



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Belfast-Boston Sister Cities Relationship

Date: 15 April 2014

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that from 19-25 March 2014 the Lord Mayor and the European Manager travelled to New York and Boston to continue working to foster stronger trade, education and tourism links with the key cities in the North American market. This work aligns fully to the aims and objectives of Council's International Relations Framework.
1.2	During the visit, the Lord Mayor visited the Massachusetts State Senate President, Therese Murray, and the Mayor of Boston, Martin Walsh. He also met with Invest Northern Ireland's Boston office and Boston business leaders, as well as the American Ireland Partnership who have a long history of investing in Community and Cross Community education projects in Ireland, including Belfast. Meetings also took place with Secretary Kerry's local office on the Global Partnerships initiative and the President of Sister Cities International.
1.3	During this programme of meetings it became more and more evident that there is a real interest at the highest political level to do business and develop closer ties with Belfast.

2	Key Issues
2.1	During the visit to Boston, the Lord Mayor met with the Mayor of Boston to tentatively explore the opportunity and value of entering into a formal city to city cooperation agreement. During the meeting, the Mayor of Boston expressed his desire to enter into a Sister Cities Agreement to foster real actions and opportunities between both cities in the areas of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic development, trade and investment - Tourism - Cultural exchange - Faith based exchange and educational linkages. -
2.2	This would require the development and signing of an official Sister Cities Agreement in line with the standards and codes of Sister Cities International. It would also require the development of an agreed annual action plan to drive and monitor the initiative in each city.

2.3	This detail would be developed and presented to the incoming Belfast City Council from June 2014 and championed by the incoming Lord Mayor and the new Development Committee which would continue to be responsible for the delivery of the Council's International Relations Framework. Plans are already underway with the current Lord Mayor to undertake an exchange of faith based leaders in both cities in Autumn 2014.
2.4	Members are asked to agree to the establishment of a formal Sister Cities Relationship and to ensure this is formally signed between both city Mayors within the timescale of the current term of the existing Lord Mayor.
2.5	The Head of Invest NI for North America, Gary Hanley has fully endorsed the potential of a Belfast Boston Sister Cities relationship to support Northern Ireland companies in the marketplace.
2.6	Members should also be aware that the Massachusetts State Senate President, Therese Murray, is fully supportive of a Belfast/Boston Sister Cities relationship and fully endorses the proposal. President Murray has collaborated with Minister Poots to put in place a Memorandum of Understanding between Boston and Northern Ireland on connected health issues. She will be in Belfast in September 2014 as part of a political programme and business mission to the North and South of Ireland. It is expected that she will be accompanied by Congressman Richard Neal, and potentially the Mayor of Boston, Martin Walsh, both strong supporters of the NI Peace Process and economic development promotion between Northern Ireland and North America.
2.7	As part of the BCC International Relations Framework Action Plan, Committee agreed to engage in the next EU/US Connected Health Alliance Conference to be held in Boston in October 2014.
2.8	Members are therefore asked to agree to host President Murray and her delegation at a City Hall civic reception in September at a maximum cost of £5,000.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	It is anticipated that the cost of hosting a civic reception to welcome Massachusetts State Senate President Murray and her delegation will not exceed £5,000.

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

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree that BCC enters into a formal Sister City Relationship Agreement with the City of Boston and that it is signed by the current Lord Mayor of Belfast before 2 June 2014. - That a Sister Cities Action Plan is thereafter developed in agreement with both cities and in particular the Development Committee. - Agree that BCC provides a welcome reception for Senate President Murray and her political and business delegation in September 2014. - Agree to provide a budget of £5,000 to cover this visit.

