

Development Committee

Wednesday, 17th May, 2006

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCausland (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Convery);
the High Sheriff (Councillor Humphrey); and
Councillors M. Browne, Crozier, D. Dodds,
Ekin, Hartley, Kelly, Long, A. Maskey, P. Maskey,
McCarthy, Newton, Ní Chuilín, Smyth and Stoker.

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 29th March and 6th and 24th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd May, subject to the omission of that portion of the minute of 24th April under the heading "Gasworks Estates: Safety at the Water Feature" relating to the removal of the water feature which, at the request of Councillor Ekin, had been taken back for further consideration.

Judicial Reviews

(Mr. C. Quigley, Director of Legal Services, and Mr. J. Walsh, Principal Solicitor, attended in connection with this item.)

Factotum

The Principal Solicitor reminded the Committee that in 2004 two editions of "The Vacuum" magazine had been published by an arts organisation known as Factotum, which had received grant assistance from the Council. The two editions contained material which was considered to be offensive since it used foul and obscene language, mocked specific church groups and displayed images which were inappropriate. The Council did not wish to be seen to be associated with the publication of the material in question since it was contrary to the Council's Good Relations Strategy. Consequently, the Council had agreed not to provide further funding to the Factotum organisation until an apology had been received from them for any offence which might have been caused to Members of the Council and the citizens of the City. As a result of this decision, the editor of "The Vacuum" made an application for a Judicial Review of the Council's decision alleging that the decision was an act of censorship and was contrary to the Human Rights Act 1998 and, in particular, his rights to freedom of expression and to hold and manifest his religion.

The Principal Solicitor informed the Committee that the application for a Judicial Review had been dismissed earlier in the month. The Judge had found that the Council's decision did not interfere with the applicant's rights and that it was within the range of proportionate responses open to a local authority in Northern Ireland presented with a publication which chose to link religious language with four letter words and religious images with sexual images. The Judge had contrasted the constructive approach of the Council, which had attempted to reach a compromise, with that of the applicant who had been unwilling to engage in any such process.

The Director of Legal Services stated that the result of the Judicial Review vindicated the Council's decision and underscored the extent of the discretion which it had with regard to the funding of the Arts in Belfast.

The Committee expressed its satisfaction with the result of the Judicial Review and thanked the Director of Legal Services and his staff for the work which they had undertaken in connection with the case.

**Planning Application in connection with the
John Lewis Development at Sprucefield**

The Principal Solicitor reminded the Members that the Council, together with a number of other interested parties, had lobbied against the planning application to develop a John Lewis Department Store and twenty-nine other retail units at Sprucefield, near Lisburn. The Council had been concerned that the proposed development, which was contrary to the prevailing planning policy, had the potential to harm Belfast City Centre and the role of Belfast as the regional driver for the economy of Northern Ireland. Despite the objections made and contrary to the advice of planning officials, Lord Rooker, the then Minister with responsibility for Planning, issued on 1st June, 2005 notice of intention to grant planning permission for the development, claiming that the social and economic advantages outweighed other considerations. Subsequently, the Council, together with other interested parties, applied for a Judicial Review of the decision. As a result of the Review, the Judge had quashed the notice of intention and subsequent planning permission.

During discussion in the matter and in answer to a Member's question, the Principal Solicitor indicated that it was likely that a further planning application would be submitted in connection with the scheme for the John Lewis Department Store and twenty-nine other retail units at Sprucefield. However, it was probable that the Planning Policy Statement in connection with retailing would be published before the new application was made. The Director of Development stated that the Council would be meeting with the various organisations which had brought the Judicial Review to discuss such issues as out-of-town shopping centres, the Department for Social Development's comments regarding the amount of retail space which was required for Belfast and the adverse effect which the planning application at Sprucefield would have on a number of city and town centres.

The Committee congratulated the Director of Legal Services and his staff on the work which they had undertaken in connection with this Judicial Review and expressed satisfaction with the result.

