



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	European Unit Progress Report
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Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Laura Leonard European Manager ext. 3577

Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware of regular reports from the European Unit providing an update on Unit progress and seeking Committee approval for new activity. The following report will cover:

1. Eurocities AGM 2008
2. OPENCities Urbact II Proposal

Key Issues

1. Eurocities

Members will be aware that Belfast City Council has been an active and full member of the Eurocities network since the late 1990's. The Council through the Director of Development and the EU Unit actively participates in the Environment, Social Affairs, Culture and Economic Development fora of the network, contributing to or leading thematic working groups, engaging in project development and delivery, and influencing the development of policy at EU level.

An example of benefit to Belfast through participation can be seen through the Culture Forum where Belfast participated in one of ten transnational projects this year with an exchange to Berlin, and from Turin, to celebrate the EU Year of Intercultural diversity. Belfast City Council's work in this project and a subsequent analysis report on learning from the project is now hailed as best practice and is profiled on the Council of Europe Website.

The Economic Development Forum provides a platform for the Council's Economic Development Unit to gather best practice in anticipation of Belfast's EU Day of the Entrepreneur to be held here in November 2008 and it also allows the Creative Industries Officer to engage currently in a Creative Clusters Working Group and address the cities on Belfast's Creative Industries strategy.

Eurocities provides a platform for engaging with counterpart officers and elected members across Europe to develop and deliver tangible projects and, importantly, influence the development of EU policy at EU Institutional level which ultimately must be adhered to by local authorities across the EU.

Further opportunities for Belfast City Council includes cooperation with the Eurocities Members to seek resources through the 2010 EU Year of Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty which is a growing issue for the Development Committee.

Eurocities 2008 AGM

The Eurocities AGM will be held in The Hague from 26-29 November 2008. Traditionally the AGM is attended by the Chair and Deputy Chair of Development (or their nominees), Director of Development, Head of Economic Initiatives and the EU Manager. The theme of this year's conference is to "Build Active Governance" and within this there will be 5 sub-themes: living, work, well-being, environment and health, and innovation in governance. The latter is a very appropriate theme given the pending Review of Public Administration in N.I.

The conference will hold a cities awards ceremony on day one. Belfast City Council has submitted 3 proposals – "Don't Drop it, Stop it" campaign, the Urban Arts Academy and the City Murals Project.

In conclusion, Eurocities continues to be the most essential network in terms of Belfast City Council's ongoing EU activity. The network was a source for partners in the Open Cities network and also provided the INTI Migration and Integration project for the Good Relations Unit. It provides Belfast City Council with the latest policy and funding developments and is the strongest and most relevant network for cities in Europe.

Members are asked to note the value of the Eurocities Network to Belfast City Council and approve the attendance of the Chair and Deputy Chair (or their nominees), Director of Development, Head of Economic Initiatives and the European Manager at the 2008 AGM in the Hague from 26-29 November 2008.

2. Urbact II OPENCities project

Members will be aware of their agreement on 21 March to lead, develop and submit a funding application under the URBACT II transnational fund. Cities can participate in the thematic URBACT networks (2008-2013) if they have benefited or continue to benefit from the Urban I and II programmes. As Members will acknowledge, the city of Belfast had benefited from Urban I (1994-1999) and currently benefits from the implementation of an Urban II programme in North Belfast worth £22 million investment. URBACT is a European Programme which aims to foster the exchange of experience among European cities and the capitalisation-dissemination of knowledge on all issues related to sustainable urban development.

Belfast City Council acts as lead city in the OPENCities project which will involve 11 cities spread throughout the EU (50% competitiveness category, 50% convergence category cities). The OPENCities project will be delivered in conjunction with two other senior partners, Madrid City Council and the British Council in Spain.

OPENCities "Towards Open Cities- Openness and the Competitive Advantage of Diversity "- explores the openness of cities in terms of attraction and retention of human capital and the social and economic integration of migrant workers.

The Urbact II programme stipulates that cities must work with their managing authority for EU funding, which in Northern Ireland's case is the Department of Finance and Personnel. DFP has formally signed up to work with Belfast City Council on this project and ultimately will involve other relevant government departments including DEL and DETI.

The three year programme also includes a 'fast track' element which means that the project has been assigned European Commission representatives from relevant Commission departments who will work with the project to identify new policy recommendations emanating from the project.

Members are asked to consider the following benefits that the programme will bring to Belfast.

1. OPENCities has to date succeeded in Phase I of the application process providing 75,000 euros to Belfast to develop a detailed 30 month project on OPENCities. It was one of only 24 successful projects out of 400 submitted from across Europe.

2. It was also one of only seven projects chosen for the Fast Track element, working exclusively as the only UK project alongside the European Commission. This will give the city of Belfast immense kudos and will heighten the city profile as we directly lead the city partners to work with senior commission officials to influence new emerging policies.

