



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Conference Subvention
Date:	15 September 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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### **Relevant Background Information**

#### Conference Subvention

Members will be aware that Belfast City Council has a Conference Subvention policy which is utilised to secure and support national and international conferences to Belfast and to build the City's profile as a conference destination. It was agreed at Development Committee of 10 March 2010 that the existing scheme would close on 31 May 2010 and that current commitments under this scheme would be honoured.

Members will also be aware that officers have been liaising with Northern Ireland Tourism Board (NITB) and Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) to develop a new Conference Subvention Scheme for Belfast.

Aligned to priorities in the draft Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework, NITB, BVCB and Belfast City Council have developed a new Conference Subvention Scheme with a total funding budget of £435,000 over three years. Belfast City Council will contribute £70,000 per annum and NITB will contribute £75,000 per annum. Funding of £70,000 is available in the current 2010/2011 Tourism, Culture and Arts budget and additional details of the new subvention scheme are in Appendix 1.

The Conference Subvention Scheme has been revised and the main objectives are;

- To raise the profile of Belfast and Northern Ireland as a leading business and conference destination
- To consolidate existing investment in Belfast and Northern Ireland hotel and conference infrastructure
- To increase the contribution of Business and Conference Tourism to Belfast and Northern Ireland economy
- To change the international perception of Belfast and Northern Ireland
- To encourage inward investment to Belfast and Northern Ireland
- To grow the number of leisure visitors by encouraging conferences to run

- partner and extender programmes
- To develop a partnership approach to promoting Northern Ireland as a business and conference destination

Belfast City Council commissioned a Report on a new Conference Subvention Scheme for Belfast in November 2008. Prepared by Sally Greenhill Associates, this report outlines that all major cities throughout the UK operate subvention schemes. For example, Birmingham - £650,000 per annum, Manchester - £6million over 3 years, Glasgow – £1 million and Liverpool, Blackpool, Bournemouth and Brighton all have pots of £1million each. The majority of subvention schemes are funded by respective City Councils.

In terms of total impact of a new Conference Subvention Scheme for the city, it is estimated that an International Association Delegate spends £386.06 per day and a multi-day Domestic Association spends £488.94 per day. In 2003/4 NITB established a similar scheme with the International Fund for Ireland worth £663,000 over 3 years. The total value of conferences secured with this fund was £6.8million in economic benefit producing a return on subvention funding of over 12:1. It is estimated that this new scheme will produce similar economic benefits to the City.

## **Key Issues**

### Criteria

The main eligibility criteria for Conference Subvention are summarised below;

- The conference should be based in Belfast and include use of overnight accommodation in the Belfast area.
- The conference should preferably have a minimum of 300 out of state delegates and accompanying partners staying for two nights in the Belfast area. However a conference with a smaller number of out of state delegates staying for multiple nights will be considered if there is evidence that this conference will lead to a larger associated conference coming to Belfast within the next 8 years. The level of subvention being sought against the potential economic benefit will be taken into consideration
- The conference should have an impact on and/or a potential for local businesses and organisations by providing opportunities for developing industry/sector links or to showcase local products, cultural, sporting or intellectual fields.
- The subject areas of the conference should relate to local economic and tourism strategies or specific priority areas for Belfast or Northern Ireland.
- The event, by locating in Belfast should enhance the areas international profile and as such the prestige value of the event will be taken into account i.e. media coverage, speaker profile
- Conferences must demonstrate strict financial project management, cash flows and projected income and expenditure account.

### Delivery

NITB, BVCB and Belfast City Council have assessed the options for delivery of the new scheme and agreed that the most appropriate vehicle is BVCB however, a separate panel including representatives from NITB and Belfast City Council will approve all applications. Quarterly reports will be presented to Development Committee on progress of the scheme and BVCB will be required to administer the scheme within current administrative budgets. BVCB will establish clear governance arrangements to be agreed by NITB and BCC to ensure transparent and effective delivery of the scheme on behalf of both funders.

Whilst approaches were made to Invest Northern Ireland to contribute to the scheme, they have agreed to consider individual requests to support subvention against those conferences that best support the economic priorities for Northern Ireland as opposed to contributing to the wider pot. This position will be reviewed once the scheme is fully established.

#### **Resource Implications**

Funding of £70,000 is available in the current 2010/2011 Tourism Culture and Arts Budget and commitment of £70,000 in 2011/2012 and £70,000 in 2012/2013.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee approveS:

- the new Conference Subvention Scheme

#### **Decision Tracking**

##### Timeline

- A New Conference Subvention Scheme is to be in operation by October 2010
- BVCB to produce quarterly reports

Timeframe: October 2010

Reporting Officer: Kerrie Sweeney

#### **Key to Abbreviations**

BVCB Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau  
NITB Northern Ireland Tourist Board

#### **Documents Attached**

Appendix 1 – Additional details of the new subvention scheme