



Usl.
Championing Ability.

BUSINESS PLAN 2024-25

Business Plan 2024-25

This draft Business Plan has been prepared for consideration and approval by the Minister for the Department for Communities. Usel is working towards delivery of the programmes, objectives and targets specified in this Plan and within the limits of the financial and other resources allocated to Usel for the current financial year.

The purpose of the business plan is to clearly demonstrate the level of progress required in-year towards the achievement of the Usel's priority objectives. Progress towards the achievement of these targets and objectives will be monitored closely and reported on throughout the business year.

The Chief Executive will ensure appropriate monthly, quarterly, and annual performance management processes are implemented as necessary.

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1. SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1.1. Ulster Supported Employment Limited (Usel) is an executive Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and operates under the direction of the Department for Communities (DfC) and on a day-to-day basis Work and Wellbeing Division. The company is a private, not for profit Company, limited by guarantee and does not have a share capital, domiciled in Northern Ireland.
- 1.2. The Company is a registered charity under Section 505 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 with effect from 20 March 1996.
- 1.3. The Company was established in 1962 to fulfil an act of Parliament to provide supported paid employment for disabled people and in 1980 the Company expanded through the acquisition of the Workshops for the Blind (The Belfast Association for the Employment of the Industrious Blind) to become the largest employer of disabled people within Northern Ireland. At the time of the merger the Workshops for the Blind had been providing employment only for people with vision impairment as it had always done since it was established in 1871.
- 1.4. By special resolution the Company changed its original incorporation name of Ulster Sheltered Employment Limited to Usel on 25 September 1998.

2. SECTION 2 – STRATEGIC CONTEXT - CORPORATE PLAN 2022- 2027

2.1. Usel Corporate Plan for 2022-2027 defines four key strategic themes.



USEL Strategic Plan
2022-27.pdf

2.2. The plan also outlines a range of outcomes to be delivered by Usel within the term of the plan.

2.3. The overall delivery of the Corporate Plan is underpinned through a structured methodology, with a clear linkage to outcomes. Usel has developed a road map for the strategy which brings together the purpose, values and behaviours and themes into defined objectives to be achieved over the life of the plan. Usel continues to embed the core methodology of the balanced score card across the organisation with business and team performance managed via a range of key performance indicators.

2.4. Usel's Purpose, Values and Vision underpin the corporate plan and reinforce Usel's commitment to support people with disabilities or health conditions to gain employment. They also align with DfC's common purpose of 'making this a great place to live for everyone by supporting people, building communities, shaping places'.

2.5. Usel's **purpose** as a Non-Departmental Public Body is to assist people with disabilities or health related conditions into employment.

2.6. The strategic **vision** for Usel is a culmination of Usel's purpose and values, the findings of the baseline commercial review and is closely linked with the themes from the DfC strategy.

2.7. As Usel continues to focus efforts on growing, the business' ability to network and partner effectively is a critical skill. The need to identify strategic partners and partners who have a desire to collaborate is now a key business driver. Usel's ability to develop sustainable business relationships with partners across the various geographies including within NI, outside NI and across the main sectors in which the Company operates (private, public, voluntary and community sectors), specifically in relation to social enterprise, is now a key element within business activity.

Our Strategic Themes

2.8. Four key strategic themes were identified in the Corporate Plan 2022 - 2027:

- Agility and innovation.
- Championing inclusion.
- Sustainable growth.
- People focused.

Our Contribution to the Supporting People, Work and Health, DfC's Operational Strategy 2020-25

2.9. As an Arm's Length Body (ALB) of DfC, Usel is committed to supporting DfC and wider government strategies and policies. The strategic plan therefore complements the Draft Programme for Government Outcomes Framework 2021, DfC's Building Inclusive Communities Strategy 2020-2025 and DfC's Disability Actions Plan 2020-2024. The Cross-Cutting Themes identified in DfC's Building Inclusive Communities Strategy 2020-2025 that are relevant to USEL are:



Objectives and Strategies:

To become economically and environmentally sustainable	Sustainability & inclusive growth Agility & innovation	Consolidate manufacturing Explore new service lines Advancing ability cafes Consolidate and grow Employment Services	<p>2022-24: Bedding operations concluded, leading to the relocation of staff to alternative manufacturing and recycling departments. Significantly expanded our contractual portfolio in mattress recycling, confidential shredding, and industrial sewing. Introduced a pioneering service in the recycling domain by venturing into multi-grade paper recycling, reinforcing our commitment to sustainability. Successfully obtained contracts for new production lines, involving the assembly of bus signs and the recycling of furniture, set to commence on July 23.</p> <p>In FY 23/24, marked a milestone collaboration with the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS), wherein USEL undertakes the production of bespoke bags and carriers. This prestigious two-contract agreement carries an estimated annual value of £40,000 per year. During the same period, our recycling department secured a lucrative three-year contract with the Belfast City Council (BCC) for mattress recycling, with a projected value of £300,000 over the duration of the agreement.</p>	

