

Development Committee

Wednesday, 11th January, 2006

MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT) SUB-COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor M. Browne (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Convery); and
Councillors Crozier, D. Dodds, Empey, Jones, P. Maskey,
McCann, McCarthy, McClenaghan, Newton, Smyth
and Stoker.

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 30th November, which had been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes, as adopted by the principal Committee at its meeting on 7th December, had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th January, subject to the omission of the minute under the heading "World Trade Centre" which, at the request of Councillor McCarthy, had been taken back to the Sub-Committee for further consideration.

World Trade Centre and Belfast First Stop Shop

The Sub-Committee considered further the undernoted minute of the meeting of 30th November under the heading "World Trade Centre":

"The Sub-Committee considered a report regarding the establishment of a World Trade Centre for Belfast. A copy of the report, with the exception of Appendix 1 referred to therein, is set out hereunder:

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update on plans for World Trade Centre, Belfast.

Background

Members will be aware that following the meeting of the Development (Economic Development) Sub-Committee, 7th September, 2005, two options were presented for consideration concerning the development of World Trade Centre Belfast. These included:-

Option 1

To pursue the World Trade Centre (WTC) concept as a virtual model whereby Belfast City Council works in conjunction with external agencies, such as Invest NI and the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI), to develop a single integrated interface for business support in Belfast. This would involve the formulation of appropriate legal agreements between bodies based on joint approaches to international trade and investment.

This option need not involve any physical changes to the location of Belfast City Council's Economic Development unit, Invest NI or Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry as it would rely on virtual/internet collaboration supported by regular joint meetings.

Option 2

This option involved the progression of the WTC concept as a physical development whereby Belfast City Council would enter into a contract with the private sector to deliver the project. Actual terms and conditions naturally would need to be investigated and acted upon at the outset along with the precise role/contribution of Belfast City Council within this project. Should a commercial property be developed as a WTC, it would be necessary to ensure a physical presence within the building for business contact.

At this meeting, Members agreed to progress Option 1 with a report to be submitted to a future meeting and a further report for Option 2.

Option 1 – Development of a Virtual World Trade Centre for Belfast

Over the past two years much work has been undertaken to develop the World Trade Centre concept for Belfast, which has included the development of a business plan and consultation with both public and private sectors agencies.

In essence the primary objective of World Trade Centre Belfast is to reposition Belfast in the international business market by changing perceptions of the city as a place within which to live, do business and visit – this necessitates a stepped change in the organisation and management of existing programmes and agencies linked to international trade including Invest NI and Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The WTCB could provide a renewed focus and support in

this area of activity for businesses as well as lending enhanced credibility and support for the regeneration of the City's international identity. It will also provide an opportunity to avail of previous services provided by the First Stop Shop that relate to international trade.

Virtual World Trade Centre Objectives

WTC Belfast has the ability to develop and deliver, with the Council and other public and private stakeholders (including NICCI and Invest NI), a strategy and plan to promote Belfast as a world class location within which to live, work, invest and visit. The related objectives would include the following:-

- to be a premier business gateway to encourage investment in and access to Belfast and Northern Ireland and to help and encourage companies to access UK, Republic of Ireland and overseas markets;*
- to link and collaborate with other WTC's across the world and all other agencies and organisations, within and outside Northern Ireland, that will help the WTCB and its clients access markets;*
- to develop and deliver effective and efficient business services, programmes, information and training to support business investment, start-ups and growth by focusing on commercial opportunities in trade and export and through the application of innovation, leadership, entrepreneurship, knowledge and good management practices in companies;*
- to establish a membership base which will offer added value services;*
- to operate at the heart and be a key influencer of the Belfast business community, working in partnership with and generating commitment from a wide range of stakeholders, demonstrating measurable and positive achievements.*

Developing the Virtual WTC for Belfast

This virtual approach ensures that WTC Belfast could be launched in 2006 with the development of economic development services and products managed and co-ordinated by Belfast City Council. This will include some of the previous activities delivered under the Belfast First Stop Shop.

Some of the existing services and products delivered by Invest NI and NICCI would continue to be delivered by these organisations but branded under the WTCB.

World Trade Centre Belfast (WTCB) structure

The structure of the WTCB to comprise three functions substantially integrating the functions of the relevant agencies (see Appendix I).

- *International Trade and Investments*
- *Business Development*
- *Marketing and Communications*

A number of benefits exist in the proposition to integrate existing projects and programmes into the WTCB brand, through the virtual model.

- *Business customers will find it easier to identify appropriate services to meet their needs;*
- *Joint marketing of services will result in less market confusion and lower marketing costs;*
- *A stronger negotiating position will be developed by the joint activities of the partners to both rationalize services (eliminating duplication and inefficient services) and building new services to meet market need, as well as attracting new funds in to build these services.*

Virtual WTCB

The virtual model presented today to Members allows Belfast City Council to work in conjunction with external agencies such as INI and NICCI to develop a single integrated interface for business support in Belfast initially under International Trade and Investment. This would involve the formulation of appropriate legal agreements between bodies based on joint approaches to international trade and investment. These will include:-

- *Single point of contact for companies between BCC, INI and NICCI.*
- *Co-ordinated external trade mission programme including planning, recruitment, delivery and follow up.*
- *Co-ordinated delivery of business support programmes on export development.*

- *Referral service for all external enquiries received through the WTC portal.*
- *Integrated marketing and promotional campaigns of Belfast abroad.*

Financial and Resources

A key requirement for the development of WTCB will be the resources required to develop the virtual WTCB. Whilst the majority of costs will be absorbed by the re-branding of existing programmes and initiatives a number of items will be required including to take forward the virtual model.

DETAIL

COST (£)

Set-up

<i>Appraisal of programmes/projects/equipment costs/network participation/portal/development</i>	<i>20,000</i>
<i>Brand Development and marketing and communications</i>	<i>65,000</i>
<i>Industry engagement programme</i>	<i>15,000</i>
TOTAL	100,000

Conclusion

To proceed with the development of a virtual WTC, lead by Council and incorporating the international activities of outside agencies including Invest NI and NICCI.

