

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 11th May, 2016

MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hargey (Chairperson);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Alderman Spence);
Aldermen Kingston and McGimpsey; and
Councillors Attwood, Beattie, Craig, Dudgeon,
Graham, Howard, Kyle, Lyons, Magee,
McAteer, O'Hara and Walsh.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;
Mr. D. Durkan, Director of Development; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were received.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 11th and 13th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd May.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Request to address the Committee - TransportNI

The Committee acceded to a request from TransportNI to present its Spring Report to a future meeting of the Committee, to which all Members of the Council would be invited to attend.

Regeneration

Linen Quarter Public Realm Analysis and Vision

(Ms. A. McGlone, Urban Development Officer, attended in connection with this Item)

The Urban Development Officer reminded the Committee that, in November 2015, along with the Planning Committee, it had considered draft Public Realm Analysis and Vision documents on both the Linen and the Western Quarters. It was agreed that a public consultation exercise would be undertaken for the Linen Quarter and that more detailed economic intervention should be developed for the Western Quarter prior to public consultation being undertaken for that area.

She advised the Members that the Linen Quarter was part of the Transport Hub and South Centre, which lay immediately behind the City Hall and was primarily made up of offices. She reminded the Committee that this area had been identified as a Special Action Area within the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) and was in need of a detailed and integrated planning approach.

She provided the Members with an update on the various responses which had been received from the public consultation on the Linen Quarter, which had now concluded. She pointed out that a number of responses had referenced the need to recognise regeneration opportunities which the proposed changes could bring for adjoining inner city communities, such as Donegall Pass, the Markets and Sandy Row, highlighting not only physical changes, but also economic and social opportunities for those areas.

She also advised the Committee that comments on the proposed changes to remove vehicular traffic from Amelia Street and Blackstaff Square, other than for servicing, had been taken into consideration for the final document. The Members were advised that Transport NI had stated, in relation to that proposal, that traffic flows might have to be remodelled to ensure that the overall efficiency of the city's transportation network was not unduly compromised.

It was also highlighted to the Committee that a number of disability action groups which represented the blind had raised concerns regarding the proposed use of shared surfaces within the scheme. The Members were advised that, after engagement with those groups, a solution had since been agreed, whereby the scheme would include kerbs which defined the edge of the carriageway from the pavement.

During discussion, a number of Members requested information on how those inner city neighbourhoods, which were connected to the Linen Quarter, would be affected by the proposed changes and it was agreed that a report on this would be submitted to a future meeting.

After discussion, the Committee:

- noted the comments which had been received in response to the consultation exercise and the proposed amendments to the final draft of the Vision document summarised in section 3 of the report;
- noted that the finalised draft version of the Linen Quarter Public Realm Analysis and Vision would be referred to the Planning Committee for its approval on 17th May; and
- agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting on how the Council could influence and deliver work(s) in relation to the adjoining inner city neighbourhoods.

MIPIM Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To evaluate the outcome of Belfast’s delegation to the MIPIM international property exhibition (held in Cannes between 14-17 March); along with recommendations for next steps.**

2.0 Outcomes and Recommendations

- 2.1 Three key outcomes were achieved from our attendance at MIPIM:**

- the strong Belfast PLC proposition has put the city back on the investment map;
- the coherence of the Belfast partnership has been strengthened and;
- at least 15 follow up visits to the city by significant investors are now in the pipeline.

- 2.2 Council has stated its ambition to attract £1 billion of investment into the city. To sustain momentum the Committee is asked to consider the following recommendations:**

- Agree in principle that Council should plan an appropriate presence at MIPIM for the next three years, with a further report brought to Committee in due course.
- Approve expenditure of £60,000 from the City Centre budget in line with 2015/16 so Council can re-book the same site for MIPIM 2017 and commence related preparations.
- Authorise officers to commence a fund raising initiative with the private sector, with the aim of meeting or exceeding match funding for MIPIM 2017.

