



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: INTERREG Funding Letter of Offer Approval

Date: February 2012

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that the European Unit within the Development Department hosts a small 2.5 staffed INTERREG Unit. This resource exists to support the Greater Belfast (known as COMET Councils of Belfast, Castlereagh, Carrickfergus, Lisburn, Newtownabbey, and North Down) area to draw down EU funding from the INTERREG IVA Programme. This is administered by the SEUPB, and since 2005, the greater Belfast region has become eligible for the first time to access this Cross Border funding which is available at 100%.
1.2	Since 2005, COMET has existed as an INTERREG Cross Border Partnership alongside the North East, North West, ICBAN and East Border Partnerships. COMET is governed by a Board of 12 elected members, 2 per Council and in the case of Belfast, is attended by the Chair and Deputy Chair of Development.
1.3	In 2007, COMET, along with the other 4 INTERREG Partnerships submitted Multi Annual Plans containing cross border projects deemed relevant to the economic development of that region. These were subsequently deemed null and void in 2009, as SEUPB changed the administrative process and instead planned to issue thematic calls for project applications.
1.4	In March 2011, COMET via BCC's INTERREG/ EU Unit supported, developed and submitted 5 projects under the Enterprise Call. A summary of all 5 projects is attached as Appendix 1 of this report.
1.5	<p>The 5 projects have been through the robust SEUPB and Government Department's economic appraisal process and decisions were made as follows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CEED Creative Industries project remains in the system with SEUPB and a decision is expected before June 2012. - Square One project led by Queens University was rejected and Queens decided not to formally appeal.

1.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Product Sourcing led by Lisburn City Council was rejected and although the Council decided not to appeal, they will re-develop and re-submit the project under the new call which is currently open. - Gateways To Growth led by the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce was approved to a value of £433,570. Work is now underway to put in place a legal agreement between BCC and the NI Chamber of Commerce, and to ensure the project commences as early as possible within the desired governance and procurement requirements. - Business Boot Camp led by Advantage NI (a non profit making training company) was approved to a less than expected value of £831,205 <p>With regard to future calls, SEUPB opened a final call on 3 January 2012, closing 17 February 2012 for Stage 1 Applications. The call seeks cross border projects around Public Sector collaboration and shared services around ICT, energy, health, enterprise, tourism, roads and transport. Projects must lead to greater public sector efficiencies across the border and/or with Western Scotland and also lead to direct economic impact in the eligible area. The European Unit is currently undertaking extensive work to encourage and support applications for the call from BCC, the other COMET Councils and external shareholders. A full report will be brought to Committee in due course.</p>
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2	Key Issues
2.1	Members should be aware that the 2 approved COMET INTERREG projects must now proceed to implementation with due completion by 31 March 2015. Arrangements are already underway to commence the NI Chamber of Commerce Gateways to Growth project.
2.2	However it is stated within the Business Boot Camp Letter of Offer to Comet as Lead Partner, that the named lead project promoter and authors of the application, Advantage NI, are not deemed by SEUPB and the Government Departments to have robust enough governance arrangements to qualify as an official project lead promoter and public sector body. Because of this, the project must be publicly tendered in the Official EU Journal and steps are underway to prepare for this.
2.3	<p>Members are asked to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accept the two INTERREG letters of offer relating to Gateways To Growth and Business Boot Camp and - approve the use of the Official EU Journal public tendering procedure to source a delivery agent for the Business Boot Camp.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	Both approved INTERREG funded projects will be funded at a full cost recovery rate of 100%, therefore at no cost to BCC or the COMET Councils.
3.2	Project support for the newly approved and developing projects is undertaken by the INTERREG staff who are fully funded under the INTERREG Programme

3.3	Costs for publicly tendering the Business Boot Camp by BCC on behalf of COMET can be eligibly covered within the project costs.
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4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no equality implications as all advertising with regard to projects will be undertaken appropriately.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accept the 2 INTERREG funding letters of offer Gateways To Growth £433,570 Business Boot Camp £831,205. - Agree to use of the EU Official Journal public tendering process with respect to the Business Boot Camp proposal.

6	Decision Tracking
There is no decision tracking attached to this report.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
SEUPB - Special European Programmes Body INTERREG - Interregional Development COMET - Councils of the Metropolitan Area	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1: Project Summaries	