There are now a number of steps that need to be undertaken over the course of the next few months to activate WTCB. These are:-

- Enter into negotiations to develop a tri-partite relationship between BCC, INI and NICCI.*
- Activate the World Trade Centre Portal.*
- Participation in WTC network meetings.*
- Develop a branding and communications plan and commence implementation.*
- Engage with private sector regarding membership potential and participation on WTCB.*
- Integration of FSS Services into the WTC concept.*
- Identify private sector property developer to partner the World Trade Centre Licence.*

Environmental Implications

None.

Equality Considerations

None.

Capital City Strategy Reference

To drive the economic growth of Belfast.

LED Plan Reference

To support and develop business growth and competitiveness.

Budgetary Implications

£100,000.

Recommendations

- (i) To note the comments of the report and approve the virtual model that positions Belfast City as the lead organisation within World Centre Trade Belfast.**
- (ii) To approve expenditure of £100,000 to develop virtual WTCB.**

Decision Required

To approve the foregoing recommendations.'

In answer to Members' questions, the Head of Economic Initiatives indicated that the proposed virtual World Trade Centre would be more than a website which contained links to various organisations. It would involve the Council working with such agencies as Invest Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry to encourage investment in Belfast and to assist Belfast-based businesses to access markets outside Northern Ireland. She indicated also that those two Bodies had committed themselves verbally to the project and that appropriate legal agreements would be prepared. She stated that the World Trade Centre brand was recognised throughout the world and that such Centres were being planned also for Dublin, Cardiff and Edinburgh.

She informed the Members that, during the Creative Industries Showcase visit to America, the Council's delegation had visited the Boston and New York World Trade Centres and had ascertained that there were business development opportunities which the Council was not pursuing but which could be undertaken by a World Trade Centre in Belfast. She pointed out that each city had developed its Centre in a manner which met its requirement and that the World Trade Centres in

Amsterdam and Barcelona had started originally as virtual projects. The Head of Economic Initiatives reiterated that a further report regarding the possibility of the establishment of a physical World Trade Centre in Belfast would be submitted to a future meeting.

During discussion in the matter, a Member made the point that Invest Northern Ireland had on previous occasions been reluctant to promote Belfast as a single entity since it considered itself to be responsible for the development of the entire Province. Accordingly, he suggested that the Council should ensure that Invest Northern Ireland was committed totally to the project prior to expending resources in connection with the virtual Trade Centre.

After further discussion, it was

*Moved by Councillor Crozier,
Seconded by Councillor D. Dodds,*

That the Sub-Committee agrees to the creation of a virtual World Trade Centre for Belfast, in which the Council would be the lead organisation, and that expenditure in the sum of £100,000 be allocated to the development of a virtual Centre, subject to the Council ensuring that all the potential partner organisations were committed fully to the project. In addition, should the Head of Economic Initiatives consider it to be necessary, that a meeting be sought with the relevant Government Minister to ensure that the furtherance of the virtual World Trade Centre would receive such commitment.

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

The Head of Economic Initiatives submitted an additional report in respect of this matter which dealt also with the forthcoming closure of the Belfast First Stop Shop. A copy of the report, with the exception of the appendix referred to therein, is set out hereunder:

"Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is fourfold:-

- (i) To provide Members with an update on the Belfast First Stop Business Shop;**
- (ii) To update Members on developments for absorbing elements of enterprise service currently provided by the Shop back into Council through the World Trade Centre;**
- (iii) To update members on enterprise activity.**
- (iv) To update Members on the World Trade Centre.**

(i) Update on the Belfast First Stop Business Shop

Members will be aware that over the course of the last number of months, Belfast City Council has been actively working with the First Stop Shop to address the issue of future funding post 2006.

The First Stop Shop is completing the final year of its strategy and funding from Council is in place up until March 2006. Members will further be aware that Council is the 100% funder of the project and currently contributes £292,000 per annum to the core funding of the initiative.

Members will be aware that at the Development (Economic Development Sub-Committee of 5th October, 2005, officers informed Members that, following meetings with representatives of the First Stop Shop, the organisation had acknowledged that, unless the Council provided a similar level of funding as it had in previous years, the Belfast First Stop Shop would have to close. A sum of £100,000 was offered to the First Stop Shop from the Council for the forthcoming financial year. However, representatives of the organisation had indicated that that sum would not be sufficient to enable the Company to operate as it had previously. At this meeting the Sub-Committee agreed in principle not to provide core funding to the Belfast First Stop Shop with effect from 1st April, 2006. Members also agreed to consider a future detailed report in respect of the costs to the Council of absorbing the enterprise service delivery work into the Economic Development Unit should the Belfast First Stop Shop close based on the aforementioned budget. Members will also be aware that the shop will close on the 31st March, 2006.

Conclusion

As discussed, with the imminent closure of the shop, it is recommended that the Economic Development Sub-Committee formally acknowledge the closure of the shop and thank them for their 7 years of dedicated service in the City. It is suggested this will take the form of a thank-you reception hosted by the Chair of Economic Development.

(ii) Update on developments of absorption of services back into Council through the World Trade Centre

Members will be aware that at the Development (Economic Development) Sub-Committee of 2nd November, 2005, an update was given on proposed actions following the announcement of the closure of the First Stop Shop. The report also highlighted the next steps required to develop a structured communications plan to handle events in the lead up to the closure of the First Stop Shop. This plan would be used to convey a number of key messages including the following;

- (i) Emphasising that Council values the services provided by the First Stop Shop and it is currently investigating how best these services can be delivered within Council due to current funding pressures;
- (ii) Updating the wider enterprise network regarding new service delivery mechanisms and developing partnerships within that network to ensure coordinated service delivery;
- (iii) Reviewing service provision in light of current provision from other stakeholders to ensure a value added service in the context of the new Local Economic Development Plan;
- (iv) To take forward Enterprise Development as a core service of the World Trade Centre virtual network.

Communications Update

To date the following progress has been made on the above points:

- (i) Research is currently underway with regard to identifying the best mechanism for delivering enterprise services into Council. A press release or any other form of formal communication regarding the value of the shop will take place in the New Year to coincide with the First Stop Shop's own plans to announce its closure. It is intended that Belfast City Council will liaise closely with the First Stop Shop regarding this;

- (ii) In terms of updating the wider enterprise network, a number of meetings have been held with Invest NI, the First Stop Shop and BIFHE as the strategic providers of enterprise support in the City. Meetings are scheduled with the Enterprise Delivery Bodies such as the Local Enterprise Agencies and Young Enterprise in the New Year.

