



# Belfast: Our Recovery

September 2020

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**Belfast**  
City Council

Energising  
**Belfast**

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# Foreword

## Belfast - the heart of recovery and renewal

**Since March 2020, our priority in the initial stages of the pandemic has been to continue safe delivery of critical council services to our residents and businesses in the city, including bereavement services, waste collection and street cleansing.**

As the NI Executive has eased restrictions on a phased basis, we have sought to maximise our contribution to the safety, health, wellbeing and economic recovery of our city by re-opening key services including our parks and open spaces, and in supporting businesses to re-open safely.

As the effects of the pandemic have begun to emerge, we have been working to understand how our city economy and communities are likely to be impacted by COVID-19, and what we need to focus on to rebuild in the coming months and years.

We recognise that the pandemic is not over and there will need to be sustained efforts to protect the safety and health of our citizens, while at the same time balancing the need to re-open our city economy where it is safe to do so.

This Belfast: Our Recovery document sets out the areas we need to focus on in the short term to drive city recovery during this pandemic phase, as well as building the foundations for sustained recovery. In leading the Belfast Community Planning Partnership, we will continue to deliver on The Belfast Agenda ambitions, our Corporate Plan and other city plans and strategies - albeit through the lens of these new challenges. We have also tasked our city's Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission with preparing an immediate report, Delivering Sustainable and Inclusive Recovery, which outlines a number of stimulus interventions which could help boost inclusive growth in the short term.

We will focus on ensuring public safety, delivering safe and high quality public services, building business resilience, community capacity and digital innovation; investing in jobs-led growth of our key sectors and developing our people's skills.

We will also work in collaboration with our partners to regenerate our city and reshape how the centre is used to increase footfall, spend and community connectivity between the centre and our arterial routes.

Whilst we recognise the financial challenges facing local government as a result of the pandemic, we are committed to working with our government, city partners and communities to deliver these growth ambitions for Belfast.

We welcome the range of financial and policy changes that the NI Executive and national government have made in recent weeks to support business, communities

and households. Continued support, including for councils, is required to enable us to deliver on the range of interventions necessary to support a robust and sustainable recovery. We will work with the Executive in ongoing efforts to respond, recover and rebuild. Every part of government and civic society must collaborate to ensure that we beat the economic forecasts and both protect existing and create new jobs.

Belfast is the cultural and business heart of the region. It plays a vital role as a driver of Northern Ireland's economy; so we contend that there must be particular consideration given to how Belfast rebuilds in the Executive's recovery plans. A stronger Belfast will support a stronger region.

There has been much discussion about the need to "build back better". For us, this means maintaining our focus on inclusive economic growth - responding to the structural shifts in the economy, but making sure that our residents can benefit from, and contribute to, city recovery and growth and access the jobs of the future. It also means recognising that threats from climate change are growing, and that we must deliver a step change in this decade.

The recovery decisions we make should accelerate our path to a net zero carbon future and ensure our city receives the economic benefits to be gained from clean energy and zero emission transport, and a new generation of skills and jobs for the city. Our increased focus on sustainable economic development must take account of impacts on the environment and deliver on quality of life and wellbeing within our communities.

We are committed to working with our communities, the NI Executive, its departments and our city partners to sustain the spirit of the city; to achieve resilient and inclusive recovery; to explore how Belfast can be repositioned to protect and grow the regional economy; and to develop an investment proposition which benefits our people.

We will proactively engage with our communities to identify local challenges, priorities and opportunities and co-design interventions and programmes that will deliver improved outcomes for people living in Belfast.



**Ciaran Beattie**  
Sinn Féin



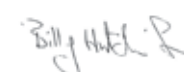
**Sonia Copeland**  
Ulster Unionist Party



**George Dorrian**  
Democratic Unionist Party



**Fiona Ferguson**  
People Before Profit



**Billy Hutchinson**  
Progressive Unionist Party



**Michael Long**  
Alliance



**Dónal Lyons**  
Social Democratic and Labour Party



**Mal O'Hara**  
Green Party



**Suzanne Wylie**  
Chief Executive



**Belfast**  
City Council



# Supporting principles

We will adopt the following guiding principles in our drive for recovery:



Making Belfast as safe as possible (public health) and helping to build personal social responsibility.



Sustainable and inclusive growth, investment and employment.



Guided by science, data and the NI Executive's five stage plan for recovery.



Building on Belfast's strengths.



Building our resilience to future crises - designing recovery to protect our citizens from the impacts of climate change and moving quickly towards a zero-emissions future.



Delivering value for money for citizens - sharing opportunity, resources and risk and driving out duplication.



Flexibility - being agile, responsive and innovative - learning from, adapting to and harnessing opportunities emerging from the pandemic.



Seeking our citizens' and communities' participation; listening and responding to their needs and aspirations.



Responding to the needs of our communities, with a focus on addressing inequalities, deprivation and disadvantage.



Instilling confidence.



