



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Special Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau 2011/2012 Business Plan
Date:	22 February 2011
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members agreed at the January 2011 Committee meeting to receive a presentation from Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau on their 2011/2012 Business Plan and financial support requested from Belfast City Council. A copy of their business plan is attached as Appendix 1.
1.2	The Tourism, Culture and Arts unit within Development Department is responsible for developing and marketing Belfast as a tourist destination. The unit delivers a range of product development initiatives, manages the visitor signage and the Belfast Tourism Monitor research contracts and delivers £1.4 million funding to the culture and arts sector to animate the city (for visitors and citizens). Marketing and visitor servicing are outsourced to BVCB to deliver. BVCB is a public-private partnership with over 500 private sector members. The main funders are Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Funding from these two organisations allows BVCB to lever additional funding from the private sector through joint marketing initiatives and this represents good value for money for Belfast City Council. In 2009/10 period total private sector income was £1,086,578.
1.3	The BVCB Board is representative of the sector and includes both private sector and elected representatives from Belfast City Council. Other councils in the Greater Belfast area (and beyond) also make smaller contributions but have no representation on the board. NITB sits as an observer, as do a range of interests including retail sector representatives.
1.4	This year, Belfast City Council is contributing financial support towards the following activities:

	Marketing and Communications £1,336,000 Visitor Servicing £529,465
1.5	A progress report of achievements to date (January 2011) is attached as Appendix 2.
1.6	BVCB's 2011 – 2014 Business Plan was developed by an external consultancy team comprising ASM Horwath, EFA Tourism and City Marketing and Kappa Consulting. It is based on the Council's Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010 – 2014 and was developed in consultation with the tourism sector across the city. The plan is seeking £1,413,000 towards Marketing/Communications and the same level of support towards visitor servicing, £529,465, in 2011/2012 period. The increase in marketing/communications appears to be attributed to events marketing. This will be treated separately to their annual request for funding as specific marketing initiatives may be agreed with the city events team during the year. Therefore the assumption is that the level of support sought for marketing is £1,336,000 as BVCB have been advised that budgets will remain at last year's level.
1.7	The independent consultancy team has offered a fresh approach to BVCB's planning process and the team has identified a number of key challenges to be addressed by BVCB during the next 2-3 years. These are explored in the issues section.
1.8	The targets established for 2011/2012 period within the plan are to grow total overnight stays by 3.9% to 4,056,000 and day trips by 4.4% to 7,730,000.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The key issues identified in this report are as follows:
2.2	Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau is a small team and the plan identifies the need for the organisation to stay focused on their primary objective which is generating bed nights and increasing occupancy. The key market segments BVCB should target are city breaks and discretionary business tourists. The key geographical markets will be closer to home, namely Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, GB and those destinations that have direct access to the city.
2.3	BVCB and indeed Belfast City Council should establish closer relationships with NITB and Tourism Ireland to maximise the opportunities of collaborative marketing and to influence Tourism Ireland on the Belfast messages in those markets where BVCB will not be present. Officers would recommend that a Belfast focused team is established including BVCB, NITB and Tourism Ireland to develop integrated marketing campaigns in ROI and GB.
2.4	To promote Belfast as a City Breaks destination the key drivers are entertainment, arts and culture and historic sites. The report recommends that the Council commissions a cultural mapping of the city to identify the key strengths in these areas. Members will be aware that we have already embarked on a new Integrated Cultural Strategy for the city and this can be incorporated into this work. The outputs of this work must be captured in the work of BVCB to convey the city's strengths within marketing campaigns.

