

Brexit Committee

Thursday, 10th January, 2018

MEETING OF BREXIT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson);
Aldermen Kingston, McGimpsey and Spence;
Councillors, Attwood, Beattie, Campbell, Canavan,
Carson, Dorrian, Dudgeon, Hutchinson, Lyons, McAteer,
O'Hara and Pankhurst.

In attendance: Mr. N. Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Business, Research and Development
Officer;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Miss C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillor Reynolds.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 6th December were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 7th January.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Presentations

InterTradelreland – Brexit and Cross-Border Trade

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. A. Gough (Designated Accounting Officer and Director of Strategy and Policy) and Mr. G. Gilmore (Brexit Manager) representing InterTradelreland.

Mr. Gough indicated that the purpose of the presentation was to update the Committee on the development and importance of cross-border trade and the significance of Brexit upon businesses. He informed the Committee that InterTradelreland's advice to small businesses since the referendum had been that the trading relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would change after Brexit and that they needed to be prepared.

Mr. Gough then provided the Members with a presentation on Brexit and cross-border trade and informed the Committee that cross-border trade had been growing

significantly since 2008 and was particularly important for small businesses. He reported that cross-border traders had higher productivity than businesses not involved with cross-border trade, that they had higher turnover and employed more people.

Mr Gilmore informed the Committee that InterTradeIreland had formed a Brexit Advisory Service and that, over 12 events, around 6500 companies had received advice from a range of government agencies on where to begin the planning process. He advised the Members that there was a free online tariff checker where companies were able to check what tariffs would be applied to their goods and measure what impact that would have on their businesses.

Mr Gilmore also advised members of the Start to Plan Voucher, which was a grant of up to £2000 to put companies in touch with groups of mentors across a range of services from supply chain, finance, tax and customs. He advised that a second voucher scheme, Implementation Vouchers, and a virtual learning environment had been created where companies would be able to access an online service to obtain particular knowledge and skills regarding customs, taxations, people, supply chains and any other of the emerging issues regarding Brexit.

In response to a number of questions from the Members, Mr. Gough agreed that the presentation would be made available and circulated to the Committee.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Gough and Mr. Gilmore for their presentation.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Invest Northern Ireland

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. D. Durkan (Executive Director, Strategy) and Mrs. M. McGuigan (Strategic Relationship Manager) representing Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI).

Mr. Durkan advised the Committee that Invest NI, working as an economic development agency, had developed a Brexit Customer Engagement Process and an e-zine had been sent out to local government representatives with an overview of the process.

He informed the Committee that Invest NI had created an online assessment tool for businesses which covered the following key areas:

- Business Strategy;
- Operations;
- Innovation;
- Sales and Marketing;
- Finance;
- People and Management; and
- Legal and Regulatory.

He advised that, on completion of the online assessment, businesses would receive an online report with tailored advice.

Mr. Durkan further explained that Invest NI had delivered Get Ready for Brexit Regional Clinics in Newry, Ballymena, Cookstown and Belfast and that 85 businesses had attended the Belfast clinic. He said that specialist advisors had been appointed in relation to:

- Strategic Sourcing;
- Finance and Currency;
- Human Resources;
- Regulations and Standards;
- Intellectual Property;
- Transport and Logistics; and
- Customs, Tariffs and Taxation.

He added that this advice was readily available to businesses as and when they needed advice and guidance.

The Committee was informed that Invest NI had commissioned Grant Thornton to produce a piece of work in terms of the impact of a no-deal Brexit on priority sectors including agri-food, construction, leisure, tourism, life sciences and digital, Mr. Durkan outlined that this was to ensure contingency plans were in place.

In response to a Member's question regarding pursuing opportunities before disruption from a no-deal Brexit occurred, Mr. Durkan informed the Committee that Invest NI had opened up ten more global offices over the previous 18 months and many of those offices had desk space available for businesses to go and position themselves within the international markets. He added that Invest NI had substantially increased its resources in trade and foreign direct investment over the previous two years and increased its trade missions, exhibitions and conferences.

