



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	European Unit Activity
Date:	7 March 2008
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Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware of regular reports to Committee outlining progress and new proposed activity from the European Unit. Members are asked to consider the following

1. Irish Sea Region Partnership
2. European Year of Intercultural Dialogue
3. Interreg Contracts

Key Issues

1. Irish Sea Region Partnership

Members will be aware that since February 2006 Belfast City Council and the Comet Councils have been engaged in a Blueprint for cooperation between Greater Dublin and Glasgow. An overarching framework of cooperation was agreed, which Glasgow has still to formally sign, seeking to work together on projects developed under 6 themes, a copy of the Blueprint is available from the European Unit.

To this end, a number of projects have been developed for delivery in 2008 namely:

- 4 World Trade Centre seminars open to Dublin and Glasgow businesses - January-March 2008
- European Day of Entrepreneurship pilot – November 2008
- Irish Sea Region Platform proposal

The Irish Sea Region Platform is an informal partnership of stakeholders around the Irish Sea, including cities, academic institutions, marine institutions and regional governments.

The interested parties have now met on four occasions to explore potential opportunities to collaborate and to work to the overall benefit of this geographical area.

In order to make a quick win, the partners have been developing a proposal to seek to secure funding for activities around the Irish Sea under the transnational European funding programme known as Interreg IVB – North West Europe zone.

Through this programme the ISP project seeks to foster and sustain territorial cooperation between the regions around the Irish Sea and including a third EU Member State yet to be determined.

This process has already begun and from the discussions that have taken place, four specific strands have been identified;

1. City-regions cooperation
 - Cruise marketing initiative
 - Carbon card incentive pilot
2. Transport/Trade logistics
3. Future challenges in coastal and marine management
4. Marine spatial planning

The Interreg IVB route is ideal if the significant outcomes of this extensive project are to be achieved. The programme funds up to 50% of project costs. The anticipated cost of the entire project is 10 million euros over a minimum of 3 years.

For Belfast it would involve working across departments and with other stakeholders including the BVCB, the Port Authority and others. The partners would be expected to provide the other 50% match funding by cash payment and in kind contributions such as staff costs. The exact amount for Belfast City Council has yet to be determined. More detail on the project, including the list of partners involved who would share costs is attached as **Appendix 1** of this report.

From a NI perspective partners to date include Belfast City Council via the EU unit, Economic Initiatives and Waste Management as well as interest from DFP and DOE.

In order to progress the funding bid, strand partners are asked to contribute £2000 as a first annual subscription to the Irish Sea Region Partnership initiative. This funding will be used to;

- Develop an ISP brand
- Engage a Consultant to develop and submit the Interreg IVB bid by May 2008
- Establish an administrative fund to coordinate meetings, policy papers and lobby activity to bodies such as the British Irish Council and the European Commission.

On a more strategic level the ISP partners have developed a Declaration of Intent to be signed by all interested parties and organisations. It is intended that this will be signed at a high level event in the Irish Sea area in May 2008. A copy of this is attached as **Appendix 2**.

Members are asked to endorse the ISP as a worthwhile initiative to put the Irish Sea Region on the map and profile this peripheral region with the European Commission and other strategic players.

Members are asked to agree to participate in the Interreg IVB funding bid subject to further consideration of the match finding required for Belfast City Council elements under the cities cooperation strand.

Members are also asked to agree the first annual subscription to the Irish Sea Platform of £2000 and to the attendance and participation of the Chair of Development or his nominee at the signing of the Declaration of Intent in May 2008.

2. EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue

2008 is the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID). Belfast City Council through the EU Unit is part of a successful Eurocities and European Council bid for EU funding to engage in EYID activities. Belfast's role in this is to partner with another two cities to undertake two city Ambassadorial exchanges. Belfast has been partnered to undertake an outward visit to Berlin from 9-12 May 2008 and to host an inward visit from Turin in June 2008.

The outward exchange is to involve an elected member, a relevant officer and a youth representative from the city. Cities are encouraged to send elected members who are actual youth champions. The Berlin event in May is defined as a four day street festival including a children's carnival and a parade reflecting Berlin's cultural diversity. Belfast City Council is aiming therefore to approach the urban arts academy or the Beat Initiative to identify a young person to accompany the Belfast City Council delegation.

Members are asked to approve the participation of the Chair or Deputy Chair (or their nominee), an officer and a youth champion in the Berlin outward exchange and to engage in welcoming the Turin inward exchange later in the year. Both exchanges will take place at no cost to the council as this will be funded through the EYID programme.

3. Interreg Contracts

Members will be aware that the Interreg Unit within the Council's EU unit is staffed by a full-time manager and a part-time administrator. The contracts for both posts, under the current letter of offer, run to April 2008. However on 18 September 2007 the Comet Interreg Partnership received an amended letter of offer to provide further support of £85,000 technical assistance which members agreed at the Development Committee meeting of 13 June 2007. 25% match funding is provided and already agreed by the 6 Comet councils. The additional technical assistance is to extend support of the Comet partnership to December 2008. Members are therefore requested to extend the contracted Interreg Manager post to December 2008 and the administrator's post to the same date.

Resource Implications

Financial

1. £2000 towards the establishment of the Irish Sea Platform Partnership and development of an Interreg IVB funding bid

Human

1. Direct input by EU Manager and Officer as well as the Head of Economic Initiatives into the development of the Irish Sea Platform
2. Attendance of one officer in the Berlin and Turin exchange visits in EYID

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members

1. Irish Regions

- Endorse the council's involvement in the Irish Sea Region Partnership
- Agree to the engagement in an Interreg IVB new funding proposal subject to further agreement of match funding required
- Agree to the contribution of £2000 as a first annual subscription to the IRSP and development of the Interreg IVB proposal
- Agree to sign the Irish Sea Region Partnership Declaration of intent and to the attendance of the Chair of Deputy or nominee at this event

2. European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

- Agree to the attendance of the Chair or Deputy Chair (or their nominee), an officer and a youth champion on the Belfast Ambassadors exchange visit to Berlin in May 2008 and to host the inward visit from Turin at a later date.

3. Interreg contracts

Agree to extend the Interreg Manager and part-time Administrator post contracts to December 2008

Key to Abbreviations

DFP – Department of Finance and Personnel

DOE – Department of the Environment

ISP – Irish Sea Platform

EYID – European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Irish Sea Regions Draft Business Plan

Appendix 2 – Irish Sea Regions Platform Declaration of Intent