



Report to: Development Committee
Subject: NI EU Regional Forum Grant Offer
Date: 03 December 2013
Reporting Officer: John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officers: Laura Leonard, European Manager, ext 3577

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that BCC launched the NI EU Regional Forum (NIERF) in May 2011 with the NI Junior Ministers. This Forum was formerly known as the Belfast in Europe group, and before that the Belfast Quartiers En Crise network. It existed to create a collaborative platform for stakeholders in Belfast who were engaged in EU activity.
1.2	The NIERF has been in existence for over 2 years, it is Co Chaired by OFMDFM and has a membership of over 100 Members from all sectors across all of NI. The Forum meets four times a year and addresses EU policy issues and funding opportunities across a wide range of sectors including social inclusion, competitiveness and employment, climate change and energy and innovation and technology essentially mirroring the work of the NI Barroso Task Force on Europe. The ultimate aim is to increase NI access to EU funding in the current and upcoming EU funding rounds.
1.3	One of the common challenges facing Forum members is capacity to engage in EU activity, achieve funding leverage and develop transnational partnerships. To address this, the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister has offered the Forum an opportunity to bid for grants for improving capacity across the NI region for EU engagement. A total of £375,000 over two years has been offered to Belfast City Council as the Forum secretariat, to manage and administer a grants programme for the Forum to provide 4 elements of funding. A total of £60,000 would be made available within this for Belfast City Council to recruit an appropriate officer post to manage the rolling grant fund and also manage the growing responsibilities of running the Forum including calling meetings, and maintaining and developing the information portal.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The detail of the criteria of the capacity grant fund for the Forum has to be developed in coming weeks, however the proposed four elements will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Costs for partner search for EU project development - Assistance for EU funds application processes and mentoring for participation in EU activity - Support for costs of EU event participation and - Match funding of last resort
2.2	<p>Members are asked to agree to accept the transfer of grant funding amounting to £375k from OFMDFM to manage on behalf of the NI EU Regional Forum. This will include recruitment of an appropriate officer post to manage the grants process over 2 years as well as manage the general running of the forum, its membership and portal development. This work would be at no additional cost to Belfast City Council and would be managed within the councils EU unit by the EU manager. Members will receive details of the grant criteria templates and processes in the near future. All such templates and processes will be in full accordance with Belfast City Council's governance and audit arrangements.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p>BCC will manage the proposed OFMDFM EU grants programme at no additional cost to council and with the full costs of an appropriate officer post created within the grants budget for 2 years.</p>

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

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>Members are asked to accept the offer of £375k transferred budget from OFMDFM to create an EU capacity building grants fund for members of the NI EU Regional Forum. Members are also asked to approve the recruitment of an officer on a 2-year fixed term contract basis to manage the capacity fund and forum secretariat. Both recommendations are made on the basis that there is no additional cost to BCC.</p>

6	Decision Tracking
<p>Timeline: 31 December 2013 Reporting Officer: Laura Leonard</p>	