



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Super Connected Business Growth Initiative
Date:	19 August 2014
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officers:	Colin McCabrey, Economic Development Manager, ext 3805

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will recall that the Council previously agreed to make a funding application to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to secure up to 75% of the costs of a demand stimulation programme that would complement the Super Connected Cities Voucher Scheme funded by DCMS. This would both raise awareness of the infrastructure investment and provide targeted mentoring support to help businesses get online or use the technologies to help them work more efficiently
1.2	Belfast City Council has now been awarded £218,445 of grant funding from Invest NI and the NI ERDF Competitiveness Programme to support the Super Connected Cities – Demand Stimulation Programme. The demand stimulation programme will supplement and support the investment in telecoms infrastructure through the £13.7 Super Connected Cities Initiative funded by DCMS, helping local businesses to improve their productivity and competitiveness.
1.3	The need for a complimentary support programme for the Super Connected Cities Initiative has been identified from experience elsewhere as well as feedback from early engagement with local companies which suggested that businesses require support to help them maximise the potential of the infrastructure.
1.4	<u>Aim Of The Programme</u> The aim of the demand stimulation programme is to assist in the creation of a vibrant, digitally enabled economy across Belfast, by helping local SMEs to understand the transformation of traditional business models which effective exploitation of the digital platform will bring about. The initiative will seek to grow the capabilities of Belfast based SMEs through a tailored and structured

	programme of support to assist them to adopt, utilise and fully exploit the opportunities presented by ultrafast and superfast connectivity.
1.5	The Super Connected Cities Business Growth Initiative has a number of elements, some of which will be delivered directly by Belfast City Council with the remaining support activity to be delivered as part of a tender process.
1.6	Belfast City Council will directly deliver a number of Super Connected Cities awareness raising Seminars. The seminars, delivered by the BCC Super Connected Team will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General overview of the Super Connected Programme - Case-studies of business efficiency and growth potentially demonstrated by local business benefactors
1.7	The total cost for this element is £13,350.
1.8	It is intended that an external organisation will be procured to deliver the remaining elements of the programme which include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentoring support to 300 Belfast based businesses to assist them in implementing business improvement techniques aligned to investment in new technologies - Workshops/Master Classes, 18 half day sessions in total targeting 20 participating businesses per session. The focus of these sessions will be informed by the needs of the client businesses - Participant Engagement and Recruitment for both Mentoring and Workshops/Master Classes
1.9	Objectives Of The Programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To provide an accessible, needs-led business improvement programme; - To support participating businesses to become more competitive and sustainable by implementing emerging digital technologies; - To develop the knowledge and skills of participating businesses; - To provide businesses with opportunities for peer learning; - To work in partnership with Invest Northern Ireland to provide a pipeline of support for those businesses with high growth potential. - To deliver measurable business growth/improvements for participating businesses
1.10	It is intended that the demand stimulation support will be available to all companies in the Council area, focusing on those availing of connection vouchers. Support will be tailored to meet the demands of the individual businesses.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The letter of Offer for the demand stimulation programme from Invest NI has been received.

2.2	Following discussions with Belfast City Council's Digital Services Team who are responsible for the delivery of the Super Connected Cities Connection Vouchers scheme, it became apparent that they would be best placed to deliver the Connection Voucher Seminar's element of the demand stimulation programme. This is based on their forward work plan and the timescale for roll out of the Connection Voucher Scheme which will create a pipeline of participants for the Connection Voucher Seminars element of the Demand Stimulation programme. A draft tender specification has been prepared for providing the elements detailed in paragraph 1.8.
2.3	The total value of the proposed procurement elements (refer to paragraph 1.8) is £255,300. The current timescale for achievement of the project is June 2015.
2.4	Approval for tender award was previously granted by Committee in line with standing orders. Due to the timeframe for delivery extending beyond Local Government Reform Members consideration is requested with the resolution requiring consideration by the Shadow SP&R committee.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<u>Financial</u> The cost of this element of the demand stimulation programme is £255,300 with ERDF/INI to support 75% of total cost of the workshops/master classes element and 56% of the total cost of the mentoring element (refer to paragraph 1.8). The net cost to Council will be £108,825.

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

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In line with Standing Orders, due to the timeframe for delivery beyond Local Government Reform, Members consideration is requested to commence public procurement of the Super-Connected Cities Demand Stimulation Programme at a budget of £255,300 with the recommendations requiring referral to shadow SP&R Committee for consideration.

6	Decision Tracking
Decision to be referred to shadow SP&R Committee	
Timeline: September 2014	Reporting Officer: Colin McCabrey

7	Key to Abbreviations
ERDF - European Regional Development Fund	