Belfast City Region

Marketing & Visitor Servicing Plan 2011 – 2014

Incorporating Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau's Operational and Business Plan

Draft report

4 February 2011

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Introduction

1.1 Belfast and Northern Ireland have experienced significant benefit from the development of tourism over the past 15 years. Public and private sector investment has led to substantial improvement in tourism infrastructure and this in turn has helped attract increased numbers of visitors. Belfast, being the capital city, main economic centre and key point of entry, has witnessed a high level of that new investment and has benefitted accordingly. As the capital city, Belfast has been the hub and driver behind the growth in tourism to Northern Ireland as a whole.

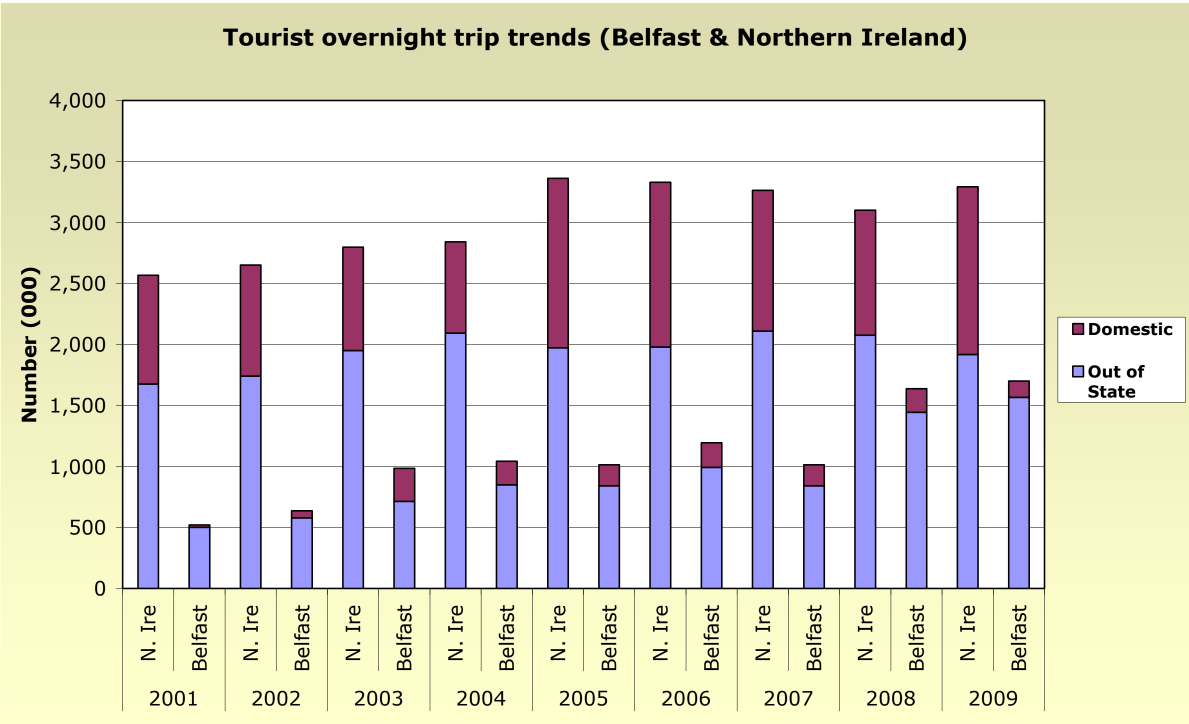
1.2 In addition to having the facilities and attractions that visitors expect, any destination must also have effective promotion and marketing. In the Belfast region, this has largely been the responsibility of the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau ("BVCB") which has made an important contribution to the tourism boost that the City has experienced.

1.3 Despite recent success, Northern Ireland continues to lag some way behind its near neighbours. The years 2012 and 2013 are generally accepted as being pivotal for tourism at a local level. The major new investments, and key celebrations, planned for these years will provide the opportunity to lift tourism onto a new and higher level. The Belfast City region will be a key player during this timeframe and BVCB will have an important role to play in ensuring the region's success.

1.4 To fully exploit this potential, all of the bodies involved in tourism development and marketing must work together with clearly defined and agreed priorities. In an environment where budgets are under pressure, any potential duplication of effort must be avoided. BVCB's focus over the coming 3 year period will be on driving overnight stays from the closer to home and direct access leisure markets and the discretionary business tourism market.

BVCB: success to date

1.5 Formed in 1999 the BVCB can, in tandem with other key stakeholders, claim credit for substantially increasing visitor and tourist numbers to the City region. The following graph charts the growth of overnight tourist trips to the City region and to Northern Ireland:



Source: BCC Tourism Monitor & NITB Tourism Facts

1.6 Between 2001 and 2009, the total number of overnight trips to the City region trebled. In 2009, total overnight trips to the region increased by approximately 4% (8% for out of state trips) compared to 2008 and by an estimated 68% (86% for out of state trips) when compared to 2005. By comparison, the number of out of state overnight trips to the island of Ireland reduced by 6% in 2009 compared to 2005. However, success in generating tourist trips does not necessarily translate into a corresponding and equivalent increase in overnight stays:

1.7 The volume of overnight stays in the Belfast region reduced in 2009, despite the increase in visitor trips. The total estimated overnight stays in the City region in 2009 was 3.77 million as against and estimate of 4.67 million in 2008.

1.8 The total estimated number of hotel bedrooms sold in 2009 increased by 15% year on year, which is contrary to the reduction in overnight stays in the region. However, demand at hotels from the business tourism market (both independent business users and conference related traffic) has reduced over the past number of years, although the increase in leisure related traffic has gone some way to mitigate this loss. It would appear that this trend has continued into 2010. In a difficult economic climate, it is crucial that increased numbers of overnight tourists that deliver increased overnight stays be attracted to the City region.

City marketing

1.9 City destination marketing is a relatively new discipline which has emerged as a consequence of the disappearance of national boundaries in the global economy. This places greater emphasis on the requirement for cities to define their competitive advantage over other places as locations to invest in, re-locate to or to visit as tourists. Developing the narrative that articulates the distinctiveness and uniqueness of a city is a critical component of competitive place marketing today.

1.10 The Belfast City region is in exactly this position. Like many other cities, Belfast has been challenged with re-inventing itself in the post industrial era. But it has had to do this following many years of being perceived as a 'war zone'. While tremendous progress has been made, there are major challenges for the future, not least the expanding capacity for tourism set against declining budgets for destination marketing.

1.11 Urban tourism is geared towards 2 primary markets, these being:

a) **City breaks**: driven by events, the arts, cultural industries, sports, retailing etc. that have led to City Breaks becoming the fastest growing sector of leisure tourism in the past decade; and

b) **Discretionary business tourism**: otherwise known as Meetings, Incentive Travel, Conferences and Exhibitions ("MICE"), and which is concentrated largely in urban destinations as they have the range of facilities and attributes to satisfy the most demanding delegates.

1.12 These are the priority markets in which Belfast must compete effectively.

Roles

1.13 The role of a city marketing agency is to contribute to improving the quality of life for all the citizens of the city by generating wealth and creating jobs. BVCB must demonstrate that it creates customers for the city and must focus on partnerships to maximise the utilisation of the expanded tourism infrastructure.

1.14 Tourism Ireland Limited ("TIL") is the all-Ireland destination marketing organisation (or "DMO") with the responsibility for promoting all of the island of Ireland overseas (including Great Britain) while the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has responsibility for promoting Northern Ireland within the island of Ireland and for providing strategic direction to the industry.

1.15 The BVCB is a public-private partnership organisation responsible for the promotion of the Greater Belfast Region to a global audience and it is also a visitor servicing organisation. Despite its remit, BVCB does not have the resources to assume a global marketing capability. Therefore it must have a more targeted, focused approach clearly defining which markets and products offer the best potential return and which it can effectively market to. In other markets, it will tap into the marketing activities of Tourism Ireland Limited ("TIL") and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board ("NITB") and ensure that the Belfast narrative is correctly and appropriately communicated in those markets.

Consultation

1.16 Consultation with key stakeholders revealed that there is both recognition of BVCB's achievements over the past decade and substantial goodwill towards working more cohesively with it. Indeed, stakeholders feel that there is an opportunity for closer engagement with BVCB, working together to plan initiatives in predefined target markets. There is also a recognition that BVCB has had to spread its resources too thinly, and now needs to focus on the markets that offer easier wins (i.e. closer to home and direct access markets).

Research and market information

1.17 As noted, a DMO should be focussed on driving overnight visitors to the destination. Since it neither owns nor controls any significant assets, its value is in the information that it holds. Therefore, it must be sufficiently well engaged with, and knowledgeable about, the destination's assets (or the 'product supply chain'[1]).

1.18 A core question for BVCB is: ***"what information does the industry owe us and what information do we owe the industry?"*** At a very basic level, BVCB needs to have access to reliable data on the performance of the destination across a range of key performance indicators (such as gaps in demand, number of tourists, overnights stays, meeting room/bedroom occupancy rates, enquiry conversion rates, confirmed conferences, projected bookings and occupancy rates). That knowledge will be valuable in developing effective strategies to improve performance.

External environment

1.19 City marketing in general faces a number of challenges quite distinct from the current economic environment. In particular, the marketplace in which visitor and conference bureaux operate is evolving, with many new players competing for space and offering similar services. There is also the challenge brought about by the migration of information to the internet and through new media. This demands that DMO's be represented on the information pathways that potential customers use as they make their decisions.

1.20 BVCB needs to review and to enhance its current web-presence, use of new marketing technologies and IT systems. This is a constant challenge and one which requires financial resource. A comprehensive review of its IT systems is required.

The Belfast Brand

1.21 The Belfast brand was developed to accurately reflect the uniqueness of the City. That is, the City has become a beacon for positive change and is alive with fresh opportunities for citizens, visitors and investors.

[1] *See Appendix A*

1.22 It is difficult at this time to judge the impact of the new 'Belfast Inspired' brand. There has been no tracking studies nor any focus group research on the brand's reach or penetration. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is considered more a Belfast City Council logo rather than a City brand.

1.23 If the brand does not differentiate Belfast from its competitors it will fail. It is essential to know where the brand sits in this regard. In moving this matter forward, BVCB should work with all Belfast stakeholders to determine the next steps in the development of the brand strategy (including articulation of the Brand narrative). This can only be undertaken once a custodian for the Brand has been nominated and focus groups in key target markets have been organised to determine responses to the Belfast brand.

Growth strategies and opportunities

1.24 A number of strategies and plans have been developed for the Belfast City region and for Northern Ireland with the singular objective of driving tourism forward in the medium to long term. Of particular relevance are the Integrated Strategic Framework for Belfast Tourism ("ISFBT"), the Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland ("TSNI") and the draft Northern Ireland 2012 Business Case ("NI 2012").

1.25 The ISFBT provides the framework for Belfast's tourism sector (public, private and voluntary) to deliver the Belfast brand experience and position the City within the top twenty city destinations in Europe. The key market opportunities outlined in the ISFBT are consistent with those identified during the stakeholder consultation exercise (that is, Great Britain, Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, direct access European markets and other overseas longer stay markets that may include Belfast as part of a trip to the island).

1.26 The TSNI identifies short term market segments as city breaks (especially those that are event led), culture/experience seekers, activity and special interest breaks and business visitors (national associations, corporate meetings/conferences, incentive travel and trade/consumer exhibitions). Many of these opportunities are in line with the markets that are typically drawn to urban destinations. Over the term of the TSNI (to the year 2020), the objective is to double revenue from tourism and to increase visitor numbers by 41%.

1.27 The years 2012 and 2013 are seen as the "tipping point" for tourism in Northern Ireland. Against this background, NITB and BCC appointed independent experts to develop the NI 2012 business case for a successful and high profile series of events in 2012 that can yield a step change in perceptions about the province. Central to this programme are events that will mark the Centenary of the completion of RMS Titanic.

1.28 The proposed budget for NI 2012 has yet to be agreed as have the mechanisms for delivering, managing and marketing the planned events. Given the role of BVCB and the Tourist Information Centres it manages, it should be at the forefront of assisting all stakeholders in exploiting the opportunities the forthcoming period presents, although additional budgets will be required.

Marketing Priorities for Belfast City Region

1.29 As outlined above, the key market opportunities for the City region are City breaks and Discretionary Business Tourism. Therefore BVCB needs to concentrate its marketing effort to drive up the number of overnight stays by ensuring that the region:

a) becomes a major European City Break destination; and

b) the leading convention destination in Ireland, particularly in light of the development of the Convention Centre, Dublin.

1.30 While daytrips are not considered a priority market for DMOs, they have been an important source of visitors and a driver of economic benefit to the city as a whole. In the short term, marketing activity should be maintained with the caveat that it must include an overnight message.

1.31 Close strategic and working partnerships with NITB, TIL and other global brand organisations based in Northern Ireland will be essential.

City breaks

1.32 The fastest growing sector of leisure tourism over recent years is the city break. To meet this demand the traditional tour operator/travel agency responded with the introduction of 'packaged' city breaks. BVCB is faced with the very distinct challenge of focusing its leisure tourism efforts on this market with the specific objective of generating bed nights that will result in increased occupancy for the accommodation sector and increased spend in the City region. Given the scarcity of resources, BVCB will be driven by the principle:

Any proposed activity should be assessed on its ability to generate bed nights and increase occupancy. If it fails to satisfy these criteria it should be abandoned.

1.33 In addition to improved exposure in media such as city break operator web-sites (see paras 5.10 – 5.12), the organisation must work through other communications and sales channels to ensure that Belfast's "share of voice" is heard within the key target markets of Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland and in Europe (through TIL). The key source markets will be those cities or regions within Great Britain with direct air access to, or which are close to major ports serving, Belfast and those European cities with which we have direct air links. In the Republic of Ireland, the key market will be the greater Dublin Metropolitan area and major regional centres with easy access to the motorway network, plus those using Ireland as a gateway to the entire island. A detailed assessment of the key market opportunities and the products to be used in attracting them is included at ***Section VIII***.

1.34 Membership of key trade bodies such as European Cities Marketing ("ECM") and its City Pass programme can provide opportunities to benchmark performance, gain access to prospect databases and ensure that the industry can engage directly with the customer (i.e. with City Pass holders).

1.35 Promotion in the City Break market will also recognise that:

a) there is an opportunity to create a greater awareness of the quality of the Belfast experience through targeted public relations activity (e.g. in - flight guides) where there is direct air access;

b) the key "drivers" for choosing a city break are entertainment, arts and culture and historic sites. They help to challenge negative perceptions of the destination as they illustrate the existence of an enhanced quality of life within the region. By engaging closely with the sector, BVCB can help to develop the "compelling narrative" to leverage the positive brand value that can result. To assist in this process it is recommended that BCC commission a Cultural Mapping study (see para 5.13c);

c) BVCB should attend the European Tour Operators Association ("ETOA")/ECM 'City Fair' event, which is dedicated to the lucrative and growing sector of city tourism; and

d) every opportunity should be sought to maximise Belfast's 'share of voice' within the key target markets of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland through a targeted public relations strategy and in Europe through TIL, which should be provided with appropriate narrative for each market.

Business tourism

1.36 Developing discretionary business tourism in Northern Ireland is undertaken separately by BVCB (associations) and NITB (corporate and incentive markets) although a close working relationship exists between the organisations.

1.37 A Convention Bureau's focus should be on attracting events that utilise more than one hotel or, what is sometimes referred to as, requiring citywide services. Although Belfast was successful in attracting the discretionary business tourism market for a number of years (2006 – 2008), the past two years have been disappointing in this regard. Some progress has been made in 2010 in converting prospects into secure bookings, but there is an over-reliance on smaller scale events as demonstrated below:

Delegate numbers	Conference wins
Conferences attracting over 500 delegates	5
Conferences attracting between 300-500 delegates	15
Conferences attracting between 100-300 delegates	27
Conferences attracting fewer than 100 delegates	33
Source: BVCB	

1.38 BVCB reported 152 enquiries for the period April 2010 to November 2010 of which only 13 were for greater than 500 delegates and 104 were for fewer than 200 delegates (and which can typically be located in a single venue). Looking forward, BVCB's convention bureau activities must be more focussed on addressing:

a) increased hotel capacity;

b) declining bedroom occupancy rates; and

c) reducing room yields.

1.39 Securing larger scale conference events will be a priority which will require close engagement with the industry. BVCB must take the lead in stimulating ideas within the supply chain to develop "saleable" propositions. Belfast has a range of high quality venues or assets that can be utilised more effectively in promoting the City region as a high quality, competitive and alternate conference destination and thereby maximising the utilisation of the City's capacity.

1.40 As part of this process, BVCB must keep its stakeholders fully informed of its performance, the challenges it faces in selling to the marketplace and the reasons why any opportunities are lost. Additionally, it must also assess the performance of those stakeholders and its impact on them. There are sufficient examples of basic reporting methods of key performance measures for discretionary business tourism within international membership organisations such as European Cities Marketing ("ECM") and Destination Marketing Association International. BVCB will adopt these KPI's (set out in ***Appendix B***) and reporting methods to provide an accurate assessment of the organisation's performance.

