



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources
Subject:	City Centre Beat Initiative
Date:	5 th March 2010
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Relevant Background Information

It is recognised that the image of the city centre is of vital importance in continuing to attract investors, shoppers and tourists alike. This means that the streets making up the city centre need to be clean, attractive and as free from antisocial behaviour, crime and illegal street trading as is possible.

The Committee will be aware that a number of years ago Belfast city centre experienced prolific illegal street trading which absorbed considerable PSNI and BCC resources to support ongoing joint enforcement operations. After a targeted approach to the problem in the area, illegal traders were largely removed from the streets. However there was a concern as to how this standard could be maintained.

In addition to controls on street trading, there were concerns about low level nuisance and antisocial behaviour such as on street drinking, littering, rough sleepers, graffiti, youths causing annoyance, traffic management, etc.

In response to this ongoing problem Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce (BCTC) and Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) entered into discussions with a range of partners and secured funding from its members to provide two dedicated Police Officers for the city centre area. These Officers were provided at a subsidised cost from the PSNI, and were additional to the existing PSNI resource in the city centre, meaning that their work could be directed by partners to deal with the types of issues mentioned above. This arrangement was formalised through a Service Level Agreement with the PSNI which is managed and reviewed through BCCM. In line with this service level agreement the City Centre Beat (CCB) scheme operates concurrently with retail trading hours, i.e. 63 hours per week.

As a result of this approach illegal street trading has continued to be well managed in the city centre and the Council has been able to develop a more strategic approach to licensed street stalls in line with its commitment to the regeneration of the city centre area. The CCB scheme has also undertaken a number of successful operations which have resulted in a strategic approach to the number of beggars and Big Issue sellers on the streets of Belfast City Centre. The officers also deal with a large proportion of the

low level nuisance and antisocial behaviour issues mentioned above and make regular referrals to BCC officers who follow up with the appropriate action.

Since 2005, the Chamber has secured the additional funding needed for the CCB scheme from its members year on year; with the SLA now focusing on anti-social behaviour, environmental management and traffic issues which have changed over time because of the Streets Ahead Project. As part of their undertaking to tackle anti-social behaviour, the CCB scheme has been responsible for managing and alleviating the problem of on street drinking, rough sleeping and begging within the city centre for a number of years.

Key Issues

In 2009, the Chamber has determined that in the current economic climate, and with the increasing focus of the scheme on social issues such as on-street drinking and begging, the contributing members were unable to maintain the existing level of funding for this scheme beyond 31st December 2009. A small amount of additional funding has been secured from PSNI and the Community Safety Partnership to maintain the service at its current level until the end of March 2010. However, the Chamber is of the view that it will be unable to continue its funding commitment to the scheme post March 2010 unless other partners contribute to meet any shortfall of funding.

As noted the CCB scheme is increasingly used to address issues of antisocial behaviour and traffic management and thus it is the Chamber's view that other statutory partners have a role to play in funding this scheme. In particular due to increasing issues with rough sleepers and the disruption caused through regeneration of the city centre the Chamber is keen to engage with partners such as Belfast City Council, DSD and the Health and Social Care Board.

The Department for Social Development, for example, is currently rolling out a £28million investment in new streetscape and furniture under the "Belfast Streets Ahead" project and Belfast City Council is a key partner in this scheme. Belfast City Council is spending £1.5m per annum on cleaning the streets in the central area (incorporating the city centre) to make Belfast as clean and attractive as possible. Moreover, the Council takes a leading role in Belfast Community Safety Partnership and the District Policing Partnership; both of which have identified the city centre as a priority. As such it is the Chamber's view that Belfast City Council, and / or the Community Safety Partnership it leads, should have a role to play in, and would benefit from, the City Centre Beat Scheme being maintained.

The Chamber believes that the cessation of the CCB scheme would result in an immediate increase in anti-social behaviour throughout the city centre through the increase and spread of on street drinking; resultant intoxicated behaviour; rough sleeping and begging.

