Belfast Met working together to support programme delivery in the city.

Once the skills infrastructure is established, this will offer opportunities for new entrants to access opportunities in a future growth area. It will also present significant re-skilling opportunities for companies in the construction sector, helping them to future-proof their business and look towards new opportunities for future growth.

3.7 Fibre Splicing Programme

Another emerging area of work is in utilities – particularly given the exponential demand for broadband as a result of Covid-19 as well as significant public investment in new infrastructure. Using the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) mechanism within our new procurement framework, we have recently appointed an operator to deliver a highly specialist intervention in early 2022 as a pilot exercise to test the potential in this new field. Once participants complete the programme, they will have an opportunity to find employment with companies that are currently offering salary levels in the range of £25,000-£35,000 pa. Updates on this programme will be brought back to a future meeting of the committee.

3.8 Supporting BCC as an Employer

In addition to working with private sector businesses across the city, officers have also been working closely with colleagues in the HR team to support people into new jobs or better jobs within Council. Some examples of this activity include:

- Delivery underway for 20 Council staff to gain their Category C lorry licence. This will open up a pathway to a better job in the council. This is planned to be open again in the New Year for a further cohort

- **Planning for Jobstart jobs for 10 young people across Council such as Zoo Crew and Business Support, with a bespoke Employment Academy designed to target and engage people, provide pre-recruitment support, in-work upskilling and personal mentoring as well as agreeing and implementing a career progression pathway for each young person.**

3.9 Financial and resource implications

The activities set out within this report are being funded through the Employability and Skills budget previously agreed as part of the estimates process.

3.10 Equality implications or Good Relations implications/Rural needs assessment

One of the key advantages of this approach is that it will enable us to target resources on specific groups, including those with particular access issues and barriers that currently prevent them from accessing training and employment opportunities. Our participation data is regularly reviewed to ensure that we are making a positive impact on key target groups and the CRM system can provide real-time data to ensure effective targeting of resources.”

The Committee noted:

- the range of existing and planned interventions to improve skills and help people find a new or better job, focusing on key target groups and those furthest from the labour market;
- the job outcomes delivered by some of the key interventions; and
- the planned developments and activity for the coming months, including the development activity in new areas of work.

Issues raised in advance by Members

A Bolder Vision Consultation

At the request of Councillor McMullan, the Committee agreed that officers would bring a report back to the Committee which would outline any learnings in relation to accessibility issues with the ‘Bolder Vision’ consultation engagement process.

Chairperson