

West Belfast & Greater Shankill Enterprise Council

Response to

Independent Review of Economic Policy

(DETI and Invest NI)

Background

1. The Enterprise Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the current consultation on the Independent Review of Economic Policy (IREP).
2. The West Belfast & Greater Shankill Enterprise Council was established in August 2006 and was officially launched in February 2007 by the then Minister Maria Eagle to encourage and support business growth in the West Belfast and Greater Shankill areas. It was formed as a direct result of recommendations made in the West Belfast & Greater Shankill “Task Force Report” to establish an Enterprise Council to bring greater coherence to the promotion and support of local businesses.
3. The intention to establish the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces was announced by Ministers Sir Reg Empey and Maurice Morrow (later replaced by Nigel Dodds) on 2 May 2001 to ‘*Bring forward recommendations aimed at reducing unemployed and poverty*’ in the West Belfast and Greater Shankill areas. The West Belfast Task Force was chaired by Padraic White and the Shankill Task Force by John Simpson
4. The members of the Enterprise Council represent a broad cross section of the local business community including representatives from small and medium sized enterprises, manufacturing and service sectors, newly established / long established businesses and family owned companies. (Membership list – appendix A)
5. The Enterprise Council and its members have formed and support a number of local business forums and networks as part of its remit.
6. The Enterprise Council have launched a number of studies that outline a strategic programme and a number of iconic projects that could economically transform this part of our region. (These documents can be downloaded from our website www.enterprisecouncil.org or hardcopies are available on request). A number of the recommendations within the IREP document has been identified, in a sub regional, context within our Enterprise Regeneration Programme, entitled “Think Enterprise”, as part of a range of interventions that can be used to stimulate indigenous business growth and attract inward investment.
7. The IREP report makes 54 separate recommendations, each valid within the context it is made, however although as individual citizens and entrepreneurs we have views and opinions on the report as a whole it is our intention, as an Enterprise Council to specifically comment only on those recommendations that touch on the strategy or programmes that we previously mentioned

(IREP Recommendations IN CAPITALS/BOLD – followed by EC Comments)

Policy Delivery (Invest NI)

- **3. The concept of Invest NI ‘clients’ should be removed to allow Invest NI to work throughout the entire business base to raise awareness and provide support for businesses undertaking Innovation, R&D and exports**

THE ENTERPRISE COUNCIL WOULD SUPPORT THIS RECOMMENDATION AS MANY INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES WITH GROWTH POTENTIAL ARE EXCLUDED FROM ACCESSING INI HELP AND EXPERTISE AS NON- CLIENTS.

IT WOULD REQUIRE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THIS ACTIVITY. OTHERWISE THIS RECOMMENDATION COULD RESULT IN A SPREADING OF RESOURCES TOO THINLY.

- **12. Invest NI’s export assistance should become more dedicated and professional, adopting a similar model to the fee-charging export agencies identified in Chapter 6, with two tiers of charges depending on whether the company is an SME or large firm**

POTENTIALLY AGREE. THE ASSISTANCE PROVIDED SHOULD LEARN FROM BEST PRACTICE MODELS THAT ARE RELEVANT OT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES. HOWEVER IF FEE CHARGING IS PROVEN TO BE SUITABLE AND ADD VALUE IN OUR LOCAL CONTEXT SME’S OF A CERTAIN SIZE SHOULD NOT HAVE TO PAY FEES UPFRONT AS THIS WOULD BE AN ADDITIONAL BARRIER TO THEM ACCESSING HELP.

Policy Delivery (DETI)

- **13 As soon as practicable, DETI and other relevant departments should commence work on preparing a case for retaining state aid limits that support the changes outlined in this Review**

IF THIS RECOMMENDATION IS TO MAKE A CASE FOR RETAINING EXISTING STATE AID LIMITS FOR SFA, THEN WE STRONGLY SUPPORT IT.

SECURING EU STATE AID APPROVAL TO RETAINING SFA POST-2013 IS VITAL FOR THE NORTHERN IRELAND ECONOMY. WITHOUT IT NI WILL BE UNABLE TO RETAIN LET ALONE ATTRACT MOBILE INWARD INVESTMENT. PART OF THE APPROACH SHOULD INCLUDE INVEST NI BEING ABLE TO PROVIDE MORE SUPPORT FOR R&D&I.

IF REGIONAL STATUS IF UNATAINABLE THEN A STRONG CASE SHOULD BE MADE FOR SUB REGIONAL STATUS FOR OUR DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES. PRECEDENT FOR THIS HAS ALREADY BEEN SET IN SCOTLAND ETC.

DEVELOPING A STRONGER R&D FOCUSSED ECONOMY AND HIGHER LEVELS OF INNOVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY WILL TAKE SEVERAL YEARS TO DEVELOP AND THEREFORE INVEST NI AND DETI WILL NEED EVERY SUPPORT MECHANISM AVAILABLE TO IT.

