

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast
City Council**

9th June, 2026

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room, City Hall on Wednesday, 10th June, 2026 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters

- (a) Apologies
- (b) Minutes
- (c) Declarations of Interest

2. Presentations

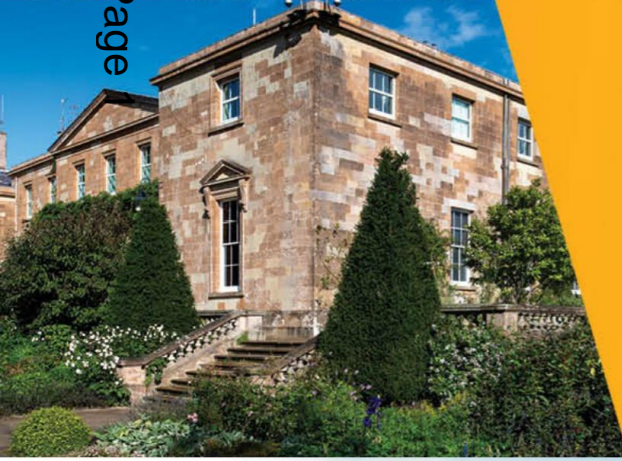
- (a) Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (Pages 1 - 14)
- (b) Destination Cathedral Quarter Business Improvement District (BID) (Pages 15 - 18)

3. Restricted Items

- (a) Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update (Pages 19 - 40)
- (b) Assembly Rooms Cluster Update (Pages 41 - 50)
- (c) WITHDRAWN: Sailortown to Titanic Quarter Bridge Update
- (d) UUEPC - Review of Housing Association Grant Changes (Pages 51 - 58)

- (e) Bad Debt Write-Off (Pages 59 - 60)
 - (f) Belfast Zoo Quarterly Performance Update (Pages 61 - 68)
 - (g) Belfast Bikes Quarterly Performance Update (Pages 69 - 90)
 - (h) Markets Quarterly Update and External Market Approval (Pages 91 - 96)
 - (i) Artist Studio and Creative Workspace Update (Pages 97 - 162)
 - (j) Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 Update (Pages 163 - 186)
4. **Requests to Present**
- (a) Department for Infrastructure - Castle Street Plans (Pages 187 - 190)
5. **Matters referred back from Council/Motions**
- (a) Notice of Motion - Silent Fireworks (Pages 191 - 194)
6. **Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure**
- (a) Local Growth Fund Consultation Response (Pages 195 - 222)
7. **Positioning Belfast to Compete**
- (a) Belfast City and Region Place Partnership Update (Pages 223 - 230)
 - (b) Culture Night Update (Pages 231 - 234)
 - (c) Festive Lights Update (Pages 235 - 240)
 - (d) UNESCO City of Music Programme Update (Pages 241 - 250)
 - (e) Department for Communities Consultation on Museums Policy - Draft Response (Pages 251 - 282)
8. **Strategic and Operational Issues**
- (a) Committee Plan 2025/26 End of Year Report and 2026/27 Performance Information (Pages 283 - 326)
 - (b) Notices of Motion Quarterly Update (Pages 327 - 330)
 - (c) Minutes of the Zoo Long-Term Financial Sustainability Group - 27th May 2026 (Pages 331 - 332)

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Belfast

City & **Region**

**Belfast City & Region
Place Partnership**

City Growth & Regeneration Committee, June 2026

Page

Agenda Item 2a



Marie Doyle

Chair, Belfast City & Region Place Partnership

Managing Partner, Deloitte in Northern Ireland



James Eyre

Chief Executive, Titanic Quarter Ltd.



John McDonald

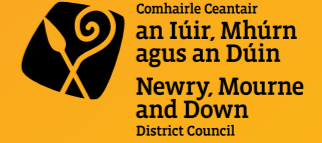
Managing Director, GRAHAM Investment Projects



Belfast City Council



Mid & East Antrim Borough Council



ARUP



BENMORE



CBRE



STARGiME



Tughans



Belfast City & Region Place Partnership

Objectives

1

Strengthen collaboration and partnership working across the Belfast City Region;

2

Promote and market the Belfast City Region nationally and internationally;

3

Enhance engagement and advocacy with key stakeholders to advance regional investment and development priorities;

4

Support delivery of Belfast Region City Deal projects and strategic initiatives;

5

Drive inclusive, sustainable and innovative growth that strengthens communities and delivers long-term prosperity.

**The Belfast Agenda**
continuing the conversation

Pillared Programming



**Investor-
Focused Activity**



**Advocacy &
Engagement**



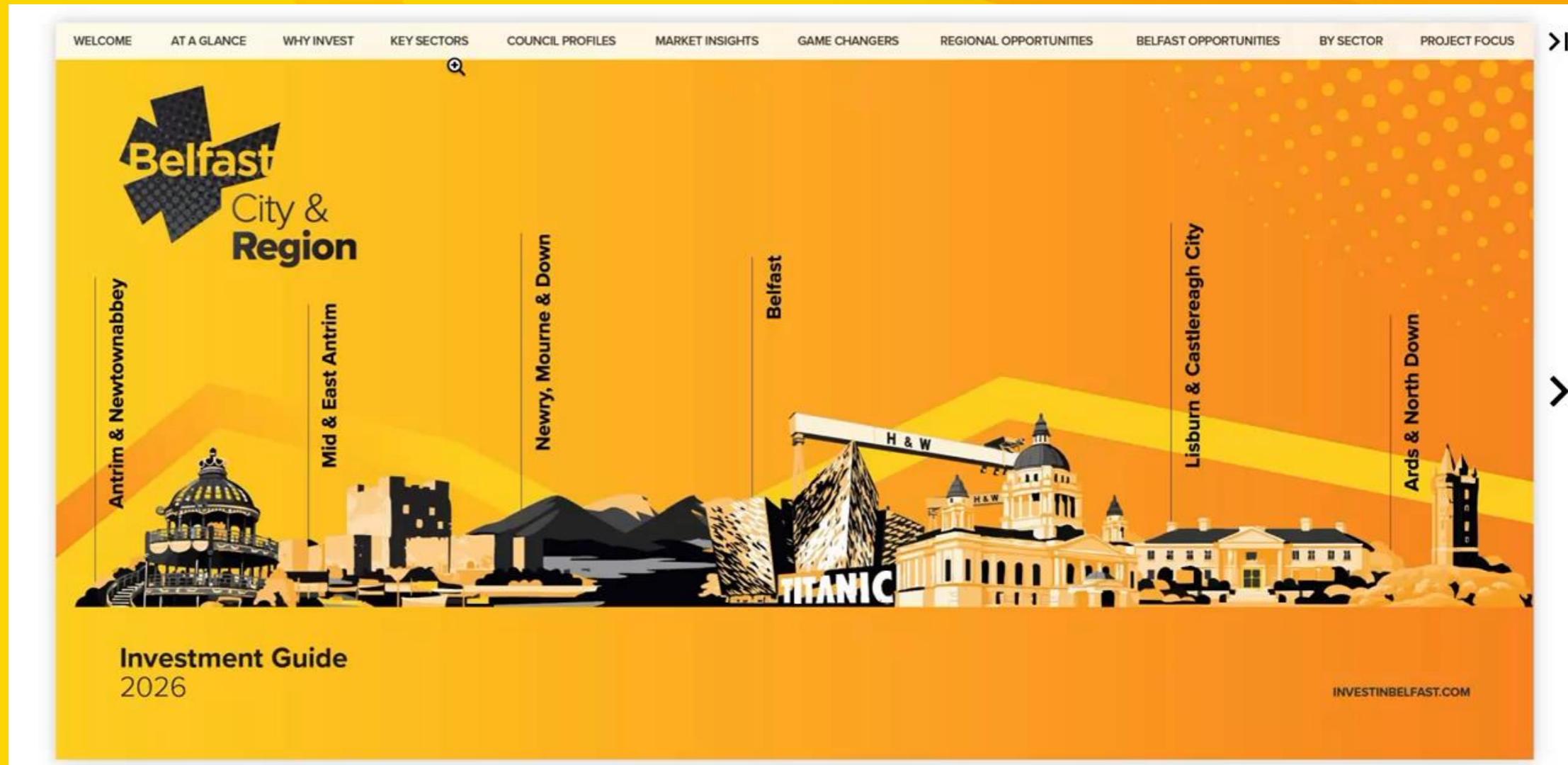
**Media &
Communication**



**Community
Engagement**

Strategic Communications

- Development of bespoke digital Belfast Region investment guide
- National and international media.
- Targeted newsletter.
- Targeted digital marketing.



Advocacy & Community Engagement



Supporting approach to **Place-Based Growth Proposition**



Advocacy & Engagement with NI, UK, Irish Governments



Use the **BCRPP Community Forum** to support engagement between community representatives and BCRPP partners to maximise the social, environmental and economic benefits associated with forthcoming investment and development activity.



Joint Ministerial meeting



Crane Survey w/ Minister Lyons



Meeting w/ First Minister & deputy First Minister



NI Civil Service & Strategic Investment Board meeting



UKREiiF w/ Minister Lyons & Elected Members



Community Forum





Investor-Focused Events



March 2026



Page 10 **Belfast sharing stages alongside other UK, Irish and European cities and partners, including supporting UK Cities Dinner**



Highlighting opportunities across Belfast Region including:

Housing-led regeneration; Transport-led regeneration; Tourism; Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor



Investor-Focused Events



May 2026

Page 11

Team 'Belfast City Region'

30+ delegates across public and private sectors
BRCD partnership approach



Highlighting opportunities across Belfast Region including:

Housing-led regeneration; Transport-led regeneration; Tourism; Advanced Manufacturing; GreenTech



What's next?

1

Continuation of BCRPP Partnership 2026-2027

Including the **objectives** and **pillared approach** to programming

2

Advocacy & Engagement

Working collaboratively to support place-based growth proposition for Belfast.

3

Investor-Focused events

Positively showcasing and positioning the city region as a place for investment inc. on-the-ground in-Belfastshowcase with international partners, MIPIM 2027 and UKREiiF 2027

4

Communications

Positively positioning the city to attract inclusive investment to deliver regeneration and development across the city

5

Community Engagement

Support continued engagement with community representatives and BCRPP partners to maximise the social, environmental and economic benefits associated with forthcoming investment and development activity.

Alignment with BCRPP's objectives and the role of the City Growth & Regeneration Committee



Influencing and contributing to regional regeneration and growth strategies and activities



Developing and implementing city-wide economic strategies and policies



Managing and maximising the impact of major physical developments in the city



Providing support for economic development initiatives



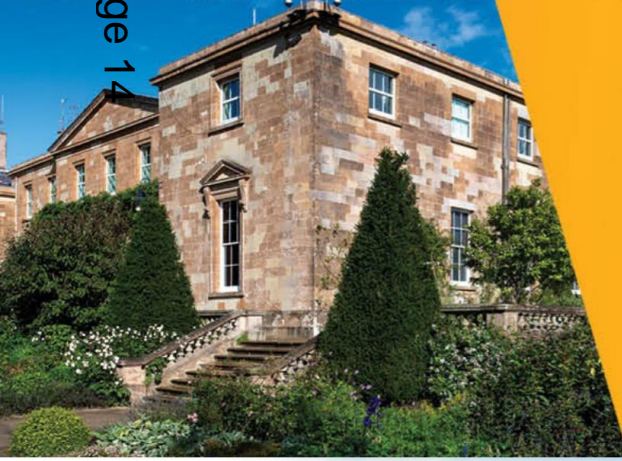
Working with other agencies to promote Belfast as a key investment and tourism opportunity



Developing programmes and actions to support local businesses and attract inward investment



Influencing and contributing to strategies and policies affecting skills, employability, transportation and energy in the City



Belfast

City & **Region**

**Belfast City & Region
Place Partnership**

City Growth & Regeneration Committee, June 2026



Subject:	Destination CQ BID – Ballot update
Date:	10 th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director Place & Economy
Contact Officer:	Keith Forster, Director economic development Lesley-Ann O'Donnell – Senior Manager Culture Tourism and events

Restricted Reports													
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>												
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 													
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 5%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future		<input type="checkbox"/>	Never		<input type="checkbox"/>
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After Council Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>											
Sometime in the future		<input type="checkbox"/>											
Never		<input type="checkbox"/>											

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

1.0	Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of the report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an update on the upcoming ballot for the third term of Destination CQ BID • Seek approval for the Council’s voting position in advance of the ballot • Outline the Council’s property portfolio within the BID boundary and associated implications
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the update on the pending ballot for the third term of the Belfast One BID (Business Improvement District) • Agree to return yes votes for the Council properties located within the boundary.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that there are three Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in Belfast city centre: BID One which covers the main retail core and runs from the City Hall down to the junction of Royal Avenue and North Street; Linen Quarter which covers the office district to the north the City Hall including the new Transport Hub and Destination CQ which covers the Cathedral Quarter including the Ulster University campus</p> <p>Destination CQ represents a key cultural, hospitality, and regeneration area within the city.</p>
3.2	<p>A BID is a defined district where organisations collectively invest in projects, services and events that will benefit that area. Destination CQ BID is an independent, not-for-profit company that works on behalf of its levy payers to support, develop and promote Belfast city centre. It focuses on delivering programmes that enhance safety, cleanliness, business support and the overall vibrancy of the area.</p>
3.3	<p>Under government legislation, all BIDs operate on a five-year term. At the end of each term, a ballot must take place in order for the BID to continue its work.. The ballot for the third term of BID One will open in July 2026 and all votes must be submitted by 1 September 2026.</p>
3.4	<p>Belfast City Council has a number of properties within the BID boundary including Belfast Stories and the Assembly Rooms. The BID area contains around 700 units that are eligible for votes. Each property must pay an annual mandatory BID levy – depending on the NAV (Net Annual Value) of the property. Belfast City Council is responsible (by legislation) for issuing the levy bills (the cost of this service is covered by the BID).</p> <p>In order for the proposal to be successful at ballot, the result will need to meet, as a minimum, three independent criteria, namely:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There must be more yes votes than no votes (volume) 2. Total rateable value of yes votes must exceed total rateable value of no votes (value)

	3. The turnout of ballot papers returned must be no less than 25% of the eligible rate payers entitled to vote in the ballot <i>and</i> total no less than 25% of the eligible rateable value.
3.5	<p>Destination CQ BID works closely with the council on a range of issues related to safety, cleanliness and vibrancy in the city centre. The team and the Board are also represented on a number of city centre forums and working groups and, given their mandate, represent a strong conduit for engagement with city centre businesses operating in this geographical area. They have produced a business plan for the five year term and this proposes focusing resources on three main pillars of work, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Support • Safer, Cleaner, Greener • Promotion & animation
3.6	The draft business plan notes that the BID is likely to generate circa £0.5 million annually through its levy collection and it will use these resources to deliver projects on behalf of levy payers within these agreed priority areas for action. Details of planned activities will be shared by the team at the upcoming meeting.
3.7	<p>Belfast City Council owns and/or manages a range of assets within the Cathedral Quarter BID boundary. The Council's portfolio includes:</p> <p>Car parks (multiple sites across Dunbar Street, Tomb Street, Kent Street, Exchange Street, and others)</p> <p>Office buildings and commercial premises, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22–30 Dunbar Street • Bank of Ireland Buildings, Royal Avenue (multiple floors) • Kyrenia House, Royal Avenue (multiple floors) • Retail / market units, including properties within Smithfield Market • Public conveniences and civic infrastructure <p>The Council's property holdings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Span key regeneration and access locations across the Cathedral Quarter • Include assets central to public realm, transport, and visitor experience (e.g. car parking) • Include vacant assets with future redevelopment or activation potential <p>This reinforces the Council's strategic interest in the success of Destination CQ.</p>
3.8	<p>Given:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's significant property and financial stake in the area • The BID's role in delivering improvements aligned to Council priorities • The established working relationship between the Council and Destination CQ • The BID's contribution to culture-led regeneration and city centre vitality <p>It is recommended that the Council supports the renewal of Destination CQ BID through a positive vote.</p>
4.0	Financial and Resource Implications
	Belfast City Council will be liable for levy payments relating to its properties and assets located within the BID boundary.
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

	No specific equality or good relations implications. The Destination CQ designated boundary has been approved by DfC. Visitor insights demonstrate that the city centre is accessed by visitors from all parts of Northern Ireland and beyond.
6.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Subject:	Request to Present: Dfl Castle St Plans
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director City Regeneration & Development
Contact Officer:	Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager, City Regeneration and Development Callie Persic, Development Manager, City Regeneration and Development

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
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6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

- After Committee Decision
- After Council Decision
- Sometime in the future
- Never

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to advise Members that the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) have submitted a request to present to the August 2026 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee. The purpose is to provide Members with an update on their potential plan to reopen lower Castle Street to public transport.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">I. Agree to receive a presentation from officials from the Department for Infrastructure at the August meeting of the CG&R Committee in relation to the potential reopening of lower Castle Street to public transport.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Background</u> In the aftermath of the Bank Buildings fire in 2018, Castle Street was closed between Fountain Street and Castle Place through a Road Closure Order to facilitate the establishment of a large cordon surrounding the building and enable stabilisation and reconstruction works. Following the construction works the section of Castle St remained closed, effectively pedestrianising the lower part of Castle Street with the potential to create a people-focused space, safe pedestrian movement and wider placemaking. However, pending the development and recommendations of the Eastern Transport Plan it has not been feasible to develop a proposition for the area, and in the interim scenario there have been occasions of ASB issues, for example, lack of definition and use of the space and access/escape of e-motorbikes. Road Closure Notices on Union Street and Brunswick Street were also brought forward at that time that enabled the delivery of additional public realm and spill out space for hospitality that were successfully delivered through the Primark Revitalisation Fund, reanimating and activating these streets into popular destinations in their own right.
3.2	As reported to the CG&R Committee in April 2026, DfI is planning to bring forward the Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) consultation in the near future. The ETP will set the framework for

	<p>making transport policy and investment decisions up until 2035. Throughout the preparation of the ETP Council Officers have worked closely with DfI to ensure alignment in terms of policy development and agreed Council priorities as set out in the Belfast Agenda and A Bolder Vision. In the current draft of the ETP lower Castle St remains closed to all traffic and Royal Avenue is designated as a 2-way Glider only route, although this is subject to consultation and finalisation.</p>
3.3	<p>At the CG&R meeting in February 2026 Members approved the final A Bolder Vision Strategy, which supported a 2-way glider only movement on Royal Avenue, with members previously not been supportive of Royal Avenue reopening to 2-way full public transport penetration. Reopening lower Castle St to public transport will reintroduce 2-way glider movement on Royal Avenue.</p>
3.4	<p>In advance of the finalisation of the ETP, the Department has been considering re-opening Castle Street to address issues highlighted by Translink. Specifically, these include congestion at bus stops on Chichester St, additional journey time and poor bus stop provision on North St that they advise have affected the North Belfast Services in the period from 2018 to present.</p>
3.5	<p>DfI held a meeting with traders and elected representatives in September 2025 to gauge support for reopening lower Castle St to public transport. At this meeting some traders were in favour of the proposal to reopen Castle Street supporting the additional benefits of having additional halts in the area, while some were against the proposal citing additional traffic, a negligible impact on trade and loss of a potential better use of the space.</p>
3.6	<p>DfI is now in the position to present proposals for Castle Street and have requested to present the options to Members of the CG&R Committee in August 2026. DfI are also planning to re-engage with traders in the area on their proposals in September 2026. Council officers will be in attendance and continue to liaise with DfI following feedback from the meeting.</p>
4.0	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> No additional financial or resource requirements are associated with this paper.</p>
5.0	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> None associated with this report.</p>
6.0	<p>Appendices - Documents Attached None</p>



Subject:	Notice of Motion – Silent Fireworks
Date:	10th June, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Craig Mealey, Committee Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To consider a motion in relation to Silent Fireworks, which was referred to the Committee by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 26th May, 2026.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to note that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure or fall within the remit of a particular Committee must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.</p> <p>At this stage, the Committee is asked to note that the notice of motion has been received and that, if agreed, a subsequent report will be brought back to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the motion and the potential cost implications.</p>

3.0	Main report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u>
	<p>At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 26th May, 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor Flynn and seconded by Councillor Smyth, was referred to the Committee for consideration:</p>
3.2	<u>Silent fireworks</u>
	<p>“This Council recognises the distress caused by high-noise fireworks to many residents, including autistic people, those with sensory issues or PTSD, elderly residents, pets, livestock and wildlife.</p>
	<p>Council notes that low-noise fireworks are increasingly used at public events and can provide the same visual impact while significantly reducing noise disruption to communities.</p>
	<p>Accordingly, Council agrees to:</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the use of low-noise fireworks at Council-run and Council-funded events.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include low-noise alternatives in future procurement processes.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Receive a report on implementation options and costs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Write to the Justice Minister calling for a review of fireworks legislation and the sale of high-noise fireworks in Northern Ireland.”
	<p>Proposer: Councillor Anthony Flynn</p>
	<p>Seconded: Councillor Brian Smyth</p>

4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None.

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Subject:	Local Growth Fund – draft consultation response
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director, Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of the report is to update the Committee on the consultation on the UK Government’s Local Growth Fund – the successor to Shared Prosperity Fund and to seek committee approval of a draft response to the consultation.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider and approve the draft response and agree that this is submitted to NIO Note the update on the “Belfast Trailblazer” that had been referenced in the June 2025 budget statement and agree to issue correspondence to NIO to seek clarity on their plans for this fund.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The Committee has previously received an update on the Local Growth Fund (LGF) – the successor to the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). The report noted that there were a number of significant changes from SPF to LGF namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management of the fund was to involve “collaborative working” between the regional government departments, NIO and MHCLG (previously no involvement from regional government departments or NIO) Funding was to move from a predominantly revenue-based budget to heavily capital-focused one (indicative split 66% capital; 34% revenue funding).

