



Subject:	Conference Subvention 2015/16
Date:	14 October 2015
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
Contact Officer:	Brian Johnston, Tourism, Culture and Arts Manager

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of the report is to seek Members' approval to allocate £105,000 from the existing Departmental budget to support conference subvention activity. This allocation will be 50% of the overall subvention budget to be matched by Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI).
1.2	The City Growth and Regeneration Committee, at its meeting on 10 June 2015, approved the tourism business plan for the current year and the conference subvention activity was part of that overall approval.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to agree the proposal to allocate £105,000 from current year budgets to support conference subvention for 2015/16 as an interim arrangement, pending the review of conference subvention to be completed by December 2015. This will be 50% of the subvention budget for the year, with the remaining 50% to be provided by TNI. Note that subvention funds have been budgeted for in previous years and are normal practice in this industry.

3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that the Integrated Tourism Strategy for Belfast identifies the importance and potential of business tourism to the city's overall tourism growth. The Council's investment in the Belfast Waterfront is a statement of the commitment to supporting the development of this area of activity. While the city already attracts a number of business conferences and events, research suggests that there is significant potential to develop this market to a greater extent.</p>
3.2	<p>Market development of this nature requires a range of investments, not only in the physical infrastructure but also in a series of wider support packages, including conference subvention support.</p>
3.3	<p>At present, Belfast City Council and Tourism NI provide resources for a conference subvention scheme which is managed and administered by Visit Belfast. The subvention is allocated as a means of attracting an event to the city. The award offered is based on the potential economic return of the conferences and an assessment of what it will take to help make the decision around choosing Belfast as a conference destination.</p>
3.4	<p>A review of the current approach is under way at present. This will look at how the scheme should operate in the period 2016-2020 and will help identify the optimal funding model for delivering this activity. It will take account of the impact of the new Belfast Waterfront but will also look at whether there are opportunities for other partners to contribute to the scheme and how all venues in the city might have an opportunity to benefit from the investment.</p>
3.5	<p>At present, decisions around the allocation of conference subventions are made by a panel which consists of officials from Belfast City Council, Tourism Northern Ireland and Visit Belfast. Since 2011 (the start date of the current scheme), 21 applications have been approved by the panel, totalling £391,000. This funding has helped to secure conferences for Belfast worth £20.1million in economic return. This represents a return on investment of 51:1.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The allocation of £105,000 from existing Departmental budgets for financial year 2015/16.</p>

3.7	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> There are no specific equality or good relations implications.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
4.1	None