Providing civic leadership and working in partnership to support delivery.



Safe, vibrant, connected spaces and places.



# COVID-19 impacts on our city and people

COVID-19 is impacting on our people and city in a variety of ways. Here we outline some examples of the key areas affected, and the responses required in support.

**Public health**  
- using public assets to address health inequalities, creating safe spaces and places.



**Supporting our businesses**  
to protect and create new jobs and skilling and reskilling our people.



**Current and future viability of the city centre and local business** - particular impact on office, retail, tourism and hospitality sectors.

**Tourism** - safely rebuilding the city's offer to attract visitors.



**Cultural life**  
- injecting vibrancy into the city through a cultural animation programme.

**City regeneration** - supporting a future city in the new post-COVID-19 context.



**Improved air quality and other environmental improvements** due to reduced traffic.

**Inequalities** - we will work with central government and other partners to address many of the social challenges amplified by pandemic including emotional wellbeing, poverty, social isolation and vulnerability.



**Neighbourhoods** - increasing connectivity, building capacity and supporting communities and local businesses.

# Levers and opportunities

To maximise the potential impact of our recovery plans, we will be seeking to harness many of the benefits from new strategic investments, emerging developments and funding opportunities. Some examples of key levers and opportunities either on the horizon or already in progress that we will be including in our plans are highlighted below:

## — Immediate opportunities —

Investing NI Executive COVID-19 Recovery support funds, including almost **£3m COVID-19 Capital Revitalisation Fund** and the **£4m Greenways programme**.



Delivery of the council's new **£8m Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund**.



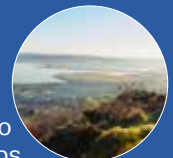
Council investment in **further projects to support regeneration in neighbourhoods** including **£25m** in two new leisure facilities commencing in 2020.



**Creation of an innovation district**, a free innovation zone and investing in digital infrastructure and skills.



**Maximizing use of land and assets** in our estate to support growth, create jobs and improve and health and wellbeing.

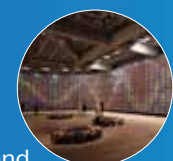


## — Long term opportunities —

**Improvement to access and connectivity.** Key projects including Belfast Rapid Transit phase II, Weavers Cross Transport Hub, and Belfast-Dublin Economic Corridor.



Existing and **new world-class visitor attractions** (for example Belfast Zoo and new Belfast Destination Hub).



Local job opportunities created by new city developments including:

- Delivery of **£6m council community grants programme**.
- **£8.3m investment in enhancing digital infrastructure and digital access** on council sites.
- Working with partners to invest in the energy efficiency of our buildings- reducing our emissions, boosting local jobs and supply chains.
- Investing in zero-emissions transport to boost sustainable connectivity across the city including investing in the city's bike infrastructure..
- Supporting local businesses, social enterprises and cooperatives and creating community wealth through social value procurement.



## Medium term opportunities

**Availability and access to key national and regional funding streams** (for example Peace IV, Peace Plus) and other forms of investment to support recovery.



**Devolution of further place-shaping powers** such as regeneration to council and enhanced economic functions.



Accelerating delivery of the **£850m Belfast Region City Deal**.



Working with partners to bring forward a **major housebuilding programme**, addressing need and supporting job creation.



**Clean Energy:** transition to a net zero carbon city.



# Our framework for recovery

**We are mindful of the impact of COVID-19 on households, jobs, health and wellbeing for all of us. The council remains focused on minimising the human cost, providing relief to communities and delivering essential day-to-day services.**

Another major challenge for the council and city partners is to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on our economy, so that businesses can once again thrive and provide much needed employment opportunities and vibrancy to local communities. We must do all this, while ensuring resilience to future crises - in particular, climate change.

Our recovery plan has six main pillars - each helping to support our communities and economy to recover by building on our strengths and assets as a city and a wider city region.

## Working together to support our city's recovery





# Our city - safe, vibrant, connected spaces and places

**COVID-19 has changed how public spaces are used, particularly the city centre, which has seen significant reductions in footfall.**

We need to ensure our public spaces are as safe as possible, to support health and wellbeing, connectivity, social and cultural vibrancy and economic recovery. Crucial to this in the short term, is ensuring that public spaces are as safe as possible and that people have the confidence to use and enjoy them.

We will offer leadership across the range of public bodies and other partners to ensure that a joined up approach is taken to bringing forward all possible measures to ensure the safety of residents, staff and visitors to the city. We will work with the Public Health Agency to support them in implementing safety guidelines across the city and we will continue to work across government, industry and other sectors to support the managed and phased approach to reopening.

Working with our health colleagues, we will continue to offer advice and support for businesses to reopen and operate safely in the short term. We have been helping the hospitality industry avail of opportunities to make use of 'spill-over' space for pavement cafés etc., to help with social distancing requirements.