			<p>2 new Ability Cafes opened with Ballycopeland opening in June 22 and Belfast Castle opening in February 23. Outside catering provision has grown during the year. We will look to consolidate the cafe`s during 24/25. We will not tender for the catering in Belfast Castle and it will close 31 March 24. As a result of making a loss running Ballycopeland Windmill we asked HED to subsidise the loss but due to them being unable to confirm funding we have made the decision to withdraw from the catering provision at Ballycopeland from 31 March 24. Employment Services has been successful in managing four new programmes during 23/24. UKSPF (empower), LMP (Labour Market Partnership) with Lisburn and Castlereagh Council, job start, we received an additional £40,000 from DFC for workable and step up this has helped us grow our income by over £400k and the number of participants that we support by an additional 350. We will continue to grow Employment Support during 24/25, both financially and the number of participants that we support.</p>	
Lead provider of disability employment in NI	<p>Agility & innovation</p> <p>Wellbeing & inclusion</p>	Develop and implement people plan	<p>2022-24: People strategy developed and implemented to run alongside strategic plan. HR business plan devised from the people strategy for the year by the POD committee with focus areas being Employee Resourcing, Employee reward & recognition, Employee relations, Employee development and Employee engagement.</p>	
To successfully champion inclusion in the workplace	<p>Sustainability & inclusive</p> <p>Wellbeing & inclusion</p>	Develop and implement communication and engagement plan	<p>2022-24: Strong results across all employment programmes with targets exceeded during the year on workable and stride. 14 new learners to our skills for work and life programme</p>	

<p>To be the partner of choice for the Department for Communities</p>			<p>during the year. We have recruited 20 clients on the TFS DS programme. USEL has secured a 2-year contract with SPFUK as lead contractor of the Empower programme working alongside Disability Action and Specialisterne, with work to commence April 23.</p> <p>Working alongside DfC on the Job Start programme with an SLA (Service Level Agreements) with DfC for Job Start starting in FY23-24. We signed an SLA with Belfast Met to recruit and train 83 participants for their Step-up programme (DARE) We had a very strong working relationship with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, as we successfully managed their LMP, we recruited 24 participants and managed to get 17 into work against a target of 12.</p> <p>We have built a strong relationship with the senior management team in UKSPF, and they are happy with the progress that we have made with the empower programme. During 24/25. We will continue to grow strong stakeholder relationships across the private and public sector.</p>	
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3. SECTION 3 – USEL - WHAT WE DO

Corporate Services Division

3.1. The Corporate Services Division (including admin and management staff) will comprise of 22 staff on 1 April 2024 and delivers a range of support functions:

- Finance
- Procurement
- Health & Safety
- HR
- ICT

Manufacturing and Recycling Division

3.2. This division will comprise of 54 staff on 1st April 2024 who deliver in range of manufacturing, recycling operations and fulfilment works. This division operates a supported employment model and is currently supported with a grant in aid from our sponsor department.

3.3. The Manufacturing Branch of the division will comprise of 17 staff on 1st April areas of activity within manufacturing focus on:

- Industrial Sewing
- Fulfilment works.

3.4. The Circular Economy Branch of the Division will comprise of 37 staff on 1st April the Circular Economy division delivers in key areas:

- Mattress recycling
- Confidential paper shredding
- Paper recycling
- Contract bailing services.
- Furniture recycling
- Sub Assembly of bus signs

Employment Services Division

3.5. This division will comprise of 96 staff on 1st April 2024 who deliver across a range of pre-employment, employment support and vocational training programmes and hospitality.

3.6. The Employment Support branch will comprise of 69 staff on 1st April 2024 delivering the following programmes:

- Employment Support Scheme

- Workable NI
- Empower (UKSPF)
- Training for Success & Apprenticeships NI (Specialist Disability Support)
- Skills for Life and Work (SFLW)
- Step up (DARE)

3.7. The total number of individuals with a disability or health condition support per year is more than 1100.

3.8. The hospitality branch will comprise of 27 staff on 1st April 2024, the majority of staff is part-time casual to work through the busy Spring/Summer season. We operate an “Ability” coffee shop / café in the following venues:

- The Foundry, Shankill Road, Belfast.
- The Stables, Lady Dixon Park.
- Belfast Zoo.

