

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL – CHINA ACTION PLAN: 2008-2010**Background**

Belfast City Council made its first official visit to China in April 2000. The visit included a three city tour to Shenzhen, Hefei and Beijing. In August that year, a Memorandum of Agreement between Hefei and Belfast was signed. This committed the cities to “friendly exchange and cooperative activities” on a number of themes including education, technology and culture. A series of subsequent visits led to the signature of a Sister Cities agreement between the two cities in 2005.

A Belfast-China strategy was presented to the Development Committee in May 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.

Update

A number of action plans have been developed and delivered since that time. Key outputs include:

- Delivery of two business development programmes on “Doing Business in China”, involving 10 local companies
- Participation of 2 local businesses from these programmes on Invest NI trade missions to China
- Organisation of two “Doing Business in China” seminars, each 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
- Participation by the then Lord Mayor in a visit to China in 2006, as part of a trade mission coordinated by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Belfast
- Creation of a Belfast-China steering group to agree and promote linkages and joint activities.

Focus for future work

While the focus for the links in the coming period will continue to be with the partner city of Hefei, it is acknowledged that our partner organisations have their own linkages in other parts of China. For this reason, it is proposed that this strategy should consider how these linkages can be developed and maximised, alongside the further development of the sister city link with Hefei.

It is proposed that a range of activities for the coming 18 month period (October 2008-March 2010) be undertaken including:

Business Development and Investment

- Organise two events on “Doing Business in China” (in conjunction with Invest NI/NICCI/CCC), showcasing companies already doing business in China and providing information on relevant support schemes. This can be linked to the development of our World Trade Centre activity
- Develop and deliver a business development programme for up to 10 companies on “Doing Business in China”, linking with Invest NI trade mission in December 2009
- Build relationships with the Commercial Attachés in the Chinese Consulates in London, Manchester and Edinburgh with a view to maximising trade linkages
- Work with the local Chinese community in Belfast to identify business and investment opportunities arising from existing contacts and linkages.

Education and Training

- Identify scope for wider civic and business linkages with those locations which currently have educational linkages with Belfast (particularly Shenzhen, Beijing and Shanghai)
- Host welcome events for Chinese students to Belfast, involving civic representatives
- Support the local educational establishments to create centres of excellence for the Chinese language and culture
- Identify opportunities for further linkages between educational institutes in Belfast and Hefei.

Enhancing links with the Chinese community in Belfast

- Provide access to council facilities for local groups to host cultural and community activities
- Provide community development support to the Chinese community in Belfast, through our Community Development workers
- Support activities for young people e.g. summer schemes.

Culture

- Support key events to promote Chinese culture, e.g. Chinese New Year
- Facilitate access to Chinese cultural performances, particularly in Belfast City Council venues e.g. Waterfront Hall, Community Centres.

Information and Awareness Raising

- Maintain contact with Local Government International Bureau (LGIB) staff for advice and support
- Liaise with UK Eurocities to exchange information on support/resources for links with China in other UK cities
- Promote “good news stories” of Belfast-China links through e-bulletin and website to ensure that all target groups are aware of the opportunities offered by the link e.g. education, training, business, cultural organisations.

Resource Implications

The budget required to deliver the activities within this plan will be £65,000. This has been included as part of the international relations work within the Development Department plan for 2008-2009 and activity taking place in the year 2009-2010 will be included in the Development Department plan for that year. An Economic Development Officer will allocate a proportion of his time to working on this and other international relations activity.