1.41 BVCB's membership of organisations such as the International Congress & Convention Association ("ICCA"), ECM, the Association of British Professional Conference Organisers ("ABPCO") or joining Destination Marketing Association International ("DMAI") and other database sources (such as Meeting Professionals International and Professional Convention Management Association) can be employed to gain access to conferences of the type and scale that match Belfast's expanded product profile.

1.42 In its forward marketing plan BVCB will:

a) concentrate on attracting larger scale conferences that will help utilise Belfast's increased capacity;

b) establish credible and reliable reporting of the performance of Belfast as a City Break and Convention destination, and on BVCB's performance to its stakeholders (see paras 5.29 & 5.30);

c) when pursuing the City Break and Convention market sectors, focus on increasing occupancy and yield of the accommodation supply sector. The natural "knock on" effects will be spending at the attractions and events, in hospitality businesses and in the retail sector, greatly improving the net value added to the economy of Belfast and Northern Ireland overall;

d) organise "flying squad" meetings with stakeholders to identify opportunities and monitor performance (see para 5.33e);

e) make a number of minor changes to the structure of its marketing department to better align it with the key business tourism segments (see para 9.26); and

f) develop a business culture that seeks to answer three questions:

i) how many tourists?;

ii) how long are they staying?; and

iii) how much are they spending?

1.43 In short, if any activity does not contribute to increased levels of performance in any one of these areas, then it should be abandoned.

1.44 BVCB's future activities and operations will be guided by the following foundations:

a) **engagement** – BVCB will work closely with its stakeholders and partners to shape and develop products, services and propositions for our key markets (including co-ordinating a city-wide marketing plan), to leverage marketing opportunities and to understand and monitor performance levels in the region;

b) **articulation –** BVCB does not have the resources to compete in every market that it may wish to. It will articulate the messages to those with the budgets (primarily TIL and to a lesser extent NITB) that can take the lead in marketing Belfast in overseas markets; and

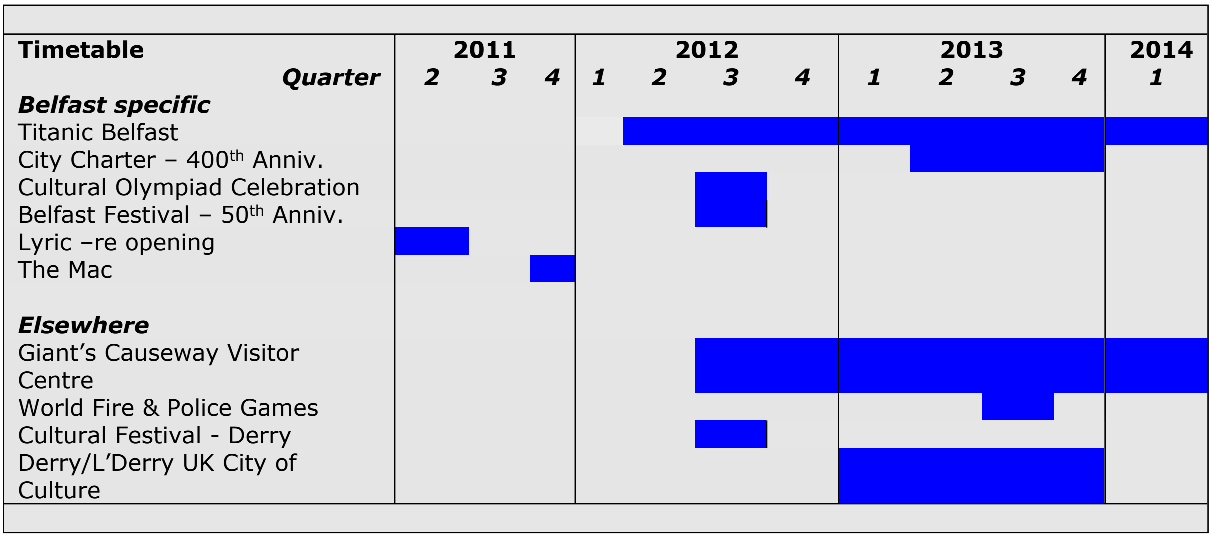
c) **focus –** emphasis will be on attracting overnight visitors to the City region from those markets that offer the best prospects.

Targets

1.45 Using the most recent Millward Brown Ulster Tourism Monitor results (for 2009) as a baseline (for 2010) for setting future targets, and recognising the importance of at least recording average annual increases in line with the ISFBT and TSNI, the following targets have been set:

City Growth targets:	**2010 est.**	**2011 est.**	**2012 est.**	**2013 est.**	**Avg. Annual**
Overnight stays	**'000**	**'000**	**'000**	**'000**	**increase**
Domestic	432	441	450	459	2.0%
Great Britain	1,549	1,610	1,675	1,742	4.0%
Rep of Ireland	1,346	1,414	1,484	1,559	5.0%
Europe	147	153	159	166	4.0%
North America	311	323	336	349	4.0%
Other	113	115	117	120	2.0%
Total	**3,898**	**4,056**	**4,222**	**4,394**	**3.9%**
Total OoS	**3,466**	**3,616**	**3,772**	**3,935**	**4.3%**
Day trippers					
Domestic	5,830	6.000	6,305	6,620	4.3%
Scotland	22	24	27	28	8.5%
England & Wales	31	32	36	37	6.5%
Rep of Ireland	1,654	1,654	1,736	1,824	3.3%
Europe	5	5	6	6	6.9%
North America	7	7	8	8	5.7%
Other	2	2	2	2	5.7%
Total	**7,551**	**7,730**	**8,120**	**8,526**	**4.4%**
Total OoS	**1,721**	**1,725**	**1,814**	**1,905**	**3.9%**

1.46 As regards overnight stays, the total average per annum increase over the period is 3.9% which is in excess of the best estimate increases set out in the ISFBT (see para 7.18) and in the TSNI (see para 7.19). This is considered to be achievable given the key developments and events that will take place in and around the City region in the short term:



1.47 The increase in day visitors is expected to accelerate rapidly in 2012 on account of the events linked to the Titanic Centenary celebrations, with a 10% increase from most geographic markets during the year, but reducing thereafter to 5% growth annually. These are ambitious growth targets, but realistic in the circumstances. **Either Belfast will take a step change in 2012 or it will not happen at all.**

1.48 So far as discretionary business tourism related bookings are concerned, the prospects in this segment remain challenging due to the economic climate and increased levels of competition.

1.49 Subject to no staff changes within the BVCB conference team and taking account of increased utilisation of the Ambassador programme, full and collaborative engagement between all partners in the supply chain, BVCB's participation in a broader spectrum of trade bodies, and the commitment by BCC and NITB to a Conference Subvention Programme, the following targets have been set:

New bookings secured	**2010 baseline**	**Target 2011/12**	**Target 2012/13**	**Target 2013/14**
Estimated Delegate numbers	18,000	26,000	34,000	38,000
Estimated Bed nights	55,000	78,000	102,000	114,000
Estimated Value	£17.9m	£25.8m	£33.8M	£37.7m
% of available annual room nights *	4.1%	5.8%	7.7%	8.6%
** based on hotel bedroom supply at 31 Dec 2010.*				

1.50 To help with the process of supply chain engagement and collaboration, a **Discretionary Business Tourism Taskforce** should be established. Its purpose is to review conference enquiries, progress, actions by members to help turn live enquiries into confirmed bookings, and to critically assess, learn from and agree corrective measures in response to failed bids. This process will improve the region's prospects "next time around". The taskforce should meet on a quarterly basis (or as soon as an opportunity arises that requires a quick response) and include representatives from BVCB, NITB, BCC, key venues, the Belfast Hoteliers Group and carriers.

Budgets and funding - BVCB

1.51 In preparing the operational cost estimates we have had to make a number of broad assumptions (detailed in paras 9.28 – 9.30). Primarily these are driven out of current uncertainties regarding departmental budgets.

1.52 In essence, we are working on the basis that the core budget available to BVCB is unlikely to increase in any significant way over the next 3 years. In order to direct spending on those key markets identified in ***Section VIII***, certain historical activities have been pared back (see para 9.32). The objective is to improve the value for money proposition by generating more high value business for the region, but utilising the same level of resources.

1.53 A detailed, costed, marketing operational plan for 2011/12 is included at ***Appendix E***. It includes associated performance targets, timing of activities and expected trade income. The total estimated budget is summarised as follows:

BVCB Budget 2011/12	**BCC**	**NITB**	**Private sector**	**Local Authority**	**Total**
	£	**£**	**£**	**£**	**£**
Total City Break Campaigns	**313,417**	**100,000**	**376,001**	**10,832**	**800,250**
Total Leisure Marketing	**146,668**	**69,300**	**131,185**	**46,497**	**393,650**
Total Web and Digital	**47,834**	**15,500**	**21,660**	**20,006**	**105,000**
Total Conference Bureau	**11,130**	**98,000**	**44,004**	**1,666**	**154,800**
Total Communications	**55,844**	**25,700**	**89,956**	**0**	**171,500**
Staff costs	693,584	62,000	27,444	4,333	787,361
Overheads	144,523			16,666	161,189
Total costs funded by:	**1,413,000**	**370,500**	**690,250**	**100,000**	**2.573,750**
	54.9%	**14.4%**	**26.8%**	**3.9%**	**100%**

1.54 This table sets out the balance of funding across the major stakeholder groups. Public sector support allows BVCB to leverage additional private sector funding in the form of sponsorship, advertising and participation in trade related events amounting to approximately £690k per annum. Any reduction in funding from BCC or NITB will have a "knock on" effect on private sector support and will substantially diminish BVCB's ability to market the region and the City's capability to meet its objectives.

1.55 The following table provides a summary of the key target outcomes arising from the proposed marketing operations:

Leisure Marketing	Conference Bureau	Communications
50,000 website visits/mnth	Secure 28,000 delegates	Host 120 press trips
Present to 30 agents/operators in direct access mkts	Secure 78,000 bed nights	secure £3.5m advertising equivalent
20 tour leads (Germany)	£25.8m of conference trade	120m weighted opps to see
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
Secure additional 158,000 bed nights (v 2009)	Host FAM trip	Issue a minimum of 36 (Corporate and Product) press releases
Secure additional 179,000 day trippers (v 2009)	Submit 120 bids/60% conversion rate	Attract 5,000 followers through social media outlets

1.56 Detailed income and expenditure budgets for the period 2011/12 to 2013/14 are included at ***Appendix F*** and summarised as follows:

Year	**2011/12**	**2012/13**	**2013/14**	**Total**
Income	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**
Belfast City Council	1,413	1,413	1,413	4,239
NITB	371	371	370	1,111
Other local authorities	100	100	100	300
Private sector income	690	763	653	2,106
Total	**2,574**	**2,647**	**2,536**	**7,756**
Non overhead expenses				
Support for GBBCA TIC	5	5	5	15
Marketing/communications	1,620	1,677	1,530	4,827
Total	**1,625**	**1,682**	**1,535**	**4,842**
Overheads				
Salaries	787	796	825	2,408
Other overheads	153	160	167	480
Depreciation	8	8	9	25
Total	**948**	**964**	**1,001**	**2,913**
Surplus/(deficit) for the period	**1**	**1**	**0**	**2**
Salaries as a % of income	30.6%	30.0%	32.5%	31.0%
Total overhead as a % of income	36.8%	36.4%	39.5%	37.6%
Marketing/Comms as a % of income	62.9%	63.4%	60.3%	62.2%

1.57 In overall terms, the BVCB is expected to break–even or record a small surplus in each year. This means that the organisation has no capacity to cover unexpected expenses without drawing budget away from marketing activities. Ideally, it should be in a position to build up a modest level of reserves to provide some cover for such eventualities.

1.58 The years 2012 and 2013 offer a major opportunity for Northern Ireland. A comprehensive programme of events is being planned, underpinned by celebration of the Titanic Centenary, but budgets and their application have yet to be finalised. Given the Northern Ireland wide benefits expected to arise from 2012 it has been suggested that marketing be undertaken by TIL and NITB. While this is logical, there will also be an important role for BVCB in promoting the Centenary in conjunction with its City Break and visitor servicing activities in much the same way as the 2009 Tall Ships event. Although the marketing and visitor servicing activities planned by BVCB for the years 2011/12 and 2012/13 make provision for the Titanic Centenary and the City of Belfast's 400th Anniversary of its Charter, any substantial uplift in such activity will require additional budgetary resource, for which separate marketing and visitor service plans should be developed.

Budget and funding - Visitor servicing

1.59 Visitor servicing falls under the remit of each local authority area. Since April 2000 BVCB has managed the Belfast City Region's visitor servicing on behalf of BCC. In addition BVCB also delivers essential gateway services through the TICs for NITB and for the rest of Northern Ireland.

1.60 The quality of visitor servicing through BVCB's 3 information centres is highly regarded. As a measure of the importance of the Belfast Welcome Centre, it handled 40.2% of all Northern Ireland tourism enquiries in 2008. The emphasis of activity over the coming 3 year period will be on:

a) improving product knowledge about the City Region and Northern Ireland more generally amongst front-line staff (including knowledge about Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 since the Belfast airports are likely to be the key gateways for overseas visitors);

b) encouraging repeat visits and increased spend;

c) identifying and developing IT related customer servicing opportunities (i.e. podcasts, apps, mobile maps, virtual 3D tours);

d) steering visitors towards Belfast's cultural and heritage products or "trails"; and

e) ensuring that the Belfast story, when developed, and the messages for Titanic 2012 and the 400th Anniversary of Belfast in 2013 are well known and articulated in the TICs.

1.61 Detailed income and expenditure budgets for the period 2011/12 to 2013/14 are included at ***Appendix F*** and summarised as follows:

Visitor Servicing budgeted income and expenditure	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total
Belfast Welcome Centre	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**
Income				
Belfast City Council	479	479	479	**1,437**
NITB	162	162	162	**486**
Commercial activity	973	1,030	1,075	**3,078**
Total	**1,614**	**1,671**	**1,716**	**5,001**
Total Costs	**1,613**	**1,671**	**1,716**	**5,000**
Surplus/(deficit) for the period	1	0	0	1
Belfast International Airport				
Income				
Belfast City Council	19	19	19	**57**
NITB	47	47	47	**141**
Commercial activity	141	150	158	**449**
BVCB	13	13	13	**39**
Total	**220**	**229**	**237**	**686**
Total Costs	**220**	**229**	**237**	**686**
Surplus/(deficit) for the period	0	0	0	0
George Best Belfast City Airport				
Income				
Belfast City Council	31	31	31	**93**
NITB	21	21	21	**63**
Commercial activity	76	82	88	**246**
RTPs	5	5	5	**15**
BVCB	5	5	5	**15**
Total	**138**	**144**	**150**	**432**
Total Costs	**138**	**143**	**149**	**430**
Surplus/(deficit) for the period	0	1	1	2
Total cost (3 TICs)	**1,971**	**2,043**	**2,102**	**6,116**

1.62 The key points from the above analysis are:

a) the level of retail activity that is required to cover the cost of operating each TIC;

b) in the case of the gateway airport TIC's the level of income and retailing at each is insufficient to cover the operating costs. Consequently, BVCB is required to redirect funding from its activities to meet the shortfall; and

c) any reduction in income from any source, or any unexpected increase in operating costs, will add pressure to BVCB to meet the "funding" gap.

1.63 The total commitment by stakeholders to all of the activities of BVCB over the 3 year period, is summarised as follows:

Funding sources	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		
	Mktg	VS	Mktg	VS	Mktg	VS	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Belfast City Council	1,413	529	1,413	529	1,413	529	**5,826**
NITB	371	230	371	230	370	230	**1,801**
Commercial Activity	-	1,189	-	1,262	-	1,321	**3,772**
Local authorities	95	5	95	5	95	5	**300**
Private sector	690	-	763	-	653	-	**2,106**
Total	**2,569**	**1,953**	**2,642**	**2,026**	**2,531**	**2,085**	**13,806**
Annual total ('000)	**4,522**		**4,668**		**4,616**		
VS = Visitor Servicing							

Strategic/long term changes

1.64 Throughout this report, we have highlighted matters that are more strategic or longer term in nature and which will, in some shape or form, play a role in further improving the City region's prospects or performance monitoring. These include:

a) BCC should undertake a Cultural Mapping exercise (para 5.13c);

b) commission a comprehensive review of BVCB's ICT operations including web and mobile technologies (para 6.7 & 6.8); and

c) the review of delivery structures in the city including destination marketing and destination management (para 6.5 & 6.10g).

1.65 The cost of these reviews has not been included within the above budgets.

City marketing and the challenges it faces II

Introduction

2.1 City marketing is a relatively new discipline which has emerged as a consequence of the disappearance of national boundaries in the global economy. Within Europe, the collapse of communism opened up many 'new' destinations in the former USSR. When faced with the challenge of entering the Western economy, those nations chose tourism as the industry that would provide the fastest and easiest access to foreign capital. However, their positioning was based on cities rather than on countries. Hence, you are invited to visit Prague rather than the Czech Republic, Budapest rather than Hungary, St Petersburg rather than Russia etc.

2.2 The introduction of highly discounted air fares on short-haul routes (sometimes referred to, erroneously, as 'low-Cost-Airlines') has created a new market for cities at both ends of the route structures. Consequently, Prague is one of the top 'city break' destinations in Europe today.