Gasworks Estate: Safety at the Water Feature

The Committee considered further the undernoted portion of the minute of 24th April under the heading "Gasworks Estate: Safety at the Water Feature" relating to the removal of the water feature. A copy of the minute in that regard is set out hereunder:

"The Committee considered a report regarding the water feature located within the Gasworks Estate. A copy of the report, with the exception of the appendices referred to therein, is set out hereunder:

'Purpose of Report

To seek Committee's views on the future of the Water Feature located in the Gasworks estate.

Background

At the Committee meeting of 21st September 2005 Members were informed of the numerous incidents of youths swimming in the Water Feature during the summer months and of the near drowning of a six year old boy last August.

In view of the continuing risks involved, the Committee agreed that safety at the Water Feature be reviewed to see if any further measures can be taken to discourage persons from entering the water which has a uniform depth of 12 feet.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) was duly instructed to carry out the review.

Current Position

Rospa have now completed their investigations and a copy of their report is contained in Appendix A.

The report states that Belfast City Council has fully implemented the series of recommendations made by Rospa in 2004. These safety measures meet the 'duty of care' required of land owners to take action which can be reasonably foreseen as necessary for the prevention of accident and injury to persons.

However, the report qualifies this endorsement by describing the safety measures currently in place as applying to 'normal, rational behaviour by responsible people' and in recognition that an element of people on the site will continue to behave unreasonably, recommend that

additional measures be introduced, namely manned patrols of the public realm area by security staff during daylight hours, May to September. The cost of this measure will be about £30,000 per annum.

The report considers other options including safety chains placed around the water's edge, a computerised monitoring system to detect persons entering the water and the idea of a steel mesh placed just below the waters edge. All of these proposals were dismissed by Rospa as being either unnecessary or counter productive.

Rospa acknowledges that the existence of the Water Feature imposes a residual risk which arises from the fact that some people will from time to time enter the water no matter what preventative measures are in place.

The Principal Solicitor in Legal Services Department has advised that, taking into account the safety measures which have been put in place in an attempt to make the Water Feature as safe as possible and also taking into account the fact that Council is fully aware of the risks, particularly to children, of retaining the Water Feature in its current form, Council would be very likely to be held liable for any accident or death arising as a direct result of the presence of this large body of water.

The Workplace Health Manager, Mike Keating, has expressed concerns that while manned patrols may help control the problem, they will also increase the risk of confrontation and work related violence particularly as the youths who enter the Water Feature have little respect for authority.

Mr Keating also advises that from a health and safety perspective, where practical to do so it is preferable to remove the source of a risk rather than increase the number of control measures being applied as these measures still cannot guarantee complete safety. He therefore recommends that consideration be given to substantially filling in the Water Feature so as to render it safe. While this action would incur initial capital cost it would, he advises, benefit from reduced costs of carrying out ongoing risk control measures and would minimise Council's risk liability.

PSNI and local community representatives from Lower Ormeau Residents Association and the Markets Development Forum have also expressed concerns about the dangers presented by the Water Feature. PSNI say that they cannot be expected to always respond to call-outs when youths enter the water.

Members will note that on the other hand the removal of the Water Feature would not be welcomed by either Radisson SAS or the site developers, Inislyn Ltd. The presence of the Water Feature played a significant part in their selection of the site for the hotel and remains, in their opinion, an enhancement to the character of both the hotel and the public realm area.

Options

Looking to ways forward there are two principal ways in which the situation can be dealt with:

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To remove the risk altogether by filling in the basin of the Water Feature and converting the land to an alternative facility, for example, a public amenity area or a water feature having just a few centimetres depth supplied by fountains using re-circulated water. This would cost in the region of £200k to £300k, depending on the scheme adopted. Given the time frame and the work implications it is suggested that in the first instance Members may wish to consider adopting option A. for this summer and seeking much further information and advice including costs for option B. before making the final decision.

Environmental Implications

None

Equality Implications

None

Capital City Strategy Reference

3.2. Making best use of Council's assets

Recommendation

Committee is asked to consider this report and to agree away forward.'