3.2	<p>In December 2025, Belfast City Council lead officers on Go Succeed were advised by MHCLG that there was to be an allocation of £2.53million revenue funding from the Local Growth Fund for one year, representing an overall reduction of around 60% on the previous revenue allocation. At the same time, all delivery partners that had previously led on the economic inactivity projects supported under the Shared Prosperity Fund from 2023-2026 were advised that their projects would also be extended for one year – but with a similar reduction in available budgets. These are the only two elements of expenditure that have been allocated from the Local Growth Fund to date this year – and they represent the entirety of the available revenue funding for this period.</p>																				
3.3	<p>NIO launched the consultation on the Local Growth Fund on 8 May 2026. The consultation will close on 26 June 2026. NIO expects to present a draft investment plan to Westminster before the recess period, with a similar plan being shared with the NI Executive in parallel. Subject to these respective approvals, they will then begin the process of commissioning service delivery against the agreed priority areas. The consultation seeks views on resource funding from 2027/28 to 2028/29 and capital funding from 2026/27 to 2028/29. It does not seek to revisit the original decisions around the capital and resource split of the funding.</p>																				
3.4	<p>The Local Growth Fund in NI will have a budget allocation of £129million funding over the next three years – an indicative allocation of £43million per annum. The indicative annual breakdown is as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="225 1106 1465 1312"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2025/26</th> <th>2026/27</th> <th>2027/28</th> <th>2028/29</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Capital</td> <td>3.8*</td> <td>27.4</td> <td>27.5</td> <td>29.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Revenue</td> <td></td> <td>11.8</td> <td>15.5</td> <td>13.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>3.8</td> <td>39.2</td> <td>43</td> <td>43</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><i>*Note – this £3.8million was allocated to North City Business Centre for the development of workspace in North Belfast.</i></p>		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Capital	3.8*	27.4	27.5	29.8	Revenue		11.8	15.5	13.2	Total	3.8	39.2	43	43
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29																	
Capital	3.8*	27.4	27.5	29.8																	
Revenue		11.8	15.5	13.2																	
Total	3.8	39.2	43	43																	
3.5	<p>The draft strategic framework underpinning the Fund is based around two priorities for growth, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing productivity: driving higher value-added activity and increasing the efficiency of the economy to create capacity for sustainable long-term growth • Promoting active participation in the workforce: tackling the barriers to employment to increase the working age population’s participation rate and meet immediate labour needs. 																				
3.6	<p>Each priority includes a number of sub-priorities as follows:</p>																				

Priority	Sub-priority
<i>Enhancing productivity</i>	Business support and innovation
	Strategic infrastructure investment
	Skills enhancement
<i>Promoting active participation in the workforce</i>	Localised economic inclusion
	Early intervention

3.7	The consultation document notes that, while MHCLG will maintain oversight of the Local Growth Fund, the Northern Ireland Executive departments will “plan and oversee delivery of the Fund” for all future expenditure. In reality, this is likely to mean that both the Department for the Economy (DfE) and the Department for Communities (DfC) will take the lead on agreed priority projects and will be responsible for commissioning and managing delivery.
3.8	It also notes that a cross-sectoral Partnership Group will be established to “provide insight and advice on delivery”. A Partnership Group existed under the Shared Prosperity Fund and local government had two representatives – one from MUDC and one from BCC. Discussions with NIO have indicated that this Partnership Group will be established once the programme is agreed, rather than advising on the programme content – as was the case for the SPF Partnership Group.
3.10	The consultation document is attached to this report (appendix 1) and an outline of indicative responses is also included in appendix 2. The consultation is focused around a number of questions relating to the core priorities (Enhancing Productivity and Promoting Active Participation) and the sub-priorities as well as the proposals around delivery and consideration of the equality implications.
3.11	<p>In addition to responding to the questions, there are a number of issues that the Committee should be aware of and that have been woven into the draft response. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit support for continued investment in Go Succeed with the potential to supplement existing support and integrate other capital interventions aligned to programme priorities e.g. grant support for digital transformation • Proposal that the activities supported under “Promoting Active Participation” should focus on outreach and engagement support and that outcomes should be appropriate and aligned to this support i.e. job outcomes are not always an appropriate outcome to evidence the impact of this work. This will also help streamline the support ecosystem

	<p>with the SPF-funded activity focusing on the “supply” side (reaching out to engage key target groups; providing key employability support and helping address barriers to progression) while the LMP activities will then focus more on the “demand-side” activities i.e. working with employers to design and develop employment support interventions for those further from the labour market and create/ring-fenced specific job roles for individuals that are successful in interviews for those roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to use local government as a delivery mechanism for economic growth support activities – direct commissioning rather than open competitions. This reflects a similar approach under Shared Prosperity Fund when councils were a conduit for substantial proportion of delivery.
3.12	<p>A key omission from the current consultation is the reference to the “Belfast trailblazer” that was noted in the June 2025 budget statement regarding the fund. At that time, it was intended that this would be a proxy for the “Pride in Place” funding that was made available to towns and cities across the UK. An indicative funding allocation of £2million was set aside for “a Belfast neighbourhood” for a period of 10 years – similar to the funding that was allocated to Derry and Coleraine in 2023. Officers understand that this indicative allocation has simply been “rolled into” the overall Local Growth Fund with the expectation that at least £2million will be allocated to Belfast-based projects – but with no ring-fenced mechanism for doing this. It is proposed that formal correspondence is issued to NIO to verify this position.</p>
4.0	Financial & Resource Implications
	No specific financial resources.
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
	No specific equality or good relations implications. NIO will be responsible for the overall equality impact assessment.
6.0	Appendices
	Appendix 1: LGF consultation Appendix 2: Draft Belfast City Council response



Northern
Ireland
Office

A public consultation on the Local Growth Fund in Northern Ireland 2026-2029

8 May 2026

Public Consultation: The Local Growth Fund in Northern Ireland (2026–2029)

Northern Ireland Office (NIO)

Introduction

1. In the 2025 Spending Review, the UK Government announced a new targeted approach to local growth funding, comprising a set of interventions to drive growth and strengthen communities across the UK.
2. The Local Growth Fund forms part of this approach, with a focus on supporting each nation to deliver long-term investments for sustained economic growth. Through this Fund, the UK Government is investing in transformational programmes and projects that will create lasting jobs and opportunities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland¹.
3. The UK Government is dedicated to working in close partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive to build a modern, dynamic and resilient economy that delivers long-term prosperity for every community.
4. Underpinned by over £129 million in UK Government funding over the next three years, the Local Growth Fund represents a significant pillar of this commitment - providing targeted investment to empower local delivery partners to address specific structural challenges that limit growth but also build on opportunities for development.
5. This consultation invites you to share your views on our proposed strategic framework for the Local Growth Fund to help shape how that investment is targeted to ensure maximum impact across Northern Ireland.
6. Taking forward the insight gathered from consultation, the Northern Ireland Office will work closely with the Northern Ireland Executive to design an Investment Plan for the Local Growth Fund. This Plan will set out details on the priorities, eligible initiatives and delivery approach and, by aligning to the Programme for Government 2024-2027², will complement Northern Ireland Executive funding. Detailed delivery approaches will be designed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Executive.
7. We recognise that there has been much discussion over the Resource and Capital split for the Local Growth Fund, especially compared to previous funds such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. However the aim of this consultation is to determine how the Capital funding for 26/27 should be allocated, as well as how the Capital and Resource funding for the remainder of the spending review period should be allocated.

¹ Further details of the overarching Local Growth Funding framework for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales can be found [here](#)

²

<https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-2024-2027-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most-documents>

The Local Growth Fund: Core Priorities and Funding

8. As part of the 2025 Spending Review, £43m per annum has been provided by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for the Local Growth Fund for Northern Ireland 2026-29 and has set allocations for two different types of spending, in line with the profile detailed in Table 1, below:

Resources - Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (RDEL) - funding, for example, for day-to-day operational costs, such as staff costs for employability programmes, training delivery, business advice, and ‘wraparound’ support services.

Capital - Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit (CDEL) - funding, for example, for long-term investment in physical assets, such as digital infrastructure, wastewater facilities, transport, and workspace development.

Table 1: Local Growth Fund - Funding allocation £m 2026-27 to 2028-29³

	25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29
CDEL	3.8	27.4	27.5	29.8
RDEL		11.8	15.5	13.2
Total	3.8	39.2	43	43

9. There are three pillars to be considered as part of the Local Growth Fund; **enabling local growth infrastructure**, **support for business**, and **skills and employment**. Taking this forward, the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Executive departments have, based on the analytical evidence, identified two core priorities for the Local Growth Fund to target and provided the following funding allocations:

Enhancing productivity - through business support and promoting innovation, infrastructure investment and skills enhancement.

Promoting active participation in the workforce - through investment in economic inactivity provision, social enterprise support and social inclusion, including working with employers.

Table 2: Proposed funding allocation £m (including resource and capital spending) across the two priorities, 2026-27 to 2028-29⁴

Theme		25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29	Total allocation	% of total allocation
Enhancing productivity	CDEL	3.8	13.7	13.8	14.9	46.2	35.8
	RDEL		2.5	3.3	2.8	8.6	6.7
	Sub total	3.8	16.2	17.1	17.7	54.8	42.4

³ Figures are shown in £m and rounded to the nearest £0.1 million. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

⁴ The total funding allocation includes the Northern Ireland share of funding derived from the Pride in Place Programme (Phase 2) and Pride in Place Impact Fund for 2025-26 to 2028-29, that will be delivered as part of the Local Growth Fund, including the £3.8m for 25/26. Figures are shown in £m and rounded to the nearest £0.1 million. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Promoting active participation in the workforce	CDEL		13.7	13.8	14.9	42.4	32.8
	RDEL		9.3	12.2	10.4	31.9	24.7
	Sub total		23.0	26.0	25.3	74.3	57.6
Annual total		3.8	39.2	43.0	43.0	129.0	100

10. The 2026/27 RDEL allocations are a reflection of the joint agreement between the UK Government and NI Executive in December 2025 for this funding to be used to deliver £9.3 million to economic inactivity projects and £2.5 million for Go Succeed (which are now in delivery). Capital funding that was made available in Northern Ireland for 2025/26 has been utilised by the Executive to progress a community based workspace project to support economic growth in North Belfast⁵.
11. As such, this consultation seeks views on Resource funding (RDEL) from 2027/28 to 2028/29 and Capital funding (CDEL) from 2026/27 to 2028/29.

The evidence for investment: Addressing Northern Ireland’s challenges and supporting opportunities for growth

12. To understand why we have chosen our proposed priorities, we must look at the current position of the Northern Ireland economy. While showing resilience and periods of strong growth in recent years, economic performance in Northern Ireland has been variable as the economy faces deep-seated structural weaknesses.

The productivity gap

13. For over two decades, NI’s economic expansion has been disproportionately driven by employment growth (61% of total growth) rather than labour productivity (39%)⁶. This imbalance has left NI’s productivity 12% below the UK average, ranking it 8th out of 12 UK regions⁷.

Sectoral imbalance: the economy has shifted from higher-productivity sectors (e.g. manufacturing) to lower-productivity, labour-intensive services (e.g. hospitality and administrative support). The economy also has a relatively low proportion of employment in sectors that have experienced stronger growth across the UK such as ICT and professional services.

‘Back office’ functions: even within high-growth areas like professional services, productivity lags the UK average by 15 percentage points, reflecting a high concentration of lower-value ‘back-office’ activities.

⁵ [Major investment to drive economic development in North Belfast | Department for the Economy](#)

⁶ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2025) [Deconstructing Economic Growth in Northern Ireland](#). From 2000-2022, employment growth occurred at a similar pace to median across UK regions but annual productivity growth of 0.5% was lower than the median rate (0.8%) across the 12 UK regions.

⁷ The Productivity Institute (2025) [Northern Ireland Productivity Dashboard 2025](#)

Public sector concentration: as of December 2025, public sector jobs accounted for 27% of total employment, highest among UK regions and significantly higher than the UK average of 18%, highlighting the need to stimulate private sector innovation⁸.

Sub-regional variations: while NI productivity performance has been a longstanding challenge, variations across sub-regions within NI also show greater distance from the UK average and additional challenges for progressing economic growth⁹.

The demographic challenge: a shrinking labour supply

14. The ‘employment-led’ growth model of the past is reaching its structural limit. We can no longer rely on a growing population to drive the economy.

Stagnating growth: NI’s population is projected to increase by just 3.6% by 2050, a stark contrast to the 12.7% projected for the UK and 19.9% for Ireland¹⁰.

The 2034 turning point: natural change (births vs. deaths) is forecast to turn negative by 2034¹¹. With unemployment already at a historic low (2.2%¹²), labour shortages will become a severe constraint on growth unless we increase productivity.

C. Economic inactivity and the skills mismatch

15. Northern Ireland possesses a high level of ‘latent employment’- people who want to work but face significant barriers.

The UK’s highest inactivity: At 26.7%, NI’s economic inactivity rate is the highest in the UK (UK average: 20.7%)¹³. Notably, of those who are inactive, 16.2% would like to work (i.e. currently want a job) while 50% expect to work at some point in the future (i.e. would definitely or probably work again), representing a massive untapped resource¹⁴.

The health barrier: 36.2% of NI’s inactive population cite long-term sickness or disability- equating to 9.6% of the total working-age population¹⁵. NI also faces the largest disability employment gap in the UK (44 percentage points vs. 29 UK average)¹⁶.

⁸ ONS, [Public sector employment](#), 19 March 2026

⁹ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2025) [Delivering balanced regional growth in Northern Ireland](#), May 2025

¹⁰ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2024) [Northern Ireland Demographics 2050 - Implications for public policy and infrastructure investment](#), August 2024

¹¹ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2024) [Northern Ireland Demographics 2050 - Implications for public policy and infrastructure investment](#), August 2024

¹² NISRA (2026) [Northern Ireland Labour Market Report](#), 19 March 2026

¹³ NISRA (2026) [Northern Ireland Labour Market Report](#), 19 March 2026

¹⁴ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2026) Labour Market Intelligence Portal, Labour Force Survey analysis Q4 2025.

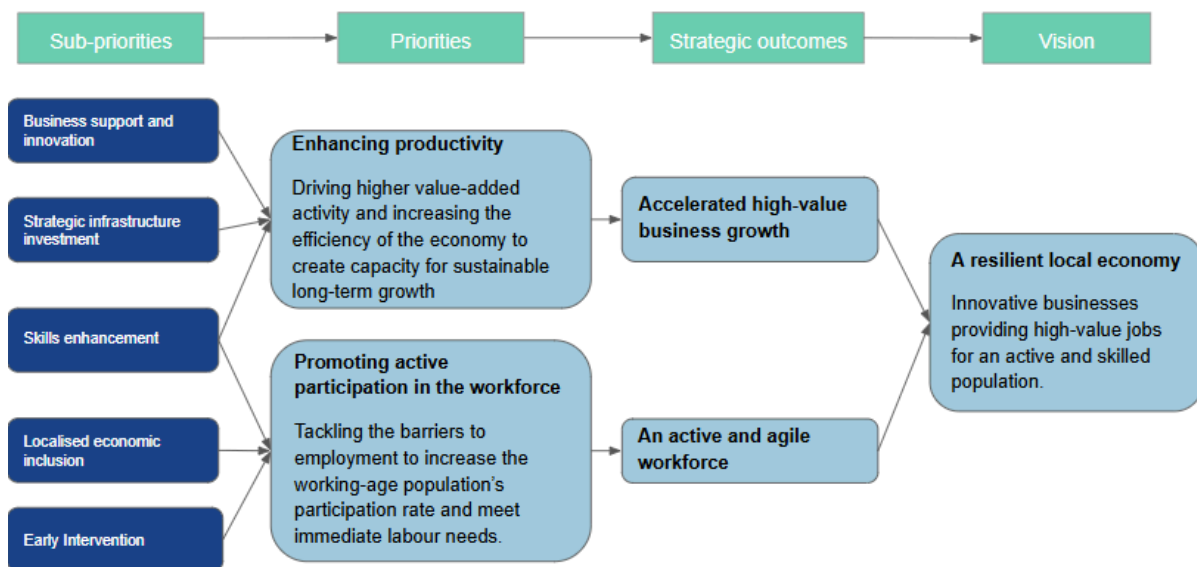
¹⁵ NISRA (2026) [Northern Ireland Labour Market Report](#), 19 March 2026

¹⁶ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2023) Maximising potential: A review of labour market outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland

The skills gap: NI has the second-lowest percentage of bachelor-level (RQF 4) qualifications in the UK. By 2033, an annual undersupply of 7,000 individuals educated to RQF Level 3 or above is projected, alongside an oversupply of those with low or no qualifications¹⁷.

Our proposed strategic framework: Two priorities for growth

16. To address the structural challenges identified in the economic data, the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive propose a dual strategy - pursuing productivity-led growth as the long-term anchor, while simultaneously promoting active participation in the workforce to ensure maximum employment growth.
17. In the Local Growth Fund, these two priorities are self-reinforcing. Productivity creates the high-wage jobs that make work attractive while greater workforce participation ensures the supply of an active and agile workforce that businesses need to expand.
18. Under this approach, the proposed framework aims to ensure that we are not just creating more jobs, but better jobs, while ensuring that every person in Northern Ireland has a pathway to participate in that prosperity in their local area.



Priority 1: Enhancing productivity

The goal: To support the transition of Northern Ireland towards a high-value, productivity-led economy.

We propose targeting investment toward three sub-priorities as drivers of productivity:

¹⁷ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2025) [Skills Barometer: 2023-33](#)

Sub-priority 1.1 – Business support and innovation

Core focus	Northern Ireland suffers from lower levels of enterprise and innovation activity compared to the rest of the UK. We propose focused support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to help them to innovate, adopt new technologies, expand into export markets and move up the value chain. This includes support for innovation ready businesses, as well as start ups, self-employment initiatives and those at the early stages of developing new ways for growing their business.
Proposed activity	Business and start up advice, grants and support for research and development and digital transformation

Sub-priority 1.2 - Local infrastructure investment

Core focus	Growth-driving sectors require high-quality foundations of infrastructure and transport connectivity. Northern Ireland contains significant sub-regional disparities where poor connectivity hampers productivity and median wages.
Proposed activity	Investment in digital and transport connectivity to support regeneration, improve location attraction, and ensure low productivity areas (including areas with high levels of rurality) are not left behind. Support for local water and wastewater infrastructure (including flooding prevention) to protect or unlock land for new social housing, industrial and commercial development (including site assembly and new business premises). Utilising infrastructure investment to harness the potential of a green growth economy, including investment in carbon-neutral technologies.

Sub-priority 1.3 - Skills enhancement (RQF Level 3+)

Core focus	By 2033, NI faces an annual undersupply of 7,000 workers with mid-to-high level qualifications. We must close this gap to sustain a high-value economy.
Proposed activity	Tailored skills interventions specifically aligned with high-growth sectors like ICT, professional services, advanced manufacturing, and the green economy.

Priority 2: Promoting active participation in the workforce

The goal: To tackle the high rate of economic inactivity (26.7%) and ensure that growth reduces regional disparities and social exclusion.

With 50% of the inactive population expressing a desire to work, there is a massive 'latent' workforce. To support moves toward employment, we propose a multi-agency approach focusing on three intervention areas:

Sub-priority 2.1 - Education, skills, and reskilling	
Core focus	Economic inactivity is inextricably linked to low educational attainment and NI currently shows the highest rate of inactivity in the UK for individuals with qualifications below NQF Level 2. Breaking this cycle is essential for both the individual and the wider economy.
Proposed activity	Expanding access to adult education and reskilling opportunities designed specifically to bring people back into the labour market.

Sub-priority 2.2 - Localised economic inclusion	
Core focus	Economic inactivity is often concentrated in specific geographic clusters with high levels of deprivation, social exclusion and low levels of connectivity ¹⁸ .
Proposed activity	Working with a range of stakeholders, including local employers, to support innovative, granular solutions tailored to local community needs. This includes support for the social enterprise sector, which acts as an engine for local growth by employing those who face the highest barriers to the labour market.

Sub-priority 2.3 - Early Intervention: Addressing NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)	
Core focus	The most effective way to reduce long-term inactivity is to stop it before it starts. Entrenched barriers often begin when young people disengage from education.
Proposed activity	Dedicated programmes to prevent young people from becoming NEET, focusing on areas with historically low educational attainment.

Delivery and governance

¹⁸ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2024) [Economic inactivity Who, what, where, why?](#)

19. We recognise that Northern Ireland requires a delivery model that is agile, locally informed, and avoids unnecessary bureaucracy.
20. Across the UK, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will maintain oversight of the overall Local Growth Fund and is responsible for periodic reporting to the UK Parliament on the Fund. In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive departments and their Accounting Officer(s) will plan and oversee delivery of the Fund, with the exception of the delivery of skills and employment support and business advice in 2026-27, which will be managed by MHCLG directly.
21. Reporting and Monitoring arrangements for the fund, as well as progress metrics, are set out in the Local Growth Fund (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) Technical note.¹⁹
22. Following final agreement of the strategic framework and outcomes, taking forward input from the consultation process, the NI Executive as Accountable Fund Lead will be responsible for managing the delivery of the Local Growth Fund to ensure alignment with local expertise. In accordance with the activities to be supported under the Fund, the NI Executive will allocate the funding to delivery organisations through a range of approaches, including commissioning and competition where appropriate.
23. To ensure transparency and rigorous management of public funds:

Partnership Group: A cross-sectoral group of partners from the public, private and third sector will provide advice and insight on delivery.

Monitoring and evaluation: Robust and effective monitoring and evaluation play a crucial role in the success of all policy and investment delivery. It is vital we adopt a culture of continuous review and improvement to learn from previous experience, build on what works, and ensure value for money. As Accountable fund lead, the Northern Ireland Executive will develop guidance to support effective monitoring and evaluation and ensure that funded projects will be subject to regular reporting to ensure they meet stated outputs, outcomes and impacts. The Northern Ireland Executive will promote transparency in that data and coordinate an independent evaluation of the Local Growth Fund.

Compliance and equality

24. As part of our commitment to a fair society, the Local Growth Fund will be developed having regard to the following assessments:

Section 75 (NI Act 1998)

25. The proposed framework for the Local Growth Fund has undergone an initial Equality screening ([here](#)). The preliminary findings suggest that the plan's focus on Enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce will have a broadly positive impact across all Section 75 categories by creating economic opportunity.

¹⁹ [Local Growth Funding framework for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales](#)

26. As details of the specific programme interventions under the Local Growth Fund are established following the consultation exercise, a detailed monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed. The Local Growth Fund will be subject to a process of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, including assessment of equality impacts.

Alignment with the Windsor Framework

27. In accordance with Article 2 of the Windsor Framework, the UK Government ensures that no diminution of rights, safeguards, or equality of opportunity (as set out in the relevant part of the 1998 Agreement) results from the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. The interventions funded under this plan will be managed to ensure they uphold these non-diminution commitments. The Local Growth Fund will also be subject to a process of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, including assessment of upholding rights and safeguards guaranteed under Article 2.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

28. As per the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016, there is a need to consider how the plan, and subsequent delivery, will give due regard to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

29. With a focus on Enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce, the Plan has the potential to target particular barriers to development in rural areas and ensure they have the same growth opportunities as those in urban centres.

30. As details of the specific programme interventions under the Local Growth Fund are established following the consultation exercise, a Rural Needs Impact Assessment will be conducted. Further to this, a monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed to track and assess the impact on an urban/rural basis.