•25 DETI and other relevant departments should undertake a study to establish how the social economy might be further helped to reduce deprivation and increase labour force participation in disadvantaged areas within NI

AGREE. THERE SHOULD BE CLEAR TARGETS SET TO ENSURE PROGRESS IS ACCELERATED. ADDITIONALLY IN AREAS OF DEPRIVATION WITH LOW BUSINESS UPTAKE AND SURVIVAL RATES SME'S SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS PART OF THIS PROCESS

Co-ordination of Economic Policy

• 26 If Northern Ireland is to achieve a step change in economic performance, the economy should remain the top priority of the Executive for many years to come

STRONGLY AGREE. HOWEVER FOR THIS TO HAPPEN THE GOVERNMENT MUST HAVE A CLEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN THAT INCLUDES THE REDUCTION OF BUREAUCRACY THAT HINDERS THE SPEED OF DECISION MAKING, SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASE RESOURCES AND HELP TO CREATE MORE COMPETITIVE CONDITIONS.

• 34 A small business unit should be created within Invest NI, with responsibility for the development and co-ordination of relevant support to SMEs throughout NI

AGREE. THE TWO ROLES FORESEEN – THE DEVELOPMENT OF SME'S AND THE COORDINATION OF COUNCILS' SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY - ARE VERY DIFFERENT. THE FORMER SHOULD BE CORE TO INVEST NI TO FACILITATE MORE EFFECTIVELY THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL SUPPLY CHAINS.

• 36 Invest NI should be allowed more freedom to operate, with DETI having less involvement in operational matters, to enable the organisation to be more entrepreneurial and responsive to business needs.

STRONGLY AGREE, IF INVEST NI IS TO BE MORE OUTCOME FOCUSED AND ENTREPRENEURIAL. INVEST NI'S FOCUS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO BE ON LONGER TERM PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND THERE SHOULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY FEWER BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES/APPROVAL PROCESSES. THEY MUST HAVE THE FLEXIBILITY TO CRAFT NECESSARY INCENTIVES WHICH MEET BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS.

• 37 To help achieve greater autonomy for Invest NI, their delegated authority limits should be both simplified and increased significantly. The current DFP delegated limits for mobile SFA (currently £10m) should also apply to Innovation and R&D projects

STRONGLY AGREE. THIS WILL REDUCE BUREAUCRACY AND DELAYS AND RELEASE ADMINISTRATION RESOURCES FOR MORE PRODUCTIVE PURPOSES.

• 43 For projects involving financial assistance to industry, ex-post assessments of value for money should be taken on a portfolio basis. The DETI / Invest NI Accounting

Officer Memorandum should be reviewed in light of the revised governance arrangements implemented as part of the IREP

STRONGLY AGREE

• 49 DEL, DETI and Invest NI should work to significantly develop management and leadership skills in NI and support the proposal for government to sponsor a “management master class” to identify and develop the best managers from local industry and the public sector

STRONGLY AGREE. A TALENT ACCELERATION PROGRAMME FOR GRADUATES, MANAGERS AND NEW BUSINESS START UP ENTREPRENEURS IS ESSENTIAL AND SHOULD MAKE THE USE OF THE NI/IRELAND DIASPORA

• 51 In the context of reform, the Planning Service should be given processing time targets which are comparable and competitive with those countries and regions against which NI is competing for mobile international investment.

The planning service should in addition seek to delegate authority to LDV To progress regeneration and encourage investment

STRONGLY AGREE

• 54 Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) process must be as efficient as possible and the time allocated for PAD should be included when reporting on timings for all applications.

STRONGLY AGREE

Appendix A

Name	Position	Business
Padraic White	Chair	
Terry Cross	Vice Chair	Delta Print & Packaging Ltd
Dr. Mark Brotherston	Vice Chair	Adfab Engineering Ltd
Prof. Ken O' Neill	Company Secretary	University of Ulster
Jim Carvill	Member	Wilton Healthcare
Máirtín Ó Muilleoir	Member	Belfast Media Group
John Carmichael	member	Silotank
Geraldine Mc Aleese	Member	Sky Line
Douglas Adams	Member	Sliabh Dubh Pubs
Michael Scott	Member	Lanark home Ltd
Terry Mearns	Member	Oasis Garden Centre
Arthur Rooney	Member	Whitefort Inn
Michael Mc Glade	Member	Yellow Design & Digital Media
Sheena Clegg	Member	Transition Training Ltd
Brendan Farnan	Member	Glenhill Merchants
Harry Mc Kee	Member	Belfast Angling Centre
Art Mc Cabe	Member	Arthur J. McCabe & Associates

Member's list of the West Belfast & Greater Shankill Enterprise Council