## **Safe reopening of city centre and arterial routes**

Working with the Department for Communities, Department for Infrastructure and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, we will implement a **£3m Revitalisation Fund** to assist the city's recovery efforts and support the planning and safe reopening of the city and key arterial routes.

Interventions brought forward include new signage along the arterial routes and within the city centre to encourage safe movement of people, working with partners to deliver physical interventions to enable effective social distancing and queuing systems and supporting infrastructure, as well as public safety messaging, marketing and communications activity. We are also providing business grants to fund infrastructure investment and use of outdoor space to facilitate the required health and safety measures to be put in place.

We will work with the Department for Infrastructure and other partners to invest in physical interventions to



improve the appearance of the city, to introduce green infrastructure and make improvements to the public realm, including the temporary pedestrianisation of key areas, provision of additional seating, creation of new parklets and public spaces.

We recently invested **£300,000 to create a new landscaped area and family friendly zone** within Cathedral Gardens and are working with the Department for Communities to identify opportunities and bring forward the redevelopment of other urban spaces within the city.

We are also working with the retail and hospitality sectors, including the roll out of pavement café licensing, to accommodate additional outdoor space to enable necessary and important social distancing measures to be applied.

In supporting more sustainable and safer connectivity across the city, we will accelerate immediate opportunities to implement our 'Bolder Vision for Belfast' Connectivity Study, which involves a significant re-think on how we use our streets and places and to start reshaping how our city centre is used, to improve connectivity, vibrancy and sustainability. Working alongside Department for Infrastructure, Department for Communities and other partners, we are implementing environmental improvement works, enhanced infrastructure provision including new covered bicycle parking facilities, enhancing connections with local communities and developing urban greenway proposals.

We will work with the Department for Infrastructure to create more connected blue and green infrastructure across the city, including a **£4m Greenways Programme**. We will also deliver the **£3.9m Forth Meadow Community Greenway project** funded by the Peace IV programme, due for completion by 2022. Once complete, it will regenerate a number of existing open spaces/parks as shared neighbourhood spaces, creating new opportunities for people to safely use outdoor space for exercise and local cultural and tourism activities, while also improving connectivity.

We also need to work hard to protect and re-energise the cultural heartbeat, vibrancy and offer within the city and its neighbourhoods to attract visitors and additional footfall. We will continue to work in partnership with our cultural and tourism partners to progress the ambitious plans set out in our 'A City Imagining 2020-30' strategy to evolve, broaden, deepen and expand the tourism and cultural offer currently available. We will deliver a significant programme of cultural events and activity at weekends throughout autumn into January 2021 to animate our streets and create welcoming, vibrant and safe places for the enjoyment of visitors and city residents alike.



## Our services

**As a council, we had to respond to the early restrictions put in place to deal with the pandemic, by quickly adapting key frontline services for our residents and businesses.**

This included ensuring that we responded to the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities through working with community and voluntary sector partners and the Department for Communities. A total of 107,407 food parcels and hot meals were delivered to Belfast residents over a 16 week period. Our helpline handled 9,770 calls and local community helplines handled a further 5,115 calls from Belfast residents.

As we have begun to re-open many of our services in line with the NI Executive's phased re-opening plan, we have also had to consider how we can ensure our services get back up and running in a safe manner.

### **Continuing to deliver essential services**

Throughout this challenging period, we have continued to deliver essential, critical services including bereavement services, waste collection and recycling centres, leisure centres and key destinations such as the Belfast Zoo and city markets.



Over 90 services are now operational, with an intensive programme underway to re-open those remaining services and community facilities, including community centres, in a safe and managed way.

We are ensuring appropriate control measures are in place, including encouraging social distancing, to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19, and continually keep this under review as guidelines change.

We have adapted processes and realigned staff and resources to ensure safe and responsive services meet our residents' needs. These services are operating in a new way, with adaptations in processes and responses, and are supported by additional staff to meet the challenges of ensuring the health and safety of staff and the public at all times. We are also operating many of our critical front line and regulatory services remotely during this time.

Throughout these changes we are ensuring our services are as accessible as possible. In July we launched a new council website to provide a more streamlined and user friendly experience for our customers. We will also be encouraging citizens to interact and engage with us in more innovative ways, using online tools to shape how services and city interventions are planned in the future.

### **Ensuring access to parks and open spaces**

We continue to ensure our parks and local open/green spaces remain open; giving individuals and families important opportunities to exercise and to help improve their physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing. We are ensuring appropriate control measures are in place, including encouraging social distancing, to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19, and continually keep this under review as guidelines change.



### **Reopening safely**

Not all council services and facilities can be restored at once and the easing of lockdown restrictions through the NI Executive five stage roadmap is the main driver for enabling this to happen. We have put in place a robust service readiness assessment and a prioritised recovery plan to ensure all implications and requirements are carefully considered, implemented and managed by council.