Once all meetings have taken place with the proposed organisations, it is proposed that the mapping exercise of service provision will be completed and the gaps will be identified.

Initial Findings

Given that there is such a wide range of delivery bodies throughout the city, it is recommended that Belfast City Council should tackle enterprise provision on two fronts:-

- Strategic co-ordination at city wide level
- Operational implementation of enterprise support services not currently being provided.

Whilst there is a wide range of programmes of support, the key conclusion to date is that there is still a need for a business advice and information service to be retained.

In terms of strategic co-ordination it is envisaged that a partnership needs to be developed with key enterprise delivery bodies such as Invest NI, BIFHE, QUB and the Local Enterprise Agencies to ensure that there is co-ordinated enterprise provision throughout the city.

Regarding operational delivery, Members will recall Invest NI have agreed to open their information and advice facility to the general public on one day per week by appointment due to a direct request from Belfast City Council for Invest NI to review how they deliver enterprise support for small companies and potential entrepreneurs. Whilst this is of help, along with the Invest NI's enterprise portal there still remains a need to face to face support for individuals who may not be able to navigate through IT channels.

Members are aware that Council is currently engaged in reviewing efficiencies across the Council's services. In order to ensure that the gap in the market of co-ordination of business information and advice, it is proposed that a dedicated resource is created with the Economic Development team.

Based on the reconfiguration of services currently delivered through the First Stop Shop, there will be an efficiency saving derived from the closure of the shop. Within the First Stop Shop there are 5 staff; it is proposed that one additional post in Belfast City Council can fill the gap identified in the enterprise information provision network. This in effect is a saving of around £190k per annum based on the reduction of expenditure achieved by the cessation of First Stop Shop services.

- (iii) As indicated in point 1, the research is on-going;
- (iv) Members will be aware that at the Development (Economic Development) Sub-Committee of 30th November, 2005, approval was given to progress the development of a virtual World Trade Centre for Belfast. This would be developed under the auspices of a tri-partite relationship with Invest NI and the NI Chamber of Commerce. A budget of £100,000 was agreed to drive forward this initiative.

World Trade Centre Belfast would comprise three functions substantially integrating the services of the relevant agencies. These three functions are:-

- International Trade and Investment
- Business Development
- Marketing and Communications

The services of the First Stop Shop that are most central to the provision of a World Trade Centre are as follows:-

- Economic Intelligence
- Market Research
- Business Advice

World Trade Centre Belfast would require personnel to act as a one point of contact to service all overseas trade enquiries, provide trade information services, co-ordinate all aspects and requirements for incoming business people and trade missions. In addition, personnel would be required to co-ordinate local provision and provide an information and signposting mechanism.

Conclusion

It is recommended that Members give consideration to the development of two posts on a two year fixed term basis. Subject to evaluation by BIS with regard to the duties identified within the job description it is envisaged that the total cost per annum for both posts would be £60,000. Given that these are two activities are within the current LED plan, it is likely that 50% will be funded from the Building Sustainable Prosperity fund. Members will be aware that a budget of £100,000 has been approved for the integration of Enterprise services within the Economic Development Unit and a budget of £100,000 has already been approved for the development of the World Trade Centre budget. These two posts would be funded from within these budgetary allocations.

(iii) First Stop Shop Enterprise Update

Members will be aware that at the Development (Economic Development) Sub-Committee on 2nd June, 2004 a financial commitment was agreed of £100,000 to deliver an enterprise awareness strategy for the City. It was agreed that this campaign will be managed by the Belfast First Stop Shop and involve the assistance of relevant enterprise and business support agencies. It was agreed at Development (Economic Development) Sub Committee on 2nd June, 2004 that the activity plan is presented back to Committee prior to implementation.

The activity plan was presented at the Development (Economic Development) Sub Committee on 12th January, 2005 and Members approved a budget allocation of £25,484 for Phase I. The key activities presented included the following:

- Enterprise promotion, events and outreach
- Business networking
- Masterclass events
- Small business award scheme
- Research into the needs of small business

A summary of activities and publicity to date are enclosed in Appendix I.

The First Stop Shop is planning to continue the enterprise awareness campaign until March 2006 and assist in providing a seamless integration of activity back into Council.

Approximately £10,000 is spent to date and it is envisaged that the remaining £15,484 will be utilised by March 2006 for remaining activity. Such activities include:-

- Pre-enterprise awareness sessions
- Ideas generation sessions
- Business clinic at St Georges market
- Business networking
- Continuous press coverage

A total of £100,000 budget had been allocated to this initiative and it is recommended that members agree to absorb any remaining unspent budget back into Council to continue the enterprise activity Post March 2006.

Overall Conclusion

Incorporating these separate elements under the auspices of enterprise development in the City, the following conclusions can be made:-

- There is clearly a need for strategic co-ordination across the city in delivering enterprise activity. Whilst there are a wide range of programmes and initiatives available there is no co-ordination
- In addition, the recent announcement within the RPA recommendations clearly stated that Local Economic Development will become the remit of Local Authorities. Therefore it is imperative that Council takes this strategic approach to enterprise and gaining the buy-in of all other organisations involved to ensure there is a co-ordinated provision throughout the City
- Analysis from meetings held to date have clearly expressed the need for retaining some kind of business advice and mentoring to clients
It is recommended that members agree to the following budgetary suggestions:
 - Appointment of a World Trade Centre Officer and Enterprise Officer on a two year fixed term basis to a value of £60,000 per annum from an already approved budget
 - Members agree to absorb any of the remaining £100,000 unspent enterprise budget back into Council to continue the enterprise activity post March 2006.

(iv) Property Development – World Trade Centre

AM Developments have recently formally confirmed their decision to relinquish their share of the licence back to Belfast City Council. This means that following completion of the financial transaction as set out in the terms of the original agreement, Belfast City Council will be the full licence holder of the World Trade Centre brand. Members approval is sought to purchase the licence back at a cost of \$105,000.

Given Members support for capitalising on the degree of developer interest in establishing a World Trade Centre, it is now proposed that Expressions of Interest are publicly sought as early as possible in the New Year. Expressions will be sought for acquisition of the World Trade Centre brand for either an existing or new major commercial building in the City Centre.

Members approval is sought to undertake this exercise.

Environmental Implications

None.

Equality Considerations

None.

