



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Economic Development Unit Update
Date:	16 September 2009
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Relevant Background Information

1. Shopmobility Belfast – request for financial support

Members will be aware that, over the last five years, Shopmobility has received financial assistance from Belfast City Council through the Economic Development Unit. Prior to 2007, this support was match funded by EU funds. However this activity is no longer eligible for match-funding from the EU and therefore this request for support relates to Council rates monies only. The organisation also receives some small levels of support from the Parks and Leisure Department for work undertaken in the Parks and Open Spaces.

2. Social Economy Enterprise Strategy Consultation

Members are advised that, in early August 2009, DETI launched a consultation exercise on a proposed Social Economy Enterprise Strategy for the period 2009-2011. The closing date for the consultation is 9 October 2009.

3. Proposal from GEMS NI

Members will be aware that, at the April 2009 Development Committee, a number of employability projects were submitted for co-funding. Following some discussion, Committee agreed to match fund these projects for one more year only and not to accept any further requests for match funding of employability initiatives.

Recently GEMS NI has submitted a proposal to Belfast City Council entitled Belfast Job Search Services. The project is not match funded from other sources. The funding request to Belfast City Council is for £40,000 to support this project.

4. Request for change of representation on Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme management structures

Members will be aware that at the Development Committee of 14 November 2007, approval was given for Belfast City Council to cluster with Lisburn City Council and Castlereagh Borough Council for the delivery of Axis 3 of the Northern Ireland Rural

Development Programme (NIRDP).

Members will also be aware that at the Development Committee of 9 April 2008, approval was given for the Chairman of Development to represent Belfast City Council on the Strategic Joint Committee (SJC) and the Deputy Chairman of Development to represent Belfast City Council on the Local Action Group (LAG).

The SJC is made up of Elected Members from the three Council areas. It meets on a quarterly basis and has lead financial responsibility to accept, reject or defer decisions made by the LAG. The LAG is made up of Elected Members from the three Council areas as well as social partners representatives. It is responsible for assessing applications and makes recommendations for acceptance/deferral or rejection to the SJC.

Applications for a number of the measures have now opened and project promoters from Belfast are currently preparing applications for submission to upcoming calls.

5. Cities of the Isles (COTI)

Members will be aware that, along with Dublin, Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Cardiff, Belfast is a member of the Cities of the Isles (COTI) network.

The cities engage in collaborative activity in the field of economic development and regeneration and an annual event on these key themes is organised for key elected members and officers. The next meeting is to take place in Edinburgh in October 2009.

6. Update of Council Local Economic Development (LED) Plan

Members will be aware that the current LED plan "Staying Competitive" runs from 2006-2010. It is proposed that preparatory work on the development of a new plan to run from 2010 gets under way in the coming months with a view to developing a City-wide Integrated Economic/ Business Development Strategy from 2011.

Key Issues

1. Shopmobility Belfast – request for financial support

Shopmobility Belfast provides motorised scooters and manual wheelchairs, free of charge, to enable those with mobility problems to access the city centre and surrounding areas.

The organisation is based at a number of locations in the city and it also provides an outreach service at events such as Rose Week and the Balmoral Show. The organisation also has placed a number of scooters at Belfast Zoo and in Ormeau Park.

Shopmobility Belfast has recently carried out a survey which indicates that a typical member using the service brought two other shoppers with them and spent around £50 in the City.

The organisation's running costs for the year are around £280,000. They have asked Belfast City Council for a contribution of £25,000 towards this budget.

Resource Implications

The request from Shopmobility is for £25,000 for this financial year (2009/2010).

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members agree to the proposed allocation of funding, subject to agreement of a work plan, in conjunction with Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM).

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required if recommendation is accepted – funding will be allocated, subject to a legal agreement.

2. Social Economy Enterprise Strategy Consultation

The consultation paper issued by the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) in August 2009 has three key objectives. These are:

- To increase the awareness of the sector and establish its value to the local economy
- To develop the sector and increase its business strength
- To create a supportive and enabling environment.

Members are reminded that, as part of the Review of Public Administration (RPA), responsibility for a range of initiatives – including the Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP) will transfer to local authorities. DETI will, however, retain policy responsibility through the social economy strategy.

The draft Belfast City Council response to this consultation is attached as Appendix 1. The key elements of Council's response include:

- Endorsement of further, targeted support for the sector with confirmation of the council's own direct commitment to pre-enterprise support for the social economy (in conjunction with the Local Enterprise Agency (LEA) network)
- Proposal for an increase in the targets of the Social Entrepreneurship Programme in the Belfast City Council area
- Suggestion that Councils (including Belfast City Council) need to be part of the proposed Social Economy Policy Group (SEPG) given our responsibility for delivering actions in this field, particularly post-2011
- Councils should also be involved in the strategy monitoring process, in order to ensure that initiatives undertaken are being targeted at the most appropriate groups.