Following discussion in the matter In addition, the Committee agreed, due to the health and safety risks involved, that the water feature within the Gasworks be removed as soon as was practicable and that a report on the associated costs be submitted to a future meeting."

Councillor Ekin, who had requested that the matter be taken back, expressed the view that other European cities were creating water features and saw them as an asset to their city environment. He therefore believed that the Council should retain the water feature at the Gasworks whilst at the same time undertaking some changes to its design which would make it less dangerous.

The Director of Development informed the Committee that officers of the Council were examining options which would involve the retention of the water feature but which would result in the depth of the water being reduced and that a report regarding the various options available would be submitted to a future meeting.

In view of the comments of the Director, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter until it had an opportunity to consider the options report.

Arts Sub-Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Arts Sub-Committee of 3rd May were approved and adopted.

Economic Development Sub-Committee

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development Sub-Committee of 3rd May.

Tourism and Promotion of Belfast Sub-Committee

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Tourism and Promotion of Belfast Sub-Committee of 10th May be approved and adopted.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board – Culture and Heritage Tourism Action Plan

The Head of Economic Initiatives informed the Members that the Tourism and Promotion of Belfast Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 10th May, had expressed concern in relation to a response which had been prepared by officers from the Tourism Unit regarding the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Culture and Heritage Tourism Action Plan. Consequently, the Sub-Committee had agreed that the principal Committee consider a revised response document which addressed the Members' concerns and that the Committee should agree:

- (i) that a letter be sent to the Minister with responsibility for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, expressing the Committee's concern at the lack of co-operation which the Northern Ireland Tourist Board afforded the Council; and
- (ii) that a statement be issued on behalf of the Committee which reflected its dissatisfaction in the matter.

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Committee that a copy of the amended response had been circulated to them and that further copies were available upon request. She informed the Committee that the concerns referred to in the response included:

- (i) the lack of consultation with the Council during the preparation of the Culture and Heritage Tourism Action Plan;
- (ii) the Plan made no reference to the Council's Culture and Tourism Strategy Action Plan, which was considered to be an example of best practice;
- (iii) the Plan did not acknowledge the excellent and innovative Cultural Tourism initiatives organised by the Council. In addition, many of the objectives in the Action Plan were already being implemented by the Council;
- (iv) there was no recognition of the role which the Council had played in developing and marketing the Cultural Tourism product;
- (v) the Plan made no reference to the impact which the Review of Public Administration would have. Rather, it indicated that Culture and Heritage Tourism would be delivered through Regional Tourism Partnerships; and
- (vi) the Plan indicated that new groups would be created and officers appointed to undertake additional cultural and heritage events. However, much of the cultural activity mentioned was already taking place and existing staff did not have the time to develop new programmes because of limited resources. This would result in numerous under-funded organisations programming similar events and achieving minimum exposure.

Moved by Councillor Maskey,
Seconded by Councillor Ní Chuilín,

That the Council's response to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Culture and Heritage Tourism Action Plan be amended to include the promotion of the Gaeltact Quarter of the City.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Long,
Seconded by Councillor Ekin,

That the draft response to the Action Plan as submitted be approved.

On a vote by show of hands seven Members voted for the amendment and eight against and it was accordingly declared lost.

Further Amendment

Moved by Councillor D. Dodds,
Seconded by the High Sheriff (Councillor Humphrey),

That the Council's response to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Culture and Heritage Tourism Action Plan be adopted, subject to the inclusion of a request that both the promotion of the Gaeltacht Quarter and the Orange Order's parades on 12th July be included within the Action Plan.

On a vote by show of hands fourteen Members voted for the amendment and two against and it was accordingly declared carried.

The amendment was thereupon put to the meeting as the substantive motion when fourteen Members voted in favour and two against and it was accordingly declared carried.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed also:

- (i) that a letter be sent to the Minister with responsibility for Enterprise, Trade and Investment expressing its concern at the lack of co-operation which the Northern Ireland Tourist Board had afforded the Council; and
- (i) that a statement be issued on behalf of the Committee which reflected its dissatisfaction in the matter.

