



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast Business Survey and Database
Date:	19 February 2013
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that the Council delivers a range of support initiatives to directly support business start-up and growth as well as a range of employability initiatives.
1.2	Members will also be aware that, within the Investment Programme, there are a range of commitments to encourage business growth and competitiveness within key sectors, including retail, creative industries and financial and business services.
1.3	The economic downturn has clearly had a significant impact on the sustainability and competitiveness of local businesses. Numerous surveys have identified the growing number of vacancies in the city and wider region and this has a knock-on effect on the Council in terms of rates revenue raised. Equally, businesses have become increasingly focused on reducing their overheads and looking at new sales opportunities, and Belfast City Council has been working with local partners to develop programmes to meet these needs.
1.4	In order to ensure that the support programmes are still relevant and to build a picture of business confidence in the city, it is proposed that a business survey be carried out with a representative number of companies across the city. It is proposed that this survey is supplemented by a business database which brings together details on all companies located in the city to build up a picture of the scale and structure of the city's private sector and to help Council target its business support interventions.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p><u>Business Survey</u></p> <p>The Belfast Business Survey is a critical economic tool which analyses trends and patterns of business activities. Successive surveys were carried out in 2009, 2010 and 2011 and these presented a useful baseline and rationale for targeting Council intervention in business support initiatives. The information provided through the survey can be analysed against business sector, size, geographical location and age of business.</p>
2.2	<p>The aims of the survey are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To establish a framework to help shape Council's future business development initiatives in order to ensure maximum impact - To monitor the trading experiences of businesses in the last twelve months - To identify Belfast businesses' perceptions regarding the economic outlook over the next twelve months. - To provide a longitudinal analysis over the years to help monitor changes to economic conditions - To analyse survey findings against other relevant independent research undertaken over a similar period.
2.3	<p>To ensure the survey is up to date, it is proposed that the Council should commission a 2013 survey of 500 businesses. These companies will be reflective of the location, size and sector of enterprises across the city.</p>
2.4	<p><u>Business Database</u></p> <p>To undertake direct marketing of support initiatives to local businesses and facilitate the delivery of research projects such as the Belfast Business Survey, it is essential to have access to accurate and up-to-date information on local businesses.</p>
2.5	<p>In previous years, the Council has accessed information from the National Business Register. This register is drawn from some of the well known sources of business data including Yellow Pages, Thompson, Companies House, Royal Mail and BT records. The data provided can be tailored to the needs of Council with the contact details and sectoral classifications of only those businesses located in the Council area provided. Information on the database is provided for Council purposes only and is subject to Data Protection legislation.</p>
2.6	<p>It is proposed that the Council accesses a revised and updated version of the data for the Belfast City Council area in order ensure that accurate and relevant information is in place to allow targeted marketing of Council support activities to take place.</p>

3.	Resource implications
3.1	<p>The total financial requirement for the business survey and the database is £17,000.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations Considerations attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to approve the commissioning of the 2013 Belfast Business Survey and the renewal of the licence for the Belfast Business Database at a total cost of £17,000 maximum.

6	Decision Tracking
A report on the outcomes of the business survey will presented at the June 2013 meeting of the Development Committee.	
Timeframe:	June 2013
	Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay