

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 7th August, 2024

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nelson (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCormick;
Alderman Lawlor;
Councillors Black, De Faoite, D. Douglas, Duffy,
Harvey, Kelly, Lyons, Maskey, F. McAteer, McDowell,
I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, McKay, Smyth and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Ms. L. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;
Ms. E. Clark, Programme Manager;
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors McCabe and McDonough-Brown.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 12th June were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st July.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following five items was restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential

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information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Housing Led Regeneration Update

The Committee was provided with an update on a number of strands of the Housing Led Regeneration programme of work as agreed within the Committee Plan.

The Committee:

- I. Noted the update in respect of the submissions now received from Housing Associations in respect of the Inner North West Development Brief, comprising BCC and DfC lands at Little Donegal St, Library St and Kent St and that, following a joint evaluation with the Department for Communities (DfC), a future report would be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee with recommendations in respect of the Development Brief, in line also with the DfC governance processes;
- II. Noted the update in respect of Phase 2 City Wide Strategic Site Assessments, including updates to Area Working Groups, and that further detailed reports and recommendations on next steps would be brought back to the Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee over the coming months in respect of specific Council lands identified through this process and, as appropriate, wider public sector assets identified as part of the ongoing work of the Housing Led Regeneration Group;
- III. Noted the update in respect of the Private Sector Partner (PSP) Procurement and that a further detailed report and recommendations for appointment of the preferred PSP would be brought back to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in October 2024; and
- IV. Noted the revised date of the All Party Housing Led Regeneration Round Table had been scheduled for Wednesday, 4th September 2024, with representation from Party Group Leaders or their nominees.

2 Royal Avenue Update

The Committee was provided with an update in respect of 2 Royal Avenue which focused on the outcome of the initial Expression of Interest / soft market testing exercise undertaken in respect of the future use of the ground floor of the building.

The Committee:

- I. Noted the update on the initial Expression of Interest / Soft Market Testing Exercise in respect of the Ground Floor of 2 Royal Avenue;

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- II. Noted the next steps which included commencing detailed discussions with parties from the formal interest list who would be asked to develop detailed proposals under agreed categories which would be reported back to Committee in Autumn 2024 and which would be subject to agreement by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee around financial and asset management aspects; and
- III. Noted that as part of the future report to Committee in Autumn 2024, detail on the propositions put forward from the interested parties would be set out against the categories as referenced in 4.5 of the report.

2023/24 Year End Finance update

The Committee considered a report regarding its Quarter 4 financial position.

The Committee noted the report and the associated financial reporting pack.

Rural Business Development Grant Scheme - 2024-2025

The Committee was informed of the opportunity and proposed approach to support Belfast-based rural micro businesses to access funding as part of a collaborative bid to DAERA along with the 10 other councils.

The Committee:

- Noted and endorsed the opportunity to participate in the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme in 2024-25 funded from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme to support rural businesses in Belfast;
- Noted that DAERA had confirmed the total capital funding would be £1.5million to support the sustainability and growth of rural micro-businesses and this would be available to all 11 local authorities; and
- Agreed to Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) undertaking the administrative function for the Grant Scheme on behalf of Belfast City Council as per agreed process for 2024/25.

Artist Studios Organisational Grants 2024-2025

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Artist Studios Organisational Grants 2024-2025 and seek approval for the recommended grants.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to:

- note the contents of this report and agree the recommendations for artist studio grants, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Members will be aware that at a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in February 2022, members agreed to open a new funding scheme for artist led organisations to provide financial and development support for this sector. In May 2024, members agreed to continue this support for the third consecutive year and £100,000 has been allocated to support Artist Studios Organisational Grants in 2024/25.

Background and context

3.2 The ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast, *A City Imagining*, committed to a broader investment model that considered the diversity of the city's cultural landscape. In response to detailed consultation with the sector, Committee agreed in February 2022 to bring forward a specific funding programme for studios and artist-led organisations, with the latest audit identifying 17 studios/ artist-led organisations in Belfast directly supporting an estimated 450 artists. This in part is due to the value of artist-led spaces not being effectively captured through traditional metrics such as income generated through ticket sales or audience figures and it was agreed that an alternative form of funding would be developed for artist-led spaces. Belfast City Council's current support programmes do not include any of these organisations as annual or multi-annual clients.

Organisational funding

3.3 The "*Artist Studios Organisational Grants 2024/25*" programme was opened on 4th June 2024 and closed on 4th July 2024. The purpose of this strand of work is to provide financial and developmental support to organisations similar to the support offered under cultural multi-annual grants (CMAG).

3.4 The Artist Studios Organisational Grants 2024/25 scheme was advertised widely. The information and application details were emailed directly to a GDPR compliant mailing list representing over 370 organisations from across the cultural and creative sectors alongside associated social media marketing. An online information session was held in advance of the deadline, as well

as organisations availing of one-to-one support sessions with the Culture Development team.

Criteria for Decision making

- 3.5 The criteria and guidance for Artist Studios Organisational Grants 2024/25 applicants are included in Appendices 1 and 2. Assessments were made, and scoring applied under four key areas of criteria:
- Fit with our investment aims, & themes 3 & 4, of cultural strategy “A City Imagining”
 - Need and potential impact
 - Value for money
 - High quality organisational development plan
- 3.6 Assessments were made only based on information supplied by the applicant within their submission. This included the application form and supporting documentation such as business plans and strategies.
- 3.7 Organisations or groups operating artist studios were able to apply for up to £10,000 to use towards specified developmental needs within a 12-month period. Grants up to £20,000 were available for organisations that accommodate at least 25 active members, and which meet additional eligibility criteria and supply a suitable business case.

Assessment

- 3.8 A summary of recommended grants and proposed grant recipients is included at Appendix 1. A summary of award descriptions is included in Appendix 2. The unit received 12 applications for Artist Studios Organisational Grants, requesting a total of £147,976. Percentage of funding allocated is based on scoring percentage. The recommendation is that we fund 11 organisations, with support of £100,000.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.9 An allocation of £100,000 is recommended to “*Artist Studios Organisational Grants 2024/25*”. These activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2024/25 budget for the Culture and Tourism section of the Economic Development division of the Place and Economy Departmental budget in line with existing approvals.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.10 The cultural strategy, *A City Imagining* has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Specific initiatives as required will be subject to a further equality screening.”**

During discussion, the Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism explained further the recommended grant allocations and advised that further information could be provided.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report and that further information would be provided in relation to the scoring matrix of the grants: and
- Agreed to the recommendations for artist studio grants, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

DfI Correspondence - Translink Night time services

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting in May, had agreed to write to the Department for Infrastructure to request that consideration be given to the funding of the provision of public transport nighttime services.

It was reported that a response had been received from the office of the Minister for Infrastructure John O’Dowd MLA, in relation to the matters raised.

