



Subject:	Belfast Business Support & Investment Advice Service – Update and Input from OCO Global/Webb Advisory
Date:	14 June 2017
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	Members will be aware that the Belfast Agenda has at its core a commitment to inclusive growth. The scale of Belfast’s ambition is set out in the draft Belfast Agenda which aims to grow the city’s population by an additional 70,000 people and for the city’s economy to support 50,000 more jobs by 2035. To focus our efforts on growing the Belfast economy, a number of ambitious and challenging targets have been set for 2021: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creating 15,000 new jobs</li><li>• Attracting £1 billion of private sector Foreign Direct Investment</li><li>• Supporting 4,000 small business start-ups</li></ul>
1.2	In an increasingly competitive global environment, Belfast must emphasise its distinct

<p>1.3</p> <p>1.4</p> <p>1.5</p>	<p>competitive advantage if it is to continue to compete and successfully attract FDI, and tourists to the city as well as encouraging more businesses to start and support those existing businesses to grow in the city.</p> <p>Members have emphasised the importance of continuing to attract and support investment and FDI to Belfast as well as committing to a step change in a comprehensive support for small businesses to start and grow. Consequently, at its meeting in November 2016, Committee agreed that professional expertise would be secured to develop a menu of city support &amp; incentives and to scope the establishment of a Belfast Investor Advice/Concierge Service.</p> <p>Combined with the changing global economic context, this provides an opportunity to take a more holistic approach to further consider the establishment of an economic delivery vehicle similar to the Belfast Investment Development Agency (as per the Notice of Motion raised in January 2014) and a number of the practical items raised in the Notice of Motion to support micro and small businesses in the city to help strengthen and progress the Council's city leadership role (as per the Notice of Motion raised in July 2016).</p> <p>The purpose of this report is to enable the appointed contractor (OCO Global/Webb Advisory) to present their findings to date, together with some initial outline options for such a service in Belfast, for the Committee to consider. The Committee's views are sought on the thinking to date to enable the development of more detailed and robust proposals which will be brought back to Committee in September 2017 for further consideration.</p>
<p><b>2.0</b></p>	<p><b>Recommendations</b></p>
<p>2.1</p>	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Note the findings to date</li> <li>- Consider the issues raised and provide comment on the options and priorities which will inform the recommendations and way forward.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.0</b></p>	<p><b>Main report</b></p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The City has already developed a successful track-record in attracting FDI and specialisms are emerging in the fields of Financial Technology, Financial &amp; Legal Services, Creative &amp; Digital Industries, Cyber Security, Green Tech and Life &amp; Health Sciences. The attractiveness of Belfast as a business investment destination is evidenced through accolades such as:</p>

- Number 1 destination for financial technology investments.
- Europe's leading destination for new software development projects.
- Named as the most Business Friendly City of its size for the second consecutive year and Being in Europe's top 10 cities for business friendliness of any size.
- Ranked in the top 20 in the world for FDI Strategy.

Research shows that those who have already invested in the city consistently report its positive aspects including the skilled workforce, the competitive cost base, quality of life, connectivity and the scale of city which makes it accessible.

3.2

To support continued investment and project a positive profile for Belfast, the Council has opened the Innovation Factory, successfully attended MIPIM and is taking forward a market-facing strategy to position Belfast and working with city stakeholders to implement the International Relations Framework. Accelerating investment in the city is central to meet the ambitions in the Belfast Agenda. Equally, the new powers for economic development have strengthened the Council's commitment to support indigenous businesses and local entrepreneurs and Committee have agreed to the development of a comprehensive business support service. In 2016/17, the Council helped to establish 584 new businesses, created 900 new jobs from start-ups and business growth and supported 2,200 people through our business support and networking activity across a range of programmes.

3.3

On reviewing this activity, there are several common elements of support and advice that local business, investors, developers and FDI clients would benefit from in the City, particularly in terms of ensuring co-ordinated promotion, marketing and access to the available support measures, incentives and services. Crucially, there is an opportunity to better connect and enhance the supply chain and partnership opportunities that new foreign owned investment and business will create for local businesses.

3.4

Therefore, at its meeting on the 9th November 2016, Committee agreed to secure professional expertise to:

- Identify and propose a package of potential support measures and incentives that Belfast City Council can offer to business start-ups, existing businesses wishing to grow and foreign owned businesses that might consider Belfast as an investment location.
- Specify a realistic scope of services to be provided through a 'City Support & Investment Advice/Concierge Service' to meet the needs of FDI, developers and indigenous businesses who may choose to start up, grow and invest in Belfast.

3.5	<p>The purpose of this is to augment the existing services and incentives to support, attract, secure and sustain business starts, business growth and investment. This will also be designed to provide an opportunity for better co-ordination of services and assurance that future approaches are additional and complementary to those services and support that is already provided by city partners.</p>
3.6	<p>OCO Global/Webb Advisory were commissioned to take forward this work. To date this has included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research into similar provision in other cities in Europe, GB and Republic of Ireland.</li> <li>- Assessment of the current availability of incentives and support for those wishing to start a business, existing businesses that wish to grow to export and foreign owned businesses who may choose to invest in Belfast</li> <li>- Product and service mapping of the business development and investment journey in the city</li> <li>- Local engagement to identify what local stakeholders and investors require. This includes engagement with the Innovation factory, Federation of Self Employed &amp; Small Business Enterprise NI, inward investors, banks, recruitment agencies, property agents, commercial lawyers, the City's two universities, Inter-Trade Ireland and Belfast Harbour Commissioners.</li> <li>- Engagement with Invest NI and Council officers in key service areas including economic development, international relations physical development, finance, planning, city centre, Smart and Resilient Cities.</li> </ul>
3.7	<p>The findings to date have highlighted that there is an opportunity for the Council to take a greater city leadership and co-ordination role, creating a clear city proposition to accelerate investment and business opportunities in Belfast. The following key issues have been identified as important factors for investors, business and developers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Competitive operating costs such as rental, property, labour costs</li> <li>- Property availability, especially to 'land and expand' opportunities e.g. through the Innovation Factory</li> <li>- Availability of, and ability to attract, talent and local skills levels</li> <li>- Ease and speed of accessing key services such as planning, regulatory and business advice &amp; support services</li> <li>- Infrastructure and connectivity, including digital connectivity and the importance of air routes</li> </ul>

<p>3.8</p> <p>3.9</p> <p>3.10</p>	<p>- Quality of life and the importance of 'place'</p> <p>The consultants will build on these key issues at the Committee meeting, outlining their findings to date and presenting their initial thinking on the options for Belfast. This will provide an opportunity for the Committee to input their views to enable the further development of robust and focused proposals for a clear city proposition of incentives and support and the most effective means of establishing a co-ordinated city service. This will be brought back to Committee for consideration at their September meeting.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Resources are included within departmental budgets for 2017/18. Current delivery is being undertaken by teams from both the City Centre Development and Development Departments. The final report will include consideration of any specific issues, skills requirements, technical support or physical assets required to deliver an effective package of support measures and Belfast Business Investment Advice/Concierge Service.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>Equality screening will be carried out once the options have been further developed. However, there is the potential to produce a positive impact on those sectors of the population who are currently underrepresented in business ownership and start-up.</p>
<p><b>4.0</b></p>	<p><b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b></p>
	<p>Appendix 1: Example Services and Supports that may be provided</p>