A Member asked Mr. Durkan to comment on the volatility of currency and what impact it's having on businesses. Mr. Durkan explained that currency fluctuations in some instances can be beneficial to some businesses while at the same time, detrimental to others, for example, the tourism industry can benefit with a drop in the value of the pound, thereby Belfast and Northern Ireland become a more lucrative and attractive destination whereas a business that imported raw materials for manufacture would be negatively affected by this fluctuation.

After further discussion, the Chairperson thanked Mr. Durkan and Mrs. McGuigan for their attendance and he retired from the meeting.

Update on Delegation to Brussels

(Mrs. C. Sullivan, Business, Research and Development Officer, attended in connection with this item)

The Members were reminded that, at the meeting of Council on 3rd December, the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 23rd November, under

the heading “Visit to Brussels”, was amended to provide that the visit take place to Brussels, as originally planned, but that it be postponed until the New Year.

The Business, Research and Development Officer circulated an itinerary and informed Members that the delegation would take place from 28th to 30th January, 2019. She added that following discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive Office to identify a schedule of meetings that would meet the objectives of the visit, a series of meeting requests had been forwarded to a number of UK, Irish and European officials who were based in Brussels.

The Committee noted the update.

EU Settlement Scheme – Communications Update

The Committee considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the EU Settlement Scheme.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note the update provided.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 Members are reminded that a report was brought to the December meeting of this Committee providing information on the EU Settlement Scheme and it was agreed:

‘that Belfast City Council would facilitate an information day in the City Hall to provide advice and guidance on the EU Settlement Scheme to EU citizens who reside in Belfast, and that officers would work with the Migrant Forum to support communication with those affected by the scheme’.

3.2 Members are asked to note that the following activities will be undertaken in relation to the dissemination of information about the Scheme:

- An Information Session will be held in the City Hall that will feature information stalls and presentations about the scheme. Local organisations who successfully obtain funding from the Home Office funding scheme will be invited to provide the information at the session and a representative from the Home Office will also be invited.**

- That officers will start to distribute information about the scheme and the toolkits through existing channels to the business, and community & voluntary sectors.
- That an article signposting residents to the Home Office information is included in the March edition of City Matters.
- That information will be distributed to staff through the Council's internal communication channels.

3.3 As the Home Office is making funding available, it is suggested that any local organisations that receive the funding should be invited to run/host the session in the City Hall and the Home Office should also be invited. They will be best placed to answer any questions that may arise. BCC Officers do not have the technical knowledge of the scheme and will not be aware of any changes that may be being considered as the Brexit situation evolves. The Home Office run regular teleconferences with Local Authorities across the UK to update them on the scheme and the next call is planned in mid-January. An update on the information provided by the Home Office will be brought to the Committee.

3.4 The exact format of the session would be agreed with the other stakeholders but is likely to involve a number of permanent information drop in stalls in the Banquet Hall to be supplemented by a presentation and questions session that will repeat hourly through the day. It is proposed that the stalls and presentations will be delivered by local organisations that receive funding from the Home Office and the Home Office. Tea and coffee will also be provided for attendees

3.5 In relation to the timing of the holding of the workshop it is proposed that it takes place in late February/early March. At this point the Home Office will have distributed its funding and we would anticipate having the date on which the Scheme is fully opened.

3.6 Officers will also take action to raise awareness of the scheme through other channels. Information about the Employer Toolkit will be sent to the three city Bids, BCCM and other representative groups with the suggestion that they pass this onto their members. Information about the scheme and the toolkits will also be passed onto our Advice Service provides, community centres and the main community and voluntary sectors that we work with. An article will be placed in the next edition of City Matters (issued in March) alerting residents to the existence of the scheme and directing them to the Home Office website to obtain the most up to date information relating to it.

3.7 Financial & Resource Implications

To deliver the Information Session will require the use of the City Hall for one day and a small budget to cover tea and coffee which will come out of existing resources.

3.8 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no implications relating to this report.

Noted.

Chairperson