

Development Committee

Wednesday, 29th March, 2006

SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCausland (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Convery); and
Councillors M. Browne, D. Dodds, Ekin, Hartley, Kirkpatrick,
A. Maskey, McCarthy and Newton.

Also attended: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor
W. Browne); and
Councillors McCann, Mullaghan and Rodway.

In attendance: Ms. M.T. McGivern, Director of Development;
Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives; and
Mr. N. Malcolm, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the High Sheriff (Councillor Humphrey) and Councillors Kelly and P. Maskey.

Belfast City Centre Management

The Director of Development reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 16th March, 2005, it had agreed to provide funding of £125,000 to Belfast City Centre Management for the 2005-2006 financial year on the basis that the level of funding be reviewed after a period of one year and subsequent to the production of a strategic plan for the Company. This decision had been taken in the context of a previous decision to fund Belfast City Centre Management until March, 2007.

She reported that, as requested, the Company had produced a new Business Plan for the period 2006-2009 which indicated that it wished to play a more strategic role in the development of the City centre. In addition, the organisation had identified a number of guiding principles and key issues and had adopted a new mission statement: "Belfast City Centre Management will assist key stakeholders to create coherence and unity of purpose so that Belfast becomes a vibrant, exciting, cosmopolitan city centre with its unique character and style that puts people at its heart".

The Director reviewed the strategic aims and objectives contained within the report and reminded that Committee that, at its meeting on 16th November, 2005, it had agreed that the Council establish an inter-agency framework to progress the regeneration of the City centre. This required a review of the current situation, especially as the Review of Public Administration was likely to increase significantly the

range of functions of the Council. Accordingly, an inter-departmental Working Group had been established to examine current Council responsibilities and to draft a framework for action by the Council. She explained that, when the Group had concluded its work, other stakeholders in the City centre would then be consulted and it was likely that one of the issues which would be discussed would be the future functions and funding of Belfast City Centre Management. She informed the Members that a report in respect of the new framework would be presented to the Committee in the Autumn. She pointed out that, in considering the Company's request for funding, the Committee would need to take into account the reduction of £800,000 in the funding which would be provided in the coming year by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau.

In answer to a Member's question, the Director of Development indicated that provision had been made in the estimates of expenditure for the forthcoming financial year for the allocation to the Company of funding in the sum of £140,000.

It was reported that Ms. Joanne Jennings, City Centre Manager, Mr. Joe Drew, Acting Chairman, Belfast City Centre Management and Messrs. Gerald Steinberg and David Penny, Directors, were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman (Councillor McCausland).

With the assistance of visual aids, Ms. Jennings drew the Committee's attention to the achievements of Belfast City Centre Management, including the Euro Campaign, the Tidy Belfast Awards and the Festive Lighting campaign provided at Christmas. She informed the Members that the work undertaken by the Company was seen as best practice, as evidenced by the fact that the Association of City Centre Managers would be meeting in Belfast later this year to discuss the work which the organisation was undertaking and, in particular, the relationship which it had established with the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce. She pointed out that income from the private sector into Belfast City Centre Management was increasing year on year, as a result of which the organisation was securing currently £15 from that source in comparison with each £1 provided by the Council.

Mr. Drew informed the Committee that, following the strategic review which the organisation had undertaken, it had set itself a three-year programme, had established a new vision and new activities and established new groups which would deal with such issues such as urban management, accessibility, character and style and economic activity. Belfast City Centre Management would be undertaking initiatives in regard to those four issues which should result in Belfast's City centre being improved. He concluded his presentation by requesting that the Committee approve Belfast City Centre Management's Business Plan for the coming three year period, agree to provide funding for the duration of the Plan and that a sum of £200,000 be allocated in respect of the 2006-2007 financial year.

During discussion in the matter, a number of Members expressed the view that there appeared to be considerable duplication in the work which was undertaken by Belfast City Centre Management and the Council, particularly in the areas of evening economy, tourism issues, street trading and public art.

In response, Mr. Drew indicated that, since Belfast City Centre Management was working with a number of organisations in the City in regard to various initiatives for which affected them and the Council, it was inevitable that there would be a degree of duplication.

In answer to a Member's question, Mr. Drew indicated that, should the Committee not agree to provide an amount of £200,000 to the Company in respect of the 2006-2007 financial year, it was likely that the organisation would have to reduce the services which it provided or make some staff redundant.

The representatives from Belfast City Centre Management thanked the Committee for receiving them and retired from the meeting.

During discussion on the presentation and the comments thereon of the representatives from Belfast City Centre Management, the Director of Development indicated that she believed that it would be necessary for the Council to have sight of a Business Plan from the organisation for the 2006-2007 financial year, rather than the three-year Strategy which had been presented at the meeting.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed that it would provide funding to the Company of up to a maximum of £140,000 during the 2006-2007 financial year, the level of which to be determined subsequent to officers from the Development Department discussing with Belfast City Centre Management the areas where duplication could be eliminated, a Business Plan for the 2006-2007 financial year being provided by the organisation and a report thereon being submitted to a future meeting.

Chairman