During discussion, the Committee highlighted the need and priority to provide night-time services for the city and economy and requested that officers explore further options, such as festival and events.

After discussion, the Committee noted the correspondence as set out in Appendix one to the report and that officers would investigate potential options with Translink and event organisers in relation to providing night-time services during festivals and event seasons in the city.

Positioning Belfast to compete

Belfast City and Region Place Partnership Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

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- **Update members on outcomes from the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) 2023 / 2024 Programme including attendance at MIPIM as requested at the meeting of the Committee in June 2024.**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- I. **Note the update on outcomes from the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) 2023 / 2024 Programme, including attendance at MIPIM as requested at the meeting of the Committee in June 2024.**
- II. **Approve attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2025 as part of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme, noting that the BCRPP presence at MIPIM will be funded from the wider public-private sector BCRPP programme budget.**

3.0 Background

3.1 Members will recall that this Committee received an update on the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) in June 2024. This Committee noted the presentation from representatives from the BCRPP; approved that officers continued to support the delivery of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme including governance processes, administering programme funded expenditure and entering into associated contracts on behalf of and with oversight from the BCRPP and in line with Council's procurement processes; and approved the Council investment (from existing and approved City Regeneration and Development Budget) as part of the wider public private sector partnership contribution towards the delivery of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme. They also agreed to write to the BCRPP to request that they consider establishing a sub-group of the partnership for community engagement with a focus on social value; and Members deferred consideration of attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2025 as part of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme until a report was submitted to the Committee in August to outline the tangible benefits of the conference.

3.2 In terms of context setting, Belfast City Council has been working with public and private sector organisations to proactively promote Belfast to local, national and international audiences to attract capital investment to support realising the growth ambitions as set out in the Belfast Agenda, and this has included attendance at various national and international conferences, exhibitions and showcase events, including MIPIM, since 2016. More recently, attendance at MIPIM has been through participation in the BCRPP annual programme of activity, as reported to this

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Committee in June 2024, and aligned to our wider Positioning the City to Compete proposition, a key programme of work within this Committee's work plan as agreed at a special meeting of CGR Committee in May.

- 3.3 Members should note that delivering on our Belfast Agenda ambitions requires a £7.5bn investment. This quantum of investment will require significant private sector funding and institutional investment, highlighting the importance of continued engagement and promotional activities with capital investment markets to positively position Belfast as an attractive investment location.**
- 3.4 Members will also be aware that work has commenced on a ten year stocktake of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), as agreed in this Committee's work plan. The output report will identify the positive development that has come forward over the past ten years, but also identify catalyst opportunities for the city in the next decade. It is likely that many of these catalytical projects will require significant private sector capital investment to be brought forward, which will require Council and City partners working collaboratively to promote these opportunities through international forums such as MIPIM.**
- 3.5 The Regeneration Lobbying & Advocacy Place Based Growth Proposition for Belfast, as agreed by SP&R Committee in February 2024, highlights the disparity in regeneration and investment funding for Belfast and the benefits that enhanced investment could make for Belfast, with work advancing at various levels. It also highlighted the key role that the private sector plays in terms of deliver of the growth ambitions for the city and the importance of working in partnership with the private sector to support delivery.**
- 3.6 In 2023, Northern Ireland's commercial investment sector attracted £338 million of investment, with 24% of this investment coming from Institutional investors, which is notably lower than the UK average, as reported by property advisory firm, Savills. The report also noted the proportion of investment in NI from institutional investors has reduced significantly since the UK's referendum on EU membership in 2016, by way of comparison YTD Q3 2023 the UK commercial investment (including offices, retail, industrial and hotel) from Institutional and REIT/ Listed investors was approximately 50%.**
- 3.7 Members will recall that Party Group Leaders or their nominees and senior officers participated on a study visit to Manchester and Leeds in April 2024. Discussions with elected representatives and**

senior officers from Manchester and Leeds emphasised the important role that attracting institutional investment has played in shaping their city growth in recent times by providing both long term patient capital and partners who are bought into the cities' values and vision. Both Councils also noted that local authorities have a strong convening role in attracting investment and supporting private sector delivery by providing the strategic vision, city priorities and messaging to give confidence to the private sector and institutional markets. They noted that successfully delivering regeneration outcomes required them proactively and consistently sharing this vision and message both domestically and internationally to attract institutional investment. MCC highlighted that Manchester's success in recent years has been built on strong partnerships between the private and public sectors. This collaborative approach has allowed them to create a clear vision for growth and attending place promotion events such as MIPIM provides a global stage to present this vision and breadth of ready-made investment opportunities to investors who could become long-term collaborators.

3.8 It is evident that in order to deliver our aspirations for the city that Belfast must continue to proactively promote itself to the international institutional investment market to attract long term patient capital at scale and to assist with bringing forward the catalytic regeneration and development projects required to deliver on our wider inclusive growth ambitions.

4.0 **Main Report**

4.1 At City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 9 August 2023, the key objectives for the BCRPP Programme for 2023 / 2024 were presented as:

- Continue to build collaboration and partnership in the city and wider region.
- Continue to promote and market the Belfast region outside Northern Ireland.
- Increase engagement and advocacy with all key stakeholders, in particular, investors and government.

4.2 MIPIM is the world's leading real estate conference and is recognised as a reference point for the global real estate industry. Over 20,000 delegates from 90 countries attended MIPIM in 2024, including over 2,000 investment companies which collectively manage approx. €4 trillion of assets, providing unique access to global investment capital to accelerate regeneration and development activities through participation in face-to-face discussions, workshops and panel discussions.

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- 4.3 UK cities / regions who attended MIPIM 2024 included Cardiff Capital Region; Liverpool; London; Greater Manchester; Newcastle; West Midland's region; and the Western Gateway. Many of these cities have attended MIPIM for a number of years, recognising the importance of MIPIM in providing a platform to showcase their cities and development opportunities to attract global sources of capital. Many UK cities success in recent years has been through collaborative private and public sector working, with local government taking a lead role in facilitating this collaborative approach to seeking this external investment required to deliver their growth ambitions.**
- 4.4 The Belfast City Region presence at MIPIM 2024 comprised of executive-level representatives and decision-makers from 15 organisations including Belfast Harbour, BRCD Council representatives, Invest NI, Titanic Quarter, private sector developers and professional services firms.**
- 4.5 Key activities over the three-day conference included Belfast representatives joining panel sessions organised by other UK cities, UK Government, and partners covering a variety of topics including city centre living, waterfront regeneration, social value and Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor, providing an opportunity to showcase city investment and development opportunities to potential investors and developers from across the UK and internationally. The Belfast delegation participated in the inaugural collaborative UK city event with Liverpool, Cardiff, Business Central South, British Property Federation, Department for Business and Trade and key investors. In addition, officers held a number of pre-arranged one to one meetings with key institutional investment funds and officers from other UK cities to build relationships and share learnings.**
- 4.6 It is important to note that MIPIM forms one element of the overarching BCRPP programme of activity which is delivered through a structured programme of work focused on the key pillars of Research; Events; Advocacy and Engagement; and Communications aligned to securing investment and regeneration for Belfast and the wider city region. Therefore, outcomes from MIPIM should be viewed in the context of the wider programme objectives as outlined above.**
- 4.7 Programme objective: Increase engagement and advocacy with all key stakeholders, in particular, investors and government.**

The 2023 / 2024 programme included a presence at international real estate investment conferences, UKREiiF 2024 and MIPIM 2024, and the organisation of a Dublin Investment Showcase event which was delivered in conjunction with Urban Land Institute

(ULI). It is important to note that all three events took place within a six-month period which allowed for initial and follow up engagement with potential investors and collaborators in a relatively short time period. An overview of MIPIM investor engagement is set out below.

