



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Northern Ireland Local Economic Development Forum and the NILGA Economic Development Working Group
Date:	15 September 2010
Reporting Officer:	Mr John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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Relevant Background Information

The Northern Ireland Local Economic Development (LED) Forum was established in 2001 to enable officers working within LED to liaise on strategic issues which affect them in the development of their District. The Forum provides a platform for discussion and collaboration between economic development officers on a range of key issues including economic development, tourism and urban and rural regeneration.

The Forum consists of a small co-ordinating group of senior development/economic development officers comprising representatives of 5 sub-regional groupings, roughly aligned to the Invest NI Regional Office network. Representatives from the sub-regional groupings are responsible for feeding back to the other councils in their area and for co-ordinating input from those councils to the LED Forum agenda.

The Forum meets on a 6 weekly basis and the current co-chairs are Shirley McCay (Head of Economic Initiatives Belfast City Council) and Derek McCallan (Director of Development Ards Borough Council). Belfast City Council's Economic Development Unit currently provides the secretariat for the group. Additionally, SOLACE has recently agreed to provide two nominations to the group in order to support the work of the Forum. These nominees are John McGrillen (Director of Development in Belfast City Council) and Liam Hannaway (Chief Executive in Banbridge District Council).

The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) Economic Development Working Group (EDWG) was established in 2009 in order to represent the interests of local authorities in relation to economic development policy and implementation and to provide a strategic member/officer interface on these key issues. The Working Group is comprised of Councillors representing all 5 main political parties, Local Authority Chief Executives and senior economic development personnel as well as NILGA policy development staff. The EDWG is currently chaired by Councillor David Rodway, Belfast City Council.

Over the course of the first year of activity, the EDWG has developed and implemented a wide-ranging action plan covering a number of policy issues including:

- Reducing bureaucracy for small businesses and speeding up decision making;
- Increasing private sector productivity; and
- Conducting research into a legislative, institutional and financial framework for Local Economic Development.

The LED Forum provides a support service to NILGA Officers in shaping the agenda and delivering on the work plan of the EDWG.

Key Issues

The LED Forum working in tandem with the NILGA EDWG has established an ambitious agenda for transformation in the field of LED incorporating an enhanced role for local authorities. The work plan for the coming year includes the following key activities:

- Developing an extensive piece of research into best practice in LED which will inform future positions related to the constitution of LED policy and delivery;
- Developing a case for statutory provision for LED for Local Authorities;
- Identifying and exploring a sustainable model of financing LED;
- Exploring the opportunities for influencing future EU policies and financial arrangements that will impact on the LED agenda;
- Establishing a coherent and cohesive role for Local Authorities in supporting the small business sector; and
- Liaising with Invest Northern Ireland and Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) to provide a local authority perspective on the implementation of the recommendations stemming from the Independent Review of Economic policy (IREP). Recommendations contained within this review will be central to the future direction of economic policy in Northern Ireland.

The NILGA EDWG is currently completing the series of actions outlined in its initial action plan. These include:

- Highlighting and addressing barriers to growth and expansion for small businesses;
- Contributing to the debate on the future make up of economic policy in Northern Ireland and Local Government role in economic development;
- Identification of opportunities for reducing the administrative and bureaucratic burden on small businesses;
- Identification of best practice in skills development in order to address current skills shortages in the economy;
- Discussions with various European institutions in relation to the roll-out of future EU funding packages for Northern Ireland; and
- Work on identifying the impact of the economic downturn to identify key budgetary pressures and issues affecting SMEs.

The EDWG is scheduled to meet with a number of key figures in the economic development arena in the coming weeks including DETI Minister Arlene Foster and Chief Executive of Invest Northern Ireland Alastair Hamilton. Additionally, officers will consult members of the EDWG in coming weeks in relation to the priorities and associated action plan for the coming year.

Resource Implications

Officer time to service both the action plan for the NILGA EDWG and the forward work agenda for the LED Forum.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the work of the LED Forum and its association with the NILGA EDWG.

Decision Tracking

No decision tracking required.

Key Abbreviations

LED – Local Economic Development
NILGA – Northern Ireland Local Government Association
EDWG – Economic Development Working Group
DETI – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
IREP – Independent Review of Economic Policy
SOLACE – Society of Local Authority Chief Executives