

# West Belfast Task Force Report



Part 2  
February 2002









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## **MEMBERS OF WEST BELFAST TASK FORCE**

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## **CONSULTANCY SUPPORT**

Locus Management Consultants  
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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ARC	Applied Research Centre
AVCE	Advanced Vocational Continuing Education
BIFHE	Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education
BITES	Belfast Institute of Training and Employment Services
BMAP	Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan
BRO	Belfast Regeneration Office
BTEDP	Belfast Travellers Economic Development Project
COC	Community Outreach Centre
CWA	City West Action
DHSS	Department Health and Social Services
DLA	Disability Living Allowance
ECDL	European Computer Driving Licence
EGSA	The Education Guidance Service for Adults
EUSSPPR	European Research Centre Programme for Peace and Reconciliation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FE	Further Education
FTET	Full-time Education and Training option
GEMS	Gasworks Employment Initiative Action Plan
GSTF	Task Force for the Greater Shankill and Woodvale (7 wards in West Belfast and part of North Belfast)
HAZ	Health Action Zone
HE	Higher Education
IDB	Industrial Development Board
ILMS	Intermediate Labour Markets Social Economy
JSA	Jobseekers Allowance
LEDU	Local Enterprise Development Unit
N&WHSST	North & West Health & Social Services Trust
NIDC	Northern Ireland Disability Council
NILF	Northern Ireland Labour Force
NOBLE INDEX	Indicators of degrees of deprivation in different electoral wards across all of Northern Ireland
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PEP	Pre-employment Programme
RDS	
SEV	Springvale Education Village
SSA	Social Security Agency
T & EA	Training & Employment Agency
TFS	Task Force Shankill
TFW	Task Force West
TSN	Targeting Social Need
VSL	Voluntary Service Lisburn
WBEF	West Belfast Economic Forum
WBES	West Belfast Employment Service
WBIIT	West Belfast Inward Investment Team
WBTF	West Belfast Task Force



## PREFACE BY CHAIRMAN

I accepted without hesitation the invitation in April 2001 from Sir Reg Empey, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Maurice Morrow, then Minister for Social Development, to chair the proposed Task Force on unemployment and social deprivation in West Belfast. I hoped that I could make some contribution to reversing the high unemployment and socio-economic disadvantage which were blighting the lives of so many fellow inhabitants of this island. I believe that my experience over the past ten years of the employment initiatives of the Northside Partnership, Dublin and previously of investment promotion with the Industrial Development Authority (IDA-Ireland) would also be relevant to the issues and solutions in West Belfast.

The Report of the Task Force is the result of an intense and sustained search for a set of proposals which would achieve an early and real change in the job prospects of the unemployed, offer a better education and career outlook to the new generation and achieve the economic regeneration of the area. These proposals, if implemented, would lead to West Belfast being a vibrant, distinct and welcoming part of a Belfast which is prospering, peaceful and proud of the diversity of its different areas and traditions.

The Task Force had representatives of many interests: the community, political parties, business, media, health and local government. In the course of the Task Force deliberations, the members demonstrated genuine respect for the views of the others, a willingness to let the analysis of the issues lead towards a solution and a commitment to improve the prospects of their fellow citizens.

The technical support group included public servants from central and local government and they participated fully in a committed and wholehearted manner in the work of the Task Force. The many groups who presented their views and proposals showed passion and professionalism in furtherance of their causes. In its own way, the Task Force process itself provides an encouraging example of many people with different interests and backgrounds combining in the interests of a better Northern Ireland.

The West Belfast Task Force members sought at all times to achieve common ground with the work of the Greater Shankill Task Force. The Joint Meeting between both Task Forces in November 2001 was pervaded by an atmosphere of goodwill and demonstrated a very high level of consensus on the human issues of unemployment and deprivation and on their resolution.

From the very first day, John Simpson, Chairman of the Greater Shankill Task Force, and myself worked closely together to achieve the best possible outcome. Our Joint Overview at the start of this document is testimony to the productiveness of our co-operation.

