



Belfast City Council

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| Report to: | Development Committee |
| Subject: | Economic Development Update |
| Date: | 13 May 2009 |
| Reporting Officer: | Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, ext 3470 |
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Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this report is to advise Members of a number of developments including:

1. West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council – Enterprise Regeneration Plan
2. Invitation to participate in summit on Job Creation and Workforce Development
3. Participation in Welfare to Work Convention and visit to City Strategies projects

Key Issues

1. West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council – Enterprise Regeneration Plan

The West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council (WBGSEC) was established in August 2006 as a direct result of recommendations made in the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Force report.

The aim of the Enterprise Council was to bring greater coherence to the promotion and support of local businesses. It was tasked with a number of issues, namely:

- Developing the local small business economy
- Developing an entrepreneurial and networking culture through the effective implementation of a series of networking initiatives
- Ensuring the implementation of the Task Force recommendations which focus on assisting the existing business base and ensure the successful implementation of a range of activities and measures identified by the two Task Forces
- Reviewing any policy and regulatory issues affecting the success and development of small businesses
- Acting as a forum at which current policies can be reviewed from the perspective of local business
- Considering relevant proposals and lobbying for appropriate change.

In December 2008, the Enterprise Council launched a plan identifying seven key development proposals for the area. In March 2009, they launched "A new approach to enterprise regeneration in west Belfast and greater Shankill". This document was circulated to key stakeholders for comment and consideration.

The document makes a number of key proposals. These include:

1. Creation of a new body to give impetus and focus to the implementation of a comprehensive series of regeneration and enterprise initiatives.
2. Re-location of a Government Department or Agency employing at least 200 people to the west Belfast and greater Shankill area.
3. Development of three 3 or 4 star hotels in the area along with development of Invest NI Forthriver site.
4. Establishment of Business Incentive Zones offering differential benefits such as relaxation of planning; abolishment of rates and stamp duty; 100% capital allowances and enhanced marketing and development subsidies.
5. Establishment of range of support initiatives to stimulate the development of more start-up businesses and to encourage the growth of micro-enterprises.
6. Development of a three year action plan, in conjunction with Invest NI, including a sales proposition for the area.

Some of the key observations that we would make with regard to this piece of work include:

- The document includes a significant level of analysis and detail and this provides a logical framework for the recommendations.
- The implementation of the recommendations will require significant political support from both sides of the community in the two areas if it is to progress.
- In addition to the political support, the Enterprise Council will need to garner support from a lot of organisations in order to progress these proposals. Given the existing range of organisations in the area that are currently engaged to some extent and in some way with the activities in this plan, there may be a need to rationalise some of the support services currently available.
- From the point of view of the statutory services, it is important that the organisations with whom we work are representative of the wider economic regeneration community. If the Enterprise Council is to gain support for this plan, it will be essential to ensure that this support is in place.
- Belfast City Council is supportive of the arguments for a dedicated agency to promote economic development in a specific area and there are examples of how this has worked. However there are other areas in the City that have similar development challenges and we feel that a City-level approach may be more appropriate.
- It will be important to ensure that there is synergy and clarity of purpose with other organisations working in this arena and that they are all pulling together in the same direction - otherwise there is the risk of duplication and ambiguity. This will lead to disenchantment on the part of the community and confusion on the part of the statutory services.
- We consider that there is limited discussion on access to other parts of the City, West Belfast and Shankill are an integral part of the City of Belfast and citizens of these communities can benefit from development opportunities taking place across the City.

Resource Implications

None.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the content of this report and agree that these observations can be submitted as Belfast City Council's comments on the Enterprise Council document.

2. Invitation to participate in summit on Job Creation and Workforce Development

An invitation has been received by the Lord Mayor to attend a New York City Global Partners Summit on 24-26 June 2009 on "Job Creation and Workforce Development". The invitation, which was issued by Mayor Bloomberg, is extended to a group of no more than four people from the City.

