



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Belfast Connection Voucher Scheme Launch</b>
<b>Date:</b>	7th February 2013
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance & Resources
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Paul Gribben, Head of Digital Services

<b>1.</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	The Belfast Connection Voucher Scheme (BCVS) allows small businesses and social enterprises within the new Belfast City Council boundary area to apply for grants of up to £3,000, to get high-speed broadband connections into their premises.
1.2	Following a successful market test phase which targeted seven areas in the city, the Belfast Connection Voucher scheme has now been opened up across the whole city. The official launch of the scheme which all Members are invited to attend, will take place in the City Hall on the 14 <sup>th</sup> February.

<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	The official launch of the Belfast Connection Voucher Scheme will provide us with the opportunity to promote the benefits of the scheme to the wider business community. We aim to outline the benefits of superfast broadband demonstrating how it can give businesses a competitive advantage.
2.1	Business leaders and business owners have been invited to the launch to hear the benefits of the scheme and how they can apply for a connection voucher. One of the businesses that took advantage of the voucher scheme during last year's market test phase will also explain how their business is already reaping the benefits of superfast broadband through increased turnover and new clients.
2.3	Alongside the launch event we are inviting all registered communications providers for the BCVS to take part in a supplier expo. This will give telecoms providers the opportunity to promote their products and services that can be paid for with a connection voucher.

2.4	Appendix 1 provides an update of the scheme to date and an outline of the application process is also provided. Appendix Two includes the detailed guidance on the scheme.
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<b>3.</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	The Super-connected Project Team will continue to administer applications to the scheme.

<b>4.</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Implications</b>
	N/A

<b>5.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	Invitations have been sent to all Members who are asked to support the Belfast Voucher Scheme Launch on the 14 <sup>th</sup> February 2014.

<b>6.</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
	Officer responsible: Ronan Cregan

<b>7.</b>	<b>Key to abbreviations</b>
	DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sport

<b>8.</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	N/A

## Appendix 1: Belfast Connection Scheme – Update

### Background

The Belfast Connection Voucher Scheme allows small businesses and social enterprises within the Belfast City Council area to apply for grants of up to £3,000, to get high-speed broadband connections into their premises.

The improved connection will allow organisations take advantage of the benefits of doing business online. These benefits include:

- a more reliable service;
- business growth through increased competitiveness in local and international markets;
- better communication with partners, suppliers, customers and staff;
- reduced costs through more efficient working;
- improved data storage and accessibility;
- faster upload and download for large files.

Hopefully the support will not stop with financing improved connectivity. The Development department is putting together an application for ERDF funding that will allow the creation of training and development packages for companies so that they can maximize the benefits that the technology brings.

Over the summer, a market test was conducted across seven areas throughout the city. The market test was very successful and that success allowed us to continue to a full city-wide launch in early December. The official launch will take place on the 14<sup>th</sup> February.

### Status

#### Voucher Scheme Figures

Applications	256
Vouchers	130

#### Suppliers:

The scheme currently has approximately 129 registered suppliers and is made up of national and local organisations. So far, all vouchers have been won by local suppliers:

- Tibus
- Atlas
- Novosco
- Rainbow
- Leaf

### Benefits

Businesses have indicated through their applications that the benefits that a voucher will bring are:

	Year 1	Year 2
<b>Jobs</b>	187	487

Turnover (£)	9,801,361	22,318,610
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## Application Process