Finally, I wish to thank, on behalf of the Task Force, the outstanding executive support to the Task Force which was led by Siobhan Watson backed up by Eileen Kelly and Jane Mc Sorley and the consultants who assisted us: Mike Morrissey, Locus, Williamson Consulting.

I commend the West Belfast Task Force Report to the sponsoring Ministers, and indeed to all the Executive Ministers, as offering an imaginative and reliable programme for a better future for the people of West Belfast and its rising generation.

Padraic White,  
Chairman  
January 2002



## INTREOIR

Ghlac mé gan amhras ar bith leis an chuireadh in Aibreán 2001 ó Sir Reg Empey, An tAire Fiontraíochta, Tráchtála agus Infheistíochta, agus Maurice Morrow, a bhí ag an am sin ina Aire don Fhorbairt Shóisialta, bheith i mo chathaoirleach ar an Tascfhórsa a bhí molta ar dhífhostaíocht agus anás sóisialta in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste. Bhí súil agam go dtiocfadh liom cuidiú le cur siar an leibhéal an-ard dífhostaíochta agus míbhuntáiste socheacnamaíoch a bhí ag déanamh díobhála ar an oiread sin comhchónaitheoirí ar an oileán seo. Agus chreid mé, go mbainfeadh mo thaithí le deich mbliana anuas ar thograí fostaíochta an Northside Partnership, Baile Átha Cliath, agus roimhe sin i gcur chun tosaigh infheistíochta leis an Udarás um Fhorbairt Thionsclaíoch (IDA-Ireland), go mbainfeadh sí le hábhar maidir le fadhbanna agus réitigh in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste.

Tá Tuairisc an Tascfhórsa mar thoradh ar dhianchuardach leanúnach chun teacht ar mholtaí a d\_fhágfadh athrú luath agus fíor ar ionchais post do na dífhostaithe, a chuirfeadh seansanna níos fearr oideachais agus slite beatha ar fáil don ghlúin úr agus a chuirfeadh feabhsú eacnamaíoch an cheantair i gcrích. Is é an toradh a bheadh ar na moltaí seo, dá gcuirfí i gcrích iad, Iarthar Bhéal Feirste a bheith ina chuid bhríomhar leithleach fháilteach de Bhéal Feirste, cathair rathúil shíochánta atá mórtasach as éagsúlacht a ceantar agus traidisiún éagsúil.

Bhí tosaíocht ó mhórán leas ar an Tascfhórsa: an pobal, páirtithe polaitíochta, gnó, na meáin chumarsáide, sláinte agus an rialtas áitiúil. Le linn phlé an Tascfhórsa, léirigh na baill fiormheas ar dhearcadh daoine eile agus bhí siad toilteanach ligint d\_ainilís ar na ceisteanna iad a threorú i dtreo réitigh agus bhí coimhlint acu ionchais a gcomhshaoránach a fheabhsú.

Ar an ghrúpa tacaíochta teicniúil, bhí státseirbhísigh ón rialtas lárnach agus ón rialtas áitiúil agus bhí siad ceangailte agus rannpháirteach ó chroí in obair an Tascfhórsa. Bhí paisean agus gairmiúlacht ag baint leis an dóigh ar léirigh an mórán grúpaí a ndearcadh agus moltaí agus iad ag cur a gcás chun tosaigh.

Ina dhóigh féin, tá próiseas an Tascfhórsa féin ina eiseamláir spreagtha de go leor daoine le leasa éagsúla agus cúlraí ag teacht le chéile ar leas Thuaisceart Éireann.

Chuir Tascfhórsa Iarthar Bhéal Feirste roimhe i gcónaí comhthalamh a dhéanamh le hobair Thascfhórsa Bhóthar na Seanchille.

Bhí atmaisféar dea-thola le sonra sa Chomhchruinniú idir an dá Thascfhórsa i Samhain 2001 agus léirigh sé leibhéal ard comhthuisceana ar na fadhbanna daonna de dhífhostaíocht agus leithcheal agus ar an réiteach dóibh.