4. SECTION 4 – GRANT IN AID SUPPORT

- 4.1. Usel receives grant in aid from the Department for Communities, which contributes, in part, to the wages and salaries of the staff, and ensures USEL'S books remain balanced.
- 4.2. In 2023-24, the Department's grant-in-aid contribution was £1,004,000 (2022-23: £978,391). In 2024-25 the grant in aid budget allocation is estimated to be £1,004,000. However, this is not sufficient to cover Usel's costs and USEL is forecasting to make a deficit of £115k.
- 4.3. In order to deliver the 2024-25 business objectives outlined below, Usel have built a detailed operational budget outlining income and expenditure forecasts (see **Annex A**) and a forecast drawdown profile for grant in aid and employment support funding.
- 4.4. USEL have presented an optimistic operational budget which shows a shortfall of £115k based on the estimated GIA allocation indicated by the Department.
- 4.5. Included within this budget is a line for £72k of income for potential new opportunities within our manufacturing and recycling department. We have a new sales manager appointed during FY23.24 and are optimistic that he will be able to deliver additional revenue.
- 4.6. We have also included income of £252k for the Step-up Dare programme which is not yet contracted yet. We have a 1-year SLA with Belfast Met for the delivery of this programme to March 24 and are hopeful that based on our performance that this will be extended into FY24.25 and have therefore included this in our budget. If we are not invited to partner with Belfast Met for a second year this will increase the shortfall to £244k.
- 4.7. From 1 April 2023 USEL became a real living wage employer which resulted in an additional cost of £66k in 2023 – 24. This is as a result of Finance Minister Conor Murphy implementing the new social value procurement policy from 1 June 2022 which mandates that staff working on government contracts are paid at least the Living Wage. As a result, all government contracts issued since June 2022 have included payment of the Living Wage as a condition of contract. USEL has a number of contracts that have the requirement to pay the Real Living Wage. From 1 April 2024 the real living wage has increased to £12 per hour and this equates to an additional cost of £142k for USEL in FY24.25 and represents an increase of over 10%. Usel delivers a lot of contracts with NICS and is facing extreme pressure from Departments within NICS when we attempt to increase our sales prices and therefore Usel is unable to pass all of this wage increase on.
- 4.8. During 2022-23 USEL entered into a 12-year pension deficit recovery plan to pay off the large pension deficit that exists on their defined benefit pension scheme. USEL will pay £380k per annum towards the pension deficit alongside £120k of administrative expenses. This is a significant cost pressure for USEL.
- 4.9. The combination of increasing payroll costs and the pension deficit recovery plan will place Usel under financial pressure in 2024-25 resulting in a short fall in budget position of approximately £115k.
- 4.10. In relation to capital, see attached capital plan covering 2024 - 2029 to support proposed Strategic Plan, see **Annex A**.

5. SECTION 5 – WHAT WE WILL DELIVER 2024 – 25

5.1. This Business Plan links directly to the Corporate Plan for 2022-27.

5.2. The proposed plan highlights several in year deliverables including:

- Continued advancement of Usel Ability Café brand.
- Explore new service lines.
- Consolidate and grow Employment Services.
- Complete the scoping of the Cambria Street development Plan.
- Further development of Usel business to business service provision.
- Formal measurement of annual social value impact.
- Develop a people plan.
- Develop a communication and engagement plan.

5.3 A list of the goods which Usel manufacture is set out at **Annex B** and a list of the business lines is included at **Annex C**. Our strategic partners are identified in **Annex D**.

ANNEX A

2024/25 Budget Forecast – see separate spreadsheets

ANNEX B

List of Manufactured Goods

- Laptop Bags
- Backpacks
- Sports Bags
- Specialist Carrier bags/soft holdalls for Ambulance, Police, Fire Brigade and Health Service
- Specialist carrier bag/Soft Holdalls for Private companies, Kelman, Camlin, Aksen
- Helmet Covers
- Signage for Translink
- Manufacturing of polling booth screens

List of Items Currently Recycled:

- Mattresses
- Cardboard
- Confidential paper shredding
- ICT Equipment
- Plastics
- Confidential shredding of counterfeit items
- Confidential shredding of blue light services uniforms
- Bailing of paper grades
- Furniture collected from NICS

ANNEX C

List of business lines - manufacturing:

- Manufacturing of bespoke bags/backpacks for various emergency services
- Sub assembly of Translink bus signs

List of business lines – recycling:

- Recycle items listed in Annex B for a range of Councils, private sector organisations and third sector organisations.
- Confidential paper shredding – DfC
- Confidential shredding from NICS
- Collection, recycling, and refurbishment of office furniture

List of business lines – Employment Services:

- Delivery of programmes, as listed at para. 3.6

List of business lines – operational outlets:

- Ability cafés, which is a training coffee shop for adults with disabilities and health conditions.

Order fulfilment

- Delivery and collection of IT assets

ANNEX D

List of Strategic Partners

Usel has developed several strategic partners to complement its various functions, including the following:

- Belfast City Council
- Mid & East Antrim Council
- Derry & Strabane Council
- Lisburn & Castlereagh Council
- Department of Justice
- NIHE
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency
- Belfast Trust
- Belfast Met
- HED
- Sport NI
- Trust Ford
- CPD
- DFC Commercial Services Division
- Disability Action
- Specialisterne