



**Report to:** Development Department  
**Subject:** Review of Council-led Tours  
**Date:** 15 January 2013  
**Reporting Officer:** John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470  
**Contact Officers:** Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Council annually provides approximately £20,000 to fund a series of walking tours at peak times across the city. The format and delivery of these tours was established over 10 years ago and they are delivered through Blue Badge Guides and in partnership with the Northern Ireland Tour Guide Association (NITGA).
1.2	Tourism in Belfast has grown over the last decade and this has resulted in a high number of small/medium size enterprises and businesses offering tour based products. In general visitors are satisfied with the quality and quantity on offer, although as Members are aware, there have been some issues around some of the Bus Tour operators.
1.3	Current tours supported and delivered by Belfast City Council include Historic Pub and Historic Walking tours and Late Night Art. Tours delivered in partnership between Council and other organisations/individuals include CS Lewis, Literary, Belfast Bred and Music tours. The latter has been through low levels of seed funding.
1.4	In February 2012 the Tourism, Culture and Arts unit sought an independent review and analysis of Belfast's Guided Tour products to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– establish the current position</li><li>– assess the potential and challenges faced</li><li>– produce an action plan to drive the sector forward</li><li>– agree role and remit of Belfast City Council</li></ul>

<p>1.5</p> <p>1.6</p> <p>1.7</p>	<p>Business Tourism Solutions (BTS) were appointed and they undertook a series of consultations with guided tour operators and stakeholders including Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, independent tour guides, tour guide operators and Area Partnership Boards and venues. The Executive Summary of their report is attached as appendix 1. The full report is available from the Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit (Kerrie Sweeney ext 3586).</p> <p>The consultations and business survey proved useful in understanding the importance of product development whilst taking into account the wide variety of independent commercial tours and excursions which operated by the private sector without Council support. Some of these tours are innovative, entrepreneurial and commercially self-sustaining.</p> <p>The tour review benchmarked Belfast against five international destinations including Dublin; Edinburgh for its market maturity; Glasgow and Cardiff for their emerging tourism markets; Bilbao for its visitor attraction the Guggenheim Museum and Rotterdam as a port city.</p> <p>The benchmarked cities highlighted that most funded tours were provided through competitive funding (application based) or collaborative marketing initiatives.</p>
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<p><b>2</b></p> <p>2.1</p> <p>2.2</p> <p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p>	<p><b>Key Issues</b></p> <p>In summary, the work undertaken by BTS confirmed that due to the strong range of commercial tours now on offer across the city, there is no longer a requirement for Belfast City Council to intervene in the provision of city tours directly. However BTS does identify a number of areas for Council to lead on so as to support the overall tour product across the city and provide a catalytic role to new product development. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Council to establish an industry-led tour guide group for the city; the group will explore areas of common interest, facilitate workshops and develop a code of conduct.</li> <li>– Undertake generic marketing of tours in the city. In partnership with BVCB, Council will develop consistent creative and promotional materials to promote the broad range of tours that are available across the city (to include the use of mobile technology)</li> <li>– Establish a business development programme to support existing individuals / organisations to grow existing tours or develop new tours. This may target geographical gaps in the city to drive footfall into the local tourism destinations or target thematic gaps whereby tours may be used to support new product development themes.</li> <li>– Council delivers tours linked to specific festivals/events or themes only if there is no uptake from the market.</li> </ul>
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2.6	It is therefore recommended that we stop the Blue Badge guided tours directly delivered by the Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit for 2013 and where we are working in partnership with other organisations agree an exit strategy whereby partners will be signposted to the business development programme once established. Members should note that these likely changes were raised with organisations as part of the consultation process.
2.7	Late Night Art will continue once a month, however again officers will scope an exit strategy to transfer delivery and ownership to the participating art galleries.
2.8	The budget (£20,000) previously used to deliver tours directly will be reinvested into the areas identified above under paragraphs 2.2 – 2.5.
2.9	BTS within their report also refer to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's review of tour guiding in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) are recommending a new accreditation scheme to accommodate guides working in individual visitor attractions, city wide tours and regional tours. It has long been recognised that to become a Blue Badge Guide is time consuming and costly. There needs to be a more flexible system to accredit a whole range of guides that visitors will interact with and ensure consistency of quality. The scheme is still under review however once agreed, it will provide a framework of training and quality assurance for guiding across Northern Ireland.
2.10	In the interim, the Northern Ireland Tour Guide Association has identified an immediate gap in language provision and they are working with NITB to pilot an Introductory Guiding Course for students with languages. Language provision has been a regular concern raised at the Belfast Tourism Forum and with an increase in cruise visits and the World Police Fire Games taking place in 2013; it is becoming a significant issue for the city. The objectives of the course will be to bring a group of 25 language students up to a professional standard in guiding. NITB has secured funding for this and whilst at this stage there is no financial commitment from Council, we have been approached for in-kind support to promote the scheme, support the recruitment process and supply materials for training purposes on Belfast's tourism product.

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	£20,000 has been included in the annual Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit over a number of years to support tours directly and is included in the budget estimates 13/14. It is recommended that this budget is retained but allocated towards establishing an industry led tour group, co-operative marketing and business development.

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations Considerations attached to this report.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	<p>Members are ask to note the contents of the report and;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- agree that we stop the tours Council-led tours for 2013</li> <li>- agree an exit strategy with partner-led tours and Late Night Art where appropriate</li> <li>- invest the existing tour budget into support the collective offer of tours across the city</li> <li>- support the sector to develop/address gaps through business development programmes</li> <li>- provide in-kind support and endorse the Introductory Guiding Course for language students.</li> </ul>

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
Update on Council's approach to supporting tours.	
Timeframe: March 2014	Reporting Officer: Kerrie Sweeney ext 3586

<b>7</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
<p>NITGA - Northern Ireland Tour Guide Association  NITB - Northern Ireland Tourist Board  BTS - Business Tourism Solutions</p>	

<b>8</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
Appendix 1 - Tour Guide Report – Executive Summary	