Ón chéad lá d\_oibrigh, John Simpson, Cathaoirleach Thascfhórsa Bhóthar na Seanchille, agus mé féin go dlúth le chéile chun an toradh is fearr a fháil.

Is fianaise do thairgíocht ár gcomhoibrithe ár gComh-fhorbhreathnú ag tús an doiciméid seo.

Ar deireadh, ba mhaith liom ár mbuíochas a ghabháil, ar son an Tascfhórsa, as an tacaíocht fheidhmeach fhíormhaith don Tascfhórsa. Siobhan Watson a bhí chun tosaigh leis sin agus chuidigh Eileen Kelly agus Jane McSorley léi, mar aon leis na comhairleoirí a chuidigh linn: Mike Morrissey, Locus, William Consulting.

Molaim tuairisc Thascfhórsa Iarthar Bhéal Feirste do na hAirí urraithe, agus leis an fhirinne do gach Aire san Feidhmeannas, mar rud a chuireann clár samhlaíoch iontaofa le haghaidh todhcháí níos fearr do mhuintir Iarthar Bhéal Feirste agus a ghlúin óg atá ag teacht i meadaíocht ann.

Padraig de Faoite,  
Cathaoirleach  
Eanáir 2002





Falls Road





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Introduction charts the social challenge presented by the West Belfast Task Force area : an expanding population estimated at some 85,000 people (1999), unemployment levels which along with the Greater Shankill area are far ahead of the other districts of Belfast , accounting for a remarkably high 43% of the city's men who are unemployed for more than two years, and a booming young population with 25,000 under the age of 16 years. The Task Force found that the real number of people who could be considered as seeking a job was just over 9,000 comprising those on the official register of unemployed and others not on the register but reasonably estimated as seeking employment. For every one person on the official register, there are almost two others ( 1.7) also available for work given the opportunity.

### Chapter 1 : Getting into Employment

The Report identifies eight separate categories of unemployed persons which have specific employability issues and which merit a specialised policy and labour market response: Very long-term unemployed men ; Women Returners; Young Parents, (mainly lone female mothers) and Political ex-prisoners; Persons with disabilities; Travellers; Victims of substance abuse such as drugs, alcohol; Ex-offenders.

Five common and recurring barriers to employability which affect most unemployed people are then analysed and a series of recommendations is set out in relation to these barriers :- Basic skill deficiencies ; Personal development and self confidence; Beyond fitness for the job - "chill factors", citywide employment options, transport access; Overcoming the benefit barriers to employment ; Childcare facilities. The recommendations add up to a formidable agenda for change if the barriers are to be removed.

The Task Force then makes recommendations specific to the employability needs of each of the eight separately identified groups of unemployed people.

The extensive range of services to the unemployed provided by the mainstream agencies such as the Training & Employment Agency and programmes such as New Deal are reviewed as well as community based training. The conclusion of the Task Force is that the existing services need to be complemented by a new service, which has the mandate and staff resources to deliver a more flexible and individual mentoring and placement service. The client base/register of the current mainstream services is the official Social Security Agency (SSA) unemployment register whereas there are close on twice that number also seeking employment and who the Task Force considers should be assisted in joining the world of work

A core recommendation of the Task Force is that a new West Belfast Employment Service should be established with responsibility for organising the desired flexible and personalised service to enable the unemployed become employable and to assist them find a job through positive links and relationships with employers. It would pro-actively reach out to unemployed persons, both those officially classed as unemployed and others such as women returners not officially unemployed but who harbour a desire to have a job. The service would be delivered through Job Assist Centres and their network which would have Candidate Counsellors to advise and guide its unemployed clients and Business Account Managers to find placements for them through contacts with employers.

The Task Force also recommends that an Employers Forum be set up comprising interested firms from West Belfast and elsewhere in the city who would wish to engage with the workforce available in West Belfast. The Employers Forum would, it is anticipated, work in partnership with the new Employment Services Board.