Capital City Strategy Reference

3.1 To drive the economic growth of Belfast.

LED Plan Reference

Promoting Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness.

Budget Implications

- (i) £60,000 per annum on a two year fixed term contract basis. The budget has already been agreed through Council
- (ii) £1,500 to hold a thank-you reception for the Board and staff of the First Stop Shop
- (iii) \$105,000 to purchase World Trade Centre licence back from AM Developments.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members:-

- (i) Note the contents of the report**
- (ii) Agree to hold a thank-you reception for the Board and staff of the First Stop Shop thanking them for their service and approve the budgetary implications of hosting an event**
- (iii) Approve the appointment of an Enterprise Officer and World Trade Centre Officer on a fixed term contract**
- (iv) Absorb any of the remaining unspent enterprise budget back into Council to continue the enterprise activity Post March 2006**
- (v) Agree to purchase World Trade Centre licence back from AM Developments**
- (vi) Agree to seek expressions of interest from the private sector to construct a World Trade Centre.**

Decision Required

To note the foregoing recommendations.”

World Trade Centre

Councillor McCarthy, at whose request the matter had been taken back, reminded the Sub-Committee that, at its meeting on 30th November, it had been informed that Invest Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry had committed themselves verbally to the project to provide a virtual World Trade Centre for Belfast. He advised the Sub-Committee that he had been informed by Invest Northern Ireland's Chief Executive that the organisation would be content to work with the Council if the development of the idea would add value and be of benefit to local businesses. However, the Chief Executive had indicated that he had not received any specific or detailed proposals from the Council regarding the virtual World Trade Centre and was therefore unable to indicate the level of support which Invest Northern Ireland could offer the Council in connection with the proposal.

Councillor McCarthy expressed concern that the Sub-Committee had agreed on 30th November to create the virtual Centre and to spend monies in connection therewith without Invest Northern Ireland being wholly committed to the Scheme, which was contrary to the information which had been provided at the meeting.

The Chairman expressed the view that Councillor McCarthy's concern was a matter of interpretation, pointing out that the information obtained by him from Invest Northern Ireland had indicated that it had expressed an interest in being involved in the project, which was no different from the advice which had been given to the Sub-Committee at its meeting on 30th November.

The Head of Economic Initiatives informed the Sub-Committee that during 2005 a number of meetings had been held between representatives of the Council and Invest Northern Ireland regarding the proposed virtual World Trade Centre and that Invest Northern Ireland had expressed an interest in being involved in the project. She pointed out that the scheme would not be proceeded with until appropriate legal agreements had been signed by the various organisations who would ultimately be involved in the proposed virtual World Trade Centre. She explained that a further meeting between representatives of the Council and Invest Northern Ireland to discuss the project had been scheduled to be held on 21st December but that this had been rearranged for later this month. The Head of Economic Initiatives indicated that she had interpreted the discussions with Invest Northern Ireland to be a verbal commitment from that organisation.

During discussion in the matter, several Members pointed out that the expenditure agreed to at the meeting on 30th November in connection with the World Trade Centre was to enable staff to be employed to ensure that the necessary proprietary work was undertaken to enable the virtual, or indeed a physical, World Trade Centre to be provided in Belfast.

After further discussion, the Sub-Committee agreed to affirm its decision of 30th November in relation to the creation of a virtual World Trade Centre. In connection with the World Trade Centre element of the additional report, the Sub-Committee approved the appointment of a World Trade Centre Officer on a fixed-term contract of two years, agreed to purchase the World Trade Centre Licence from AM Developments at a cost of \$105,000 and agreed also to seek expressions of interest from the private sector regarding the construction of a World Trade Centre in Belfast.

First Stop Shop

During a lengthy discussion on the Belfast First Stop Shop element of the report, a Member expressed the view that the Economic Development Unit should not provide a signposting service and information to persons who were considering setting up their own businesses, since a large number of other organisations provided similar facilities within Belfast. He pointed out that the Council might be seen as a competitor to those organisations and it could be detrimental to the Council's desire to undertake the strategic co-ordination of the delivery of enterprise activity across the City.

The Head of Economic Initiatives informed the Committee that the Economic Development Unit was undertaking currently research into the enterprise delivery within the City. This work had almost been completed and it had been established that no existing agency undertook in an efficient manner signposting and co-ordination services. The Council would therefore not be acting as a competitor but would be providing a valuable service.

During discussion in the matter, several Members expressed the view that, since the First Stop Shop was due to cease operations on 31st March, it would be important that absorption of the enterprise service delivery into the Council was undertaken seamlessly. It was pointed out that, if the Sub-Committee were to receive a report at its February meeting concerning the work which had been undertaken recently regarding enterprise delivery within Belfast, the Sub-Committee would be in a better position to decide whether or not it would be necessary to approve the appointment of an Enterprise Officer to undertake some of the work which had formerly been undertaken by the First Stop Shop.

After further discussion, the Sub-Committee agreed:

- (i) that a reception for the Board and staff of the Belfast First Stop Shop be held to mark the Council's appreciation for the work which the organisation had undertaken, at a cost not to exceed £1,500;
- (ii) to defer consideration of the appointment of the post of Enterprise Officer to enable further information to be obtained; and
- (iii) that, if any of the First Stop Shop's enterprise budget remained unspent on 31st March, it be transferred back to the Council to enable it to continue the Enterprise activity work from April.

Local Economic Development Plan 2006-2010

The Sub-Committee noted a progress report regarding the various aspects of the Local Economic Development Plan for the period 2006-2010 and the key projects which would be undertaken during that period and noted also that it was intended to launch the Plan, together with the associated actions plans and subsequent programme, in February or March.

Creative Industries Showcase

The Head of Economic Initiatives submitted a report in relation to the Creative Industries Showcase event. A copy of the report, with the exception of the appendices referred to therein, is set out hereunder:

"Purpose of Report

To update Members on the Creative Industries Showcase.

Background

Members will be aware that, at the Development (Economic Development) Sub-Committee of 1st June, 2005, it was agreed by Sub-Committee to support a showcase event designed to promote the wealth of expertise, innovation, economic value and investment opportunities available in Belfast's creative sector to a targeted audience in Boston and New York in 2005, 7th – 11th November, 2005.

