

Development Committee

Tuesday, 18th December, 2012

SPECIAL MEETING OF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Stalford (Chairman);
Alderman Ekin; and
Councillors Austin, Hendron, Hussey, Keenan,
Kelly, Kingston, Kyle, Mac Giolla Mhín, Mallon,
Maskey, McVeigh, Ó Donnghaile,
Ó Muilleoir, Reynolds, Spence and Webb.

In attendance: Mr. J. McGrillen, Director of Development;
Ms. S. McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives
and International Development; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor McKee.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

International Marketing Framework - NI Connections

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

1.1 Following the Council’s adoption of the Investment Programme, work is under way to deliver one of the key actions; to develop an International Marketing framework to support attracting tourism, foreign direct investment, commercial investment, European funding and talent.

1.2 Members will remember from the Committee report in September 2012 a set of agreed key objectives for implementing an International Marketing framework:

- **To secure buy-in and agreement of a coordinated approach to international relations and integrated city marketing across all key stakeholders in Belfast.**
- **To develop a city narrative agreed by all key stakeholders.**

- To refresh the Belfast brand, ensuring it reflects the current values and narrative of Belfast and has city-wide ownership.
- To agree the key target audiences, messages and methodologies for an integrated approach to marketing.
- To agree the optimum vehicle for coordinated international marketing in agreement with the city's key stakeholders.
- To agree the key global destinations for an integrated approach to international marketing with all key stakeholders in Belfast.

1.3 Since our last report we have engaged nearly 20 key city stakeholders through meetings, surveys and an official breakfast symposium hosted by the Lord Mayor. All of the stakeholders are very keen to be involved and to shape Belfast's International Marketing framework. A representative from N Ireland Connections was at this symposium and she invited Belfast City Council and other stakeholders to officially join NI Connections (NIC) organisation.

2 Key Issues

2.1 NI Connections is a recently established organisation by Minister Foster with the aim of developing and growing the support of people with a connection to Northern Ireland by birth, family, education or business. It is a not-for-profit public/private organisation which has been established to make use of Invest NI's systems but to act fully independent and be managed by its governing Council via a supervisory board made up of sponsors and subscribers.

2.2 The organisation's objectives are to promote:

- means for improved collaboration of diaspora consumer organisations,
- methods to engage the strategic diaspora,
- strategies to unlock the cultural diaspora market, and
- mechanisms to support and remain connected with the recent diaspora.

2.3 Belfast City Council is invited to act as a sponsor at an annual cost of £30,000 for a period of three years, after which a review will be undertaken. The Council would be given a place on the NIC Board to guide the strategic direction of the organisation.

- 2.4 Membership of NI Connections will allow Council the following benefits:
- Strategic alliances with other key international stakeholders in the city
 - An opportunity to develop a 'Belfast ask' list for NI diaspora
 - Developing lucrative links with NI diaspora
 - Marketing of the Council's information and stories to the NI diaspora.
 - Participation in NIC events throughout the world.
 - Cooperation of NIC Council at the council's events.
 - Leverage of the Council's investment in diaspora relationships and opportunity to build on the synergies that exist with others in NI.
- 2.5 This is an opportunity for the Council to set the strategic direction of NIC and to engage with a wider diaspora with other NI organisations and to leverage their contacts' relationships and good will. NI Connections can provide the umbrella brand and with Belfast establishing 'Belfast Connections' as part of the overall strategic approach of the Belfast's International Marketing Framework.
- 2.6 NIC has already signed up as full sponsors (contributing £30K) N Ireland Tourist Board and Invest NI will soon include Tourism Ireland and Derry City Council. In addition, British Visitor and Convention Bureau, Belfast Harbour, Belfast City Airport and British Council are in negotiation to sign up as members only (contributing £6K). Negotiations are also in place with University of Ulster, Queen's University, Belfast Met and Titanic Quarter to join too. Full sponsorship would also allow the Council direct access to the key stakeholders in the city. NIC will also engage with general diaspora groups such as Ireland funds, ITLG and International Irish Business Network. In addition NIC will provide us with links to the NI Executive and its organisations in the US and Brussels.
- 2.7 Actively participating in NI Connections is only one action within the Belfast's International Marketing Framework and would provide us with the effective tool in marketing the city internationally and utilising NI and Belfast Diaspora across the world.

3 Resource Implications

- 3.1 It is estimated that the sponsorship of NI Connections would cost up to £30,000 and would be paid annually for the period of three years.

