



MBO Annual Report 2008-09

Executive summary

This report outlines the Merseyside Brussels Office's main achievements for 2008-09. These are categorised under the five Liverpool City Region Development Programme themes, which provide a strategic framework for the MBO's annual work programme. The Annual Report covers work done with all the MBO's fourteen partner organisations. It also contains more detailed case studies from six MBO partners/networks. Overall, the report aims to give a clear picture of both the breadth and depth of the MBO's work with its partnership.

Introduction

This report outlines the main activities and achievements of the Merseyside Brussels Office (MBO) for the twelve months from April 2008 to March 2009.

The MBO represents Merseyside at the heart of the European Union. It has fourteen partner organisations from the public and voluntary sectors in Merseyside. The MBO has two officers in Brussels, who provide a vital link between these partners and the EU institutions and other European regions. The office helps Merseyside to:

1. Influence policy
2. Access funds
3. Build European partnerships

Brussels is where the major EU institutions are located and where most European regions and sectors are represented, so it is the ideal place for Merseyside to be making its voice heard. Much of the legislation that affects the local level is formed in Brussels. There is also considerable EU funding available from Brussels that local organisations can compete for. The MBO has a good relationship with North West MEPs, the European Commission and the UK government's representation to the EU. It is also active in various European regions networks, which lobby jointly, bid for funding together and share best practice.

The MBO's focus is on areas of joint EU-Merseyside interest. The annual report groups the MBO's activities and achievements under the five Liverpool City Region Development Programme (LCRDP) themes, to demonstrate how the MBO's work in Brussels is linked into the strategic priorities for the city region.

These themes focus on:

- Improving the city region's creativity and competitiveness
- Making the city region an attractive destination;
- Improving the connections within the city region and beyond
- Fostering talent and skills
- Encouraging sustainability

At various points in the report, there are short case studies from individual MBO partners setting out how a particular MBO activity has been useful to them.

The MBO keeps partners informed in a variety of ways including: organising visits to Brussels; setting up meetings and seminars in Merseyside; and sending out regular thematic bulletins. It works with partners bilaterally and through Merseyside-wide networks. There is also an MBO web site (www.merseyside-europe.org), which promotes Merseyside and MBO partners in Brussels and beyond.

The annual report focuses on major actions only. Some regular MBO activities are not included in the report, such as:

- Attendance at and feedback from Brussels conferences and meetings;
- Production of reports and bulletins;
- Regular meetings with partners in Merseyside.

Every two months, the MBO produces one-page reports that outline these regular activities.

LCRDP theme: CREATIVE AND COMPETITIVE CITY REGION

Work programme activity - Following and engaging with EU developments on regional policy (how the EU allocates funds to the regions)

Actions completed:

- Reported on a number of recent developments in relation to regional policy, both through written reports and by attending Merseyside network meetings (such as the European Issues Group). These include:
 - Implications for the regions in the recent EU Economic Recovery Plan,
 - Change in the rules on using EU regional funding to invest in green housing
 - Early intelligence on how the UK will use EU regional funding to support co-operation between regions in the UK and Europe.
- Supported Merseyside involvement in two separate responses to a recent EU consultation on the new concept of “territorial cohesion”. Territorial cohesion looks at how the EU regional funds can be used in new ways to support EU-wide co-operation, connections and growth in a way that takes into account Europe’s geography. One of the responses was produced by a NW-level European group; the other came from the Cities for Cohesion network, which consists of major cities across the EU, and which focuses on the urban dimension of EU regional policy.
- Set up and attended a meeting between Merseyside partners and the European Commission representative dealing with the EU regional funding programme for the NW of England. This was to discuss issues from Merseyside relating to the new programme.
- Hosted a Merseyside Policy Unit visit to Brussels for meetings with a representative sample of offices representing other EU regions. This was to learn about their structures and good practice.
- Negotiated Merseyside involvement in the 2009 European Week of Regions and Cities, an annual event that brings together policy makers from across Europe. Merseyside will take part in seminars organised by two different groupings of regions: the first looking at the link between social inclusion and economic regeneration; the second at the cultural, social and economic impact of the European Capital of Culture initiative and other large cultural events.

- Arranged for two upcoming local events in Merseyside to be branded under the European Week of Regions and Cities and receive free marketing from the European institutions.