The aim of the Creative Showcase was to increase awareness among businesses located in New York and Boston of the purchasing and networking opportunities offered by the Creative business sector in Belfast. The showcase aimed to:

- Increase the number of Belfast companies selling and working in the USA.
- Improving the business networks and partnerships with companies in Belfast and the USA.
- Presentation of Belfast's Creative Industries from local entrepreneurs in the Film, Digital Media, Fashion and Software sectors.
- Targeted appointments for those wishing to make international connections and develop new investment opportunities.
- Overview on the work of Belfast City Council in the development of the creative industries and the promotion of Belfast as a place to live, work and visit.
- Tours of selected companies and organisations wishing to share best practice examples of collaboration, clustering, education and International sales and marketing.

Creative Showcase Review

Belfast City Council received 54 applications for participation on the trip from a wide range of companies in Belfast's Creative Sector. Out of all applications returned, 10 companies were selected based on export potential, turnover and company size. Belfast City Council successfully raised a total of £15,000 from the Northern Ireland Film and Television Commission and Momentum to assist in the travel and accommodation costs for all delegates. Participating companies included:

- Banjax
- Net-Finity
- Maria Cardenas
- Irish Linen Company
- Street Monkey
- Rogue Rocket
- Can Do Interactive
- Bandigital
- Make Ltd
- Straight Forward Productions

The Chief Executive of Momentum, Ian Graham and Director of Policy for the Northern Ireland Film and Television Commission also participated on the mission.

Itinerary

The showcase itinerary was split into two distinct elements, Civic and Business. Robert M. Johnson, President of the Executive Council of New York and Friend of Belfast worked closely with Belfast City Council co-ordinating the visit including the event management, press and PR and meeting facilitation in the both New York and Boston. Robert Johnson has key contacts in the Creative sector including, media venture capitalists, Film and TV networks, software and digital media companies.

The business element of the showcase took the following format:-

Monday 7 th Nov	Boston	Showcase Event
Tuesday 8 th Nov	Boston	121 Meetings
Wednesday 9 th Nov	New York	Showcase Event
Thursday 10 th Nov	New York	121 Meetings

The Showcase event and the 121 meetings provided companies from Belfast's creative sector the opportunity to promote their businesses and develop networks with potential investors, collaborators and media buyers. Key meetings were held with a wide range of organisations including Citibank, Steiner Studios, Animania, Turbine Games and Front Row Productions.

Outcomes

The key outcomes from this showcase event included:

- 2 Networking events held in Boston - 70 delegates in attendance
- 2 Networking events held in New York - 100 delegates in attendance
- 32 leads identified and to be followed up
- UK Trade and Investment Boston have approached Belfast City Council to assist with a forthcoming trade mission to Belfast
- New York Economic Development Corporation have also approached Belfast City Council to assist with a forthcoming trade mission to Belfast
- Invest NI Boston agreement to assist with marketing of local companies through the Northern Ireland Technology Centre

- Invest NI Boston agreement to assist with provision of hot desk facilities for local companies when in Boston
- Invest NI New York agreement to assist with marketing of local companies through their Wall Street offices
- Invest NI New York agreement to assist with provision of hot desk facilities for local companies when in New York
- Over \$1 Million offered by Venture Capitalists to 2 Belfast companies
- Over \$500,000 raised by 1 Belfast company for TV series. Memorandum of Understanding agreed between Momentum and the Massachusetts Software Council to build relationships between companies in Boston and Northern Ireland
- Joint partnership contract signed with Boston company Stevens Linens and the Irish Linen Company, who are taking a new approach to the Textile Industry through the convergence of digital technology, internet marketing, design and manufacturing. All garments will be printed and made within Northern Ireland
- Invitation for 1 company to exhibit product at the Lincoln Centre, Brooklyn Museum and the Nassau County Museum of Art in 2006
- 2 web design and storyboarding jobs contracted for 2 companies
- Invitation for Belfast companies to participate in the Massachusetts Innovation and Technology Exchange Awards

Following the visit, each company completed an evaluation of the programme and key comments are as follows:-

‘The trade mission was an imaginative and bold step for Belfast City Council to take, particularly with such a small and generally inexperienced sector. Without the support of the council I would likely never have been in Boston on Banjax business and would never have made the contacts I did.

The New York trip alone was worth the time and additional expense on our part – we managed to set up a range of meetings to further our business in advance and happily this is likely to bear significant sales for the company in due course.

The side-show of being able to spend quality time with the councillors, council staff and fellow-participants was very rewarding – I now have a better understanding of the skills and aspirations of a number of very talented individuals and a better understanding of their business issues (which are very similar to my own!).

Overall this was a great success for us - it opened many doors for Banjax and introduced me to people who are likely to be very helpful/useful in the near future.’ *Banjax*

‘It has to be said that the organisation of the trip and the professionalism of those running it and taking part was exemplary.’ *Street Monkey*

‘In general terms the Showcase proved to be a very worth while endeavour by providing all of the delegates with the opportunity of exploring new areas of business.

The formal parts of the Showcase presented new opportunities for networking and making invaluable contacts but the particular success of each individual lay in their ability to set up more targeted contacts before embarking on the trip.’
Straight Forward

‘The BCC ran this event to perfection – We were treated like adults with respect and not frogmarched from event to event. The events themselves were so well organised and had the right people attending - it would have been stupid to miss them.’
Net-Finity

‘This was probably the most successful trade mission I have participated in. Organisation was first class, the quality of the US participants was high and most importantly a strong ethos of mutual support emerged amongst the NI companies that participated.’ *Momentum*

‘I thought it was well organised and run smoothly. The idea of several companies going together helps.’ *Irish Linen Company*

Detailed outputs pertaining to each company is contained within Appendix I.

Next Steps

By way of follow up to the showcase, a debriefing session was held with the participating companies on returning from the trade mission with the aim of discussing what was learnt from the event and to identify actions for moving forward with regards the clustering of the companies and business development.

