Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	OPENCities Project Update
Date:	16 March 2011
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1	**Relevant Background Information**
1.1	Members will recall that they receive regular reports on EU projects. The following report outlines the outputs and final stages of the OPENCities project.

2	**Key Issues**
2.1	OPENCities is a fixed term project within the Council's European unit which is funded under the European Urbact II programme. The project concept was developed by the British Council and is led by Belfast City Council in partnership with eight other European cities namely; Bilbao, Cardiff, Dublin, Dusseldorf, Nitra, Poznan, Sofia and Vienna.
	It runs from October 2008 to September 2011, and is the only UK led project with a European Commission Fast Track label. In practice, this means that the project is closely followed by the EU Commission who believe that the funding will impact and influence emerging European policies and funding programmes, with regard to the integration of economic migrants.
2.2	An "open city" is a city's ability to attract and retain international populations and this contributes to a city's international competitiveness. It is about looking at economic migrants as an asset to a city and addressing barriers to their integration.

The OPENCities project attempts to address these barriers under three themes; Leadership and Governance, Internationalism, Integration and Social Inclusion, and all these are interdependent if a city is to become a successful open city to new populations.

The project is managed by a fixed term two person team within the European unit and is greatly supported by NI managing authorities for EU funding, namely the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Employment and Learning. Working closely with member state managing authorities is an essential part of the Urbact programme to ensure that policy makers and funders are tracking and contributing to projects such as OPENCities, with a view to considering how to take and use the findings and recommendations and make a real change at local level.

| 2.3 | **Why engage in the OPENCities project?** |

With the accession of the twelve new member states to Europe in 2004, cities in western Europe including Belfast began immediately to see an increased flow in migrant populations. This in turn began to have health, housing and economic impacts in the city. Coupled with the continued loss of Belfast's indigenous populations known as the brain drain, it became apparent that city stakeholders needed to be proactive to try and retain population and harness the opportunities and talents that new international populations i.e. economic migrants could bring to the city. Belfast City Council recognised that the city could learn a lot from other more experienced cities on migrant issues namely Vienna, Dublin, Madrid and others. The Urbact II programme offered a funding opportunity to engage in exchange and learning and ultimately provide resources for Belfast to:

1. Identify who the new migrant populations were, what skills they brought to Belfast and what jobs they were seeking and securing.
2. Identify the issues and barriers to the successful integration of Belfast's economic migrants.
3. Identify and coordinate the existing services provided to assist economic migrants.
   NOTE: The OPENCities project does not address social integration issues such as health, housing, hate crime etc however these are indeed interlinked with economic issues.
4. Identify initiatives still required to successfully integrate economic migrants, encouraging entrepreneurship and removing barriers to employment and employability.
5. Promote Belfast as a competitive open city that harnesses international talent.

| 2.4 | **How will the project make an impact in Belfast?** |

The second essential element to an Urbact project is that each participating city must set up a Local Support Group of key stakeholders and beneficiaries, (LSG). This LSG then has to produce a Local Action Plan (LAP) as a final output of the project. The LAP is the culmination of three years work looking at best practice in Europe, practical transferable case studies and critically identifying and providing an evidence base for the city along with proposed solutions to the issues identified within the project.

Belfast City Council along with the Belfast Local Support Group members have been working on a LAP for the last six months based around the cities needs relating to the three themes; Leadership and Governance, Internationalisation and Integration and Inclusion.

The Local Action Plan sets out:
1. EU, National and Local migrant policy context.
2. A Belfast baseline produced at the start of the project which outlines the state of play with respect to the level of migrants, their role and needs in 2008.
3. Information on the OPENCities international monitor.
4. A detailed plan of what kind of actions/support/projects are required to successfully integrate economic migrants, from information and sign posting to language training and business development.
5. Recommendations for Belfast as a city to promote the city as an open city for international populations to work, live and visit, which in turn will make Belfast more competitive and attractive in a global economy.

Extensive consultation on the Local Action Plan took place with migrant groups, employers, trainers and all relevant stakeholders in November and December 2010 and the plan was equality proofed and finalised in January 2011. Once agreed and signed off by Belfast City Council as lead partner, the plan will be presented and promoted at the OPENCities final conference in Brussels on 25 May 2011. This is a very important event and an opportunity to promote the results of the project to the European Commission and influence future policy and funding for migrant issues.