4.8 MIPIM Investor Engagement

There was a significant footfall on the Belfast Stand throughout MIPIM with a number of requests for impromptu meetings for investors, highlighting the continued interest in Belfast within the national and international investment community. In total, 133 leads were collected on stand with interest from a variety of sectors including residential development, leisure / hotel development, green energy and life sciences. In addition, City Council officers held one-on-one meetings with key institutional investors, banks, pension funds and end-occupiers interested in opportunities across the city.

4.9 Work is on-going to follow up with contacts made during MIPIM 2024 and other BRCPP activities. As noted at June Committee there has been a number of follow up meetings in Belfast over the past months, with more planned in the coming months from investors, developers and occupiers including:

- Major housing / residential developers who have not to date delivered projects in Belfast / NI
- Real estate investment trust (REIT) with a strong interest in residential developments
- End-use occupiers including FDI companies, commercial / leisure operators, innovation hub operators and F&B operators

4.10 The marketing activities during MIPIM have translated into inward visits to the city, with many of these visits / meetings taking place with private and other public sectors partners of the BRCPP who have testified to the benefits of attending MIPIM. Commercial sensitivities and the length of timeframes for concluding investment transactions make it difficult to precisely quantify the total level of inward investment achieved from attendance at international events such as MIPIM. However, to give Members an idea of the types of investment secured following introductions and engagement by 'Team Belfast' at MIPIM since 2016, Elkstone Partners, a leading Irish Investment House, have made a number of significant investments in Belfast, including purchasing Murray Exchange in February 2024 which was the key office investment in Q1 2024. Greystar, an international investment management firm, have invested in a number of purpose-built student managed accommodation (PBMSA) schemes in Belfast, with their most

recent investment being Nelson Street, a £48m PBSMA development.

- 4.11** In June 2023 Legal & General, with whom senior officers and other partners have held a series of meetings with at MIPIM, announced a £150m investment in the residential development Loft Lines, which is the largest single residential investment in Northern Ireland for 20 years, and will see the delivery of 778 new homes including 151 social and affordable homes, and significant public realm investment. MIPIM 2023 and 2024 saw a notable increase in interest in residential opportunities in Belfast from institutional investors, with follow up visits taking place. While these types of processes can take a number of years to complete, we anticipate that this engagement will continue to translate into investments to assist with bringing forward residential development in Belfast in the coming months and years.
- 4.12** Members will be aware of the Council's on-going competitive dialogue process to secure a private sector partner (PSP) to deliver residential led, mixed use developments across the city. This process follows an Expressions of Interest exercise which was presented at MIPIM 2023. Attendance at both MIPIM and UKREiiF 2023 allowed officers to actively engage with the private sector and investment market and afforded the opportunity to fully detail and explain the scale of the opportunity and the type of partner Council were seeking to attract.
- 4.13** In addition, private sector partners have established working relationships and secured business as a direct result of relationships brokered at MIPIM. By way of example, the Belfast based team from ARUP, a BCRPP Partner, has highlighted that working relationships made at MIPIM resulted in increased business and successful tendering outcomes on specific major projects.
- 4.14** Positively positioning Belfast as an attractive investment location to an international audience relies on strong collaboration with central government and international partners. The Partnership works collaboratively with the Department for Business & Trade (DBT) throughout the annual programme of activity. It supported the delivery of Northern Ireland Investment Summit which took place 12 and 13 September 2023 through supporting the showcasing of capital investment opportunities via a Capital Investment Roundtable and familiarisation tour of city regeneration and investment opportunities, with follow up engagement with investors who attended the Summit taking place at MIPIM and UKREiiF. In addition, MIPIM provided a useful platform for engagement with UK Government representatives to promote potential investment opportunities in Belfast and the

wider city region and have early engagement on the place-based growth proposition for Belfast. In recent years it has also provided an opportunity to showcase to both investors and international companies the research, development and innovation capabilities of the Belfast Region, which are being significantly enhanced in growth sectors through BRCD investments, and which is now so critical for international businesses when making decisions on where to locate or expand.

4.15 Programme objective: Continue to build collaboration and partnership in the city and wider region.

As mentioned previously, the BCRPP is delivered as a public private partnership with a significant percentage of the partners having consistently supporting the Partnership since its inception, showing the value that city partners perceive from being part of this collective partnership approach.

4.16 Feedback from BCRPP Partners

The private sector partners have highlighted that one of the significant benefits of attending MIPIM is the calibre of the Belfast delegation coming together to collectively showcase the city as 'Team Belfast', highlighting that relationships formed and enhanced at MIPIM help aid collaboration to deliver on our shared ambitions for the city. Outlined below is an overview of feedback received from the Belfast delegation post-MIPIM:

'I believe it is crucial that there is a joined-up approach across public and private sector partners as well as third level education (QUB, UU) to promote Northern Ireland on the international stage. Given that we face constant challenges in this part of the UK, it is essential that we are able to have a platform from which to create our own narrative rather than allow others to shape this for us outside of our control. Northern Ireland has so much that is positive to offer and doing this face to face at MIPIM plays to our strengths.'

'It is extremely important to promote the city region on an international level. If we don't talk about ourselves, there'll be no-one else talking about us. There are many countries around the globe that are promoting themselves at present, and subsequently many regions within each. It is important to be a part of these discussions in order to make sure Belfast is seen as the investment opportunity it truly is.'

'We are all trying to sell NI to the world, so having positive people championing Belfast and wider NI is important as we need to keep shouting to be heard.'

'It is essential that such events are supported by both the private and public sector. Investors are encouraged by economic and political stability. Great to see Belfast City Council and Invest NI represented alongside the private sector. The challenge (and opportunity) is how Belfast can demonstrate effective collaboration and strategic alliance with both Dublin and the UK that would make a compelling proposition to invest in Belfast and enjoy the benefits from dual market access.'

