



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Draft Plan for State of the City
<b>Date:</b>	09 December 2009
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Shirley McCay Acting Director of Development, ext. 3459
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### Relevant Background Information

Committee will be aware of the successful State of the City series of conferences organised by the Development Department.

After the last conference of the current series, in May 2008, the Policy and Business Development Unit (PBDU) commissioned Lestas Consulting to undertake a review of the initiative.

In summary, the review stated that the State of the City programme has been: 'a very successful way of bringing together key individuals and organisations to reflect on the needs and development of the City'.

Nearly all (94%) of key stakeholders stated that their impression of the SOC events was either excellent or good.

The review also stated that there were some areas for improvement, with the main ones being:

- The business sector could be more presented;
- The State of the City should be an engagement mechanism with two-way stream communication.
- Cost efficiency could be improved;

This report describes a proposal to refresh State of the City as a key BCC product and how recommendations for improvement in the review will be addressed.

## **Key Issues**

### 1. Purpose of the SOC

PBDU notes that the purpose of the SOC is to:

- Maintain BCC's leadership role in development areas, particularly urban regeneration (economic, physical, social and cultural)
- Share knowledge and propagate intellectual capital
- Influence evidence-based decision making
- Improve internal and external relationships by increasing networking between Members, BCC officers and external stakeholders
- Influence the agenda about issues affecting the future of the City (and community planning) and complex public policy issues
- Serve as a mechanism to initiate action and a catalyst challenge to community planning, leading to joint knowledge/expertise and joint understanding and synergy
- Raise profile of BCC as a dynamic, learning organisation

### 2. Why we need the State of the City initiative

By refreshing the State of the City initiative, BCC would show strong leadership as there are no other organisations with a sole Belfast focus covering so many cross-cutting issues. BCC needs State of the City to continue to grow capacity, knowledge, understanding, skills and consensus for future joint or synergetic/integrated action subsequent to on-going institutional changes e.g. RPA.

Belfast needs a platform for a high level debate on the future development of the City, covering all the challenging aspects of social, economic, cultural and physical development. The City also needs a regular networking mechanism through which those who work on improving the City can share ideas and knowledge. To achieve its purpose however, the SOC initiative would need to have more frequent and effective ways of communicating.

BCC and its Development Department are in the best position to offer that for the following reasons:

- Its work is Belfast focused
- Its work covers all key aspects of City development
- It has overarching knowledge and expertise
- It has access to high level speakers and experts
- A dedicated budget

### 3. State of the City Brand

As State of the City is already a very recognisable initiative and it exists as such in other cities in the UK and USA, it is recommended that the City maintain the name but redesign and refresh the brand. This is a lower cost alternative to developing an entirely new brand.

### 4. State of the City Products

Different multiple products would be used to reach the stakeholders, achieve the maximum impact and ensure a more value for money approach:

- 8 Seminars over two years: Over one year BCC would hold four quarterly seasonal seminars that would take place in City Hall as it is the civic centre of Belfast with the best public access. Each event would take place at 5.00 pm and would last for up to an hour and a half. The seminars would have a Member making the opening address and welcome which would bring the initiative into a closer relationship with Members. Speakers would be balanced between local, national and international figures, covering a series of interwoven topics. The seminars would provide opportunities for debate but also foster networking, enabling connections to be made and future projects and initiatives to be developed.
- Publications:  
Four Development Briefs: .After every quarterly seminar PDBU would publish a Development Brief on the topic covered, starting with Spring 2010. This Brief would be made available to members, BCC staff and external stakeholders.  
One major research paper – PBDU proposes to publish one research paper per year on one of the main topical subjects, e.g. Recovery from Recession in Belfast. This could be done in partnership with one of the think tanks, e.g. The Work Foundation.  
Magazines – City Matters and Intercom would be used to communicate the information both internally and externally.
- Web Page: The Council's website will be regularly updated to ensure that stakeholders are well informed. A Facebook page would also be set up to serve as an online portal for information on the upcoming events, sharing ideas, documents and feedback on the events.
- One-to-ones: Meetings would be organised with some internal officers, Members and external stakeholders to raise the profile of the events, attract co-hosting opportunities and support the development of future projects & initiatives; and
- Email: Stakeholders would be notified by email of the upcoming events and the change of direction for SOC. The invites and RSVPs would also be sent by email again a low cost, environmentally friendly option compared to previous conference expenses.

