



Belfast City Council

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| Report to: | Development Committee |
| Subject: | China Development Plan |
| Date: | 10 September 2008 |
| Reporting Officer: | Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, ext 3470 |
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Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that at the Development Committee of 7 June, 2006, a two year plan for activities to develop and promote the linkages between Belfast and Hefei was agreed.

Work has been progressing on the delivery of the key objectives within this plan and a summary of activities to date is attached as requested by Members. Should Members wish to continue with the sister city relationship, a plan for activities to take place over the next two years has been drafted based on progress to date and with a view to maximising upcoming opportunities for collaboration. Hefei are very keen to continue the relationship and we are awaiting specific proposals from them for new areas of cooperation.

Key Issues

The civic link between the cities of Belfast and Hefei dates back to the late 1990s and the first Belfast delegation visited the Chinese city in 2000. Since then, there have been a number of visits and exchanges between the two cities, focusing on the themes of economic development, education and training and cultural promotion.

An action plan for this work was approved by the Development (Economic Development) Sub-Committee in March 2003. This identified a broad range of activities along with associated actions. The key areas of action were agreed as:

- Business Development and Investment
- Education and training
- Enhancing links with the Chinese community in Belfast
- Cultural awareness
- Information and awareness-raising.

This plan was updated for the period 2006-2008. In that timeframe, a range of key outputs

was achieved including:

- Delivery of a business development programme on “Doing Business in China”, involving 10 local companies, two of whom participated on Invest NI trade mission to China; 7 companies currently pursuing joint ventures or other linkages.
- Organisation of a “Doing Business in China” seminar attended by 30 local businesses
- Hosting of a visit to Belfast by Central China TV (CCTV) during which a documentary on Belfast was produced. This has since been aired on Chinese television
- Participation by local political representatives in key events with the Chinese Community in Belfast including Chinese New Year
- Participation by local political representatives in events to welcome the Chinese student population to the city
- Involvement in a working group to establish a Confucius Institute (a centre of excellence to promote Chinese language and culture) at Queen’s University Belfast
- Participation in an international cultural festival in Hefei by a cultural group from Belfast, including a showcase on economic and cultural development in Belfast
- Participation by the then Lord Mayor in a visit to China/Hefei in 2006, as part of a trade mission coordinated by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Belfast.
- Extensive engagement with Chinese Chamber of Commerce, including support for business linkages between them and contacts in Hefei
- Letters and introduction provided for two local companies to support business linkages with Chinese counterparts
- Presentation at best practice event in London for local authorities involved in UK-China linkages, focusing on business linkages,
- Development work with Invest NI to explore potential for focused activity and visit to Hefei as part of trade mission programme. Economic profile of possible business opportunities produced and agreement by Invest NI to consider inclusion of visit to Hefei as part of upcoming trade missions.

Building on the outputs identified above and the achievements accomplished, a series of activities under these broad areas of work have been identified. This takes into account the opportunities for linkages not only with Hefei but with other locations in China, given the contacts that other partner organisations in the city have with this country. It also takes account of the integration into the Development Department of the Community Development section and the linkages with the local Chinese community that this brings. As such, it represents a broadening of the potential activities and offers an opportunity for further development work in this field.

Resource Implications

The total funds required to deliver this action plan for the period October 2008-March 2010 are estimated at £65,000.

Recommendations

Members are asked to review the sister city relationship with Hefei and to consider the content of the draft action plan for linkages with China.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Draft Action Plan for Belfast City Council linkages with China