



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Quartiers en Crise
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Relevant Background Information

This report deals with the transfer of the Quartiers en Crise network from the Belfast Trust to Belfast City Council.

Quartiers en Crise

Quartiers en Crise (Neighbourhoods in Crisis) was established as a European cities network in 1989. Under the leadership of the then North and West Health Trust, Belfast was one of the ten founding members. The network was set up to:

- Promote integrated approaches to urban regeneration and local residents' involvement in that process
- Develop programmes and projects which facilitate the exchange of experience and practice
- Support initiatives based on greater participation of target groups
- Promote joined up working and thinking between local authorities and other key agencies, especially local communities and NGOs
- Undertake research and evaluation in order to impact on existing and future urban regeneration policies/programmes
- Represent the views and needs of disadvantaged areas/groups within EU and EU groupings and networks
- Create a network which constitutes a European "think tank" regarding the issues of diversity, integration, social and economic exclusion and urban regeneration

The strength of the network has always been its three pillared approach involving elected members, officials and local residents in influencing policy and project delivery on the ground.

The normal approach to membership of Quartiers en Crise is that the city municipality takes the lead, as the city is the member.

In Belfast however, this function has historically been undertaken by the Belfast Health Trust although the success of QEC in Belfast has been a multi agency approach. Belfast City Council has been active in the network through officer engagement and elected member activity. The current Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Kelly participated in the recent AGM held in Italy in November 07.

The Quartiers en Crise headquarters in Brussels has a team of 11 led by a Director and managed by an Executive Bureau. The Executive Bureau meets four times a year and ensures the implementation of the membership programme as agreed by the General Assembly.

Executive Bureau members are usually officers acting by proxy for the leading politician in each city with a remit for European affairs, in Belfast that is the Council's Chair of The Development Committee.

At a local level each city stakeholder contributes an annual subscription of £2,500, which totals £15,000 or approximately €20,000. From this subscription, €7,800 is paid to the Brussels secretariat as a membership fee and contribution to the staff and running costs of the Brussels office. The balance is used to cover the costs of the Belfast Co-ordinator, travel costs for attendance at meetings and match funding, where possible, for new projects for Belfast.

Each city has a local Quartiers en Crise structured membership with Belfast's as follows:

- Belfast Health Trust
- Belfast City Council
- NI Housing Executive
- Department of Education & Learning
- Belfast Education & Library Board
- Belfast Regeneration Office
- Arts Council
- Probation Board
- Belfast Area Partnership Boards

The benefits of Belfast City Council involvement in Quartiers en Crise include:

- The creation of a local forum for the Chief Executives of key city stakeholder organisations in Belfast
- Early access to information on European policies and funding opportunities
- Funded projects
- Opportunities for staff and community representatives to learn from other projects in Europe
- Opportunities to promote Belfast in Europe
- Access to and opportunities to contribute to best practice in Europe in integrated approaches to urban regeneration
- Opportunities to promote and showcase Belfast best practice in Europe, including citizen involvement.
- Getting involved in EU 'think tank' regarding issues of diversity, integration, social and economic exclusion and urban regeneration.

Projects that have been accessed via Quartiers en Crise for Belfast involvement include 2 Interreg projects, an Equal initiative, ReStart education programme, Latent Potential initiative as well as the Urbact Programme

Key Issues

Proposed way forward

Since the rationalisation of the Health Trusts in Belfast there has been a re-focus of external activity. Although remaining fully and actively committed to Quartiers en Crise, the Belfast Health Trust no longer wishes to retain the position of local co-ordinator and driver of Quartiers en Crise, Belfast. The constituent members of Quartiers en Crise Belfast have collectively requested that the management and delivery of Quartiers en Crise is transferred to Belfast City Council.

In practice this would mean that Belfast City Council, through the Development Department's European Unit, would assume responsibility for the coordination of Quartiers en Crise bi-monthly meetings, oversee the development of new project activity, manage the annual subscription to Quartiers en Crise and manage the local Belfast budget. This local budget would cover administrative support, and the workload of Quartiers en Crise Belfast would be subsumed within the EU Unit. The local Belfast QEC Group would continue to nominate the Belfast Chair and nominate the representative to the Executive Bureau in Brussels.

Currently Belfast's membership includes holding the position of Treasurer of the network. Positions on the Executive Bureau are elected every two years and it is the intention of the Belfast group to seek re-election next year. The Bureau meets quarterly and there is an Annual General Meeting. All expenses related to attendance at the Executive Bureau are paid for centrally.

If Belfast retains the role of Treasurer, the representatives will also have meetings with the accountant, usually alongside the Executive Bureau.

The role of the Executive Bureau is to oversee and approve the work of the network, to represent the network in meetings with significant Commission representatives, and to ensure sound financial management.

If Belfast is not represented in the Executive Bureau, then its participation is reduced to project participation rather than having an overall view of the workings of the network.

Belfast is not guaranteed an elected position on the Executive Bureau but could go forward to seek this if there is a political will.

Benefits to Belfast City Council

Since joining QEC as a founding member in 1989, Belfast City stakeholders have engaged in European projects from a bottom up level.

QEC is a unique network that involves the participation of residents and community stakeholders, elected members and officers. This citizenship involvement in European Union activity is unique and would be lost if QEC Belfast was to disappear.

QEC also provides a local platform of engagement in EU activity at a multi agency level and is the only such vehicle existing in Belfast and the region. It allows BCC officers and Members to engage in EU activity with relevant officers from the member organisations promoting integrated approaches on key priority issues such as governance, housing, health, poverty and urban regeneration.

Resource Implications

Quartiers en Crise

Co-ordination, administration and subscription to the network would be covered by the Belfast members' subscription to Quartiers en Crise. This would be managed through the European Unit and built into its yearly business plan. BCC would manage the local QEC budget of £15,000 plus any income gained from new European project implementation. The direct cost to Council from within the EU unit budget will therefore be £2,500, which is the Council's member contribution to the Belfast budget of £15k.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Approve the transfer of Quartiers en Crise to the management of Belfast City Council
- Approve the 2008 annual subscription fee of £2500

Members will be briefed at a later date on the opportunity to seek a position on the QEC Executive Bureau and resource implications will be considered at this time.

Key to Abbreviations

QEC – Quartiers en Crise
NGO – Non-governmental organisation