Consultation questions

31. This consultation will respect the Fair Funding principles outlined in the 'Partnership Agreement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland.'

32. The focus of this consultation is to ensure the most effective and efficient use of public funds for maximum impact and value to Northern Ireland. This consultation will not consider the overall level of funding for the Local Growth Fund.

33. Within this framework, we are seeking your views to refine the proposed strategic framework for the Fund. Your responses to the following questions will be instrumental in ensuring that our interventions are practical, impactful, and tailored to the unique needs of Northern Ireland's economy.

The strategic priorities

Do you agree that the two core priorities - Enhancing Productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce - are the correct priorities for the Local Growth Fund over the next three years?

Looking at the proposed activities under each priority, is the indicative balance of funding between the priorities appropriate? If not, what should it be? (To note: this question is not asking about the total Resource and Capital funding split for the Local Growth Fund but is asking about the proposed funding balance between the two priorities, Enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce).

Priority 1- Enhancing productivity

Which of three sub-priorities identified (Business support and innovation, Strategic infrastructure investment, Skills enhancement), or others, would you focus on to deliver higher value-added activity and increase the efficiency of the economy?

How can the Local Growth Fund best support SMEs and business start ups to grow and move up the value chain, including engaging in Research and Development?

Regarding local growth infrastructure, which specific local barriers (e.g., wastewater, flooding, transport, digital, green energy) are most significantly preventing business growth in your local area?

Priority 2 - Promoting active participation in the workforce

What specific support is most needed to help those currently economically inactive move toward employment, including self-employment and starting their own business?

What specific adult education or reskilling models have proven most effective at re-engaging those with qualifications below NQF Level 2?

What capital programmes / projects can best promote active participation in the workforce?

Delivery and equality

Which organisations are best placed to deliver each sub-priority of the fund and why? (For example, NI departments, local government, third sector organisations, the private sector, education providers).

Are there opportunities to better align with existing or planned provision (For example by boosting an existing local or NI project or initiative)?

Are there any groups protected under Section 75 who may be adversely affected by the proposed sub-priorities set out in this proposed Framework? Are there opportunities for promoting good relations?

The Local Growth Fund aims to promote regional balance. Are there any further considerations we should give to ensuring support benefits rural communities as per the

Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016? How can we ensure that investments in infrastructure and skills are delivered in a way that effectively supports rural communities and businesses?

How to respond

34. This consultation will remain open for 7 weeks. This timeframe allows for a robust engagement process that provides stakeholders the opportunity to share their views, while ensuring we can act swiftly to finalise the design of the Investment Plan and commence implementation as soon as possible.
35. Please submit your responses by **5:00pm on Friday, 26 June 2026**
36. Please provide your comments to the questions outlined in Section 7 using the response form [here](#) and send it to any of the following:
- **Email:** NILGFconsultation@nio.gov.uk or
 - **Post:** Northern Ireland Office, Erskine House, 20-32 Chichester St, Belfast, BT1 4GF
37. To ensure we capture the most comprehensive evidence within this timeframe, we are also conducting a series of targeted engagement sessions with representative bodies and stakeholder organisations across each sector (i.e. the public, voluntary / community, and business) to supplement the public consultation process.

**Appendix 2
Consultation Questions**

Strategic Priorities

Question 1.

Do you agree that the two core priorities - Enhancing Productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce - are the correct priorities for the Local Growth Fund over the next three years?

Enhancing Productivity

(insert an X under the relevant heading)

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	X			

Supporting comments:

Supporting evidence reinforces the fact that this has been an ongoing challenge in the NI economy for some time and needs to be the focus of collective support across wider government investment. Given the limited resources available in this programme, it will be important to consider how investments can add value rather than duplicating existing activity.

Productivity improvement is a key driver for DfE investment in Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs). As a result, local councils will be progressing a range of interventions to drive productivity improvements across the region, so it will be important to consider how any new activities can complement or add value to existing provision. Likewise, it is a key driver of the Belfast Region City Deal investments, particularly those linked to digital and innovation support.

It's difficult to argue against the focus on productivity but it is important to be realistic about what impact a two-year programme can have on productivity outcomes. These investments need to be longer-term and at an appropriate level. Short term funding interventions can only ever have limited long-term impact or effect long-term change.

Productivity should not be understood solely in terms of business output or inward investment, but also through the quality, accessibility and adaptability of local places. For example, Belfast city has a commercial vacancy rate of approximately 32%. Many buildings have underused spaces representing an opportunity to support local enterprise, flexible workspaces, skills development and start up activities. Re-purposing these spaces can help create a more resilient local economy, reduce dereliction and provide accessible employment opportunities closer to where people live.

Promoting Active Participation in the Workforce

(insert an X under the relevant heading)

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	X			

Supporting comments:

Promoting active participation in the workforce complements and supports the focus on enhancing productivity and can make a critical contribution to driving local growth.

The nature of the challenge is significant across all NI but there are particular pockets – in both urban and rural areas – where resources need to be focused to ensure optimal impact. Likewise, there are key target groups – particularly young people and those who are disabled – that will require focused support and we would encourage focused investment on these groups.

Activities to support labour market participation are more likely to utilise revenue rather than capital funding. However, given the balance of this fund, consideration may need to be given to enhancing elements that promote labour market engagement (supporting infrastructure; investment in facilities) rather more traditional support mechanisms. Clarity on potential “capital” activities in this area would be helpful.

Promoting active participation in the workforce should also focus on reducing structural barriers to employment through targeted investment plans than support and grow the existing ecosystem. This includes enhancing existing economic centres, addressing long term vacancy and dereliction, improving access to public transport and active travel infrastructure and supporting development that provides homes close to employment and educational opportunities and local services. While 57% of the indicative allocation towards this priority is capital funding, it is unclear from the consultation document what types of eligible capital expenditure can be incurred within this priority.

Question 2.

Looking at the proposed activities under each priority, is the indicative balance of funding between the priorities appropriate? If not, what should it be? *(To note: this question is not asking about the total Resource and Capital funding split for the Local Growth Fund but is asking about the proposed funding balance between the two priorities, Enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce).*

(insert an X under the relevant heading)

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
			X	

Supporting comments:

The indicative balance of revenue funding between the two priorities appears to be inconsistent with potential eligible areas of spend, as outlined in the consultation document. This is particularly relevant given the capital/revenue split as the interventions and indicative activities to support active participation in the workforce are largely revenue based, yet revenue funding represents only 43% of eligible expenditure at present.

Across the two priorities, we also note that the indicative allocation for priority 1 is around 42% of available budget with 58% of the budget proposed for priority 2. Given that there is a much broader spectrum of eligible capital activities aligned to priority 1 measures, we would propose that these figures are reversed. This is less a comment on the relative merits of the priorities and more a reflection of the most appropriate spend on eligible activities aligned to each of the individual priorities.

Place-based interventions that support a mixture of priority 1 and priority 2 activities could provide more flexibility in the types and range of services supported. Funders may wish to consider whether there are mechanisms for supporting projects that address both priorities – this might enable investment in a more coherent programme of support. Local councils would be well placed to advise further on the potential nature of these place-based approaches.

Priority 1- Enhancing productivity

Question 3.

Which of three sub-priorities identified (Business support and innovation, Strategic infrastructure investment, Skills enhancement), or others, would you focus on to deliver higher value-added activity and increase the efficiency of the economy?

(insert an X under the relevant heading)

Business support and innovation	
Strategic infrastructure investment	
Skills enhancement	

Supporting comments:

All three elements are complementary and can make a valued contribution to driving local growth. Some specific commentary on the relevant sub-priorities outlined:

Business support and innovation: we support the focus on support for SMEs, helping them to innovate, adopt new technologies, expand into export markets and move up the value chain. This is consistent with the Go Succeed model developed and delivered by councils under the Shared Prosperity Fund. Councils have taken a continuous improvement approach to this model and have begun the process to look at the evolution of the service, focusing more on driving value and focusing resources more purposefully on those businesses that have the potential to innovate, create jobs and support reinvestment across the region, while structuring the support through a place-based lens. Councils are open to engagement on further evolution of the service in line with funder needs, including targeted support for digital transformation and improving innovation-readiness (potentially utilising capital resources).

Strategic infrastructure investment can be a primary focus for delivering higher value-added activity and increasing the efficiency of the economy, particularly where it supports the regeneration and reuse of vacant and derelict spaces. However, this should be closely aligned with business support, innovation and skills enhancement to maximise long term impact. Vacancy and dereliction continue to undermine the economic potential of Belfast and many neighbouring communities. Poor quality and under-used environments can deter private sector investment, reduce investor confidence and create a perception of decline that is not helpful to innovation or business growth. Concentrated vacancy can also contribute to anti-social activity, reduced footfall and weaker community confidence, further limiting economic activity and place attractiveness. The Local Growth Fund presents an opportunity to address this challenge through targeted regeneration and infrastructure investment that enables the productive reuse of existing buildings and sites.

Investment in sustainable transport and active travel infrastructure should also be considered part of the strategic infrastructure investment, as improved accessibility is essential for connecting people to employment, education and services. Better connected and revitalised city centres are more likely to attract businesses, retain talent and support higher productivity

sectors. However it is important to consider how the limited resources available through this programme can be most effectively invested. In some cases, the scale of the infrastructure challenge may be so significant that the LGF resources can effect little or no change – and therefore it would not make sense to direct these resources on these areas of work (e.g. wastewater infrastructure).

Skills enhancement: we agree that targeted skills interventions – particularly at level 3 and above – are critical for driving productivity. We also understand that the overall skills profile is improving and that the number of people with no or low skills is decreasing. While apprenticeships and vocational skills in key growth areas are critical, consideration needs to be given to how these pathways can be more inclusive (e.g. individuals that do not have L2 English and Maths cannot currently engage on an apprenticeship programme). Given the prevalence of small businesses in Northern Ireland, consideration may also have to be given to more flexible solutions e.g. shared apprenticeship models.

Question 4.

How can the Local Growth Fund best support SMEs and business start ups to grow and move up the value chain, including engaging in Research and Development?

Answer:

There are a number of factors that need to be considered if SMEs are to grow and move up the value chain, including engaging in R&D. These include:

1. Enable Accessible, Locally Delivered Support

Go Succeed has created a single entry point in the ecosystem with an in-built triage system to provide businesses with the support that they need in a time that works for them. This “funnel” creates a clear entry point into innovation, with the potential to add value through wider “add-on” services such as grants for innovation, digital transformation and R&D. The “packaged” support of mentoring and grant support makes it easier for the SME to apply the learning in the business and improves the likelihood of success. Councils are well positioned to act as trusted intermediaries, ensuring that innovation support reaches businesses that would not otherwise engage.

2. Invest in Place-Based Ecosystems and Enterprise Infrastructure

Supporting businesses to move up the value chain requires strong local ecosystems. The Fund should:

- Support sub-regional sectoral clusters aligned with local strengths (e.g. agri-food, advanced manufacturing, tourism, digital and creative industries)
- Support innovation diffusion activities within capital investment projects – including those aligned to City and Growth Deals – in order to maximise SME access to and uptake of these resources.

Question 5.

Regarding local growth infrastructure, which specific local barriers (e.g., wastewater, flooding, transport, digital, green energy) are most significantly preventing business growth in your local area?

Answer:

While it is clear that wastewater/flooding issues are impacting development projects all across NI, it is important to consider what realistic impact LGF investment can have in addressing these challenges. Instead, it may be more appropriate to focus resources on areas of potential opportunity to support growth e.g. regenerating places through investment in and redevelopment of vacant and/or underutilised buildings and sites. These spaces can negatively affect perceptions of place quality and investor confidence discouraging private sector investment and limiting the attractiveness of areas for new and expanding businesses. In many locations prolonged vacancy contributes to reduced footfall, blight, anti-social activity and declining commercial vitality, creating an environment that is not supportive for innovation or economic growth.

Another significant barrier is transport connectivity and accessibility. The lack of affordable public transport, poor pedestrian infrastructure and underdeveloped active travel networks can restrict access to employment, reduce labour mobility and make it more difficult for businesses to retain and attract workers. This particularly affects those without access to private vehicles, including young people, lower income households and older residents.

To address these barriers the Local Growth Fund should support integrated regeneration projects that combine infrastructure investment, sustainable transport improvements, digital connectivity and adaptive reuse of vacant assets. A place-based approach of this nature would help create more attractive, accessible and productive environments for businesses and communities alike. Local councils are well placed to advise further on appropriate approaches to support growth in local areas.

Priority 2 - Promoting active participation in the workforce**Question 6.**

What specific support is most needed to help those currently economically inactive move toward employment, including self-employment and starting their own business?

Answer:

We highlight the need for targeted, flexible, place-based support to address the wide range of barriers faced by economically inactive individuals. Key priorities include tailored, locally delivered employability support comprising:

- Community-based outreach through trusted local providers to engage individuals furthest from the labour market
- Personalised mentoring, coaching, and confidence-building programmes to support progression
- Ensuring access to flexible, wraparound support including childcare, transport assistance, and health and wellbeing services
- Long-term engagement rather than short, time-limited interventions
- Focus on progression rather than “into work/jobs created” as an appropriate outcome measurement, with greater consistency in how this is measured.

We consider that LGF activities supported under “Promoting Active Participation” should focus on outreach and engagement support and that outcomes should be appropriate and aligned to this support i.e. job outcomes are not always an appropriate outcome to evidence the impact of this work. This will also help streamline the support ecosystem with the LGF-funded activity

focusing on the “supply” side (reaching out to engage key target groups; providing key employability support and helping address barriers to progression) while the LMP activities operating in all councils areas will then focus more on the “demand-side” activities i.e. working with employers to design and develop employment support interventions for those further from the labour market and create/ring-fence specific job roles for individuals that are successful in interviews for those roles. Engagement between the supply and demand support is obviously critical but we consider that, with greater role clarification in the way that we have described it, this can be achieved – thereby creating more effective local solutions and a clearer understanding of outputs attributable to respective investment sources. It is important to note the funding-dependent nature of LMP delivery and the fact that councils are working on annual funding cycles (at best) while trying to provide long-term, flexible support in line with participant needs.

Regarding pathways into self-employment and enterprise, there are many examples across councils of how Go Succeed support has worked alongside other interventions such as LMP activity to support self-employment for those who are furthest from the labour market. Given councils’ delivery across both areas, there is the potential to explore opportunities for further collaborative activity in this space, based on our learning.

Question 7.

What specific adult education or reskilling models have proven most effective at re-engaging those with qualifications below NQF Level 2?

Answer:

There is a strong and effective community-based support infrastructure all across Northern Ireland that has significant experience in engaging and working with individuals who are far from the labour market. They employ a range of approaches that have been shown to be effective including:

- Community-embedded learning provision
 - Delivery in familiar, non-formal settings (community centres, libraries, local hubs) to reduce stigma and build trust
 - Outreach-led engagement through local networks and grassroots organisations.
 - Informal “first step” programmes that ease learners back into education.
- Bite-sized and flexible learning models
 - Short, modular courses that allow incremental achievement and build confidence
 - Flexible scheduling (part-time, evening, blended/online delivery) to accommodate caring responsibilities and health barriers
 - Recognition of prior learning to support quicker progression
 - Introduction of digital badges to track progression pathways and enable those with no or low skills levels to build a strong “skills passport” (now being developed across all LMPs)
- Essential skills integrated with vocational pathways
 - Combining literacy, numeracy, and digital skills with practical, work-related training
 - Providing 1-2-1 support to ensure progression into further training, apprenticeships, or employment.
- Wraparound and personalised support
 - Dedicated mentoring and pastoral support to address confidence, motivation, and personal barriers
 - Access to childcare, transport assistance, and wellbeing services
 - Ongoing learner tracking to support retention and progression

Councils have also developed specialisms and expertise on working with these individuals to create sustainable employment opportunities. Through strong partnerships with local businesses, they have developed effective interventions that include:

- Employer-connected models
 - Co-designed programmes with local employers to support real job outcomes
 - Creating inclusive pathways – developing non-traditional pathways into jobs in key growth sectors
 - Inclusion of work placements, site visits, and guaranteed interviews where possible
- Stepping-stone pathways to enterprise
 - Introductory enterprise and self-employment programmes for those less suited to traditional employment, aligned to the Go Succeed model.
 - Practical, supported routes into self employment or freelancing

We note that the current focus in the consultation is largely on re-skilling but our view is that the critical outreach and engagement work and support to address barriers is critical – even ahead of the skills support. This can come once the participants are engaged and confidence has been built to help them consider skills development and potential labour market engagement.

Question 8.

What capital programmes / projects can best promote active participation in the workforce?

Answer:

The most effective capital programmes will be those that adopt a place-based integrated approach by combining regeneration, connectivity, skills infrastructure and sustainable transport to create attractive accessible opportunities and economically active communities. A “Centre First” approach of enhancing existing economic centres will provide the added benefits of a clustering of economic, employment and opportunity with quality place-making to strengthen the existing offer while delivering on growth ambitions.

A key priority should be the regeneration and repurposing of vacant and derelict buildings within cities and neighbourhoods. Bringing these spaces back into productive use can create community services, mixed use developments, childcare provision, training hubs and workspaces that support local employment and economic participation. Repurposed buildings could provide much needed homes for key workers and affordable accommodation in accessible locations close to employment and public transport.

As noted above, the consultation document does not currently suggest that these types of interventions might be eligible for support under priority 2. As a result, councils consider that it is important to be realistic about the scale of capital investment that can be delivered under this priority measure.

Delivery and equality

Question 9.

Which organisations are best placed to deliver each sub-priority of the fund and why? (For example, NI departments, local government, third sector organisations, the private sector, education providers).

Answer:

Local government authorities should play a central role in delivering strategic infrastructure investment as well as regeneration and place-based economic development initiatives. Councils have detailed knowledge of local conditions, community needs and spatial priorities and are well positioned to co-ordinate regeneration activity, town/city centre renewal and the reuse of vacant

and derelict spaces. Local Authorities are also experienced in delivering agile programmes that deliver outcomes at scale, in conjunction with Executive Departments and with the private and third sectors. They have robust audit processes that can provide full accountability and transparency for funders.

Belfast City Council through its community planning partnership has experience of convening stakeholders, aligning investment and ensuring projects contribute to wider place-making and economic strategies. In common with other local authorities, it has already worked with partners to agree a series of strategic interventions required to unlock inclusive growth and regeneration within the boundary. It is important to consider how LGF resources might be allocated to support delivery rather than reinventing the wheel.

Sub-priority 1.1 – Business Support and Innovation – Councils are well placed to support core service delivery through their evolving Go Succeed model. This has created a strong track record of delivery and is built on a strong partnership involving the 11 councils working closely with DfE; Invest NI and the FE colleges as well as a wider support network to ensure effective local coverage in keeping with the Minister for the Economy’s priorities around sub-regional growth, driving entrepreneurship and productivity improvements. In Belfast, we have also focused on deriving value for our small businesses from critical investments such as City Deal Digital and Innovation projects.

Sub-priority 1.2 – Local infrastructure investment – the delivery lead will depend on the specific infrastructure element to be supported. For example, councils may work with DfC on local regeneration support but green growth investments may be led by Invest NI or academic/skills partners.

Sub-priority 1.3 – Skills enhancement – DfE is likely to be the lead partner on this element but we would propose close collaboration with councils (specifically relating to LMP activities).

Sub-priority 2.1 – Education, skills and reskilling – DfC is likely to have a view on the most effective deployment but councils will have a direct role in advising on potential local solutions. The LMP provides a mechanism for this engagement at local level – ensuring that resources are most effectively deployed. DfE may also become engaged around reskilling support – particularly where this is supporting progression.

Sub-priority 2.2 – Localised economic inclusion – this falls directly within the scope of LMPs and they would be the best place to guide and support delivery.

Sub-priority 2.3 – Early intervention – DfE (and potentially DE/EA) may be best placed to advise on prioritisation. Delivery support could be channelled through LMPs and/or CPPs – depending on how significant this challenge is in local areas.

While the Executive Departments have a key role to play within the delivery of the LGF, the administration of the fund should be agile and streamlined without putting undue burden and time delay on the delivery agents. Councils worked very closely with MHCLG on the Shared Prosperity Fund, and the administration approach adopted – commissioned service delivery from MHCLG to councils – provided an effective delivery model. Consideration should be given to the role of Local Authorities managing the LGF directly – particularly in those areas identified above where, in our view, they should have a lead role.

Question 10.

Are there opportunities to better align with existing or planned provision (For example by boosting an existing local or NI project or initiative)?

Answer:

There are significant opportunities to align the Local Growth Fund with existing local and regional regeneration initiatives to maximise impact, avoid duplication and accelerate delivery outcomes.

Opportunities include:

- Local Economic Partnerships – projects are coming forward across all 11 council areas and are focused on productivity improvements (alignment with priority 1)
- Community Planning Partnerships – all local Community Planning Partnerships will have agreed a series of prioritised interventions to support place-based growth for their respective areas. These are likely to include activities across both priority areas
- Shaping Sustainable Places – this emerging policy approach from DfC, DfI and DAERA represents a more collaborative, engaged model for developing solutions to specific place-based challenges through funding local physical and infrastructure projects. Potential for alignment with priority 1.2
- Opportunity to support the evolution and growth of Go Succeed (particularly relating to sub-priority 1.1). There is a track record of delivery and an existing partnership in place – as well as strong political for the future development of this service
- Enhanced Investment Zones – work progressing on sector-focused support interventions, based on regional specialisms. Subject to final decisions on agreed areas of focus, potential to align to LGF to maximise impact.

There will be other local level examples across respective council areas and these will be drawn out in individual responses. One specific example in Belfast is the work that is being undertaken to address vacancy through its emerging vacancy toolkit and related city centre regeneration initiatives. This work seeks to address long term vacancy and dereliction through targeted capital investment, the repurposing of underused buildings and sites, and the promotion of more active and sustainable urban environments (alignment to sub-priority 1.2). The Local Growth Fund could build on these approaches by supporting projects that bring vacant properties back into productive use for housing, workspaces, commercial and retail activity and community infrastructure. There is also an opportunity to support land assembly and strategic site interventions where stalled development has limited regeneration potential and private sector investment.

There is also strong potential to align the Fund with “A Bolder Vision” strategy, which promotes a more connected, accessible and safer city centre and neighbourhoods through public realm improvements, active travel infrastructure and sustainable transport. Investment that improves walking, cycling and public transport accessibility can help reduce barriers to employment, improve access to education and services and create healthier and more attractive environments. Better connectivity also supports increased footfall and commercial activity within city centres, strengthening the conditions for local business growth and private sector investment.