Articulating the message

2.3 It is no surprise therefore, that in today's global economy the unit of analysis of economic performance is the city region. This places greater emphasis on the requirement for cities to define their competitive advantage over other places as locations to invest in, re-locate to or to visit as tourists. In other words, **developing the narrative that articulates the distinctiveness and uniqueness of your city is a critical component of competitive place marketing today**.

2.4 Belfast, like many other cities, has been challenged with re-inventing itself in the post industrial era. But it has had to do this following many years of being perceived as a 'war zone'. The establishment of Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau ("BVCB") in 1999 represented a very positive opportunity to begin the process of returning Belfast to its citizens as a place to be proud of again and of promoting it as a great, historic city to an external audience. With the support of both the public and private sectors the results produced are evidence of its success to date.

2.5 While tremendous progress has been made, there are major challenges for the future, not least the expanding capacity for tourism set against declining budgets for destination marketing. Given the enormous changes that have taken place in Belfast in recent years, as evidenced by the massive investment in tourism infrastructure and public realm projects, it is necessary to re-align the marketing and information services of BVCB to ensure they are focused on taking full advantage of the opportunities presented over the next three years.

2.6 **The role of a city marketing agency is to assist in improving the quality of life for all the citizens of the city by generating wealth and creating jobs. BVCB must demonstrate that it creates customers for the city and focus on partnerships to maximise the utilisation of the expanded tourism infrastructure**.

The external environment

2.7 BVCB must address three emerging strategic themes if it is to become a more effective destination marketing organisation ("DMO") in the 21st century knowledge economy:

a) Relevance;

b) The Value Proposition; and

c) Visibility.

Relevance

2.8 To varying degrees, visitor and convention bureaux operate in an increasingly noisy, confusing, and evolving marketplace – one in which their role is less and less uniquely defined and less willingly acknowledged.

2.9 The increasing disintermediation of the visitor services marketplace, the rise of new business entities contending for the attention of visitors and meeting organisers, the wealth of free information made available online and increasing local competition for funds formerly earmarked for destination marketing, all conspire to challenge the traditional role of a DMO. Consequently BVCB will be under constant pressure to prove its 'value role' within the distribution chain.

2.10 As stakeholders contend with their own individual business pressures, their expectations of BVCB will increase proportionately.

The Value Proposition

2.11 Closely related to the theme of relevance, the value proposition issue embodies a long-term question of focus (i.e. – the configuration of services traditionally offered). This is the single essential contribution made by the BVCB in the perceptions of the many stakeholders with whom it interacts. Over the years, many new players in the marketplace for travel, tourism, meetings, and hospitality have been 'nibbling away' at the DMO "value package." The expansion of Belfast's infrastructure has introduced a new group of professionals who are going about their business, and who should have knowledge of, and contact with, BVCB.

Visibility

2.12 As the massive migration of "content" – information of every conceivable kind – to the Internet proceeds, visitors and those who market services to them have an abundance of sources for researching, planning, and organising travel-related activities. Sophisticated travellers increasingly go to online sources to plan their vacations. While they may be susceptible and responsive to print sources such as newspapers, magazines, and the publications of travel writers, the battle for customer attention will increasingly be fought on the Internet.

2.13 If one accepts the premise that the capacity to market anything depends on some kind of access to those who buy it – visibility – then Belfast needs to be in the information pathways that potential customers use as they make their decisions. BVCB's websites require the level of sophistication, user-friendly design, and inter-activeness needed to compete with other sources. City-operated websites, sites operated by city-specific newspapers and magazines, and sites of individual local attractions all compete with BVCB's site for visitor attention.

2.14 The "Mobile Internet" is fast becoming an essential resource where hand-held personal electronic devices with miniature screens enable the cyber-conscious customer to search a wealth of information from any location. BVCB and Belfast City need to position themselves in as many as possible of the critical information pathways available to the prospective visitor.

Future trends in destination marketing

2.15 Eight "Super-Trends" that will shape Belfast's strategy in the future are:

- **Customer Sector**: ***"Proliferating Preferences"*** Travel customers, both consumers and commercial demand aggregators, are seeking and responding to an ever growing range of choices in the travel products and experiences they buy. BVCB and its stakeholders will have to develop ever more targeted and responsive value packages to capture and retain business;

- **Competitor Sector**: ***"The Battle for Attention."*** Belfast will have to work even harder to be heard through the noise of an increasingly crowded and complex market place, particularly as the travel-buying experience continues its migration to the Internet;
- **Economic Sector**: ***"Dodging Asteroids."*** The city break and discretionary business tourism sectors are increasingly vulnerable to various economic "shocks" such as energy prices, exchange rates, political unrest, terrorism, and threats of cataclysmic effects such as health pandemics. Belfast has to plan for potential "economic asteroids" in its strategy (i.e. major events or changes that can suddenly reorder the competitive arena) and has to be able to respond and react to events as they arise;
- **Technological Sector: *"Smart and Friendly Websites."*** The website is now an absolute necessity for doing business in the travel sector, and website design is becoming ever more sophisticated. In knowledge-intensive business environments such as tourism, the most successful competitors tend to be those that continue to exploit the latest technologies and information strategies. BVCB, in representing the City region, must stay abreast of the many potential competitors that offer information and advice and it must ensure that its electronic communications are at the 'leading edge'. For instance, emerging technologies include on-line visa applications, virtual 3D tours and mobile maps;
- **Social Sector: *"The Electronic Society."*** Traditional localised, physically based human communities are increasingly being extended – and in some cases, replaced - by virtual, electronically mediated relationships. On-line social media and networking (*Facebook, Twitter et al*) and user-generated web content will be increasingly important as competitive strengths;
- **Political Sector: *"The Quest for Relevance."*** funding sources traditionally allocated for destination marketing are increasingly subject to claims by other groups (e.g. BCC Events, Arts and Cultural organisations);
- **Legal Sector: *"Mixed Signals From Government."*** The tourism industry is ever more strongly affected by the policies, practices, legislative agendas, and economic strategies of governments across the globe, many of which are contradictory or conflicting, and which sometimes pit regions, destinations, and interest groups against one another; and
- **Geophysical Sector (Place and Space):** *"Going Green."* As public consciousness and political activism make the issue of ecological sustainability ever more real, business entities of all kinds, including BVCB and the stakeholders they serve, will experience increasing pressure to be "seen as green." Belfast will find it necessary to develop realistic strategies and plans for sustainable development and management of the tourism product in the future.

2.16 To the above can be added the recent trend in the United Kingdom for local Destination Marketing Organisations ("DMO") and City Centre Management ("CCM") organisations to merge or partner. DMOs have historically marketed the destination to the external audience, whereas CCMs have largely been focussed on attractions (inc retail, business, arts etc) access (inc transport, parking), amenities (inc cleanliness, public realm) and action (inc marketing, strategies), the objective being that the destination is both desirable and attractive. Ultimately, BVCB relies on the industry at large to deliver on its marketing promise and opportunities for greater collaboration between all sectors needs to be addressed. The challenge is agreeing who does what? – the Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework sets out recommendations to deal with this matter.

2.17 The key drivers for such collaboration include the thinking that DMOs must have some ability to influence the quality of the product to ensure the destination's long term sustainability. Added to this are budgetary pressures and the need for revenue generation. While any such consideration is outside the scope of this assignment, this is a matter that may need to be visited in some detail within the next 4 years and in advance of the review of public administration proposals to substantially reduce the number of local council bodies.

2.18 The trends highlighted above demonstrate that the tourism marketplace is dynamic, is being influenced by an increasingly wide range of factors and that the activities of DMOs must be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure compliance with market changes. The Tourism Marketplace has changed dramatically in the ten years since BVCB was established. In this context, it is both appropriate and necessary that BVCB "step back" from its activities from time to time and critically assess how it is responding to and meeting new and emerging challenges.

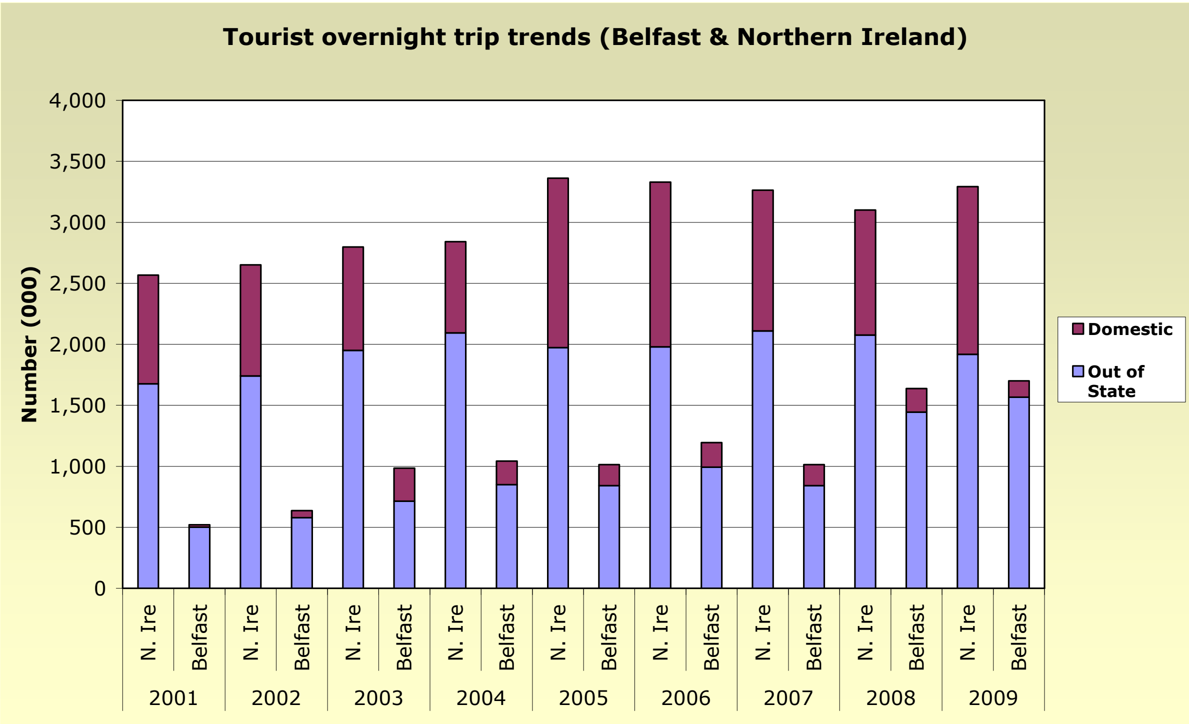
Introduction

3.1 There are a number of sources of information and statistics in relation to the performance of Belfast as a tourist and visitor destination including Northern Ireland Tourist Board statistics, the Belfast Tourism Monitor and private sector funded research.

3.2 Some of the stakeholders consulted as part of this assignment were uncertain about the consistency and reliability of the statistics currently being used, and felt a disconnect between some of the statistics and the 'on the ground' experience of the industry. However, NITB and BCC are working in partnership to deal with this issue.

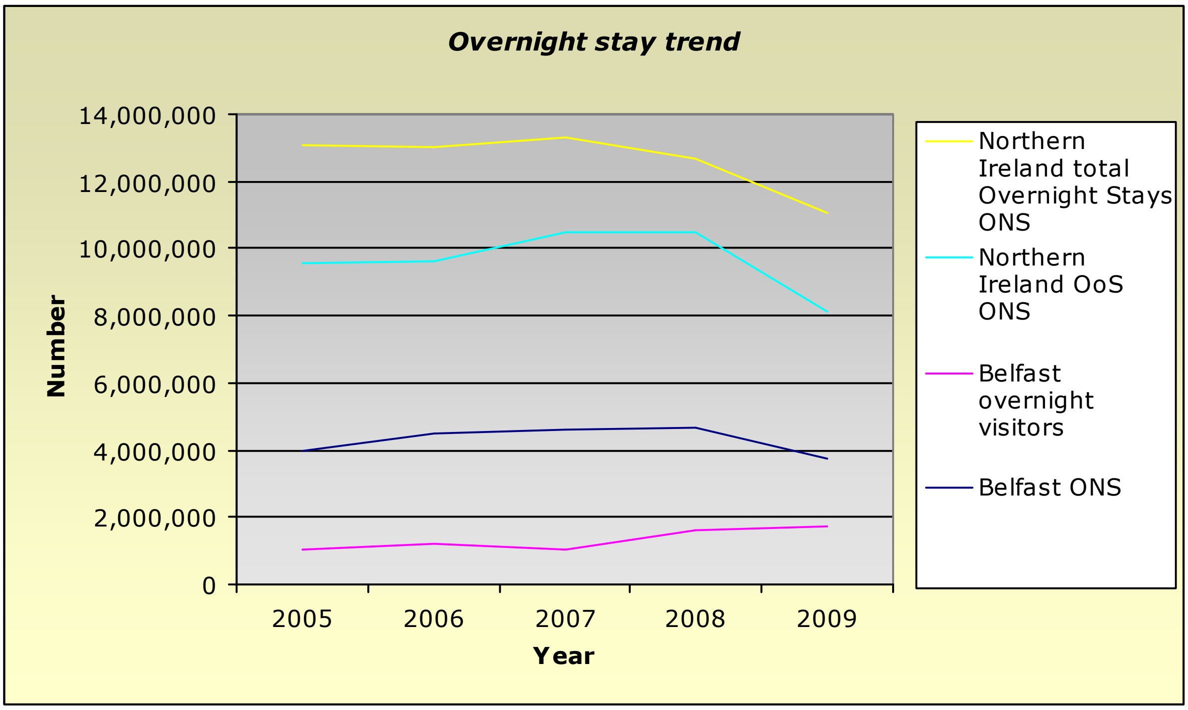
Performance measurement

3.3 Based on the Belfast City Council Tourism Monitor and NITB research, the success of Belfast in increasing the number of overnight visitors, relative to Northern Ireland, can be demonstrated as follows:



Source: BCC Tourism Monitor & NITB Tourism Facts

3.4 Between 2001 and 2009, the total number of overnight trips to the City region trebled. In 2009, total overnight trips to the region increased by approximately 4% (8% for out of state trips) compared to 2008 and by an estimated 68% (86% for out of state trips) when compared to 2005. By comparison, the number of out of state overnight trips to the island of Ireland reduced by 6% in 2009 compared to 2005. However, success in generating tourist trips does not necessarily translate into a corresponding and equivalent increase in overnight stays:



Source: NITB Tourism Facts and Local Authority Tourism Estimates and the BCC Tourism Monitor 2009

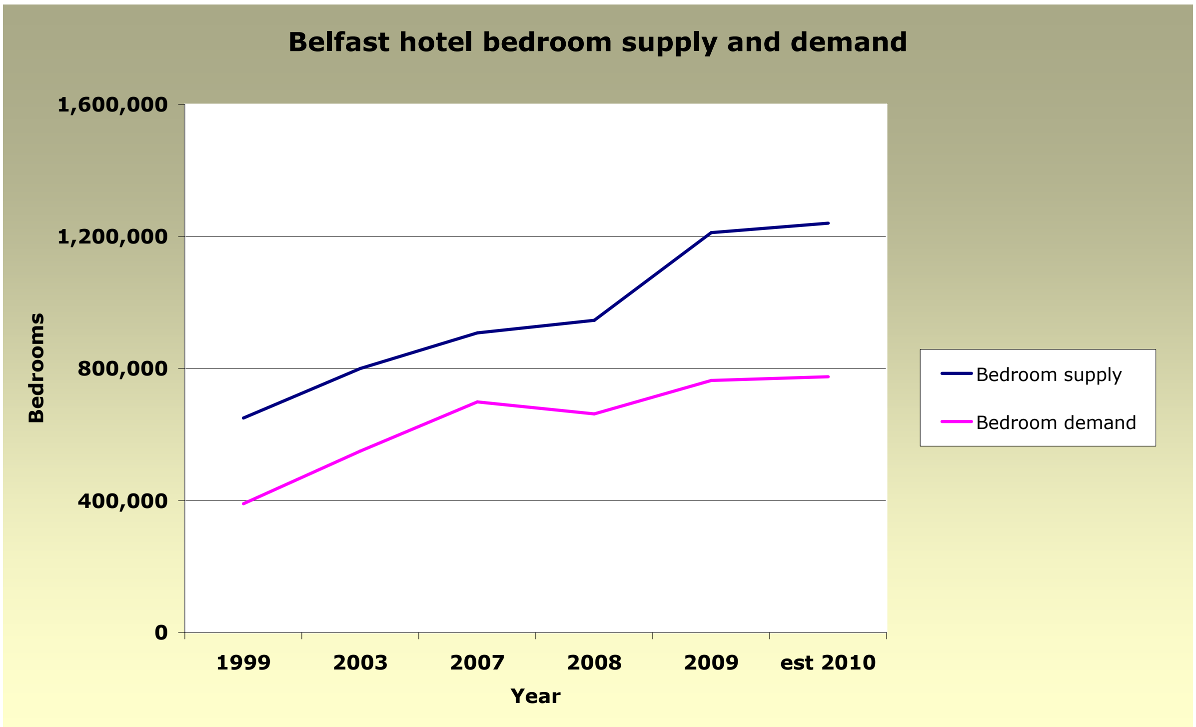
3.5 The volume of overnight stays in the Belfast region reduced in 2009, despite the increase in overnight trips. The total estimated overnight stays in the City region in 2009 was 3.77 million as against and estimate of 4.67 million in 2008. In addition, the City region welcomed approximately 7.6m day trip visitors in 2009 (*source: Millward Brown Ulster Belfast Tourism Monitor 2009*).

3.6 The number of overnight stays throughout Northern Ireland has been in decline since 2007. In the most recent year for which statistics are available (2009), total overnight stays reduced by approximately 13% compared with 2008, while the volume of Out of State (OoS) overnight stays reduced by approximately 22%.

3.7 Other performance highlights from the 2009 Tourism Monitor include:

Tourism Monitor Highlights 2009	versus '08/reason	**number/%**
Visitor trips	**+30%**	**9.25m**
Out of state o/night tourists	**+12%**	**1.57m**
Overnight tourists from Republic of Ireland	**+107%**	**0.88m**
Overnight tourists from Great Britain	**-27%**	**0.55m**
Out of state tourists – first time in Belfast	**-9%**	**58%**
Out of state day trippers – most popular mode of entry	**Via RoI**	**51%**
OoS – Overnight tourists – most popular mode of entry	**air**	**74%**
Continental Europeans arriving via Republic of Ireland		**26%**
OoS – Overnight tourists – main reason to visit	**City brk / h'day**	**60%**
OoS – Day trippers – main reason to visit	**attractions**	**46%**
OoS tourists – main information source pre-visit	**internet**	**68%**
OoS – Overnight tourists – booking commercial accomm	**internet**	**57%**
Overnight tourists – reason for visiting	**Curious/different**	**47%**
Source: BCC/BVCB		

3.8 Given the trend in overnight stays in the City one would expect the tourist accommodation providers to have reported similar experiences in 2009. However, this is not necessarily the case. The following table charts the level of hotel bedroom supply and demand over the past number of years:



Source: NITB (Supply) & ASM Hotel Industry Survey (Demand)

3.9 The estimated number of bedrooms sold in 2008 reduced in comparison to 2007, although there was a circa 15% increase in total estimated room sales in 2009. Due to an increase in bedroom supply during 2009 and into 2010, average bedroom occupancy rates have been in decline since 2008. New supply was planned on the expectation that demand in the City region would continue to increase at a rate that was largely consistent with previous years (and before the current economic "slump").

3.10 These results suggest some inconsistency between the published visitor performance statistics recorded in the Tourism Monitor and the Local Authority Tourism Estimates and the experience of the industry "on the ground". Assessing the nature of demand at hotels does not address this issue, but it does reveal some interesting points:

Hotel overnight guests - Belfast	2007	2009
Corporate users	49.1%	33.9%
Conference/meeting delegates	7.3%	6.5%
Independent tourists	29.8%	46.9%
Tour groups	10.1%	5.1%
Air crew	2.3%	3.6%
Other	1.4%	4.0%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
Source: ASM Hotel Industry Survey		

3.11 Comparing 2009 with 2007, the number of business related overnight guests has reduced while the volume of leisure traffic has increased (an important market but which tends to be more price sensitive). The net result is that bedroom yields have declined. Of the total bedroom sales at hotels in 2007 and 2009, approximately 7.3% and 6.5% respectively were accounted for by conference and meeting delegates – a market that can be influenced by the activities of BVCB. However, the corporate market cannot be influenced in any way by the actions of the DMO, so any increase or decline in demand from this user group arises for other reasons.

Addressing the disconnect

3.12 A core question for BVCB is: ***"what information does the industry owe us and what information do we owe the industry?"*** Without access to reliable market information, and proper management of the 'product supply chain'[2] the destination marketing organisation is subject to the criticism.

3.13 In turn, this raises questions about the efficiency of the city-wide systems and processes currently used for data gathering, management and dissemination of information related to the performance of the city destination and therefore the operational performance of BVCB.

Monitoring requirements

3.14 Based on the above assessment, BVCB will:

a) implement a broader range of key performance indicators and measures (as identified at paras 5.29 and 5.30);

b) with Belfast City Council ("BCC") and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board ("NITB") agree a uniform method of statistical analysis and reporting and how this will be resourced; and

c) through its membership of the ECM (European Cities Marketing – an organisation for the exchange of knowledge and best practice), adopt its tourism research and monitoring practices. This would help in benchmarking the performance of the Greater Belfast City region with other City destinations.

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[2] *See Appendix A*

BVCB's role within the tourism structure in Ireland IV

Introduction

4.1 The reorganisation of tourism following the 'Good Friday Agreement' resulted in the establishment of Tourism Ireland Limited ("TIL") as an all-Ireland destination marketing organisation with responsibility for promoting all of the island of Ireland overseas (including Great Britain).

4.2 The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has responsibility for promoting Northern Ireland within the island of Ireland and for the strategic development of the industry.

BVCB's position within the new structure

4.3 The BVCB is a public-private partnership responsible for marketing and for visitor servicing for the Belfast City region. Despite its remit, BVCB does not have the resources to assume a global marketing capability. With the resources available, BVCB must adopt a more targeted, focused approach, clearly defining which products and markets offer the best potential return and to which it can market effectively, while also identifying those markets where it can use and tap into the marketing activities of NITB, TIL and Belfast City Council.

4.4 Since BVCB is a membership organisation, it is at risk of being seen as a 'trade association' rather than a pure destination marketing organisation and therefore being driven by the demands of specific members or groups of members (rather than what is best for the wider region). BVCB is required to provide adequate support to the 'member' local authorities outside Belfast where the level of funding represents a small percentage (£117k or 4.3%) of BVCB's budget. This adds further stress to the already limited resources available to it. A cost benefit analysis that identifies the expectations of the local authorities and the realistic cost of meeting those expectations may create the opportunity that they increase their contributions to BVCB. Ultimately the judgement will be based upon added value. However, there should be no doubt amongst any of the members that Belfast is the driver of the regional economy.

4.5 TIL is funded on a 2:1 basis by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively. That is, Northern Ireland contributes one third (circa £14m) of Tourism Ireland's annual budget despite having approximately one tenth of the infrastructure capacity. The point has been made in the past that a deficiency in the tourism infrastructure in Northern Ireland precluded any significant growth. This is no longer the case, especially in the City region which has undergone substantial transformation in terms of infrastructure and products to attract and service visitors.

4.6 Future tourism growth for the City region and Northern Ireland more generally will require the reversal of the downturn in visitors sourced from Great Britain. TIL has a pivotal role to play in this regard, as does BVCB.

Working together effectively

4.7 In its future activities, BVCB will:

a) develop closer working partnerships with BCC and NITB to agree common messages that ensure the maximum return on Northern Ireland's investment in TIL;

b) assist in co-ordinating city wide promotional activity and budgets (where this will attract an outside audience);

c) focus on destination specific, rather than member specific, marketing; and

d) conduct a review of the service level agreement with each local authority member to ensure that BVCB is meeting its obligations under the agreement and that the cost of providing the support expected does not exceed the membership paid.

The Belfast Brand

4.8 The challenge for a city brand is that it must answer the questions:

a) what does the city have that no other city can claim which is authentic, believable and appealing to both internal and external audiences?;

b) is it of global significance?; and

c) can it be developed into a purchasable proposition that will position the city in key target markets?

4.9 It is essential that the Belfast brand differentiates Belfast from its competitors.

4.10 It is difficult to judge at this stage whether the new 'Belfast Inspired' brand has made any impact. There have been no tracking studies that we are aware of, nor are we cognisant of any focus group research on the brand's reach or penetration. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is considered more a Belfast City Council logo rather than a City brand.

4.11 There is also the issue of timing and whether or not a city is ready for Brand treatment. If Belfast's key target markets continue to associate the city with its violent, political past then a branding exercise may be considered premature.

4.12 At this point, there is no single organisation engaged in developing the 'Belfast narrative'. In the short term, Belfast needs to continue to pursue an event – led strategy to re-position the city in key target markets to ensure maximum utilisation of the existing and new tourism assets. The current calendar of events for the City, and those planned for 2012, go some way to meeting this objective, but co-ordination between those responsible for delivery would appear to be limited and there remain gaps or weaknesses in the "spread" of events. For instance, New Year's Eve represents an opportunity to appeal to the family market. This is hugely successful in a number of US cities and attracts overnight guests from regional hinterlands and overseas.

4.13 In terms of progressing the Brand:

a) the relevant stakeholders should work together to determine the "next steps" in the development of the brand strategy, including agreement on which organisation is to be the custodian of the Brand;

b) a series of focus groups should be held in key target markets to determine responses to the Belfast brand. This should be managed and funded by the organisation nominated as the Brand custodian;

c) BVCB, NITB and BCC should work closely together in developing individual marketing plans for major Belfast based events (we understand that preliminary work by BCC in mapping all of the events is already underway (e.g. 2012 Titanic themed events). Provision has been made within the marketing plan for promotion based around the key events in the City, in line with the key strategies developed for Belfast, Northern Ireland and the Titanic Centenary, but additional resource will be required for the marketing of individual events; and

d) BVCB should begin developing and articulating the 'Belfast narrative' in conjunction with the Brand custodian to build brand awareness and brand equity.

Introduction

5.1 Urban tourism has a unique set of experiences to offer that are location specific. These are geared to:

a) ***events*** - that are driven by the arts, cultural industries, sports, retailing etc. that have led to City Breaks becoming the fastest growing sector of leisure tourism in the past decade; and

b) ***discretionary business tourism*** - otherwise known as Meetings, Incentive Travel, Conferences and Exhibitions ("MICE"), and which is concentrated largely in urban destinations as they have the range of facilities and attributes to satisfy the most demanding delegates.

5.2 As noted, BVCB does not have the resources to effectively target a global market and, in many cases, its resources and activities are spread too thinly over a broad range of markets and sectors. To be more effective, BVCB must concentrate its efforts on the two markets that are fundamental to the urban destination and on a select number of priority regions. It must also collaborate more closely with NITB, TIL and other global brand organisations based in Northern Ireland to achieve the growth targets required over the next three years.

5.3 With this in mind, BVCB needs to re-align its business strategy to concentrate on developing Belfast as:

a) a major European City Break destination (Leisure Tourism); and

b) the leading convention destination in Ireland (Discretionary Business Tourism), particularly in light of the development of The Convention Centre, Dublin.

5.4 It must also "own" the customer. The process of owning the customer is based on the principle that the Destination Marketing Organisation has been directly engaged with the customer through the entire process of:

awareness	**>**	to purchase	**>**	to customer satisfaction

Developing Belfast as a European city break destination

5.5 BVCB is faced with the very distinct challenge of re-focusing its leisure tourism efforts on city breaks with the specific objective of generating bed nights that will result in increased occupancy and yield of the hotel sector.

5.6 With tightening budgets and ever more stretched resources, the focus of BVCB's marketing effort needs to be driven by the principle:

Any proposed activity should be assessed on its ability to generate bed nights and increase occupancy. If it fails to satisfy these criteria it should be abandoned.

5.7 It has to be remembered that the justification for public sector support of destination marketing is wealth generation and job creation. BVCB needs to demonstrate its ability to generate customers that are attracted by those activities that are location specific to cities.

5.8 The process it needs to engage in includes:

a) developing a compelling narrative (Belfast's unique history, heritage and culture);

b) telling the story in key markets (Public Relations Activity);

c) ensuring the product is available and easy to buy through key distribution channels both traditional and new media (managing the supply chain);

d) customer awareness (marketing and sales effort) - ensuring there is no disconnect between the marketing promise and the customer experience (quality of service at point of delivery); and

e) performance management of the destination across a series of KPI's. Success will ultimately be measured by the utilisation of tourism capacity that will in turn generate wealth and create jobs.

5.9 The four resources BVCB has available to it in this critical endeavour are the physical and event attributes of the city (attractiveness capital), budget (financial capital), the skills and competencies of its people (intellectual capital) and systems and processes (efficiency capital). All four must be aligned if the organisation is to be successful.

5.10 The fastest growing sector of leisure tourism in recent years has been the city break. To meet this demand the traditional tour operator/travel agency responded with the introduction of 'packaged' city breaks. The following table identifies some of the key operators in this marketplace and Belfast's current status in terms of 'visibility':

Operator	**Some competitive cities featured**	**Belfast's visibility**
Superbreak	Manchester Edinburgh Liverpool	4 Hotels featured
Cities Direct	Dublin £204 Prague £267 Riga £199	6 Hotels featured Cheapest £170
Brilliant Trips	Dublin £199 Budapest £145 Paris £170	Not featured
City Vacations	Dublin £113 Amsterdam £119 Prague £94	Not featured
Great Escapes	Dublin £214 Prague £288	Not featured
Leger	Edinburgh £249 Amsterdam £229 Paris £149	Not featured
Letsgo2	Prague £133 Budapest £225 Amsterdam £129	Not featured
Travel Editions	An interesting specialist operator which designs short breaks geared to arts and activities (i.e. Bridge). Possible opportunities for Titanic, MAC, Lyric etc	Not featured
Travellers Cities	Prague £159 Budapest £159	Not featured
Thomson Cities	Dublin Prague (Hotels only)	Not featured.

5.11 If BVCB was able to focus its efforts and resources more on priority markets, rather than spreading its activities across such a broad range of sectors, it would be able to drill down into the priority segments and ensure full impact and visibility.

5.12 Presently, Tourism Ireland is running an advertisement for Belfast "City of Music" on the third party site lastminute.com. There is a limited amount of narrative on the appeal of the city in the bookings section of the site and no link from the advertisement (or the Belfast section) to the gotobelfast website, where a more comprehensive insight into the City region's appeal would be provided. BVCB will explore every opportunity with TIL to ensure that the City region is maximising its visibility on such sites.

The way forward

5.13 BVCB's future marketing activities will address the following:

a) Belfast is faced with an identity issue when trying to establish the destination within the City Break marketplace. None of the current on-line city break operators have it listed within Ireland and only some have it located in the U.K. This raises the question of 'positioning' within this market and is an issue for discussion with NITB and TIL. It may be strategically appropriate to consider positioning Belfast as a European City Break destination;

b) there is an opportunity to create a greater awareness of the quality of the Belfast experience through targeted public relations activity (e.g. in - flight guides) where there is direct air access;

c) the key "drivers" for choosing a city break are entertainment, arts and culture and historic sites. They help to challenge negative perceptions of the destination as they illustrate the existence of an enhanced quality of life within the region. By engaging with the sector more regularly BVCB can help develop the "compelling narrative" to leverage the positive brand value that can result. BCC should commission a Cultural Mapping study to enable the development of appropriate strategies (this exercise will identify the depth and breadth of the cultural sector in the city (including arts organisations, cultural bodies, creative industries));

d) the opening of the redeveloped Lyric Theatre and The MAC are major cultural events that will be addressed in BVCB's tactical plan;

e) Belfast's representation within key City Break operators needs to be strengthened. This will require engagement with the industry, and particularly accommodation providers;

f) BVCB's membership of European Cities Marketing ("ECM") means that it can participate in their City Card programme. This will provide an opportunity for the local industry to engage directly with the customer by offering special discounts that are available only to card holders;

g) the European Tour Operators Association ("ETOA") has combined with ECM to run regular workshops for city destinations and buyers. ETOA's tour operator members alone represent a combined buying power of over €5 billion, while ECM has a membership of more than 100 cities. The ETOA/ECM 'City Fair' is a one day event of pre-scheduled appointments dedicated to the lucrative and growing sector of city tourism. It is scheduled to take place in London in June 2011. This is a unique opportunity for European city DMO's and their suppliers to meet, network and conduct business with tour operators and city product developers from all over the world. BVCB will attend the event; and

h) every opportunity should be sought to maximise Belfast's 'share of voice' within the key target markets of Great Britain and Republic of Ireland through a targeted public relations strategy and in Europe through TIL, which should be provided with appropriate narrative for each market.

5.14 In addition to its own product offering, there is an opportunity for Belfast to 'piggy back' on other major events scheduled to take place around the UK both in terms of market intelligence and opportunities for partnership and strategic alliances (e.g. London 2012, Londonderry 2013 and Glasgow 2014 (Commonwealth Games)). An example of the preparatory work currently being undertaken by the City of London can be found on www.theculturediary.com. BVCB will take account of the information available on this site.

Developing Belfast as a leading convention destination

5.15 Discretionary Business Tourism is that sector of business tourism where the decision to choose a destination can be influenced by promotional stimuli (unlike independent business travellers). Regrettably, there are few reliable statistics as to the volume and value of the sector as the tourism statistics choose to use the general heading of Business Tourism to describe the sector.

5.16 Discretionary Business Tourism comprises the following categories:

a) National Associations;

b) International Associations;

c) Corporate meetings;

d) Government;

e) Exhibitions; and

f) Incentive travel.

5.17 The following sub segments are key to Belfast:

a) Medical;

b) Engineering;

c) IT;

d) Sport; and

e) Science.

5.18 BVCB has responsibility for the Associations market, while NITB is responsible for the corporate convention/meeting and incentive categories although a close working relationship exists between the organisations. The absence of purpose built high quality exhibition space in the City is limiting Belfast's opportunities in this particular segment.