Tender for Web-based Neighbourhood Information System

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The move towards the SNAP- based delivery of neighbourhood services requires the enhancement of the Council's ability to gather, store and interpret information gathered at a local neighbourhood level. Relevant information includes census details, socio-economic information, accessibility to Council and other public services and crime, health and environmental data.

Such information would enable the Council to build up a complex profile of the City's neighbourhoods and would allow us to put in place a robust evidence-based decision-making system based on accurate and current data. Such a system would enable the Council to more accurately shape the delivery of its services to meet the needs of local people.

To establish such a capacity the Council requires the procurement of a community intelligence system that can readily capture and collate data from a wide range of sources and allow Members and officers to easily view, analyse, interpret and take action on the resulting information.

Similar systems are already in place in a number of local authorities in England and Scotland. Officers from Development Department, Core Improvement and ISB recently visited South Tyneside to see a demonstration of their award-winning system, which has allowed that Council to transform their decision-making processes at neighbourhood level. They have recently extended the system to share information not just within the Council but with their public sector partners (who in turn share with them their own neighbourhood information).

Members can view the system for themselves at www.southtyneside.info/intelligence

A similar system is also in place at Brighton and Hove Council whose interactive data catalogue and mapping service (called 'Citystats') is also a partnership with public sector providers committed to sharing data effectively and making statistical and service information more accessible: www.citystats.com

Key Issues

There is an on-going demand from Members for access to useful, coherent, map or chart-based information on their neighbourhoods. To date the gathering of such information has proved to be a time-consuming and often, ad hoc, process. The proposed system would greatly increase the quality of such neighbourhood profiles with the added advantage of being available instantly 24 hours a day and drawn from the most recent and comprehensive information sources.

Belfast City Council already collects a wide variety of neighbourhood data – either gathered internally or sourced from partner organisation such as NISRA and DETI. A proportion of this data is GIS in nature and is analysed using the Council's Mapinfo system.

However, there is, no central mechanism for bringing this information together in a logical fashion that allows easy access and analysis by Members and officers with the minimum of IT and statistical training; or for its central maintenance by the Council's policy officers.

Over the medium term the need for such neighbourhood information will grow considerably as it will be required to implement the agreed SNAP programme and, over the longer term, will also be necessary for the Council's obligations under the Community Planning proposals as outlined under the RPA.

Such a system would allow the Council to not only gather neighbourhood data from its partner organisations but would, potentially, offer them a facility to access it for their own purposes. Such a system – if web-based - would also offer the potential for making neighbourhood profiles available to members of the public via the Internet as currently offered by both South Tyneside and Brighton & Hove.

Resource Implications

Members of the Development Department, Core Improvement Team and ISB have investigated the options for such a system and have drawn up a specification that ensures the system would complement the Council's current IT infrastructure (including our GIS capabilities) and meet the information requirements of SNAP and the likely requirements of community planning.

As with most IT projects that the Council procures, such a system would be evaluated over a three to five year life span. It would be 'hosted' locally on ISB's own server infrastructure but would be installed, implemented and supported by a third party software vendor. As such the Council will have to tender to software companies for the system. An internal solution is not available.

Financial

Market research has suggested that the tender would be to the value of between £30,000 and £50,000 for the purchase, adaptation and initial maintenance of the system for the period 2006 to 2007.

This sum has been allocated within the existing Development Department budget for 2006/2007.

Human Resources

Existing ISB staff would provide the infrastructure required to implement the system and liaise with the software company to ensure the system meets the technical requirements of the Council.

Existing staff of the Development Department's Policy & Research Unit would liaise with the software company regarding the initial input of data sets and the on-going adaptation of the system.

Recommendations

That Members agree that the Council instigates a tendering process for the Community Information System software, up to a costing of £50K."