'I think it is extremely important for Belfast to be put on the international stage as the city continues to develop with our dual market access and North South relations continuing to grow, it puts our city up there with the largest UK cities in terms of attendance and visibility.'

'When you have everyone in the same boat, pulling the same way then you start to make waves and you can get really get places. It HAS to be a united approach: Council, businesses, planning, Translink, Invest NI, and employers with support from the Assembly so that we can give confidence to the people who are looking at us and Belfast/NI is actually worth spending time, money and effort in.'

'Important for Belfast to be represented as other cities such as Cardiff / Manchester etc to maintain prominence and increase exposure for future investment.'

'Public and private partners need to demonstrate that Belfast is a cohesive place to do business with as few barriers as possible.'

4.17 Programme objective: Continue to promote and market the Belfast region outside Northern Ireland.

Communications through digital marketing and PR activities is a key strand of work within the BCRPP programme of work. Outputs included the development of an interactive Belfast Region Investment Guide which was a key marketing asset at MIPIM 2024.

4.18 As part of the communications campaign focused on Belfast's attendance at MIPIM, high quality media coverage was secured in a number of publications including Insider Housing, Ireland's Business Post, Place North West, and Real Asset Management. A targeted social media campaign highlighting Belfast's presence at MIPIM and key messaging on investment and regeneration opportunities reached 50.7K+ people and received 11.2k views of high-quality video content.

4.19 Learning from best practice

Beyond building important investor relationships, MIPIM also provides an opportunity for attendees to learn from best in class examples in delivering regeneration. A focus for MIPIM 2024 was bringing attention to crucial topics such as sustainability, waterfront regeneration and city centre living. Belfast delegates attended roundtables and panels on topics such as ‘delivering sustainable economic growth through partnerships’ and ‘creative retrofit’, partaking in discussions and learning from best practice examples. This knowledge sharing and understanding of how other cities have faced some of the challenges and opportunities Belfast is faced with is invaluable.

- 4.20** At the June Committee Members had also highlighted the need for community engagement by the BCRPP with a focus on social value. There have been some initial discussions on the most effective way of doing this and over the coming weeks this is to be explored further with community representatives, building also on a report BCRPP had previously commissioned (Building Social Impact) in relation to maximising social impact from the built environment. Further detail will be brought back to Committee on this.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 5.0** Approval is sought for attendance of senior officers at MIPIM 2024. Travel costs for Council attendance at MIPIM 2024 to be met from within existing and approved departmental budgets. All other costs related to these events would be met from the 2024 / 2025 BCRPP Partnership programme budget.”

During discussion, the Director of City Regeneration and Development provided further detail on the tangible benefits of the conference and highlighted that further details of the investment statistics from the Savills report could be provided, if required.

The Strategic Director emphasised the importance of engagement and building relationships to deliver investments in Belfast.

Proposal

Moved by Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCormick,
Seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin,

That the Committee agrees to the recommendations as outlined in the report.

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Amendment

Moved by Councillor Lyons,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy,

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the report to allow an options paper to be submitted to the next meeting to consider alternative models for inward investment, such as a reduced delegation at MIPIM and alternative approaches through different events and networks.

On a vote by show of hands, eight Members voted for the proposal and nine against and it was accordingly declared lost.

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor McCormick and seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin was put to the meeting. On a vote by show of hands nine Members voted for the proposal and seven against and it was declared carried.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- I. Noted the update on outcomes from the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) 2023 / 2024 Programme, including attendance at MIPIM, as requested at the meeting of the Committee in June 2024; and
- II. Approved the attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2025 as part of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme, noting that the BCRPP presence at MIPIM would be funded from the wider public-private sector BCRPP programme budget.

Music Strategy and UNESCO City of Music update

The Committee considered the undernoted report and associated appendices:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the work relating to the UNESCO City of Music plan and seek approval to the allocation of funding to several important strands of the music strategy.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the contents of this report and the progress made against areas of the music strategy, ‘Music Matters: A Roadmap for Belfast’**

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- **Agree the actions for remainder of 2024/25 as set out in the report and in Appendix 1 including budget implications to be met from existing departmental budgets**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in December 2022, members agreed the final ‘Music Matters: A Roadmap for Belfast’. Mirroring A City Imagining cultural strategy the music strategy has 4 strategic themes, each having 4 strategic priorities. There are several actions and recommendations given for each priority catering to many areas of need across the music sector.

3.2 UNESCO Music delivery is funded from existing recurring and non-recurring departmental funds. At the meeting of the Special Policy and Resources Committee in April 2021, members agreed an allocation of resources to the delivery of the music strategy. £900k has been allocated towards City of Music and the Music Strategy for delivery on key developmental activities across 2023/24 and 2024/25 respectively. Members received updates and approved allocations of spend against various initiatives in April, June, August and September 2023. There has been substantive progress against each of these initiatives, including:

3.3

<u>Programme/Action</u>	<u>Status</u>
Recruitment and selection of the Belfast Region Music Board	Completed in April 2023
Expansion of the Output Conference, Ireland’s biggest one-day music conference and live music showcase	Completed in June 2023
Continuation of Gradam Ceoil bursaries	Launched in March 2023 and continuing to March 2024
Micro bursaries programme, available to individual musicians, to assist with costs incurred within their artform. Delivered in Collaboration with Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival	Launched in December 2023. 18 musicians received awards of up to £1,000 in January 2024.
The Pipeline Investment Fund for music venues through a	Completed in September 2023 with 5 Grassroots Music Venues in

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partnership with Music Venue Trust	receipt of funding to upgrade equipment
Belfast Music marketing channels	New supplier appointed July 2023
Implementation of Access Riders to improve disability access	November to September 2024
The NI Music Prize	Event took place on 15 th November 2023
City of Music Industry sessions – series of free information sessions for the local music community	Delivered 6 sessions to date
Creation of a digital music support service developed in collaboration with Music Connections	Launching in September 2024
Music Industry Mentoring Programme for 2023/24	Launching in September 2024
Programme to develop the production skills of women, female-identifying and non-binary music creators in a safe and trusted studio environment.	Contract appointed in March 2024
Health and Wellbeing sessions for musicians and the industry	Ongoing throughout 2024
‘Go Green’ toolkit with tangible recommendations and measures for implementation	Launching November 2024
Music Matter Internship Programme – Supporting 7 internships across the music industry	Supplier appointed in August 2024, programme launching in September 2024.
Support for international exchanges with other UNESCO Cities of Music.	Exchanges held with Hannover, Germany, Brno, Czech Republic, and London, Ontario Canada

3.4 The Belfast Music Board

The Music Strategy sets out governance recommendations for Belfast Music, including the formation of a Belfast Region Music Board. The overarching role of the Board is to oversee the implementation and prioritisation of the music roadmap, anchoring the city’s commitment to music and ensuring its composition represents the varied interests and needs of both the music sector and the people of Belfast.