### **Continuing to invest in our services: delivering social and economic value for communities**

There is still more to be done - we will review our own internal resources and services, starting with a transformational review of community provision. We will also maximise the opportunities presented by our own recruitment, investment and procurement decisions to stimulate the local economy, support local supply chains, create community wealth and deliver social and economic value for communities.

In seeking to manage the city's waste more sustainably, we will continue to look for opportunities to support and grow the circular economy, encouraging enterprise development, providing skills and training opportunities and creating jobs. We will also look for ways to improve the performance of our waste collections.

We have recently opened new leisure centre facilities at Andersonstown, Brook and Lisnasharragh to support Belfast's medium-longer term recovery and enhance citizens' health and wellbeing. We will continue to invest in our facilities, including **£8m in the redevelopment of the Avoniel Leisure Centre, £17m for the restoration and extension of Templemore Baths** and progressing plans for a new leisure facility at Girdwood.



# Our communities

**The pandemic will further intensify existing inequalities and create significant economic and social challenges for our communities in coming years.**

We will place wellbeing at the centre of our recovery efforts, reinvigorating public service provision locally and ensuring people and places disproportionately affected by the pandemic are not left behind.

We recognise our communities need to be at the heart of our city's recovery. We will engage with and work alongside our citizens, and others in our communities including the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors who play such vital roles in city life, to identify priorities together. Working with these sectors, we have recently established a VCSE Panel and Network, and we will continue to build on this to enhance participation going forward.

We want this engagement to support community participation in co-design of area based interventions to deliver an inclusive and jobs led recovery for local people, as well as addressing the wider social impacts acutely experienced by local people. Recent engagement has highlighted important concerns in relation to the impact of COVID-19 on health inequalities, mental health and wellbeing, social isolation and vulnerability and financial worries including income, food and fuel poverty. We will work with government to scale up projects to help address these issues.

We will use the significant learning captured during the emergency response to the pandemic and the relationships with community and statutory partners to continue to support vulnerable people and families through these challenging times, alongside supporting the reinvigoration of our neighbourhoods and developing community confidence, capacity and longer-term resilience through a range of support programmes.

As we seek to engage communities in this work over the coming months, we will be building on learning from innovative approaches that we have had to take in response to restrictions on physical and face to face interactions. We will be deploying a new online engagement platform and will seek to enhance our engagement via webinars and other forms of engagement that make it easier for citizens to engage and have their say.

We have already adapted how we engage with communities and citizens in bringing forward capital schemes, as well as submitting and assessing planning applications with greater use of online methods instead of traditional face to face interactions.

**Building community capacity and creating community wealth**

Communities were first to respond to the pandemic and have shown the strength and resilience of the sector in challenging times. In support of this work, we have allocated over **£1.6m funding to over 280 local community and voluntary organisations** to support vulnerable people and families and assist community recovery.

We have continued to deliver the **£6m council grants programmes**, despite the financial difficulties we face, to ensure important support services and programmes could be delivered across the city.

We will work with central government and other funding bodies to bring forward further financial support packages for communities and the third sector to help address many of the social challenges which will be amplified as a direct result of the impact of the pandemic. These include, but are not limited to, increased unemployment levels, local business closures, emotional wellbeing, poverty and deprivation. And we will review our own internal resources and services, starting with a transformational review of community provision within the city.

**Supporting businesses in neighbourhoods**

We are aware of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on many of our local businesses, social enterprises, co-operatives, and employees. We continue to work with central government to support the sector, seek to secure additional funding and find innovative ways to support local business recovery, including the revitalisation business grant scheme.

We recognise the important role of the arterial routes and key neighbourhood economic hubs across the city in supporting recovery in terms of retaining existing and creating new jobs and creating community wealth. We are bringing forward specific and tailored programmes to support local businesses and social enterprises; retaining existing or creating new jobs and supporting economic recovery in local areas.





We will use investment and procurement decisions to support businesses and local supply chains, to create community wealth, and deliver social and economic value for our communities. In doing so, we will work with local enterprises, micro, small and medium-sized businesses to increase awareness and develop their capacity to access potential opportunities.

And we will work with local communities and partners to bring forward a significant programme of investment in local tourism assets, infrastructure or products that will attract additional footfall and expenditure into our neighbourhoods and creating destinations to visit.

Enhancing the connectivity and movement between neighbourhoods and linkages with the city centre will be a key focus of our recovery plans including investing in the further extension of the Belfast Bikes Scheme.

### Retaining jobs and re-skilling for employment

We will work with the Department for the Economy and other partners to ensure local people gain the necessary skills, including traditional skills, to remain in or enter the local workforce.



We will continue to deliver our Employment Academies and other tailored employment interventions to support those impacted by COVID-19 and those furthest from the labour market. This will include our approach to recruitment and how we work with anchor institutions and large employers to incentivise and provide opportunities for local people to access skills and employment opportunities.

It will also include a strong focus on helping upskill our local workforce for the green economy - investing in jobs of the future.

