



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	European Unit Update
Date:	20 April 2009
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Background

Members will be aware of regular EU Progress reports. Members are asked to consider progress on the following projects:

1. Quartiers En Crise
2. Interreg IVA programme
3. Irish Sea Partnership

Key Issues

1. Quartiers En Crise

Members will be aware that Belfast City Council is a member of the local Belfast Quartiers En Crise network and in February of last year the Committee agreed that the Council would take over co-ordination of the local network from the Belfast Health Trust.

Members of the local Quartiers en Crise network are:

- Belfast Health Trust
- Belfast City Council
- NI Housing Executive
- Department of Education & Learning
- Belfast Regeneration Office
- Belfast Area Partnership Boards (BAPS)

All members with the exception of BAPS pay an annual membership fee of £2,500. From this €7,800 is paid to the Brussels secretariat as a membership fee which contributes to staff and running costs of the Brussels office. The balance is used to cover travel costs for local members to attend meetings and to provide match funding to support the development and implementation of new projects.

This fee allows members to access information on funding and policy developments, to influence policy and to work in partnership with others to develop projects that assist people facing disadvantage.

Since taking over responsibility for co-ordination of the local group in June last year, group members have reviewed their roles, improved how the network operates and renewed their commitment. Information on projects sent out by the Brussels secretariat now reaches a wider local network and through this we have enabled local organisations to partner in two projects that are currently being considered for European funding. These focus on migrant women and the poverty and health issues relating to third country nationals. If successful these projects will start in autumn 2009.

Belfast's membership also currently includes holding the position of Treasurer on the Executive Bureau which oversees the work of the network. The Bureau meets quarterly in different cities and there is an Annual General Meeting. All expenses relating to attendance at the Executive Bureau are paid for centrally by the Brussels secretariat. Members of the Executive Bureau are usually officers acting by proxy for the leading politician in each city with a remit for European affairs, in Belfast that is the Council's Chair of the Development Committee.

As earlier indicated, since the transfer of responsibility locally to Belfast City Council for coordination of QEC, the partnership has reviewed its role and decided to widen the remit and names of organisations at a local level to become known as "Belfast in Europe -QEC-ERAN".

The rationale behind this is to highlight, promote and share the wealth of European policy dissemination, project development and networks that each of the local constituent member organisations engage in. Given the growing importance that the NI Assembly is now placing on Europe since the launch of the NI Task Force on Europe, there is increased interest in European affairs at local level. By re-naming QEC Belfast to 'Belfast in Europe -QEC-ERAN' the members believe it will portray a more open and inclusive organisation that seeks to share EU opportunities with stakeholders beyond the Belfast grouping. It is also a more meaningful name than the French term "Quartiers En Crise".

To launch and celebrate this new identity the new 'Belfast in Europe-QEC-ERAN' partnership plan to hold a launch event in September 2009, preferably in City Hall. This will be a two fold event to reinvigorate and rename the cross sectoral partnership and to coincide with the 20th Anniversary of Quartiers En Crise.

When agreeing to the transfer of coordination, the Committee also agreed to pay the membership fee of £2,500 for 2008, fees are now due for 2009 for the same amount. Membership enables the Council to access funding and policy information to support the development and implementation of new projects which underpin its strategic objectives. It also enables the Council to be part of a wider European group which seeks to influence policy on Urban issues.

The Chair of the Development Committee or their nominee and/or officer acting as proxy are required to attend the quarterly Executive Bureau meetings and QEC AGM to be held in Brussels on 24-26th June 2009

Resource Implications

£2,500 from the 2009/2010 EU unit budget is required to pay the 2009 membership fee for Quartiers en Crise.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Approve the 2009 annual membership fee for Quartiers en Crise of £2,500
- Agree attendance of the Chair of the Development Committee or their nominee and/or appropriate officer at the quarterly Executive Bureau meetings and QEC AGM. Costs incurred are covered by the Brussels secretariat
- Members are asked to note the new name 'Belfast in Europe-QEC-ERAN' and approve the attendance of all Development Committee Members at the re-launch and 20th Anniversary event planned for September 2009

2. Interreg IVA

Members will recall a report presented to Committee in January 2009 highlighting the seven cross border projects approved for delivery within the Greater Belfast Metropolitan Area (Comet). This is the first time that Comet has secured cross border funding under the Interreg IVA programme.

The European Unit has received draft letters of offer in relation to two of the seven projects and is currently finalising the details before taking them to the Comet Interreg Board and subsequently the Councils' Development Committee for sign off.

Members will also be aware that Belfast City Council through the Development Committee will act as lead council and lead partner on behalf of the Comet councils with the Special EU Programmes Body. In practice this means that Belfast City Council will assume all legal and financial responsibility in relation to the implementation of funding to the seven projects. To this end the Council has received 100% funding to recruit an Interreg IVA Secretariat comprising a manager, a finance and monitoring officer and an administrator. These posts have been evaluated by the Council's Business Improvement Section and recruitment is underway.

In order to begin and monitor implementation of the seven projects, the council's Legal Services has developed a partnership agreement to be put in place along with a detailed project document between Belfast City Council on behalf of the Comet councils and each of the seven lead project promoters. Both document templates are attached to this report as Appendix 1 and 2 for Members' information.

In parallel to the development of the partnership agreement and project document templates, Legal Services has also developed a Service Level Agreement to be put in place as a partnership agreement between the six comet councils. This is attached as Appendix 3 of this report.

Under the new governance arrangements of Interreg IVA, the Comet Shadow Interreg Partnership for IIIA was brought to a close at the last Shadow Board Meeting held on 11 February 2009.