After further discussion, the Committee agreed that a tendering process be instigated in connection with the provision of a Community Information Software System, at a cost not to exceed £50,000.

European Unit Progress Report

Position of Cypriot Honorary Consul

The Director of Development informed the Committee that the Council had been requested to host at Stormont on 25th May a reception to mark the appointment of Mr. Nick Lestas to the position of Cypriot Honorary Consul for Northern Ireland. She reported that the reception would cost approximately £500.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to host the reception at an estimated cost of £500 and authorised the attendance of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman at the function.

European Mayors' and Leaders' Forum

The Director reported that, on behalf of the Eurocities Network, the Government would be hosting in London on 29th and 30th June a European Mayors' and Leaders' Forum entitled "Leading Sustainable Cities". The Council had been invited to be represented at the Forum by the Lord Mayor or the Councillor who was responsible for leading European affairs, together with an appropriate officer.

She stated that the event would enable the delegates to exchange experiences and ideas and to discuss the building of sustainable cities in conjunction with the European Institutions. Given the enhanced powers and roles which the Council would obtain as a result of the Review of Public Administration and the role of Belfast as the economic driver for the region, she recommended that the Chairman of the Development Committee, together with the Europe Manager, attend the Forum.

During discussion in the matter, a Member expressed the view that, since the invitation had been issued to the Lord Mayor, he, rather than the Chairman of the Committee, should represent the Council at the Forum.

In response, the Director of Development indicated that, previously, the Lord Mayor had forwarded to the Chairman of the Development Committee invitations to attend Eurocities events. Another Member made the point that, on previous occasions, the Chairman of the Development Committee had led on European and Eurocities issues.

Following further discussion and a vote by show of hands, four Members voted in favour of the Chairman of the Development Committee attending the Forum and ten Members voted in favour of the Lord Mayor attending. In addition, the Committee agreed that the European Manager accompany the Lord Mayor to the European Mayors' and Leaders' Forum and authorised the payment of the appropriate attendance and subsistence allowances in connection therewith.

Proposed Payment to Arc21

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Committee will recall that at its meeting on 18th March 2004 it agreed that the south eastern portion of the North Foreshore would be used for Waste Management purposes.

The Council has agreed to provide a serviced site of between five and twelve acres to ARC21 for the provision of an Organics Treatment Facility in this area.

Preparation of this serviced site will require the carrying out of site conditioning works, comprising compaction, filling and gas protection/collection measures, funded from the Health & Environmental Services' capital programme budget, and infrastructure works comprising drainage and services installations, funded from the Development Department's capital programme budget.

At its meeting on 15th February 2006 the Committee agreed to the amalgamation of the site conditioning and infrastructure works for the Organics Treatment Facility into a single contract with all further approvals to be granted by the Development Committee.

The amalgamation was also agreed by a special Health & Environmental Services Committee on 16th February 2006.

Further information regarding the details of the proposed works, the relevant Committee approvals and the financial considerations are set out in Appendix A.

Key Issues

Design of the necessary infrastructure/site conditioning works is proceeding and tender issue is anticipated in early June with a commencement date on site in early August.

The process for Arc21 to procure the Organics Treatment Facility is also underway.

The construction methodology for the proposed Arc21 Organics Treatment Facility may require the provision of dense piling which penetrates and may destroy any existing gas protection layers and membrane put in place during the conditioning works. Where work carried out under the Council's conditioning contract requires to be replaced by ARC21's contractor, the original expenditure will be

rendered nugatory and there would be an additional cost to the Council in that the cost of its replacement by ARC21's contractor will inevitably be incorporated into the gate charge which the Council will be required to pay in any future usage of the facility.

It is therefore proposed that it may be appropriate for some of the conditioning works which would otherwise be installed as part of the servicing of the site by the Council's contractor to be assigned for execution by Arc21's contractor, thereby avoiding nugatory expenditure.