The board was appointed in April 2023 and consists of 24 individuals from across a wide variety of disciplines, industries, and interest. The Belfast Music board has been meeting regularly alongside officials in the culture team to map out programmes and initiatives against each theme and priority in this Music Strategy. This engagement has been vital in informing and shaping the projects contained in this paper.

3.5 Theme 1 - Placing Artists at the Heart

Theme One of the Music Matters strategy focuses on ‘Placing Artists at the Heart’. The most basic – or foundational – needs of musicians, music creators and performers are the focus of this theme with a range of initiatives including funding, creative and professional development and opportunities to collaborate and create with others.

Building on the success of previous initiatives in this area, a range of programmes are recommended. These include:

3.6 The NI Music Prize/Sound of Belfast – The Northern Ireland Music Prize honours and celebrates the very best of new, established and emerging Northern Irish music and is a key music event for the city of Belfast and its UNESCO City of Music status. It is an annual awards night organised by the Oh Yeah Music Centre and takes place in the Ulster Hall during Sound of Belfast Festival every year. This is an important event for music in Belfast and to complement and strengthen the initiatives and ambitions laid out in the UNESCO City of Music.

The NI Music Prize was established to support the growth and build the profile of NI Music and reflect similar work and recognition of regional music in other parts of the UK and Ireland. It is a significant event and key milestone for Belfast as the regional driver for the music industry in Northern Ireland.

The 2024 Music Prize will host an audience of 1,000 people including music industry guests from all over the UK and Ireland, Europe and the USA, as well as musicians, artists and music fans. The event will be broadcast live on BBC Radio Ulster and is filmed by a production company for YouTube. Many key industry professionals that attend are also involved in presenting and running panels at the Sound of Belfast conference earlier that day, including 200 young emerging artists who attend these panels which are streamed live on YouTube. Belfast City Council has supported the event since its inception and provided £30,000 of support in 2023.

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- 3.7** At the meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 13th September 2023, members also agreed to provide support to conduct an independent review of the NI Music Prize and Sound of Belfast. This independent review considers alignment to music strategy and role that it can play in achieving objectives through a longer-term strategic partnership and the value that it would take to achieve this. It has involved consultation with peers including benchmarking against similar events both nationally and internationally and produce a series of ‘recommendations’ or ‘next steps’ as part of a roadmap for development. This review is currently concluding, and a further update and full report will be presented to members in Autumn 2024.
- 3.8** Officials have received an interim report and recommendations from the review based on the research undertaken and the discussions held to date. This interim report recommends that funding is increased to enhance, scale and strengthen the activities being delivered at Sound of Belfast, including the NI Music Prize, in its 10th anniversary year. This additional resource would be ringfenced for a dedicated marketing and communications campaign to champion artists, promote the events and engage new audiences with Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize. Based on the recommendations from this interim report, it is recommended to allocate £45,000 to the NI Music Prize and Sound of Belfast.
- 3.9** Output Belfast- Established in 2016, Output Belfast has earned its reputation over the last 7 years as Ireland’s biggest one-day music conference and live music showcase. Delivered as a key event within the City of Music programme the event is directly related to priority 2.5 within the music strategy, which reads ‘Develop regular music business touchpoints throughout the year using existing conferences to offer more regular but bitesize opportunities for micro learning’. The conference features a full programme of panels, workshops and conferences, followed by an evening showcase of live music for free to the public. Activity includes music and creative digital showcasing and networking events, business development panels and workshops and meetings and networking with key international creative digital companies.
- 3.10** In December 2023, members agreed to allocate £28,000 to Score Draw Music Ltd to continue the delivery of the Output Conference in 2024. This conference was originally planned for April but due to logistical challenges with the April date, council officials and Score Draw Music explored alternative dates later in the year. The event will now take place on Tuesday 12th November to coincide with, and celebrate, the 10-year anniversary of Sound of Belfast.

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- 3.11 This will be the first time that the Output Conference and showcase will take part during the same week as Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize and represents a unique opportunity to test the impact of combining both events and create a critical mass of activity throughout the city.
- 3.12 Continuation of the Micro-Bursaries scheme – This programme provides up to £1,000 to individual musicians, to assist with costs incurred within their artform. In 2023, this programme was delivered in Collaboration with Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival, through enhancing their existing bursary programme to include a music micro-bursary. This initiative proved to be highly successful, with over 160 applications from musicians with 18 musicians receiving support. It is proposed to continue this scheme in 2024/25 with an allocation of £20,000 to the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival.
- 3.13 Continuation of the Gradam Ceoil bursary scheme - At the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on Wednesday 8 September 2021, members agreed to support the Gradam Ceoil bursary scheme of a five-year period (2021 – 25) and contribute £15,000 each year.

The Gradam Ceoil Bursary Scheme is a series of three annual awards awarded to young (18–25-year-old) traditional musicians in Belfast, in partnership with Duncairn Arts Centre, Red Shoe productions and TG4. Each award is valued at £3,000 each and the programme aims are:

- To provide support, training and mentoring
 - To support creativity and cultural expression
 - Build capacity in online/broadcasting presentation skills (in acoustics and visuals)
 - Develop capacity and profile for the traditional music sector in Belfast.
- 3.13 The 2024/25 scheme aims to launch in January 2025 and will select three young Belfast traditional musicians to receive an award in March 2025. Highlights from the 2024 awards included the recipients performing at the Gradam Ceoil awards in Limerick for the Irish President, Michael D. Higgins, as well as a special performance at the Fleadh Cheoil and an invite to the Lord Mayor’s parlour for a reception to celebrate. It is proposed to continue this important partnership with a £15,000 contribution in 2024/25.
- 3.14 Health and wellbeing – In 2023/24, officials have worked on a range of partnerships with key organisations such as Tonic Rider and Help Musicians NI to co-design practical wellbeing events and initiatives focusing on the physical and mental health of music

creators. This has manifested as a number of practical schemes, including a partnership with Help Musicians NI that will see hearing health care and greater awareness of hearing health in the local music industry. In addition, a pilot programme with NI Alternatives entitled 'Fit to March' will launch in September 2024. This programme is targeted at the marching band community and will focus on physical and mental well-being of marching band members. It is recommended that this important element of the music strategy continues in 2024/25 with an allocation of £15,000 towards additional co-designed and targeted programmes.