Belfast City Council is also the delivery partner for a number of capital investment schemes to support economic growth in local areas. The council has significant expertise not only in programme management and oversight but also in local engagement and collaborative working. It has strong financial processes that are fully transparent and can be a trusted delivery partner for NIO in this space.

Finally, the Belfast Region City Deal partners (council, academia, public sector) have built strong working partnerships and have already implemented significant projects of scale to drive productivity. As the focus moves to benefits realisation, there is an opportunity to consider how the Local Growth Fund can be used to drive targeted activities in line with the indicative programme priorities.

Question 11.

Are there any groups protected under Section 75 who may be adversely affected by the proposed sub-priorities set out in this proposed Framework? Are there opportunities for promoting good relations?

Answer:

Groups that may face barriers include disabled people, older people, young people, carers, individuals on lower incomes, people living in rural areas and those without access to private transport. If investment is concentrated in specific places or focused on particular sectors there is a risk that some communities and individuals could become further excluded from employment opportunities – hence the need for targeted outreach and engagement.

There is also a risk that regeneration and infrastructure investment could unintentionally contribute to displacement or unequal access if improvements to local areas are not accompanied by affordable housing, accessible and affordable transport and inclusive community facilities. The repurposing of vacant and derelict spaces should therefore prioritise community benefit, affordability and accessibility to ensure that regeneration supports existing communities rather than displacing them.

The framework presents significant opportunities to promote good relations if investment is delivered through a place-based and inclusive approach. Regeneration projects, shared public spaces, travel infrastructure and community facilities can help create more connected and accessible environments that encourage social interaction and shared use across different communities. Investment in accessible city centres and neighbourhoods, public realm improvements and integrated transport can support greater participation and reduce social isolation.

There are also opportunities to promote good relations through collaborative delivery models involving local government, education providers, the third sector and community organisations.

Importantly, the framework should ensure that consultation, co-design and community engagement are embedded throughout project development and delivery. This would help ensure that investment reflects local needs, supports equality of opportunity and contribute positively to social cohesion in NI.

The proposed framework has strong potential to promote good relations, provided investment decisions are inclusive, geographically balances and focused on reducing barriers to participation for disadvantaged groups.

Question 12.

The Local Growth Fund aims to promote regional balance. Are there any further considerations we should give to ensuring support benefits rural communities as per the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016? How can we ensure that investments in infrastructure and skills are delivered in a way that effectively supports rural communities and businesses?

Answer:

No specific comments here.

Question 13.

If you have any related comments which have not been addressed in the above questions, please use this space to share them.

Answer:

We are mindful of the time pressure on spend and would encourage NIO to move at pace in securing agreement around the investment plan in order to move forward on delivery.

We note the annual funding allocations (both capital and revenue) and would ask NIO to explore opportunities for flexibility across each spend year. This is particularly important given the capital-focused nature of the programme and the need for flexibility in these schemes, including working across financial years.

We welcome the proposed establishment of the Partnership Group to “provide advice and insight on delivery”. It is regrettable that this Partnership Group will not be established until after the adoption of the investment plan, and therefore partners will not be able to influence the content of the plan. Local Government was an active contributor on the SPF Partnership Group and we would welcome the opportunity to participate in the LGF Partnership Group structure

On 11 June 2025, MHCLG announced 25 trailblazer neighbourhoods to receive long-term investment. [Government announces 25 "trailblazer neighbourhoods" to receive long-term investment - details - GOV.UK](#). Belfast was listed as one of those neighbourhoods, to receive £2million annual funding over 10 years. However the current consultation document makes no reference to how this funding is to be allocated. We would ask for urgent clarity on this position from NIO.

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Subject:	Belfast City & Region Place Partnership Update
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development
Contact Officer:	Marie Miller, Marketing Manager, City Regeneration & Development

Restricted Reports													
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>												
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 													
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 5%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future		<input type="checkbox"/>	Never		<input type="checkbox"/>
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Call-in
Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update Committee on the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) 2025 / 2026 programme. • Seek approval to extend Council's involvement into the BCRPP to 2026 / 2027.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note a presentation will be made at Committee from representatives from the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP). • Note the update on the BCRPP 2025 / 2026 programme as set out in this report. • Approve that officers continue to support the delivery of the BCRPP 2026 / 2027 programme including governance processes, administering programme funded expenditure and entering into associated contracts on behalf of and with oversight from the Taskforce, and in line with Council's procurement processes. • Approve 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 2026 / 2027 programme. • Approve attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2027 as part of the BCRPP 2026 / 2027 programme, noting that the BCRPP presence at MIPIM will be funded from the wider public-private sector BCRPP programme budget. • Approve attendance of the Chair of the City Growth & Regeneration Committee and the Council's nominated Elected Member / Chair of the BRCD Council Panel, or their nominated representatives, to attend UKREiiF 2027 as part of the BCRPP 2026 / 2027 programme, noting that the BCRPP presence at UKREiiF 2027 will be funded from the wider public-private sector BCRPP programme budget.
3.0	Background
3.1	<p>The Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) is a joint public–private initiative delivering a structured programme of work to attract inclusive investment that supports regeneration, infrastructure development, and a modern built environment for Belfast and the wider City Region.</p>

3.2	<p>The Partnership is supported by a broad coalition of public, private and anchor institutions, including Belfast City Council, all Belfast Region City Deal partner councils, Belfast Harbour, Translink, Queen’s University Belfast, and representatives from the local development and regeneration sector.</p>
3.3	<p>Members will recall that this Committee agreed in May 2026 to receive a presentation from representatives of the BCRPP in June 2026. The purpose of the presentation is to update Members on the 2025/2026 programme of work and the proposed approach to the 2026/2027 programme, including priority issues and objectives for the Partnership moving forward.</p>
3.4	<p>Members may also recall that BCRPP representatives presented to this Committee in June 2025. The Committee subsequently approved Council participation in the 2025/2026 Programme of Work, as part of a wider public–private sector approach and recommended the establishment of a Community Forum/Reference Group. This was intended to provide a mechanism for engagement between the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sectoral Advisory Panel (for Community Planning) and BCRPP partners.</p>
3.5	<p>In terms of context, Belfast City Council has, for over a decade, worked collaboratively with public and private sector partners to proactively promote Belfast to local, national and international audiences to attract capital investment. This supports the delivery of the growth ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda and aligns with the Council’s strategic priority to position the city to compete globally for inclusive and sustainable investment.</p>
3.6	<p>Members will be aware that “Positioning the City to Compete” is a key deliverable within the 2026/2027 City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan, as agreed in April 2026, and is also aligned with the Council’s International Relations Framework 2025–2028, agreed in November 2025.</p>
3.7	<p>The Council plays an important civic leadership role as convener and facilitator, bringing together public and private partners to collectively promote Belfast as a competitive location for investment. This is particularly important in attracting international capital to support regeneration and development, recognising that delivery of growth ambitions requires both public and private sector funding.</p>
4.0	Main Report
4.1	<p>The Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) 2025/2026 Programme commenced on 1 September 2025 and is delivering a structured programme aimed at attracting inclusive investment to support regeneration, infrastructure and a modern built environment across Belfast and the wider City Region. The Committee presentation will provide an overview of progress and highlight key outputs from the current programme. Key areas of focus for the partnership include:</p>
4.2	Communications

	<p>The partnership has undertaken proactive, year-round media engagement to reinforce positive messaging around the Belfast region’s investment proposition, targeting local, national and international real estate and development audiences, including development of an interactive, digital investment guide showcasing real estate investment and development opportunities across the region.</p>
4.3	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>Following a request from this Committee in June 2025, the BCRPP has established a Community Forum/Reference Group comprising representatives from the VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel. While statutory public consultation requirements are already embedded within the Local Development Plan (LDP) and the planning application process, the Forum is intended to provide a broader platform for engagement with community representatives and to support BCRPP partners in maximising the social, environmental and economic benefits associated with forthcoming investment and development.</p>
4.4	<p>Following formal establishment in November 2025, engagement has taken place with VCSE representatives, Council officers and BCRPP representatives on the role of the built environment plays in driving inclusive growth to help identify where local communities can most effectively engage in the city’s physical regeneration and development activity. It is envisaged that, moving forward, the Forum will support the dissemination of information to local communities on forthcoming development proposals and will help identify and support additional opportunities for community involvement in future projects.</p>
4.5	<p>Engagement and advocacy</p> <p>The Partnership has expanded activity to support two-way engagement with policymakers, the public sector and the real estate community. This includes advancing engagement to support the Belfast City Council led Belfast Place-Based Growth Proposition, which sets out the case for enhanced regeneration funding and proposes the establishment of a City Regeneration Fund focused on housing-led regeneration, green infrastructure and placemaking. The BCRPP has facilitated a number of high-level engagements including convening a joint Ministerial meeting with the Ministers for Finance, Economy, Infrastructure and Communities in September 2025; a meeting with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister held in April 2026; and subsequent follow up meeting with NICS and SIB in May 2025. In addition, following an invite from the BCRPP, the Minister for Communities attended UKREiiF supporting the Region’s presence at what has become the UK’s leading forum for real estate, regeneration and infrastructure investment.</p>
4.5	<p>Scottish Cities Alliance Devolved Nations Political Leaders Meeting</p> <p>Following approval at Committee in February 2026, the Chair of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Council’s nominated Elected Member/Chair of the BRCD Council Panel attended UKREiiF to participate in the Devolved Nations Political Leaders Meeting and wider BCRPP activity.</p>
4.6	<p>The Devolved Nations Political Leaders Meeting built on earlier engagement in January 2026 between the Scottish Cities Alliance, the Cardiff Capital Region and Belfast City Council to consider city-regional governance and devolution arrangements. The discussions highlighted a shared diagnosis of the “double squeeze” facing cities in Scotland, Wales and Northern</p>

Ireland — characterised by UK-level decision-making and limited devolved powers — which restricts access to long-term funding, capital flows and policy discretion available to English Mayoral Authorities. Participants felt that deeper, faster devolution tailored to national contexts is required, supported by long-term funding under city control and strengthened multi-level governance between UK Government, devolved governments and city regions. Five areas of common ground were identified: the readiness of cities to deliver growth; the value of governance pluralism; the need for varied pace and models of devolution; opportunities for joined-up engagement through shared instruments; and the importance of a sustained collective voice in UK-level discussions. Participants considered continued group engagement and joint case-making to Westminster. Work is ongoing with representatives of the SCA and Cardiff Capital Region on a continued programme of engagement and next steps.

4.7 Investment focused events

The 2025 / 2026 programme has included participation at national and international real estate showcase events, including representation at UKREiiF 2026 and MIPIM 2026, showcasing the Belfast City Region to global investors and developers.

4.8 At UKREiiF - the UK's leading built environment showcase event, in addition to attending the Devolved Nations Political Leaders Meeting, elected members and senior officials undertook a range of engagements. This included attendance at the Belfast City Region Showcase Reception; the UKREiiF International Investment Dinner attended by senior UK Government Ministers, institutional investors and major UK developers; the City & Regions Breakfast with other UK city leaders; the ministerial roundtable with the NI Minister for Communities and Director of Core Cities UK; roundtable discussions and meetings with national and international investors and developers. Collectively, these engagements helped ensure that the regions' voice was heard within conversations shaping future investment and regeneration priorities across the UK, while also facilitating shared learnings with other Core City elected representatives and senior officers.

4.9 In addition, senior officers attended MIPIM 2026, the world's leading built environment conference and exhibition which attracts approximately 20,000 public and private sector delegates from across the globe. Attendees included major European and UK cities such as London, Manchester, Newcastle, Cardiff, Liverpool alongside, for the first time, an Ireland at MIPIM pavilion, an Irish Government led initiative aimed to showcase Ireland as a progressive, high-growth location for international investment. MIPIM provided a platform for Belfast to position itself to a global audience and attract interest from institutional investors, developers, occupiers and funders.

4.10 BCRPP's presence at UKREiiF and MIPIM has continued to stimulate significant investor and developer interest in Belfast and the wider region. Building on the strong engagement achieved at these flagship events, a coordinated programme of follow-up activity and inward-investment visits is now underway. This includes tailored engagement with:

- New-to-market residential developers: major UK, Irish and international homebuilders considering expansion into Belfast and Northern Ireland.
- Institutional investors: funds and asset managers with active mandates for housing-led regeneration, mixed-use districts and strategic infrastructure.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End-use occupiers: including FDI companies, commercial and leisure operators, innovation-hub providers and global hotel brands assessing opportunities for expansion into Belfast.
4.11	<p>Proposed approach to 2026 / 2027</p> <p>The Partnership is governed by a Taskforce comprising representatives from both the public and private sectors. The Taskforce has endorsed continuation of the Partnership into 2026/2027 and the delivery of a structured, pillar-based programme of activity. The presentation to be delivered to Committee by BCRPP representatives will outline the core objectives and proposed programme of activity for 2026/2027.</p>
4.12	<p>BCRPP partners consistently express strong support for the value and benefits of participating in the wider public–private partnership and taking a coordinated approach to investment-promotion activity. While commercial sensitivities limit the detail that can be shared about specific investments secured for Belfast through this work, partners report a clear and shared view of the partnership’s added value. This includes its impact on elevating the overall positioning of the Belfast City Region, enhancing the visibility of real estate investment opportunities, and contributing directly to business and investment activity that has emerged as a result of the partnership’s work.</p>
4.13	<p>From a Council perspective, the key aims and objectives of continued participation in the BCRPP, and contribution to the programme, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing the investment required to support delivery of the city’s shared growth ambitions, as set out in the Belfast Agenda, the Local Development Plan, and BCCRIS, while recognising the wider economic benefits, including economic growth, increased rates generation and delivery of corporate priorities; • Strengthening advocacy and support for the Belfast Place-Based Growth Proposition; • Maximising the benefits of investment through the Belfast Region City Deal and opportunities presented by the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor; • Securing investment in the built environment across the city to support job creation, inclusive economic growth, and enhanced physical and social infrastructure; and • Securing investment in key infrastructure priorities, including waterfront regeneration, connectivity, net zero transition, and innovation-led projects. • Supporting delivery of the Council’s International Relations Framework 2025–2028;
4.14	<p>Council plays a key role in both the strategic and operational management of BCRPP including the development, management and delivery of the Programme of Activity. Members are asked to approve Council continuing to take on this role, with officers supporting the 2026 / 2027 programme including governance processes, administering programme funded expenditure and entering into associated contracts on behalf of and with oversight from the Taskforce, and in line with Council’s procurement processes.</p>
4.15	<p>The BCRPP Partnership is supported and funded by public, private and key anchor institution partners, with external funding forming the majority of the overall programme delivery budget. Members are asked to note the proposed approach to the 2026 / 2027 Programme and approve the Council investment (from existing and approved City Regeneration &</p>

	Development Budget) as part of the wider public private partnership contribution towards the delivery of the 2026 / 2027 Programme.
4.16	Council has facilitated and supported a Team Belfast presence at MIPIM since 2016. Following the positive feedback from MIPIM 2026, the Taskforce has endorsed a Belfast City Region presence at MIPIM 2027, in line with the approach taken by other UK cities and the Irish Government, and has recommended its inclusion within the wider BCRPP programme of activity for 2026 / 2027. The Taskforce considers that, to effectively showcase Belfast and the wider City Region, civic leadership and attendance by Belfast City Council is essential. Members are therefore asked to approve attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2027, noting that the BCRPP presence at MIPIM will be funded through the wider public-private BCRPP Partnership budget.
4.17	Following positive engagement at UKREiiF 2026, Committee approval is sought for the Chair of City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Council's nominated Elected Member / Chair of the BRCD Council Panel, or nominated representatives, to attend UKREiiF 2027 to participate in wider BCRPP activity at UKREiiF, including participation in a Belfast City Region Showcase event. Members should note that the BCRPP presence at UKREiiF will be funded from the wider public-private BCRPP Partnership budget.
5.0	Financial and Resource Implications
5.1	The BCRPP Partnership is delivered as a public private sector sponsorship fund and is supported by a range of public, private and key anchor institutions who contribute financially towards the 2025 / 2026 programme, with external and private sector funding forming the majority of the overall programme budget. It is anticipated that the majority of the 2026 / 2027 programme budget will again be funded through external funding.
5.2	Council has previously agreed to contribute of £80,000 towards the 2025 / 2026 Programme, and subject to Members agreement it is proposed that Council contribute £80,000 (from existing and approved City Regeneration and Development Budget) as part of the wider public private partnership investment towards the delivery of the 2026 / 2027 programme.
5.3	Approval is sought for attendance of senior officers at MIPIM 2027. Travel costs for Council attendance at MIPIM 2027 to be met from within existing and approved departmental budgets. All other costs related to the Belfast City Region presence at MIPIM would be met from the 2026 / 2027 BCRPP Partnership programme budget.
5.4	Committee approval is sought for the Chair of City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Council's nominated Elected Member / Chair of the BRCD Council Panel, or their nominated representatives, to attend UKREiiF 2027 to participate in wider BCRPP activity at UKREiiF, including attendance at a Belfast City Region Showcase event. Travel costs for Member attendance at UKREiiF 2027 to be met from within existing and approved departmental budgets. All other costs related to the BCRPP presence at UKREiiF will be funded from the 2026 / 2027 BCRPP Partnership programme budget.
6.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
	None associated with this report.
7.0	Appendices – Documents Attached

	None
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Subject:	Culture Night update
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture, Tourism & events Rachael Campbell-Palmer – Culture Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of the report is to update on the planning and preparation for Culture Night Belfast 2026, to take place on Friday 18 th September 2026
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the updates provided
3.0	Main report
3.1	Culture Night 2026 – Programme Development Update

Following Committee approval in February 2026 of the proposed approach to the delivery of Culture Night 2026, officers have commenced implementation of key programme development milestones. A delivery contract has been awarded and formally commenced on 12 May 2026, followed by an inception meeting on 14 May 2026 and a subsequent marketing meeting on 20 May 2026 to agree initial communications and engagement activity. Weekly project management meetings have also been established between Belfast City Council and delivery partners to support ongoing coordination and delivery.

3.2 **Programme Development and Engagement**

As part of the early engagement process, an open call for participation in Culture Night 2026 opened on Monday 1 June 2026, accompanied by targeted communications to the cultural sector.

A programme of in-person information and planning sessions has been scheduled across the city between 4–11 June 2026. These sessions aim to:

- Support awareness of Culture Night 2026
- Encourage participation from artists, venues and organisations
- Facilitate collaboration and co-creation of programme activity
- Inform the development of geographically balanced programming across North, South, East and West Belfast

An additional online engagement session is also being explored to maximise accessibility for those unable to attend in person. It is anticipated that these sessions will support the establishment of localised working groups, strengthening place-based programming and supporting continued city-wide participation.

Key Milestones

3.3 Key delivery milestones for Culture Night 2026 are as follows:

- Open call for financial assistance closes on 19 June 2026
- Open call for programme submissions closes on 26 June 2026
- Successful participants to be confirmed in mid-July 2026
- Online Health and Safety support sessions scheduled for 22 and 23 July 2026
- Deadline for submission of Health and Safety documentation: 14 August 2026
- Strategic Advisory Group meeting scheduled for 1 September 2026
- Official Culture Night Belfast launch planned for 27 August 2026

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture Night Belfast 2026 will take place on Friday 18 September 2026 <p>To further strengthen the geographic spread and sustainability of Culture Night Belfast 2026, officers are exploring opportunities to enhance engagement with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) across the city.</p> <p>Building on place-based programming and the development of localised working groups in North, South, East and West Belfast, engagement with BIDs presents an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support increased participation from venues, businesses and cultural organisations within BID areas • Enhance local programming through coordinated activity aligned to existing BID priorities and audiences • Contribute to animation of key commercial districts during Culture Night, increasing footfall and dwell time • Provide potential supplementary funding or in-kind support to participating artists, venues and events <p>Officers will continue to explore opportunities to formalise BID involvement as part of the evolving delivery model, with a view to enhancing both the scale and sustainability of Culture Night in future years.</p> <p>Other Considerations</p> <p>3.4 A request for the use of City Hall for Culture Night activity is currently being prepared and will be submitted for Committee approval in line with standard procedures. Engagement will continue with other stakeholders who may wish to provide support for the activation of further enhanced programming.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.5 All other expenditure is within existing departmental budgets and approvals.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>3.6 The cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining</i> 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.</p> <p>4.0 Appendices</p>
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4.1	None
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Subject:	Festive lights
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin – Strategic Director Place and Economy Keith Forster – Director Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell – Senior Manager – Culture, Tourism & Events

Restricted Reports													
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>												
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Sometime in the future		<input type="checkbox"/>											
Never		<input type="checkbox"/>											

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

1.0	Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To provide members with a report and overview of the 2025 festive lighting scheme and update on ongoing planning for 2026 provision
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Note the contents of this report
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Background and Programme Context</p> <p>The Culture Team currently led on the delivery of the Council’s Christmas Lighting Scheme, working in partnership with appointed contractors, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Estates and Property teams, and private landowners to deliver a city centre-wide festive lighting programme.</p> <p>In March 2025, a new tender was issued inviting proposals from contractors to deliver the city’s Christmas lighting provision. This procurement process reflected a shift in approach, recognising the importance of festive lighting not only as seasonal decoration, but as a strategic cultural and economic intervention supporting city centre vitality.</p> <p>The tender placed particular emphasis on the role of Christmas lighting in contributing to economic growth, reinforcing Belfast City Centre’s position as a major retail, leisure and cultural destination, encouraging increased footfall, and enhancing the overall visitor experience during the peak winter trading period.</p> <p>This approach aligns with the broader principles of the City’s Lighting Strategy, which positions lighting as a core component of public realm quality, place identity, safety, and the activation of the night-time economy.</p>
3.2	<p>Strategic Objectives of the Christmas Lighting Scheme</p> <p>One of the core objectives of the Christmas Lighting Programme is to improve connectivity and coherence across the city centre, creating strong visual and experiential linkages between key destinations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Christmas Market at City Hall • Victoria Square Shopping Centre • CastleCourt Shopping Centre

