



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Economic Development Unit Update
Date:	11 November 2009
Reporting Officer:	Shirley McCay/Tim Husbands, Interim Co-Directors of Development
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Relevant Background Information

1. Belfast City Centre Management – Presentation

Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) is currently delivering its business plan for the 2009/10 financial year and is working on an outline business plan for 2010/11. BCCM has requested an opportunity to present at an upcoming meeting of the Development Committee details of current activities and achievements and draft proposals for the year ahead.

2. Festive Lighting – Arterial Routes

Members will be aware at Development Committee meeting of 15 October 2008 discussion took place in connection with festive lighting during the Christmas period. At this meeting Members expressed the view that in 2009 they would like to see emphasis being placed on the provision of festive lighting on those streets which acted as gateways to the City centre rather than those streets within the centre of Belfast alone. Committee subsequently agreed that further discussions be held with the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce to examine methods of ensuring that the arterial routes within the City are made more festive during the 2009 Christmas period. This issue has since been explored and 'A Guide to Christmas Lighting in Belfast' has been produced and distributed to areas outside the city centre.

3. East Belfast Mission – Request for Funding

At the April 2009 Development Committee, Members agreed to provide match funding to four organisations which had been successful in securing financial assistance through the European Social Fund (ESF). These organisations were East Belfast Mission, North Belfast Partnership, Women into Business and Training for Women Network. The approval granted was to provide funding for the 2009/10 financial year only and, as a condition of the funding; the four groups were not to request any further

money from the Council in connection with the 2010/2011 aspect of their ESF projects.

Recently, East Belfast Mission has written to Council seeking match funding of £52,509 to further support the Work 4 U project in the 2010/2011 financial year.

4. Retail Therapy - Tender

Retail Therapy is Council's bespoke business development programme for independent retailers aimed at improving the competitiveness of the local independent retail business community within the City.

At the Development Committee meeting in May 2009, approval was given to develop and deliver a second wave of the programme in 2009/10.

5. Committee Site Visits

Interest has recently been expressed by Members and from external organisations in undertaking a number of site visits to various organisations throughout the City as part of an ongoing process of relationship building between Elected Members and the local business community.

6. Customer/Stakeholder Engagement

It is proposed that the Development Committee should host an informal networking session for its customers and stakeholders to help build relationships between Councillors and external organisations.

Key Issues

1. Belfast City Centre Management – Presentation

BCCM is undertaking a number of initiatives aimed at improving the environment and retail offering within the City centre area and has asked for an opportunity to present to Members actions delivered during 2009/10 and a range of activities being considered for 2010/11.

Resource Implications

No resource implications associated with this request.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members agree to receive a presentation from BCCM at the December 2009 meeting of Development Committee.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required if recommendation is accepted.

2. Festive Lighting – Arterial Routes

Festive lighting is a key element in providing a vibrant atmosphere during the Christmas period. It is at the core of creating an area's identity and can actively contribute towards attracting shoppers and therefore bolstering trade during the Christmas period.

The Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce and BCCM have recently prepared and distributed a Christmas lighting leaflet to trader groups across the City providing details

of the various lighting options available (e.g. tree lighting, lampposts, cross-street and wall mounted lights) and the associated average costs per unit, including installation and connection fees.

BCCM is eager to project manage additional lighting schemes outside of the City centre and has informed these groups that they are willing to manage the health and safety issues and implementation of lighting on their behalf, free of charge.

Trader groups are however required to purchase their own lights either through the existing City centre contract or through their own networks.

Resource Implications

No specific resource implications associated with this activity.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the content of this report.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required.

3. East Belfast Mission – Request for Funding

East Belfast Mission, through the Stepping Stone Project, currently delivers the Work 4 U project, funded by ESF and match-funded by the Council. The aim of this programme is to work with unemployed individuals in East Belfast, including those deemed economically inactive, and assist them to find employment.

