

Extract from minutes of –

DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

16th SEPTEMBER, 2009

“United Kingdom City of Culture 2013

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

‘Relevant Background Information

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has launched a UK-wide contest for areas to be designated as UK City of Culture 2013. Thereafter the competition will be staged every four years.

The overall aim is to encourage the use of culture as a catalyst for a “step change”.

The successful city will need to:

- Deliver a high quality cultural programme (similar standard to that delivered by Liverpool Capital of Culture) that spans the course of the year and reaches a wide variety of audiences
- Deliver a programme that uses culture to lead to lasting social regeneration
- Demonstrate economic impact from the programme
- Maximise the legacy of UK City of Culture

Bids must be distinctive, ambitious, demonstrate cultural and artistic excellence, reflect a broad partnership, reach out to wide range of audiences and participants (especially under representative groups), be realistic and achievable. The assessment criteria have been published as part of the guidance notes.

Key Issues

Outline proposals for 2013 can be submitted by 15 October 2009 for initial feedback from expert assessors. This part of the process is optional. An initial bid must then be submitted by 11 December 2009 and, if shortlisted, areas will be asked to submit a second full and final bid by the 28 May 2010.

Belfast has the opportunity to bid for UK City of Culture 2013 either on behalf of the City or a wider area. There has been some discussion that there could be a regional bid from Northern Ireland incorporating Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Both cities have registered an initial expression of interest. The guidance notes state that the location bidding should have a clear identity for visitors; a city and its hinterland; or a closely linked set of urban areas; or be a cohesive area capable of sustaining a concentrated programme of cultural activities.

Officers have met with the regional and city stakeholders, including Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Department of Culture Arts and Leisure, Department of Social Development, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Belfast Chamber of Commerce, Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau and Belfast City Centre Management. The purpose of the meeting was to update stakeholders on the UK City of Culture initiative and gauge support. The initiative was met with a positive response; the general view is that the timing is right for Belfast to submit a bid given the level of investment in culture related infrastructure including the opening of the Titanic Signature Building in 2012.

Regional agencies expressed the desire to see the strongest bid coming from Northern Ireland which may be one collective bid based on a regional approach, including both Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. However, if competition arises between areas regional agencies will not support any one bid over another during the competitive process. Belfast based agencies including BVCB and BCCM expressed a desire to submit a bid for Belfast.

On balance, and in order to maximise the benefits that would be returned to Belfast from attaining this title, it is considered that the optimum way forward is for Belfast to participate in a regional bid. Central Government is stressing the benefits of a single bid from the region and without the support of DCAL and ACNI it would not be possible to undertake a successful bidding process. A full assessment of the resource implications along with an analysis of how a regional bid would be constructed will be brought back to the next Development Committee should Members agree to adopt this route.

Resource Implications

There is no Government budget allocated to the bidding process. The two stage process has been designed to keep the costs to bidding areas reasonable, as only those areas that are shortlisted will be required to prepare the detailed elements of the full and final bid.

At a UK level a number of funders, including Arts Council England, HLF, English Heritage and Visit Britain, have indicated their desire to support the process and winning bidder but cannot make firm or exclusive commitment to any one bidder during the process.

Belfast City Council's Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit alongside the Events Unit would have to allocate resources to prepare the outline proposal followed by an initial bid. However, due to the national significance of this potential accolade, it will be important to engage with a range of partners to secure buy-in and maximise resources from other agencies.

If successful, there will be substantial costs involved in delivering a high quality programme of events during 2013. Obvious benefits for the UK City of Culture 2013 will be the economic and social benefits derived from programme delivery. The guidance notes also flag the significant media impact and promotional value of hosting a large scale programme of cultural activities as well as commitment from BBC and Channel 4 to support the winning project to similar level of coverage given to Liverpool Capital of Culture.

Recommendations

It is recommended that

- Members note the contents of the above report and agree that Belfast should further explore participation in the UK City of Culture Competition as part of a wider regional bid.

Decision Tracking

If the Committee agree to submit a bid, details of the outline proposal along with resource implications will be presented at the October Committee.

Timeframe: October 2009 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key to Abbreviations

DCMS - Department of Culture, Media and Sport
HLF - Heritage Lottery Fund
BVCB – Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau
BCCM – Belfast City Centre Management'

The Head of Economic Initiatives informed the Committee that 29 Cities had expressed an interest in being considered as the United Kingdom City of Culture in 2013. She pointed out that, subsequent to the papers having been issued for the meeting, it had been ascertained from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport that it was unlikely that a regional bid from Northern Ireland would be successful.

During discussion in the matter, Members pointed out that, before any decision could be taken with regard to the submission of a bid, the Committee would need to receive a report on how the entire process would be funded. Other Members expressed the view that, at present, Belfast was not in a position to be successful with a bid since its arts infrastructure, whilst improving, was not yet fully operational. It was pointed out further that one of the reasons why the bid which the Council had submitted for the European Capital of Culture had not succeeded had been the lack of involvement of sporting organisations and that the report before the Committee gave no indication that sport would be included in the 2013 bid. It was also suggested that the City would need to develop its shared future agenda more fully before a bid was submitted.

Following further discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Crozier,
Seconded by Councillor Rodway,

That the Committee further explore Belfast's participation in the 2013 United Kingdom City of Culture competition.

On a vote by show of hands five Members voted for the proposal and seven against and it was accordingly declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed that the Council not submit a bid for the 2013 United Kingdom City of Culture competition."