The programme will focus on how cities can develop and maintain a dynamic workforce that links to cities' local economic development goals. It will include discussion on how global cities are taking a lead on workforce development issues by implementing innovative policies, building new partnerships and training workers for the jobs that economies need. There will also be a visit to a Workforce Careers Centre that connects businesses with a skilled workforce and provides employment services to the city's adult jobseekers.

This event is part of a wider programme of engagement by New York City Global Partners to expand the city's interaction with other leading cities and has evolved from the city's Sister City programme. Fifty cities are targeted for these events. Previous topics covered have included health and climate change; governing a diverse city, technology and tourism development. Forty global cities took place in last year's event.

In light of the Council's plans to develop a citywide employability and skills strategy, it is considered that this event would provide a useful insight into best practice from elsewhere. Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has been involved in a number of best practice visits to USA and other locations in the past and they have found that these are useful. It may be appropriate to invite representatives from DEL to participate in this event, subject to DEL meeting the necessary costs.

Resource Implications

Participation at this event is free of charge and all hospitality costs at the event are also paid for by the event organisers. Each participant is expected to pay their travel and accommodation costs. It is estimated that this will cost £1500 per participant i.e. £3,000.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Lord Mayor (or nominee) and one officer attend the event and that two representatives from DEL be invited to participate.

3. Participation in Welfare to Work Convention and visit to City Strategies projects

Members are advised that the Welfare to Work Convention is the largest UK annual event for employment, skills and tackling child poverty. This year's event takes place in Liverpool on 16-17 June. The key themes for 2009 include:

1. Responding to rising unemployment
2. Delivering integrated employment and skills
3. Improving delivery for all: partners working together
4. Tackling disadvantage and child poverty

The Convention works through a mix of plenaries, case-studies and policy seminars. There are 80 different sessions and over 150 speakers spread across two days.

Members are reminded at the December 2008 meeting of the Development Committee, agreement was sought to open discussions with DEL and other key skills and employability partners in order to develop an agreed skills and employability strategy for Belfast. Work on this programme is progressing and through the establishment of a Belfast Employment and Skills Board we are currently exploring opportunities that may exist for Belfast to replicate the existing UK template in respect to 'City Strategies'. The first meeting of the group is due to take place on 21 May, 2009.

As part of the strategy development process we wish to invite guest speakers to meet with the Board and to undertake best practice visit(s) to one or more of the UK cities involved in the 'UK City Strategies' process. It is therefore recommended that we invite all organisations participating on the Board to attend the Welfare to Work Convention in Liverpool in June. In doing so this will not only provide Belfast with a chance to join a UK network of cities which are all attempting to address city employability and skills problems specific to their own boundaries, but will create valuable opportunities to network with a wide range of local authorities who have already engaged in the city strategies process.

In addition to attending the Convention it is recommended that we undertake a best practice visit to Liverpool and Manchester to meet and discuss with policy makers and the programme deliverers of City Strategies.

It is suggested we undertake this best practice visit at the same time as the Convention in order to ensure cost savings. It is proposed that delegates would be invited to attend the Welfare to Work Convention on 16 June (all day) and 17 June (am only); and to visit Liverpool on 17 June (pm) and Manchester on 18 June (am).

Although it is recommended the full Board be invited it is unlikely that all individuals will be able and/or willing to do so. It is therefore expected that only a small group (a maximum of 10) will engage in this exercise. It is also suggested that the Chair and/or Deputy Chair of the Development Committee be invited to participate on this visit and to attend future meetings of the Employment and Skills Board.

Resource Implications

It is expected that the costs for travel, accommodation and participation in the conference will cost £800 per delegate.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report
- Approve the request to invite all members of the Belfast Employment and Skills Board to attend the Welfare to Work Convention and/or the Best Practice Visits to Liverpool and Manchester
- Approve the budget of £8,000 to cover the conference, travel and accommodation costs for a maximum of 10 persons
- Approve the attendance of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman at the Convention and/or the Best Practice Visits and future Employment and Skills Board meetings.

Decision Tracking

N/A

Abbreviations

DEL – Department for Employment and Learning
WBGSEC - West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council

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