Work programme activity - Supporting involvement in EU funding for research and development, competitiveness and innovation and co-operation with other regions

Actions completed:

- Attended various working groups of the ERRIN European research regions network, to gauge the usefulness of the network to Merseyside.
- Reported to Merseyside networks such as the European Issues Group on potential ways forward for Merseyside local partners on accessing the Seventh Framework Programme, which is the major EU fund for research and development

Case study from the MBO Strategic Board members

The MBO has supported its partnership in Merseyside over the last year in understanding the changing EU agenda on regional policy (how the EU allocates funds to the regions) and in feeding into the debate taking place in Brussels. EU regional funding will allocate a total "ringfence" of €468m to Merseyside over the period 2007-13, so understanding changes being introduced in Brussels to how these funds can be used allows Merseyside partners to exploit the full potential of the ringfence to invest in infrastructure, employment and training and regeneration locally. With the current recession, the European institutions have passed new rules allowing a wider range of projects to be supported by the regional funds and bringing forward some of the spend to help to kick start local economies. The MBO has kept Merseyside partners abreast of the detail and timetable of these changes.

The European Commission is also beginning to look at the next round of regional funding allocations for after the current programme ends in 2013. One new concept the Commission is throwing into the debate is "territorial cohesion" and it organised a green paper consultation to get views on what this might mean. Territorial cohesion aims to create a balanced distribution of economic and social resources among the European regions in a way that improves the sustainability and global competitiveness of Europe. Merseyside partners led a response to the consultation on behalf of the whole of the North West region and the MBO played an important role in this process, providing key information and participating in the debate. The MBO also arranged for Merseyside to sign up to a pan-European response to the same consultation by the Cities for Cohesion network, a grouping of major European cities that campaigns for more regional funding for cities. This response argued that urban areas are key to delivering the territorial cohesion goal and suggested a number of detailed changes to European policy in order to allow urban areas to play a fuller role. The Cities for Cohesion response was a good example of how individual cities can have greater weight at European level by working with each other around a common goal. Taken together, the two responses ensured that Merseyside's interests were voiced in the debate.

LCRDP theme: PREMIER DESTINATION

Work programme activity - Promotion of Liverpool Capital of Culture at Brussels level

Actions completed:

- Worked with The Culture Company to deliver Merseyside's involvement in the 2009 European Week of Regions and Cities, an annual event that brings together policy makers from across Europe. Liverpool, together with the other current and upcoming European Capitals of Culture, organised a seminar, debate and reception focusing on different aspects of preparing and running the Capital of Culture year. The Culture Company's presentation focused on the tourism aspects of Capital of Culture and Liverpool city councillor Flo Clucas chaired the seminar and debate. The event was particularly well attended and generated a lot of interest among candidate Capitals of Culture and the European Commission.
- Negotiated Liverpool's involvement the 2009 European Week of Regions and Cities as part of the same grouping of Capitals of Culture. This year the focus will be on the social, cultural and economic impact of Capital of Culture and other large cultural events. The MBO has also arranged for an upcoming local event being held in St Helens to be branded under the European Week of Regions and Cities and receive free marketing from the European institutions; again, the focus of this event will be the impact culture can have on other aspects of life in local communities and regions.

Work programme activity - Exploring Brussels good practice on destination promotion

Actions completed:

- The MBO and The Culture Company delivered Merseyside's involvement in the "Investors' Café" exhibition organised by the EU institutions in Brussels. This was a chance for other European regions to find out about Merseyside as a destination for tourism and business and to learn more about Merseyside and the North West's work on culture.

Work programme activity - Following EU policy developments on culture and tourism

Actions completed:

- Attended the launch meeting of the European Network of Cities for Sustainable Tourism and will be exploring with partners whether formal membership of the network is of interest to Merseyside.

Case study from Neil Peterson, International and Income Generation Manager, Culture Liverpool, Liverpool City Council

The MBO's work with The Culture Company/Culture Liverpool over the last year has been extremely useful in terms of supporting the international side of the Liverpool 08 legacy, promoting at Brussels level the achievements of the year and building our advisory role to upcoming Capitals and candidate cities. The seminar in Brussels in October as part of the European Week of Regions and Cities generated a lot of interest among European cultural actors and was extremely well attended. It was a chance for the existing network of Capitals of Culture to present an outward looking face and have a useful and lively debate with other cities active in the cultural sphere. At the event, Liverpool presented the 2008 programme with a particular emphasis on how we linked the build up to the year with the development of Liverpool and the city region as a strong tourist destination, with culture and events at the heart of the offer. This included the development of the 08 Welcome programme, and how we engaged front line staff and volunteers, and the way key partnerships involving a range of agencies across Merseyside came together to make the year such a resounding success. As well as the formal events, the MBO arranged several bilateral meetings for us with candidate cities. Our involvement in the Investors' Café exhibition that took place at the same time allowed us further to promote our activities and gave us an ad hoc meeting point for discussions with other cities.