The proposed Employment Service for the most disadvantaged would operate in concert and co-operation with the existing services of the T&EA, Social Security Services, BIFHE, private and community providers and current job matching services. It would in fact draw on most of the services delivered by these bodies.



The Task Force considers it essential to reach out and make a significant positive impact on the lives and life style expectations of the unemployed of West Belfast.

Having regard to the estimates of the number of people who would aspire to a job and the additional numbers coming out of education each year, it considers that the West Belfast Employment Services should have the capacity to assess and assist 1,500 - 2,000 unemployed persons per year commencing in the year from mid 2002 and to gain work annually for 1,000 (60% plus). The Report proposes that there would be 5 Job Assist Centres, as well as outreach centres.

### **Chapter 2 : Jobs and Economic regeneration**

In assessing the potential to create the maximum number of jobs accessible to the unemployed of West Belfast and spur the economic regeneration of the area, the Task Force considered the scope for growth under three headings:

Enterprise and Existing Business Development;

Culture based job creation;

Foreign Direct Investment.

The overall conclusion of the Task Force is that the major acceleration of jobs in West Belfast will have to come from local enterprise and the expansion of the existing base of foreign companies.

The level of private entrepreneurial activity ( as distinct from community activity) is stated to be low in West Belfast. Ways of overcoming this " culture block" are reviewed. The retention of welfare and secondary benefits on a decreasing scale for start-up entrepreneurs is recommended and the need to improve access to enterprise agencies is recommended. The barriers to growth of existing business in West Belfast - finance, workspace and business skills - are examined. The Report argues strongly for a smooth, seamless and supported transition from business incubation, through to establishment and expansion which encourages business to stay in West Belfast.

The Report identifies the lack of available space in the range 2,000-10,000 sq ft as a critical barrier and advocates the provision of such larger scale workspace, on an owner occupier basis, as an immediate priority.

The Report recommends that Invest Northern Ireland should, in relation to its sites and buildings, exercise greater flexibility in setting rental rates and offering purchase options such as co-operative and co-ownership schemes.

An imaginative approach to micro-business is recommended including assistance with accommodation in the range 200 to 3,000 sq ft.

The recommendations to foster local enterprise include the designation of West Belfast as an "Enterprise Action Zone" with ring-fenced resources applied to the Task Force's recommendations and the establishment of a West Belfast Local Enterprise Council to bring greater coherence to the promotion of and support for local business. The New Enterprise Council could assist in implementing the recommendations of the Task Force on local business. It could provide a forum for identifying the issues of main concern to existing business. It could facilitate the evolution of a small business network in West Belfast. The Council would comprise representatives of the Local Enterprise Agencies, Invest Northern Ireland and local business. It would have a small secretariat co-funded by the private sector itself (including secondments) and by Invest Northern Ireland.

The Report recommends an imaginative emphasis on culture based job creation and describes the vibrant cultural activities in West Belfast centred on the Irish language and culture. It sees an outstanding opportunity to foster a powerful and vibrant Gaeltacht Quarter in the west of the city, based on the Irish language, culture and traditions and which could add to the rich diversity of Belfast for the enjoyment of its citizens and visitors alike. It makes a strong recommendation in favour of a representative Gaeltacht Quarter Development Board, properly resourced, to develop the cultural cluster in West Belfast into a designated Gaeltacht Quarter (Gaeltacht Cathrach) with





its physical hub on the Falls but with the Irish language at its heart.

The conclusion of the Task Force is that while local enterprise and expansion of the existing foreign base are likely to be the major source of new jobs in the West Belfast area, there is a need for the new promotion agency, Invest Northern Ireland, to achieve a higher share of new inward investment for West Belfast having regard to its New TSN status, the clear job need as set out in the Report and the attractive facilities being developed in the area. Specifically, the West Belfast area should be a location for a set of the emerging knowledge based and information and communication technology industries (ICT) providing local employment for local people.