The proposed Action Plan for the next twelve months is detailed below:

Action	Measurement
Creative Entrepreneurs Club	Companies leading and participating on the Creative Entrepreneurs Club
Ongoing showcasing for companies in Belfast	2-4 Showcasing events per year held in Belfast
Regular meetings arranged for participating companies	Meetings arranged once a month for showcase companies in Belfast
Secure Invest NI support for future inward and outward trade missions with agreement to assist in the identification, contacting and set up of appointments for Belfast companies with companies from the USA..	INI to support BCC activity
Facilitation of companies with contacts in Boston and New York	Regular updates and assistance for Belfast companies regards new and existing contacts in Boston and New York
Meet with Invest NI's Head of Creative and Design to encourage investment in the Creative Sector.	Invest NI to address participating companies in relation to support for trade missions and financial assistance.
Utilise the Friends of Belfast Network with regards access to Venture Capital and investment opportunities	Compile and distribute database of useful contacts with support from the FOB network.
To host an inward visit from Boston's Creative Industries	To liaise with UK Trade and Investment in Boston regards an inward trade mission in 2006/07
To develop relationships further with Invest NI in New York and Boston regards temporary office space and marketing of opportunities in Belfast.	Invest NI in the USA to actively provide assistance and support for those companies wishing to establish a presence in the USA.
To meet with NIFTC to discuss future strategy and Council involvement in the development of the film and tv sector.	To ensure representation from Belfast's creative sector in the future direction and access to finance in the NIFTC strategy.

Action	Measurement
To develop relationship with the BBC to discuss the main issues affecting local production and production spend in Belfast/Northern Ireland.	To lobby the BBC to ensure more local content is produced and finance spent within Northern Ireland. Currently 7 out of 8 productions for the local market are made in London.

The Sub-Committee will be updated with any further developments regarding the Creative Showcase in the coming months.

Civic Itinerary

In parallel to the business itinerary, the Chair and Deputy Chair also undertook a Civic Itinerary. The key organisations visited included:-

- Boston Redevelopment Authority
- World Trade Centre, Boston
- Head Friend of Belfast, Boston
- Head Friend of Belfast, New York
- World Trade Centre Association
- Kirkpatrick & Lockhart
- Lower Manhattan Development Corporation
- Codman Health Centre

A summary of the key outputs from the meeting are contained within Appendix II. There are 5 key actions pertaining to the civic visit that Members may wish to consider. These are:-

- (i) Pursue John Cullinane's Telemedicine proposal for Belfast
- (ii) Pursue Harry Grill's proposal to host a seminar on 'Doing International Business and protecting intellectual property
- (iii) Friends of Belfast Bulletin to be further developed and integrated with Competitive City with monthly issues
- (iv) Belfast City Council to consider how to make greater use of FOB networks
- (v) Belfast City Council to be more visible in New York (and Boston).

Environmental Implications

None.

Equality Considerations

None.

Capital City Strategy Reference

3.1 Leaving a Legacy.

LED Plan Reference

To support and develop business growth and competitiveness.

To capitalise on new growth sectors by creating economic conditions conducive to success.

Budgetary Implications

None.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members:

- (i) Note the contents of the report**
- (ii) To agree the activities and actions contained within the report for the business showcase**
- (iii) To agree civic recommendations:**
 - Pursue John Cullinane's Telemedicine proposal for Belfast**
 - Pursue Harry Grill's proposal to host a seminar on 'Doing International Business and protecting intellectual property**
 - Friends of Belfast Bulletin to be further developed and integrated with Competitive City with monthly issues**
 - Belfast City Council to consider how to make greater use of FOB networks**
 - Consider whether Belfast City Council wish to be more visible in New York (and Boston)**

Decision Required

To note the contents of the report and approve the proposed action plan."

The Head of Economic Initiatives drew the Sub-Committee's attention to various aspects of the report, informed the Members that the targets which had been set for the visit had been exceeded and that the Council's officers were still working with the ten companies which had participated in the trip. She pointed out that one of the key benefits arising from the event was that the companies concerned now had a more positive view of the Economic Development work which the Council was undertaking. However, it had been pointed out by the Friends of Belfast in both New York and Boston that it would be important for the Council to undertake such events on a more regular basis in order that Belfast could become more visible in both cities. She stated that, since this would have financial implications, it would be necessary for the Sub-Committee to discuss this matter on a future occasion.

During discussion in the matter, a Member expressed the view that it was important that the Council did not confine itself to New York and Boston but arranged to undertake similar visits to other areas within America, particularly those which had suffered similar economic decline as Belfast.

Following discussion, the Sub-Committee adopted the recommendations contained within the report and congratulated the staff of the Economic Development Unit who had been involved in the event.

West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces

The Sub-Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 2nd November, it had considered a report regarding the seventeen projects which the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces had submitted for funding under the Integrated Development Fund and had requested further information concerning the following projects:

- Advanced Technology and Workforce Economic Development Centre
- Conway Mill
- Social Economy Fund
- Task Force Education Initiatives

Advanced Technology and Workforce Economic Development Centre

The Economic Development Manager explained that the Development Centre was a core part of the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education's plans for the Springvale Campus. It would be a state-of-the-art centre equipped with the latest equipment and technology which would be accessible by the community, businesses and the College's students. The equipment involved would be used in such areas of work as video capture, web design, animation, environmental engineering, composite facilities and maintenance engineering. In addition, the Development Centre would have a Multi-media Training Academy and a Software Centre of Excellence. It would provide also incubation support for social economy projects and pre-employment, employability, in-service and enterprise training.

Conway Mill

The Sub-Committee was informed that the State Aid issue which had been causing a delay in the drawing-down of funds for the redevelopment of Conway Mill had now been resolved. This would now enable the project to be progressed.

Social Economy Fund

The Economic Development Manager indicated that the purpose of the Fund was to provide support and financial assistance for innovative social economy projects in the West Belfast/Greater Shankill areas which could enable unemployed persons who faced particular difficulties in accessing normal employment to be part of social economy companies. It would involve a two-year pilot programme and support would be provided for business plan development and start-up and working capital, including salaries and wages.

She reported that the Consultants which had been appointed to carry out an economic appraisal of the proposal had recommended that the Social Economy Fund would be an additional element to the Social Economy Programme being undertaken by Invest Northern Ireland and would provide additional support to participants from West Belfast and Greater Shankill. The project would be moving to the full economic appraisal phase in the near future.

Task Force Education Initiative

The Sub-Committee was informed that both the Belfast and the South Eastern Education and Library Boards had submitted proposals under this Initiative.

