



Subject:	Update on Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor
Date:	6 December 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

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 and to seek Committee approval for signature of a new Collaboration and Funding agreement among the partners.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note progress on the development of the DBEC initiative • Approve the Collaboration and Funding Agreement attached as Appendix 1.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At its meeting in March 2023, members received an update on progress to support the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor including work on the strategy and action plan. The plan aims to support 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.
3.2	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.
3.3	The strategy articulates a number of strategic objectives for the partnership, including; <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

The action plan outlined key pillars to support effective delivery, including ways of working, governance and resourcing, and communication and marketing. Priority actions to date include:

- Staffing: in line with recommendations under the strategy, two full time staff members, a Programme Manager and Project Officer were recruited in Summer 2023. The staff are based at Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and operate across the partnership
- Management and governance: Dates have been agreed until September 2024 for regular meetings of the partnership governance structure, including monthly meetings at Director level, bi-monthly among CEOs and quarterly meetings for elected representatives. A new Collaboration and Funding Agreement has been prepared to further clarify areas of co-operation and partnership working and to confirm the budget profile for 2024 (attached for approval)
- Communications: DBEC is developing a coherent marketing and communications strategy in line with the strategic objectives. The team will work with an external communications partner to support delivery
- Engagement: Given that the Partnership now has dedicated resources in place, the team is working on a stakeholder engagement framework that will identify priority linkages, aligned to the action plan. The Team is already engaging in key meetings and this work will continue in order to further shape the programme of activity
- Research: The immediate focus on research includes a review of existing skills strategies, identifying gaps, barriers and opportunities for co-operation. The DBEC staff have also participated in consultation around research commissioned by the Shared Island Unit in relation to the all-island labour market and are exploring opportunities for engagement in Peace Plus projects in this area of work
- Funding: The Irish Government's Shared Island initiative aims to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future. The DBEC Partnership was successful in an application for Shared Island funding to carry out a feasibility study into regional innovation hubs within the partnership area. This work will conclude in early December and relevant findings will be brought back to this committee for information.

3.5

As part of the governance structure for the partnership, there are 24 councillors who make up a Political Advisory Group (3 nominees from each council area). This group provides an advisory and consultative forum, supporting the Directors Group and CEO group in the governance of the partnership.

3.6	<p>Following the local elections in May 2023, new nominees were sought to represent Belfast. The Belfast City Council nominees are Cllr Ronan McLaughlan, Cllr Sarah Bunting and Cllr Eric Hanvey. Nominees are appointed for a two-year period, with a view to participating in quarterly meetings. The most recent meeting of the group took place in September 2023 hosted by Dublin City University. The next meeting is expected to take place at the Ulster University Belfast Campus in December 2023.</p>
3.7	<p>The development of a new Collaboration and Funding Agreement was recommended as part of previous work to strengthen and clarify the governance and management arrangements for the Partnership. A draft document was prepared by the DBEC secretariat and has been reviewed by council officers. This is attached as Appendix 1.</p>
3.8	<p>The Agreement sets out the detailed workings of the collaborative partnership between the 8 partner councils and the 2 universities. Newry Mourne and Down District Council has agreed to undertake the role of Lead Council on behalf of and with the agreement of the other Collaborating Members. The Lead Council will continue to administer the DBEC resource team and will request and co-ordinate input from the Collaborating Members as and when required. The Lead Council will also provide accounting and financial management for the partnership and will be responsible for procurement.</p>
3.9	<p>The Political Advisory Group (PAG), Chief Executive Officers (CEO) Steering Group and Directors Steering Group will oversee programme delivery and review performance against the DBEC Strategy and the Action Plan.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>A contribution of £35,000 was approved in March 2023, resourced from the 2023/2024 Enterprise and Business Growth budget. This will fund the Belfast City Council contribution for the current financial year. The contribution for the 24/25 financial year will be considered as part of the estimates process.</p>
3.11	<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 relation impacts will be assessed throughout delivery within the overall governance framework.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices - Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1: DBEC Collaboration and Funding Agreement 2024</p>