### Investing in our neighbourhoods and local assets

We will continue to invest in and deliver community infrastructure projects to support new and enhanced community facilities, sports and leisure facilities, and open space and environmental regeneration through our **£9m Local Investment Fund, £28.2m Belfast Investment Fund and £4m Social Outcomes Fund** to create vibrant, attractive and sustainable neighbourhoods.



Over 130 partnership projects have been supported through the Local Investment Fund across all parts of

the city, with projects including community gardens, facilities for children and young people and older people and improvements to many other community facilities designed to improve the wellbeing of local people. Over 110 projects have been completed with work continuing on a further 20 in 2020.

We are bringing forward a new **£8m neighbourhood regeneration fund** and will seek to lever additional investment to drive recovery and transformation in local areas and communities. This includes the delivery of significant community partnership projects through the Urban Villages capital programme and Social Investment Fund.

We will continue to work with communities across the city to help them get the maximum benefit from local assets. We are working with public sector partners to bring forward opportunities for use of public sector land assets to support mixed-use developments including housing led regeneration; create living neighbourhoods and provide community infrastructure, amenities and open/green spaces.

We continue to deliver our **£105m leisure programme** with four new state of the art facilities already opened and another two to commence this year with a **£17m investment in the redevelopment and extension of the Templemore Baths and a new £8million investment in the redevelopment of Avoniel Leisure Centre**. We will work closely with our partners at GLL to ensure our leisure facilities deliver programmes which help improve people's health and wellbeing.

### Creating safe and shared places

We will continue to work with our communities and city partners to create a safe, inclusive and shared city, and places, through the delivery of the Good Relations Strategy and ensuring maximum impact of investment and programmes supported through Peace IV and the new PEACE PLUS to be brought forward.



# Our economy

## Building business resilience to protect and create jobs

We are committed to working alongside the NI Executive, the Department for the Economy, and other partners to bring forward an integrated approach to supporting businesses, sustaining jobs and creating new employment opportunities within the city. We welcome the support packages and interventions being brought forward to support those sectors most affected, as well as to stimulate and incentivise job retention and skills development, including the recent **£17.2m funding commitment** to help bolster the local apprenticeship system.

We will revamp our current system of business support to make it easier to access, more flexible to meet the needs of business and more focused on those businesses that can benefit from the support.

To support business resilience, we introduced **three months' rent free to council tenants at a cost of over £1.5m**, and agreed a three month rent free period for St George's Market traders. Whilst it is unaffordable to continue this in the longer term, we will work with government on the review of rates, to support businesses where possible.

We will continue to work with partners including Invest NI, Catalyst, FE colleges and community and voluntary organisations to amplify existing programmes and develop new programmes to create a continuum of support for entrepreneurs, businesses, social enterprises and co-operatives to enable individuals to achieve their potential.

We will initially focus on business resilience, job retention and community wealth building. This will evolve to focus on programmes and policies with partners on growing jobs, productivity, and community wealth within an increased focus on key growth sectors. Alongside our resources, we will utilise our City Deal finances, our city investment fund, developer contributions and the outputs from our emerging Inclusive Growth City Charter and Social Value Procurement Policy to assist us with developing jobs, opportunities and businesses for the most disadvantaged in our city. We will continue to support traditional sectors and promote inclusive economic growth across the city.

## Revamping the business start-up offer

We will deliver an easy to understand and easily accessible range of support for those considering starting their own businesses. We will continue to offer existing support including the Go For It programme and will leverage partnerships with the Department for Communities and with our colleges and universities to bring



together financial and technical support to ensure that anyone wanting to start a business gets access to the resources they need and the transition to self employment is de-risked and supported.

## Supporting social enterprises and co-operatives

We will encourage and support individuals and groups to develop community based businesses in the form of social enterprises and co-operatives to build wealth within our communities and will continue to expand our Social Enterprise and Co-operative Action plan.

We will encourage entrepreneurs to build businesses that can access the opportunities stemming from the **£850m City Deal** and will provide bespoke channels through which local entrepreneurs and businesses can access those City Deal opportunities.

## Focusing on key growth sectors

While we maintain a focus on our key sectors, we will continue to promote inclusive economic growth. Our support will remain available to all businesses that have the potential and commitment to grow and create jobs.

The **£850m Belfast Region City Deal** investment will provide a boost for key growth sectors, transform our global profile and create new and better jobs. We will ensure all of our residents and communities have equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the opportunities brought about through the City Deal. To do this, we will remove barriers to participation in those growth sectors through a widespread digital inclusion programme and focus on educational inequalities. We will also provide support to new and existing businesses to harness digital technology to drive innovation, productivity and growth. We will drive growth in clean energy and zero emissions transport sectors by enabling and supporting ambitious partnerships.

Building upon our strengths and successes, we will focus on key growth sectors including Cyber Security, Financial Services, Artificial Intelligence and carbon reduction and clean energy to shape this investment to support existing businesses in these sectors, encourage the growth of more indigenous businesses and continue to attract high value Foreign Direct Investment. This will further develop our "centres of excellence" in sectors where the city already is, or has the potential to be, competing globally.