This would necessitate the Council reimbursing Arc21 for these works, which would be valued at no more than the tendered rates which the Council would otherwise pay under its infrastructure/site conditioning contract, thereby resulting in no net additional cost to the Council.

The approach outlined above would be dependent upon the Council being assured of the quality of installation that would be delivered by the ARC 21 contractor and that no additional liability would attach to the Council through this route.

The identification of the extent of such works and their value will only be possible following award by ARC21 of the tender for the Composting Facility and consideration of the proposed construction methodology. It is anticipated that the value will be in the range £250,000 to £500,000.

The Department has sought the advice of the Legal services Department who have confirmed that the mechanism for payment to ARC21 in these circumstances is covered by the Local Government Act.

Resource Implications

There will be no net increase in capital expenditure as a result of this action, which should result in a reduced gate charge.

Financial

Funding for the current proposals in relation to the preparation of the ARC21 site has been included within the current Capital Programme. Details are set out in Appendix A.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee notes that the site conditioning works in selected areas which would otherwise be carried out by BCC's appointed contractor may, where this would

have advantages for the Council, be installed by ARC21 and that payment for any such works will be made to ARC21 at rates which would otherwise be paid by the Council under the terms of its infrastructure/site conditioning contract.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation contained within the foregoing report.

Celebrate Belfast Update – Progress Report

The Committee considered a report regarding the programme of events involved in Celebrate Belfast. A copy of the report, with the exception of the appendices referred to therein, is set out hereunder:

“Relevant Background Information

In March 2003 the Development Committee agreed that a programme of cultural activity and celebrations should be delivered to coincide with the Centenary Celebrations for City Hall in 2006. The current Celebrate Belfast programme has been designed to showcase and promote the city to local and international audiences. The programme promotes the city’s cultural offering and provides an opportunity to attract additional visitors and enhance the range of cultural products available in the city. The Belfast celebrations have followed a two stage process: collaboration with Cork in 2005 as part of their European Capital of Culture status and with other cities in England, Scotland and Wales; and a year of cultural celebration in Belfast 2006, which is co-ordinated with the City Hall Centenary programme.

Key Issues

Over the next nine months a number of key initiatives under the banner of Celebrate Belfast are planned. Full details of the following items are contained in Appendix 1.

- Four Northern Ireland Omnibus surveys are planned in order to ascertain the effectiveness of the Celebrate Belfast programme.
- The BBC has contacted the Council to host a Big Screen event connected to World Cup broadcasts and it recommended that this should take place on the 1st July during the Belfast Maritime Festival.
- In February 2006 Members agreed to the staging of a New Year’s Eve outdoor concert to mark the end of the City Hall Centenary and Celebrate Belfast programme. Recently Laganside Corporation has confirmed that they are willing to support the event to the sum of £25,000. However, this is conditional upon the event taking place in Custom House Square and not at City Hall.

- A series of marketing activities are scheduled as part of the Celebrate Belfast promotional campaigns, which will cover provincial and national marketing in conjunction with BVCB. Details of the next three month Celebrate Belfast guide have been published and are contained in Appendix 1.
- A new series of community based funding initiatives are requested as part of Celebrate Belfast. These include enhancement of the Council's Arts Development and Outreach Programme and Rolling programme plus activities connected to New Belfast Arts that would be funded by ACNI.
- A series of coaching master classes organised in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Athletics Federation. This would involve a series of seminars and workshops presented by former international athletes such as Steve Backley former Olympic medal winner. The seminars would cover 'Training for Young People' and 'The Mindset of a Winner'. Classes would be made available to all sporting bodies.
- Members are asked to note that NITB have allocated £20,000 funding to further develop tours, signage, literature and familiarisation trips with regard to Titanic related activities in and around Titanic Quarter.

Resource Implications

Financial

All financial expenditure is within Council agreed budgets.

Human Resources

The staffing levels to deliver the above elements are in place until the end of December 2006.

Recommendations

Members are requested to agree the following items and are asked to note that all finances for these items are within the overall budget for Celebrate Belfast.

