



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Milwaukee Irish Festival Northern Ireland Showcase
Date:	14 April 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

### Relevant Background Information

A request has been received from the organiser of the Milwaukee Irish Festival, for Belfast to feature as part of the Milwaukee Irish Festival programme in 2010.

The Milwaukee Irish Festival is the world's largest annual Irish cultural festival and takes place over four days in Wisconsin U.S.A. This year the festival will be staged from 19–22 August 2010 and the aim is to promote Irish culture through music, dance, cultural exhibits, drama and sport. 130,000 consumers are expected to visit Milwaukee Irish Fest, 79% of whom have roots in Ireland, 55% have visited Ireland before and 40% planning a visit to the island within the next year.

There are two tourism areas within the 75 acre festival site. Destination Ireland, sponsored by Tourism Ireland, is in a prime location just inside the Main Entrance and across the aisle from the Travel Area. The second area, a Northern Ireland Village, will be located at the entrance to the Celtic Roots Stage and will include a marquee for each County/City showcasing their particular part of Northern Ireland.

As part of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations Belfast has been asked to be represented as part of a Northern Ireland Showcase. The organiser has also requested if Belfast could mount a Titanic Exhibition as part of the Showcase.

The Milwaukee Irish Festival has approached the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to ask it to consider funding organisations in Northern Ireland to attend the Showcase. This request is currently being considered by DCAL, however it is unlikely to be a significant investment in 2010.

Appendix 1 is the most recent correspondence from the Milwaukee Irish Fest organisers outlining the current Northern Ireland participants

**Key Issues**

The Titanic Exhibition was first developed as part of the Smithsonian event in 2007. It is owned by National Museums Northern Ireland and it has been in storage for the last few years. Tourism Ireland is currently looking at updating the exhibition in partnership with National Museums Northern Ireland and displaying in Grand Central Station, New York in September 2010. The cost of this will be in the region of £300,000. It is unlikely at this stage that these partners will consider Milwaukee Irish Fest due to timing and budget constraints.

National Museums Northern Ireland have indicated that they could supply some exhibition content if the production and erection could be covered by Milwaukee Irish Fest. Whilst the festival would have no budget to put towards this, they would have the skills and resources to erect the exhibition on site.

It should also be noted that NITB has established a Titanic 2012 marketing group to identify marketing opportunities between now and 2012 to promote Titanic. They have not included Milwaukee Irish Fest as part of their plans, although have acknowledged the potential.

Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) has included £5000 towards attending Milwaukee Irish Fest as part of their Marketing Plan 2010. Having discussed this opportunity with Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, they are keen to go to the event to explore the opportunities that it presents for Belfast in the future. BVCB can liaise with National Museums Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to source some exhibition materials to promote Belfast and Titanic.

**Resource Implications**

Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) has a budget of £5000 to attend the 2010 Milwaukee Irish Festival. This budget is part of BVCB's Marketing and Visitor Servicing Plan agreed by Development Committee in January 2010.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee should await BVCB's analysis (as well as DCAL) after this year's event and then consider potential Belfast involvement in future years.

**Decision Tracking**Timeline

BVCB attend the Milwaukee Irish Festival from 19 – 22 August 2010 and report back to Belfast City Council on future potential.

Date: September 2010

Officer: Kerrie Sweeney

**Key to Abbreviations**

DCAL - Department of Culture Arts and Leisure

BVCB - Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau

**Documents Attached**

Appendix 1 – recent correspondence from Milwaukee Irish Fest