- 3.15 **Music Mentoring Programme Stage Two - Point 6.1** within Theme One of the Music Matters strategy recommends investment in 'the delivery of a specially designed mentoring programme for individuals working in music, including continued professional development for senior or experienced individuals working in music' In 2023/24, members agreed an allocation of £30,000 towards the development of the Music Industry Mentoring Programme to upskill participants including agents, managers, PR professionals and labels. This programme is currently at procurement stage and will be delivered throughout Autumn 2024.
- 3.16 It is proposed to continue this programme with an allocation of £30,000 for Stage Two in early 2025. Stage two of the programme will allow the music industry entrepreneurs that have been through the programme thus far to continue their educational development by putting into practice with a cohort of artists, the latter of whom will be the focus of this continuation of the opportunity. The output of this second stage will be a group of local music creators who can progress through their careers with greater confidence in how they manage their individual businesses alongside a stronger team of individuals working in the spheres of management, PR and other complimentary roles.
- 3.17 **Music Industry Sessions - Theme one** of the Music Strategy focuses on the development of musicians, including action point 2.4 which seeks to 'provide opportunities via events and programmes to provide regular access to professional associations in music to deepen existing relationships and create new ones'.

In 2023/24, officials delivered 6 industry free industry sessions for musicians. It is proposed to continue this important sessions throughout 2024/25 with an allocation of £10,000 towards an additional 6-8 events. Proposed events thus far include focuses on women in sound design, meeting the Tallinn music industry, managing your vocal health, PR and connectivity in the digital sphere.

3.18 Theme two – Nurture the sector

Theme two of the Music Strategy focuses on strengthening the structures to support those who guide and invest in creators. Through prioritising the sustainable growth of the music business sector, initiatives in this theme support entrepreneurialism, meaningful business development, professional development and sustainable career pathways within the sector. A range of initiatives are proposed within this theme including:

3.19 Educating the Educators To support and promote sustainable career pathways within the music sector, it is proposed to run a Pathways Into Music programme in 2024/25. This programme will work directly with the Pathways into Music Foundation and is based on a successful scheme delivered in England supported by Arts Council England.

This programme for music educators, education hubs and talent development organisations will consist of a two-day in-person event in Belfast in autumn 2024, plus three accompanying webinars. These events will focus on careers and trends in the music business, providing music educators with the information, knowledge and contacts they need to advise and support students who seek to pursue a career in music.

The programme will be open to anyone involved in educating or supporting young people making music from key stage three (aged eleven) or above, including: music teachers, instrument tutors, and FE and HE lecturers, plus people working for music education hubs and talent development organisations. This programme will be delivered directly with the Pathways into Music Foundation, in collaboration with the Education Authority. It is proposed to allocate £20,000 towards this programme, reaching between 50-100 education professionals.

3.20 Supporting Accessibility in Music – Theme two of the Music Strategy includes a commitment to allocate programming funding to provide opportunities for disabled musicians in performance spaces across Belfast. In addition, there are several commitments to ensuring that music programming takes an inclusive approach at all times and that music activities are made available in safe spaces for all ages, where the needs of those with disabilities can be met.

To ensure greater opportunities for showcasing musicians with disabilities or additional needs, as well as to provide music activities that are accessible to all, it is proposed that BCC partner with the University of Atypical to develop a pilot a new support scheme that would allow recipients to host activities and events

that would develop, promote and provide platforms for those within the d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse music community. This programme would be developed through a strategic partnership with the University of Atypical for Arts and Disability (UofA), a disabled-led lead sectoral organisation for arts and disability.

It is envisaged that these grants would support not just costs associated with the running of the potential events but also costs that ensure access needs are met. It is proposed to allocate £30,000 to the University of Atypical for this pilot programme.

3.21 Theme 3 - Igniting the Live Experience

Theme three of the music strategy focuses on supporting the live music sector as a major catalyst for cultural and economic growth. This theme recognises the importance of live music to Belfast for creators and performers, for freelancers and those working in music, and for the people of the city, our audiences. a range of programmes are recommended for 2024/25, including:

3.22 Strategic Partnership with Music Venue Trust – The Music Venue Trust is a UK wide charity which acts to protect, secure and improve Grassroots Music Venues. The organisation has been a key partner during both the formation of the Music Strategy and at implementation stage. In 2023/24, Council collaborated with the Music Venue Trust to run a Pipeline Investment Fund for music venues. This scheme resulted in five Belfast venues receiving capital grants to improve their facilities.

3.23 Priority 9 of the Music Strategy focuses on deliver a series of measures that would facilitate the development of a thriving, sustainable and strong live music sector, including a commitment to ‘engage with the Music Venue Trust to gain a greater understanding of the issues facing the survival of grassroots music venues in Belfast and the ways in which these challenges can be addressed’.

3.24 Through meaningful discussions with the Music Venue Trust as to how best to benefit the Belfast Music venues, it is agreed that prolonged engagement would have the most lasting impact upon the sector and would allow for the long-term fulfilment of five Music Matters strategic priorities. Through this engagement, the Music Venue Trust will work closely with venues throughout Belfast, including a co-designed series of events and workshops bringing together venue staff and leaders from local music venues with experienced counterparts and stakeholders from across the UK.

3.25 These events will focus on development opportunities for local Belfast music venues, education and knowledge sharing of best practice and utilisation of the annual report to compare and contrast regional statistics. A key aspect of the day will be information gathering to gain a greater understanding of the issues facing the survival of grassroots music venues in Belfast and the ways in which these challenges can be addressed (9.4). They will be able to utilise this direct engagement with the sector to also develop a strong awareness of the current entertainment licencing processes and how they impact local venues (9.3) as well as their event space and equipment needs (9.5) and other challenges facing venues. This research will go on to inform best practice at Council when supporting local venues as well as future partnerships with the sector and advocacy work undertaken by the charity. It is proposed to allocate £20,000 towards this strategic partnership with the Music Venue Trust.

3.26 Greening the Sector - Priority 12 of the Music Strategy focuses on greening the live music sector, embedding sustainability at the heart of its approach to business operations.

To deliver on this priority, it is proposed to allocate up to £5,000 towards an event and launch of a toolkit in November 2024. This event will be focused on sustainability in creative productions, particularly within the music sector, featuring a panel discussion with key Belfast creatives who will explore practical strategies and innovative approaches to making creative productions more environmentally sustainable, alongside experts in the field from organisations such as Native Events, specialists in looking at new ways of working more sustainably. The conversation will be live-streamed to reach a broad audience and later made available online as a valuable digital asset. In addition to the panel discussion, it is proposed to launch the Green Arts Toolkit for Belfast, a comprehensive resource designed to help artists and cultural organisations implement sustainable practices. This toolkit, developed in collaboration with Native Events, will provide actionable guidelines and best practices for reducing the environmental impact of creative activities. The event offers a unique opportunity to introduce this critical resource to the music community, with the support of Belfast City Council underscoring the city's commitment to sustainability and cultural leadership. The event will be produced by NI Science Festival and Nerve Centre and promoted through each organisations own channels, as well as the Belfast 2024 channels.