The overarching purpose of the Belfast Education and Library Board's proposal was to improve the life chances of children and young people, demonstrated by increased achievement levels, a commitment to life long learning and an increase in employability. The Integrated Development Fund monies would be used to support the delivery of a work programme which would focus on educational achievement and employability and would be delivered through:

- (i) Learner Support - a multi-agency resource which would support schools to address behavioural problems, suspensions and expulsions;
- (ii) Early Years Interventions - the consolidation and strengthening of early years support to improve life chances, educational achievement and employment opportunities;
- (iii) Health and Wellbeing - a range of measures which would target specific health concerns of children and young people, including those who were vulnerable and at risk; and
- (iv) Parent Support and Participation - an expansion and development of methods to support the participation of parents in their children's education.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board's proposal focused on the Colin area of the City and would tackle matters such as inequality, social exclusion, poor educational outcomes and barriers to employment. It was intended that the funding would support the delivery of the work programme by focusing on educational achievement and employability and would be delivered through:

- (i) Counselling Provision - a school-based counselling service which would be provided by professionally trained non-school personnel;
- (ii) Extended Schools - a range of measures which would incorporate good quality childcare, healthy eating and which would provide opportunities for parents to access education and training;
- (iii) Early Years Interventions – the consolidating and strengthening early years support;

- (iv) Parent Support and Participation - expanding and developing methods of supporting parents' participation in their children's education;
- (v) Enhanced support to counter Speech and Language and other problems - improved access to education psychology and speech and language therapy; and
- (vi) Healthy Living and Outdoor Education - a range of healthy living and outdoor education initiatives targeted at young people.

The Economic Development Manager informed the Members that the Task Force Education Initiative was being sponsored by the Department of Education and that an economic appraisal regarding the project was underway.

The Sub-Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Employability Initiatives

The Sub-Committee considered the undernoted report regarding employability initiatives within the City:

"Purpose of Report"

The purpose of the report is to inform and update members of the employability initiatives within the City.

Background

Members are asked to note that as part of Belfast City Council's Local Economic Development Plan a key priority under the theme 'Driving Economic Change' is to identify opportunities for further Labour Market Intermediary Initiatives and to implement these in other parts of the city.

Members will be aware that Belfast GEMS was initiated by Belfast City Council in 1999 and was set up to reduce the incidence of long term unemployment in South and East Belfast. Since this time, Council has continued to play a lead role in its development. It has had significant successes to date in providing sustainable employment outcomes and improving access to training.

Since its inception, the project has created a modular service, which can flexibly and individually meet the needs of those facing a range of barriers to employment. The project has successfully brought together a range of good practice and a number of employers have started to change their attitude to long-term unemployment and are increasingly recognising the value of attracting such employees.

At the Development (Economic Development) Sub-Committee of Wednesday 3rd March, 2004 Members were advised of a Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) tender to identify and support labour market intermediary (LMI) projects in North, South, and East Belfast. After a competitive tendering process three organisations were informed in March 2004 that they had been successful in their tender submission for the parliamentary constituencies of North, South and East Belfast. They were as follows:

- North - North Belfast Employment Centre in partnership with the Ashton Centre
- South – Belfast GEMS
- East – Stepping Stones

The LMI contracts commenced on 1st April, 2004 and the pilot phase runs for a period of two years to 31st March, 2006.

West Belfast and the Greater Shankill are funded by DEL under the targeted initiatives policy.

Services currently provided under the LMI contract

The LMI contract currently being funded by DEL provides a client-focused and mentoring service not only to assist clients into employment, but also to help them make progress where employment is not an immediate option. The clients serviced through this programme are those furthest removed from the labour market.

The LMI providers are required to work in partnership with Jobs and Benefits Offices/Job Centres, the voluntary and community services and others to address the specific needs of those furthest from the labour market.

Each LMI contract states that with regard to employer liaison the activity will be focused on supporting the client priority groups through the provision of an advice and mentoring service.

Gaps that exist in the provision of an LMI Contract

DEL recognised that the LMI contract did not go 'far enough' in its liaison role with employers and therefore encouraged LMI delivery agents to seek alternative sources of funding to compliment the LMI provision.

Belfast City Council agreed to fund each LMI an employer liaison service. Their role included the following:

- Initiating and developing relationships with local employers
- Marketing the service to local employers and gaining their commitment to its ethos and objectives
- Providing advice to employers in relation to the artificial barriers to the long term unemployed caused by current recruitment procedures
- Screening and matching LMI participants to suitable employment opportunities
- Providing interview facilities and administrative support and connecting LMI participants with employer contact
- Providing on-going employee/employer mentoring support to assist job-retention.

Current Provision

East Belfast

In 2004 Belfast City Council entered into an agreement with Stepping Stones in East Belfast to develop a specialised employer interface with the aim of removing many of the artificial and inappropriate barriers to those furthest removed from the labour market. Stepping Stones developed an Employer Liaison Team to work with local employers to increase access to employment opportunities for local people.

Belfast City Council is providing salary costs for two Employer Liaison posts and associated office and running costs from October 2004 – September 2006. The service was launched in August 2005.

Outputs:

- Staff Provision: 2 employment consultants
- Number of employers engaged with: 122
- Number of employers actively engaging with: 59
- Number of people into jobs through the LMI contract: 370
- Number of people into jobs directly through the employer - liaison work: 76

North Belfast

Belfast City Council in partnership with North Belfast Partnership Board has established LEAP, an employability intervention in the North of the City which is working with local employers to increase access to employment opportunities, particularly for those experiencing disadvantage. LEAP is similar to the employer liaison services operating in other parts of the city and is helping to provide an integrated and co-ordinated service

which builds on partnerships between statutory agencies, local voluntary and community organisations and employers. In addition LEAP brings together all elements of an employability package, tailored to individual needs and makes use of local outreach opportunities to engage all of those people available to the labour market.

The main purpose of LEAP is to intervene in the labour market at point of labour market failure, both to improve labour supply and to activate or stimulate demand for labour. LEAP aims to:

- Enhance outreach work carried out by the Ashton Centre and North Belfast Employment Centre in order to reach and access those furthest from the labour market
- Support LMI job seekers through enhanced job placement support and counselling
- Undertake extensive marketing and promotion of the service
- Provide bespoke support packages which assist local people into employment
- Facilitate the development of an Employability Strategy and Action Plan for North Belfast

Belfast City Council is providing salary costs for an Employability Consultant and associated office and running costs from October 2004 – September 2006. The service was formally launched in June 2005.