This effectively brings to an end the role of social partners who will now only be invited to information and promotional events in the instance of new funding calls. A new Interreg IVA partnership was established and will hold its first meeting on 15 April 2009.

Under the guidance of the SEUPB, the Interreg IVA managing authority, the new Comet Interreg Board will consist of two Elected Members from each of the six Comet councils. Members are asked to nominate the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Development Committee as Belfast City Council's representation on the Board.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Approve the Belfast City Council's partnership agreement, project document and service level agreement with respect to delivering the IVA programme
- Approve the appointment of the Chair and Deputy Chair of Development to the newly configured Comet Interreg board

3. Irish Sea Region Partnership

In March of 2008, the Committee received an update on the Irish Sea Region Partnership and agreed a contribution of £2,000 towards the establishment of the Irish Sea Platform (ISP) and development of an Interreg IVB bid.

Over the past year the ISP has brought together cities, academic institutions, marine institutions and regional governments to explore potential opportunities to collaborate to maximise benefits for this geographical area and to prepare a funding bid for submission under the Interreg IVB North West Europe programme for Territorial Co-operation. The funding application will be submitted in April 2009.

The Irish Sea region is defined as the Northwest of England, Wales, Scotland, the Isle of Man, the East coast of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It holds a total population of 15 million and in 2005 it had a combined gross domestic product of £450 million. The region provides an important link between the island of Ireland, the Isle of Man and the UK and there are a number of strategic interests operating in and around the area.

The ISP recognises the unique characteristics of the Irish Sea region within the European Union and these are linked with the strong cultural, economic, and social ties between the communities around the Irish Sea. It also recognises the region shares similar challenges at different levels with different issues including:

- Increased urbanisation
- Tourism
- Fishing
- Transport
- Sport
- Energy Consumption
- Regional Trade

As a platform, the ISP seeks to offer a valuable and rare opportunity for enhanced co-operation to encourage a partnership approach to resolving such issues. To support its work, it is seeking funding under the transnational European funding programme known as Interreg IVB – North West Europe zone. Through this programme the ISP seeks to foster and sustain territorial cooperation between the regions around the Irish Sea by developing a transnational partnership which brings together factors from the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, England's Northwest, Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Man. The ultimate goal is to gain recognition of the area as a European macro region, to establish a brand for economic growth which will enhance its competitiveness and contribute to overall sustainable development.

If successful, funding will support cooperation and collaboration between:

- Key politicians
- Representatives of national, regional, city and local governments
- Platform members
- Statutory organisations
- Universities
- Marine, fishing, energy and transport sectors.

It will help to identify opportunities for partnership working, enabling partners to address key issues, identify new projects and ways of working to ensure sustainable development of the area as well as lobbying for funding and policy support.

The platform will provide an ideal opportunity to develop close working relationships between multi layered governance structures to ensure that economic development and competitiveness takes place within an environmentally sustainable framework. It will focus on finding common solutions to sustainable development, connectivity, climate change and competitiveness which can be replicated across the North West European programme area.

The ISP's key activities will be:

- To establish the Irish Sea Platform as a vehicle for increased cooperation across and within the Irish Sea region, bringing together politicians and representatives of national, regional, city and local governments, statutory organisations, universities, marine, environmental, fishing, energy and transport sectors.
- To promote the Irish Sea region as a European macro region and a brand for economic growth, enhanced competitiveness and environmental sustainability.
- To further the strategic delivery of increased competitiveness within the North West Europe Programme area.
- Promote the concept of environmental sustainability in relation to communities around the Irish Sea, competitiveness and the management of natural resources.

In addition to the application to establish the platform, two other work packages have been developed focusing coasts at risk and marine spatial planning. These compliment the overall aim of the ISP and provide early examples of what can be achieved under the banner of the platform.

Resource Implications

The total value of the application is around £4 million and platform partners are being asked for a cash contribution of £10,000 per year over three years. Partners include:

- Northwest Regional Development Agency
- 4NW – The Regional Leaders Forum for the Northwest of England
- Dublin Regional Authority
- Belfast City Council
- Isle of Man Government
- Dublin City Council
- Mersey Dee alliance
- Cumbria county Council
- University of Cork, Cork Marine Resources Centre (CMRC)
- Liverpool University
- Bangor University
- Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
- Natural England
- Countryside Council for Wales

This funding will entitle partners to:

- Membership of the Platform
- Opportunities to attend ISP Workshops and Conferences
- Provide input into research activity
- Opportunities to shape and develop policy in the Irish Sea region
- Access potential future European funding sources

For Belfast City Council resource implications also include staff time to prepare for and attend meetings. This will be considered as a contribution in kind and amounts to £25,553.91 over the three years of the project for two staff members. Within the application we can also demonstrate staff and costs incurred in the preparation of the application as a contribution in kind, this mounts to £2,140 staff time, £886.58 travel and accommodation.

As per the previous report to Committee in March 2008 this project also involves working across departments and with other stakeholders including the BVCB, the Port Authority and others.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Approve a £30,000 cash contribution to the Irish Seas Platform as cash match over the three years of the project (from within the European unit budget)
- Approve staff time as match funding amounting to £25,553.91 over the three years of the project
- Approve contribution of costs already incurred in developing the platform and preparing the application as match funding mounting to £3,027

Key to Abbreviations

BAPS – Belfast Area Partnerships
ISP – Irish Sea Platform

Documents Attached

2. Interreg IVA
Appendix 1 – Partnership Agreement
Appendix 2 – Project Document
Appendix 3 – Service Level Agreement