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary pedestrian corridors such as Royal Avenue and Donegall Place <p>The lighting scheme is therefore not intended as a series of isolated installations, but as a coordinated city centre network that supports pedestrian movement, wayfinding, and dwell time across multiple retail, leisure and cultural anchors.</p>
3.3	<p>2025 Programme Delivery and Performance</p> <p>The 2025 installation was implemented across a significantly expanded footprint of the city. While the scheme was successfully delivered and well received, several infrastructure and operational issues impacted installation timelines. These included upgrade requirements of power supplies, timeliness of external agency approvals, issues incurred with private supply feeds, constraints due to construction on buildings with infrastructure points.</p> <p>Despite these operational challenges BCC officers worked well with suppliers to secure the necessary approvals and alternative power sources or locations where required</p> <p>2025 Infrastructure Uplift and Enhancements</p> <p>As part of the 2025 programme uplift, Department for Infrastructure (DfI) lighting columns were upgraded in line with current electrical and safety standards. This enabled the safe addition of column-mounted Christmas lighting features across the city centre.</p> <p>Additional lighting was installed along Royal Avenue, including illumination of street trees. This intervention was widely recognised by BIDs and private landowners as having a positive impact on the inner city core, contributing to improved ambience and increased evening activity.</p> <p>New lighting curtain installations were introduced on Castle Place and Fountain Lane, alongside colour-controlled festoon lighting on Garfield Street. Going forward, both the Fountain Lane lighting curtain and the Garfield Street festoon installations have remained in situ, with no additional cost to the Council, providing ongoing value from the initial investment.</p> <p>Some minor issues were recorded during the season, primarily relating to servicing and loading vehicles coming into contact with lighting elements. In total, there were approximately 6 contractor call-outs related to maintenance and minor repairs.</p> <p>Festive Lighting Commission and Switch-On Event</p> <p>The full festive lighting programme was safely installed and fully operational in advance of the official Christmas Lights Switch-On event. Delivery was achieved within required timescales and in compliance with all relevant health and safety requirements.</p> <p>Approximately 84 wayleave agreements for the installation of eyebolts and fixings were secured enabling lighting infrastructure to be installed across privately owned frontages and buildings.</p>

	<p>The successful completion of these agreements in advance of the Christmas period was critical to programme delivery.</p>
<p>3.4</p>	<p>Issues for Long-Term Sustainability and Improvement</p> <p>While the 2025 programme was delivered successfully, a number of structural and strategic issues have been identified which require longer-term planning and intervention to ensure future viability and growth of the programme.</p> <p>It is clear that a future strategy should address a number of critical and interdependent components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Spectacle: Developing a format and programme capable of functioning as a large-scale tourism product. • City-Wide Reach: Exploring how to achieve greater lighting density and presence beyond the core city centre. • Pathways: Building local skills, knowledge and career pathways within cultural sector for lighting and production • Infrastructure: Addressing key infrastructure challenges and mitigating future operational risks, such as the reliance on private electrical feeds and the loss of fixing points. • Future Technologies: a future-focused approach to festive lighting, recognising that lighting technologies are evolving rapidly and audience engagement is shifting towards immersive and interactive experiences. • City-Wide Approach: At present, festive lighting remains heavily concentrated within the city centre core and future considerations should consider support for neighbourhood retail centres <p>However, it should be noted that development an implementation of this strategic approach would require an uplift to current fund levels.</p>
<p>3.5</p>	<p>Next Steps and Strategic Direction</p> <p>Planning is underway for the delivery of the 2026 core scheme and associated switch on event.</p> <p>Festive lighting budget allocation is £300,000 and , with management support previously facilitated through BCCM. cCouncil have been in ongoing discussions with the BIDs about future provisions of the management of the scheme but for 2026 this will remain as council led delivery.</p> <p>Officers will continue to engage with the BIDs to identify additional areas that can be supported through allocation of their own funding.</p>

	<p>Future intention, aligned with ongoing work on the development of an events action plan, and subject to future budget provision, is to move towards a more strategic, sustainable and place-based approach to Christmas lighting, which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports economic regeneration objectives • Enhances the city’s cultural offer and visitor experience • Reduces operational and safety risks • Builds local creative and technical capacity • Enables more equitable city-wide participation
3.6	Financial and Resource Implications
	There are currently no financial implications attached to this report.
4.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
	There are no Equality or Good Relation Implications attached to this report.
5.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None

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Subject:	UNESCO City of Music Programme Update
Date:	10 th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forester
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell Senior Manager Culture, Tourism & Events Rachael Campbell-Palmer Culture Development Manager

Restricted Reports													
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Sometime in the future		<input type="checkbox"/>											
Never		<input type="checkbox"/>											

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

1.0	Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>This report provides Members with an update on the delivery of UNESCO City of Music activities against the 2025/26 Workplan.</p> <p>In addition, the report seeks approval for activities within the 2026/27 Cultural Development Workplan approved by the Committee in April described as “Additional UNESCO City of Music Activity”, but in relation to which additional detail is now provided.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to note the contents of this update report and approve the additional aspects of the City of Music 2026/27 Workplan delivery outlined in Appendix 1.
3.0	Update Report
3.1	<p>Belfast City Council continues to support the growth, sustainability and international profile of the city's music sector through the delivery of its music development and UNESCO City of Music programmes. This report provides an update on key activities undertaken during the reporting period, highlighting progress across accessibility initiatives, community engagement, international partnerships and sector support.</p> <p>The Gradam Ceoil bursary scheme has continued in partnership with Duncairn Arts Centre. Each year three young artists receive a bursary towards their artistic and professional development, alongside mentoring, performance opportunities and ongoing support through The Duncairn and its wider cultural network. Many past recipients have gone on to perform nationally and internationally, contributing to a vibrant and evolving traditional music scene rooted in both heritage and innovation. This year’s awardees are guitarist Jack McGoldrick, fiddle player Eimear Magee and multi-instrumentalist Peadar Connor.</p> <p>Micro bursaries available to individual musicians is delivered in Collaboration with Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival (CQAF). Each year 20 artists/bands from all genres and backgrounds receive a £1,000 bursary towards development or music creation that supports their career pathway. Artists and groups supported in this recent round range from singer-songwriters to Irish drone artists, to electronic musicians and more. Those awarded are:</p>

Conchur White | Keith McAlister | Morgana | Robyn Maddox | Erin K Hill | Luke Bell | May Rosa | Alfie Norma | J Shields | SILK | Neil Foster | Reflect | Sarah McCreedy | TUIRSE | Fuzzy Pines | Maeve O'Donnell | Moon Landing | O.S.G. | Heliopause | Tanazaki

The Crescendo Post-Primary Pathway in partnership with Ulster Orchestra seeks continued investment to sustain and expand high-quality music education opportunities for young people in North and West Belfast. This initiative provides a vital progression route into post-primary instrumental tuition, ensemble participation, and long-term musical engagement for students who would otherwise face significant financial and social barriers to access.

Through access to instruments, specialist tuition, orchestral participation, and performance opportunities, the programme nurtures musical talent while also supporting attendance, confidence, wellbeing, and educational attainment. Numerous successes have been noted since the beginning of this partnership, with students going on to pass ABRSM Music Medal assessments, others choosing GCSE Music as a response to this support, and teachers reporting measurable improvements in attendance, confidence, aspiration, and engagement with school life.

Teenage Kicks was launched to provide an expansion of opportunities in Belfast for under 18s audiences to experience high quality live music. Twelve awards made of £2,000 per event in the pilot round, supporting events across an array of music venues and cultural spaces. This year's awardees included venues, promoters, festivals and individuals covering events such a showcase of local artists at the Crescent, a matinee performance of orchestral video game music, a collaborative event with Alternatives Restorative Justice featuring Young Spencer. The awarded groups in this pilot round are:

Accidental Theatre | Irish Video Game Orchestra | EastSide Arts | the Black Box | The Duncairn | Sugru; Claire Kieran | Factory 61 | Niamh McDermott | Chordblossom | Scott's Jazz Club | Girls Rock School | Score Draw Music

NI Music Prize & Sound of Belfast a continued partnership with the Oh Yeah Music Centre with a commitment to a three-year uplift of support following research undertaken and reviewed by Committee. The NI Music Prize is an event celebrating the very best of new, established and emerging Northern Irish music. Sound of Belfast and the Northern Ireland Music Prize took place in November 2025 and will return this year, year two of the tree-year partnership. In 2025 the festival held 66 events across the city, with 166 local artists gaining paid performance opportunities. Total festival attendance was 8694, a significant increase on

previous years. Increased support for the festival allowed for a higher number of artists to be paid as well as enhanced quality of shows and greater marketing to reach a wider audience.

Direct partnership with Score Draw Music. Output is Ireland's biggest one-day music conference and live music showcase. Delivered as a key event within the City of Music programme, the conference features a full programme of panels, workshops and conferences, followed by an evening showcase of live music for free to the public. The conference and subsequent artist showcases took place in September 2025 and will return this year. In 2025, Output welcomed over 110 conference speakers across 34 panels, which was attended by 750 delegates. At the evening showcases, 36 music artists performed in the Cathedral Quarter across 9 venues, to a total audience of 5000 people.

Working with colleagues in Enterprise and Business Growth we are developing a Music Business Accelerator Programme tailored to a spectrum of needs within the music industry. A scoping and consultation exercise has now been undertaken and the first stage of the programme will be delivered this year.

Partnerships with organisations including Soultrane, Beat Carnival and Imagine Festival provided opportunities for people of all ages to develop skills and music knowledge as part of City of Music Industry Sessions, such as the 'Beyond the Blue' event during which participants learned about jazz history and its impact on music today, ending in an open jam session, as well as a two-day instrument building and percussion workshop with Korean band HOOLA where attendees learned about how to use recycled materials to create their own music.

Numerous projects have taken place to support the development and promotion of under-represented genres, such as an inaugural full-day Rap Festival featuring a networking event followed by performances from artists such as Leo Miyagee, Quinncidental and Don Chi. Additionally this strand of support provided the opportunity for a UNESCO City of Music legacy piece, with previous UNESCO Day rap artists Kadesh Flow and Kemet Coleman, from Kansas City US, returning to Belfast to record music with producer Eulogy and several local artists.

The City of Music programme delivers a partnership with University of Atypical continuing a fund for the d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse community within music to run accessible music events. This year, six grants in total ranging between £1,000 and £5,000 have been

awarded to Northern Irish music creators across genres, industry experience, and disabilities for events to take place in Belfast in 2026. Recipients include: Martin della Vecchia, Joe Kenny, Andy Skinner, William McLean, Lauren Martin and Susie Blue.

Continuation of a Strategic Partnership with the Music Venue Trust to support the survival of grassroots music venues in Belfast and the ways in which these challenges can be addressed. Following a successful first NI Venues Day a period of support for NI venues took place to engage in a period of data collection that led to the first ever NI representation within the 2025 Music Venues Trust Annual Report, noted as the most comprehensive picture to date of Northern Ireland's grassroots music infrastructure and the venues that sustain it.

This report was presented at Stormont on April 14th alongside political representatives and local artists, such as Neil Hannon from the Divine Comedy. At this presentation the Music Venue Trust revealed that they will be opening their "Raise the Standard" initiative to venues in Northern Ireland - a new scheme designed to support participating venues with full financial relief for high-quality PA systems, lighting, backline, microphones, stands and leads, along with any maintenance or repairs needed thereafter.

Through a partnership with Native Events a Sustainability Toolkit has been developed. This was preceded by a period of research and consultation with a group of industry stakeholders. The toolkit will be launched alongside an event focused on environmentalism in music and made public in 2026.

Belfast City Council supported Scott's Jazz Club to create high quality films of their weekly performances by renowned local and international jazz musicians. These films are provided to the artists, to use as essential promotional tools. The films will ultimately contribute to an archive of the contemporary jazz scene in Northern Ireland and was delivered under priorities to support organisations to embrace assistive technologies to increase accessibility of music for all and enhancing the visibility of Belfast globally as a key music destination.

Work internationally with the UNESCO Cities Network to deliver shared music, skills and learning opportunities. Artist exchanges and learning opportunities have taken place across UNESCO Cities of Music such as Metz, France; Daegu, Korea; London, Ontario, Canada; and Hannover, Germany, as well as Dublin UNESCO City of Literature. This has included the first part of a Samba exchange with Beat Carnival's BeatNDrum in Germany, a City of Music performance for Belfast queer punk band Problem Patterns in Canada, the formation

	of a Brno-Hannover-Belfast jazz ensemble with local artists Scott Flannigan and Andrew McCoubrey and more.
4.0	Financial and Resource Implications
	There are currently no additional financial implications attached to this report.
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
	The cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining</i> 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.
6.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 Remaining City of Music workplan 2026/27 for approval

Culture Development Workplan 2026 / 2027 – UNESCO City of Music “Additional Activity” for Approvals

Project Name	Project Description	Timeline	Budget
UNESCO City of Music Workplan 2026/27 remaining activity for approval			
Theme 1: Placing Artists at the Heart			
Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival (CQAF) Micro bursaries programme	Continue to partner with the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival to provide grants for local music creators. 20 musicians / groups supported each year across all genres and backgrounds with a grant of £1000 towards the career enhancement or support of their choice, such as recording, mentoring, PR and more.	October 2026 to March 2027	£25,000
Co-designed wellbeing events and initiatives to ensure the physical and mental health of music creators is safeguarded and protected throughout the year.	Partner with key stakeholders and organisations in the sector hosting initiatives to support the physical and mental wellbeing of music creators. Launch an initiative to bring music into libraries during winter months to benefit local communities. Bring music wellbeing events to groups where access may otherwise be limited, such as newcomer communities through a partnership with Happy Women’s Group.	June 2026 to March 2027	£8,000
Co-design with sectoral stakeholders a series of projects that will allow for the Priorities within Theme 1: Placing Artists at the Heart.	Partner with key stakeholders and groups to launch initiatives that address priorities across Theme 1, such as ensuring there is enhanced inclusivity in music, seeking investment and export opportunities for artists and industry representatives at varying stages of their career and continuing to engage with young people to expand their understanding of the world of music.	June 2026 to March 2027	£12,000
Theme 2 : Nurture the Sector			
NI Music Prize & Sound of Belfast	Annual programmes that celebrate the very best of new, established and emerging Northern Irish music. Recognising outstanding talent while providing opportunities for live performance, industry engagement and audience development. Second year or a three-year partnership.	June 2026 to March 2027	£55,000
Music Connections Website – a one-stop-shop online Music Directory to promote and connect all facets of the music business and those working in it.	Final year of delivery for Music Connections website and online directory and support service for musicians.	June 2026 to August 2026	£30,000
Music Business Accelerator Programme	Following the launch of the Music Business Accelerator- programme scoping exercise with the local sector, Stage One will launch in 2026 to provide local businesses with	June 2026 to March 2027	£10,000

Project Name	Project Description	Timeline	Budget
	tailored support and connections to specific industry events, in collaboration with colleagues in Economic Development.		
City of Music Industry Sessions	Continued programming of free and accessible educational events around an array of topics within the music industry and partnering with groups that provide skill development opportunities. A space to allow local music creators and entrepreneurs to network together. Partners include EmuBands, Imagine Festival, The Night Institute, Belfast TradFest and Native Events.	June 2026 to March 2027	£8,000
Allocate programming funding to support organisations who seek to develop and promote diverse and under-represented genres	Continue to support projects and partnerships that develop and promote diverse and under-represented genres where gaps are identified, working with groups such as Sonic Arts Research Centre and Soultrane.	June 2026 to March 2027	£14,000
Co-design with sectoral stakeholders a series of projects that will allow for the priorities within Theme 2.	Partner with key stakeholders and groups to launch initiatives that address priorities across Theme 2, such as providing pathways for artist and industry representative attendance at international conferences to develop new networks, including The Great Escape, as well as sourcing alternative education opportunities for continuous upskilling of the local music sector and creating pathways for local music businesses to be nurtured.	June 2026 to March 2027	£15,000
Belfast Music Forum	Host the inaugural Belfast Music Forum to bring different music communities together, mirroring the Visual Arts Forum and the Festivals Forum, and provide sector support identified through direct engagement, data and research opportunities. Utilise this engagement to inform future planning and respond to immediate sectoral needs.	June 2026 to March 2027	£8,000
Theme 3: Igniting the Live Experience			
Purple Flag Alignment	Alignment with the city of Belfast's Purple Flag, partner with key stakeholders and groups to launch initiatives that enhance Belfast's night-time economy, culture and governance to ensure the city is fulfilling its economic and cultural potential after dark, as well as ensuring our venues are safe and accessible for audiences and artists.	June 2026 to March 2027	£8,000
Theme 4: Unlock the unifying power of UNESCO			
Music as a key asset for the outward promotion of NI	Collate Belfast music-focused imagery and videos that can be utilised when promoting Belfast on a global platform, such as during UNESCO City of Music forums, as well as capturing significant moments in projects supported through the Music Matters	June 2025 to March 2027	£5,000

Appendix 1

Project Name	Project Description	Timeline	Budget
	delivery and new opportunities, such as the launch event for an all-Ireland UNESCO network in September.		
Co-design with sectoral stakeholders a series of projects that will allow for the Priorities within Theme 4.	Partner with key stakeholders and groups to launch initiatives that address priorities across Theme 4, such as supporting the sector to develop assistive and interactive technologies to increase the accessibility of music for all, enhancing the visibility of Belfast globally as a key music destination and working with the film and design sector to weave music throughout the city across different outputs and artforms.	June 2026 to March 2027	£12,000

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Subject:	Draft response for DFC consultation on Museums Policy
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Keith Foster , Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture, Tourism & Events

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation, or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	Members are asked to: Note the contents of report and agree the draft response to the consultation laid out in Appendix 1
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that the Department for Communities has opened a public consultation to inform the development of a new ten-year Museums Policy, replacing the existing 2011 policy framework.</p> <p>The Department for Communities is developing a new Museums Policy for Northern Ireland as part of the wider Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme. The policy is intended to provide a strategic framework for investment, development and support for the museums sector over the next ten years.</p> <p>The consultation focuses on a draft vision, alongside a set of proposed policy aims structured around people and communities, places, and partnerships, and underpinned by the themes of strengthening, connecting and innovating across the museums sector.</p> <p>The proposed policy recognises the role of museums in preserving and interpreting heritage, supporting wellbeing, contributing to economic development, and engaging communities through participation and storytelling.</p> <p>Consultation Scope The consultation seeks views on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a proposed overarching vision for the sector, • twelve draft policy aims structured across key themes, and • a number of identified challenges and opportunities including sustainability, skills development, partnership working and audience engagement. <p>Strategic Importance to Belfast Museums and heritage assets play a significant role within Belfast’s wider cultural and economic landscape. They contribute to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • place-making and city regeneration, • tourism and visitor experience, • community engagement and participation, • and the preservation and interpretation of the city’s diverse histories and identities. <p>Alignment with Council Priorities Officers have ensured that the draft response reflects and reinforces existing Council priorities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Cultural Strategy and associated action plans, • the development of Belfast as a cultural destination, • neighbourhood tourism and local storytelling, • and the strategic development of Belfast Stories. <p>Key Themes in Draft Response The Council’s draft response highlights several cross-cutting priorities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of local museums in supporting neighbourhood tourism and dispersing visitor activity, • the need for sustained investment in heritage preservation, including both tangible and intangible heritage,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the value of collaborative partnership working across local government, cultural organisations and communities, • the role of museums in animating spaces and supporting vibrant civic life, and the opportunity to align policy with major cultural infrastructure initiatives <p>Members are advised that the formal consultation response mechanism is structured as a series of online questions, primarily requiring scaled responses (e.g. from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”) with limited opportunity for detailed narrative responses.</p> <p>In line with the approach previously agreed by Committee in responding to strategic consultations, including the Council’s response to the Arts Council Northern Ireland draft strategy, officers are proposing to submit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the required online questionnaire responses; and • a supplementary covering letter outlining the Council’s broader strategic position and key policy messages in more detail. <p>This approach will ensure that Belfast City Council’s response is both compliant with the formal consultation format and sufficiently robust in articulating the Council’s ambitions and perspectives.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>No specific financial or resource implications.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The Department for Communities has undertaken the appropriate equality screening and impact assessment as part of the consultation process. The Council’s response supports the principles of inclusivity, accessibility and equitable participation in cultural provision.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices - Documents Attached</p> <p>Appendix 1 – Draft Belfast City Council Response to Consultation & associated cover letter</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Draft Museums Policy</p>

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Section 1: Draft Policy Vision

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft vision

“Accessible heritage: inspiring discovery, enhancing wellbeing and connecting communities”?

Response: Strongly Agree

Supplementary commentary (text box): Belfast City Council strongly supports the proposed vision, which reflects the broad and evolving role of museums as accessible, inclusive civic assets. The emphasis on wellbeing, connectivity and discovery aligns closely with our cultural strategy and the role of culture in supporting place-making, participation and civic pride.

We particularly welcome the recognition of museums as spaces that connect people to place and to one another, and believe this should be further strengthened through place-based storytelling and community engagement.

Section 2: Policy Aims – PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following aims are important areas of priority for the museum sector?

Q2. Supporting positive health and wellbeing through engagement

Strongly Agree

Commentary: The Council strongly supports the recognition of museums as contributors to wellbeing outcomes. We encourage continued investment in outreach, community programming and inclusive engagement, particularly for underrepresented groups and those experiencing barriers to cultural participation.

Q3. Inspiring creativity and lifelong learning

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Museums are key partners in lifelong learning and cultural education. We support stronger integration with schools, community learning and informal education settings, and highlight opportunities to align with skills development and creative learning pathways.

Q4. Supporting access to trusted information and resources

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Access to trusted, curated knowledge is fundamental to the role of museums. We would welcome further emphasis on digital access and innovation to ensure collections and knowledge are accessible to wider audiences.

Q5. Working innovatively to drive participation and engagement

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Innovation in audience engagement is critical. This includes digital storytelling, co-creation with communities, and new participatory models aligned with projects such as Belfast Stories.

Section 3: Policy Aims – PLACES

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following aims are important areas of priority for the museum sector?

Q6. Providing safe, accessible and inclusive spaces

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Museums are vital civic spaces. Continued investment is required to ensure accessibility, sustainability and inclusion, particularly across smaller museums.

Q7. Preserving local histories including collections, traditional skills and crafts, and stories for people and communities

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Belfast City Council strongly supports this aim. Preservation must include both tangible collections and intangible heritage such as oral histories, traditions and lived experience.

We particularly emphasise the importance of connecting preservation with active interpretation and storytelling.

Q8. Celebrating and representing cultural diversity through collections, programming and storytelling

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Representation is central to building shared cultural understanding. Museums should reflect the diversity of contemporary society, through inclusive collecting, programming and interpretation.

Q9. Contributing to the public awareness of Northern Ireland's environmental challenges through sustainable operations, local actions and provision of information and resources.

Strongly Agree

Commentary: We support the principle and recognise the role museums can play in environmental education. However, delivery should be proportionate and supported by resourcing and guidance, particularly for smaller organisations.

Section 4: Policy Aims – PARTNERSHIPS

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following aims are important areas of priority for the museum sector?

Q10. Demonstrating the value of the museum sector in meeting government outcomes

Strongly Agree

Commentary: We strongly support the need to better evidence and communicate the social and economic value of museums. This is critical for advocacy, investment and cross-government alignment.