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 A total of 53 people attended MIPIM as part of the Belfast delegation with 23 sponsors making financial contributions that more than tripled the initial £60k budget. Our objective was to showcase Belfast from three core perspectives of ‘Talent; Tax and Technology’; including clear reference to the opportunities presented by the changes to Corporation Tax coming to NI in 2018.**

- 3.2 Feedback from external investors and delegates was extremely positive. 91% of delegates ‘strongly agreed’ that MIPIM helped them to develop new relationships, and build on existing ones; whilst 100% of delegates agreed or strongly agreed that the media and PR around MIPIM provided a robust profile for the City. Feedback on the events programme and quality of the hospitality/networking opportunities was also strong.**
- 3.3 From the outset Belfast was determined to have an energised presence, and our stand was brought to life through 22 separate events. This included presentations from Council and private sector sponsors to provide an in depth analysis and understanding of the ‘Belfast Offer’. In addition delegates held 121 separate meetings with a range of external contacts.**
- 3.4 The events included five investment sessions. These lunches/dinners were sponsored by our partners and themed around opportunities in creative & digital, education and property sectors. Advance invites were sent to specific investment organisations, and positive interest was generated, in particular Belfast’s strengths in film, media and production.**
- 3.5 One of the Council’s specific objectives at MIPIM 2016 was to introduce the City Centre Strategy to financial institutions who invest in UK regional cities, but have not invested in Belfast to date. This was extremely successful: 15 expressions of interest were made and visits from three organisations have now taken place with a further three scheduled. The visits will focus on investment opportunities around Grade A offices, retail and residential; as well as larger regeneration schemes such as the Cultural Hub.**
- 3.6 Another key objective of MIPIM was to share experience of regeneration and investment with other cities, particularly in the UK but also further afield. BCC officers had significant contact with key officers from other cities and regions, which provided a rich exchange of information. The Chief Executive also spoke at a showcase ‘waterfront cities’ event alongside senior colleagues from Rotterdam, Liverpool, and Oslo.**
- 3.7 Wider dissemination of the Belfast message was extremely effective. Activity was supported by a specially developed Belfast App, which highlighted key events and contact information. This was supplemented by 29 press articles, including in-depth coverage from specialist publications such as the Financial Times, Estates Gazette, and Property Week. There were five broadcast interviews profiling Belfast’s**

attendance at the event, and a successful twitter campaign that attracted 400 followers and made 275k impressions.

3.8 Delegates also made several suggestions to enhance our future presence:

- Feedback on the location, hospitality, and networking opportunities afforded by the Belfast stand was very positive, but a number of delegates felt that the stand itself should be bigger. Whilst our main focus is on the quality of events rather than the size of the stand, it was accepted that the area did become quite congested at times.
- One of the success factors at MIPIM was the significant effort put into pre-event preparations; including development of new marketing material and targeted dialogue with potential investors. However, some delegates suggested that this work should commence at an earlier point. Subject to Committee approval, officers would be keen to commence preparations for MIPIM 2017 with immediate effect.

3.9 Finally officers from across the Council will be working to generate further investment interest, and to translate that interest into viable projects. This includes:

- Developing a narrative for scheduled visits, and working with public and private sector partners to help host them.
- Preparing a portfolio of investment opportunities in the city.
- Integrating city centre investment activity with our existing international marketing strategy.
- Continuing to develop shared investment messaging for the city, alongside strategic partners in both the public and private sector.

Financel & Resource Implications

Finance: Members are asked to note that Belfast has an option to secure the same location for its stand in 2017, as long as firm booking is made by 27 May 2016. This is an outdoor location on the Croisette, and the majority of delegates felt it helped Belfast stand out from the crowd. It is therefore recommended that £60,000 is allocated from the city centre budget to secure this, and to commence work for MIPIM 2017, on the understanding that private sector contributions will match or exceed this contribution.

Resources: The city centre team and corporate communications will progress the agenda for MIPIM 2017. However, members are asked to note that significant external resource is also required: including design and construction of the stand; PR & marketing; and the cost of preparatory events. Subject to approval from Members, these will be funded through the public-private budget outlined above.”

During discussion, a number of Members welcomed the report and the positive feedback which had been received from external investors and delegates regarding Belfast’s attendance at the MIPIM property investment conference, 2016.

A Member referenced a recommendation which had been published in 2008 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which stated that, post local government reform, Belfast should have its own investment strategy and governance arrangements and stressed that an integrated approach for the city, including private sector support, was integral.

After discussion, the Committee:

1. agreed in principle that the Council should plan an appropriate presence at MIPIM for the next three years, with a further report submitted to the Committee in due course;
2. approved expenditure of £60,000 from the City Centre budget in line with 2015/16 so that the Council could re-book the same site for MIPIM 2017 and commence related preparations;
3. authorised officers to commence a fund raising initiative with the private sector, with the aim of meeting or exceeding match funding for MIPIM 2017; and
4. agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting on the arrangements for developing a strategy and governance arrangements for future investment in the city.

