



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	European Unit Progress
Date:	9 June 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Laura Leonard, European Manager, ext 3577

### Relevant Background Information

Members receive regular updates with respect to work within the EU unit. The following report will provide detail relating to

1. Quartiers En Crise
2. Dublin civic study visit to Belfast/Comet region

### Key Issues

#### 1. Quartiers En Crise:

Members will be aware that the city of Belfast has been a member of the Brussels based network Quartiers En Crise ( QEC) since it was formed in 1989. The name of the network means “Neighbourhoods in Crisis” and exists to bring European opportunities closer to cities by way of delivering European (EU) funded projects at a neighbourhood level. The network is formed on a three pillar basis ensuring that elected members, citizens and statutory professionals work together on EU driven projects and policy, particularly around urban regeneration. From 1989 to 2008, the city of Belfast was involved in the organisation as Treasurer through the Belfast Health Trust (formally North and West Health Trust). Traditionally cities are members of the network through their municipalities.

Belfast City Council (BCC) was involved through the Development Department and attendance by the Director of Development and later the European Manager. The network can be credited for playing a key role in securing the Urban pilot, the Urban programmes for Northern Ireland and over 30 projects for neighbourhoods in Belfast .

Members will recall that BCC took over the responsibility of chairing the QEC network membership and the local branch of stakeholders in June 2008. The local QEC grouping involves the Belfast Health Trust, BAPs, NIHE, DSD, Belfast Metropolitan College, DEL, DETI, BRO and Healthy Cities.

On 18 September 2009, QEC and its local partners re-launched the network local

branch as 'Belfast in Europe – QEC', giving the group a more meaningful title.

The cost of engaging as a member of QEC is €7800 per annum for each city partnership. The cost for BCC has been £2500 per year, which is also contributed by each of the local partners. The balance of this partner contribution provides funding for engagement in EU events in Brussels and also to match fund local projects that secure EU funding through QEC.

BCC also contributes a significant amount of staff time to QEC centrally in the role as Treasurer on the Executive Bureau and also as local coordinator ensuring meetings are facilitated, information shared and project opportunities are followed up.

In February 2010, The Internal Local Government Auditors undertook an audit of the European Unit. One of the recommendations was to examine the current level of EU network engagement and in particular the "current level of commitment to QEC and the feasibility issues associated with acting as Treasurer to an organisation based in Brussels.

A cost benefit analysis with respect to BCC's involvement in QEC is attached as Appendix 1 of this report.

Since taking on the role of chair of the local QEC network in June 2008 and attending the Executive Bureau meetings and AGMs, BCC staff are querying the internal structure of the organisation in Brussels. Information has repeatedly been sought regarding more detailed accounts and staff contracts and to date responses have been unsatisfactory. To this end a final attempt was made by the EU Manager on the advice of BCC Legal Services to explore the inner workings of the organisation at an Executive Bureau Meeting in January and March 2010. The manager expressed concerns around Bureau member liability with regard to staff and other issues.

At a recent meeting of the QEC/Belfast in Europe Partnership, a unanimous decision was taken by members to withdraw entirely from the QEC network both in terms of standing down as Treasurer and as a member. This decision was taken based on concerns regarding the internal operations of the organisation and in the context of scrutinising EU networking and outputs in the context of the recession. The organisational statutes require six months notice of withdrawal as member before the end of the calendar year and non re-nomination on the Executive Bureau before the AGM to be held on 15 June 2010.

Members are asked to consider the proposal to withdraw entirely from the QEC network and continue to support the local re-energised Belfast in Europe.

## **2. Dublin Civic Study Visit to Belfast/Comet region:**

Members will be aware that BCC's EU unit provides the secretariat for the Comet Interreg partnership. This partnership was set up in April 2005 and comprises two elected members and an economic development officer for each of the Comet councils, namely Belfast, Lisburn, Castlereagh, Carrickfergus, North Down and Newtownabbey.

In September 2006, the Comet Interreg Partnership was invited by Dublin City Council and The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) to a civic and study visit to the city of Dublin and its surrounding areas to undertake site visits and share and discuss approaches to urban regeneration and metropolitan partnership. The visit was endorsed and welcomed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of the Taoiseach.

A return visit from the Dublin authorities and the NSMC has been agreed by the Comet Interreg Partnership. This will take place on 9 November 2010. The aim is to showcase urban regeneration within the Greater Belfast metropolitan area and to explore future potential areas of collaboration particularly in the area of economic development. The detail of the one day study visit programme will be determined over the summer period but will entail a political briefing in Armagh by the NSMC, a welcome at Stormont or BCC, followed by site visits (yet to be determined within the Comet area) and a civic dinner offered by Newtownabbey Council.

On the second day of the Dublin visit to Greater Belfast, the Comet Interreg Partnership will be formally launching its Interreg IVA cross border projects at an event to be held in Belfast City Hall. This will be attended by the EU Commission and NI Assembly representatives, as well as stakeholders involved in cross border project development and delivery.

In connection with the formal launch, the Comet partnership will also hold a half day thematic conference which will showcase Comet's transnational activity in recent years. This will be an opportunity to showcase projects such as the Brownfield Europe and OPENCities projects led by BCC.

The conference will also be a platform to promote current and future opportunities for interregional and transnational working. Members are asked to note the events of 9-10 November 2010 and give approval of the participation of the Lord Mayor, the Chair and Deputy Chair of Development and the Chief Executive, or their nominees.

#### **Resource Implications**

1. Withdrawal from membership of the QEC network will result in a £2,500 annual saving to Belfast City Council.
2. There is no direct financial cost to BCC as all costs are already accounted for in the current Comet service level agreement

#### **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to approve the following:

1. That BCC withdraws entirely from the Brussels based Quartiers En Crise network; and
2. The participation of the Lord Mayor, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Development Committee and the Chief Executive (or their nominees) in the Dublin study visit to Greater Belfast and the Comet Interreg Launch Conference

#### **Decision Tracking**

Further to ratification the European Manager will:

1. Withdraw from the Brussels QEC network and continue facilitating the Belfast in Europe stakeholders group without connecting it to the QEC network.

Time line: September 2010

Reporting Officer: Laura Leonard

2. Develop a programme for the Dublin Study Visit to Belfast

Time line: September 2010

Reporting Officer: Laura Leonard

**Key to Abbreviations**

QEC – Quartiers En Crise

BAP – Belfast Area Partnerships

NIHE – NI Housing Executive

DSD – Department of Social Development

DEL – Department of Employment and Learning

DETI – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

BRO – Belfast Regeneration Office

AGMs – Annual General Meetings

NSMC – North South Ministerial Council

**Documents Attached**

Appendix 1 - QEC cost benefit analysis