### Investing in skills development and reskilling for employment

Given the scale of job losses across a range of sectors, and the likelihood of a slow return to growth, it is clear that a range of labour market interventions will be required. These will include incentives for key target groups (such as the local equivalent of the Kick Start scheme), traineeships, a re-focused apprenticeship solution and consideration of how those in receipt of benefits can be supported to move back into the labour market.

We will work with the Department for Communities on an 'Employability NI' solution that will provide a dynamic, responsive and flexible approach for targeted employability solutions for those furthest from the labour market. To further reinforce our support for those furthest from the labour market, we will work with our anchor institutions and large employers to maximise recruitment opportunities for our residents - we will use our emerging Inclusive Growth City Charter to focus this work, share good practice and develop collaborative approaches. This work will include a focus on ensuring the development of skills programmes for transition to the green economy, to boost local companies already investing and growing in this area.

### Supporting tourism and hospitality

We also need to work hard to protect and re-energise the city's cultural heartbeat and spirit, both across our communities and in the cultural offer to attract visitors and additional footfall into the city and its neighbourhoods.

We are working with the NI Executive and Westminster to bring forward new tourism products to attract visitors. In the early stages of recovery, the focus for enhancing tourism will be on attracting visitors locally from within NI, Republic of Ireland and from Great Britain.

We will continue to work in partnership with our cultural and tourism partners to progress the ambitious plans set out in our A City Imagining 2020-30 strategy to evolve, broaden, deepen and expand the tourism offer currently available.

We will also progress delivery of the Belfast Region City Deal tourism pillar, including the creation of a new world class tourism Destination Hub.

#### Our immediate and short-medium term response to stabilise and grow tourism includes:

- Developing a Visitor Experience Plan for Belfast to enhance and enrich visitor experience.
- Supporting tourism development across the city's neighbourhoods.
- Supporting skills development to enhance tourism growth and development, with an emphasis on digital skills.
- Working with partners to develop and implement a new hybrid business tourism model to secure Belfast's future in a competitive market, combining digital capability with on site offer including Festival 2022 and UNESCO City of Music in 2023.



We are working with the NI Executive and Westminster to bring forward new tourism products to attract visitors and football back into the city and its neighbourhoods.

We are also working with our tourism partners and industry to bring forward a significant 'support your city marketing campaign' to promote Belfast as a staycation destination, with unique offerings, as well as encouraging people to spend local.

Looking ahead, we will also be striving to enhance our city's offer in sustainable tourism, and to maximise the city's potential for rebuilding growth in business tourism through the International Convention Centre (ICC) Belfast.

### City regeneration and investment

We will continue to deliver on the commitments in our City Regeneration and Investment Strategy.

Through our Future City Programme, we will bring forward a comprehensive programme of short and longer interventions aimed at reimagining the city centre and addressing the challenges impacting the high street, particularly in the context of COVID recovery. This programme includes a focus on physical and environmental improvements; increased city centre living; addressing vacancies and diversification of uses; vitality; enhanced connectivity to surrounding communities; digital transformation and business support.

#### Our Future City Centre programme will:

- Bring forward the Bolder Vision for Belfast aimed at reshaping how our city centre streets and places are used to make them attractive, healthy, vibrant and accessible.
- Connect neighbourhoods to the city centre, maximising opportunities to support and secure greater active and sustainable travel and enhance community connectivity.
- Deliver a series of physical and environmental interventions aimed at enhancing and greening the streetscape environment; revitalising spaces and places; and diversifying the city centre offer to provide a family centric and welcoming city core.
- Address the need for increased city centre living, including the strategic use of public sector land assets to deliver on housing led regeneration schemes.
- Turn vacancies into valuable spaces: enabling working with city partners to bring forward the use of vacant space by SME's, start-up retail/ businesses and the cultural and third sectors.
- Working with city partners to develop a strong public private Renewed Ambition programme around the city's offering as a place to invest in line with our Inclusive Growth Strategy.
- We will explore the need for, and benefit of, further devolution of important place-shaping powers such as regeneration to the council and work with partners to identify, secure and maximise the impact of recovery related funds.
- Deliver a programme of cultural and animation events and activity to enhance and protect the city's cultural vibrancy and offer.





We will also maximise opportunities presented by our **£200m capital programme** and **£105m leisure programme**, creating new state-of-the-art facilities that will help improve the health and wellbeing of citizens across the city, as well as creating significant employment opportunities.

We will maximise the potential benefits of major regeneration schemes, such as the North Foreshore, for Belfast people, through targeted skills and employability programmes.

We will continue to work with public and private sector partners to explore how key city development and regeneration schemes can transform the city landscape and create jobs through construction and wider local supplier chains and long term sustainable employment.

