



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: EUROCITIES Social Affairs Update

Date: 15 April 2014

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that with the support of the European Unit, Belfast City Council is a proactive member of the EUROCITIES network which operates across 130 major European cities.
1.2	Members will also recall that Belfast held a very successful meeting of the Social Affairs Forum in October 2013 which enabled the Council to demonstrate innovative practices in engaging local communities in delivering social change.
1.3	Belfast continues to profile good practice to its counterparts through this Forum by participation in bi-annual Forum meetings as well as engagement in thematic Working Groups and Taskforces.
1.4	Members will also be aware that this Forum is important in respect to raising the profile of the role of cities in developing European policy.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>In February 2013 the European Commission published the “Social Investment Package (SIP)”. It is important to note that this is not a new funding stream but rather a policy instrument to enable Europe to re-orientate its social policy. By this, it means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Maintaining social investment throughout the individual’s life; – Pursuing, activating and enabling policies by including more people into the labour market; and – Increasing the sustainability and adequacy of social systems.
2.2	In response to this policy initiative, EUROCITIES developed in June 2013, a policy statement which was submitted to the European Commission. This statement highlighted the fact that cities are responsible for delivering the majority of the public services and are often the first ones to respond to emerging

	social problems. It asserted that the success of SIP can only be achieved through a strong multi-level partnership, involving cities directly, and improved coordination.
2.3	The recent Social Affairs Forum meeting in Barcelona focussed on how cities can facilitate and contribute to these European objectives and included a politicians' panel. Alderman Bob Stoker represented the Council along with counterparts from 14 other European cities to stress cities' fundamental role in social policy.
2.4	Alderman Stoker presented a position paper which was endorsed by the panel, which will be integrated into original EUROCITIES statement and taken back to its Executive Committee for endorsement. A copy of the statement is attached at Appendix 1.
2.5	The fact that Alderman Stoker's paper was debated and agreed is a significant output and cements Belfast's role as an active participant in European Affairs. Indeed as a result of this process, Alderman Stoker has since been invited by the European Commission to attend the Social Policy Innovation Conference in Brussels on 19-20 May 2014. This is an extremely high level, invite only event at which the Commissioner will speak, and will be of great benefit to Belfast to attend. It is therefore recommended that Members approve the attendance of Alderman Stoker and a European Officer at this event to continue to represent and profile the work of Belfast in this highly relevant and topical area.
2.6	An additional output from the Barcelona meeting was agreement to establish a SIP Taskforce. EUROCITIES is presently seeking best practice examples from cities to demonstrate their contribution to socially inclusive cities. The network will then select 10-12 cities who will participate in the Taskforce. EU funds are available to support their participation in a defined set of activity to maintain this lobby with the European Institutions over the next year.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	The maximum cost of attendance by Alderman Stoker and an EU Officer at the EU Commission event in May 2014 will not exceed £2,400 and this is budgeted for within the annual EU Unit EUROCITIES activity budget.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	Work carried out through the Social Affairs Forum and the SIP Taskforce will support Council's work to provide equal access to employment opportunities for all citizens

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to note the substantial contribution made to the EUROCITIES Statement on the Social Investment Package.
5.2	Members are also requested to approve the attendance of Alderman Bob Stoker and an EU Officer at the above mentioned conference and to approve associated expenditure in the amount of £2,400 to facilitate travel, accommodation and subsistence.
5.3	Members are requested to note that Belfast will apply to participate in the SIP Taskforce.

6	Decision Tracking
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7	Key to Abbreviations
SIP- Social Investment Package	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1: EUROCITIES statement "Making Social Investment Package a reality". Appendix 2: Agenda for May EU Commission event	