2.5	A copy of the final Local Action Plan is attached as Appendix I of this report.
2.6	Deliverables Outputs Ultimately the outputs of the OPENCities project have been: 1. Networking and exchanging experience with the other cities as well as British Council as partners. 2. Production of case studies of existing successful work ongoing across Belfast to support migrants. These are detailed and available within the European unit and have been hailed a best practice by the EU Commission, Urbact and other cities in Europe. This is a tribute to the fact that relevant and successful work is already ongoing with migrants in Belfast. 3. Establishment of a Belfast Local Support Group with key government departments, academic players, employers, migrant support agencies and migrants themselves all working on economic issues. This Local Support Group will continue to exist as a unique resource beyond the OPENCities project. 4. Series of city exchanges allowing stakeholders on the ground to see what works well for attracting and retaining economic and talented migrants in other cities. 5. Development of the Local Action Plan itself, which highlights existing successful work with migrants and what the gaps are in Belfast. 6. Development of an OPENCities monitor. This was developed and resourced by the British Council and essentially is an online tool that participating cities can use to assess their level of openness through 54 indicators. Users bear in mind that an open city is a city that draws international talent and is therefore a competitive city. Belfast as an example, has attracted much foreign direct investment and many international workers in recent years without which the city would be less open, competitive and with a reduced international profile.

	7. Increased profile of Belfast on the EU stage. During the course of the project, Belfast City Council has been asked to present at many events throughout Europe due to the high profile label that this project has at European level. 8. Production of EU and global influenced reports on best practise approaches at city level with respect to leadership and governance, internationalisation and integration and inclusion.
2.7	Deliverables, cost implications and implications for department plans The deliverables of the Local Action Plan are outlined on pages 31-45 of the attached plan. There are six overall objectives under the three themes of the project and under these are the actual required actions to meet these objectives. The entire plan including the objectives and actions was developed based on the original Belfast baseline and based on identified needs for the city. These needs were articulated and evidence based by the Local Support Group (Appendix 1 page nine). The potential required actions within the plan to take OPENCities further have not been costed as each of these would be a project in itself. Potential funding streams have been identified as have potential partners but resources for the overall project come to an end in June 2011. In addition, the remit for most of the strands within the action plan does not lie within the council's European unit. Some actions identified within the Local Action Plan are already underway or will be resourced within the Council's Peace Plan, and some are the remit of other Belfast stakeholders. The key to resourcing and implementing the Plan will be to identify and appoint an elected champion who will take the lead in driving forward the implementation of the Plan
2.8	Summary Overview – The Local Action Plan provides an opportunity to map existing projects and new initiatives as well as solutions to problems associated with managing migration and the benefits to the city. – Local pilot projects are identified and developed based on learning gained from transnational workshops which were attended by Local Support Group (LSG) members. – LSG members helped translate this knowledge into local projects which will seek financial support from a range of funding sources including European Structural Funds.
2.9	Existing BCC Initiatives: – Anti-racism and good relations training – Belfast Migrant Forum – Shared City Project developed to create greater engagement and collaboration within and between political leaders, migrant organisations, and relevant agencies – Cultural and integration festivals and programmes held throughout the city – PEACE III funding of various migrant projects & organisations
2.10	New Initiatives being developed (LAP influenced) – BCC tender to develop programme to build the capacity of advice workers to address migrant needs. – BCC tender to develop an online multi-lingual information hub