5.19 While reliable statistics are unavailable at the national or international level, at city convention bureau level, discretionary business tourism is the most measurable sector of tourism. In every sense, the city convention bureau should 'own' the customer through the following process:

Generating the lead	>	Developing the bid	>	Converting the bid	>	Servicing the event	>	Post event management

5.20 The entire process can be 'tracked' to ensure delivery of a successful outcome.

5.21 One of the basic principles of a Convention Bureau is that the conferences they pursue are rarely 'one-off' events. This effectively means that a lost bid should not be a permanent loss. Failure to secure the event the first time will arise because either the marketing or the product was ineffective or unappealing. Identifying the reasons why provides the opportunity to address the issues and to re-bid until successful. The key message is "Never give up on a lead".

5.22 However, there is an important question that a convention bureau needs to answer at the outset of this process: *"When should it intervene in the process of selection between the client/customer and the venue/hotel?"*

5.23 If a single hotel unit can handle all of the client's/customer's requirements the convention bureau should not intervene in the selection process, rather it should simply distribute the enquiry to the hotels that can satisfy the criteria for selection and then disengage. The alternative is to be open to the charge of upsetting the natural competitiveness within the hotel sector. This, of course, does not mean that an event located within a single unit cannot ask the convention bureau to provide a range of services to that event.

5.24 A Convention Bureau's focus must be on attracting events that utilise more than one hotel or, what is sometimes referred to as, requiring citywide services. Belfast has a range of high quality venues or assets that could be utilised more effectively in promoting the City region as a high quality, competitive and alternate convention destination.

5.25 For the period April 2010 to November 2010, BVCB handled 152 enquiries of which only 13 (9%) were for greater than 500 delegates and 104 (68%) were for fewer than 200 delegates. Of this total, the conference "wins" can be analysed as follows:

Delegate numbers	**No of conferences**
Conferences attracting over 500 delegates	5
Conferences attracting between 300-500 delegates	15
Conferences attracting between 100-300 delegates	27
Conferences attracting fewer than 100 delegates	33
Source: BVCB	

5.26 The majority of enquiries and wins are for smaller scale conference events (i.e. less than 300 delegates). The objective going forward must be on attracting larger scale events utilising citywide services.

5.27 As of 21 January 2011, BVCB's "conference calendar" included the following bookings:

Year	**Events size**	**100 - 200**	**201 - 500**	**501+**	National	Int'national
2011	Number of events	**24**	**15**	**6**	22	23
	Delegates (total)	2,910	4,570	6,800	5,850	8,430
2012	Number of events	**5**	**3**	**3**	6	5
	Delegates (total)	665	1,100	3,400	2,965	2,200
2013	Number of events	**1**	**2**	**2**	1	4
	Delegates (total)	110	950	21,200	110	22,150
NB: 2 of the above noted events are Northern Ireland wide events related to World Police & Fire						
2013	Number of events	**0**	**1**	**0**	1	1
	Delegates (total)	0	400	0	TBC	400
Source: BVCB						
** While not a conference, the World Police & Fire Games is included as it will have a significant impact on city-wide resources.*						

5.28 The World Fire and Police Games (2013) excepted, the number of larger scale events booked for future years is limited in comparison the number of events of between 100 and 200 delegates. This illustrates that BVCB's convention bureau activities must be more focussed on addressing:

a) increased hotel capacity;

b) declining bedroom occupancy rates; and

c) reducing room yields.

5.29 Securing larger scale events will go some way to meeting these challenges. Activity in this area should be supported by rigorous evidence. There are sufficient examples of basic reporting methods of key performance measures for discretionary business tourism within international membership organisations such as ECM and Destination Marketing Association International ("DMAI"). BVCB will adopt these KPI's and reporting methods to provide an accurate assessment of the organisation's performance and to provide feedback to its trade partners and funders. DMAI is producing an updated version of their Performance Reporting Handbook[3] scheduled for publication in Spring 2011 (our recommendations to broaden the scope of the key performance indicators and ratios to be monitored are included at ***Appendix B***).

5.30 There is also the need to 'manage the supply chain' in terms of effective data gathering on the performance of the destination of Belfast across a range of key performance indicators (such as future bookings, gaps in demand, number of tourists, overnights stays, meeting room/bedroom occupancy rates, enquiry conversion rates, confirmed conferences, projected bookings and occupancy, the increase in bookings driven by specific campaigns). With that knowledge available it then becomes possible to develop effective strategies to improve performance.

5.31 In order to exploit the opportunities within the discretionary business tourism sector, BVCB will:

a) take the a lead in gathering prospect and performance related information and in stimulating ideas within the supply chain to develop "saleable" propositions.

b) restructure the Convention Bureau sales management team, so that the sales managers are organised on a sectoral basis (e.g. National Associations, International Associations). This will afford better focus in these key segments;

c) re-evaluate its plans to generate the discretionary business customers necessary to maximise the utilisation of the expanded capacity in Belfast. For instance, greater use of BVCB's membership in organisations such as the International Congress & Convention Association ("ICCA"), ECM, the Association of British Professional Conference Organisers ("ABPCO") or joining Destination Marketing Association International ("DMAI") and other database sources (such as Meeting Professionals International and Professional Convention Management Association) could be employed to gain access to conferences of the type and scale that match Belfast's expanded product profile; and

d) explore opportunities for greater participation in ABPCO through the expanded venue capacity in Belfast and, as a consequence, to mount a bid to host a future ABPCO conference. Utilising the opportunities the aforementioned organisations present will be key in boosting the region's profile and success in the convention market.

[3] *A copy of the 2005 DMAI Performance Reporting Handbook is attached as* ***Appendix B***

5.32 Every 1% of bedroom occupancy in hotels in the Belfast region equates to approx 13,300 room nights per annum. BVCB's stated discretionary Business Tourism target for the 2010-2011 year is 18,000 delegates generating 55,360 bed-nights. This equates to a contribution of around 4% of occupancy to the existing hotel supply. The preferred performance from a convention bureau in a developed city destination is a minimum contribution of 20% towards occupancy rates. This would require BVCB to set a target to deliver 332,500 bed-nights on existing hotel supply. However, BVCB is not directly responsible for discretionary corporate/incentive tourism promotion. In any event, such a target will take significantly longer to attain than the period over which this plan covers, but it does serve to illustrate the potential that this market offers over the longer term.

Building business and conference tourism

5.33 In developing discretionary business tourism for the City region BVCB will also:

a) concentrate on attracting larger scale conferences that will help utilise Belfast's increased capacity;

b) work with relevant partners to establish credible and reliable reporting of the performance of Belfast as a City Break and Convention destination (see para 5.29 & 5.30);

c) provide periodic and reliable performance updates its stakeholders;

d) when pursuing the City Break and Convention market sectors, focus on increasing occupancy and yield of the accommodation supply sector. The natural "knock on" effects will be spending at the attractions and events, in hospitality businesses and in the retail sector;

e) organise "flying squad" meetings (as and when required) with the hotel sector and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to market the City (such as when forward bookings are low, or there is a sudden shift in exchange rates) and to monitor performance; and

f) develop a business culture that seeks to answer three questions:

   i) how many tourists?;

   ii) how long are they staying?; and

   iii) how much are they spending?

5.34 In short, if the activity does not contribute to increased levels of performance in any one of these areas, then it should be abandoned.

Visitor servicing VI

Introduction

6.1 Visitor servicing falls under the remit of each local authority area. Since April 2000 BVCB has managed the Belfast City Region's visitor servicing on behalf of BCC as well as operating the manned gateway Tourist Information Centres at Belfast International Airport and the George Best Belfast City Airport. In addition, BVCB provides a temporary visitor servicing facility at the Port of Belfast during the cruise ship season.

6.2 In all, these facilities in 2011/12 will deal with around 495,500 enquires per annum, of which around 355,000 are "across the counter" enquiries. Approximately 300,500 of that total are handled by the Belfast Welcome Centre ("BWC").

6.3 The quality of visitor servicing through BVCB's three information centres is highly regarded. As a measure of the importance of the Belfast Welcome Centre, it handled 40.2% of all Northern Ireland tourism enquiries in 2008.

The future

6.4 Currently, there is consideration being given to relocating the Belfast Welcome Centre. The rationale for the move is being driven partly by its current location (at first floor level) and the expectation that a new high visibility facility at ground floor level can better showcase the ambitions of the City in 2012/13, provide an opportunity to enhance commerciality (important in meeting a proportion of the costs of running the facility) and increase visitor spending in Belfast through the opportunity to better direct visitors to attractions, shows and events. It is envisaged that touch screen technology will be incorporated within the relocated centre to deliver information services. A review of recent new technology developments in a new state of the art TIC at the Visit Manchester Centre is being used as the basis for such a service in a new relocated ground floor TIC in Belfast.

6.5 Under a review of city-wide tourism structures if BVCB was to become a Destination Marketing Organisation rather than a Destination Management Organisation, then it could be argued that the DMO would not be responsible for visitor servicing as its primary responsibility should be to encourage visitors to the destination. Visitor servicing responsibility would then fall onto the local authority as is currently the case throughout other parts of Northern Ireland.

6.6 However, assuming that BVCB will continue to provide this function in the short to medium term, then it is essential that it has the resources to revisit its IT related visitor servicing tools. As noted, the migration of content to the internet means that visitors and those who market services to them have an abundance of sources for researching, planning and organising travel-related activities. Therefore, BVCB needs to be in the information pathways that potential customers travel as they make their decisions.

6.7 In adhering to the objective of 'owning the customer' there is a need to capture the customer from the moment they first visit the web-site for initial information until they return home following their visit. This can only be achieved through the alignment of the organisation's systems and processes based on web and mobile technologies. The BVCB/Belfast website needs to be further developed to enhance its level of sophistication, user-friendly design, and inter-activeness.

6.8 A website is a destination's window on to its database (Information Visibility). The quality of that database and the systems and processes that support it, are critical components in the development of Belfast's 'value proposition'. ICT systems need to be reviewed to ensure alignment with customer needs. In particular, the digital revolution is rapidly moving towards sophisticated mobile communication devices (Smart phones, iPhones) which can link directly with the internet at high speed and in almost any location. The ability to provide solutions that meet this rapidly expanding need will change the nature of visitor servicing. There will be a shift away from printed media as a result.

6.9 Through necessity, the merchandising element of the BWC has grown over the years to the point where it could now be said to dominate the current facility. Ideally, this should be scaled back substantially (and limited to Belfast and Northern Ireland branded goods and where the service is not in competition with the retail community) in order that more attention can be given over to providing tourist information and booking services to those using the centre (although much of this service could also be provided on line). Such a move is in keeping with the NITB Draft Visitor Information Plan, but would reduce the contribution from this function to the running costs of the BWC. Any shortfall will need to be met from other sources.

6.10 Against this background, Belfast's Visitor Information Servicing activities face a number of critical issues:

a) are manned tourist information centres the appropriate method of delivering information at Belfast's points of arrival? Should BVCB develop a partnership with a mobile phone/internet service supplier to ensure that upon arrival, visitors immediately receive a welcome message from BVCB providing access to the website on their handheld device?;

b) will all the services available in the new Belfast Welcome Centre be available in 'virtual' information centres?;

c) could commercially sponsored information kiosks situated at key points throughout the city and at key points of arrival provide access to BVCB's website?;

d) could BVCB partner with a company that could ensure access to BVCB's website on a dedicated channel in every hotel room in Belfast?;

e) packaging ideas to encourage longer stays (i.e. dynamic links to city break operators featuring Belfast to be posted on the web-site);

f) in opening new windows on to its database BVCB needs to resist the pressure to sacrifice functionality for design; and

g) is the city DMO the most appropriate mechanism for delivering such services on behalf of BCC for the city and NITB for Northern Ireland?

6.11 Clearly there are a range of considerations and opportunities in respect of visitor servicing that are unlikely to be addressed in the short-term. In particular whether, or not, BVCB continues to provide this service directly or the basis on which it moves forward with technology will require detailed assessment and consultation with appropriate stakeholders. The use of emerging technologies should be discussed in some detail with BCC & NITB since NITB has made a case for securing an IT capital budget to underpin the introduction of emerging technologies for the industry.

6.12 In the meantime, the visitor servicing priorities should be an extension of the work commenced in 2010, including:

a) undertaking training and capacity building through the Concierge Programme;

b) training in telling the Belfast story;

c) encouraging repeat visits and increased spend;

d) improving product knowledge about the City Region and Northern Ireland more generally amongst front-line staff (including Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 since the Belfast airports are likely to be the key gateways for overseas visitors);

e) improving event sales through its ticketing service and encouraging greater use of the city's visitor attractions and increasing visitor spend;

f) ongoing work with cruise liners, improved racking and information provision at all transportation termini;

g) identifying and developing IT related customer servicing opportunities (i.e. podcasts, apps, mobile maps, virtual 3D tours);

h) steering visitors towards Belfast's cultural and heritage products or "trails"; and

i) ensuring that the Belfast story, when developed, and the messages for Titanic 2012 and the 400th Anniversary of Belfast's City Charter in 2013 are well known and articulated in the TICs.

Targets

6.13 Individual departmental targets for the year 2011/12 are detailed in ***Appendix E*** with the key targets summarised as follows:

Key performance indicator	Belfast Welcome Centre	Belfast International Airport TIC	George Best Belfast City Airport TIC
Visitor numbers	265,566	53,418	34,464
Total enquiries	348,636	77,832	69,039
Gross income	£972,501	£140,650	£76,300

6.14 Of note is the level of income generated from each of the TIC's and the total volume of enquiries.

Three year income and expenditure budgets

6.15 Detailed income and expenditure budgets for the period 2011/12 to 2013/14 are included at ***Appendix F*** and summarised as follows:

Visitor Servicing budgeted income and expenditure	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total
Belfast Welcome Centre	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**
Income				
Belfast City Council	479	479	479	**1,437**
NITB	162	162	162	**486**
Commercial activity	973	1,030	1,075	**3,078**
Total	**1,614**	**1,671**	**1,716**	**5,001**
Total Costs	**1,613**	**1,671**	**1,716**	**5,000**
Surplus/(deficit) for the period	1	0	0	1
Belfast International Airport				
Income				
Belfast City Council	19	19	19	**57**
NITB	47	47	47	**141**
Commercial activity	141	150	158	**449**
BVCB	13	13	13	**39**
Total	**220**	**229**	**237**	**686**
Total Costs	**220**	**229**	**237**	**686**
Surplus/(deficit) for the period	0	0	0	0
George Best Belfast City Airport				
Income				
Belfast City Council	31	31	31	**93**
NITB	21	21	21	**63**
Commercial activity	76	82	88	**246**
RTPs	5	5	5	**15**
BVCB	5	5	5	**15**
Total	**138**	**144**	**150**	**432**
Total Costs	**138**	**143**	**149**	**430**
Surplus/(deficit) for the period	0	1	1	2
Total cost (3 TICs)	**1,971**	**2,043**	**2,102**	**6,116**

6.16 The key points from the above analysis are:

a) the level of retail activity required to cover the cost of operating each TIC;

b) in the case of the gateway airport TICs the level of income and retailing at each is insufficient to cover the operating costs. Consequently, BVCB is required to redirect funding from its activities to meet the shortfall; and

c) any reduction in income from any source, or any unexpected increase in operating costs, will add pressure to BVCB to meet the "funding gap".

6.17 The estimated total funding requirement from each source over the 3 year period is summarised as follows:

Funding sources – visitor servicing	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Total
Income	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**
Belfast City Council	529	529	529	**1,587**
NITB	230	230	230	**690**
Commercial activity	1,189	1,262	1,321	**3,772**
RTPs	5	5	5	**15**
BVCB	18	18	18	**54**
Total Gross Income	**1,971**	**2,044**	**2,103**	**6,118**

6.18 Over the 3 year period, commercial activity within the TIC's accounts for 61% of total gross income.

Introduction

7.1 In developing this marketing plan, consultation was undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders including public sector bodies, tourism development and marketing agencies, private sector representatives and area partnership boards. The purpose was to secure views on the performance of the region to date, the success of BVCB in driving tourism forward, where deficiencies may exist and where opportunities lie. A list of those consulted and the organisations they represent is included at ***Appendix C***.

7.2 The key strategies that, in one way or another, will influence tourism in the City region over the medium term have also been assessed.

Consultation

7.3 The diversity of stakeholders consulted mean that the views expressed were often given from a single perspective. It is unlikely that any marketing and visitor servicing plan can entirely satisfy the wishes of all of the individual stakeholders, but it can take on board those points that are likely to have the greatest degree of impact on the majority. In these circumstances, we have limited our summary from this exercise to those points or issues that were most often highlighted:

positive commentary

- there is general acceptance that Belfast should be in charge of its own image and destiny and that the most appropriate promotional vehicle is the BVCB. All stakeholders offered to collaborate on a more regular and meaningful basis with BVCB;
- the organisation has performed well over the past decade, but the environment has changed and so BVCB needs to reassess and change its approach

not so positive

- the emphasis of activity tends to benefit Belfast City Centre (we note that this is a natural consequence of recent investment in new infrastructure. In any case, Belfast is the engine that is driving demand. If any other product offering wants to hitch its wagon then they are welcome to do so but not if it is going to slow down the Belfast engine);
- there is little, or no, guidance/direction in terms of assisting in/advising on the development of products in peripheral areas that would add to/complement the Belfast experience (we note that this is more properly the role of NITB, rather than BVCB);
- the Belfast message is not sufficiently well articulated;
- there needs to be greater focus on discretionary business tourism;
- there is an opportunity and willingness for greater co-operation with stakeholders;

opportunities

- there should be some element of "lobbying" on behalf of the region including matters such as Air Passenger Duty, regulation of Bus Tours, opening of new direct access air routes;
- events are a significant draw for visitors – the nightlife/shopping message does not set Belfast apart from any other city. We must now focus on brand development;

- Northern Ireland is not getting its fair share of visitors from overseas – there needs to be more robust engagement with TIL. The Northern Ireland and Belfast messages get lost within TIL;
- the Belfast brand is seen more as a brand of Belfast City Council rather than being "owned" by the City and its people;
- key markets for BVCB should be Ireland, Great Britain and the domestic market, closely followed by those overseas markets with direct air access;
- we need one headline event each year to underpin the comprehensive calendar of events that has been developed; and
- the marketing approach and tools need to be innovative.

