

PUTTING BELFAST ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY



AFTER ONE OF THE TOUGHEST YEARS EVER FOR BELFAST BUSINESSES, WE ARE BEGINNING TO EMERGE FROM THE PANDEMIC AND EDGE TOWARDS RECOVERY.

Recently, Belfast Chamber partnered with Bauer Media NI to produce the 'Road to Business Recovery' survey. Over 200 businesses from all sectors of our city's economy responded with their thoughts, views and opinions on what is needed to support recovery and what challenges still lie ahead.

We found that whilst optimism is high, much concern remains. Their focus is not just on the short-term need to continue to support businesses as they get back on their feet, but also on the long-term need to continue to invest in the transformation of Belfast so that it is fit for the challenges that lie ahead and to help our city reach its full potential.

Belfast Chamber is setting out its 5 Priorities for Putting Belfast on the Road to Recovery. These Priorities concentrate on supporting businesses, growing the city's

population, enabling innovation, reimagining Belfast and investing in our infrastructure. Belfast Chamber believes that these interventions have the potential to kickstart Belfast's economy and get us going in the right direction again, and also put in place the foundations needed to build a better future for everyone in our city.

Our message to those in power, whether that be in City Hall, at Stormont or in Westminster, is that Belfast Chamber and our members stand ready to work constructively with government to put Belfast firmly on the road to recovery.

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BELFAST CHAMBER'S 5 PRIORITIES

1. SUPPORTING

The reopening of much of the city's economy that was forced to close because of COVID-19 has helped to reinvigorate Belfast's streets which are slowly but surely coming back to life again. Allowing businesses to trade again is key to their recovery but it is clear that the effects of the pandemic will be felt by many businesses in Belfast for quite some time to come.

Belfast Chamber calls on the Executive to continue supporting businesses in the most hard-hit sectors through continued rates support including a fundamental review of the business rating system, ongoing grant assistance where and when required and the timely roll out of the High Street Stimulus Fund to help boost trade in places like Belfast.

Traders in Belfast also support initiatives aimed at driving more footfall including advertising campaigns for the city and a programme of events especially on Sundays.

Belfast Chamber also asks our government to 'lead by example' and set in motion a plan for the safe return of public sector workers to their city based offices.

2. GROWING

The pandemic has exposed Belfast's lack of a city centre population. With tourists, students and office workers gone, the challenge for retail and hospitality businesses in Belfast city centre was compounded by the absence of a sizeable residential population. Belfast Chamber believes that this issue needs to be taken far more seriously and requires much greater and more concerted action.

Belfast Chamber encourages the Executive to create a multi-agency task force to produce a strategy to dramatically increase Belfast's city centre population over the next 10 years. This should include the development of housing investment funds similar to those deployed in places like Greater Manchester to help stimulate the residential property market.

3. INNOVATING

Belfast Chamber strongly supports the Innovation City Belfast initiative which aims to build on Belfast's heritage as a city of inventors and creators and transform the city's economy into a knowledge based one. Our development of world class clusters in fintech, medtech and cyber security are just the beginning of a bright future for Belfast. Whilst our ability to produce extraordinarily talented people is at the heart of our growing status as a 'Tech City', Belfast Chamber believes that incentivising innovation is also important and that the Government's roll out of Freeports across the UK presents a once in a generation opportunity for Belfast.

Belfast Chamber urges the Executive to work closely with institutions across the city to produce a bespoke Freeport for Belfast that is concentrated on innovation, regeneration and inclusive growth.

4. REIMAGINING

Cities around the world have responded to the pandemic by reimagining their cities with the aim of making them even more attractive places to live, work and enjoy leisure time. Belfast has been no exception although the scale and pace of change here has been noticeably slower than many other cities. Major public realm schemes in the likes of Royal Avenue, Donegall Place and High Street, creating more open and green space for people to meet, making walking and cycling in the city easier and allowing hospitality businesses the opportunity to maximise their outdoor space are crucial to injecting more vibrancy into our city and key to attracting talent, students and visitors.

Belfast Chamber supports the production of an ambitious plan for Belfast city centre which is properly financed and delivers high quality investments that improve and enhance the city's environment with an overarching emphasis on making Belfast a 'people centred city'.

5. INVESTING

Investing in infrastructure is a well proven way of boosting economic productivity and also creating employment – two things that Belfast will definitely need as we edge towards recovery. Large parts of Belfast's infrastructure are in need of considerable investment which will assist the city to continue to be the engine room for the entire region's economy.

Belfast Chamber calls for the production of a Belfast Infrastructure Plan that includes proposals for urgently investing in schemes such as:

- The York Street Interchange
- Our 5G and full fibre broadband network
- An expansion in public transport provision
- The upgrading of the city's water and sewerage system