3.27 Safety in Music – Priority 11 of the Music Strategy aims to support venues and performance spaces in implementing initiatives to ensure the health and safety, both physically and in terms of

mental wellbeing, of performers and attendees at live music events.

To support a safer night-time environment for those working in or attending music events across the city, it is proposed to partner with and support Equity NI's 'Safe Home' campaign through a series of events and training with local venues with the inclusion of the Musicians' Union and relevant stakeholders in night-time safety. It is proposed to allocate up to £10,000 to this programme which will include practical training and events for local venues and the creation of video and print assets that will further increase knowledge and uptake of the campaign across the city.

3.28 Theme 4 – Unlocking the unifying power of UNESCO

Theme 4 of the Music Strategy aims to create a sense of ownership of the UNESCO title for the people of the city, recognising the vital role they have played in our musical past and the exciting role they can play in our music future. This roadmap aims to provide more opportunities for embedding music in all corners and communities of the city and also seeks to position the Belfast City of Music brand on the international stage as a gateway to visitors and investors.

3.29 As part of Belfast's application and status as a City of Music, member cities are committed to '*work internationally with the UNESCO Cities Network to deliver shared music, skills and learning opportunities.*'. In 2023/24, support was provided for local music creators and industry to undertake international exchanges with other UNESCO Cities of Music such as Hannover, Germany, Brno, Czech Republic, and London, Ontario Canada. In addition, a partnership with the Belfast International Arts Festival provided a platform for a special UNESCO day featuring acts from other UNESCO cities at the Festival. It is proposed to continue this partnership with the Belfast International Arts Festival through hosting a UNESCO City of Music day on 9th November 2024, featuring artists from City of Music Kansas, USA.

3.30 As well as collaboration between cities, UNESCO Member cities are also expected to take part in official UNESCO events, including the annual UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) conference and UNESCO Music subnetwork meetings. Officials and the Lord Mayor were in attendance at the UNESCO conference in July which featured over 250 cities across the globe. Following this conference, officials have received expressions of interest from 11 different UNESCO cities to collaborate on a range of opportunities. Officials are actively considering each opportunity and exploring meaningful opportunities for artists and music

entrepreneurs from that will allow our local talent to be showcased on a global platform and increase opportunities for music tourism.

3.31 Finally, it is important to note that 2025 will mark four years since Belfast was awarded the title of UNESCO City of Music. As part of this year, Belfast City Council will be expected to complete and submit its Membership Monitoring Report highlighting each Creative Cities' contribution to UCCN's implementation. This report is mandatory for member cities every four years and will require a detailed analysis of progress against commitments in the music strategy alongside a plan and budget for the following four years.

3.32 **Finance and Resource Implications**

There are no new financial implications. The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2024/25 budget from existing departmental budgets allocated to music development for the Culture and Tourism section of the Economic Development division of the Place and Economy.

3.33 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

The cultural strategy, *A City Imagining* and the Music Matters Music Strategy have both been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Specific initiatives as required will be subject to a further equality screening.”

During discussion, several Members of the Committee welcomed the Music Strategy and its inclusive approach.

After discussion, the Committee:

- I. Noted the contents of the report and the progress made against areas of the music strategy, “Music Matters: A Roadmap for Belfast”; and
- II. Agreed the actions for the remainder of 2024/25 as set out in the report and in Appendix 1, including budget implications to be met from existing departmental budgets.

Update on Belfast 2024

The Committee received a presentation from the Creative Programme Manager in relation to the Belfast 2024 Events Programme, which included a range of dance and theatre events, family fun days, outdoor spectacles, a celebratory concert, and the City Hall Immersive Rooms.

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The Committee noted the contents of the presentation and the Belfast 2024 programme of events for the coming months.

Growing Business and the Economy

Enterprise Support Service Update

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in August 2023, an update had been provided on the progress to operationalise and deliver the Enterprise Support Service which had been branded as Go Succeed.

Since the last update, the service was successfully launched and had now been operational for around eight months.

It was reported that the new service aimed to be the go-to source for expert business advice across the region. It represented the councils' collective response to our statutory responsibility and offers a set of connected enterprise support services where individuals, entrepreneurs or businesses could access a continuum of support to meet their needs, depending on their stage of development.

The key objectives of the model were to:

- Nurture a strong entrepreneurial culture, recognising enterprise as a viable career option and/or a route out of economic inactivity;
- Enable a vibrant and productive business base across Northern Ireland;
- Increase the proportion of 'innovation-active' businesses in NI and embed this more firmly with enterprise/ start-up agenda;
- Diversify the representation amongst those supported by the enterprise and innovation ecosystem;
- Delivery a service designed with the user in mind;
- Focus on adding value to existing support available in the ecosystem; and
- Providing regional coverage while ensuring that delivery reflects local differences/nuances.

The Committee was informed that the 'Go Succeed' provided a continuum of support from early-stage enterprise awareness through to starting, growing, and scaling a business. The concept was that the service would help people get the right support at the right time – and would also help maximise other available funding streams by helping businesses to navigate the complex support ecosystem.

The service had been established to deliver across three core areas – Start, Grow and Scale – with tailored support for clients aligned with their growth ambitions.

- **Start:** this element of the service aims to identify individuals with entrepreneurial intentions as well as reaching those individuals who do not have an intention to start a business but could be encouraged to do so.

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There is specific, targeted support for a range of underrepresented groups. The menu of support available included masterclasses, peer support networks and 1-1 mentoring;

□ **Grow:** this element of the service provides support for existing businesses. 1-1 mentoring is allocated based on the business' potential to grow and innovate. Masterclass and peer support network activity are also provided to support existing businesses to make key decisions on issues such as entering new markets or accessing finance for growth; and

□ **Scale:** this part of the service is geared to supporting start-ups that have the potential to go on and generate at least £1m in revenue after 3 years. Support is delivered through 1-1 mentoring which aims to enable access to finance or further support through Invest NI, Catalyst or others.

In addition to the tiered menu of support, small grants of up to £4,000 (and up to 70% of capital/revenue costs) are available to entrepreneurs or businesses accessing support through the service who demonstrate growth potential.

The delivery was underpinned by investments such as a wide-reaching marketing and communications campaign; a call handling service to deal with phone enquiries as well as an online portal to deal with online requests for support and a regional CRM system to enable tracking of client engagement across the service.

Regional Performance Update

Since the service launched in November 2023, we have achieved the following by way of regional performance:

- 18,793 individuals 'reached' through a range of community outreach activities;
- 3,204 individuals/entrepreneurs supported through start up activity (1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks);
- 2,514 businesses supported through growth activity 1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks); and
- 176 entrepreneurs/businesses have accessed Go Succeed Grants since the launch in February 2024.

The Committee was advised that the service provided an opportunity for councils to deliver a consistent approach to enterprise, start up and growth provision across the region. However, it also had the flexibility to adapt to meet the specific needs of entrepreneurs and businesses within local areas. To achieve this, councils had developed local-level annual service plans which identified key areas of focus for outreach and delivery activities.