Business & Economy

Support for Independent Retailers and Business Associations

(Mrs. L. Toland, Head of Economic Initiatives, attended in connection with this Item)

The Head of Economic Initiatives reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 12th August 2015, it had agreed funding to provide resources for business associations operating outside of the city centre.

She explained to the Committee that, while the evaluation of the activity had not yet been completed, a number of points had been noted in relation to the support given so far, namely that:

- it was difficult for associations to get feedback on the economic impact from campaigns which had been aimed at increasing footfall from local traders;
- marketing was often fragmented and ad hoc;
- the capacity and longevity of roles within each association had varied greatly; and
- a longer-term strategic approach was required, which was beyond the scope of the annual budget currently allocated.

The Committee was therefore asked, based on feedback from the associations, to consider the following approach for the current financial year:

- that the Council would continue to work with the seven business associations currently availing of the Council's support, that is, Antrim Road, Ballyhackamore, Finaghy, Greater Shankill, Hollywood Arches, Strandtown and West Belfast Associations;
- that associations would draw down their budgets on the basis of an agreed activity plan and would have marketing support provided through a professional PR company which would be directly appointed and managed by the Council;
- that funding of up to £3,000 per association would be available from the Council, with a further £2,000 available if the group could provide evidence of (£ for £) match funding; and
- that £10,000 would be set aside by the Council for any new business associations, on the same basis as the existing organisations.

The Head of Economic Initiatives also provided the Members with an overview of the support which was available for business start ups, including the Regional Start Initiative (RSI) and the "Healthy High Street" industry-led retail project, which was managed locally by Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) in association with a number of private sector partners.

After discussion, the Committee

- noted the work undertaken to date to support the retail sector outside of the city centre through local business associations;
- agreed the proposed way forward, which was to maintain the current Economic Development funding level for retail support, supporting business associations who continue to be engaged in the development of plans for their local retail area as well as any new or emerging business associations in areas of the city not currently represented, up to a total of £45,000;
- agreed to provide support for an industry-led independent retail support programme for 30 small independent retailers, where the recommended budget for this work strand was £25,000;
- noted the continuation of the Retail Forum which met on a quarterly basis under the Chairmanship of the Chairperson of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee; and

- agreed that Council support for these organisations should be kept under review, as momentum built around local area working.

Operational

Belfast Zoo Proposal - NI Bat Group

The Committee was advised that the Northern Ireland Bat Group was a volunteer organisation which worked closely with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and was licensed to work with bats and carry out voluntary calls by engaging with the public for the conservation of bats.

The Members were advised that the NI Bat Group provided both an educational and advisory service to householders, schools and conservation organisations and had successfully been working alongside the Belfast Zoo for the past fifteen years. The Committee was advised that the partnership between the NI Bat Group and the Belfast Zoo had empowered local people to protect and save both local habitats and wildlife. The Members were also advised that, whilst other organisations were charged a fee for similar services, Belfast Zoo was not and that this was due to their ongoing positive partnership.

During discussion, a Member welcomed the positive work which was ongoing with the Northern Ireland Bat Group in Belfast Zoo and stated that they would like to see more conservation work being undertaken.

The Committee agreed that the Council would continue its partnership with the Northern Ireland Bat Group to include activities as outlined within the report and the use of facilities as appropriate.

Belfast City Council Response to Small Business Rate Relief

(Mr. M. McBride, Head of Finance and Performance, attended in connection with this Item)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The Department of Finance and Personnel has issued a discussion paper on potential alternatives to the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme including how best to use the existing Executive budget provision for the scheme from 2017/18 onwards.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- agree the draft response to the seven questions included in the discussion paper issued by DFP