The MBO has also been negotiating our involvement in the next European Week of Regions and Cities, which will take place later in 2009. This year the focus will be on what the economic, cultural and social impacts are of Capital of Culture and large cultural events. It will be an opportunity for us to present to an international audience the Impacts 08 study – our pioneering work, conducted jointly with the Liverpool universities, looking into what the full range of benefits of Liverpool 08 were and how these can be evaluated.

At the same time, the MBO has been providing useful regular support on the funding available from the European Commission to support cultural projects, which could potentially help us in continuing our innovative work and co-operation with other cities and locally within Merseyside in the years to come.

LCRDP theme: WELL-CONNECTED CITY REGION

Work programme activity - Following and engaging with EU policy on urban transport

Actions completed:

- Produced a response from PTEG (the UK Passenger Transport Executive Group, which brings together all the UK passenger transport executives) to feed into the European Parliament for its proposed changes to the EU Eurovignette Directive. The directive sets out rules for how countries can set tolls for HGVs on long-distance journeys.
- Organised a planning meeting of the network of UK regional Brussels offices working on transport issues. This was to set out a schedule of meetings over the coming year between the UK Brussels offices and the European institutions on various transport issues.
- Supported a PTEG position on current EU proposals on the green procurement of vehicles and distributed the position to key decision-makers.
- Gave a number of presentations to the PTEG European group, which brings together European specialists from all the UK passenger transport executives.
- Produced an updated guide to all EU transport legislation currently on the table or waiting to be translated into UK law.
- On behalf of Merseytravel, the MBO hosted meetings of two pan-European transport networks, the European Forum on Intermodal Passenger Travel and the European Platform for Mobility Management.

Work programme activity - Supporting involvement in EU funding for transport

Actions completed:

- Supported a bid by Halton Borough Council for a biofuels project under submitted to the Commission in June.
- Produced an updated guide to all EU transport funding, complete with upcoming call dates.

Case study from Neil Scales, Chief Executive and Director General of Merseytravel, Chair of the Public Transport Executive Committee (PTEG) and Chair of the MBO Board

Over the past year, the MBO has played a key role in helping Merseyside and wider UK urban public passenger transport partners in following and influencing the legislation coming out of the EU on transport. A number of key transport proposals have been going through the EU institutions and the MBO has supported and drawn up a number of lobbying responses and fed them into key decision makers, in order to ensure our voice is heard in this process. These concerned questions such as: how the EU should invest in the European transport network in the years to come; what the rules should be for road infrastructure managers to charge certain hauliers for long-distance journeys, and the best mechanism for ensuring that public authorities and transport operators commission and buy cleaner vehicles. Many of these responses have been drawn up with the UK Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEG), which I chair and which represents the interests of all the UK passenger transport executives. PTEG is a relatively new partner for the office and is building its profile on the Brussels scene. Early in 2008 the MBO helped to arrange a Brussels visit for PTEG to meet up with the different EU institutions and have discussions with them around specific transport proposals. The PTEG European lobbying activity over the last year has helped to build on the profile established by PTEG during their visit.

In addition to the PTEG work, the MBO has, in the last year, helped Merseytravel to host a number of European transport network meetings in Brussels. The MBO has also started work on organising a promotional reception at the European parliament for one of these networks (the European Platform on Mobility Management, of which I am the president). This will help to ensure that this key European network for promoting sustainable transport has a high profile in Brussels and can continue to grow.

LCRDP theme: TALENTED AND ABLE CITY REGION

Work programme activity: supporting involvement in EU funding for social inclusion, education, and employment

Actions completed:

- Promoted relevant EU funding opportunities in the field through the MBO Social Inclusion Forum and discussions with individual partners such as Merseyside Network for Europe.
- Explored with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service resubmission of a funding bid for an innovative project around integration of migrants. This would be under the part of the European Refugee Fund that is administered by the UK Border Agency and the MBO has had discussions and a meeting with the agency in relation to this bid.

