



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: World Trade Centre licence update

Date: 14 January 2014

Reporting Officer: John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that Belfast City Council acquired the licence for World Trade Centre Belfast (WTCB) in 2003 in partnership with property development company AM Development (since then re-named Multi Development).
1.2	At that stage, Multi Development had expressed an interest in acquiring the land at Musgrave Street Police Station and developing a World Trade Centre (WTC) on that site. When it became apparent that the land was not going to be made available, the development company agreed to allow Belfast City Council to purchase their 50% of the licence. Since 2008, the council has been the 100% licence holder.
1.3	There are approximately 300 WTCs across all continents. Around 200 of these operate virtually i.e. do not have a physical presence. For those that do operate from a building, this can take many forms, including office space, hotels and conference centres. WTCs are operated by both private and public operators.
1.4	Four cities in the UK have licences for WTCs, namely Belfast, Milton Keynes, Hull and Edinburgh. Of these, only Hull operates from a branded World Trade Centre (WTC Hull and Humber). An operator has acquired a licence for a WTC in Dublin and is currently using the branding to provide a range of export support services for local companies on a paid-for basis.
1.5	Only one licence is granted per economic region and Belfast City Council holds the licence for Northern Ireland. There is an annual fee for holding the licence and this is currently set at \$10,000.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>As the licence holder, the Council developed a delivered a series of pilot activities under the banner of WTC in previous years. These have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global Business Skills workshops - Business Development Programmes - Channel Development Clinics - Trade Mission to Doha, Qatar– a trade mission to Futurallia in Doha, Qatar, was organised in conjunction with Invest NI. <p>Consideration was also given to a membership structure for the private sector but the administration involved in this made it prohibitive, given the available resources within council at the time.</p>
2.2	<p>These programmes were match funded by DETI, using EU funds. However given changes in the business support environment, a review of the services at that time indicated that there would be merit in “packaging” these services as part of the wider EDU offering, linking into other export support services e.g. from Northern Ireland Chamber and Invest NI. For example, members will be aware that the council has just completed a successful “Belfast Tech” Mission and this was branded under the Council’s wider Economic Development programme of activities and was carried out in conjunction with other business support partners, including Invest NI and the NI Chamber of Commerce.</p>
2.3	<p>With regard to the property options associated with the membership, there were a number of discussions with potential developers to assess potential interest in developing a World Trade Centre in the city since acquiring the licence outright. However since the downturn, there not been any significant follow-up on this activity from the private sector. While individuals did express some interest at that time, it may be possible to refresh this process, given that recent economic projections are more positive than they have been over the last few years.</p>
2.4	<p>There is also the potential to explore options for deploying the branding on some of the council’s assets. Members will be aware that there has been significant progress in accessing external funding for the extension of the Waterfront Hall to incorporate a new conference and exhibition centre. Other cities e.g. Boston have branded their conference facilities as “World Trade Centre” and have brought together a range of related facilities and services under this umbrella. The opportunity exists to explore a similar model for the Waterfront facility and this is currently being considered as part of the business plan for the new development.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>In order to maintain the licence and ensure that we have access to the branding, resources and facilities, an annual fee of \$10,000 will be payable to the World Trade Centers’ Association. The amount has been set aside within the EDU financial provisions for the current financial year.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no specific equality and good relations considerations attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the update on the WTC licence - Agree the payment of the annual membership fee of \$10,000 subject to ongoing exploration of the potential for usage of the branding as part of a physical development in the city.

6	Decision Tracking
Progress report on outcomes to be presented to Committee by June 2014.	
Timeframe: June 2014 Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay	

7	Key to Abbreviations
WTC – World Trade Centre.	