This would come out of the Development Department's International Marketing Framework budget. It will also be required for a Council officer to sit and attend the quarterly meetings of the NIC Board.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 Members are asked to:

- agree that the Council becomes one of the sponsors of the NI Connections and to participate on the NIC Board"

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Tourism Ireland Limited and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1 Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 At Development Committee on 20 November 2012, Members considered a report on The Gathering and agreed to invite presentations from Tourism Ireland and Northern Ireland Tourist Board to understand how Belfast would maximise this and other emerging tourism opportunities in 2013 and beyond.
- 1.2 NITB is a non-departmental public body of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It is responsible for the development of tourism and the marketing of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination to domestic tourists, from within Northern Ireland, and to visitors from the Republic of Ireland.
- 1.3 NITB manages the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) which will provide financial support for the Belfast Welcome Centre relocation (£747,000) and the Waterfront Hall extension (£2million). NITB operates the Tourism Events Fund (two streams to support International events and National events) which supported Belfast to attract MTV European Music Awards in 2011 and the Titanic Festival in 2012. Council's application for the Maritime Festival in 2013 is still being assessed. NITB also has a Product Development team which liaises closely with Council's Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit to support product related initiatives such as Belfast Music Week and Belfast Restaurant Week.

- 1.4 NITB currently provides direct support to Belfast via a Service Level Agreement with Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau worth £416,500.
- 1.5 Tourism Ireland was established under the framework of the Belfast Agreement of Good Friday 1998. It is jointly funded by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive on a two to one ratio, and operates under the auspices of the North/South Ministerial Council through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland and the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport in the South.
- 1.6 Tourism Ireland employs 160 people in key source markets, such as Great Britain, USA and Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Austria, Switzerland and Australia. Tourism Ireland also has offices in Coleraine and Dublin – and has now extended its reach to include emerging tourist markets, such as Japan, South Africa, New Zealand, China, India, Poland, Asia and the Middle East.
- 1.7 Tourism Ireland invests significantly in joint marketing initiatives with Belfast e.g. in 2012, Tourism Ireland contributed £116,000 to BVCB for joint carrier campaigns and in October, Tourism Ireland supported Council to stage a launch of Belfast Music Week in London.
- 1.8 BVCB promotes Belfast as a tourism destination and delivers visitor servicing activity through the Belfast Welcome Centre and two airport tourist information centres. Council recognises BVCB as the preferred conduit for promoting the city to the short break, cruise and business tourism markets and contributes £1.8million towards BVCB per annum. They are currently preparing their Business Plan for 2013/14 and due to present to Development Committee in February 2013.

2 **Key Issues**

- 2.1** In 2011, the Belfast Tourism Monitor reported that there were 1.58 million overnight trips to Belfast. The value of direct tourism spend in Belfast was estimated at £401 million of which out of state tourists contributed £215 million. In terms of overnight visitors, Northern Ireland market represented 27% of total nights spent in the city; Republic of Ireland – 38% and Great Britain – 27%. Overall these 3 markets generate 92% of overnight visits to Belfast.
- 2.2** During 2011 and 2012 a number of key research projects were completed on the ROI, NI and GB markets recognising that they were failing to realise their full potential and only if this was addressed, would Northern Ireland fulfil the targets set within the Programme for Government; to grow visitor numbers to 4.2 million and tourist revenue to £676 million by December 2014.
- 2.3** NITB has summarised the findings of this research within the attached report, Northern Ireland Tourism Priorities for Growth October 2012
- 2.4** In summary, this report highlights that there are a number of ‘best prospect’ consumer segments requiring dedicated communication channels. These are highlighted in Table 1 below.
- 2.5** The approach to targeting these segments is to develop and promote ‘experiences’. Building on the work completed through the development of the signature projects, NITB is proposing ‘signature experiences’ supported by clusters of similar product and services. The key experiences are identified in Table 2 and the relevance to Belfast highlighted in bold.
- 2.6** Both Tourism Ireland and NITB spend significant budgets on promoting Northern Ireland in the NI, ROI and GB markets. This reached new heights in 2012 with the Northern Ireland - Our Time, Our Place campaign. It is clear from the above research that Belfast will continue to be a key driver to target these ‘best prospect’ markets. Given Council’s investment into marketing Belfast via BVCB, it is crucial that NITB, Tourism Ireland, Belfast City Council and BVCB’s marketing activity is aligned.