7.4 There is substantial goodwill towards BVCB, and interest in working more cohesively with it to plan initiatives in predefined target markets. There is also a recognition that BVCB has had to spread its resources too thinly, and now needs to focus on the markets that offer easier wins (i.e. closer to home and direct access markets).

7.5 Our earlier assessment of the role of a DMO is that it should be focussed on driving overnight visitors to the destination and that it must be sufficiently well engaged with, and knowledgeable about, the destination's assets that it can develop appropriate strategies and tactics to meet this objective. Following this basic principle would appear to address a number of concerns voiced by stakeholders.

Tourism development strategies and plans

7.6 We have also been mindful of the key strategies and action plans designed to drive tourism forward in the medium term, including the Integrated Strategic Framework for Belfast Tourism ("ISFBT") 2009 to 2014, the Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland and the draft Northern Ireland 2012 Business Case.

7.7 The ISFBT has been developed between BCC and NITB with the vision: *"Belfast, working in partnership, will deliver the authentic capital city experience by developing and co-ordinating our cultural, natural and commercial assets to attract a greater number of visitors to the city and maximise the economic benefits for Belfast and Northern Ireland"*.

7.8 In elaborating upon this vision, Belfast will:

- develop a strong reputation as a vibrant capital city with unique and exciting experiences that, once visited and enjoyed, will compel return visits time and time again;
- spread the economic benefits of tourism across the whole city;
- offer a broader range of access services – air, sea, road and rail;
- consolidate its position as a welcoming gateway for tourists to Northern Ireland and the island as a whole;
- enhance its position as a (discretionary) business tourism destination;
- stage a consistent annual programme of events and festivals – including a major high quality event each year and especially those that are unique to Belfast;
- possess much improved services and facilities, including easier means of moving around; more accommodation options; and an upgraded array of shopping, catering and entertainment facilities; and
- offer all with a distinctive Belfast flavour, in an environment of attractive and ambient urban and natural spaces.

7.9 It is evident from various studies that visitors are attracted by Belfast's culture and heritage and its "novelty" value. The Belfast brand proposition reflects these features: *"A* *unique history and a future full of promise have come together to create a city bursting with energy and optimism"*. The brand promises revolve around experiences, people, character, authenticity and discovery. However, as noted, the on the ground perception is that the Belfast brand is not as well established as it could be.

7.10 The key market opportunities outlined in the ISFBT are consistent with those identified during the consultation exercise (that is, Great Britain, Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, direct access European markets and other overseas longer stay markets that may include Belfast as part of a trip to the island). The strategy also maps out the infrastructural and spatial deficiencies that must be addressed if the City is to develop into a unique and appealing destination over the longer term. The marketing activities outlined in this plan recognise the work that has gone into developing the ISFBT.

7.11 The Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland ("TSNI") sets out to provide a clear and inspiring vision for the development of Northern Ireland's tourism experience through to the year 2020. Over the decade, the objective is to double revenue from tourism and increase visitor numbers by 41%. In the current economic climate these are challenging targets, however, recent and ongoing investment in tourism infrastructure projects by both the public and private sectors should ensure that Northern Ireland as a destination is better placed than at any other time in its recent past. A high quality experience in all that we offer will be essential in ensuring the success of the TSNI, as will collaboration at all levels.

7.12 The years 2012 and 2013 are seen as the "tipping point" for tourism in Northern Ireland, when the critical mass of attractions will represent a genuinely new experience that must be capitalised on. It is expected that 50% of all visitors to the country will be from the closer to home markets. Short term market segments include city breaks (especially those that are event led), culture/experience seekers, activity and special interest breaks and business visitors (national associations, corporate meetings/conferences, incentive travel and trade/consumer exhibitions). Belfast stands to gain substantially from recent and ongoing infrastructure investments and the short-term opportunities identified above.

7.13 Against the background of 2012 and the Tourism Strategy, NITB and BCC appointed independent experts to develop the business case for a successful and high profile series of events in 2012 that can yield a step change in perceptions about the province.

7.14 The Northern Ireland 2012 Business Case ("NI 2012") notes that *"by 2012, Belfast will have as good a physical infrastructure for festivals as any of the world's significant cultural destinations. The key to the success of all of these assets will be the cultural product which animates them".* The Business Case, which is seeking around £7m in funding, set the following objectives:

- create a positive and distinctive visitor experience for those who travel to Northern Ireland;
- showcase Northern Ireland on a local, national and international stage as a unique place to live, learn, work and visit, raising the profile and changing perceptions;
- explore notable events in Northern Ireland's history and celebrate its many great contributions to the world through a sensitive, co-ordinated and customer focused programme;
- build awareness and interest amongst the Northern Irish diaspora that will motivate them to come home during 2012 and beyond;
- develop a volunteer greeters' programme for Northern Ireland to ensure a warm welcome and high quality visitor experiences at events;
- stimulate a sense of belonging and pride amongst local people; and
- provide a unique marketing opportunity to grow visitor numbers.

7.15 The priority markets for NI 2012 will be the Domestic, Republic of Ireland, Great Britain, North America and European markets and in particular, the targeting of leisure and

VFR (visiting friends and relatives) traffic (amounting to 150,000 staying visitors throughout Northern Ireland). We are of the view that the United States will prove to be a difficult market in the immediate short-term given the state of the economy. Canada should prove an opportunity market given its distinctive Northern Ireland associations (although no direct access air service currently exists). One needs to be careful when considering spending scarce marketing funds on VFR traffic that will travel despite the DMO. This segment does not contribute to bed nights and yield to the same degree as pure tourists and discretionary business tourism.

7.16 We understand that the proposed budget for NI 2012 has yet to be agreed as have the mechanisms for delivering, managing and marketing the planned events. Given the role of BVCB and the Tourist Information Centres it manages, it should be at the forefront of assisting all stakeholders in exploiting the opportunities the forthcoming period presents.

7.17 The visitor growth targets set out in the ISFBT and the TSNI are summarised as follows:

Growth targets:	**2008 actual '000**	**2009 est. '000**	**2010 est. '000**	**2011 est. '000**	**2012 est. '000**	**2013 est. '000**	**Avg. Annual increase**
ISFBT							
Total overnight visitors	1,600	1,666	1,722	1,787	1,854	1,923	3.8%
inc Holiday visitors	500	536	575	617	662	710	7.2%
Nights	**5,100**	**5,197**	**5,296**	**5,396**	**5,499**	**5,603**	**1.9%**
TSNI - Visitor numbers							
Domestic			1,154	1,177	1,201	1,225	1.4%
Great Britain			1,285	1,324	1,363	1,404	2.2%
Rep of Ireland			322	345	369	394	5.5%
Germany			50	53	56	60	4.9%
France			38	40	41	43	3.2%
Italy			23	24	24	25	2.2%
Netherlands			23	24	25	27	4.2%
Spain			41	41	42	42	0.6%
Other Europe			91	95	98	102	2.9%
United States			156	161	167	174	2.8%
Other			78	78	82	83	1.5%
Total			**3,261**	**3,362**	**3,468**	**3,579**	**2.4%**
Total Out of State			**2,107**	**2,185**	**2,267**	**2,354**	**2.8%**

7.18 The ISFBT sets out growth targets under 3 scenarios, these being 'low', 'medium' and 'high'. Given the current economic climate, we consider the targets under the 'low' scenario as being the most realistic in the short term (and this is reflected in the above table). For comparison, the average annual growth rate in the number of overnight visits under the 'medium' and 'high' scenarios is 2.80% and 3.65% respectively. No analysis of increase in visitor numbers by geographic source is included within the ISFBT.

7.19 The estimated average annual growth rate in visitor numbers over the period 2010 to 2013 under the TSNI is 2.4% overall, with an annual rate of increase of 2.8% from out of state markets. No estimate of visitor nights has been provided. No indication of growth by market type (i.e. business, leisure) has been provided.

7.20 Those markets where above average levels of growth are expected to arise are the Republic of Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands (the latter two being relatively small markets for Northern Ireland overall), whereas the rate of growth from Great Britain is expected to be less than the overall average (circa 2.3% per annum throughout Northern Ireland). Given that the Belfast region historically accounts for around 1 in 3 of all Northern Ireland visitors, and that the region will be the "centre of attention" in 2012 and into 2013, it is crucial that the BVCB growth targets over the period 2011 – 2014 at least match those in the ISFBT and the TSNI.

7.21 Tourism Ireland Limited's ("TIL") role in promoting all of the island of Ireland to overseas markets means that it has important role to play in attracting tourists to the Belfast City region. Its marketing plan for 2010 set an objective to grow the number of promotable visitors to Northern Ireland to 2 million over a 5 year period. Standalone campaigns were at the core of this objective with a particular focus on the signature projects, scenery and Belfast as the City of Music and Titanic 100 years on.

7.22 Specific themes in key markets were:

a) Great Britain: *Titanic: 100 years on* and *Titanic Experience 2012*; *City of Music*

b) Europe: *Belfast: City of Music* and *Titanic: 100 years on*; and

c) United States: *Titanic: Made in Belfast* (at a recent exhibition in New York).

7.23 During the consultation exercise, the strengths and weaknesses of the region, the threats facing it and the opportunities available to it were considered. The output from this exercise is summarised as follows:

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
The City and region	
Cultural product – people, music, food, art, literature, history and heritage	Still needs more variety of things to do and see – building on key themes. Absence of Cultural Mapping Strategy.
Compact city and surrounding region – with variety of product (city; mountains; coast; rural)	Inconsistencies in the quality of the tourism product and service
Character and people	Lack of cafe culture and restricted opening times
Still seen as a relatively new destination to visit	No integrated conference and exhibition facilities
Some high quality and varied venues and visitor attractions (museums, zoo, City Hall, theatres, W5, Odyssey, Stormont, shopping, hills, …….)	Message and marketing activities need to be more coordinated across the various bodies The Belfast Brand is not currently used as a differentiating competitive strength.
Good track record with events and festivals, and strong potential for more	Need for more coordination and packaging of the tourism product available across the various areas within the City and the wider region.
Availability and range of accommodation	The key marketing messages and USPs need to be more clearly communicated. Absence of compelling narrative in support of brand positioning.
	Tightening budgets and resources for marketing the region
	Need to use more new media for marketing the region

Opportunities	Threats
The Belfast Story – which has still to be told as a complete and coordinated tourism product (industrial heritage; the building of Belfast; culture; music; history and major achievements).	Economic uncertainty and recession – contracting the market and tourism investment.
2012 and 2013 – including the Titanic Signature project and Maritime Heritage	Intensifying competition, as market conditions become more difficult.
Developments and development opportunities which will enhance the cultural tourism product and visitor experience – MAC; Connswater Community Greenway; Crumlin Road Gaol; Gaeltacht Quarter ……	Perceived as being expensive compared with other destinations. Recent VAT increase to 20% will add to this concern.
Coordinated marketing of the various tourism 'areas' across the greater Belfast region (City Centre; Queens Quarter; Cathedral Quarter; Gaeltacht Quarter; North Belfast Cultural Corridor; Lisburn Road; Titanic Quarter; The Lagan River-Maritime Corridor; Belfast Hills, Belfast Castle and Belfast Zoo; Connswater Greenway; The Shankill Road; North Down; Lisburn District; Carrickfergus; Newtownabbey...)	Reduced direct access air routes to Belfast. Increased UK air passenger duty makes North American flights to Northern Ireland significantly more expensive than into Ireland (duty of £120 –v- €10)
Collaboration between key stakeholders	Ripples of political unrest
Availability of conference subvention scheme	BVCB does not re-align its marketing efforts, change its operating procedures and approach to communicating with the industry.
	City marketing budgets are not realigned Engagement across the industry lost

7.24 Many of the current weaknesses identified and threats facing the region are borne out of current and emerging trends within the industry or of the wider economy. A comprehensive summary of those trends is included at ***Appendix D*.**

7.25 During the course of two workshop sessions, one with senior management from within BVCB and the other with the BVCB and BCC Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit management teams, consideration was given to the appeal of the region. Belfast has a variety of products and experiences to offer the visitor during their stay. However, the challenge is to identify those products and messages which will attract visitors to Belfast in the first place - those aspects of Belfast, and the Belfast region that are ***unique***, and could provide ***stand out*** and serve as key ***attractors*** to the region.

City-wide marketing priorities and challenges

7.26 It was agreed that culture, in its widest sense, should be the priority product offering where culture refers to:

a) The Belfast Story (history; industrial heritage, including the Titanic and Maritime theme; key achievements; famous personalities, the people and their welcome...); and

b) Festivals and events (incorporating music, food, literature, art, theatre and creative industries…).

Key themes and messages

7.27 The following key messages and attributes should be reflected across all marketing communication:

a) ***The welcome and the people*** – the friendly personal approach; the craic; the characters;

b) ***A modern City*** – promoting Belfast as a modern destination, that still offers an authentic experience in terms of culture, people and entertainment;

c) ***A 'new' destination –*** Belfast is still seen as a relatively 'new' and undiscovered destination, so retains the advantage of intrigue and novelty. This should be exploited, and some efforts made to prolong this interest – a 'cool' and edgy destination; emerging from, but not dwelling on, the Conflict, and always offering new experiences and variety; and

d) ***Compact and relaxing –*** a compact destination where visitors can see and do a lot in a relaxed manner.

7.28 It is much more effective to focus the marketing message on these unique selling points, than to try to spread it across all of the available product areas – once visitors are attracted to the region, visitor servicing has the capability to ensure that the variety of products and services available are fully promoted.

7.29 These messages are consistent with the Belfast brand, which is intended to portray Belfast as a dynamic city, with personality, a memorable experience, a proud culture and heritage, and an optimistic future. The key messages revolve around the experience, people, authenticity and discovery. As outlined above, TIL has utilised a number of our cultural themes in 2010 for promotion in overseas markets.

Products and messages

8.1 The table below sets out the key markets and the primary products that can stimulate interest in the region over the coming 3 year period and which should be used in tactical communications. These are consistent with the key strategies developed for the region and for Northern Ireland:

Market	Segment (messages)	Primary product	Support product
City break (closer to home markets)	***Short break*** (Titanic experience welcome, modern, new, City of Music)	Events, Heritage attractions (i.e. Museums, Zoo), Cultural Quarters.	Food, Retail, Night life, Entertainment, Coastal region, rural hinterland
	Micro break (Titanic Experience, welcome, compact, authentic)	Events, culture, sports	Night life, Retail
	Activity (compact)	Walking, sailing, nature	Relaxation, access to hills, sea etc
	Curious (welcome, authentic)	Troubles tours, Heritage attractions	Food, Night life
	Special interest (Titanic Experience, welcome, authentic)	Maritime, conflict resolution, Ulster Scots, Gaelic, Music, Literature	Access, Modern v History
Tour groups	(welcome, authentic, new)	Heritage attractions, VFM	Retail
Touring (to encourage short break)	(Titanic experience, welcome, compact, authentic)	Access, touring routes, attractions, events	VFM, local food
Short break/touring (long haul)	(Titanic Experience, welcome, authentic, compact)	Events (2012/13), Heritage attractions (i.e. Museums), Culture, Genealogy, Access	Food, Retail, Night life, Events, Scenery (outside the region), activities

Market	Segment (messages)	Primary product	Support product
Discretionary business tourism	***Closer to home*** (welcome, new destination)	Access, variety of interesting venues, welcome, small city (ease of movement), industrial heritage, vibrancy	Heritage attractions, golfing, night-life, retail for Partner programmes
	Europe/longer haul (welcome, new destination)	Access, universities, interesting venues, industrial heritage, current industry specialisms (food, pharma etc)	Heritage attractions, golfing, night-life
Day trips Domestic/RoI	(welcome, compact)	Events, attractions retail (inc. markets) VFM for o/night stays	Food
Cruise	(Titanic Experience, welcome, authentic, new destination)	Cultural/heritage attractions (i.e. Belfast's Quarters, Museums, Signature project), scenery/attractions outside region	Retail

8.2 Different themes and messages are relevant to each market and to each market segment.

Channels and partnerships

8.3 The following communications channels and partnership arrangements are recommended in promoting the city region to its key market prospects:

Geographic	market	channels	Key partners
Great Britain	**city break**	Road show, carrier campaigns, 3rd party /specialist sites, in flight mags, outdoor, editorial, FAM trips	TIL/carriers/hotels/BVCB
	discretionary business	Trade show, member organisations, database mining, FAM trips, face to face	Ambassadors/Trade/NITB/ TIL/BVCB
	gateway touring	advertising, 3rd party /specialist sites, editorial,	TIL/Carriers/BVCB
Republic of Ireland	**city break**	Road show, advertising, 3rd party /specialist sites, editorial, outdoor, FAM trips	NITB/BVCB/BCC

Geographic	market	channels	Key partners
	day trip	advertising, editorial, outdoor	Private sector/BCC/ NITB/BVCB
	all island touring	advertising, 3rd party /specialist sites/publications, editorial	TIL/NITB/Carriers
	discretionary business	Trade show, member organisations, database mining, FAM trips, face to face	Ambassadors/Trade/NITB
Mainland Europe (direct access)	**city break**	Road show, advertising, 3rd party /specialist sites, editorial, outdoor, FAM trips	TIL/carriers/BVCB
	discretionary business	Trade show, member organisations, FAM trips, face to face	TIL/NITB/Invest NI/Trade/BVCB
North America	**city break/holiday**	Road show, advertising, 3rd party /specialist sites, editorial, FAM trips	TIL/BVCB
	discretionary business	Trade show, member organisations, FAM trips, face to face	TIL/NITB/Invest NI/BVCB
Domestic	**city break**	Advertising, 3rd party /specialist sites, editorial, BVCB web site	BCC/NITB/Trade/BVCB
	discretionary business	face to face	BVCB/Trade
	day trip	Advertising – outdoor, radio, tv	BCC/NITB/Trade
Other	**Coach tour/sport**	Trade shows, members bodies	TIL/NITB/BVCB
	Cruise	Trade shows, editorial specialist press, face to face	TIL/BVCB

8.4 Other longer haul and emerging markets should be serviced by TIL alone.

8.5 In the years (2007/2008) when average occupancy and achieved room rates were at a peak, Belfast hotels chose not to develop the Tour Group market (which is typified by low pricing but high volume). Given the change in the profile of demand at hotels and the loss of corporate business, this market may be worth pursuing (but it is not a priority sector and will be driven by hotels being prepared to discount heavily).

