



Subject:	Update on Development of International Relations Framework 2016-2020
Date:	12 October 2016
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
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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 update Members on the development of the International Relations Framework for the period 2016-2020.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the content of this report• Agree to hold a workshop to which all members of Council will be invited, to discuss the emerging priorities of the International Relations Framework. This will allow the draft final report to be presented to the November meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee for consideration.

3.0	Main report
3.1	Members will be aware that in 2012, the Development Committee approved the development of a new three year International Relations Framework 2012-2015. The aim of the Framework was to promote Belfast on the international stage as a place to visit, study, invest and do business.
3.2	Since 2012, the Council has engaged in a number of strategic international partnerships, namely with Boston, Nashville and Shenyang, along with increasing collaboration with Dublin and London. These engagements have involved not only the Council but also its partner organisations, thereby ensuring that the relationships are multi-dimensional.
3.3	With new Planning powers already in place and Regeneration powers expected to transfer to Councils in the coming years, and with a significant endorsement of the commitment to “Growing the Belfast Economy” as articulated in the Belfast Agenda, the Council is increasing its ambition around positioning the city to attract international investment from developers, FDI and institutional investment. It is also supportive of work being undertaken by partner organisations to increase the number of international students in the city, grow tourism investment and support more Foreign Direct Investment as well as helping local businesses to become more active in international export markets.
3.4	In recognition of the need to create more focus and ensure added value of the Council investment in this area, a new International Relations Framework 2016-2020 has been under development since August 2016. As part of the commission, the consultancy team has engaged with a range of key internal and external partners to identify the appropriate focus, structure and priorities in moving forward.
3.5	Some of the emerging principles and areas of focus identified to date include:
3.6	<p><u>Clarifying the Role of the Council</u></p> <p>The role of cities in driving economic performance is proven. However, it does not follow that the local authority must be involved in all aspects of economic policy and delivery. The value that Belfast City Council can play in international relations has been consistently articulated by our city partners: it amplifies the work of others and plays a critical leadership role that opens up opportunities and access to influence on a scale that is beyond what our city partners would be able to achieve working unilaterally.</p>

3.7

Positioning the City – importance of the collective message

Belfast has a range of audiences to speak to in international markets, from potential investors to students and tourists. The international market is a competitive environment and we are only one of many cities and locations trying to achieve a similar ambition. Over time, the city has developed a suite of marketing materials and ‘place positioning’ brochures. While the message needs to be targeted to the respective audiences, it is critical that this is underpinned by a shared, compelling narrative that can be carried across social media and other web-based channels as well as traditional media and through events and promotional activities.

3.8

Strengthening our relationships with key partners and locations

Building successful international relations takes time and effort. However we are not starting from a low base: we already have significant partnerships and relationships in place. The challenge is to prioritise those that can potentially provide the most significant return or add most value. These may include:

- **International partnerships:** Belfast’s international focus aligns well with the Northern Ireland Executive and other key city partners. Belfast should be open to new opportunities from wherever they emerge and should assess each opportunity on its merits but maximising our current relationships should take priority
- **City Partnerships:** Our city partners all play a valuable role in Belfast’s growth and development. Complementing that activity and amplifying its impact should be a core principle of this framework
- **Civic Leadership:** Belfast City Council has an important role to play in international relations, enabling and facilitating access to key influencers and networks. The role of the Lord Mayor in outward visits and in hosting delegations that visit the city has been recognised by our city partners as a vitally important contribution that Belfast City Council can make. Our international relations efforts should ensure our elected members play a key civic leadership role
- **Diaspora:** There are tens of thousands of people and friends of Belfast living around the globe. It is important for Belfast to engage this diaspora and identify business and cultural opportunities
- **Best Practice and Influence:** Belfast City Council is a member of a number of international networks such as Eurocities, NI Connections, Friends of NI in China and Belfast/London Forum. Belfast has recently been chosen as one of 100 Rockefeller Resilient Cities. Ensuring value and effectiveness from our membership of these global networks can guide our international relations work.

3.9

Objectively assessing new opportunities

While it is proposed that the focus should be retained on maximising the existing relationships with Nashville, Boston and Shenyang, new opportunities for city partnership working will undoubtedly arise. These opportunities will require measured assessment to determine value to the Council and our stakeholders. Belfast City Council is in the process of establishing an Economic Forum for the City to support the Growing the Economy objective within the Belfast Agenda. This Forum will look at sectoral growth priorities for the City in conjunction with City partners. Using an objective assessment tool, the Council should evaluate each new opportunity against a range of factors before providing recommendations on the new opportunity. Criteria may include:

- Export potential
- Investment potential
- Inward Investment potential
- Student/Education links potential
- Tourism potential
- Cultural links
- Ease of doing business
- Partner Priorities
- Costs or engagement (financial, staff resources)

3.10

Promoting trade and investment opportunities as a key area of focus

Belfast has achieved great success in attracting inward investment jobs in recent years. Our recent attendance at MIPIM is an example of where the Council can work with partners to promote Belfast's investment opportunities to a global audience. Maximising future opportunities to attract investors is paramount to growing our city and this will require a planned, targeted, concerted and collaborative effort alongside a number of our partners. Likewise, we need to consider how we can encourage re-investment after the initial investment decision.

3.11

Competitive cities should have a diverse economic base, comprising both FDI companies and indigenous businesses. Belfast is home to many dynamic, ambitious, small companies. Building the confidence and capabilities of these companies and helping them find international trade links will help our economy thrive. We should support these companies into international markets, and support the international trade efforts that our partners already undertake, focusing on our key partner links and locations.

3.12	<p><u>Attracting Visitors and creating positive perceptions of the city</u></p> <p>Attracting people to our city for study, leisure or business involves several related strands. The first strand requires a marketing strategy that sells the city to students, conference operators and leisure visitors. Access to the city is a crucial strand and we should work with our airports and seaports to support their route development efforts where possible and target marketing efforts in destination markets. Once visitors come to the city, we must ensure that Belfast provides a rich, positive experience through our culture, arts, leisure and events provision so that visitors leave with a positive experience and a desire to return.</p>
3.13	<p><u>Ensuring Transparency and Communicating Success</u></p> <p>We need to be clear about the objectives of both inward and outward visits involving Councillors and Officers and the level of investment needs to be commensurate with the potential return to the city and its partners.</p>
3.14	<p>The need for multi-annual planning for the city-to-city links as well as our wider international promotion activity is clear: there should be proactive work planning along the key themes to identify priority actions, in line with available budgets. These multi-annual plans should form the focus of the future work programme, and they should have clear targets attached. At the end of each year, successes should be communicated.</p>
3.15	<p>Elected Members have been central to the consultation and engagement process to date. The consultancy team has spoken directly with the Chair and Deputy Chair of Committee, and they also presented some of the emerging findings from their work to the September meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.</p>
3.16	<p>In order to share more detail on these principles and potential areas of focus, as well as the overview of the draft framework and the potential resource implications, it is proposed that a workshop is held with Members in October 2016. All members of Council should be invited.</p>
3.17	<p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Committee approval is already in place for the development of a new International Relations Framework, within the existing unit budget. Any new activities identified as part of the framework review will be taken account of in the new financial estimates and brought</p>

3.18	to Committee for approval. <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> The new International Relations Framework will be equality screened.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
4.1	None