- To note and agree the Celebrate Belfast marketing activities, which will be funded within the current Celebrate Belfast marketing budgets for 2006/7 of £200,000. To note the three month calendar of events (Attached)

- To agree the funding recommendations for the Celebrate Belfast Development and Outreach Programme/Rolling programme and to note the details of the New Belfast community arts initiative that would be funded by ACNI.
- To agree funding of £8,000 for the staging of High Performance Coaching Master Class as part of the Sports strand of Celebrate Belfast.
- To note that NITB have allocated £20,000 of funding to further develop tours, signage and literature and familiarisation trips with regard Titanic related activities in and around Titanic Quarter.
- To agree to the hosting of the BBC Big Screen event within the Council's Maritime Festival, as part of the Celebrate Belfast programme.
- To decide at which location the 2006 New Year's Eve concert should take place, either, City Hall or Custom House Square.
- To agree the funding for a series of Northern Ireland Omnibus surveys."

The Head of Economic Initiatives drew the Committee's attention to various aspects of the report and, in answer to a Member's question regarding the New Year's Eve outdoor concert, indicated that Customs House Square could hold approximately 5,000 persons, whilst in the region of 15,000 could be accommodated at the front of the City Hall. She indicated that the number of persons attending the event would be dependent upon the popularity of the artists who would be performing.

During discussion in the matter, several Members pointed out that previous events held on New Year's Eve had been poorly attended and that, in the event of inclement weather, an alternative location for the event had been the Ulster Hall. Accordingly, it was suggested that the New Year's Eve concert be held in Customs House Square, since it was better suited to a smaller audience.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed that the officers from the Development Department undertake further work regarding the New Year's Eve concert, particularly in regard to the artists who would be performing, and submit a further report to a future meeting regarding the venue for the event.

In connection with the Coaching Master Classes, a Member suggested that they should be made available to persons other than athletes. The Head of Economic Initiatives undertook to ensure that any member of the public who so wished could attend the Coaching Master Classes.

After further discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations contained within the foregoing report, subject to the Coaching Master Classes being made available to anyone who wished to attend and the deferral of the final decision on the location for the New Year's Eve concert pending the submission of a further report thereon.

Christmas Continental Market 2005

The Director of Development informed the Committee that approximately 350,000 persons had visited the Continental Market which had been held at the front of the City Hall in November and December 2005. The Market had resulted in a 30% increase in footfall within the prime retail area of the City compared to the same period in 2004 and the event had attracted favourable press coverage. However, a number of traders in the Fountain Street area had requested that the Committee meet with them to discuss concerns they had had regarding the Market.

Following discussion in the matter, during which the Director indicated that the organisers had been requested to ensure that in 2006 the traders at the Market include a better selection of hand-crafted goods which were appropriate to that time of year, the Committee agreed that an All-Party deputation should meet with the traders from the Fountain Street area to discuss their concerns regarding the Christmas Market.

Belfast City Council's Response to Future European Structural Funds Programme for Northern Ireland Document 2007 to 2013

The Committee considered a report regarding the Council's response to the future European Structural Funds Programme for Northern Ireland Document 2007 to 2013. A copy of the report, with the exception of the appendices referred to therein, is set out hereunder:

"Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that the current six year programme of European Structural Funds for Northern Ireland draws to a close in December 2006. As a result of an independent review in 2005 the European Commission acknowledged it had failed to reach strategic targets and decided that the future structural funds programmes should be set against more stringent result indicators.

Regulations and budgets for the next round of structural funding for the European Union are now in place with a ringfenced amount of approximately 200m Euro cited for Northern Ireland for the period 2007 to 2013 out of a 6.2 billion Euro for the United Kingdom. On 28th February 2006, the United Kingdom's Department of Trade and Industry launched a consultation process with respect to the future European Funding Programme. This programme is known as the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) formerly known in Northern Ireland as the Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme 2000 to 2006. Each Member state across the European Union is currently undergoing the same process with respect to their NSRF.

