



Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Enhanced Christmas In Belfast Campaign
Date:	8 November 2013
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, Ext. 3470
Contact Officers:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives and International Development

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>At the meeting on 4 November 2013 the Council adopted unanimously the undernoted Notice of Motion:</p> <p><u>Notice of Motion - Belfast City Centre</u></p> <p>“This Council recognises that Members will always seek to represent the areas for which they were elected. However, the City Centre businesses contribute a very large portion of the rate base which, in turn, contributes to the cost of provision of services across the City. The views and plans of the business community for the future of the City are important.</p> <p>The Council agrees that the Party Leaders of the Council should provide civic leadership in seeking to provide a united voice, along with City Centre businesses, and, to that end, requests the Party Leaders to meet regularly as a group with representatives of the business community to ensure the future development and prosperity of the entire City of Belfast.</p> <p>Furthermore, recognising the importance of the Christmas period to those businesses, the Council agrees that it is vital to attempt to build upon the normal Christmas promotion campaign through helping to animate the city and to promote the many exciting and enjoyable events, activities and offers happening in Belfast in the lead up to the Christmas. Accordingly, the Council requests the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to give urgent consideration as to the possibility of identifying additional resources which could be allocated to that promotion campaign and, due to the urgency of making quick decisions, agrees, if such resources can be identified, to delegate authority for a decision to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, so that the activities funded by the resources can be put in place before Christmas.”</p>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>As Members will be aware the Christmas period is absolutely critical to the financial sustainability of the retail and hospitality sectors. To that end, Belfast City Council provides support annually to Visit Belfast, part of which is to help finance a marketing campaign to encourage people from across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to visit the City and enjoy the City's retail and hospitality offering.</p>
2.2	<p>As has been their normal practice in recent years, Visit Belfast have prepared a marketing campaign for this year's Christmas season in consultation with the Chamber of Commerce, CastleCourt, Victoria Square and Translink. The resources available for the campaign are £210K, including a £85K contribution from the DSD.</p>
2.3	<p>As is the case with many city centres across the UK and Ireland, 2013 has proven to be a difficult year, particularly for the retail sector. Whilst this is in part due to disposable incomes remaining low a major challenge comes from on-line retailers. Recent UK Press reports suggest that up to 50% of Christmas retailing this year will be done on-line. In order for town and city centres to survive it is important that they are seen as destinations which offer more than simply retail outlets, but are places where people have an enjoyable and memorable experience with access to culture, art, entertainment, bars, restaurants and retail.</p>
2.4	<p>Belfast has a strong product offering in this regard; ticket sales are currently fairly strong in the City's key cultural venues for Christmas shows, forward booking of restaurants are also strong and sales are going well for music gigs and sporting events.</p>
2.5	<p>The retail sector, however, is not so robust. Research conducted by Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce (BCTC) shows that year-on-year sales are down by 9% on last year. Whilst this is in part due to an increase in on-line shopping the City is also suffering from a persistent perception that it is hard to access during times of parades or demonstration, that car parking is prohibitively expensive and the introduction of further bus lanes has made the City inaccessible. This is further backed up by evidence that there has been a substantial decline in the number of people travelling in from neighbouring towns and cities to shop in Belfast.</p> <p>There is anecdotal evidence that traders believe that these factors have led to business closures which has in turn led to a reduction in the City's rates base.</p> <p>As a result of these challenges, the Council has been approached by the President of BCTC on behalf of the Chamber's membership to ask if it would be prepared to enhance the Advertising and PR campaign planned by Visit Belfast in the lead up to Christmas.</p> <p>It is undoubtedly the case that in addition to the City Centre, traders along the City's arterial routes have also been impacted by the downturn in retail numbers and would equally benefit from support from the Council.</p> <p>The evaluation of last year's Backin' Belfast campaign would suggest that</p>

