



Subject:	Update on Dublin - Belfast Economic Corridor and Action Plan
Date:	11 January 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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Restricted Reports	
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"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a progress update on the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) and the draft action plan along with resourcing requirements for 2023.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the progress to date to develop the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve Belfast City Council's contribution of £21,000 to Newry Mourne and Down District Council to enable delivery of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor Action plan in 2023.
3.0	Main report
3.1	At its meeting on 10 August 2022, members received an update on progress to support the development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor including finalisation of the strategy and action plan. Since that meeting, the work has continued, and the strategy has now been completed and agreed by all DBEC partners. It aims to articulate a vision for the partnership to enable sustainable economic growth across the region and to provide an evidence base for action, identifying areas of focus for the partnership to address future opportunities and seeking to address any gaps in existing provision.
3.2	Members of the DBEC political advisory group met in Dundalk on 14 October 2022 to discuss the emerging findings and to consider the strategy and emerging action plan. The strategy has a vision of becoming a leading economic corridor in Europe, achieving sustainable growth through collaborative R&D, a highly skilled workforce and enabling infrastructure. This includes an ambition to be to be world-renowned as a major international centre in growth sectors like Professional Services, Advanced Manufacturing, ICT, Life Sciences and Advanced Agriculture.
3.3	<p>The strategy articulates a number of strategic objectives for the partnership, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase skills and training to meet the labour requirements of the region, building on and expanding the existing workforce • Advocate for cross-border infrastructure to strengthen connectivity and access to markets and labour • Enhance cross-border collaboration in R&D and Innovation, targeting investment in high growth sectors and the green economy • Promote sustainable and climate conscious growth along the corridor, aligned with councils' development plans and wider policy objectives • Align with and support economic development partners to increase trade and investment along corridor. • Market the region and elevate the DBEC brand so that the region becomes globally renowned as an attractive place to live and do business.

3.4	<p>The next steps for this work are to develop a detailed action plan in order to focus resources and bring forward priority interventions. The partnership recognises that this will require dedicated resources and have agreed in principle to the recruitment of two staff resources (as previously advised). The recruitment process for these posts is currently under way and staff will be housed within Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.</p>
3.5	<p>As with all elements of the work to date, the eight councils have been co-funding the research activities. The indicative budget for development work and resourcing in 2023 is €260k. In line with previous agreements, this will be resourced by the eight councils based on population share. The Belfast proportion is £35,805.83. At the 6 April 2022 meeting of this Committee, a budget of £15,000 had been agreed as an initial contribution. In order progress the action plan, the Committee is asked to approve a further allocation of £21,000. The budget will be held by Newry Mourne and Down District Council through their role as Chair and Secretariat of the DBEC partnership. Belfast City Council's contribution will be allocated from existing budgets.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Shared Island Fund update</u></p> <p>As noted above, strategic objectives for the DBEC work include enhancing cross-border collaboration in R&D and Innovation, targeting investment in high growth sectors as well as infrastructure that strengthens connectivity and access to markets and labour. To progress this work, the partnership applied for funding through the Irish Government's Shared Island Initiative. They were successful in attracting funding of €150,000 in September 2022 to carry out a feasibility assessment to develop a network of regional innovation hubs within the corridor region. These locations would support current or emerging business clusters in particular locations, to the benefit of the entire region. The project will look at pairing up locations based on sectoral strengths and clusters, such as Fintech in Dublin and Belfast. The proposal also incorporates an ambition identified by the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission to support growth sectors such as Fintech and capitalise on linkages with cities such as Dublin.</p>
3.7	<p>A procurement exercise is underway to secure external expertise to carry out this work, aiming to commence in January 2023. This is being led by Fingal County Council and Belfast City Council officers will participate in a project steering group.</p>
3.8	<p>In addition, Dublin and Belfast City Council were awarded €250,000 to carry out feasibility research on capital projects to support the circular economy. There has been extensive work</p>

	<p>with colleagues from both councils involved in preparing the terms of reference for a procurement exercise, with Dublin City Council as lead partner. This is expected to be finalised in January and Belfast City Council will work closely with Dublin officials at all stages.</p>
3.9	<p>Opportunities for funding from the Shared Island Fund as well as other interventions such as Peace Plus are being actively explored in order to bring forward some of the interventions identified through the DBEC strategy and emerging action plan.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The activities outlined within this report will be resourced from the 2022/23 Enterprise and Business Growth budget.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Given the nature of this initiative as a multi-party, cross-border partnership, equality and good relation impacts will be assessed throughout delivery within the overall governance framework.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	N/A