



Subject:	Update on work of Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor
Date:	5 April 2023
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a progress update on the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) and the draft action plan for the partnership.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the contents of this report and progress to date to develop the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor partnership.

3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>At its meeting on 11 August 2022, members received an update on progress to support the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor including work on the strategy and action plan. Since that meeting, the strategy has now been completed and agreed by all DBEC partners. It articulates a vision to sustainable economic growth across the region, identifying areas of focus for the partnership to address future opportunities and seeking to address any gaps in existing provision.</p>
3.2	<p>The vision of the strategy is to become a leading economic corridor in Europe, achieving sustainable growth through collaborative R&D, a highly skilled workforce and enabling infrastructure. This includes an ambition to be world renowned as a major international centre in growth sectors such as Professional Services, Advanced Manufacturing, ICT and Life and Health Sciences.</p>
3.3	<p>The strategy articulates a number of strategic objectives for the partnership, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase skills and training to meet the labour requirements of the region, building on and expanding the existing workforce • Advocate for cross-border infrastructure to strengthen connectivity and access to markets and labour • Enhance cross-border collaboration in R&D and Innovation, targeting investment in high growth sectors and the green economy • Promote sustainable and climate-conscious growth along the corridor, aligned with councils' development plans and wider policy objectives • Align with and support economic development partners to increase trade and investment along corridor • Market the region and elevate the DBEC brand so that the region becomes globally renowned as an attractive place to live and do business.
3.4	<p>The strategy identified the need for dedicated resources to bring forward the key actions. As a result, recruitment is under way for two staff members. These positions were advertised internally across all partner councils for a period of two years. The recruitment process is led by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council who currently act as secretariat.</p>
3.5	<p>The action plan outlined key pillars to support effective delivery, including ways of working, governance and resourcing, and communication and marketing. Priority actions identified across the short and medium term include:</p>

- Undertaking further stakeholder engagement and developing a coherent marketing and communications strategy in line with the strategic objectives
- Progressing the Shared Island feasibility study (see below) around sectoral Innovation Hubs along the corridor, with the aim of preparing an application for external funding by Q4 2023. In parallel with circular economy activities at Belfast City Council and Dublin City Council, gathering insights on circular economy initiatives along the corridor
- Identification and preparatory scoping for relevant external funding opportunities, including Peace Plus and Shared Island
- Undertaking research on existing skills strategies and enterprise plans and identifying key barriers to skills development with the aim of developing a clear skills policy and strategy
- Mapping of key assets along the corridor with development potential and highlighting infrastructure gaps.

3.6 As part of the governance structure for the partnership, the DBEC political advisory group continues to meet. There are 24 councillors who make up a Political Advisory Group (3 nominees from each council area). The Belfast City Council nominees are Cllr Ciaran Beattie Alderman George Dorrian and Cllr Eric Hanvey. The last meeting of the group took place in January 2023. Members were presented with a summary of the action plan and briefings from other cross border initiatives. The next meeting of the group is expected to take place in June/July 2023.

3.7 Shared Island Fund
 In order to bring forward collaborative activities aligned with the strategic priorities set out in the plan, a number of applications for funding were submitted to the Irish Government's Shared Island Initiative in late 2022.

3.8 The DBEC partners were successful in attracting financial support of €150,000 to carry out a feasibility assessment on the development of a network of regional innovation hubs across the corridor region. These locations would support current or emerging business clusters in particular locations, to the benefit of the entire region. The project will look at pairing up locations based on sectoral strengths and clusters, such as Fintech in Dublin and Belfast. The proposal also incorporates an ambition identified by the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission to support growth sectors such as Fintech and capitalise on linkages with cities such as Dublin.

3.9	A procurement exercise is underway to secure external advisory support for this work. It is being led by Fingal County Council and Belfast City Council officers will participate in a project steering group. A preferred bidder has been selected and it is expected that this project will commence first week of March 2023.
3.10	In addition, Dublin and Belfast City Council were awarded €250,000 to carry out major feasibility research on capital projects to support the circular economy. Opportunities to develop the sector within the context of the Dublin Belfast Corridor will be considered as part of this work, although the primary focus is on the cities of Dublin and Belfast. There has been extensive work with colleagues from both councils preparing the terms of reference for technical support, with Dublin City Council as lead partner. This tender was issued through a procurement framework following guidance from the Office of Government Procurement in Dublin. The Tender is currently open and will close on 20 March 2023. The partners continue to monitor and review opportunities for further funding from the Shared Island Unit. Officials from the Unit made a presentation on live and pending opportunities to the Political Advisory Group meeting in January. The partnership is also monitoring relevant opportunities for funding under Peace Plus.
3.11	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The activities outlined within this report are being resourced from the 2022/23 Enterprise and Business Growth budget.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Given the nature of this initiative as a multiparty, cross border partnership equality and good relations impacts will be assessed throughout delivery within the overall governance framework.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	N/A