



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast Welcome Centre Premises
Date:	16 September 2009
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay Head of Economic Initiatives ext.3459

Relevant Background Information

Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau Limited have been in occupation of first floor premises at 35-47 Donegall Place, since 1 August 2000. The current lease on the premises terminates on 31 July 2010. The premises are sublet from BCC to BVCB. The premises are used for both office and retail use, with the majority of space given over to the sale of goods and services. The current rent on the premises is £160,000 per annum and, in addition, approximately £110,000 to cover annual occupation costs such as service charge, insurance and rates. In the year 2009/10, BCC will contribute an estimated £477,000 to the BVCB and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board an estimated £148,000. Turnover from merchandise and tickets is estimated at £1.15 million gross (£345,000 net) for 2009/10. Annual expenditure on operation of the BVCB estimated at £1.774 million for 2009/10.

Key Issues

BVCB were not able to secure suitable ground floor premises in 2000 and moved into the current location with an aspiration to move to ground floor premises after a 10 year period. Given the importance of providing visitors with first class access to visitor services, especially information, and the significant need to generate revenue from the sale of goods and services at the BWC, there are concerns that the full potential is not being realised from the current location on the first floor. These concerns have increased recently in the light of growing competition in the City centre from other outlets selling souvenirs and gifts.

BVCB have viewed a number of vacant properties in the Donegall Place/Donegall Square North area. Due to the current economic climate a choice of available properties with ground floor access.

A move to the ground floor will involve an increase in rent and an initial capital cost to fit out the premises.

The BWC currently supports in excess of 300,000 visitors per annum .It is anticipated a ground floor location would grow visitor numbers by a further 25% with a corresponding uplift in turnover. Options are being explored for visitor information/servicing facilities to be placed inside City Hall as part of the new layout.

Resource Implications

BVCB will incur increased rent and other occupation costs with any ground floor tenancy. Estimated rent for suitable accommodation is approximately an initial £275,000 - £300,000 per annum. Capital costs for fit out will depend on the state of repair of the premises and the level of finish required. £1 million was spent on the initial fit out of the existing premises.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report and agree to continued BCC Officer involvement in the search for new premises for BVCB.

Decision Tracking

Further to agreement there will be continued BCC officer involvement in the search for new BVCB premises.
Timeline: April 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key Abbreviations

BVCB-Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau
BWC-Belfast Welcome Centre