



<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Employer Engagement Support - Update
<b>Date:</b>	16 October 2012
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John McGrillen Director of Development ext 3470
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives ext 3459

<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	Members will be aware that the Investment Programme contains a range of commitments around employability and skills development. One of the key commitments involves collaboration with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and other partners on a city-wide employability and skills strategy.
1.2	The aim of this proposal is to develop a collaborative, targeted approach to employability and skills development issues by creating a better understanding of the local welfare to work arena and enabling partners to align and pool funding and resources to reduce duplication of services and fill gaps in provision. The anticipated outcome of this approach is that additional people would be helped into employment and that those employment prospects would be more sustainable.
1.3	In order to ensure that employability initiatives and approaches are in line with existing employer needs and future growth areas, it is important to ensure a structured dialogue with employers. One such avenue for engagement is through the Employers' Forum. This was established in 2003 as part of the Task Force initiatives in west Belfast and greater Shankill. It is managed by Business in the Community (BITC) and draws on the resources of this organisation's members to provide opportunities for skills development and employment opportunities, focusing on those furthest from the labour market.
1.4	At the 18 September meeting of the Development Committee, members were advised that there was an opportunity to explore how the Employers' Forum could be engaged to act as the employer conduit on a city-wide basis. This would ensure that ideas and proposals could be tested to confirm that they are in line with employer demands. Equally, employers could be encouraged to develop new and flexible approaches to recruitment and skills development,

	particularly engaging those furthest from the labour market.
1.5	Members were also made aware of the fact that DEL (Department for Employment and Learning) was open to the potential of exploring collaboration with the council on this initiative and to match-funding the resource implications of any such development.
1.6	They were advised that a meeting was to take place between DEL, Belfast City Council and Business in the Community to look at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A draft terms of reference for the city-wide employers' forum</li> <li>• A proposed work programme</li> <li>• Areas of focus e.g. key sectors; geographical areas; target groups</li> <li>• Governance arrangements</li> <li>• Financial commitments and contributions.</li> </ul>
1.7	This meeting has now taken place and the proposed detail behind these key points has been developed.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	Since their establishment in 2003, initiatives undertaken by the Employers' Forum have helped almost 1300 long-term unemployed people into work. While the focus of the initiative has been on those from west Belfast and greater Shankill, employers have also provided opportunities for those from all communities across Belfast.
2.2	Following a meeting with DEL and BITC to consider future collaboration on a city-wide basis, draft terms of reference have been drawn up. These are attached as <b>Appendix 1</b> .
2.3	There is still some work to be done to complete the work programme for the forum. However it is likely to consist of a range of targeted activities to deliver a set of agreed outcomes, principally around employment opportunities (particularly for long-term unemployed) or pathways into key sectors (e.g. ICT). This will ensure that there is greater alignment between skills supply and demand and will also help develop new routes into growth sectors for those without further or higher level qualifications. These outcomes will be reviewed on a quarterly basis and will be written into a letter of offer with Business in the Community to ensure their delivery. This letter of offer will be developed in conjunction with DEL in order to ensure that there is an agreed programme of work to which all organisations are signed up. Details of the work programme will be presented to a future meeting of this committee and regular updates on progress against target will also be provided to the committee.
2.4	The current Chair of the Employers' Forum is Michael Ryan from Bombardier Aerospace. He has been in this role since the forum's inception and has indicated that he would be willing to remain in this position as part of the citywide group. Belfast City Council is represented on the forum through the Head of Human Resources.
2.5	The proposed terms of reference and draft work plan are to be presented to the next meeting of the Employers' Forum which takes place on 19 November. If

	endorsed, this will give the go-ahead to move towards a city-wide grouping, taking account of the proposed changes and activities required by Belfast City Council and DEL as key funders.
2.6	Business in the Community have confirmed that they will be able to match-fund the council and DEL support. On the basis of a possible £25,000 annual contribution from council along with £25,000 from DEL, they have confirmed that they will be able to provide match funding of £50,000 from the private sector (both in cash and in-kind).

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	A funding commitment for this work of £25,000 per annum from Belfast City Council is proposed. It is recommended that the Committee approve funding for a period of three years (subject to annual review), based on the lifetime of the Investment Programme. This funding should also be subject to match funding being available from DEL and from the private sector, through Employers' Forum members (support to be provided both in cash and in-kind).

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
4.1	No specific equality and good relations considerations at this stage. The city-wide approach will take account of all relevant considerations.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the proposed engagement with DEL and the Employers' Forum as part of the city-wide employability and skills plan</li> <li>• Approve the proposed terms of reference for the group</li> <li>• Approve funding of £25,000 per annum, for a period of three years (subject to annual review). This funding should be subject to match funding of £25,000 being available from DEL and £50,000 of match funding from the private sector, through Employers' Forum members (support to be provided both in cash and in-kind).</li> </ul>

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
The work programme for year 1 will be brought back to the December 2013 meeting of this Committee for information.	
Timeframe:	December 2013
Reporting Officer:	Shirley McCay

<b>7</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
BiTC – Business in the Community	
DEL – Department for Employment and Learning	

<b>8</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
Appendix 1 – Draft terms of reference for citywide employers' forum.	