Q11. Investing in a vibrant and connected accredited sector

Strongly Agree

Commentary: The accreditation system is an important mechanism for quality and sustainability. Continued investment is essential to support resilience across the sector.

Q12. Working with others to preserve, grow and celebrate local heritage, arts and culture

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Partnership working is essential. We emphasise the critical role of local government in facilitating place-based collaboration across culture, tourism and community sectors.

Q13. Working innovatively with others to support positive outcomes for people and communities.

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Innovation is best delivered through partnership. We support cross-sector approaches that bring together culture, tourism, regeneration and community development.

Q14. Accreditation remains the best assurance of quality standards and NI Museums Council should continue to apply the UK Accreditation Standard.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

Belfast City Council strongly agrees that accreditation remains a critical mechanism for maintaining quality, governance and public trust across the museums sector. The UK Accreditation Standard provides a robust and recognised framework that supports continuous improvement and ensures consistency across institutions of varying scale and capacity.

We support the continued role of NI Museums Council in administering the scheme and providing guidance and support to museums in achieving and maintaining accreditation.

Q15. NI Museums Council should encourage greater numbers of museums to pursue accreditation.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

The Council supports efforts to increase participation in accreditation, recognising that it strengthens the overall resilience and credibility of the sector.

However, this ambition should be accompanied by:

- appropriate financial and advisory support, particularly for smaller and independent museums,
- capacity-building initiatives to support organisations through the accreditation process,
- and recognition of the varying starting points and resource constraints across the sector.

Encouraging wider participation must be matched by practical support to ensure accessibility and equity.

Q16. NI Museums Council should deliver further small grant schemes for accredited museums.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

Small grant schemes represent a highly effective mechanism to enable museums to deliver programmes, maintain collections and undertake essential improvements.

Belfast City Council strongly supports the continuation and expansion of such schemes, noting that:

- relatively modest levels of funding can deliver significant impact,
- these schemes support innovation, programming and community engagement,
- and they are particularly valuable in supporting local authority and independent museums facing resource constraints.

Q17. Pilot a small grant programme to support connections between museums, schools and young people.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

The Council strongly supports this proposal and emphasises the importance of strengthening links between museums and young people.

We recommend that this programme:

- supports both in-person and outreach activity,
- aligns with curriculum delivery and informal education pathways,
- prioritises access for schools and communities facing barriers to participation,
- and encourages partnership working between museums, schools and youth organisations.

This will be essential in nurturing the next generation of audiences and ensuring long-term sustainability of the sector.

Q17. Programme to support care of significant collections.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

Belfast City Council strongly supports this proposal, recognising that many museums care for collections of national, regional and local significance.

We emphasise:

- the need for specialist expertise and investment in collections care,
- the importance of ensuring long-term preservation alongside public accessibility,
- and the value of expert-led decision-making in determining eligibility and prioritisation.

This programme will be particularly important for smaller institutions with limited access to specialist resources.

Q18. Assessment of capital needs across HCC sectors

Strongly agree

Commentary:

Belfast City Council strongly supports the need for a comprehensive assessment of capital requirements across the Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) sectors.

We recommend that this assessment:

- considers both **immediate maintenance needs and long-term strategic investment**,
- aligns with wider **place-based regeneration and cultural infrastructure planning**,
- and ensures that capital investment supports **accessibility, sustainability and digital capability**.

There is a significant opportunity to align capital investment with wider civic priorities, including regeneration, tourism development and the delivery of major cultural infrastructure such as Belfast Stories.

Q19 Research programme on social and economic value of museums

Strongly agree

Commentary:

The Council strongly supports the implementation of a coordinated research programme to better evidence the social and economic impact of museums.

Such research should:

- capture the **full value of museums**, including wellbeing, education, tourism and community cohesion,
- support stronger alignment with **Programme for Government outcomes**,
- and provide a shared evidence base for **advocacy, investment and cross-sector collaboration**.

We would welcome opportunities to collaborate on this work, building on existing local and regional data.

Q20 Assessment of skills requirements across museums

Strongly agree

Commentary:

We fully support the development of a sector-wide skills assessment, recognising that workforce capacity is critical to future sustainability.

This should include:

- **digital skills and innovation capacity**,
- **collections care and conservation expertise**,
- **community engagement and participatory practice**,
- and leadership, governance and organisational resilience.

A coordinated skills strategy will ensure that the sector is equipped to respond to changing audience expectations and technological developments.

Q21. Development of networks to catalyse innovation and partnerships

Strongly agree

Commentary:

The Council strongly endorses the development of new and strengthened networks across HCC sectors.

We particularly emphasise:

- the role of **cross-sector collaboration** (culture, tourism, regeneration, education),
- the importance of **place-based networks** that reflect local contexts,
- and the need to support **innovation through collaboration**, particularly in programming and audience engagement.

Local government has a key role to play in convening and supporting these networks at city and neighbourhood level.

Q22. Supporting sectors to adapt to funding environment and diversify income

Agree

Commentary:

Belfast City Council agrees that supporting the sector to diversify income streams is important, particularly given ongoing constraints on public funding.

However, we emphasise that:

- public investment remains **foundational to the sustainability of the sector**,
- not all organisations have equal capacity to generate commercial income,
- and support is required to build capability in areas such as fundraising, partnerships and income diversification.

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Place and Economy Department

Economic Development Division



Belfast
City Council

Dealt with by Lesley-Ann O'Donnell

Date June 2026

Email odonnell@belfastcity.gov.uk

Department for Communities Northern Ireland

Dear Officer

On behalf of Belfast City Council, we welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the Department for Communities consultation on a new Museums Policy for Northern Ireland.

The Council recognises the importance of this consultation in shaping a new ten-year framework to support a vibrant, sustainable and inclusive museums sector. Our response aligns closely with the Council's cultural priorities, including delivery of our cultural strategy, support for inclusive economic growth, and the development of Belfast as a leading cultural destination.

The Council has completed the formal consultation response via the required online questionnaire. However, as this format is primarily based on scaled responses (e.g. "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree") with limited opportunity for detailed narrative, we are providing this supplementary letter to articulate our key strategic considerations and priorities in greater detail.

As a key civic partner in the cultural and heritage landscape, Belfast City Council recognises the important role of museums in preserving and interpreting our shared heritage, supporting wellbeing, and contributing to the economic and social vitality of the city and wider region.

In alignment with our existing strategic priorities and future ambitions, including the development of Belfast Stories, we wish to highlight the following key areas:

Cultural Strategy Alignment

We support the proposed vision and policy direction, particularly the emphasis on connecting communities, enhancing wellbeing, and ensuring access to heritage. Museums are central to delivering on these ambitions and should be recognised as core cultural infrastructure within the wider civic and cultural ecosystem.

Alignment with Place-Based Cultural Development

The policy should explicitly recognise the role of museums within wider place-making and regeneration frameworks. Museums act as key cultural anchors within neighbourhoods, supporting local identity, civic pride and economic activity.

Neighbourhood Tourism and Place-Making

We emphasise the role of museums in supporting neighbourhood tourism and place-based development. Local museums and heritage assets act as anchors within

communities, helping to distribute visitor activity beyond the city centre and creating more inclusive economic benefit through cultural tourism.

Preservation and Promotion of Heritage

We strongly support continued investment in the preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage. This includes collections, traditional skills, oral histories and community narratives. Ensuring these assets are protected while also being actively interpreted and shared is critical to maintaining their relevance and impact.

Partnership Working

We welcome the strong focus within the policy on partnership and collaboration. Effective delivery will require coordinated working between central and local government, cultural institutions, tourism bodies, and community organisations. Local government plays a key role in convening and enabling these partnerships at a place-based level.

Animation of Spaces and Public Engagement

Museums should be supported as dynamic civic spaces, contributing to the animation of the city through programming, events and community engagement. Investment in outreach and participatory activity is essential to increase access, particularly among underrepresented groups.

Innovation and Belfast Stories

We recognise the opportunity to align the policy with major city-scale initiatives such as Belfast Stories. This includes supporting new approaches to storytelling, digital innovation, and audience engagement, as well as strengthening the connection between heritage, tourism and contemporary cultural identity.

Alignment with Belfast Stories and Strategic Cultural Infrastructure

The Council highlights the opportunity to align policy delivery with major cultural infrastructure initiatives such as Belfast Stories, which will demonstrate the transformative potential of storytelling, heritage and audience engagement at scale.

Sector Sustainability and Skills

We support the emphasis on building resilience across the sector, including through skills development, workforce capacity, and sustainable funding models. Continued investment will be essential to maintain standards, support innovation, and ensure long-term sustainability.

Sustainable Funding and Long-Term Resilience

While the proposed actions are welcomed, their success will depend on sustained and strategic investment. The Council encourages continued exploration of diverse funding models and long-term financial planning.

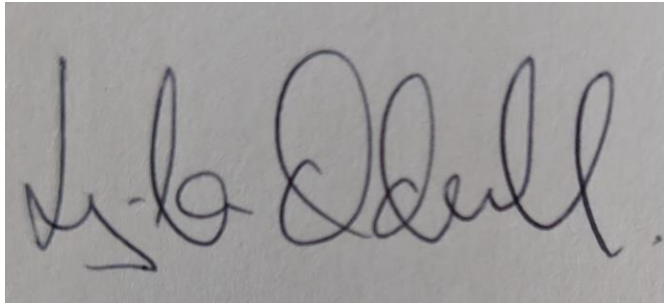
In conclusion, Belfast City Council is supportive of the development of a new Museums Policy and believes it provides a strong opportunity to strengthen the sector, enhance collaboration, and maximise the role of museums in delivering social, cultural and economic outcomes.

We look forward to continued engagement with the Department for Communities and sector partners in progressing this important work.

Belfast City Council, Place and Economy Department,
9 Adelaide, 9-21 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8DJ
Tel: 028 9032 0202 Textphone: 028 9027 0405

Thank you for considering our response.

Yours sincerely

A photograph of a handwritten signature in blue ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'Lesley-Ann O'Donnell'.

Lesley-Ann O'Donnell
Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism

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Department for

Communities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Museums Policy NI: Consultation



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or email: hccconsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk

This publication is also available to download from our website at www.communities-ni.gov.uk

OVERVIEW

The Department for Communities (DfC) is the Executive department with responsibility for policy on the museums sector in Northern Ireland.

The current policy - “Northern Ireland Museums Policy” – was published in 2011 and this consultation is part of the process to establish a new policy to replace it.

The focus of this consultation is on the draft vision statement, the 12 policy aims that are proposed as the basis of a new policy for Government support of Northern Ireland’s museum sector, and on a number of emerging issues where action might be taken.

The vision and aims have been prepared following engagement with people across the museums sector and research on modern, good practice, nationally and internationally.

Your views are important to us and will help inform the new policy. A questionnaire on the draft vision and the policy aims is available at the link below and we would welcome your response by 22 June 2026.

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, we would ask that only one person from each organisation submits a response. A paper-based questionnaire is available on request from HCCpublicconsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk.

For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they do not wish for their responses to be published. All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity may be published. We will remove any personal data, including email addresses and telephone numbers, from these responses; but apart from this, we may publish them in full. For more information about what we do with personal data please see our [consultation privacy notice](#).

Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR); however, all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (UK) 2016/679.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under the FOIA or EIR.

In order to facilitate the survey, Citizen Space, which is not operated by the Department, is used as a data processor. Details of Citizen Space’s privacy policy can be found online at [Citizen Space Privacy Policy](#).

MUSEUMS POLICY NI: CONSULTATION

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



Our museums are places that hold many remarkable and unexpected objects and collections that help tell the story of our people, our places and our heritage.

They are heritage spaces that offer room for tranquil study and contemplation; but they are also full of life, delivering a huge array of events, courses and opportunities to hear the stories of generations past, and to tell our own.

Without the knowledge, professionalism and curiosity of our museum professionals, the risk is that important and interesting connections to our past could be missed, misinterpreted or lost altogether.

This consultation marks an important step in the development of a new policy on how the Executive supports our museums sector and the people who work in it.

And it is your chance to give your views on how our heritage should be not only protected and preserved; but brought into the light and brought to life, to be shared and enjoyed.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this consultation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Lyons'.

GORDON LYONS MLA
Minister for Communities

27/04/2026

MUSEUMS POLICY NI: CONSULTATION

Introduction and Context

1. The Department for Communities (DfC) is the Executive department with responsibility for policy for the museums sector in Northern Ireland. The Department also provides financial support for museums through a number of channels.
2. This consultation is an important part of the process to inform the direction of a new policy to update and replace “Northern Ireland Museums Policy” which was introduced in 2011.
3. The focus of this consultation is on the draft vision for the policy, the 12 aims that are proposed as the basis of a new policy, and on a number of emerging issues where action might be taken. It is intended that the new policy should have a lifespan of ten years, with a mid-life review.
4. The vision and the aims have been prepared following engagement with people across the museums sector and through research on modern, good practice, nationally and internationally.
5. This document offers information on the context for the development of the new policy, the nature of support currently provided for museums and an outline of areas where a new ten-year policy might particularly focus.

The Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme

6. The work to develop a new policy for museums forms part of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) Programme. HCC was established by the Minister for Communities in July 2024. It will see the development of new policies for the arts, historic environment, public libraries and museums and will give each of the policy areas the status they merit and provide each of the communities of interest with their own focus. More information about HCC can be found at [Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme](#).

Guiding Principles for Policy Development

7. The HCC Programme is built on a shared set of guiding principles for the policies to be developed under it. They are that Heritage, Culture & Creativity Programme policies will:
 - be **valued** by all
 - be **inclusive**, recognising and respecting the diversity of our society
 - bring **equitable** access to opportunities and experience
 - **enhance** the lives of people and communities
 - be **sustainable** in terms of economic and environmental challenges

The purpose of a new Museums Policy

8. Every policy should be subject to periodic review and re-assessment, to ensure that it remains relevant and capable of achieving the intended outcomes. Changes in role, focus and professional practice, in technology and in visitor expectations since “Northern Ireland Museums Policy” was published in 2011 mean that a review now is merited.
9. The new policy will aim to support the high standards and sustainability of the museums sector over the next decade and to encourage the role museums, and the people who work in them, can play in addressing their core functions and in contributing to community needs and to Executive priorities and policy.
10. As such the policy will provide the basis for the investment of public funding to the sector and serve as a guide for the strategic planning of National Museums Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Museums Council and for individual museums and galleries.

Current areas of support

11. The Department’s support for the museum sector is primarily delivered through two bodies, National Museums NI and the NI Museums Council.
12. National Museums NI is Northern Ireland’s flagship heritage institution. It was formed under legislation made in 1998 and comprises the Ulster Museum, Ulster Folk Museum, Ulster Transport Museum and Ulster American Folk Park. It has national and increasingly international standing and recognition for its work.
13. It is an arm’s-length body of the Department, which provides around 80% of its annual funding. It is a respected and successful institution, a significant employer with a multi-disciplinary workforce and is responsible for collections amounting to 1.4 million objects, along with a significant portfolio of property, including many historic and landmark listed buildings. It also plays an important leadership role in supporting the wider museum and culture sector in Northern Ireland.
14. The Department’s resource funding to National Museums NI over the last five financial years is provided in the chart adjacent. The opening grant for 2025/26 was £20 million.

Year	Opening budget	Closing
	£'000	£'000
2024/25	16,119	18,137
2023/24	13,820	17,465
2022/23	13,349	16,311
2021/22	12,245	14,614
2020/21	11,459	13,029

15. While in the current public spending environment this represents a positive outcome, there is an established and growing need for modernisation and renewal across many of the museums collections and exhibitions, necessary to keep pace with its responsibilities, current standards and visitor expectations.
16. National Museums NI also faces significant capital funding requirements, particularly in relation to its estate and collection care. The recent announcement in respect of its £50m Reawakening Project at the Ulster Folk Museum is recognition of the Museum's need for investment and of the economic and social value that the redevelopment is expected to generate.
17. However, its maintenance requirements, and their growing costs, is leading to a deterioration of its estate; stalling improvements in accessibility; and impacting its plans to modernise its facilities and visitor experiences. Investment decisions in respect of National Museums NI are considered through a well-established business case process.
18. Further information on National Museums NI can be found by following this link: [National Museums Northern Ireland](#).
19. The NI Museums Council is an arm's-length-body of the Department and is the development body for the museum sector in Northern Ireland. It provides leadership, advice, and training and development opportunities to local museums and museum professionals. It promotes best practice in collections care and visitor experience and delivers networking events.
20. NI Museums Council is central to ensuring that local museums across Northern Ireland operate to the highest standards and remain sustainable. It achieves this through its role as the Northern Ireland Administrator of the UK Museum Accreditation Scheme, working in partnership with Arts Council England.
21. Subject to the availability of funding, NI Museums Council delivers grant programmes to support the work of accredited museums in areas like programme and exhibition development, collections care, and through small capital works and purchases. In 2025/26, the Department provided NI Museums Council with £110,000 in capital funding, the first since a £25,000 investment in 2022/23. Utilising that funding, NI Museums Council successfully delivered two small-grant programmes for accredited museums.
22. NI Museums Council also provides essential opportunities for museum staff and volunteers to develop skills and knowledge through training and networking. This is increasingly important in a sector where limited resources restrict career development. By investing in people, NI Museums Council helps strengthen the foundations of the museum sector and supports long term resilience.

23. More information on the work of the NI Museums Council, can be found here: [Northern Ireland Museums Council](#).
24. The broader museums sector comprises a number of institutions funded and managed by our local councils, along with a range of independent museums. The Department supports their work, and particularly their progress through the Accreditation Scheme, by its sponsorship of the NI Museums Council. There are 40 accredited museums across Northern Ireland.

The Role, Contribution and Value of Museums

25. The fascination, appreciation and importance of heritage is shared across the world. It is the focus of a number of international organisations; the subject of a range of international agreements and conventions; and the quarry for myriad academic studies.
26. The global interest is reflected just as strongly nationally and locally. It is not driven solely by curiosity about the past, but by a recognition of the influence, insight and creativity that an understanding and appreciation of our natural, cultural and built heritage can bring to contemporary life.
27. That recognition is one of the reasons museums have such an important place as crucial heritage institutions and in cultural life - a YouGov survey in 2024 for Art Fund found that 89% of UK adults thought museums are important to UK culture, with 47% saying they are very important and only 7% that they are not important.¹
28. In the UK, the Museums Association set out the characteristics of museums as being to “...enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.”
29. In 2022, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) produced the following definition, which has been adopted by the Irish Museums Association:

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”

¹ https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/ArtFundNMDC_Museums_240426.pdf

30. These statements of characteristics provide a basis for understanding the foundational purpose of museums, but they do not tell the whole story of their impact and contribution, or of their social or economic value.
31. Beyond their conservation, interpretation and exhibition roles and their stewardship of huge numbers of artefacts and archives – for example, National Museums NI is custodian to 1.4 million objects across four museums – our museums, and their expert, cross-disciplinary staff, play an important role across a spectrum of activity.
32. Among other things, museums are important visitor attractions appealing to local people and tourists alike.
- Figures for 2024 published by the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions show the Ulster Museum as the third most visited venue in Northern Ireland, with more than 530,000 visitors, and all of the four National Museums NI sites in the top ten;²
 - The NI Continuous Household Survey 2024/25 found that 42% of adults within Northern Ireland had visited a museum or science centre within the previous year. This compared with a UK figure of 48% found in the 2024 YouGov survey for Art Fund.³
 - Although the 2022 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey observed a 15-year low of 53% in young people visiting a museum or science centre.⁴
33. Organisations in the museum sector are significant employers, encourage volunteering and are important education facilities and research institutions. For individuals, a growing body of evidence supports the positive contribution to mental health and wellbeing of visiting museums and participation in activities.
34. At a practical level, their work ensures that heritage objects remain accessible and highlights the ongoing need for traditional craft skills. With their particular focus on the preservation, restoration and ongoing maintenance of historic buildings at the Ulster Folk Museum and Ulster American Folk Park, National Museums NI provides opportunities for skilled heritage contractors in thatching and other traditional construction techniques. These skills support wider application in construction and restoration in the wider built heritage sector.

² <https://www.alva.org.uk/details.cfm?p=423>

³ <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/communities/experience-of-culture-arts-and-heritage-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202425.html>

⁴ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/young-persons-behaviour-and-attitude-survey-2022>

35. Museums, and the people who work in them, play a crucial role in our understanding of our cultural heritage. Without the knowledge, professionalism and curiosity of our museum professionals, the risk is that important and interesting connections to our past could be missed, misinterpreted or lost altogether. For example, their professional expertise is looked to in the safeguarding of the customs, traditions, crafts and skills that constitute our living heritage - this role is becoming more significant following the UK Government's ratification of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, with NI Museums Council serving as the Northern Ireland community hub in that initiative.

Opportunities and Challenges: Policy Priorities and Potential Direction

36. To support the development of the new policy, the Department has undertaken a programme of stakeholder engagement, visits to institutions and research on approaches and priorities in other jurisdictions. That engagement and research has led to the development of the propositions which are the subject of this consultation process and to the development of the draft vision and policy aims.

37. It is acknowledged that funding for the sector is an important issue and, while the development of the new policy is intended to support the rationale for additional, targeted financial support for the sector, the new policy will not in itself be an immediate guarantee of that.

38. As a result of its engagement and research to date, it is not expected that the new policy will result in the need for any change in the governance or role of National Museums NI.

39. In terms of the broader museums sector, it remains the case that accreditation is regarded as the most effective means to ensure all museums are, in the words of Arts Council England, "sustainable, focussed and trusted, inspiring the confidence of the public and funding and governing bodies".

40. As such we propose that the UK Accreditation Standard should continue to apply in Northern Ireland and that the NI Museums Council should continue in its accreditation role.

41. Subject to the availability of funding, the Department will also consider supporting NI Museums Council to extend the level of its engagement and encouragement of museums, and particularly those seeking to pursue or retain accreditation.

42. For small organisations, the availability of financial support in the development of new programmes, activities, events and exhibitions, or for essential minor works or the purchase of equipment, can make a significant contribution to the services an accredited museum can provide.