2.5	The consultancy team through consultation feedback has queried the impact of the Belfast Brand as many stakeholders regard it as a logo and call for a Belfast brand strategy, including the development of a Belfast narrative. Whilst BVCB will have a key role to play, the team felt that it was not clear who this responsibility lies with. Officers would recommend that given the importance of developing a strong narrative for the city that the responsibilities should lie with Belfast City Council.																																				
2.6	The business plan identifies a number of new ways in which Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau should be monitored. In particular, the focus is on increasing occupancy levels across the accommodation sector as well as adopting key performance measures that international membership organisations such as European Cities Marketing report on. It is also suggested that a Discretionary Business Tourism Taskforce is established to review the performance of BVCB in winning conferences. This would result in a closer relationship with the sector and allow for even more transparency in relation to monitoring BVCB's performance.																																				
2.7	<p>The importance of Performance Management and the need for a performance related service level agreement was highlighted in a recent internal audit of the Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit.</p> <p>It is important therefore that funding from Belfast City Council to BVCB is related to the achievements of key performance indicators which directly relate to the objectives within the Council's Corporate Plan and those set out in the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework 2010 – 2014. A typical set of performance indicators is set out in the table below.</p>																																				
2.8	<p><u>Table 1</u> BVCB KPIs 2011-2012</p> <p>Source – Belfast City Region Marketing and Visitor Servicing Plan 2011 – 2014</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="319 1220 1380 1960"> <thead> <tr> <th><u>Leisure Marketing</u></th> <th><u>Conference Bureau</u></th> <th><u>Communications</u></th> <th><u>Visitor Servicing</u></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>50,000 website visits/mnth</td> <td>Secure 28,000 delegates</td> <td>Host 120 press trips</td> <td>BWC visitor numbers: 265,566</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Present to 30 agents/operators in direct access mkts</td> <td>Secure 78,000 bed nights</td> <td>secure £3.5m advertising equivalent</td> <td>BWC total enquiries: 348,636</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20 tour leads (Germany)</td> <td>£25.8m of conference trade</td> <td>120m weighted opps to see</td> <td>BWC gross income: £972,501</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20 leads from WTM</td> <td>Recruit 70 new ambassadors</td> <td>Secure PR coverage for 230 articles</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Secure 31 cruise ships</td> <td>Secure interest of 60 buyers</td> <td>Produce & distribute 12 issues of the Corporate (product) e-zine</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Organise 20 fam trips/300 trade visitors</td> <td>40 new leads in Europe, 40 in UK, 10 in USA</td> <td>Produce & distribute 12 issues of the Consumer (product) e-zine</td> <td>Airport TICs: visitor numbers: 87,882</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Secure additional 158,000 bed nights (v 2009)</td> <td>Host FAM trip</td> <td>Issue a minimum of 36 (Corporate and Product) press releases</td> <td>Airport TICs: total enquiries: 146,871</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Secure additional 179,000 day trippers (v 2009)</td> <td>Submit 120 bids/60% conversion rate</td> <td>Attract 5,000 followers through social media outlets</td> <td>Airport TICs: £316,950</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<u>Leisure Marketing</u>	<u>Conference Bureau</u>	<u>Communications</u>	<u>Visitor Servicing</u>	50,000 website visits/mnth	Secure 28,000 delegates	Host 120 press trips	BWC visitor numbers: 265,566	Present to 30 agents/operators in direct access mkts	Secure 78,000 bed nights	secure £3.5m advertising equivalent	BWC total enquiries: 348,636	20 tour leads (Germany)	£25.8m of conference trade	120m weighted opps to see	BWC gross income: £972,501	20 leads from WTM	Recruit 70 new ambassadors	Secure PR coverage for 230 articles		Secure 31 cruise ships	Secure interest of 60 buyers	Produce & distribute 12 issues of the Corporate (product) e-zine		Organise 20 fam trips/300 trade visitors	40 new leads in Europe, 40 in UK, 10 in USA	Produce & distribute 12 issues of the Consumer (product) e-zine	Airport TICs: visitor numbers: 87,882	Secure additional 158,000 bed nights (v 2009)	Host FAM trip	Issue a minimum of 36 (Corporate and Product) press releases	Airport TICs: total enquiries: 146,871	Secure additional 179,000 day trippers (v 2009)	Submit 120 bids/60% conversion rate	Attract 5,000 followers through social media outlets	Airport TICs: £316,950
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2.9	The Business Plan flags the need to focus on IT solutions and maximise Belfast's presence on city break websites. This is also identified within the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework and it is clear that the city requires a joined-up approach to new media marketing and communications.
2.10	A further issue identified in the report, which was also identified in the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework, is the variance between national and city statistics. The Tourism, Culture and Arts unit are currently working with both NITB and DETI to address this issue in the long term.
2.11	Finally, the success of BVCB relies on the relationship between BVCB, BCC and NITB. This relationship has been further cemented by the new Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework for Belfast 2010 – 2014; however it is important that all parties agree the role of BVCB and the targets to be delivered. If Council commit funds to BVCB for 2011/2012 period, a series of trilateral meetings will be held to agree activity, targets and budgets to allow BCC to finalise its funding agreement.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	The same level of funding based on 2010/2011 period to be committed to BVCB for marketing and communications (£1,336,000) and Visitor Servicing (£529,465). This has been included in Departmental budget estimates for 2011/2012.
3.2	Development Committee should note that a number of issues need to be addressed including a new media tourism plan for the city, cultural mapping exercise, better alignment of research between national and city statistics and a branding strategy (including the Belfast Narrative). This work must be integrated into the work of the Council to support the work of BVCB but furthermore to ensure we maximise the outputs.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	BVCB will be subject to undertaking Equality Screening on their plan as part of our funding requirements.

5	Recommendations
5.1	It is recommended that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Members agree to commit £1,865,465 towards Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau Marketing and Visitor Servicing Plans for 2011/2012 period, subject to a detailed service level agreement and 2. Members agree that officers, prior to issuing a funding agreement, engage with both NITB and BVCB to agree activity, targets and budgets to be included within the service level agreement and ensure an integrated approach between the three partners.

6	Decision Tracking
Timeframe: March 2011 Agreement between BVCB, NITB and BCC on actions, targets and budgets Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay	
Timeframe: April 2011 Funding agreement issued to BVCB Reporting Officer: Kerrie Sweeney	

7	Key to Abbreviations
BVCB - Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau NITB - Northern Ireland Tourist Board KPI - Key Performance Indicators DETI - Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 - BVCB Marketing and Visitor Servicing Plan Appendix 2 - Progress Report January 2011	