

Cost Benefit Analysis of QEC ERAN Membership

1. Introduction

This report focuses on the costs and benefits associated with membership of the QeC ERAN network for the two year period June 2008 to June 2010. Costs noted in the report include staff time paid by Belfast City Council to provide the service of secretariat for local members of the QeC network, the annual membership fee of the network, travel and meeting costs.

2. Background

From 1989 until 2008, the Belfast Health Trust held the role of Treasurer on the Executive Bureau of the QEC ERAN Brussels based network and was responsible for co-ordinating local network activity in Belfast. In June 2008 the role and responsibilities associated with Treasurer were transferred to Belfast City Council and local activity was undertaken by the European Unit.

The key objectives of the QeC ERAN network are to:

- promote integrated approaches to urban regeneration ensuring local residents' involvement
- Develop programmes and projects that facilitate the exchange of experience and practice
- Support initiatives based on greater participation of target groups
- Promote joined up working and thinking between local authorities and other key agencies, especially local communities and NGOS
- Undertake research and evaluation in order to impact on existing and future urban regeneration policies/programmes
- Represent the views and needs of disadvantaged areas/groups within EU and EU groupings and networks
- Create a network which constitutes a European 'think tank' regarding the issues of diversity, integration, social and economic exclusion and urban regeneration

The network's headquarters are based in Brussels and it offers its members:

- a) an information service on policy and project calls,
- b) support in developing projects, finding partners and funding
- c) project development support at local level

In Belfast 6 organisations came together as a local group to discuss and benefit from the opportunities made available through the QeC ERAN network. These were:

- 1) Belfast Regeneration Office/ Department of Social Development*
- 2) Department of Employment and Learning*
- 3) Belfast Health Trust*

- 4) Northern Ireland Housing Executive*
- 5) Belfast City Council*
- 6) Belfast Area Partnership Boards

Five of these members (shown by an asterisk) are paying members. Each calendar year they make a payment of £2,500 (totalling £12,500), of which 7,800 euros are paid to cover the annual membership fee of the QeC ERAN network. £3,600 is paid to Belfast City Council to cover annual costs associated with local administration and the remaining monies are used to support costs for attendance at QeC ERAN policy/funding related workshops and/or used to provide match funding to support local projects.

In November 2008, Belfast members of the QeC network commissioned Stratagem to undertake a review of their network involvement. Its report Stratagem highlighted:

- that motivation to be a member of the local group and QEC network stemmed from desire to be involved in a European level interagency/partnership approach to the development of Belfast. This supported complimentary objectives of member organisations.
- Members valued the benefits of an integrated approach involving the three pillars of statutory, political and community sectors. This was always regarded as a unique strength of the QEC ERAN network as elected members, officials and local residents were involved in exchanging learning, influencing policy and implementing project delivery on the ground. In its first years of operation the network was extremely successful in lobbying the Commission on Urban policy and as a result the URBAN programme was launched.
- Members also valued the make up of the local group which reflected broad sectoral interests. They welcomed the opportunities membership of QEC ERAN offered to receive and exchange information on policy and funding for projects in their sectoral areas.
- Members welcomed the opportunity to improve co-ordination of EU activity through local meetings and information sharing as well as the opportunity to develop new activity on themes such as community planning, poverty, social inclusion and the environment.
- Holding a position on the Executive Bureau of QeC ERAN was also valued as this provided an opportunity influence the direction of the network to benefit Belfast.

One member summed up rationale for membership of network as follows:

“QEC-ERAN provides the glue that brings us all together. If it did not exist we would be seeking to re-invent it.”

When reviewing their involvement with QeC ERAN and future role, Belfast members recognised value in the opportunity to be informed about policy and funding and to influence these where possible by tapping into other resources and networks such as Eurocities and CECOHDAS. The local group was re-launched in September 2009 and re-named as Belfast in Europe QeC ERAN to reflect its wider interests. Since then membership has expanded to include:

- 1) Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
- 2) Belfast Healthy Cities
- 3) Belfast Metropolitan College

The European Commission Office in Belfast as well as the British Council have also expressed interest in joining.