##### 5. Suggested State of the City Theme for 2010

It is proposed to focus the first year of SOC on the how Belfast is recovering from the recession from different development points of view i.e. business, social, cultural, physical and environmental. The seminar series could be entitled "Belfast Bounces Back".

This theme would attract the business sector whose presence at SOC has effectively decreased over the years. A business champion could be chair for some of the events.

The (1<sup>st</sup>) Spring seminar would be opened by a key note speaker with a wide ranging city development and renaissance/growth expertise, such as Daniel M Rooney, US Ambassador to Ireland or Councillor Steven Purcell from Glasgow City Council.

The (2<sup>nd</sup>) Summer seminar would focus on increased poverty and social exclusion as an impact of the recession. Potential speakers would be Margaret Ledwith, professor of Community Development and Social Justice at the University of Cumbria and Mae Shaw, University of Edinburgh.

The (3<sup>rd</sup>) Autumn event could focus on Belfast as a Cultural City and the challenges recession has placed on its cultural assets.

The (4<sup>th</sup>) Winter event could focus more on the physical aspect of the recession in Belfast, the launch of the Belfast Masterplan.

Using this approach the seminars would cover all three important aspects of the City development, economic, social and physical and still remain very topical.

Other topics are proposed for the SOC events during its second year under the auspices of renaissance of the City after the recession:

- Community development (co-hosting with CFNI)
- Community planning (BCC leading the way)
- Skills (co-hosting with Belfast Metropolitan College)
- Transport and connectivity (co-hosting with DOE/DRD)

The Development Department Managers' Team and Unit Managers' Forum would be involved in the selection of topics and speakers – it is proposed that SOC would be a regular agenda item.

#### 6. Actions to progress State of the City:

- Update SOC website
- Update and create SOC master database - pass it around Departmental Sections and Units for additional inputs
- Hire a design company to refresh the brand and produce low cost banners, stands, templates and stationery material which would be used for every seminar/event – in line with agreement with Corporate Communications' protocol and guidelines
- Hire an event management company to organise seminars – this will reduce the administration burden on officers who could focus their effort on production of the development briefs and the research paper
- Book venue and hire speakers
- Set up a Facebook page - in agreement with Corporate Communications

#### 7. Evaluation and monitoring

Regular evaluation sheets would be used to assess the success of each event and publication. There will be a particular focus on the degree to which the events have led to the development of future projects and initiatives. After the first year of operation, in October 2010, PBDU proposes to undertake an evaluation of the initiative in order to gain an insight into the overall success of SOC and whether changes need to be made.

#### **Resource Implications**

- The Development Department has already allocated an existing budget of £30,000 to cover one year's spend in 2010, to cover the costs of all events and the production of research documents and development briefs. The second year of the project will require a further £30,000.
- Compared to the last SOC series where £30,000 delivered one annual conference, the new SOC series will (with the same budget) deliver 4 events, 4 Development Briefs and one research paper. Co-hosting will be encouraged to reduce the costs of delivery and organisational burden.

**Recommendations**

Members are asked to approve the proposed process for State of the City OC and the allocation of £30,000 for the second year of the project, subject to the 2010/2011 Revenue Estimates being agreed.

**Decision Tracking**

Further to approval, the first seasonal State of the City Seminar will take place in March 2010.

Time line: March 2010

Reporting Officer: Barbary Cooke

**Key Abbreviations**

SOC – State of the City

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