Work programme activity: following and engaging with EU policy making on social inclusion, education and employment

Actions completed:

- Relunched its Social Inclusion Forum, which brings together Merseyside actors from the public and voluntary sectors to discuss EU social policy developments, and held four quarterly meetings of the forum during the year.
- Submitted a response, through the MBO Social Inclusion Forum to a recent European Commission consultative green paper on the future direction of EU policy and funding on education and migration.

Work programme activity - Continued participation in the European Network of Social Authorities (ENSA) social policy network and the European Regional and Local Authorities for the Integration of Migrants (ERLAI) asylum and immigration network

Actions completed:

- Produced several editions of the ERLAI network newsletter, which included articles on the MBO Social Inclusion Forum's response to the European Commission's Education and Migration Green Paper and a recent study by the North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership on the health needs of migrants in the region. The network has been supported by EU migration funding for the past couple of years (under the ERLAIM project). This funding has now come to an end, and the MBO is supporting ERLAI in its re-launch as a self-supporting network.
- Supported Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) involvement at the recent final conference of the EU-funded ERLAIM immigrant integration project and arranged for a subsidised place for an MFRS delegate. The MBO also supported some of the organisation of the conference.
- Negotiated Merseyside's involvement the 2009 European Week of Regions and Cities as part of a grouping of European regions looking at the link between social inclusion and economic regeneration. The group will organise a seminar in Brussels on this issue, at which Merseyside good practice will be presented. The MBO has also arranged for an upcoming local event being held in Liverpool by Merseyside Network for Europe to be branded under the European Week of Regions and Cities and receive free marketing from the European institutions; the focus of this event will be how the local voluntary sector is promoting social inclusion through social enterprise, community development, and green housing.

Case study from the MBO Social Inclusion Forum members

The relaunch of the MBO "Social Inclusion, Lifelong Learning and Entrepreneurship" Forum has been an invaluable opportunity for discussion of EU and local developments in these fields between a range of local actors across the local authorities, other public-sector bodies and the voluntary sector.

One of the major outputs of the group in the last year was our response to the Education and Migration Green Paper consultation released by the European Commission. This asked for views on what the challenges and opportunities are around education of migrant pupils and how the EU can help European countries, regions and localities to improve education to migrant pupils. Some of the issues highlighted in our response were: the difficulties of financial planning for schools and education authorities, especially given the rapidly-changing numbers of migrant pupils; the need for better migration data; that approaches need to be tailored according to the country of origin of the pupils; and that migrant pupils can be a great opportunity for schools by bringing wider cultural perspectives, encouraging language learning and laying the foundation for inclusiveness in society as a whole. To this end, we called on the EU to provide more help in terms of data on migration, sharing and comparing good practice and providing better funding support to local and regional organisations for innovative projects with all migrant groups and teacher training placements in other countries. Later this year, the group will have the opportunity to present Merseyside good practice on education and migration in an upcoming seminar with the Commission. The MBO has played a key role in these developments: leading the consultation response, encouraging discussion of the issue between partners and organising Merseyside involvement in the Commission seminar.

Another key development for the forum is Merseyside's involvement in this year's European Week of Regions and Cities. Merseyside is part of a group of European regions organising a seminar in Brussels, with the participation of the European institutions, that will showcase innovative local projects where social inclusion and economic regeneration have worked hand-in-hand. This will be an invaluable opportunity to promote our work to key decision makers at European level, raise our profile and network and share good practice with other leading regions from across Europe.

LCRDP theme: SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Work programme activity - Following and engaging with EU policy making on justice and home affairs and civil protection

Actions completed:

- Supported a second Brussels visit by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and gave a presentation on EU legislative developments of relevance to fire protection. The MBO has been promoting to Brussels actors Merseyside Police's 2nd Annual European Serious Organised Crime Conference, which is held in Liverpool.