Resource Implications

No specific resource implications associated with this strategy.

Recommendations

It is proposed that members note and agreed the proposed Belfast City Council response to the consultation on the Social Economy Enterprise Strategy 2009-2011.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required if recommendation is accepted – response to be submitted to DETI in advance of the 9 October 2009 deadline.

3. Proposal from GEMS NI

The proposal incorporates a range of support measures for people in the Greater Belfast area who have lost their jobs or are facing redundancy as a result of the economic downturn. In essence the proposal includes 4 key services:

- A marketing campaign to raise awareness of the service
- A dedicated telephone helpline/web portal/community friendly access points and a Job Ops Shop – the latter to be held in GEMS twice a week – all elements of which are aimed at engaging with the newly unemployed
- A menu of employment access support e.g., help with CVs/application forms/interview skills/skills and training opportunities and referrals to other support services
- Engagement with employers/sector skills bodies/SMEs on market needs and opportunities for the newly unemployed.

The duration of the project is 9 months at a cost of £40,000 (£8,000 of which is to cover the costs central admin costs including the helpline).

In discussion with GEMS NI, they indicated that they were aware that Council has not set aside resources to support this activity. It was therefore suggested that officers would discuss the proposal with Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in order to see whether they might support this proposal.

DEL staff expressed concern that there would be duplication with the services already on offer through the Department and noted that they would therefore not be in a position to financially support this proposal in partnership with Council.

Resource Implications

The budget for this work over a 9 month period would be £40,000.

Recommendations

It is recommended that, given the lack of funding within Council, this proposal is not funded. However it may be pertinent to open discussions with DEL about future activity in this area, in order to ensure a coordinated support plan across the city.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required if recommendation is accepted.

4. Request for change of representation on Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme management structures

The political representation on the Strategic Joint Committee and the Local Action Group is weighted across the three Council areas to ensure an appropriate balance.

Given the change of Chairman and Deputy Chairman of Belfast City Council's Development Committee in June this year, this will create an imbalance in the political structures on the two bodies. None of the political affiliations from any of the other Councils have changed.

In light of this situation, a request has been received from the programme secretariat that the Deputy Chairman of the Development Committee be represented on the Strategic Joint Committee and that the Chairman of the Development Committee be represented on the Local Action Group.

Resource Implications

No resource commitments

Recommendations

It is recommended that members agree to the proposal that the Deputy Chairman of the Development Committee be represented on the Strategic Joint Committee and that the Chairman of the Development Committee be represented on the Local Action Group.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking applicable – decision to be actioned if agreed.

5. Cities of the Isles (COTI)

The 2009 summit event for the Cities of the Isles network will take place in Edinburgh on 8-9 October 2009. The programme for the event is currently being finalised but the theme is the economic downturn and the challenges for funding infrastructure, maintaining investment flows and developing plans for economic resilience at a city level. It will consist of a range of presentations by city representatives as well as site visits

across the city.

Resource Implications

The city of Edinburgh has invited four representatives for each city to attend. It is likely that the travel, accommodation and subsistence costs will not exceed £300 per person.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members approve the attendance at this event of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman (or nominees) along with up to two officers, at a maximum total cost of £1,200.

Decision Tracking

Following approval, that arrangements be put in place for the attendance of Chair, Deputy Chair or nominees at the COTI Summit:

Time frame: December 2009 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

6. Update of Council Local Economic Development (LED) Plan

Economic conditions have changed significantly since the development of the current LED plan. Similarly, the funding structure for Council-led local economic development activity has changed with a new Structural Funds programme. In light of these developments, it is proposed that the current LED plan be updated to reflect this situation and in preparation for 2011 when a range of additional LED functions will transfer to councils.

Resource Implications

No specific resources required for the review of the LED plan – work to be carried out by staff resources. Resource commitments for proposed activities within the plan will be met from existing Council and external funding sources. As part of the process, a review of the current staffing structure within the Economic Development Unit may be necessary.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the proposal to update the current LED plan in the coming months and that they agree to a review of the staffing structure required to deliver this activity, with a further report to be brought back to a future meeting for approval.

Decision Tracking

Following approval, work will commence on the revision of the plan. A draft of the plan – along with a review of the resources required for delivery, will be brought back to a future committee meeting.

Time frame: January 2010 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key Abbreviations

DETI – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
NIRDP – Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme
LAG – Local Action Group
SJC – Strategic Joint Committee
COTI – Cities of the Isles
LED – Local Economic Development
SEPG – Social Economy Policy Group
SEE – Social Economy Enterprise

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Draft Belfast City Council response to Social Economic Enterprise consultation