### Exploring economy boosting initiatives in a post-Brexit environment

We will work closely with Invest NI to develop and deliver a series of support interventions for businesses impacted by Brexit, focusing on the run-up to 1 January 2021.

Working with seven partner councils north and south of the border, we will bring forward a detailed economic analysis identifying business opportunities and areas for collaboration with our partners along the Belfast-Dublin economic corridor.

### Enhancing connectivity

We will continue to work with the Department for Infrastructure and Department for Communities to accelerate opportunities emerging from the Bolder Vision for Belfast to create healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environments that promote wellbeing and enhance access to jobs, by connecting the city centre and surrounding communities.

### Working with partners to maximise housing development opportunities

We will work with partners to explore and identify opportunities for the strategic use of public land assets and funding mechanisms to accelerate city centre living and deliver mixed-tenure homes. We will also seek to maximise opportunities to address the significant housing stress which exists across the city, encouraging mixed-use developments providing community infrastructure, amenities and open/green spaces and creating living and sustainable communities.

We will also consider how we can work with government and the private sector to progress early proposals emerging from the Belfast Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission for taking a jobs led approach to investing in and improving energy efficiency in the city's existing housing stock through a retrofit programme of significant scale.

### Securing investment in critical city infrastructure

We will work collaboratively with public and private sector partners to identify the key infrastructure requirements to enable and support future growth and development.

We will continue to engage with the NI Executive and central government to identify, prioritise and secure investment to deliver the city's major infrastructure needs including water, waste, energy, supporting active and sustainable transport and increasing connectivity across the city and with the wider region.

### Using our planning and other regulatory powers to support inclusive and sustainable city recovery and development

We are responsible for developing a Local Development Plan (LDP) for Belfast, working with local people to create a clear vision of how the council area should develop and what it will look like in years to come.

#### We will:

- Respond to industry demands for services during the pandemic.
- Introduce a new electronic submission facility.
- Instigate new legislation (for example pavement café licences) to support recovery.
- Work with the Planning Appeals Commission to progress the Local Development Plan to adoption.
- Progress the Planning Portal to digitise the planning process.
- Liaise with city partners to influence changes to legislation to remove red tape and speed up end to end processes.
- Utilise developer contributions to deliver enhanced public spaces and support employment and skills opportunities in the city.

### Developing a low carbon economy

The transition to a net zero carbon economy presents significant economic opportunity for the city in this decade, but starting now.

We will identify investment opportunities for the development of clean energy infrastructure in the city, including through our City Deal partnerships. Through an examination of the potential for skills and jobs growth, we will grow the number of skills development programmes associated with low-carbon technology.



# Our environment

**COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of building resilience to future crises. To deliver the urgent action required to respond to climate breakdown, we will accelerate our work on climate adaptation, mitigation and decarbonising our economy.**



We will publish the city's first Resilience Strategy later this year with more than 20 strategic programmes to reduce emissions and protect the city from the effects of climate change.

It will include a focus on sustainable tourism, skills for a green economy, and support for SMEs to build their climate resilience.

- We will launch our 'One Million Trees' programme, an ambitious approach to urban tree planting, to build our climate resilience, our approach to carbon capture, and improve city 'liveability'.
- Through the city's forthcoming 'Mini Stern' report, we will examine the impact of climate change on the city and set out a roadmap and specific actions to create a prosperous and low carbon Belfast.
- We will bring forward our partnerships to explore zero-emissions transport infrastructure, by growing a network of Electric Vehicle charge points in the city and will work to find new ways to incentivise transition to low-emissions vehicles across our fleet. We will also work with city partners to collaborate on the development of low-emissions public transport and ensure we use digital innovation to drive energy transition in transport.
- Through the work of the Resilience and Sustainability Board, we will work collaboratively with public and private sector partners to ensure our infrastructure meets the city's existing and future needs. We will continue to engage with central government to prioritise and deliver important urban city infrastructure (for example water, waste, energy) to ensure the city can accommodate future growth and development and remain resilient.
- With city partners, and as part of our broader work on resilience and sustainability, we are exploring



pathways for investment at scale in the energy efficiency of our buildings across the city. This will not only contribute to improving health conditions, but will also act as a catalyst to create and sustain jobs, reduce energy bills and provide a significant boost to local supply chains and trades in the construction sector.

- We will ensure that waste is managed effectively and investigate the economic potential presented by processing and recycling our waste to support job creation and growth (circular economy model).
- We will work with our Executive colleagues to accelerate the Green New Deal proposal and advocate for investment in housing retrofit schemes, hydrogen transport, flood programmes and sustainable urban drainage.
- We are also exploring how we use our land assets and enable better access to open and green spaces for communities and families to improve mental and physical wellbeing as well social isolation challenges.
- We will be carrying out a comprehensive assessment of air quality in the coming months, to identify what other measures are needed to make further significant improvements in air quality across the city to deliver improved public health outcomes.