Within the United Kingdom Plan is a Northern Ireland chapter (Appendix 1) outlining the strategic context and proposed high level strategic priorities and themes for allocating structural funds in Northern Ireland to which Belfast City Council wishes to respond.

Key Issues

The Northern Ireland chapter of the NSRF (Appendix 1) is largely a reflection of the Northern Ireland Economic Vision produced by the Department of Enterprise Trade & Investment in June 2005. Further details of this vision will be outlined in the forthcoming Northern Ireland Regional Economic Strategy. Northern Ireland's allocation of future European Union funding must reflect both European and domestic policy priorities.

The whole of Northern Ireland will be eligible for funding under the new funding priority 2 status known as The Competitive and Employment Objective. The Department of Finance and Personnel will allocate and manage funds

Under this new status Northern Ireland will operate a single European Regional Development Funding Programme for the entire region focusing on

- (i) Improving accessibility and enhancing the environment.
- (ii) Increasing investment in research and development and promoting innovation.
- (iii) Promoting Enterprise

The Belfast City Council response paper attached (Appendix 2) relates to each of those themes from a local government perspective.

Northern Ireland will also operate a single European Social Fund Programme for the entire region focusing on two inter-related priority areas.

- (i) Helping people into sustainable employment
- (ii) Improving workplace skills and adaptability

Again the Belfast City Council response paper, attached as (Appendix 2) relates to each of these from a Council point of view.

A further cross cutting theme outlined in the NSRF is Creating Sustainable Community. Members will recall their decision in March 2006 to call on government for preference funding under this theme to deliver an Urban type programme in South and East Belfast. A detailed position paper with respect to a case for the future urban programme is attached as (Appendix 3) of this report.

Over and above the Northern Ireland Programme 2007 to 2013 the region will have access to the new European wide Territorial Co-operation Programme which will replace the current Interreg IIIA Programme. A detailed position paper will be brought to Members with respect to this in due course.

Members are asked to consider the Belfast City Council response to the future Northern Ireland European Funding Programme attached as (Appendix 2) (BCC comment on the NSRF) and (Appendix 3) (case for the Future Urban Programme) of this report. This response outlines the key issues highlighted by the Council's Departments and collated by the European Unit.

It is intended that the paper once endorsed by Members will be submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel who are responsible for consultation on this critical issue for Northern Ireland and copied to the Department of Trade & Industry in London.

Resource Implications

While there are no immediate resource implications for Belfast City Council in making a response to this consultation exercise the implications for Belfast City Council in the medium to longer term will be significant. Within the RPA it is explicitly written that local government will have a role with respect to the delivery of future European funding programme. It is important, therefore, that Belfast City Council as a capital city and regional driver has an influence on the shaping of the future Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan 2007 to 2013. Belfast City Council will also have to consider the cost of any future management role in terms of match funding and human resources to administer European Programmes.

Financial

None.

Human Resources

None.

Asset and Other Implications

None.

Recommendations

To approve the Council's response to the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 to 2013."

During discussion in the matter, a Member pointed out that the draft response did not contain the correct names of certain wards within the City and he requested that this be corrected prior to the response being forwarded. The Director undertook to amend the document accordingly.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed that the Council's response to the National Strategy and Reference Framework document, as amended, a copy of which was available to Members on request, be forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel and Department of Trade and Industry in London and agreed also that the Director submit a further report regarding a possible Urban-type Programme for South and East Belfast to a future meeting.

Urban Alchemy Conference – Request for Hospitality

The Committee was advised that the Council, together with the Royal Society of Ulster Architects and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, was hosting at the Waterfront Hall in September a Conference entitled "Urban Alchemy". The theme of the Conference would be devoted to sharing new ideas in creating a greater understanding of the power which architecture and art held in shaping and re-energising the environment.

The Director of Development recommended that the Committee host a reception and dinner in the City Hall to mark the occasion at a cost not to exceed £7,000.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Chairman