43. Informed by the evidence of the impact of funding programmes introduced in 2025/26, the Department will seek to support further such investment, subject to the availability of funding. Accreditation would be a gateway for entry to such funding.
44. Throughout the engagement process, many stakeholders reflected on the impact of rising costs on their visitor numbers and on their capacity, for example, to undertake visits to schools and other groups in the community.
45. A key role for museums lies in outreach and in its connections with schools and young people. For children to miss out on the chance to visit a museum or have a museum visit them at school is a very real loss, not just in terms of the missed curriculum opportunity but in missing the chance to build connections to museums and heritage more widely.
46. On that basis, and subject to the availability of funding, the Department proposes to work with NI Museums Council to explore the potential to pilot a small grant programme to support proposals to maintain and develop the connections between museums and young people.
47. Engagement across the sectors covered by the first phase of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme (that is arts, museums, public libraries and the historic environment) has generated a number of common themes and issues which may be considered for action on a programme-wide basis. These include:
 - a. A desire to address the capital needs of the sectors, in terms of routine maintenance, investment to address access, environmental and health and safety requirements and a coherent approach to strategic capital development;
 - b. Growing evidence of the social and economic value of the sectors and their intrinsic importance to individuals, communities and society more generally; the contribution and value of the work of the museums sector to, for example, the priorities established in the Programme for Government might also be included as part of a wider research initiative under the aegis of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme;
 - c. The benefits that might be brought through a programme of skills development to include provision in terms of organisational governance, management, investment and fund-raising; in digital potential and skills; supporting professional development and so on, to strengthen the skills base of the sector and support its sustainability;
 - d. The potential to develop networks, within and across sectors, with a view to catalysing new potential and innovative projects and partnerships;
 - e. Recognising that public funding is likely to continue to be constrained, the potential to maximise existing funding sources should be explored along with approaches to generating new income streams and funding options.

48. Other than to the National Museums Northern Ireland, the Department does not provide core funding⁵ to accredited museums. Responsibility for the viability and sustainability of these institutions rests with their respective governing authorities.
49. However, there have been a number of ad hoc arrangements where the Department has provided some support directly to accredited museums to meet particular, last resort, needs. While the Department has the authority to provide such support, it does not constitute a funding programme.
50. Many significant items and archives are under the custodianship of our public cultural institutions – for example the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, National Museums NI, Libraries NI, Armagh Observatory and Planetarium or the Historic Environment Record of Northern Ireland. However, the Department recognises that stewardship of important locally, and nationally, significant heritage is not confined to those institutions.
51. It is certainly also the case that our local accredited museums hold many remarkable objects and collections that tell the story of our people, places and heritage. It is also true that the nature of such items and collections can sometimes require a level of management or essential care that can be beyond the day-to-day capacity or the budget of smaller institutions.
52. Subject to the availability of funding, the Department proposes to work with the NI Museums Council to develop a programme to support museums in the care of objects or collections that are considered to be of particular significance and which merit, or require, particular, specialist care or management, in order to ensure their continued preservation and accessibility to museum users. While the terms of such a programme are not predetermined, it is anticipated that decisions on eligibility would be informed by expert advice.
53. This programme would replace the current ad hoc funding arrangements for some institutions, with the intention to introduce new arrangements from 1 April 2027.

The Draft Vision for the New Museum Policy

54. In the consultation questionnaire you are also invited to offer your views on the draft vision for the policy, which is intended to describe succinctly what the policy is aiming to achieve. Having taken into account some points for inclusion suggested in the course of engagement, we propose the following vision:

“Accessible heritage: inspiring discovery, enhancing wellbeing and connecting communities”

5 By core funding we mean long term funding to support running and operational costs

The Draft Policy Aims

55. In developing the draft policy aims, the Department has taken account of:
- Legislative duties as set out in the Museums and Galleries (NI) Order 1998. The Order itself can be found at: [Museums and Galleries \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998](#)
 - Government policy priorities, including the Programme for Government
 - Stakeholder engagement
 - Literature review and best practice from the UK, Ireland, and internationally
56. At the heart of each of the policies developed under the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme are three common focusses: People & Communities, Places, and Partnerships; and three shared drivers: to strengthen, to connect and to innovate. When brought together these form a matrix which is the basis for the presentation of the policy aims.
57. The matrix below sets out 12 draft aims proposed for the museum policy. The new policy will rest on these aims, and you are invited in the following pages to offer your views on them.

Museums:

HCC Policy Goals		People and Communities	Places	Partnerships
Museums:	<p>Strengthen: Building resilience growing capacity and ensuring the sustainability of the sector.</p>	<p>1. Supporting positive health and wellbeing through engagement and participation.</p> <p>2. Inspiring creativity and supporting opportunities for life-long learning.</p>	<p>5. Providing safe, accessible and inclusive spaces for everyone.</p> <p>6. Preserving local histories including collections, traditional skills and crafts, and stories for people and communities.</p>	<p>9. Demonstrating the value of the museum sector in meeting government outcomes.</p> <p>10. Investing to support a vibrant and connected accredited museums sector.</p>
	<p>Connect: Realising the full potential of creative connections, intersections and partnerships.</p>	<p>3. Supporting access to trusted information and resources.</p>	<p>7. Celebrating and representing cultural diversity through collections, programming and storytelling.</p>	<p>11. Working with others to preserve, grow and celebrate local heritage, arts and culture.</p>
	<p>Innovate: Fueling innovation and propelling growth, impact and reach.</p>	<p>4. Working innovatively to drive participation and engagement.</p>	<p>8. Contributing to the public awareness of Northern Ireland's environmental challenges through sustainable operations, local actions and provision of information and resources.</p>	<p>12. Working innovatively with others to support positive outcomes for people and communities.</p>

Conclusion

58. We greatly appreciate you taking the time to share your views on the draft vision, policy aims, and other matters relating to the museum sector in Northern Ireland.

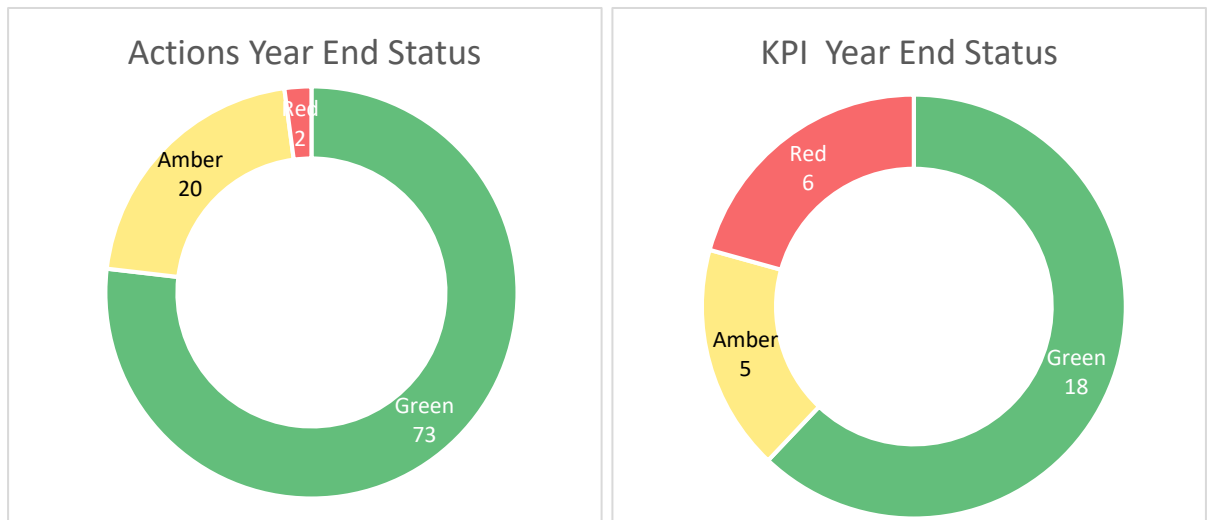
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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues						
1.1	To provide an end of year report on the key actions contained in the 2025-26 City Growth and Regeneration (CG&R) Committee Plan, as agreed by this Committee in May 2025.						
1.2	To present to Committee the final City Growth & Regeneration Committee Plan for 2026-27 which incorporates a completed performance information section.						
2.0	Recommendation						
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of the end of year report as set out in Appendix 1; • Approve the performance section included within the City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan for 2026-27 attached at Appendix 2. 						
3.0	Main Report						
3.1	<p><u>CG&R Committee Plan 2025-26 End of Year Report</u></p> <p>While the Committee receives regular updates on progress for specific programmes and initiatives, Appendix 1 sets out an End of Year performance report detailing progress against the strategic priorities and deliverables that were contained within last year’s Committee Plan (2025-26) as agreed by members at its meeting on 4th June 2025.</p>						
3.2	A range of monitoring mechanisms is in place to track the wide variety of actions and KPIs set out in the Plan. For organisations in receipt of funding, grant recipients are usually required to submit their own end-of-year monitoring reports. This process creates a time lag, as it involves issuing individual requests, receiving responses, and then collating and analysing the information before it can be reported to Members. As a result, the data was not available in time for the April committee meeting when the 2026/27 report was presented. Officers are continuing to develop and improve monitoring processes and arrangements to enable more timely and responsive performance reporting.						
3.3	<p>Year-end performance has been analysed using a Red-Amber-Green, using the following definitions:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td style="background-color: #f08080;">Red</td> <td>Action was not delivered as planned. KPI target not achieved (>5% tolerance).</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #ffd700;">Amber</td> <td>Action partially delivered. KPI target almost achieved (within 5% tolerance)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #90ee90;">Green</td> <td>Action delivered as planned. KPI target achieved.</td> </tr> </table> <p>In summary, 91 out of 124 measures (73%) were rated Green, with 25 Amber and 8 Red. This represents a significant improvement from the mid-year position (reported to Committee in November), where there were 76 Green, 43 Amber and 5 Red measures. The increase in Green ratings (+15) and reduction in Amber ratings (-18) demonstrates clear progress and effective corrective action during the second half of the year. The year has ended with a clear</p>	Red	Action was not delivered as planned. KPI target not achieved (>5% tolerance).	Amber	Action partially delivered. KPI target almost achieved (within 5% tolerance)	Green	Action delivered as planned. KPI target achieved.
Red	Action was not delivered as planned. KPI target not achieved (>5% tolerance).						
Amber	Action partially delivered. KPI target almost achieved (within 5% tolerance)						
Green	Action delivered as planned. KPI target achieved.						

upward trajectory. The substantial reduction in Amber measures shows that issues identified at mid-year have been actively managed and, in many cases, successfully resolved. Overall, the committee has delivered a strong year-end performance across both Our Economy and Our Place themes.



3.4 CG&R Committee Plan 2026-27

At its April meeting, the Committee approved the draft City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan for 2026/27, subject to additional performance information being brought back to its next meeting. The Performance Monitoring section of the draft Committee Plan has now been completed and includes SMART targets for the year ahead. It should be noted that many targets cannot be compared with the actual figures from the previous year as the budget allocations are often different. Work continues to develop a suite of indicators that aren't just outputs but rather reflect the impact of the investment. Going forward, it is proposed that KPIs and progress towards their targets will be reported on a six-monthly basis together with an accompanying progress report against all deliverables.

3.5 Financial and Resource Implications

The draft Committee Plan 2026/27 is aligned with the budget agreed by the Special Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on 13th February 2026, namely a cash limit for the CG&R Committee of £23,958,554 as set out in Appendix 2.

3.6 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Strategies, programmes and actions within the Committee Plan are developed and delivered in consultation with the Council's Equality & Diversity Officers and subject to appropriate equality, good relations and rural needs assessment.

4.0 **Appendices - Documents Attached**

- Appendix 1 - CG&R Committee Plan 2025-26 End of Year Report
- Appendix 2 – Final CG&R Committee Plan 2026-27

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FRONT COVER

Image from Alexi Comin (taken from City Matters)

City Growth & Regeneration

2025/26 End-of-Year Performance Report



Looking Back – A selection of highlights from the past year

434 Belfast businesses supported to grow through Go Succeed

873 Belfast entrepreneurs supported through Go Succeed start-up activity

24 Vacant Properties brought back into use by the Vacant to Vibrant programme

Culture Night delivered on 19th September attended by 50,000 people

Strategic Partnership agreement signed with Private Sector Partner

Strategic acquisition of the Assembly Rooms and adjoining assets

928 participants recruited to Employment and Upskilling academies

225K funding awards made through the £250k Sandy Row Revitalisation Scheme

Belfast secured Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann for a second consecutive year in 2027

Belfast Titanic Maritime Festival delivered with an audience of 57,000

International Relations Framework adopted and being implemented

724,514 visitor servicing enquiries managed by Visit Belfast

1,048,237 visitors to St George's Market

459 conferences, weddings or events at Belfast Castle and Malone House

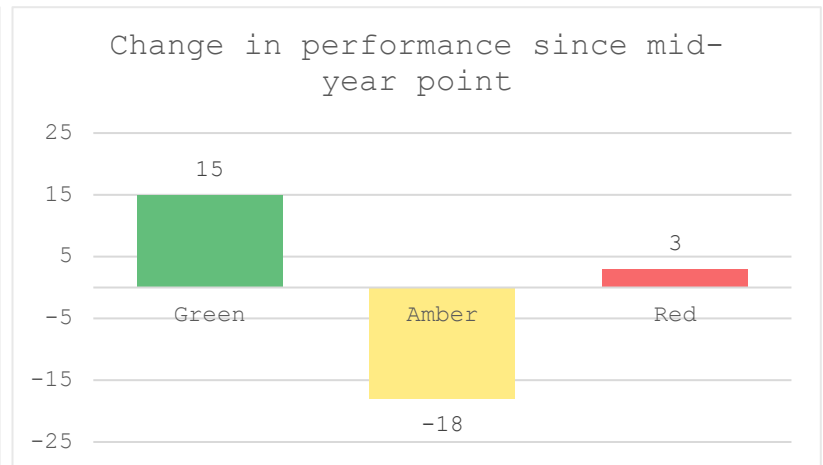
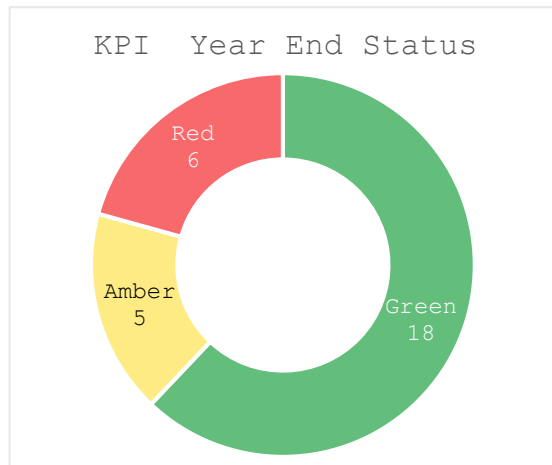
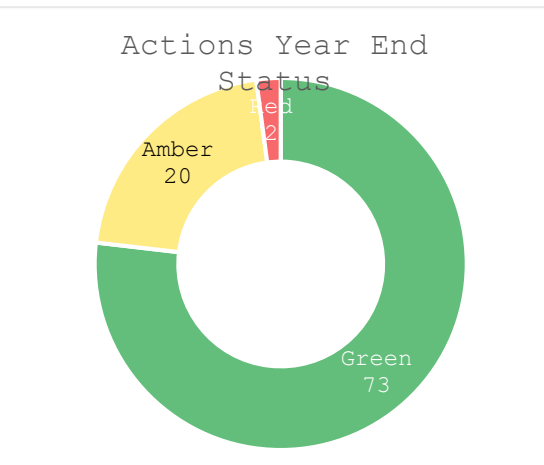
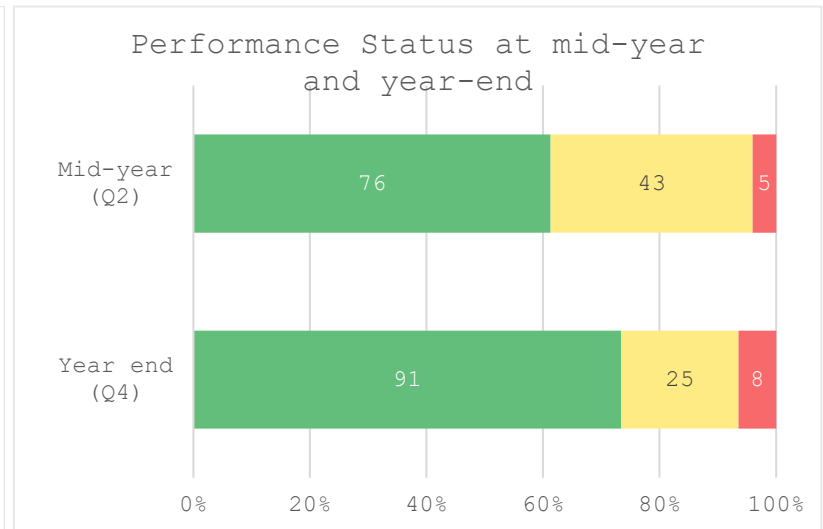
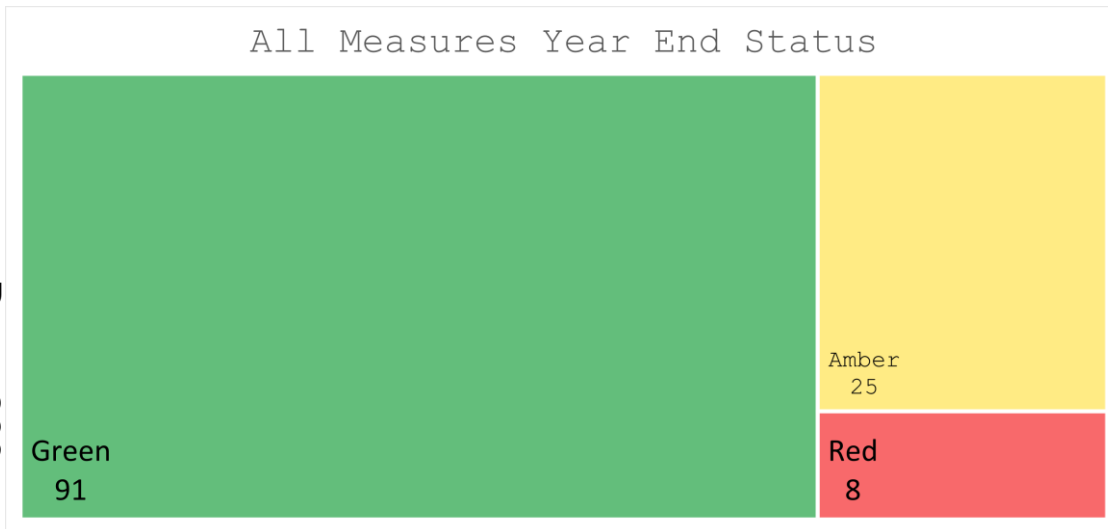
2,820 people attended our localised Jobs Fairs

Belfast ranked 9th as a globally sustainable destination for tourism

Performance Dashboard

At year-end, 91 out of 124 measures (73%) were rated Green (Action delivered as planned or KPI target achieved), with 25 Amber (Action part delivered or delivered with some uncertainty or KPI target almost achieved – within a tolerance level) and 8 Red (Action not delivered or KPI target not achieved). This represents a significant improvement from the mid-year position (at the end of Q2), where we had 76 Green, 43 Amber and 5 Red. The +15 increase in Green ratings and -18 reduction in Amber ratings demonstrates clear progress and effective corrective action during the second half of the year. The year has ended with a clear upward trajectory. The substantial reduction in Amber measures shows that issues identified at mid-year have been actively managed and, in many cases, successfully resolved. Overall, the committee has delivered a strong year-end performance across both Our Economy and Our Place themes.

Page 289



Our Economy Priorities

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
Support business start-up and growth by managing and overseeing the delivery of the Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service (NIESS) and deliver targeted support in Belfast to meet funder and statutory targets.	Undertake the 'Lead Council' role on NIESS, managing the delivery of £9.2 million to foster enterprise across the region, in line with funder obligations and work to secure a more permanent funding source.	The council managed the delivery of the £9.2 million, on behalf of all councils as part of the Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Scheme. A further £4.53 million of funding was secured for future delivery.	Green
	Deliver a flexible menu of support through the Enterprise Support Service (Go Succeed) for Belfast entrepreneurs wishing to start a business; tailored support for existing businesses wishing to grow or scale including grant assistance to support their growth.	Go Succeed was tailored to support Belfast entrepreneurs both through startup activity and for existing businesses wishing to grow or scale. There was a significant uplift in business start-up activity totalling 839 businesses. There were a further 380 businesses supported through Go Succeed support for growth-focused companies. In addition, there were 127 grants were awarded to Belfast based businesses in the 2025/26 year.	Green
	Support 30 SMEs to access finance to support investment and growth through the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF).	Seven calls were successfully launched with 31 SMEs being supported to access finance in the 2025/26 financial year.	Green
Support the development of the social enterprise sector	Develop the social economy sector, encouraging more social enterprise/ cooperative start-ups, through (Go Social) the provision of mentoring, workshops and upskilling; facilitate three best practice knowledge sharing events and deliver six outreach sessions.	During the year, there have been 22 new social enterprises assisted through Go Succeed start support and a further 16 existing social enterprises were assisted through Go Succeed growth support. There were 54 new and existing social enterprises supported via the council's bespoke Go Social programme and 17 successful recipients of the Social Economy Incentive Fund enabling new and existing social enterprises to support their business growth aspirations.	Green
	Deliver the Social Economy Incentive Fund, with a renewed focus on establishing new social enterprises addressing barriers in areas of deprivation across Belfast.	The Social Economy Incentive Fund was launched, with just under 100 applications received. There were 49 eligible applications, 22 were invited to pitch and 17 were ultimately awarded funding, totalling just under £90,000 to support business growth.	Green
Maximise the benefits emerging from Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD and Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC))	Support delivery of the benefits of first phase of BRCD delivery by integration and alignment with economic development and skills programmes.	Worked with the Belfast Region City Deal team to support delivery of benefits realisation activity, with a focus on SME access and skills development (particularly creating inclusive pathways to employment). The Local Economic Partnership also agreed that the LEP Action Plan should feature City Deal "benefits realisation" projects in order to ensure that residents can access opportunities and businesses are able to develop capacity in key growth sectors.	Green
	Develop an updated economic proposition demonstrating the critical role of Belfast and	The draft Belfast Economic Proposition document was developed by year end and will be used to assist with the promotion of the city for investment and international trade opportunities to support long-term sustainable and inclusive growth. The	Amber