8.6 A city-wide programme of promotional activity plan is included at ***Appendix G***.

BVCB marketing plans **IX**

Introduction

9.1 The environment in which BVCB operates is changing.

9.2 On the one hand, the infrastructure and appeal of the Belfast City region is as good as it has been, while on the other hand, prolonged economic uncertainty means that in an industry where the highest proportion of spend is discretionary, competition for tourists is intense. It could be said that the only certainly in the short to medium term, is uncertainty, and this extends to funding for DMOs from whatever source.

9.3 As noted elsewhere, the main focus of BVCB's marketing efforts should be on stimulating demand from the City Break and Discretionary Business Tourism markets to deliver over night stays, higher levels of spending and improved tourism asset utilisation and profile for the region.

9.4 Promoting to the day trip market should only be undertaken where the cost of doing so does not dilute BVCB's efforts in, or funds for, generating bed-night sales or where opportunities exist to convert the day trip market to overnight stays.

9.5 In assessing the activities and functions of BVCB, 3 key points emerged. The result is that this Plan is underpinned by the following foundations:

a) **engagement** – BVCB will work closely with its stakeholders and partners to shape and develop products, services and propositions for our key markets (including co-ordinating a city-wide marketing plan), to leverage marketing opportunities and to understand and monitor performance levels in the region;

b) **articulation –** BVCB does not have the resources to compete in every market that it may wish to. It must articulate the messages to those with the budgets (primarily TIL and to a lesser extent NITB) that can take the lead in marketing Belfast in overseas markets; and

c) **focus –** emphasis must be on attracting overnight visitors to the City region from those markets that offer the best prospects.

Role

9.6 BVCB must be able to demonstrate its ability to create customers for the city and to maximise the utilisation of the expanded tourism infrastructure. In order to meet this challenge, marketing effort should be assessed on:

its ability to generate bed nights and increase occupancy - if it fails to satisfy these criteria it should be abandoned

Vision, aims and objectives

9.7 BVCBs vision statement remains:

"to establish Belfast as a world class visitor destination by increasing the contribution that tourism makes to the economy in a way that is customer-focused, delivers a quality solution in a cost-effective way, respects the environment, is acceptable to the local community and offers sustainable growth"

9.8 The strategic aims of the organisation, as set out in its previous 3 year plan remain valid, with minor amendments as necessary:

Aim	Objectives
Working together….	in partnership with Belfast City Council, NITB and other funders at strategic and operational level to provide a truly integrated marketing function that focuses on the delivery of strategic objectives for the Belfast City Region and Northern Ireland as a whole
	with stakeholders to ensure a joined-up approach to tourism development, clarity of roles and responsibilities and most effective allocation of resources
	to maintain excellent working relationships with BCC, NITB, TIL, all the industry, members, customers and suppliers to ensure the strategic aims and objectives for Belfast and the region are delivered
Growing Value and Difference….	by focussing on unique features and experiences to grow interest and target our marketing activities and resources at key source markets and sectors with greatest potential for tourism growth
	positioning and differentiating Belfast's uniqueness as a worldwide tourism destination by ensuring that Belfast's brand proposition underpins all communications and achieves the widest possible penetration
	focusing on Belfast's business tourism potential
	create, drive and deliver innovative marketing campaigns through the integration of on-line tools and applications in all marketing and promotional activity, engaging proactively with visitors before, during and after their visit
Showcasing Belfast and Northern Ireland….	communicate and reinforce the Belfast brand promise and characteristics through integrated marketing activities and publicity to capitalise on strong consumer interest
	nurture and expand Belfast's role as a welcoming gateway, and through effective visitor servicing, inform and encourage visitors to explore all the city and the rest of Northern Ireland through our 3 TICs
	anticipate and respond to visitor needs by providing comprehensive visitor information and services that engage, communicate, tell our stories and add value – before, during and after their visit
	reflect the unique character, culture and heritage of Belfast at every to generate wider interest
Generating Measurable Results ….	implement a planned and integrated approach to marketing the City to ensure the best return on marketing investment
	incorporate a proactive and flexible approach to continue to meet the challenges and respond to uncertainties of the global economy
	monitor and measure the effectiveness of all BVCB activities and marketing campaigns to evaluate performance against targets and objectives
	deliver best value for money from all our marketing, visitor servicing and operational programmes

Aim	**Objectives**
Building Foundations for the Future…	make Belfast a 'must visit' destination for the future
	engage with our key markets – let our partners develop new and developing markets by building awareness, interest and curiosity in the region with our narrative
	ensure BVCB and Belfast are firmly positioned to capitalise on new growth and market opportunities that emerge as the industry recovers from the global downturn
	assist in building interest and awareness of Belfast and Northern Ireland in advance of the world-class Titanic Signature Project and the London Olympics in 2012, the World Police and Fire Games and Belfast 400th birthday celebrations in 2013

BVCB's target markets and tactics

9.9 BVCB's priority markets, messages and products are summarised below as are the communications channels:

Market	Segment (messages)	**Primary product**	**Support product**
City break (closer to home markets)	***Short break*** (Titanic experience welcome, modern, new, City of Festivals)	Festivals & Events, Heritage, attractions, Cultural Quarters.	Food, Retail, Night life, Entertainment, Coastal region, rural hinterland, music
	Micro break Shopping (Titanic Experience, welcome, compact, authentic)	Retail, events, culture, sports, VFM for O/N trips	Food/Night life, Retail
	Activity (compact)	Walking, sailing, nature	Relaxation, access to hills, sea etc
	(welcome, authentic)	Troubles tours, Heritage attractions	Food, Night life
	Special interest (Titanic Experience, welcome, authentic)	Maritime, conflict resolution, Ulster Scots, Gaelic, Music, Literature	Access, Modern v History
Tour groups	(welcome, authentic, new), VFM	Heritage attractions	Retail
Touring FIT (to encourage short break)	(Titanic experience, welcome, compact, authentic)	Access, touring routes, attractions, events	Vfm, local food

Market	Segment (messages)	**Primary product**	**Support product**
Day trips Domestic/RoI	(welcome, compact), City experience, vale for money, unique aspects	Events, attractions retail (inc. markets)	Restaurants/cafes, tours
Discretionary business tourism	***Closer to home*** Local ambassador, unique experience, (welcome, new destination)	Access, variety of interesting venues, welcome, small city (ease of movement), industrial heritage, vibrancy	Heritage attractions, golfing, night-life, retail
	Europe/longer haul (welcome, new destination)	Access, universities, interesting venues, industrial heritage, current industry specialisms (food, pharma etc)	Heritage attractions, golfing, night-life
Cruise	(Titanic Experience, welcome, authentic, new destination)	Cultural/heritage attractions (i.e. Belfast's Quarters, Museums, Signature project), scenery/attractions outside region	Retail

9.10 From the above table it is clear that different themes and messages are relevant to each market and market segment.

Channels and partnerships

9.11 The following communications channels and partnership arrangements are recommended for BVCB marketing activity in promoting the city region to its key market prospects:

Geographic	**market**	**channels**	**Key partners**
Great Britain	**city & micro break**	Road shows, advertising (above & below the line), digital, social media & web, PR, FAM trips and trade workshops	TIL/carriers/hotels/BVCB/ Trade
	discretionary business	Trade shows & workshops, member organisations, database mining, FAM trips, face to face/sales calls	Ambassadors/Trade/ TIL/BVCB
	gateway touring	Road shows, advertising (above & below the line), digital, social media & web, PR, FAM trips and trade workshops	TIL/Carriers/BVCB/ Trade
Rep of Ireland	**city break**	Advertising (above & below the line), digital, social media & web, PR, FAM trips and trade workshops	NITB/BVCB/Trade
	day trip	Advertising (above & below the line), digital, social media & web, PR, FAM trips and trade workshops	NITB/BVCB/Trade
	discretionary business	Member organisations, database mining, FAM trips, face to face, sales Calls	Ambassadors/Trade/NITB
Mainland Europe (direct access)	**city break**	Road shows, advertising (above & below the line), digital, social media & web, PR, FAM trips and trade workshops	TIL/carriers/BVCB/ Accommodation
	discretionary business	Road shows, advertising (above & below the line), digital, social media & web, PR, FAM trips and trade workshops	TIL/Trade/BVCB

Geographic	market	channels	Key partners
North America	**discretionary business**	Trade show, member organisations, FAM trips, face to face	TIL /Invest NI/BVCB
Domestic	**city break**	Advertising (above & below the line), digital, social media & web, PR, FAM trips and trade workshops	BCC/Trade/BVCB
	day trip	Advertising (above & below the line), digital, social media & web, PR, FAM trips and trade workshops	BCC/Trade
Other	**Coach tour/sport**	Trade shows, members bodies	TIL/NITB/BVCB
	Cruise	Trade shows, specialist press, digital, sales calls	BVCB/Belfast Harbour Commissioners

9.12 In the short term, given current resources, BVCB is not in a position to proactively market the destination and product in long haul and emerging markets. However, BVCB will continue to support incoming Tourism Ireland fam trips.

9.12 Below is a summary of key tactical changes that will help to drive overnight volume to the City region from the key markets.

City breaks

9.13 BVCB's marketing plans will focus on the drive to increase the volume of overnight stays from short-haul, direct access markets. BVCB will:

- ensure increased exposure on city break third party web-sites;
- attend relevant trade shows in Great Britain ("GB") and Ireland;
- undertake a series of road shows in GB and in Dublin. In GB, priority will be given to direct access Northern Cities (i.e. Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh etc). This will be supported by advertising and poster campaigns (significantly less costly in these cities than is the case in London);
- ensure that TIL advertisements for the Belfast City region on third party sites include a link to the gotobelfast web-site;
- undertake with TIL, a series of road shows in direct air access cities in Continental Europe (Paris, Barcelona, Amsterdam) supporting carrier campaigns;
- work with sea carriers to promote routes into the region to the touring market (using Belfast as the gateway with a short-stay element);
- evaluate the benefits of joining the ECM City Pass programme;
- join key trade bodies and attend meetings/events (i.e. ECM/ETOA City Fair event);
- identifies tour group operators (if not covered under the City Fair event or NITB Meet The Buyer Events) to market the City;

- secures public relations exposure in "in-flight" guides/press to boost the City's reputation and profile; and
- utilise the marketing potential of 2012 as a key attractor.

Discretionary business tourism

9.14 BVCB will take the lead in the Associations segment, and will continue to work in tandem with NITB in the Corporate and Incentives segments. The emphasis for BVCB will be on larger scale events, particularly those that require city wide services.

9.15 A review of the source of conference enquiries over the period 1 April to 31 December 2010 shows that of the total of 154, one third (53) were sourced through the Ambassador Programme, 19 were member referrals, 16 were phone enquires and 13 were generated via the BVCB web-site. The balance was sourced from referrals, attendance at trade shows, BCC, NITB and via membership of trade bodies amongst others. The drive to increase the volume of bookings from the Discretionary Business Tourism market will require:

- further development of the Ambassadors programme;
- attending relevant trade shows in GB, Ireland and Europe;
- working with Invest NI to identify those industries where Northern Ireland has a specialism, and which Invest NI is promoting, and target those sectors for conference bookings;
- packaging interesting and exciting itineraries that set the region apart from other destinations;
- working with the supply chain to make sure that the City is price competitive in this marketplace;
- securing membership of a broader range of industry bodies (see ***Section V***) to gain access to conference databases/prospects;
- utilising a broader range of key performance indicators to manage and monitor performance and sharing this information with the trade and partners;
- ensuring feedback on failed bids is communicated with the supply chain – agree the necessary changes and re-bid for the event the following year; and
- increasing one to one meetings with PCOs.

9.16 Detailed tactics employed and cost estimates are included at ***Appendix E.***

Day trip

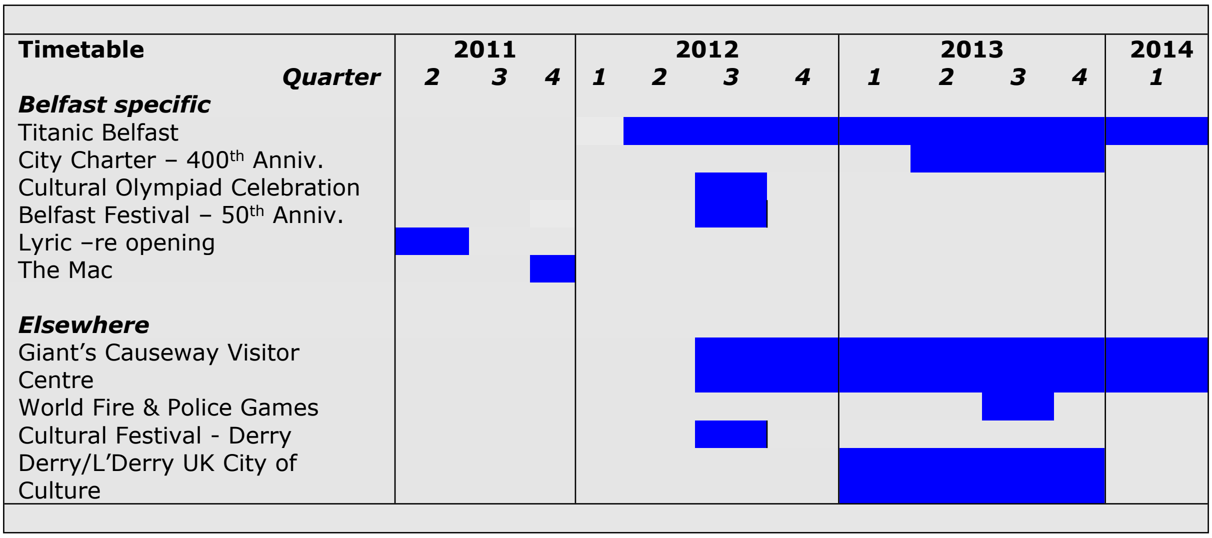
9.17 Whilst BVCB's focus is to increase overnight stays, the day trip market will in the short term continue to be an important element of the tourism economy and our marketing plan. The key objective will be encouraging traditional day trip visitors into overnight stays. Festivals, events, shopping and attractions with a seasonal focus offer the best opportunities, especially to those further away locations in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. Value for money will be key in the conversion process and this requires engagement with the trade in developing/promoting these value packages. The programme of events being planned for 2012 presents a particularly strong basis for generating day trips and overnight stays from these markets. Additional budget will be required to develop event-led marketing campaigns that have the potential to deliver visitors outside the greater Belfast area and to encourage conversion to overnight stays.