- 2.7 To date Council has an agreed Tourism Framework 2010–2014 with NITB which is monitored by the Belfast Tourism Forum. Both Tourism Ireland and NITB sit on this Forum. This works well to align infrastructure and key event led initiatives such as 2012, however there is a risk that given the prominence of the Belfast experience in the segmentation results, there could be duplication around marketing and promotion which needs further attention.
- 2.9 A significant development within the attached research is the prominence of younger markets; ‘social energisers’ and ‘young and lively’. Belfast and Dublin will be the main attractors for these markets and the report highlights the importance of social media. BVCB must become a leader in this field, underpinning Council’s strategic investment in the urban broadband project.
- 2.10 Members are reminded that Council is leading on the development of Local Tourism Destinations across the city. To date we have developed 5 draft local action plans for Cathedral Quarter, Gaeltacht Quarter, Queen’s Quarter and Lisburn Road and Shankill Quarter and a further plan is being progressed in the East. These plans highlight the infrastructure, product and service requirements for each destination. Officers plan to finalise these plans and hold a workshop for these areas to identifying city wide signature experiences which reflect the best prospect markets. A report will be tabled for Development Committee in early 2013.
- 2.11 Finally, Members wished to explore opportunities for promoting Belfast as part of The Gathering initiative. Both Tourism Ireland and NITB have been advised to identify opportunities for Belfast within their presentations to Committee.

3 Resource Implications

- 3.1 There are no immediate resource implications, however the work of Tourism Ireland and NITB may inform how BVCB’s budget is allocated, including Council’s contribution of £1.8 million.

5 Recommendations

5.1 **Members are requested to note the contents of this report.”**

It was reported that Mr. A. Irwin, Head of Northern Ireland, representing Tourism Ireland Limited, Mr. A. Clarke, Chief Executive, and Ms. S. McCullough, Director of Marketing and Events, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, together with Mr. G. Lennon, Chief Executive, Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr Irwin outlined the aims and objectives of Tourism Ireland and explained how it sought to promote Northern Ireland internationally to increase visitor numbers. He explained that Tourism Ireland delivered marketing initiatives throughout the world and worked in conjunction with a range of industry partners, particularly Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, to influence product development and to address the evolving needs of tourists within the world market. He outlined also the role of that organisation in the promotion of events associated with ‘The Gathering’ initiative which, he stated, sought to attract significant additional tourists to the island of Ireland in 2013.

Mr. Clarke and Ms. McCullough proceeded to outline the aims and objectives of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and explained how its role was distinct from Tourism Ireland. Ms. McCullough pointed out that the island of Ireland had experienced a significant decline in visitor numbers from Great Britain over the past five years. She added that this had impacted particularly on the industry in Northern Ireland and that future forecasts had suggested that any recovery in this market would be slow. She indicated that there existed a number of barriers which hindered tourism development in Northern Ireland, such as concerns over safety and security, and she pointed out that there existed a need to focus on immediate growth opportunities and innovative product development in 2013 and 2014.

During discussion, a Member suggested that the future marketing of the City, on an international basis, could be re-examined with a view to establishing a formal memorandum of understanding which would define clearly the roles and responsibilities of each of the organisations involved in the promotion and marketing of Belfast. Such a memorandum, it was suggested, would establish clear demarcation lines and help address any perceived duplication of service which existed in this regard.

Mr. Clarke indicated that the Tourist Board would be content to explore the feasibility of establishing such a memorandum of understanding with all of the partners involved in the promotion of the City. He agreed that the promotion of Belfast on a collective basis, where each organisation was aware of its particular role and responsibility, would provide greater long-term benefits in terms of visitor numbers and business tourism.

The Chairman (Alderman Stalford) thanked the representatives of the various organisations for attending and they retired from the meeting.

(The Deputy Chairman (Councillor Ó Muilleoir) in the Chair.)

The Director outlined a range of options which the Committee might consider in respect of the Council's future relationship with the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau. He reminded the Members that the Bureau would be attending the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 19th February at which it would present its business plan for 2013/2014. He suggested that, prior to that meeting, it would be beneficial for officers from within the Department to work with the Bureau with a view to submitting an agreed plan for the Committee's consideration. This, he pointed out, would enable the Council to assure itself that any contribution made to the Bureau in 2013/2014 would be utilised in accordance with the strategy, as set out earlier in the meeting, thus ensuring that the any arrangements entered into would be based on clear and measurable outcomes.

Members concurred with the comments of the Director and the point was made that, within the context of the information provided in respect of the significant drop in visitor numbers to Northern Ireland, it would be prudent for the Council to ensure that there were clear and definable targets through which it could measure the performance of the Bureau. As such, it was pointed out, the Council's future relationship with the Bureau could be addressed within the context of an over-arching memorandum of understanding which would determine the future roles of all organisations involved in the development and promotion of tourism in Belfast.

The Committee noted the information provided and agreed that officers would undertake discussions with a range of organisations regarding the formulation of a memorandum of understanding for the future development and promotion of the City as a tourist destination. In addition, it was agreed that Council officers would engage with the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau with a view to agreeing a plan which would be submitted to the Committee for consideration at its meeting scheduled for 19th February.

Chairman