Belfast Performance Update

It was reported that, since the service launched in November 2023, the Council had achieved the following:

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- 1,984 individuals 'reached' through a range of community outreach activities;
- From January-March 2024, the Enterprise and Business Growth team had also delivered inclusive mentoring support to 15 individuals with further barriers to engagement;
- 523 Belfast entrepreneurs supported through start up activity (1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks)
- 481 Belfast businesses supported through growth activity (1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks).

The Committee were advised that, 82 Belfast businesses had accessed Go Succeed Grants since the launch in February 2024, drawing down over £300,000. These grants had enabled businesses to purchase capital and/or revenue items which will support their future growth plans.

For the year ahead, planned activity included:

- Establishing, and building upon, relationships with key stakeholders across the city to put in place targeted interventions to engage with under-represented groups and work to overcome the barriers to starting or growing a business for those groups;
- Working with the council's Culture and Tourism teams to support a neighbourhood tourism programme promoting innovation and entrepreneurship across all city neighbourhoods and helping bring forward new tourism products;
- Continuing to raise awareness of the Social Economy sector, encouraging and supporting new and existing social enterprises and co-operatives; and
- Partnering with the council's Employability and Skills team to target self-employed sectors, including childminding, and delivering bespoke academies to break down barriers to self-employment.

It was highlighted that, for the future, it was critical that funding was secured to enable this service to continue. The SPF funding was currently scheduled to run out in March 2025 and there was no clarity as to the future SPF funding approach beyond this date. There had been some engagement with the Department for the Economy (DfE) and the Minister had been vocal in his support for the service. However, at this point, DfE was not making a financial contribution to support the delivery of NIESS – although councils were using some of resources allocated to them from central government for the delivery of their statutory duty to provide start-up support as their match funding contribution to the overall funding pot.

The Committee:

- Noted and endorsed the progress to date on the delivery of the Enterprise Support Service across Belfast and beyond, with the objective of driving more and better businesses;

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- Noted the pending end date of the current funding in March 2025 and the lack of clarity around future resource availability at this point; and
- Agreed to support the work to secure resources for delivery beyond March 2025.

Sub Regional Economic Development - Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on work being led by the Department of the Economy (DfE) on sub-regional economic development, in line with the Minister’s Economic Vision set out in February 2024.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the update on the work currently being led by DfE around sub-regional economic development.
- Note the pending development of sub-regional economic development plans and the timelines for council engagement in this activity.
- Agree to receive a future update on this work with a view to discussing the Belfast City Council priorities.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Members will be aware that, for some time, the NI government departments – led by DfE – have been considering sub-regional approaches to economic development. In June 2023, this committee agreed a response to a call for evidence issued by DfE in the context of ‘10X Place’. That call for evidence sought to build an understanding of how policy could be effectively flexed to meet local economic needs – and also to understand relative strengths across the region.

3.2 The council response covered a range of issues in line with the questions asked. A summary of the key points raised in that response included:

- Simply creating a sub-regional tier without additional transfer of statutory authority does not equal sub-regional economic development
- The critical issue is flexibility of approach to meet local needs

- Local authority boundaries can be building blocks for building up or drilling down – depending on the issue
- Concerns at creating another layer/partnership mechanism – propose that it would be more effective to use existing structures
- Request to understand what elements were ‘in play’ – all of DfE portfolio? Consideration that wider input/support was critical – particularly from DfC and DfI, given need for critical infrastructure investments to support any economic development activity.

3.3 Following the restoration of the NI Executive in February 2024, Minister Murphy set out his economic mission. It comprises four key themes, namely:

- Increase the proportion of the working-age population in ‘Good Jobs’
- Promote Regional Balance
- Raise Productivity
- Reduce Carbon Emissions

3.4 It is our understanding that the 10X Place work has effectively been replaced by the work around ‘promoting regional balance’. In our recent engagement with DfE and Invest NI regarding sub-regional economic development, we have continued to raise a number of key issues, namely:

- Role of Belfast as regional driver – research clearly shows that cities play a key role in generating wealth and opportunity. They need to be supported to play that role – and the benefits that accrue go beyond the city boundaries
- Ongoing inequities in Belfast – particularly within communities that face multiple disadvantage: there is a £3,474 yearly earnings gap for Belfast based on place of work and place of residence; 6 of the top 10 most deprived wards are in Belfast and the top 15 most deprived wards for the Education, Skills and Training domain of the Multiple Deprivation Matrix are all in Belfast
- Research also suggests that the underperformance of cities is one of the most significant contributing factors to low levels of productivity across the UK – policy needs to focus on removing barriers to growth rather than just trying to re-locate growth
- Need to ensure that this is not just about bringing all areas ‘up to the same level’ – productivity levels in NI already lag behind UK, ROI and many global metrics: Belfast’s level also needs to continue to improve (and this in turn can support the wider region).

3.5 In terms of tactical interventions that could support these ambitions, there are a number of areas of potential interest. These include:

- Maximising the impact of the City Deal investments – through innovation diffusion and SME access as well as skills interventions, including inclusive pathways
- Supporting the development of key clusters in areas of competitive advantage – through targeted investment in finance; infrastructure and expert support
- Targeted outreach and engagement support to develop inclusive pathways into new growth sectors.

3.6 With regard to next steps in this work, it is our understanding that DfE intends to move ahead with the development of a ‘sub-regional economic development plan’ in September 2024. That ‘plan’ is likely to be more of a broader set of intentions, with the ask that each council comes forward with their outline areas of priority and resource requirements. Council boundaries will be the building blocks for action – but they are open to collaborative activities, working across council boundaries on areas of shared interest e.g. sectoral priorities. No details are yet available on timelines, but it is likely that DfE will ask that plans are submitted in early 2025, to enable delivery from the new financial year. DfE officials have advised that engagement is taking place to try to secure additional resources for this work: However, we have made the point that it should not just be about new resources but, more importantly, considering how the existing resources can be flexed.

3.7 One other stipulation that DfE have flagged is that the plans will be brought together by local partnerships. They have not prescribed what these partnerships should be and have suggested that it is for councils to advise. This recognises the volume of existing partnerships that are already in place across all council areas, working on broader economic development issues.

3.8 It is likely that additional information on the proposed way forward will emerge in the coming weeks. At that point, officers will bring back a more detailed update and set out a proposed approach to ensure that the position of Belfast is recognised and appropriately supported through this work.

3.9 **Financial and Resource Implications**

No specific financial or resource implications at this time.

**3.10 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

DfE will be responsible for the overall equality impact assessment work on this activity.

It is intended that support will be available to all council areas – urban and rural.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations as outlined in the report.

Chairperson