3.0 Main report

- 3.1** The Small Business rate Relief (SBRR) scheme was introduced on 1 April 2010 for a period of five years to help small businesses cope with the impact of the recession. At this time Northern Ireland had suffered three consecutive years of recession and similar SBRR schemes had already been introduced in England, Scotland and Wales. The scheme has cost £61.5m to date.
- 3.2** In order to consider the future of the scheme the Department of Finance and Personnel in 2014 commissioned the Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) to undertake an evaluation of the Northern Ireland scheme. The evaluation showed that the main beneficiaries of SBRR were 'retailers, wholesalers and offices'. The most recent data demonstrated that the largest percentage of these were shops (42%).
- 3.3** The evaluation concluded that the scheme offered limited quantifiable economic benefits and provided a low level of value for money. Whilst it helped ratepayers with cash flow, survival and keeping the cost of overheads down, there was little evidence that the scheme incentivised any significant additional economic activity.
- 3.4** On the 21st March 2016 the Department of Finance and Personnel issued a discussion paper on alternatives to the SBRR scheme. In referring to the paper the Finance Minister, Mervyn Storey MLA stated he was seeking views on alternatives to small business rate relief, with a particular focus on town centres. He further stated that small business rate relief is a popular scheme but the independent evaluation found it to be poorly targeted. He therefore stated he was canvassing views on other targeted measures, including rating and other initiatives that would provide greater support to small businesses than the current scheme.
- 3.5** The Minister for Social Development, Lord Morrow MLA stated that our towns and cities have faced many challenges over recent years and they are not as competitive as their national counterparts with the evidence base showing lower levels of employment, enterprise, and population. He further stated the aim was to drive economic growth, through better targeted support, which would facilitate and incentivise

investment in urban centres. He acknowledged the impact that technology and consumer habits were having on our town centres and that innovative measures were needed to respond to this issue. He highlighted the need to build on current initiatives like Business Improvement Districts.

Issues for Consideration

- 3.6 Small businesses have come to regard the small business rate relief scheme as a 'constant' over the last few years. The impact that any removal of this relief will have on the small business sector will need to be assessed carefully; likewise consideration needs to be given on the impact removal might have on LPS business rates collection.
- 3.7 It should also be noted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget Statement in March 2016 that Small Business Rate Relief Scheme in England would be increased from 50% to 100% and that the rateable value for SBRR would be increased.
- 3.8 Small business relief in Northern Ireland could be restructured, to make it more targeted in the impact on small businesses. Such a restructure could examine whether it could or should take account of the proportion of rates against turnover, or take into consideration other broad financial parameters. However, in practice, administration of such a scheme could be challenging and more expensive, given the challenges in accessing company accounts and the timeliness of this information in many cases – particularly from very small businesses.
- 3.9 The introduction of rates holidays for small businesses meeting specific (suitably challenging) growth criteria could be considered as a way of linking relief to economic growth. Small and new businesses start ups could be targeted through financial assistance in the initial period of establishing their standing in the market place, for example during the first two years. A business start up relief would encourage regeneration. In the context of the particularly low levels of start up in Belfast, this could be an additional incentive, offered as part of a wider package of support, which could be coordinated through the Council.
- 3.10 Consideration could also be given to using the relief as an incentive scheme for small businesses to create employment opportunities such as modern apprenticeships.

3.11 In framing the consultation the Department has posed a series of questions against a series of options. Those options and questions and a draft Council response have been included. The draft NILGA response has also been included for information.

3.12 Financial and Resources Implications

The SBRR Scheme is funded by the NI Executive

3.13 Equality and Good Relations Implications

There are no specific equality or good relations implications.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Belfast City Council Response to DoE Consultation, Dangerous and Dilapidated Buildings

(Mr. S. Hewitt, Building Control Manager, attended in connection with this Item)

The Building Control Manager reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 13th April, it had noted that officers would draft a response to the Department of the Environment’s consultation on Dilapidated and Dangerous Buildings and Neglected Sites. He also reminded the Members that this review of legislation had, in large part, been due to concerted lobbying by the Council’s Building Control Service over many years, where the Service had identified numerous deficiencies within the current legislation in allowing the Council to take effective action on dilapidated or dangerous buildings or neglected sites.

He provided the Committee with an overview of the contents of the draft response, which had been drawn up in conjunction with officers from Environmental Health, Legal Services, Economic Development and the Planning Service. He highlighted the main proposals within the consultation paper which included:

- support for a new legislative and policy regime with the rationalisation and modernisation of current legislation;
- greater powers for the Council to recover costs expended in dealing with these issues;
- simplified systems for issuing notices on persons with an interest in property or land;
- the ability to deal with wider issues of dangerous and neglected sites and also to compel property owners to take action to prevent such dilapidation occurring in the first place the need for statutory guidance to be developed to underpin any new legislation; and
- the need for statutory guidance to be developed to underpin any new legislation.