3. The EU Commission and Parliament view the OPENCities project as the EU flagship project on migration. The cities committed to take forward this project want to identify what makes a city open and attractive to international migrants – essentially how do we define 'Open-ness'. This will look at what an open city is and how can cities develop more pro-active policies to create open cities to better attract or retain mobile international populations, which are important to both the competitive and convergence objectives of the European Union.

4. The project will secure over €1M for undertaking a 30 month project involving the 12 partners. The British Council will provide further funding to the project to attract other international partners that cannot be funded through EU funds.

5. At the end of the project, each city will have a local action plan tailored to them. The managing authority in each region (i.e. DFP), will then review the action plans to assess the provision of funding to implement the recommended activities within the plan.

6. Each city will also have a Local Steering Group of key stakeholders. Partners will range from employers, recruitment agencies, unions, community representatives and statutory bodies. This steering group will be a lasting legacy of the project and a permanent platform for engagement around the subject.

7. Each city will be able to participate in city exchange and peer reviews at an elected

member, officer and stakeholder level.

8. The project led by Belfast City Council will be launched here in January 2009. This will be led by the Minister of Employment, Sir Reg Empey, and will attract high level politicians from the partner cities and senior policy makers from the EU institutions and DCLG.

9. Belfast City Council has already been profiled around this project in various publications including the Eurocities 'Inclusive Cities' newsletter and the Council has been invited to speak at the high profile Brussels Open Days in October 2008 and The Global City Forum in April 2009.

10. The project is the only project in Ireland addressing the issue of human migration and its impact on cities.

11. There is a strong North/South, East/West dimension to the project as Cardiff and Dublin are involved and it has already grabbed the attention of government departments in each jurisdiction as well as the NSMC and the Council of the Isles.

12. The involvement of larger cities such as Madrid and Vienna in the project will allow excellent exchange and learning possibilities for smaller cities like Belfast.

13. The Eurocities network interest in the project is very significant and they have established a new working group on economic migration to connect to the OPENCities project to allow for wider dissemination of the project findings to other cities.

14. The British Council will fund a range of cultural events to track and visualise the project including paying for a photographic record in each city and touring exhibition. As part of this the British Council will be holding an event on 23 October at the Belfast Festival looking at the issues addressed by the project. Charles Landry, a renowned author in the subject, will be chairing the debate. Belfast City Council has been asked to be a partner and speaker at the invitation only event. The Chair and Deputy Chair of Development will be invited. Members are requested to approve a contribution of £2,000 towards this event.

15. Main outputs of the project:

- Concept papers setting out the proposed methodology to define and measure Openness
- Training materials and workshops for participating partners to establish financial management, communication and audit trail process
- Materials from baseline survey on OPENCities considering the factors which contribute to Openness
- Guidance on local action plans and local leadership for OPENCities.
- An OPENCities Index or Kitemark Quality Standard.
- International conferences to promote the OPENCities concept and index
- Policy recommendations on how cities can influence national and regional frameworks to support more open cities
- Local Action Plans in participating city councils, including a number of Pilot Projects proposals taken forward from these plans & to be financed by Structural Funds.
- Reports/Publications and Case Studies on OpenCities (in collaboration with EU

Commission)

As members will note, the OPENCities is certainly a unique project addressing a current and growing issue for the city and NI as a whole. Members are asked to note this report and approve the attendance of Development Committee Members at the OPENCities launch in Belfast on 13 January 2009.

Resource Implications

1. Eurocities AGM

Associated costs for attendance at the Eurocities AGM in the Hague 26-29 November as follows:

Accommodation:	570 euros per person
Flights:	200 euros per person
Total:	770 euros per person

2. OPENCities

Phase One : Belfast City Council will contribute £4,500

Phase Two: Belfast City Council will contribute £30,000 over three years.

These amounts have already been agreed within the departmental plans.

3. A £2,000 contribution to the British Council OPENCities event at the Belfast Festival

Recommendations

Members are asked to –

- Approve the attendance and expenditure of all associated costs of the Chair and Deputy Chair, Director of Development, Head of Economic Initiatives and the European Manager at the Eurocities AGM 2008 (or their nominees).
- Note the anticipated benefits of the OPENCities project and agree to the attendance of Development Committee Members at the Belfast launch of the project on 13 January 2009.
- Approve £2,000 towards the British Council event on 23 October 2008.

Documents attached

None

Abbreviations

EU – European

AGM – Annual General Meeting

DFP – Department of Finance and Personnel

DETI – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

DEL – Department of Employment and Learning

DCLG – Department of Communities and Local Government

NSMC – North South Ministerial Council

NI – Northern Ireland