



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Belfast Connection Vouchers Scheme - Update
<b>Date:</b>	24 January 2014
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance & Resources

<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Paul Gribben, Head of Digital Services
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<b>1.</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	This report provides an update on the Super-connected Belfast project following the city-wide launch of the Belfast Voucher scheme – 7 December 2013.
1.2	Belfast was one of ten cities to launch in December. It is anticipated that a further 12 cities will go live in February 2014 – one of which is Derry City Council (DCC).
1.3	Officers from DCC have asked the Belfast Super-connected project team to investigate if our Voucher Scheme, back office system and processes could be scaled up to support the administration of the DCC voucher scheme.
1.4	The DCC Development committee 14-01-2014 has agreed in principle to request that Belfast carry out the administration of the DCC voucher scheme if value for money can be demonstrated.

<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	The DCC project has targeted a voucher uptake of 350 from approximately 2,400 potential SMEs. These figures are significantly lower than the targets set by Belfast, which are 3,250 vouchers from approximately 11,000 businesses.
2.2	It should be noted that there is no requirement for Belfast to conduct demand stimulation activities on behalf of DCC. Nor will the staff of Belfast carry out any onsite visits to applicants.
2.3	The nature of the proposed service will solely be focused on hosting the online application forms, telephone support in the form of inbound and outbound calls, application approvals, and the payment to suppliers.

2.5	Officers from DCC have indicated that they would pay £80,000 for the service provided by Belfast City Council.
2.6	The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has already indicated support for the proposal and are content that Belfast already has the processes and systems capable of delivering a successful project both for Belfast City Council and DCC.
2.7	Members will also recall approval for up to 5 additional staff to support the Belfast Connection Vouchers Scheme. These additional resources will provide the capacity to support both schemes with no detriment to the success of the Belfast programme.
2.8	The Belfast Connection Voucher Scheme project team estimate that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small number of changes to existing processes and procedures will be required,</li> <li>• limited changes to the back office IT system will be required to cater for DCC,</li> <li>• BDUK funds can be recouped through DETI using the same mechanism for both schemes,</li> <li>• Belfast’s role in the DCC scheme will be limited to back office administration and call centre activities minimising any reputational risk to Belfast City Council,</li> <li>• and, additional effort to administer the DCC scheme will not affect the aims and objectives of the Belfast Connection Voucher Scheme.</li> </ul>

<b>3.</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	No additional staff will be required to administer the Derry City Council voucher scheme.
3.2	To meet the costs of scheme administration and overheads BCC will charge DCC <b>£80,000</b> .  This will remain a fixed price and is not dependent on the number of applications processed or vouchers redeemed.
3.3	The Belfast Super-connected project team will draw up a service level agreement indicating the roles and responsibilities of both councils which will form part of a legal agreement between both parties.

<b>4.</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Implications</b>
4.1	N/A

<b>5.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	That committee authorise the Super-connected Belfast team to enter into an agreement with Derry City Council for the administration of their Voucher Scheme.

<b>6.</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
6.1	Officer responsible: Paul Gribben

<b>7.</b>	<b>Key to abbreviations</b>
7.1	DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sport BCC – Belfast City Council DCC – Derry City Council

<b>8.</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
8.1	N/A