2.11	**Hoped for Initiatives** - Contribute to the implementation and development of the LAP by funding projects delivering on key actions through PEACE III & future Structural Fund Programmes. - BCC agreement to sign Eurocities Inclusive Cities Charter. - BCC support for projects that encourage the formation, growth and internationalisation of migrant businesses. - Programmes that build the capacity of migrant groups to identify, take action and advocate for their needs. - Programmes that increase migrants' awareness of Belfast's current & historical political, social and cultural context. - BCC Economic Development Unit potential interest in adapting business development programmes for migrants to begin to build their entrepreneurial capacity. - BCC continued championing of actions that promote Belfast internationally as an Open City. Belfast's OPENCities LAP will help deliver on Belfast Corporate Plan, improving good relations and promoting social cohesion between migrants and the local community. It will do this through existing and new programmes, projects and supports which aim to increase and promote awareness amongst existing population of religions and cultures outside of the traditional local faiths. These initiatives will promote a greater understanding of the economic, social and cultural contributions made by minority ethnic groups to Belfast as a city.
2.12	**Openness monitor – Belfast's position?** The openness monitor in an index produced by the British Council over the life of the project. It has just gone live and can be accessed at www.opencities.eu using the guide on English at http://www.youtube.com/user/opencities. The monitor groups 54 indicators into 11 areas which are all weighted differently: 1. Migration 2. Freedom 3. Barriers of entry 4. International events 5. International presence 6. Education 7. International flows 8. Infrastructure 9. Quality of living 10. Standard of living 11. Diversity actions This allows participating cities to measure their level of openness compared to other cities and then measure and analyse the 11 different areas. The value of this is to allow cities to see how well they are doing with respect to attracting and retaining international populations and then take action to develop new approaches.

	Such approaches could be more directly competitive foreign direct investment measures, strategies to proactively market and attract international students or effective and inclusive diversity and good relations policies. The monitor also offers valuable strategies, policies and practical case studies within the eleven areas and 54 indicators that work successfully in other cities and that can be applied in other cities to improve their openness. The city of Belfast as a partner in the OPENCities project is profiled within the monitor free of charge until 2012. After this time an annual fee of 4,000 euros will be charged to remain within the monitor. To date, the British Council has still to train city council staff on the use of the monitor and until this happens a full report on Belfast's status is not available. Belfast City Council will be approached before the summer of 2011 to provide the annually required update data with respect to remaining in the monitor. To participate in the survey conducted by the monitor technical experts Bak Basel consultants, there is a cost of 4,000 euros. The European unit will consider the value of the monitor before taking a further report to Committee to decide whether or not to commit to and pay for remaining within the monitor.
2.13	**Brussels Open Days** Given that OPENCities is labelled as a European Commission fast track project, it is followed closely by policy makers and funding programme designers at the EU level. One of the biggest EU calendar events is the annual October Brussels Open Days. Belfast City Council has engaged in the Open Days since their inception nine years ago and has been invited to both attend and speak at workshops each year. NOTE: In 2010 Councillors Maire Hendron, David Rodway and Conor Maskey spoke separately at events, highlighting Belfast's expertise in a number of areas. The council through the EU unit has been invited to join the city of Sofia and other partners to co-host a workshop at the 2011 Open Days. The workshop will look at city approaches to openness elaborating on experience and good practice in creating diverse cities, building balanced and cohesive human resources embracing diversity and creating good relations. It is probably more relevant that the Good Relations Unit/Partnership engages in this workshop however this can be defined nearer the time. Chief officers are asked to note this recommendation.

3	**Resource Implications**
3.1	This project was funded under the EU Urbact II programme. The total cost of the paper was 518,850 euros with a cost of 17,295 euros to Belfast City Council.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	The Opencities Action plan will be presented to the Good Relations Partnership in March 2011.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to: 1. Note and endorse the content and completion of the Belfast Local Action Plan 2. Agree to the presentation of the plan to the March Good Relations Partnership 3. Consider where ownership of the delivery of the plan should lie 4. Agree the attendance of the Chair of Development or nominee, the Director of Development and EU Manager at the OPENCities final conference on 25 May 2011. NOTE: The Chair and deputy chair of Development would normally have been invited to attend however, due to the May 2011 elections, Committee chairpersons will not yet be appointed at this time. 5. Agree the participation of Belfast City Council in the October 2011 Brussels Open Days programme in partnership with the city of Sofia. NOTE: Full details and cost implications will be presented at a future date

6	Decision Tracking
	Further to approval the Chair of Development or nominee, the Director of Development and EU Manager will attend the OPENCities final conference on 25 May 2011 and BCC will participate in partnership with Sofia, in the Brussels Open days programme in October 2011. Time line: October 2011 Reporting Officer: Laura Leonard

7	Abbreviations
	LAP – Local Action Plan LSG – Local Support Group

8	Documents Attached
	Appendix I – Copy of Local Action Plan and related papers.