Outputs:

- Staff Provision: 2 (1 employer liaison officer based in Ashton Centre; 1 employability consultant in North Belfast Employment Centre)
- Number of employers engaged with: 60
- Number of employers actively engaging with: 2
- Number of people into jobs through the LMI contract: 113
- Number of people into jobs directly through the employer liaison work: 3

Delays in securing Urban II funding and the recruitment of two members of staff, have resulted in employer engagement in 2005 being limited. Levels of employer engagement in 2006 are expected to rise significantly.

Belfast GEMS is also working with LEAP in delivering a pre-employment programme in Woolworths. Outputs from the Woolworths pre-employment course are outlined below:

- 13 clients interviewed
- 4 job offers
- 3 job offers taken up by LEAP clients (all three due to go permanent from their temporary contracts after the New Year)
- 8 LEAP clients put on a holding list by Woolworths for their second round of recruitment in 2006.

LEAP will become an important initiative for North Belfast as the North Foreshore develops and will provide the access for local people to get jobs in the business park.

South Belfast

Belfast GEMS is providing salary costs to cover the costs of 2 Employer Liaison officers and associated office costs for the period April 2005-March 2006. A key focus of the work of Belfast GEMS is to promote its service to employers within the Gasworks and Laganside sites.

Outputs:

- Staff Provision: 2 Employer Liaison officers
- Number of employers engaged with: 270 employers on their database
- Number of employers actively engaging with: 53
- Number of people into jobs through the LMI contract: 180
- Number of people into jobs directly through the employer liaison work: 101

At present, Belfast GEMS funding package will be complete by March 2006 which is six months earlier than both LEAP and Stepping Stones. It is requested that members consider extending the contract to September 2006.

West Belfast

Council is represented on the Employment Services Board which oversees the Department of Employment and Learning's Targeted Initiatives Programme in the West Belfast and Greater Shankill area. The Employment Services Board (ESB) oversees the Job Assist Centres and Transitional Employment Programme. Job Assist Centres offer a community based mentoring and support

service to those furthest removed from the Labour Market. They complement the work of Jobs and Benefits offices but deal with a different target group, especially non JSA clients. The transitional employment programmes provides wage based training and some key outputs from the programme include:

396 – Participated on transitional employment programmes
246 – Progressions
50% - Moving into sustained employment

Job Assist Centre:

1209 Caseloads to date
1528 Referrals to specialised training
124 Progressed to employment
73 Progressed into sustained employment
3 Into self-employment

Labour Market Intermediary Provision – Post March 2006

The current LMI contract is currently being evaluated and it is envisaged the evaluation will be complete in January 2006. This evaluation will look at the existing provision in the City and identify the best way forward for future initiatives. It is anticipated that the LMI will be re-tendered. However, if there are any delays with the evaluation then it is likely that the current LMI contracts may be extended before a re-tendering exercise takes place. Officers are scheduled to meet with the Department for Employment and Learning to discuss this further.

Belfast City Council: Future Strategic Approach to Employability

Belfast City Council has no clear remit for employability as it currently sits within the remit of the Department for Employment and Learning. However, given its economic significance this has become a major priority within the current Local Economic Development plan and it is anticipated to play a role in the new plan for 2006 - 2010. Belfast does not have an employability strategy for the city and to date it has been dealt with via a range of bodies delivering various employability initiatives and programmes or via an ad hoc partnership approach.

Given the current funding climate facing many organisations delivering employability initiatives including Belfast City Council, and the issues of economic inactivity that continue to blight areas of the city, there is now an imperative to adopt a citywide co-ordinated approach to address employability. This would require strategic engagement with key bodies such as D.E.L and BIFHE in order to drive this forward. Belfast City Council with its convening authority could be best placed to drive this forward.

At present, one of the key priorities for Belfast City Council to address is the issue of employer liaison which is the current funding package for the three LMI's. Given the current structures already in place and the employer liaison service in each part of the city, there is a greater need for city wide strategic engagement between these bodies to avoid duplication and to alleviate employer fatigue. Members will be aware that the Economic Development Unit are moving into a new strategy post March 2006 and the existing budget is being reduced by 50% due to the loss of European funding. Hence it is not feasible for Belfast City Council to fund the 3 LMI's to the extent of existing funding; therefore a wider strategic approach is required.

Currently employers are being approached by numerous employer liaison officers offering the same service. Belfast City Council can provide the leadership to get unemployed and economically inactive Belfast citizens back into work through a city-wide approach to employer engagement. This would require the three LMI's to work together to address this issue. Hence the following proposed roles are put forward for Belfast City Council to action:

- Bring all LMI organisations in line until September 2006 with regard to Belfast City Council funding. This would require additional funding of £32,500 to Belfast GEMS for the period April 06 – September 06
- Engage with DEL and BIFHE to identify their role in employability provision
- Work with the LMI's to encourage them to present joined up proposals for employer support
- Commence work in co-ordinating a strategic approach to employability in the City with Belfast City Council acting as a broker in bringing key organisations together in a city wide approach.

Environmental Implications

None.

Equality Considerations

None.

Capital City Strategy Reference

To address inequality and promote equality and equity within neighbourhoods.

LED Plan Reference

To bring jobs to people and people to jobs.

Budgetary Implications

£32,500 to extend the Belfast GEMS contract until September, 2006

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members:

- (i) Note the content of the report
- (ii) Approve the proposals identified within the report:
 - Bring all LMI organisations in line until September 2006 with regard to Belfast City Council funding. This would require additional funding of £32,500 to Belfast GEMS for the period April 06 – September 06
 - Engage with DEL and BIFHE to identify their role in employability provision
 - Work with the LMI's to encourage them to present joined up proposals for employer support
 - Commence work in co-ordinating a strategic approach to employability in the City with Belfast City Council acting as a broker in bringing key organisations together in a city wide approach."

In answer to a Member's question, the Economic Development Manager informed the Sub-Committee that the initiatives would improve the literacy and numeracy of school leavers, which should result in them having a better opportunity of gaining employment. She pointed out also that the Council, at the request of AM Developments, was co-ordinating the employment opportunities within the Victoria Square development.

Following discussion in the matter, during which the Sub-Committee expressed its satisfaction at the success of the employability initiatives and pointed out that the Department should publicise this work, the Sub-Committee adopted the recommendations contained within the foregoing report. In addition, the Sub-Committee requested that it receive at a future meeting a report regarding employability initiatives in the City centre.