As noted the PSNI has committed to meeting the financial shortfall for the remainder of 2009-2010 to ensure the present level of service is not diminished. Belfast Community Safety Partnership has also committed funding in the 2009/2010 financial year using slippage monies. The Chamber however has approached Belfast City Council to request that it contributes or helps to secure funding into the scheme to support its continuation beyond March 2010 and also its continued extension into the Castle Street area. Funding from other partners has not yet been secured, but the Chamber would suggest that a commitment from BCC or its Community Safety Partnership would help to lever such contributions.

This issue was raised at the Strategic Policy and Resources meeting of 11th December 2009 and the Committee requested that a report be brought back to it in due course. Members should be aware therefore that Belfast Community Safety Partnership has been working on this issue since it was first brought to its attention and has initial indications that it has secured £15,000, non-recurrent funding, as a contribution from one of its partner agencies to this scheme in 2010/2011.

It is intended that this funding would support the continuation of the scheme in 2010/2011, helping to lever in the additional support needed to deliver a dedicated approach to the city centre area, including Castle Street, during which period BCTC would be able to consider alternative options should there be a similar shortfall in funding at the end of 2010/2011.

Resource Implications

Financial

In 2010/2011, the City Beat Scheme will cost £150,000 to run. In previous years the total cost was made up with a £40,000 subsidy from the PSNI and approximately £80,000 from the BCTC along with other in kind contributions. However the Chamber is proposing to reduce its contribution to £45,000 per annum (see Appendix 1 for current financial statement).

Therefore the shortfall in funding needed for 2010/2011 is £65,000. It is proposed by the BCTC that this shortfall would be met through contributions from other statutory partners.

The Belfast Community Safety Partnership is likely to be able to secure £15,000 non-recurrent funding as a contribution from one of its partner agencies to this scheme in 2010/2011. No allowance for contributing financially to this scheme has been included in the Council's 2010/2011 Revenue Estimates. Any contribution directly from BCC would need to be agreed under section 115 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 or by making a contribution to the Community Safety Partnership. However, the contribution of £15,000 from the Community Safety Partnership may be sufficient to help the Chamber lever in the remaining £50,000 needed from other agencies.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee agrees to:

- Write to the BCTC in support of the continuation of the scheme during 2010/2011; noting that the Belfast Community Safety Partnership, which is led by the Council, is likely to secure a total contribution of £15,000 non-recurrent funding.
- Authorise its officers to participate in any emerging discussions, led by BCTC, with regard to identifying sustainable resources to support this scheme.

Decision Tracking

The Head of Environmental Health will report back to the Committee on progress with securing the full funding package required.

Key to Abbreviations

BCC - Belfast City Council

DCU – District Command Unit

DSD – Department for Social Development

PSNI – Police Service of Northern Ireland

BCTC – Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce
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Documents Attached

City Centre Beat - Current Financial Statement
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City Centre Beat – Current Financial Statement

June 2005 – May 2009				
June 2005 – May 2009 (4 years)	Total Cost	BCTC Financial Commitment	PSNI Financial Commitment	BCCM Commitment in kind
CCB- 63 hours per week	£ 490,000	£330,000	£160,000	-
Project Management of Scheme				£ 160,000

June 2009 - May 2010					
June 2009-May 2010	Total Cost	BCTC Financial Commitment	PSNI Financial Commitment	Deficit £	BCCM Commitment in kind
CCB- 63 hours per week	£ 130,000	£45,000	£40,000	£ 45,000	-
Project Management of Scheme					£40,000

June 2010 - May 2011					
June 2010-May 2011	Total Cost	BCTC Financial Commitment	PSNI Financial Commitment	Deficit £	BCCM Commitment in kind
CCB- 63 hours per week	£ 150,000	£45,000	£40,000	£ 65,000	-
Project Management of Scheme					£40,000