Headline targets

9.18 Using the most recent Millward Brown Ulster Tourism Monitor results (for 2009) as a baseline (for 2010/11) for setting future targets, and recognising the importance of at least recording average annual increases in line with the ISFBT and TSNI, the following targets have been set:

City Growth targets:	**2010 est. `000**	**2011 est. `000**	**2012 est. `000**	**2013 est. `000**	**Avg. Annual increase**
Overnight stays					
Domestic	432	441	450	459	2.0%
Great Britain	1,549	1,610	1,675	1,742	4.0%
Rep of Ireland	1,346	1,414	1,484	1,559	5.0%
Europe	147	153	159	166	4.0%
North America	311	323	336	349	4.0%
Other	113	115	117	120	2.0%
Total	**3,898**	**4,056**	**4,222**	**4,394**	**3.9%**
Total OoS	**3,466**	**3,616**	**3,772**	**3,935**	**4.3%**
Day trippers					
Domestic	5,830	6.000	6,305	6,620	4.3%
Scotland	22	24	27	28	8.5%
England & Wales	31	32	36	37	6.5%
Rep of Ireland	1,654	1,654	1,736	1,824	3.3%
Europe	5	5	6	6	6.9%
North America	7	7	8	8	5.7%
Other	2	2	2	2	5.7%
Total	**7,551**	**7,730**	**8,120**	**8,526**	**4.4%**
Total OoS	**1,721**	**1,725**	**1,814**	**1,905**	**3.9%**

9.19 As regards overnight stays, the total average per annum increase over the period is 3.9% which is in excess of the level of increases set out in the ISFBT (including the 'high' level scenario - see para 7.18) and in the TSNI. This is considered to be achievable given the key events that will take place in and around the City region in the coming years:



9.20 The increase in day visitors is expected to accelerate rapidly in 2012 on account of the Titanic Centenary celebrations, with a 10% increase from most geographic markets during the year, but reducing thereafter to 5% growth annually. These are aggressive growth targets, but realistic in the circumstances. Either Belfast will take a step change in 2012 or it will not happen at all.

9.21 So far as conference related bookings are concerned, the prospects in this segment remain challenging due to the economic climate and increased levels of competition. Dublin now has a purpose built facility which removes our competitive advantage on the island of Ireland. Nevertheless, high quality conference and associated facilities is a "given" in any destination that competes in this marketplace and it could be argued that Belfast is at least competitive in this regard (dedicated exhibition facilities excepted). As noted, over the period 1 April to 31 December 2010 BVCB hosted 154 conference enquiries and secured 80 bookings (a conversion rate of 52%). This equates to approximately 18,000 delegates and 55,000 additional bed nights secured for future years.

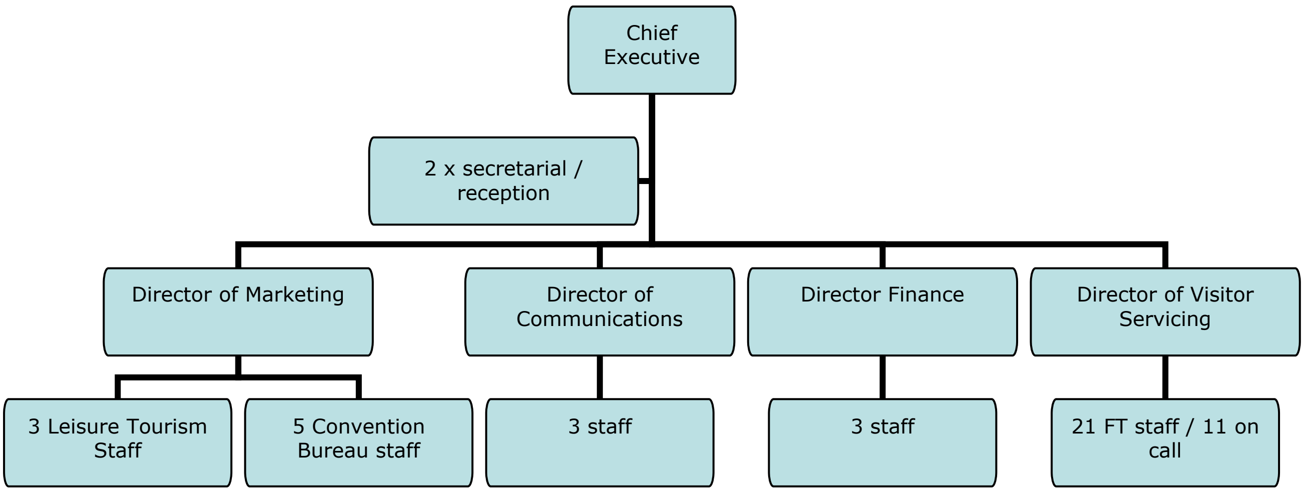
9.22 The current BVCB conference team has been in place for approximately 6 months. Subject to minimal or no staff changes in this regard, and taking account of increased utilisation of the Ambassador programme, full and collaborative engagement between all partners in the supply chain, BVCB's participation in a broader spectrum of trade bodies, and the commitment by BCC to a Conference Subvention Programme, the following targets have been set:

New bookings secured	2010 baseline	Target 2011/12	Target 2012/13	Target 2013/14
Estimated Delegate numbers	18,000	26,000	34,000	38,000
Estimated Bed nights	55,000	78,000	102,000	114,000
Estimated Value	£17.9m	£25.8m	£33.8M	£37.7m
% of available annual room nights *	4.1%	5.8%	7.7%	8.6%
** based on hotel bedroom supply at 31 Dec 2010.*				

9.23 To help with the process of supply chain engagement and collaboration, a **Discretionary Business Tourism Taskforce** will be established. Its purpose is to review conference enquiries, progress, actions by members to help turn live enquiries into confirmed bookings, and to critically assess, learn from and agree corrective measures in response to failed bids. This process will improve the region's prospects "next time around". For events that have been hosted, there should be a record of actual numbers attending compared against those estimated. The taskforce should meet on a quarterly basis and include representatives from BVCB, NITB, BCC, key venues, the Belfast Hoteliers Group and carriers.

Staffing

9.24 The current staffing structure of BVCB is summarised diagrammatically as follows:



9.25 Going forward BVCB will align its resources against the marketing requirements of this plan, as appropriate. For example, there is a need for some minor amendments to the responsibilities of the two sales managers within the Conference Bureau (see para 5.31). In addition the Marketing or Communications Director should be involved in Brand development and the narrative for each market (see para 4.13).

Operating costs and funding

9.26 In preparing the operational cost estimates in conjunction with BVCB, we have had to make a number of broad assumptions.

9.27 Primarily these are driven out of current uncertainties regarding public sector budgets. In particular the preparation/issuing of draft departmental budgets, arising out of the UK spending review, and the current process of consultation means that NITB is not yet in a position to commit funds to BVCB, nor to be specific about the level of funding that may be made available to it.

9.28 Inevitably, there will also be pressures at local government level and it is likely that private sector members will be reassessing their spending commitments in the coming years. For this reason it will be crucial that we engage with our partners to clearly outline its objectives and targets for the coming 3 year period, and on a regular basis thereafter to inform them of progress.

9.29 Against this background the following assumptions have been applied in preparing the operating cost estimates:

a) staff salaries, which have been frozen for the past two years, will continue to be fixed at current levels for the foreseeable future;

b) funding from BCC and NITB will remain at current levels. **Any significant reduction in commitment from either source will compromise the City's ability to drive tourism forward**;

c) most local authority partners will remain as members;

d) the private sector will continue to support the organisation through membership;

e) under any new service level agreement with NITB, it will be possible to reallocate funding for certain current activities (i.e. visitor servicing of Cruise Liners), to activities that are focussed on generating room nights; and

f) BVCB will take a more commercial approach to securing income from trade members where this is aligned to trade shows, road shows and so on.

9.30 In essence, we are working on the basis that the core budget available to BVCB is unlikely to increase in any significant way in 2011/2012 or in the following 2 years. In order to direct spending on those key markets identified in ***Section VIII***, certain historical activities have been pared back, including:

a) direct participation on long haul sales missions (i.e. Australia, North America and emerging markets) – it will be the role of TIL to promote the region in these markets (with appropriate input from BVCB);

b) fully funding a regular coach shuttle service from Port of Belfast to the BWC during the Cruise season – BVCB will encourage the private sector to deliver or pay for most of this service. Funds that would have been spent by BVCB can be reallocated to marketing the City;

c) leveraging every opportunity to work alongside TIL and NITB in our key markets and utilise their facilities at shows/events etc (unless a separate Belfast presence is considered an absolute must); and

d) no further non-IT related marketing of Luxury Belfast. Luxury Belfast was successfully used as a positioning strategy for the City and can now be incorporated in the overall marketing proposition.

9.31 The objective is to improve the value for money proposition by generating more high value business for the region, but utilising the same level of resources through:

a) redirecting spending at the Associations market;

b) engaging more fully with trade bodies to "tap" into their prospect databases;

c) enhancing marketing and communications in our key City Break markets. Key gateways in Dublin, the North of England and Scotland will be marketing priorities, but BVCB will also work with TIL to promote the region in the key direct access gateway cities in Europe;

d) securing exposure on a wider range of on-line City Break provider web-sites;

e) making sure that every bid produced for future conference trade will be of the highest quality and that any failures are quickly identified, disseminated and addressed. If difficult conversations need to take place within the supply chain, they will be;

f) working with TIL and NITB to drive the all island touring market through Belfast; and

g) working with TIL to articulate the Belfast message in the long-haul markets.

9.32 A detailed, costed, operational plan for 2011/12 is included at ***Appendix E***. It includes associated performance targets, timing of activities and expected trade income. Within the same Appendix, we have also included a detailed cost and funding plan, clearly showing the application of funds to each activity. The following tables provide a summary of both plans:

Marketing and communications summary budget 2011/2012

9.33 Budgeted expenditure on leisure marketing, conference bureau activities and commensurations, is summarised as follows:

BVCB Budget 2011/12	**BCC**	**NITB**	**Private sector**	**Local Auth.**	**Total**
	£	**£**	**£**	**£**	**£**
City Break Campaigns					
City Break Campaigns GB	132250	0	174667	8333	315250
City Break Campaigns ROI	0	100000	80000	0	180000
City Break Campaigns Europe	3167	0	46334	2499	52000
City Break Campaigns NI	78000	0	75000	0	153000
City Break Campaigns Belfast Events	100000	0	0	0	100000
Total City Break Campaigns	313417	100000	376001	10832	800250
Leisure Marketing					

Collateral production	114667	35000	72334	24999	247000
Product Marketing Activity	28000	20000	15000	0	63000
Exhibitions and Sales Visits	4001	0	34351	3498	41850
Cruise Marketing	0	4000	9500	4000	17500
Familiarisation Visits	0	10300	0	0	10300
Research Project Costs				9000	9000
Belfast RTP funding of BCA TIC				5000	5000
Total Leisure Marketing	146668	69300	131185	46497	393650
Total Web & Digital	47834	15500	21660	20006	105000
Conference Bureau					
Exhibitions & Sales	0	65000	12934	1666	79600
Advertisements	0	5000	3000	0	8000
Ambassador Programme	0	19500	6500	0	26000
Association & Membership Activity	6000	0	0	0	6000
Bid & Promotional Materials	0	3000	7000	0	10000
Site Inspections & Fam Trips	630	5500	6870	0	13000
Secondary marketing	4500				4500
Booking Commission & Database Maintenance	0	0	7700	0	7700
Total Conference Bureau	11130	98000	44004	1666	154800
Communications					£
PR Activities	11844	0	38156	0	50000
Improving Competitiveness	20500	0	10500	0	31000
Press Fam Trips	0	25700	5300	0	31000
Media Briefings & Events	6000	0	10000	0	16000
PR Expenses	17500	0	26000	0	43500
Total Communications	55844	25700	89956	0	171500
Staff costs	693584	62000	27444	4333	787361
Overheads	144523			16666	161189
Total costs funded by:	1413000	370500	690250	100000	2573750
	54.9%	14.4%	26.8%	3.9%	100%

See Detailed Operational Plan at ***Appendix E*** for related KPI's.

9.34 The cost items recorded under the Local Authority column will be funded from neighbouring council membership fees. The "other" category relates to expenses funded from trade membership subscriptions, income from advertising and sponsorship and from additional income generated from member attendance at trade shows, exhibitions and road shows etc. It is clear that any substantive reduction in funding will have serious implications for the marketing of the region.

9.35 Individual departmental targets for the year 2011/12 are detailed in ***Appendix E*** with the key targets summarised as follows:

Leisure Marketing	Conference Bureau	Communications
50,000 website visits/mnth	Secure 28,000 delegates	Host 120 press trips
Present to 30 agents/operators in direct access mkts	Secure 78,000 bed nights	secure £3.5m advertising equivalent
20 tour leads (Germany)	£25.8m of conference trade	120m weighted opps to see
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
Secure additional 158,000 bed nights (v 2009)	Host FAM trip	Issue a minimum of 36 (Corporate and Product) press releases
Secure additional 179,000 day trippers (v 2009)	Submit 120 bids/60% conversion rate	Attract 5,000 followers through social media outlets

9.36 The total estimated budget for marketing is summarised as follows:

BVCB Budget 2011/12	**BCC**	**NITB**	**Private sector**	**Local Authority**	**Total**
	£	**£**	**£**	**£**	**£**
Total City Break Campaigns	**313,417**	**100,000**	**376,001**	**10,832**	**800,250**
Total Leisure Marketing	**146,668**	**69,300**	**131,185**	**46,497**	**393,650**
Total Web and Digital	**47,834**	**15,500**	**21,660**	**20,006**	**105,000**
Total Conference Bureau	**11,130**	**98,000**	**44,004**	**1,666**	**154,800**
Total Communications	**55,844**	**25,700**	**89,956**	**0**	**171,500**
Staff costs	693,584	62,000	27,444	4,333	787,361
Overheads	144,523			16,666	161,189
Total costs funded by:	**1,413,000**	**370,500**	**690,250**	**100,000**	**2.573,750**
	54.9%	**14.4%**	**26.8%**	**3.9%**	**100%**

9.37 Of note is the balance of funding across the major stakeholder groups. Public sector support allows BVCB to leverage additional private sector funding in the form of sponsorship, advertising and participation in trade related events amounting to approximately £690k per annum. Clearly, any reduction in funding from BCC or NITB will have a "knock on" effect on private sector support and will substantially diminish BVCB's ability to meet its objectives.

Three year marketing income and expenditure budget

9.38 Detailed income and expenditure budgets for the period 2011/12 to 2013/14 are included at ***Appendix F*** and summarised as follows:

Year	**2011/12**	**2012/13**	**2013/14**	**Total**
Income	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**
Belfast City Council	1,413	1,413	1,413	4,239
NITB	371	371	370	1,111
Other local authorities	100	100	100	300
Private sector income	690	763	653	2,106
Total	**2,574**	**2,647**	**2,536**	**7,756**
Non overhead expenses				
Support for GBBCA TIC	5	5	5	15
Marketing/communications	1,620	1,677	1,530	4,827
Total	**1,625**	**1,682**	**1,535**	**4,842**
Overheads				
Salaries	787	796	825	2,408
Other overheads	153	160	167	480
Depreciation	8	8	9	25
Total	**948**	**964**	**1,001**	**2,913**
Surplus/(deficit) for the period	**1**	**1**	**0**	**2**
Salaries as a % of income	30.6%	30.0%	32.5%	31.0%
Total overhead as a % of income	36.8%	36.4%	39.5%	37.6%
Marketing/Comms as a % of income	62.9%	63.3%	60.3%	62.2%

9.39 The key points are:

a) income secured from the private sector is expected to increase in the 2012/13 on account of the production of a new conference guide an increase in marketing costs is estimated in the same year); and

b) in overall terms, the BVCB is expected to break–even or record a small surplus in each year. This means that the organisation has no capacity to cover unexpected expenses without drawing budget away from marketing activities. Ideally, it should be in a position to build up a modest level of reserves to provide some cover for such eventualities.

Years 2012 and 2013

9.40 The years 2012 and 2013 offer a major opportunity for Northern Ireland. As noted, a comprehensive programme of events is being planned underpinned by celebration of the Titanic Centenary, but budgets and their application have yet to be finalised. The draft business case prepared for 2012 noted that marketing must:

a) be of a significant scale and be creative and innovative;

b) be more than the sum of the parts – consistent branding and key messages;

c) strongly branded;

d) reinforce the positioning of the new Northern Ireland brand;

e) generate news stories and strong iconic images for the media;

f) generate new stories and a buzz about Northern Ireland;

g) be taken up by locals and those who have visited;

h) target opinion formers in NI, ROI, GB;

i) have a clear and easy call to action and fulfillment; and

j) start in 2011.

9.41 Given the Northern Ireland wide benefits expected to arise from 2012 it was suggested that marketing be undertaken by TIL and NITB. While this is logical, there will also be a role for BVCB in promoting the Centenary in conjunction with its City Break activities especially (in much the same way as the 2009 Tall Ships event). While the marketing activities planned by BVCB for the years 2011/12 and 2012/13 make provision for the Titanic Centenary and the City of Belfast's 400th Anniversary, any substantial uplift in such activity will require additional budgetary resource, for which separate marketing plans should be developed.

Strategic/long term changes

9.42 A number of issues that are more strategic or longer term in nature have been highlighted elsewhere in this document and they will, in some shape or form, play a role in further improving the City region's prospects or performance monitoring. These include:

a) BCC should undertake a Cultural Mapping exercise (para 5.13c);

b) commission a comprehensive review of BVCB's ICT operations including web and mobile technologies (para 6.7 & 6.8); and

c) the review of delivery structures in the city including destination marketing and destination management (para 6.5 & 6.10g).

9.43 The cost of these reviews has not been included within the above budgets.

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