3. Benefits

In the period following June 2008 to end June 2010, the QeC ERAN network has provided local members with opportunities to:

- partner in 25 projects funded through a range of programmes including Interreg, Grundtvig Lifelong Learning, Integration Fund for 3rd Country Nationals, European Social Fund, Fundamental Rights and FP7
- develop and lead projects relevant to their priority areas
- receive quarterly updates highlighting key EU policy and funding developments
- profile work undertaken in Belfast at QEC ERAN the AGM events
- guide and influence the work of QeC by holding a key role on the Executive Bureau

3.1 Opportunities Taken up

A) Events

Cllr Michael Browne presented at the QEC Winter event in Brussels in January 2009. His attendance was useful in terms of confirming Belfast City Council's commitment to the role of Treasurer as well as profiling the city.

Laura Leonard and Deirdre Ferguson attended the QEC spring event in Prague. Learning from this event was policy based with a focus on urban issues.

Elma Newberry, (BAPs representative 2009) accompanied Deirdre Ferguson to the AGM in Brussels in June 2009. This provided a valuable

opportunity to learn about regeneration activity taking place in Brussels, to network and explore opportunities with other QEC ERAN network members.

Belfast members have attended all 6 Executive Bureau meetings in this period. Costs for flights and accommodation have been paid for by the QEC ERAN membership fee. In addition to attending QEC ERAN meetings members have maximised their time in Brussels by attending side meetings/events such as the Open Days or attendance at Eurocities meetings.

B) Projects

Of the 25 project opportunities presented by QEC ERAN 2 have been taken up in the period 2008 to date.

i. Building Healthy Communities

Belfast City Council took up the opportunity to be one of 9 partners in this 700,000 euro 3 year URBACT funded project. It is of benefit to the Council as it ties in with sub-themes of its Corporate Plan namely health assessment, healthy aging, healthy places and environment. Funding coming to the Council supports involvement in information exchange events, local support group activity and contributes to staff costs. The Council has been required to provide £25,000 as match funding for the project.

ii. Healthy and Wealthy Together

QEC ERAN offered an opportunity for Belfast to partner in an application to the European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals for a 'Health and Wealthy Together' project. Belfast Health Trust took up the opportunity to be a partner in this 625,000 euro 18 month project and now leads a local action group which Belfast City Council is part of. The Council's Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator sits on this group.

Through this project the health needs of migrants are being mapped and the capacity of professionals working with migrants is developed. By participating in this project the Council's work relating to its corporate theme of health and wellbeing is accelerated. As the project is managed by Belfast Health Trust, the Trust undertakes all funding and resource responsibilities of local lead partner including provision of match funding. Belfast City Council has the opportunity to learn and benefit from this project at no additional costs to the Council.

C) ESF Empowerment and Inclusion

Belfast also benefits from a third project. At the end of 2008, QeC ERAN alerted the group to an opportunity to partner in an ESF funding bid. This was discussed by local members who learnt that the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) were planning to make a submission to

the same funding call. A decision was made to support the ESF application led by DEL who are a member of the Belfast in Europe group. The application was successful and DEL now leads on a 3 year 495,000 euro project called "European Learning Network on Empowerment and Inclusion".

Belfast City Council can benefit from this project by piloting tools that enable it to measure how attractive it is as a workplace for those who at some distance from employment and described as 'hard to reach'.

D) End of Year project Review

The local group reviewed project opportunities circulated via the QeC ERAN network at its meeting in January 2010. They commented that:

- QEC ERAN projects broadly reflected the needs of the group but in many cases they did not meet needs sufficiently to become a partner
- Timescales involved in responding to project opportunities were often too tight and did not give members the time needed to gain approval to take part
- pressures to concentrate on organisational priorities meant that members did not have flexibility to develop projects or take up opportunities presented
- financial pressures meant that match funding was difficult for members to find

4. Costs

For the purpose of this exercise actual costs relate to the day to day secretariat support provided for local Belfast members by Belfast City Council staff, annual QeC membership fees, costs incurred by attending local meetings as well as costs relating to meetings and events hosted by QeC ERAN.