When Members agreed in April 2009 to co-finance support for all four projects, it was agreed that as a condition of the year two funding, all groups in receipt of match funding must not request further money from the Council in connection with the 2010/2011 aspect of their ESF projects. This condition was written into all four separate Funding Agreements - all of which were signed by the individual parties and returned for the Council's official seal of approval.

Whilst the Work 4 U project is worthy, it is for the reason noted above, that the Development Department has not made provision in its revenue estimates for 2010/11 for groups participating in European Social Fund Projects.

The Council believes it is imperative there is a more strategic, co-ordinated approach to tackling the skills and employability needs of its residents and is currently taking steps to address this issue. In response to this, Members agreed in December 2008 to a proposal to open discussions with Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and other key skills and employability partners in order to develop an agreed strategy for our City.

Members are advised that the Council convened a Belfast Employability and Skills Board in May 2009 including representatives from Central and Local Government, Universities, Colleges, sector skills councils, trade bodies and the local community. Since this group first formed, regular meetings have taken place and a 'Belfast Employability & Skills Action Plan' is currently in development which will help address current and future needs facing our City. This document is expected to be finalised in January 2010 and is intended to help shape the Council's future role in employability and skills related activity – in particular advancing joint activity with key partners and stakeholders in responding to the economic downturn.

Members are asked to note that if financial assistance is offered to the Work 4 U project it is likely we will be asked to support other ESF projects that we are currently financing, including Local Employment Access Partnership (LEAP), Women into Business and Training for Women Network. Members are also reminded that there are 47 ESF projects in total in the Belfast area and we cannot rule out the possibility that some of these projects would not approach us for year three funding.

Members should also be aware that, given that ESF activity is funded by the EU, any agreement to co-finance these projects will preclude the draw-down of monies from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) (i.e. the money for co-financing will have to come from rates monies only).

Resource Implications

The budget for the Work 4 U project over a 12 month period would be £52,059.

Recommendations

It is recommended this proposal is not funded given the lack of funding within Council and the decision taken by Members in April 2009 – that is, groups in receipt of match funding must not request further money from the Council in connection with the 2010/2011 aspect of their ESF projects. In addition, agreeing to co-finance the Work 4 U project for one further year would adversely affect other activity planned, most notably, that of the Belfast Employability and Skills Board.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required if recommendation is accepted.

4. Retail Therapy - Tender

A tender for delivery of Council's Retail Therapy initiative will be issued towards the end of 2009. Members are asked to delegate authority to the Interim Co-Directors of Development, in association with the Chairman of Development Committee, to approve the most economically advantageous tender received, subject to a form of contract being drawn up by Legal Services.

Resource Implications

The budget of £50,000 was approved by Committee in May 2009 and is included in the Departmental Plan.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the content of the report and approve the proposal to appoint the most economically advantageous tender following a competitive tendering process and subject to an appropriate legal contract.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required.

5. Committee Site Visits

Relationship building between Elected Members and the local business community can be achieved by undertaking a programme of company site visits with selected companies on a sectoral/geographical/scale basis.

To date interest has been expressed by the Port of Belfast, Stena, George Best Belfast City Airport, Belfast International Airport and the Northern Ireland Science Park.

Resource Implications

No specific resource implications associated with this activity.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members of Committee note the contents of the report and approve a programme of site visits to selected companies, including the Port of Belfast, Stena, George Best Belfast City Airport, Belfast International Airport and Northern Ireland Science Park. Additional visits may also be considered at a later date, if deemed appropriate by the Committee

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required.

6. Customer/Stakeholder Engagement

It is proposed that the Development Committee should host an informal networking session for its customers and stakeholders to help build relationships between Councillors and external organisations.

Resource Implications

Less than £3000.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee agrees to host an information networking session for its customers and stakeholders in December 2009.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required.

Key to Abbreviations

BCCM – Belfast City Centre Management

ESF – European Social Fund

LEAP – Local Employment Access Partnership

DEL – Department for Employment and Learning

DETI – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

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