During discussion, the Committee commended those officers within the Building Control Section who had persisted in bringing the issues to the fore.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the draft response, which had been considered by the People and Communities Committee at its meeting on 10th May 2016.

**Exploratory Drilling in Woodburn Forest –
Response from NI Water**

The Committee considered a response which had been received from the Chief Executive of NI Water, Sara Venning, in relation to the Committee's concerns regarding the exploratory oil drilling at Woodburn Forest. The Chief Executive outlined that the correspondence stated that NI water was wholly satisfied with assurances that there was no risk to the public water supply by the exploratory drilling project. She advised the Members that Ms. Venning had also highlighted that all work was subject to the approval and agreement of the relevant authorities, including the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), DETI and the Forest Service.

During discussion, a number of Members expressed concern regarding the current situation at Woodburn.

After discussion, the Committee

1. noted the correspondence from NI Water;
2. agreed that the Chief Executive would engage on this issue with the Chief Executives of the other relevant Councils, as well as the relevant departments and agencies and would provide feedback to the Committee; and
3. agreed that a special meeting be held on the issue, to which Northern Ireland Water, representatives from those lobbying against the exploratory drilling and any other relevant persons which the Chief Executive felt appropriate, would be invited to attend.

**Request to Attend Event - Tourism NI Awards:
Twilight Market**

The Director of Development reminded the Committee that the first Twilight Market, which was held in St. George's Market on 11th November, 2015, had been a huge success for the local food and craft producers taking part, attracting around 17,000 people and had generated an estimated £600,000 for the local economy. He also reminded the Committee that it had approved a Belfast Year of Food and Drink 2016 Action Plan at its meeting in February, 2016, and that this plan included two more Twilight Markets, each over a two day period, with one taking place in May and the other in November.

He advised the Members that the Twilight Market at St. George's had been shortlisted in the final three for the Best Tourism Innovation Award at the 2016 Tourism Northern Ireland Awards. The Members were advised that the awards ceremony would take place in Derry/Londonderry on 26th May, 2016.

The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, or their nominees, plus two officers would attend the event to represent the Council, at a cost of £65 plus VAT per person, and that it would be met within Departmental budgets.

Tourism, Events and International Relations

Tourism Delivery Plan - Year 2

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on progress against the 2015-16 tourism delivery plan and to seek Members' approval for the actions contained within the 2016-17 draft tourism delivery plan.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the detail of the 2015-16 delivery plan as outlined**
- Consider the draft 2016-17 draft tourism delivery plan and endorse delivery of the actions as outlined**
- Approve the delivery plan and associated budgets as identified**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

The Integrated Tourism Strategy was approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in May 2015.

3.2 The strategy was developed in tandem with the City Centre Regeneration Strategy and Investment Plan and the proposals are aligned to support the future development, economic growth and profile of the city.

3.3 During year 1 of the Integrated Tourism Strategy there was delivery across a number of work streams as outlined on modern.gov. The partnership continues to develop between

the key public agencies involved in tourism in the City (Belfast City Council, Visit Belfast, Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland) and, where possible, greater alignment of resources has occurred in order to deliver on the ambition of doubling the value of tourism.

- 3.4 The development of partnerships with the public and private sectors will be fundamentally important for Belfast City and will be a key pillar in delivering the targeted doubling of the value of tourism by 2020. Resources will need to be fully aligned behind the Belfast Integrated Tourism Strategy and to this end we will develop an MOU between the key agencies to ensure that this is achieved.
- 3.5 Belfast City Council will provide a leadership role in this respect and will facilitate partnerships between the public sector bodies in particular involved with tourism in the City. We will fully engage in the development of the new tourism strategy for Northern Ireland currently being led by the Department for the Economy ensuring that Belfast is adequately represented within this. This will be important in ensuring that the tourism priorities for Belfast are fully considered in the next round of the Programme for Government, to include the new Cultural Hub.
- 3.6 Visit Belfast will facilitate active engagement with the private sector ensuring they have an influence on tourism activity and policy going forward. A number of industry events have taken place in recent times with more scheduled throughout the year. The private sector will have a key role to play in helping shape and deliver future tourism growth.
- 3.7 Tourism Northern Ireland will continue to be key partners in the City and will spend £1m promoting Northern Ireland in the Republic of Ireland during 2016-17. Tourism Northern Ireland working alongside Food NI will roll out Year of Food activity during 2016 and will deliver an events programme and series of other funding opportunities. Belfast City Council will work closely with Tourism NI to ensure Belfast secures maximum return from this activity.
- 3.8 Tourism Ireland will provide the lead on the International stage with offices in 23 locations across the world and a significant spend on promoting Ireland and the Northern Ireland message within this. Belfast City Council officials have worked closely with Tourism Ireland during 2015-16 to ensure that the new place positioning proposition being developed for the City will be a key message in all Tourism Ireland activity. This will provide significant and consistent

International messaging for Belfast City during 2016-17.
We will seek to ensure this continues in the future.

