



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	EU Unit Progress
Date:	14 January 2009
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Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that the EU unit brings regular progress reports to members. The purpose of this report is to advise members of progress with respect to:

- OPENCities project
- Interreg IVA programme
- Comet Brussels visit
- Opportunity Europe 2008
- European Year of Intercultural Dialogue: Closing Conference

Key Issues

1. OPENCities Project

Members will recall their decision on 21 March 2007 to allow Belfast City Council's EU unit to develop a proposal to secure funding within the European Urbact II programme. Members will also recall that a proposal was successfully developed to address the issues around economic migration in Belfast and to identify best practise economic migration tools in cities elsewhere in Europe. The project was granted €75,000 for a development phase to recruit partner cities and their respective managing authorities and plan the 30 month phase II programme.

At this stage the project was awarded a new EU Commission Fast Track label, this means that the EU Commission views the project as a flagship project and will assign commission staff from relevant departments to work with the project and ensure that any findings are considered when developing future European policies relating to economic migration.

On 24 November 2008, Belfast City Council as lead partner was informed that the Stage II application had been successful, securing a further €635,000 funding.

The programme funding under Urbact II is provided at 70% and will mean in practice that Belfast City Council will contribute approximately €30,000 over the 30 month period but will in turn secure two full time posts to manage the project.

The OPENCities project involves the following partners; Dublin, Sofia, Bilbao, Vienna, Düsseldorf, Bucharest, Gdansk, Nitra, Cardiff, Madrid and the British Council Madrid.

The OPENCities project will produce a number of outputs including an openness index, best practice exchanges and reports, local action plans and toolkits.

2. Interreg IVA

Members will be aware that on 14 December 2007 the Comet Interreg partnership submitted a multi annual plan for funding to the Special EU Programmes Body. The plan was developed over 14 months following extensive awareness raising, promotion and project development throughout the metropolitan area. The plan contained 18 (out of an original 54) projects across the themes of enterprise, tourism and public sector collaboration totalling £18 million. At the same time the other four Interreg Partnerships across NI and the border region submitted competing bids for the Interreg IVA funding of €258 million. Although Comet has not received a formal letter of offer, the partnership board has been told that to date it has secured €5.5 million to deliver seven projects across the border and Comet regions.

Details of the seven projects are contained as Appendix 1 of this report. Members should however note that Belfast City Council and its stakeholders will benefit in particular from:

A business development programme led by the NITC

A NI Chamber of Commerce collaboration project

The council carbon footprint analysis

The capital build support for the Oh Yea creative industries project, and

The Gaeltacht quarter cultural tourism projects.

Members will be aware that Belfast City Council is represented on the Comet board by the Chair and Deputy Chair of Development, Councillor Michael Browne and Councillor William Humphrey. The role of both members will be enhanced through the implementation of Interreg IVA as Belfast City Council as lead partner of the application will be fully responsible and accountable for the implementation and management of the funding 2008-2011.

The Comet councils and stakeholders will have an opportunity throughout the Interreg IVA programme to develop and submit new project bids as new calls open under enterprise, collaboration, creative industries and environment. Due to over subscription it is not expected that there will be a further tourism call. Members are asked to note the allocation of Interreg IVA funding.

3. Comet Brussels visit 2009

Members will be aware that the six Comet councils namely; Lisburn, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, North Down, Newtownabbey and Belfast, collaborate on a number of levels including:

- Policy dissemination
- Plato programme for small businesses
- Interreg IIIA and IVA funding

- Hosting inward study visits

The Comet officers group comprises the Economic Development Managers of the six councils and meets once a month to oversee collaborative projects and develop new activity. They operate under a service level agreement, with Belfast City Council's EU unit providing the secretariat. The councils have an annual project development budget of £30,000 contributed by the six councils on a pro-rata basis based on population.

The officers group has identified the opportunity to make a focused study visit to Brussels on 17-19 February 2009 to meet with the key senior figures from the European institutions and to meet selected regional offices with a view to developing new transnational projects. This is particularly in the context of Interreg B and C and the Rural Development programme for NI that dictates that 5% of RDP cluster funding is spent on transnational activity.

Members are asked to agree to the attendance of the Chair of Development Committee and the Economic Development Manager (or their nominees) to join counterparts from the other five Comet councils to visit Brussels on 17- 19 February 2009. The cost of this trip will be covered under the Comet Service Level Agreement 2008/2009.

4. Opportunity Europe 2009

Members will be aware that one of the objectives of the EU unit is to bring Europe closer to the citizens of Belfast. To this end the unit hosts an annual European Fest in St George's Market each October. This year the event was aimed at all NI post primary school children. Attendance by the schools and the general public cumulated in 7,000 people attending the event on 21-22 October 2008.

In addition to the two day event two off-shoot events were held:

- A schools workshop
- A Belfast Telegraph schools competition

A great deal of publicity was generated for Belfast City Council in relation to Opportunity 2008 and is attached as Appendix 2 of this report.

5. European Year of Intercultural Dialogue: Closing Conference

2008 was dedicated by the European Commission as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID). To mark the year, a number of transnational partnerships were supported to encourage intercultural dialogue. Belfast was one of 23 cities partnering under the EUROCITIES umbrella in a series of best practice exchange visits. As part of this programme, a delegation undertook a visit to the Berlin festival in May 2008 and hosted Turin visitors during the Belfast City Carnival later in the summer.

A final conference and a meeting of the Eurocities Culture Forum is being held in Amsterdam on 5 March 2009 to launch the project's publication and associated recommendations. Participants of the 23 cities, the wider EUROCITIES Culture Forum and key European networks will be expected to attend. It is requested that the attendees from each participating city include a youth representative, one council officer and one elected member. A draft conference agenda is included in Appendix 3 of this report.

As member of the project's Steering Group, Belfast will also present a case study under the "Youth" theme in the afternoon workshops.

Members are asked to agree the participation of the Chair of the Development

Committee (or his nominee) and the previous project participants i.e. the youth representative, the Culture & Arts Manager and the European Officer (who has acted as contact point and co-ordinator) at the closing conference. The total cost is indicated at a maximum of £3,700.

Resource Implications

1. £22,000 maximum for the study visit to Brussels to be funded through the Comet service level agreement annual budget.
2. £3,700 maximum for four delegates to attend final EYID conference, this amount is included in the current European budget.

Recommendations

Members are asked to -

- Note the success of the Open Cities application.
- Note the success of the Interreg IVA multi annual plan and projects for Belfast and the Comet region.
- Approve the attendance of the Chair or nominee and Economic Development Manager or nominee at the Comet Brussels Study visit in February 2009 to be funded through the Comet Service level agreement budget 08/09 at a maximum cost of £22,000.
- To note the success of the Opportunity Europe event 2008.
- To approve the attendance of the Chair, the Arts and Culture Officer, an EU Officer or their nominees and a Belfast Youth Representative to be nominated by the Belfast Youth Forum at the EYID closing conference at a maximum cost of £3,700.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 Details on Interreg projects
Appendix 2 Opportunity Europe Press Coverage 2008
Appendix 3 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue: Closing Conference Draft Agenda

Abbreviations

NITC – NI Technology Centre at Queens
RDP – Rural Development Programme
EYID – European Year of Intercultural Dialogue