The Task Force believes there is considerable scope for attracting sub-supply investment to the area and recommends that Invest Northern Ireland should target and investigate the feasibility of external suppliers to large existing companies in Ireland, developing or re-locating some of their facilities in West Belfast.

### **Chapter 3 : The Springvale Educational Village ( SEV)**

The Task Force notes that its objectives of reducing unemployment and economic regeneration should be greatly assisted by the commencement and development of a new third level educational campus at Springvale over the next five years. The Springvale Education Village is a joint development between the University of Ulster and Belfast Institute of Further & Higher Education (BIFHE) and its catchment area also includes the Greater Shankill and North Belfast areas. The SEV is being located on a 30 acre site at Springvale, involves an estimated £70m capital investment and will have 4,000 full and part-time students (3,000 full time equivalents).

The Report makes a series of specific recommendations to achieve the following ends :  
a core curriculum more closely linked to the economic regeneration of West Belfast ; more effective links with the community and business in the area; funding of the community and outreach mandate of the SEV.

The Task Force recommends that a President or Director of the Springvale Education Village should be appointed immediately to develop the ethos and role of the new Campus and to take overall executive responsibility for its evolution.

### **Chapter 4 : Social Economy, Intermediate Labour Markets & Community organisations**

The Report analyses the positive role of the social economy, intermediate labour markets and key community organisations in facilitating unemployed people make the transition to the world of work, particularly those who are not ready or able to take up a job in a fully commercial organisation. In addition, these organisations can efficiently deliver local services.

The Report recommends that a positive approach be adopted by Government to these organisations, that their role needs greater recognition and that they should be funded on a medium term basis.

### **Chapter 5 : The emerging labour supply - a preventative approach to unemployment**

The Task Force believes that a preventative approach should be adopted to unemployment whereby many more young people from West Belfast coming out of education and training in the future will secure a satisfying job, enter a career path and avoid the darkness of unemployment.

The data for school leavers indicates that compared with the other main districts of the city, West Belfast has the lowest percentage of school leavers going into further and higher education and a very high proportion of school leavers going straight into work. The Report makes a series of recommendations to assist those children most at risk of educational underachievement and school "drop out" It advocates radically improved education, training and employment progression through better co-operation between the schools, education and training providers and employers in assisting young people aged 14-19 years find the career paths which offer them the best prospects.



### **Chapter 6 : Infrastructure and Planning**

The Task Force recognises the need to achieve the future economic and social development of the area while conserving the natural environment. The recommendations seek to develop a sustainable community : a community which is a home for residents, which will offer opportunities for employment and one which maintains its distinctive character.

The Report makes a series of recommendations relating to: land availability; natural environment and built heritage; the proposed Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan; Springvale Educational Village /Mackies; a Development Arc from the outer west to Belfast City centre; transport and linkages; arterial routes and the branding of West Belfast.

The recommendations include the following :

- a mechanism be examined to facilitate the purchase and development of sites for sustainable development in West Belfast. The examination should include the need for any related change in planning or land vesting powers ;
- the SEV/Mackies sites should be developed in the framework of an overall concept plan almost as a single development;
- a Development Arc should be promoted as a connected spine of economic activity from outer west through to Belfast City Centre;
- current office policy planning restrictions of office developments in excess of 2,000 sq ft should be abolished so as to encourage a better mix of office and industrial employment in the area,

### **Chapter 7 : Special cases of Alienation or Peripherality**

The Report examines alienation and peripherality as it affects West Belfast in general and then assesses these issues as they affect certain communities in the Task Force area, namely, the Suffolk community and Colin Urban area of Twinbrook, Poleglass and Lagmore.

### **Chapter 8 : Implementation and Funding**

The Task Force recommends the formation of West Belfast & Greater Shankill Oversight Commission to oversee and report to Ministers on the implementation of the recommendations of both Task Forces. A single Inter-Departmental Implementation Group is also recommended.

Some of the priority areas for funding are listed and the possible sources of funding.