Work programme activity - Supporting involvement in EU funding on justice and home affairs and community safety

Actions completed:

- Supported Merseyside police in successfully securing EU funding (a €49,000 grant from the Lifelong Learning Programme for an exchange scheme with police forces in Poland, Sweden, Norway and France)
- Helped Merseyside Police to secure a grant of c €300,000 under the EU Crime Prevention Fund for a project working with Polish police to get intelligence from Polish criminals in Merseyside prisons
- Supporting Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service in two planned bids: the first under the EU's Crime Prevention Fund for a project concerning intelligence sharing on the misuse of explosives; the second under EU civil protection or regional funding for a flood-response project

Work programme activity - Following and engaging with EU policy making on the environment

Actions completed:

- Attended the EU's annual Green Week conference and exhibition, covering numerous sessions on waste and sustainable production and consumption on behalf of Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority (MWDA).
- Liaised with the European Parliament and the UK Permanent Representation (the Foreign Office's representation in Brussels) on the recent revision of the EU Waste Framework Directive (the overarching EU law on waste management) on behalf of the MWDA, leading to the MBO producing a detailed analysis of the likely final provisions of the EU Waste Framework Directive on behalf of MWDA. This will allow Merseyside partners to start looking at the implications of the directive for waste management strategy and provision in Merseyside.
- MWDA submitted a response to a recent European Commission consultation on the future of EU policy on biowaste (food and garden green waste). MWDA also informally fed in to the UK Local Government Association's response to the same consultation.

Work programme activity - Supporting involvement in EU funding on the environment

Actions completed:

- St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council recently had its bid for the "BLISS" project approved. The project, which has an overall EU grant of EUR 3.6m from the EU's Interreg fund for co-operation between European regions, will test new approaches to sustainable street lighting in four municipalities across NW Europe. The MBO's involvement was an initial meeting and other initial activities with St Helens and their consultant, where the MBO signposted them to the Interreg fund and the support that exists within the NW region to help NW organisations to apply to Interreg.
- Alerted MWDA to an opportunity to get involved in another European region's Interreg project bid on waste minimisation and helped MWDA to make contact with the bidders.

Case study from Neil Ferris, Assistant Director Strategy and Resources, and Glynn Stevenson, Waste Strategy Policy Officer, Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority

The legislative framework for municipal and wider waste management originates largely from the EU. The European institutions set European-wide rules that are translated further down the line into UK law. In the last year the institutions have put into law a major revision of the EU Waste Framework Directive, which sets out the broad approach on how Europe will manage its waste for the years to come. The MBO has given key support to Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority (MWDA) over the past year on the provisions of the new directive; this included liaising with the European institutions on specific technical questions from the MWDA and providing detailed reporting on the main impacts for the authority and its partners, including a timetable for implementation.

Knowledge of the latest developments in EU waste legislation is invaluable for MWDA and its partners in allowing us to plan well in advance for the waste law of the future and the kind of targets we will be asked to achieve. In particular, this will support the forthcoming review of the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS), which will enable Merseyside to achieve sustainable environmental, social and economic benefits in relation to how it manages its waste and resources. The Waste Framework Directive will be followed in the coming year by other proposals for new EU laws on specific waste streams, such as electronic and biowaste. The MBO and MWDA will continue their good co-operation in relation to these new developments.

Case study from Chief Inspector Paul Levick, Partnership Development Officer (Liverpool), Merseyside Police

Over the past year, Merseyside Police has learned that it has been successful in securing two project grants from European funding sources with the help of the MBO. The first was for a staff-exchange programme with other EU police forces. A grant of €49,000 was awarded for this under the EU's Leonardo vocational training fund. The placements were between Merseyside police and forces in Norway, Sweden, Holland, Poland, France and Turkey and the overall aim was to expose staff to innovative good practices in the host force on promoting public safety, practices that could then be copied and adapted back home. The second grant concerns an international prisoner debriefing programme. Approximately €300,000 will be awarded under the EU Crime Prevention Fund for this project, which will involve working with Polish police to get intelligence from Polish criminals in Merseyside prisons convicted of serious organised crime or terrorism offences. This will allow us to gather intelligence on international criminal activity and organised crime networks.

The support of the MBO has been key in securing these grants. This support has included: signposting Merseyside Police to the various European grants available for crime prevention; helping in the preparation of the funding bids; and, in one case, liaising with the European Commission on technical questions relating to the bids and contract negotiation.

The benefit for Merseyside Police of these projects is clear: there is a net financial gain for the organisation directed at projects that would be difficult to fund from statutory funding or UK government grants. However, there are also less obvious benefits. First, working on a common project with forces from other parts of Europe is a way of learning new good practices that may not currently be in use in the UK. Secondly, these two projects may put Merseyside Police in a stronger position to bid for future grants, as the organisation will be able to demonstrate a track record in securing European funding and running the projects. Thirdly, bidding for EU grants is recognised as a highly competitive process; the fact that Merseyside Police beat competition from across the EU to secure these grants can only add to the organisation's reputation.

**James Sharples,
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