**Resilience and Sustainability is one of five priorities in the council's Corporate Plan. To ensure urgent action in this area, we are currently undertaking:**

- A Sustainability Audit to review all council activities and put in place an action plan for sustainable practices in the delivery of our services. This will include ways to reduce the council's consumption of single-use plastics.
- In partnership with Climate NI, we are developing an Adaptation Plan to ensure council assets (community centres, parks, etc.) are protected from the effects of climate change in the years to come.
- An Energy Review - building on our successes on energy efficiency, to set future targets and to put targets in place on CO2 emissions.
- All of this work is intended to ensure that we meet our Belfast Agenda ambitions as a sustainable city, while also ensuring our local economy benefits from new jobs, a new generation of skills development and investment in local supply chains.

# Our digital innovation

**Digital technologies will play a critical role in the city's recovery. There is strong evidence that those businesses and services that have fully embraced digital innovation have been the most resilient during the current crisis.**



However the economic impact of COVID-19 has also brought into sharp focus urgent digital skills challenges for Belfast, with lack of digital skills exacerbating social and economic disparities. The skills required for a post-pandemic world will be crucial to Belfast's recovery and our first priority will be to ensure that digital inclusion for our youth, citizens and businesses is at the core of our digital innovation strategy.

We will ensure that strategies and funding through the Belfast Region City Deal are directed to address our most challenging health and societal issues within Belfast.



Our Smart Belfast framework will encourage collaborative innovation in the use of digital technologies between government, industry and our universities to address economic, social and environmental challenges. This ambition will be greatly enhanced by Belfast Region City Deal investment and collaboration.

## We will:

- Enhance digital literacy, including focused support for those groups most excluded or at risk.
- Support digital skills development or reskilling to address identified skills shortages and support people to access employment.
- Support businesses to use digital technology to adapt their business model and operations in response to COVID-19.
- Invest in the city's wireless and data infrastructure. As part of the **Local Full Fibre Networks programme we are investing nearly £8.3 million.** This will increase high speed broadband availability across the city by installing fibre connectivity in our council sites, and will facilitate development of the communications network, enabling access to enhanced connection speeds for businesses in poorly connected areas.



- Deliver a series of lighthouse projects supporting the development of digitally enabled smart healthy neighbourhoods; a net zero carbon energy ecosystem; and maximising the use of data science and technologies to support more effective mobility solutions.

- Create a flagship and world class innovation district, a smart port and a smart city core to showcase our global ambition and digital capability. They will attract significant investment, talent, businesses and create jobs within the city.



- These districts will have state of the art technology and special incentives to stimulate business start, growth and innovation. They will bring together research and business to test and develop new technology products to address city challenges.

- We will work with our universities, Belfast Harbour, Catalyst Inc and the private sector to maximise the opportunities presented by the City Deal Investment to create Centres of Excellence which will increase business capability, enable knowledge transfer and skills development, attract international investment and accelerate the development and implementation of innovative excellence.





# Supporting recovery in the longer term

**Our immediate focus is very much on the interventions needed to support our businesses and communities in the short term, however we are committed to ensuring our longer term plans reflect the new reality and challenges the city faces, and to sustaining and building momentum as a city to create lasting recovery, growth and transformation.**

Whilst we will continue to review and update our plans over the coming years, we will be advancing many of the short-term actions which will form part of longer term strategic programmes of work that have potential to deliver real catalytic impact for Belfast.

Many of these catalytic programmes of work will sit alongside other long term Belfast Agenda ambitions to grow our city's population and stimulate more city centre living, and to reduce inequalities in health and educational underachievement - and we expect that these will continue to shape our plans and delivery over the coming years.

**Examples of initiatives already highlighted in this document that have real longer term transformational potential include:**



# Next steps - looking ahead



## Engage with political leaders and decision makers at all levels

Over the coming weeks and months, we will continue to engage with political leaders and decision makers at national, regional and local government levels to shape our approaches and seek buy-in, support, and alignment of efforts across all aspects of government.



## Evolve and deliver

We will develop implementation plans to deliver the interventions and commitments in this outline document. Given the uncertainty we face, this document and our approach will remain flexible and will continue to evolve as the pandemic progresses and the effects of COVID-19 on Belfast's economy and city life continue to emerge.



## Engage with communities

We will also be engaging with communities across Belfast. We want citizens and everyone with an interest in Belfast to have an opportunity to shape our recovery plans. Our updated city strategies and interventions need to be informed by the experience, needs and aspirations of our citizens, businesses and other stakeholders.



This Belfast: Our Recovery document reflects our early assessment of the pandemic's impact and responses required, but we recognise we will need to keep this under continual review, alongside communities, and adopt our plans and focus in response to the rapidly changing environment we are in. This means communities will have the opportunity to engage in the further development of our plans, and their implementation.



In 2021, we will also be reviewing our city strategy, The Belfast Agenda to take stock of what is needed in the medium and longer term to support the renewal and transformation of our city and to drive improvements for everyone who lives, works, invests in and visits Belfast.



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