	any additional support to the proposed campaign would be best done through animating the City, increased direct advertising in those towns from which visitor numbers have dropped along with a targeted PR and social media campaign.
2.6	It should be noted that DSD, in addition to financially supporting the Visit Belfast Campaign, will be providing an ice rink in Custom House Square to enhance the visitor experience and are prepared to consider financially supporting additional animation activity should the Council decide to embark upon this activity. The Christmas Market has also agreed to extend their stay by 3 days.
2.7	Last year the Council also made its three staff car parks available for free parking over weekends prior to Christmas. This is something that the Committee might wish to consider doing again this year. Given the Council's support to the NI Hospice it has been suggested that hospice volunteers could use this as an opportunity to seek a voluntary contribution from patrons using the Council car parks.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p>The Director of Finance has indicated that he will be reporting to the next meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee a year end forecast under spend totalling £900k of which £250k has already been committed to the NI Hospice. He has indicated that up to £300k of the remaining £650k could be made available for re-allocation to support the enhanced Christmas in Belfast Campaign, if that was the wish of Members.</p> <p>Based on this projection Members may wish to consider the following options for providing support to traders across the City.</p>
3.2	<p>Animation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animation Programme - £150,000 <p>The animation programme will utilise the most successful elements of the Backin' Belfast campaign to animate the City's streets and deliver an enjoyable family-friendly experience. Previous experience would suggest that an effective animation programme would cost approximately £150K. This will be enhanced by other programmes to add value to the core retail and hospitality offering. Street entertainers, spot prizes of vouchers for use in particular stores and music were all elements used last year in respect of this.</p> <p>Commencing 23 November for 5 weekends, this programme would be delivered by an external organisation following a procurement exercise. Council officers would oversee the procurement of the organisations which would provide the on-street animation. This would be managed by Council officers and would be rolled out across both the City Centre and local neighbourhoods. Officers will endeavour to ensure a 50/50 split between the city centre and neighbourhoods, however, this will be dependent upon an audit of all activity taking place around Belfast at this time to ensure activities complement those already in place and avoid displacement.</p>

	<p>This will enhance the visitor experience and dwell time along with other attractors, such as the Continental Market and ice rink in Custom House Square.</p> <p>Activity programmed and planned by the 12- trader groups across the City, as a result of funding already provided by the Council, will also be incorporated as part of this campaign.</p>																															
3.3	<p>Additional Advertising and Public Relations</p> <p>In addition to animating the City streets, Members might wish to complement Visit Belfast's planned Christmas advertising and PR campaign in order to deliver strong and positive messages around some of the perceived barriers to a visit to Belfast at Christmas time. In particular, it would target those areas which have seen fewer people visit the City.</p> <p>This support could include the following options:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="411 801 1436 1283"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2">ACTIVITY</th> <th colspan="3">BUDGET</th> </tr> <tr> <th>£50K</th> <th>£100K</th> <th>£150K</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Additional Advertising</td> <td>£15K</td> <td>£20K</td> <td>£40K</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Additional PR Activity</td> <td>£10K</td> <td>£10K</td> <td>£20K</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tactical TV/Radio Press</td> <td>£10K</td> <td>£20K</td> <td>£25K</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Vox Pops (to support social media activity)</td> <td>£10K</td> <td>£15K</td> <td>£15K</td> </tr> <tr> <td>60-second TV Slots</td> <td></td> <td>£25K</td> <td>£40K</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Evaluation</td> <td>£5K</td> <td>£10K</td> <td>£10K</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The most coherent way to deliver this activity would be through the contract which has already been put in place through an OJEU competition by Visit Belfast. Legal Services have confirmed that this option is fully compliant with the Council's procurement processes. This would ensure an integrated approach, add value to and complement the Visit Belfast Christmas marketing campaign.</p> <p>An alternative approach would be to procure competent agencies to deliver elements of the above programme. Members should be aware, however, that due to time limitations and the need to adhere to the Council's procurement procedures this could only be done on the basis of quotations which would require the programme to be broken down into distinct elements of no more than £30k. Whilst this approach would potentially provide greater levels of creativity it would be difficult to deliver a coherent programme of support within the timescales available.</p>	ACTIVITY	BUDGET			£50K	£100K	£150K	Additional Advertising	£15K	£20K	£40K	Additional PR Activity	£10K	£10K	£20K	Tactical TV/Radio Press	£10K	£20K	£25K	Vox Pops (to support social media activity)	£10K	£15K	£15K	60-second TV Slots		£25K	£40K	Evaluation	£5K	£10K	£10K
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3.4	<p>Officers will also engage with car park operators to seek to secure discounted car parking rates at various sites across the City.</p>																															

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>Members are asked to consider this report and determine:</p> <p>(1) Does the Committee wish to provide additional financial assistance to animate and promote the city in the run up to Christmas?</p> <p>(2) If the Committee is minded to do so, how much resource does it wish to employ? A number of options are set out in paragraph 3.2 and are listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Animation only - £150k b. Animation plus additional advertising and PR at the level of an additional: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. £50k making a total of £200k ii. £100k making a total of £250k iii. £150k making a total of £300k.
5.2	Members are also asked to agree to the Council's 3 staff car parks being made available to weekend shoppers at no cost with the NI Hospice being permitted to seek voluntary contributions from patrons using the car parks.

6	Decision Tracking
There is no decision tracking attached to this report.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
<p>DSD – Department of Social Development</p> <p>BCTC- Belfast Chamber of trade and Commerce</p>	