



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Belfast in Bloom
Date:	14 August 2008
Reporting Officer:	Fiona Holdsworth, Principal Parks and Cemeteries Services Manager
Contact Officer:	Reg Maxwell, Area Manager

Relevant Background Information

The Belfast in Bloom project has been developed by the Parks and Cemeteries Section over the last 14 years, the objectives being to make Belfast a cleaner and more attractive city, to encourage inward investment and to increase tourism. It falls within the wider Ulster in Bloom initiative which is celebrating its 30th birthday and the wider United Kingdom scheme Britain in Bloom. While a considerable emphasis is placed on flowers, the project's aims are wider and look at improving the landscape generally through, for example, the removal of graffiti and the reduction or elimination of litter. The Parks and Cemeteries Section would, therefore, acknowledge the support received from colleagues in the Health and Environmental Services Department.

Each year, competitions are organised for the commercial and community sectors with categories for Best Hanging Basket, Window Box, Front Garden, Community Street, Hotel, Public House, Restaurant, Commercial Street and Commercial Premises. Awards are made at a formal presentation ceremony which is well attended and receives substantial media coverage.

Belfast Council has a number of partners who support the project – the Department for Regional Development Roads Service, the Department for Social Development - Belfast Regeneration, City Centre Management, Belfast Chamber of Trade and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The bulk of the Council's contribution is from the "Brighter Belfast" programme which this year amounted to £50k, some 50% of the overall expenditure.

In September 2007 at the Award Ceremony of Ulster in Bloom, Belfast won the award for the 'Best City' category and was nominated for the first time ever to represent Northern Ireland in the Britain in Bloom competition 2008 (judged on 7 August).

At the 2007 awards, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board representative stated:

'Who would have thought back in 1979 that Ulster in Bloom would become so popular, or that Northern Ireland would be named as a 'must see' destination by the world's leading travel publication, Lonely Planet? This competition has a central role to play in making Northern Ireland such an attractive destination and significantly adds to the visitor experience.'

Key Issues

The 'In Bloom' initiative is a major project for improving the City on a number of fronts and contributes significantly towards meeting the council's objectives. It is, however, entering a critical period.

The key issues that face the initiative now are

- The 'Brighter Belfast' programme funding contribution may end or, at best, be substantially reduced from its current level of £50,000. If withdrawn in full, this will lead to at least a 50% reduction in the available funding.
- Two of the key officers involved with the project will have left within the next 18 months.
- The tightening economy and the increased competition for sponsorship.

The flower baskets are planted and grown by Parks staff and the placing out and maintenance of them is outsourced. Owing to the increase in the amount of floral displays requested a tender exercise is required for the placing out and maintenance service.

Resource Implications

Financial

The value of the tender is £30K to £35K per annum and the evaluation criteria for awarding the contract is:

- price
- previous experience
- ability to meet timescales
- contract management skills including liaison with Council representatives.

Human and Asset

Consideration must be given to the future capacity issues that have been identified

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to

- note the success of Belfast in winning the Ulster in Bloom, Best City award and its subsequent nomination to the 2008 Britain in Bloom competition, representing Northern Ireland, for the first time ever.
- agree in principle to the continuation of Belfast in Bloom and to the Council's leading role
- approve the undertaking of a strategic review of the Belfast in Bloom initiative, which will include:
 - an assessment of how the project may be expanded to improve all aspects of the environment including litter, graffiti, fly-posting etc.
 - an assessment of the quality, quantity, type and location of plantings to maximise impact.
 - an assessment of how the project may be funded including what opportunities exist for profitable partnerships within the City and how these may be developed to continue to improve its image.
- approve the above tender exercise and authorise the Director of Parks and Leisure to award the tender following evaluation using the agreed criteria.

Key to Abbreviations

None.

Documents Attached

None.