Total costs relating to QeC involvement in the period since June 2008 are estimated at £25,578, the breakdown is as follows:

- Time spent by BCC staff in preparing for, attending and undertaking actions following attendance at QeC ERAN Executive Bureau meetings accounts for £7,413 of the total.
- £7,800 is paid to QeC ERAN for the annual membership fee.
- £1,438 of the total accounts for subsistence and additional travel costs.
- £3,600 is paid each year to BCC to cover costs associated with admin and finance support.
- Provision of secretariat support (including staff time) and costs for local meetings amount to just under £4,000.

- £1,516 accounts for staff time and costs associated with dissemination of information circulated by QeC ERAN.

Since taking on the role of Treasurer of the QeC network in June 2008 6 Executive Bureau meetings have been attended. In terms of costs including staff time, travel/subsistence and QeC membership fees this accounts for £16,651 of the total cost of £25,577 incurred from 2008 to end May 2010.

At each of these meetings efforts have been made to understand the role and responsibilities associated with the role of Treasurer and to improve communications to enable Belfast to shape the work undertaken by the network and to bring opportunities back to the city.

Requests have also been made to ensure finance and other reports were issued in advance of Executive Bureau meetings to allow comments from BCC finance officers and local QeC members to be tables at meetings. There were also requests for clarity and improved presentation of financial information and for copies of EU audit information to be sent out. Despite constant requests, information was not sent out on time or not sent out at all. However, consideration has been given to changing finance reports.

During 2009 QeC staff also shared concerns about the operation of the network and all staff have since left the organisation. Although there was no evidence to corroborate their concerns, the information they put forward was noted by the local Belfast group and a meeting was requested with the Executive Bureau to discuss the future of the network and to clarify:

- governance and roles of Executive Bureau members,
- staffing, turnover, contracts of employment,
- finance, reporting and communications

These issues were discussed at a meeting held in January 2010 in Charleroi and were followed up at the Executive Bureau meeting held in March in Brussels. At these meetings there have been verbal assurances there is no liability associated with the role of Treasurer. However, there are two versions of internal regulations which show conflicting information, with one stating the Executive Bureau has responsibility for staff and the other stating it hasn't.

Staff turnover was linked to the ending of projects, however, one staff member who has left has taken a case to her union relating to a change in her role/contract. Two staff remain who are employed by QeC and who have contracts, however, the contract of employment for the Director cannot be found.

It remains unclear what responsibility the Executive Bureau has in relation to staff.

The organisation's finances are externally audited and the Treasurer has responsibility for reporting at the AGM on the financial position of the organisation.

5. Conclusion

A lot of time and effort has been invested in clarifying and understanding the role of Treasurer and its responsibilities. The time invested in attending Executive Bureau meetings, trying to improve the network and chasing information has meant time away from project development work and has not translated into any real benefits for BCC or Belfast in Europe members. More effort has gone into the network than outputs achieved for local members. This work has however focused the minds of local members who have decided to withdraw from the network and to invest time working together to achieve greater benefits through Belfast in Europe.

Deirdre Ferguson
European Officer

18 May 2010

Cost Breakdown**Appendix 1**

Item	Date	People Involved	Cost
Brussels Winter Event and Executive Bureau meeting Subsistence 3 days preparation 3 days attendance	January 2009	Deirdre Ferguson Cllr Michael Brown Deirdre Ferguson	£1143
Prague Spring Event and Executive Bureau meeting Subsistence 3 days preparation X 2 3 days attendance X 2	March 2009	Laura Leonard Deirdre Ferguson	2039
Brussels AGM and Executive Bureau meeting Subsistence 4 days preparation 3 days attendance	June 2009	Deirdre Ferguson Elma Newberry	1089
Brussels Executive Bureau Meeting Subsistence 3 days preparation 3 days attendance	October 2009	Deirdre Ferguson Briege Rainey	948
Charleroi Executive Bureau Meeting Subsistence 1 night accommodation 4 days preparation X 2 3 days attendance x 2	January 2010	Laura Leonard Deirdre Ferguson	2302
Brussels Executive Bureau meeting Subsistence 3 days preparation X 2 2 days attendance	March 2010	Laura Leonard	1330

Project work and information dissemination 12 days	September 2008 to June 2010	Deirdre Ferguson	1516
Fees	2009	Belfast in Europe paying members	7800
12 Local Meetings 12 days X 2	2008 to 2010	Deirdre Ferguson Laura Leonard	3810
		Belfast City Council Support	3600
		Total Costs	25,577