3.9 The action plan for the coming year includes a range of priority projects such as:

- Supporting Business Tourism growth, focusing on the Belfast Waterfront
- Development & refinement of a tourism brand proposition, as part of a wider city positioning piece, to be adopted by key tourism stakeholders in the City.
- Development of a new tourism research framework and agreement by all parties on the baseline and methodology
- Delivery of the Year of Food Belfast action plan
- Identification of key skills development challenges on the basis of research soon to be presented by the Department for the Economy and collaboration with partners to address these issues, in the context of the Councils Employability and Skills support initiatives
- Continued focus on supporting additional hotel capacity in the city
- Development of new tourism product that is authentic to Belfast in order to continually refresh the offer and maximise tourist spend.

3.10 Financial & Resource Implications

Activities identified will be resourced from the agreed Departmental budget allocations for the current financial year. Individual project allocations are outlined on modern.gov

3.11 Equality or Good Relations Implications

The Tourism Strategy was screened out and any major projects will be taken forward in consultation with the Council's equality and diversity officer."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

RESTRICTED ITEMS

The information contained in the following two reports is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

International Events

(Mr. G. Copeland, City Events Manager, attended in connection with this Item)

The Director of Development provided the Committee with a proposed list of high profile events which were planned to take place in Belfast in 2017.

In response to a Member's question, the City Events Manager clarified that, in order to attract high profile events to Belfast, his section was obliged to make commitments years in advance. However, he clarified to the Committee that break clauses were included in the contracts in order that the Members would make the final decisions on which events the Council would fund.

After discussion, the Committee approved financial support for a number of key international events planned for the city in 2017, namely:

1. the World Ice Hockey Series, 23rd to 29th April 2017, at a cost of £50,000 to the Council;
2. the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Women's Under 19 European Championships, 8th to 20th August, at a cost of £50,000 to the Council; and
3. the International Rugby Board's (IRB) Women's Rugby World Cup (WRWC), 9th to 26th August, at a cost of £100,000 to Council.

The Committee further noted that:

1. the total cost of staging all three events would be £2.7million, provided by a range of funders, while the economic impact of all three events would be in the region of £6.2million for the city; and
2. funding for the above-named events would come from a realignment of the Council's annual events programme which meant that there would be no additional burden on budgets (as it was possible to realign the £95,000 which had been allocated for the BBC NI Proms event in previous years, now due to take place outside of Belfast; reduce the Autumn Fair budget by £15,000; reduce the Spring into Easter Festival by £20,000 and use an underspend within the Tall Ships, 2015, reserve of approximately £70,000).

Belfast Titanic Maritime Festival

The Director of Development explained to the Members that, over the last decade, the Council had developed the Belfast Maritime Festival and, on average, it had attracted 60,000 attendees and ships from right across Europe. He pointed out to the Committee that, in 2014, it was estimated that the project had created £956,000 of additional economic activity for the city.

He advised the Committee that approval was being sought for the Council to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Belfast, Liverpool and Dublin who also hosted maritime festivals in and around May. He highlighted that the aim of the MoU was to reduce costs of visiting vessels and that it would be anticipated that the collective efforts of each of the three authorities could encourage vessels to visit three ports in the Irish Sea rather than just one. The Committee was advised that the Memorandum would be at zero cost to the Council

During discussion, during which a number of Members paid tribute to the City's successful maritime festival, the Committee agreed that the Council would enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with Liverpool and Dublin in relation to each city's annual maritime festivals.

Visit to Entrepreneurial Spark (Espark)

The Director of Development asked that the Committee considered undertaking a site visit to the Espark Hub in Belfast to see the work which was taking place there.

The Committee agreed to undertake a site visit, before the summer recess, to Entrepreneurial Spark (Espark) Belfast, Lombard Street.

Chairperson