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	the Belfast Region in creating good jobs, supporting innovation and driving productivity.	proposition was developed in the context of the council's International Relations framework, Investment Guide and Invest in Belfast website. to ensure consistency on the key messaging on the city's strengths including priority sectors; quality of life proposition; and cultural assets.	
	Contribute to the development of a new strategic approach as part of the DBEC, focusing on promoting economic linkages along the corridor.	The council supported work in line with annual action plan, including taking a lead role on the Peace Plus skills programme.	Green
Establish Local Economic Partnership to support delivery of sub-regional economic development fund priority actions.	Establish the Local Economic Partnership (LEP), building on the Labour Market Partnership in the first instance.	The Partnership was established, aligned closely with the Labour Market Partnership. Following partner engagement, an action plan was presented to CG&R in March 2026, which was subsequently endorsed by members.	Green
	Agree priority projects for (LEP) financial support and draw down year one funding to mobilise activity	A proposal was submitted to the LMP outlining Belfast's LEP focus, centred on developing sector-specific skills - particularly in film and production linked to Studio Ulster. Suggested programmes from Local Enterprise Agencies and partners are now under review. Following extensive engagement, an action plan was presented to CG&R in March 2026, setting out a programme built around three pillars: creative sector incubation, capital investment for creative growth, and targeted business growth and innovation support. The committee endorsed the emerging priority work areas.	Green
Develop and maximise international linkages to support inclusive economic growth	Engage and collaborate with city partners on outward business missions explore the potential for developing business-to-business opportunities, investment in capital and innovation programmes, and facilitating cultural/ tourism and educational linkages with partner organisations in host cities.	Work was undertaken to prepare for an outward business mission to Boston in the next financial year. The team hosted a successful Connected-Health inward recce from Nashville in March 2026 and is preparing a full inward mission for October 2026. Support was also provided to the Northern Ireland Health Minister ahead of their March 2026 visit to Nashville.	Green
	Complete a review of the council's international engagement activity and develop a new approach to international engagement activity to ensure that Belfast is optimally positioned on the world stage and that collaborative opportunities for promoting economic development are maximised.	The new 2025–2028 International Relations Framework was approved by Committee in November 2026. The framework includes a new pillar focused on re-engaging with Europe. The team has also introduced new assessment and tracking processes to measure international activity, impact, and improved targeting.	Green
Support the development and delivery of the Belfast	Undertake a review of the pilot phase of the Belfast Business Promise (BBP) programme to inform the future approach of the scheme.	A review of the Belfast Business Promise was undertaken, and the findings were presented to members of the SP&R Committee in March 2026. Members agreed the preferred way forward which included: greater potential to scale, providing flexibility to adopt the approach and focus depending on the size of the business; improving	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
Business Promise scheme		the added value to specific business sectors/cohorts; and ultimately enhancing the delivery of the desired outcomes.	
	Deliver six Belfast Business Promise Learning Days for existing member organisations.	Three promise learning days were delivered in this financial year with an additional three peer support networks and two confidence and wellbeing days for existing members. During the final quarter, the focus turned to project evaluation and future planning and delivery.	Amber
Oversee the management of the Innovation Factory to maximise occupancy levels and optimise inclusive growth opportunities for existing tenants.	Support the operation of the Innovation Factory, in line with the agreed Annual Service Plan obligations.	The Review of the Annual Service Plan (ASP) was complete and a contract extension to be issued following sign off with SRO. Occupancy has significantly increased with Q4 closing out at 94% and the average occupancy for the year at 77%.	Green
Support access to sustainable employment opportunities and improve skills levels for target groups	Delivery of Employment Academies (into work) within sectors with high job demand such as caring professions, customer service sectors and professional services, in line with business demand.	At the year-end, 519 participants have successfully started an Employment Academy. A total of 66% have already secured a positive outcome and we continue to track activity until everyone has completed both their participation as well as aftercare. It is important to note that differences in volume across sectors above is not an indicator of investment levels. Academies targeting higher paid roles are significantly more expensive to deliver due to the skills levels required for the role. For example, a Tech Employment Academy can cost over £4000 per person, while a Health & Social Care Employment Academy costs under £1000 per person. Additionally, employment outcomes are continuously monitored and investments subject to review to ensure residents receive the best service possible and underpinned by the implementation of a Quality Assurance Framework. While it is too early to report on outcomes due to the fact that academies are still being delivered, of those who completed participant surveys in 2025/26 so far, 22% of participants reported having a disability, 30% were from an ethnic minority, those who identified as British or Irish had only 4% of a difference.	Green
	Work with partners to deliver Upskilling Academies targeting those working in low paid sectors to achieve higher level qualifications and gain a better job, in line with business demand.	At the year-end, a total of 409 participants commenced an Upskilling Academy. These academies focus on low-paid, female-dominated sectors where Level 3–5 qualifications are essential for career progression, such as Childcare, Playwork, Classroom Assistants, and Health & Social Care. Initial capacity was limited due to an attempted transition to partners, but after this proved unworkable, additional LMP funding in Dec 2025 and Feb 2026 significantly increased available places. Given the 18-month delivery timeframe, it is too early to report full outcomes, though	Green

Page 292

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
		attrition remains low at 6%. During the year, 147 participants completed an Upskilling Academy, with 143 achieving a better job (97%).	
Support the management and development of the Belfast Labour Market Partnership.	Convene and chair up to six Labour Market Partnership meetings, to identify key labour market challenges and co-design solutions and co-ordinate delivery of agreed programmes of work.	During the year, seven Labour Market Partnership meetings were convened (May 2025, June 2025, September 2025, November 2025, January 2026, February 2026 and March 2026). The LEP was first introduced in September 2025 but the first meeting with LEP representation was November 2025.	Green
	Deliver the Gateway to Choices service, providing independent advice and guidance and encouraging informed decision making to find the right provision for people.	Performance against the contract's key performance indicators has been broadly achieved; however, LMP members have concluded that ongoing uncertainty within the wider Employability and Skills (E&S) ecosystem necessitates a strategic change in direction. Consequently, it has been agreed that the Gateway to Choices contract will be brought to a close and will not continue beyond 31 March 2026. Although a series of potential future options has been identified by LMP/LEP members, no decisions will be implemented until there is greater clarity regarding the post-SPF funding landscape and the transition to the Local Growth Fund. During the 2025/26 period, the Gateway to Choices service supported a total of 1,180 participants, with 224 progressing into employment and a further 372 entering education or training.	Amber
	Deliver the Bridges to Progression service and work in partnership to scope the need for additional supports for young people under 24 years old to manage positive transitions.	Delivery will continue until the end of June 2026 and as a result outcomes will not be finalised until then. At the year end, there were 60 participants (against a target of 90); 45 participants had completed the service (of which 100% were satisfied and 100% reported increased confidence; 3 participants progressed into employment and a further 7 progressed into education and training.	Amber
	Host localised jobs fairs in partnership with Jobs and Benefits Offices and explore other jobs and skills events.	During 2025/26, a total of 25 localised job fairs were delivered in partnership with Jobs and Benefits Offices, alongside a range of wider jobs and skills events, collectively engaging 2,820 participants. During Quarter 4, the programme delivered multiple large-scale events involving over 80 exhibitors and more than 1,100 attendees. These included a JobStart Apprenticeship Pathway event attended by 220 participants, a JobStart "Meet the Employer" event attracting 658 attendees, and a targeted recruitment event with Mount Charles involving just over 100 participants. In addition, a dedicated support event for carers was delivered with 300 attendees, accompanied by the development of a new resource to assist partners in signposting residents to relevant support services.	Green
	Expand the Labour Market Partnership to encompass the work of the Local Economic Partnership, developing priority projects	New Terms of Reference and guidance were developed with 2 LMP/LEP meetings held (1 with full LEP/LMP membership and 1 pre-LEP formal incorporation). The LEP was first introduced in September 2025 but the first meeting with LEP representation was November 2025.	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	aligned to funder criteria and overseeing delivery		
Deliver social value while supporting the wider employability and skills ecosystem	Expand and consolidate the Employability and Skills Provider Network including organisations representing target groups for people with a disability, women, young people, justice leavers, ethnic minorities and care leavers.	The Provider Network grew by 53 new members and 18 new organisations. To support this work, particularly in reaching into local community infrastructure, we commissioned the Belfast Area Partnerships to extend the reach of our Provider Network and to deliver localised outreach and engagement to create a pipeline to our delivery. This has become even more critical with the significant reduction in funding due to Local Growth Fund implementation. Further engagement is planned with the Youth Justice Agency (Department of Justice) to look at proposals to support young people leaving prison.	Green
	Ensure Employability and Skills considerations are included within Developer Contributions by providing statistical data and analysis on labour market shortages. Review and recommend interventions regarding Skills Plans where applicable.	Employability and Skills considerations were considered as part of Developer Contributions following engagement with colleagues from the Planning Service in respect of Queens Street PBSA. A further Employability and Skills Plan from McAleer and Rushe was also reviewed during Q3.	Green
	Support contractors to meet their Social Value job requirements and support inclusive recruitment practices on current labour market issues such as visa requirements, employing people with disabilities.	A total of 350 SV points incurred through E&S contracts. Activities included the delivery of Employability & Skills (E&S) initiatives to support priority groups and young people across a total of 191 hours of E&S initiatives for Belfast residents.	Green
Improve the visitor experience at St George's Market to drive footfall and enhance customer satisfaction and provide support for city markets.	Develop a programme of customer insights based on new footfall tracking technology, regular customer surveys and introduction of additional customer feedback loops.	Footfall cameras are fully operational, and ongoing data collation will ensure that year-on-year (YoY) figures are captured for more meaningful analysis. During Q4 there were 221,257 visitors to the market. This brings the year-end total to over 1 million visitors (1,048,237) exceeding the annual target.	Green
	Benchmark St George's Market with other comparable visitor attractions in terms of customer experience and visitor feedback.	Tourism NI have paused the Visitor Attraction rating scheme - outside BCC control. Alternative arrangements for feedback and assessing customer satisfactions (reviews) are planned for the 26/27 year.	Amber
	Manage and promote the delivery of the annual Christmas Continental Market and additional market events such as Twilight Markets.	The 2025 Christmas Market and Twilight Market were highly successful, with the Christmas Market attracting over one million visitors during its six-week run, while the Twilight market attracted over 20,000 visitors over two days in November. The 2026 Christmas Market will be the final event delivered under the current contract, which is scheduled to go out to tender in June 2027. Twilight Markets are confirmed to take place in November 2026.	Green
	Review the markets rights policy to ensure that it supports the operation of independent	The Markets Right Policy was approved and is now fully implemented. The new fee structure is in place.	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	markets across the city, to enhance animation and vibrancy.		
	Review existing storage policy at the market to increase opportunities for additional rental income/ income generation on non-market days.	The Storage Policy was approved and is now being implemented. Storage and the associated storage fees will officially go into effect on 1st June 2026.	Green

Our Place Priorities

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
Support and work with partners to address housing challenges and delivery high quality housing-led regeneration and place-making	Establish and oversee governance arrangements across the Private Sector Partner indicative work streams ensuring alignment and linkages to the established council governance structures.	Governance arrangements were established across the Private Sector Partner (PSP) including agreement around engagement with elected members. The Strategic Partnership Agreement was signed in Q1. A Party Group Leaders site visit to Loft Lines took place in February 2026.	Green
	Work in partnership with the Private Sector Partner to take forward development of the initial four strategic sites (Corporation Street / Exchange Street, Gloucester Street, INW Smithfield, Ormeau Avenue) in line with the contractual timelines and development programmes (to be agreed by Council).	The Development Programme was agreed for the site prioritisation to take forward the initial four strategic sites (Corporation Street / Exchange Street, Gloucester Street, INW Smithfield, Ormeau Avenue). An initial Site-Specific Business Plan was drafted, which is to be agreed / approved by Council, and PAD submitted. Development and delivery approaches have been under consideration, and engagement with members on this took place during Q4.	Green
	Agree and progress the delivery route for delivery of housing-led regeneration in respect of Tranche 1 sites from the Strategic Site Assessments Phase 2 (as agreed via CGR/SPR)	Positive progress was made during the year on the Tranche 1 SSA Phase 2 sites. Members were engaged during Q4 around this, and a report for consideration by Committee has been drafted to be brought to members in the new financial year.	Amber
	Progress Tranche 2 sites (from the Strategic Site Assessments Phase 2) through feasibility and development options for subsequent consideration by CGR/SP&R.	During the year feasibility options for Tranche 2 SSA Phase 2 sites were completed. Whilst progress was made during the year, there is further work required on complex areas going forward into the next financial year.	Amber
	Working in partnership with the Department for Communities, and Clanmil Housing Association, oversee delivery of a housing led regeneration scheme on the Inner North-West lands (following award of the Inner North-West Development Brief).	Worked in partnership with DfC and Clanmil Housing Association during the year in respect of the Inner North-West Development Brief. The site has been registered within the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) and the Association is progressing extensive stakeholder engagement to inform the planning process. Legals will progress into 2026-27.	Amber
	Develop Placemaking Action Plan for lands at Joy Street/ Cromac Street/ Stewart Street.	During the year work was progressed with partners around the development of a Placemaking Action Plan for lands at Joy St, Cromac St and Stewart St, including stakeholder engagement. This included land assembly subject to necessary approvals. Note: SP&R approval in September 2024 on the targeted acquisition of property in the area was completed in Q3; SP&R further agreed (June 2025) a further acquisition to support the land assembly, this acquisition was also completed in Q3.	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	Work with partners in relation to developing Placemaking Action Plans for Cregagh Green, Shankill / Glencairn and Tullycarnet.	During the year work advanced with partners in relation to Placemaking Action Plans, notably Shankill which was published in Q4. Work will continue into the next financial year in respect of Cregagh aligned to NIHE's Tower Block Strategy.	Green
Support the delivery of strategic regeneration and investment programmes	Progress options for vesting and/or acquisition by agreement of the Tribeca site in whole or in part, including the Assembly Rooms, including potential development / funding options, and development of Strategic Regeneration Framework to underpin future development.	In September 2025, the council agreed to purchase the Assembly Rooms and associated adjoining lands and buildings from Castlebrooke Investments, as part of its continued focus to drive forward the regeneration of the city centre. The acquisition of the Assembly Rooms Cluster was completed during Q3.	Amber
	Develop future use / development proposals for Regeneration Assets including 2 Royal Avenue and 35-39 Royal Avenue.	The initial Expression of Interest (EOI) process for the long-term future use of the ground floor of 2 Royal Avenue was concluded and reported to CG&R Committee in October 2025. Committee agreed not to progress with the recommended proposal. Subsequently a new EOI process was agreed and successfully launched. Immediate health and safety building works (including shop frontage improvements and lighting installation) were undertaken at 35-39 Royal Avenue, and the property was actively marketed to let. The Letting of the property at 35-39 Royal Avenue was agreed by the SP&R Committee during Q4.	Amber
	Deliver the Vacant to Vibrant City Wide capital grant scheme to support the reduction of vacancy and promote the revitalisation of the city.	The City Wide Vacant to Vibrant capital grant scheme was fully expended as reported to the CG&R Committee in September 2025. This resulted in £500k (funded by DfC and UKSPF) capital investment of grant awards to 24 applicants; creating 83 direct employment opportunities; presenting an estimated rates return of £911,777.69 over the course of the lease & subject to LPS valuation; and a return of £1.79 on every £1 invested. Internal and external funding was secured to extend the City Wide Vacant to Vibrant Scheme.	Green
	Progress outputs from the Homes On Upper Spaces for Everyone (H.O.U.S.E) Expression of Interest process and scope funding opportunities aimed at bringing vacant upper floors into residential use.	Extensive progress was made during 2025 - 2026 on the outputs from the HOUSE EOI. Agreement was made on the parameters and progression of the HOUSE Programme as the next delivery workstream of the Vacant to Vibrant Toolkit, including actively seeking funding to deliver the proposed pilot project.	Green
	Undertake a scoping study on vacant offices, to include financial, economic and regeneration implications and future use and funding options.	A scoping study on vacant offices (including desktop research and engagement with the office market) was completed and will be used to support the business case for HOUSE Programme.	Green
	Deliver the Sandy Row Revitalisation Scheme, administering Department for Communities funding in the Sandy Row area to support	The Sandy Row Revitalisation Scheme (£250k DfC Funding) was launched on 18 March 2025, the scheme closed to applications on 31 August 2025 following an agreed grant period extension by the CG&R Committee. At the year-end, 45 applications were received, assessed and Letters of Offer issued representing an	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	eligible businesses and the wider revitalisation of the area.	investment of £225k, with several applicants also availing of the wrap-around support services delivered through the Go Succeed programme. The Marketing & Branding workstream was rolled out across the businesses and wider area, with completion to extend into Q1 2026-27. A Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Scheme (£200k Funding) was also launched during the year and was over-subscribed. A total of 23 applications were received requesting a total of £115k funding against an allocation of £100k. Four Environmental Improvement Grants, representing an investment of £100k, are progressing through the grant process and delivery stage, this is expected to continue into 2026-2027.	
	Progress the Dunbar Regeneration Scheme (including BCC lands and private sector assets) and bring forward an action plan and route map to deliver a comprehensive regeneration scheme for the combined lands assets.	An update on the Dunbar Regeneration Scheme was presented to the CG&R Committee in September 2025. A Master Plan has been developed with private landowners in the area. Pre-Application Discussions have taken place, and this work will further advance in during 2026-27.	Amber
	Ensure City Regeneration and Development considerations are included within Developer Contributions to maximise the regeneration benefits.	Engaged with colleagues in Planning Service to ensure City Regeneration and Development considerations are included within developer contributions to maximise regeneration benefits. This includes ensuring an internal way of working that enables opportunities for developer contributions, progress has been made, however there is further work required.	Amber
Connectivity, Active & Sustainable Travel & Net-Zero	Refresh A Bolder Vision strategy in line with the Eastern Transport Plan. Undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment and publish final documents with a Delivery Prospectus.	During the year, extensive work was advanced towards finalising the A Bolder Vision strategy. Throughout 2025/26, Queen's Quay Kiosk was opened, delivering on a ABV. Additionally, as an outworking of ABV the Under the Bridges and the Sailortown-Titanic Quarter Bridge projects have come forward as transformational initiatives that deliver on the priority need to connect communities to the city centre. committee agreed the updated supporting interventions to enable the finalisation of the strategy as the Council's position on major infrastructure and policy consultations with the understanding that any consultation responses will be brought back to Committee for approval prior to submitting.	Amber
	Progress the Under the Bridges project to design development RIBA Stage 3 (Spatial Coordination).	During the year, the Under the Bridges project progressed to design development RIBA Stage 3 and planning application was submitted.	Green
	Progress the Sailortown/Titanic Quarter (TQ) bridge project to design development RIBA Stage 2 (Concept Design).	During the year, the Sailortown to TQ Bridge RIBA Stage 1 completed. It is anticipated that RIBA Stage 2 will be completed in Q1 2026-27. During 2025-26, engagement on future funding was advanced.	Amber

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	Progress public realm improvements through design development and statutory approval at Little York Street, Little Patrick Street, 5Cs and Blackstaff Square & Environs.	During the year, the Little York Street-Little Patrick Street scheme design was engaged in a statutory TRO process with DfI, which was approved. The 5Cs and Blackstaff schemes progressed at various stages through DfC governance and design and planning.	Green
	Deliver the UP2030 Net Zero Neighbourhoods Framework (NZNF).	The UP2030 Belfast Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework document was finalised during Q3 and was approved by the CG&R Committee at its Special meeting in November 2025. Following this the UP2030 Belfast Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework was submitted to the UP2030 Horizon Europe Consortium after Council ratification on 1 December 2025.	Green
	Support the delivery of relevant priorities in the Climate Action Plan for 2025/26	Officers have been engaging with the council's Climate Team to support relevant actions within the Climate Action Plan for 2025/26 to look at options for future delivery.	Green
Positioning the City to Compete	Support the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership, taking a joint public-private approach to promote and position the city and city region as a priority location for investment, underpinning the regeneration, development and infrastructure required to deliver our inclusive growth ambitions.	During 2025 - 2026 officers worked to Position the City to Compete including through the BCRPP. Officers and elected members advocated and positioned Belfast for inclusive strategic investment to national and international audiences. Engagement with the VCSE Panel in relation to the establishment of a Community Forum / Reference took place with work to be continued on its outworkings. Through the BCRPP the Place Based Growth Proposition has been advanced through advocacy and engagement during 2025-2026.	Amber
	Undertake a strategic engagement programme aligned to the Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition, working with city, regional and national government partners to seek to secure place based and regeneration investment funding.	During 2025 -2026 the Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition was updated. Alongside this a Business Case was developed and submitted to Treasury seeking place based and regeneration investment funding for Belfast. Extensive strategic engagement took place during 2025-2026 with Elected Members, the NI Executive Departments, Ministers, Belfast MLAs and with Westminster Officials and Belfast MPs.	Green
	Facilitate investment and development related follow ups aimed at positioning the city to compete and promote inclusive development for the city.	Positive investment and development related follow-ups took place across 2025-26.	Green
	Manage and maintain the Invest in Belfast website and complimentary digital platforms and collateral.	Throughout 2025-26 the Invest in Belfast website and complimentary digital platforms and collateral were managed and maintained. This included with regular news digests, investment guide and BCRPP sponsorship and programming information. During the year, there were 4,993 Active Users to the Invest in Belfast website. Active users report the number of people who engaged with the site. The average engagement time per active user was 33 seconds.	Green
Future City Centre Programme	Working with internal and external partners, deliver agreed priorities in the Future City Centre	Positive progress was made in 2025 - 2026 in relation to the development of a Future City Centre Programme with city stakeholders. This was anchored in	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	<p>Programme to reimagine the city centre by addressing the five priority pillars (Regeneration and connectivity; business and investment proposition; animation and distinctive offering; creating a clean, green, inclusive & safe place; and supporting those who are vulnerable).</p>	<p>Community Planning through the establishment of the City Centre Leadership Coordination Group, key priorities have been agreed around operational task and finish and opportunities around Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.</p>	<p>Green</p>
<p>Deliver Year 5 of A City Imagining, Belfast's 10-year cultural strategy.</p>	<p>Deliver Core Multi-Annual Grant (CMAG) funding to sustain accessible cultural activity (Festivals and events grants) and infrastructure (arts and heritage grants) within Belfast.</p>	<p>All 2025/26 contracts were issued with mid-year monitoring returned in November 2025, and subsequent payments released in December 2025. The application process for the next round of CMAG covering the period 2026-28 was launched and closed on 10th October. Following scoring, the recommendations for future CMAG funding were presented to committee and approved in March 2026. A total of 50 Awards (totalling £1,239,554) were approved across Festival & Events and Arts & Heritage organisations including fourteen uplifts and nine new entrants to the funding programme.</p>	<p>Green</p>
	<p>Provision of Community Festivals Fund small grants (in partnership with the Department for Communities) to assist 15 Community and Voluntary organisations to celebrate their identity, enhance community relations by delivering community festivals.</p>	<p>All 25/26 contracts issued mid-year monitoring was returned in November 2025 and subsequent payments issued. The application process for the next round of CFF covering the period 2026-27 closed in January 2026. Officers scored the applications in January 2026 and made recommendations to support 23 grants. These have been offered to Community, Cultural and Voluntary organisations in Belfast towards their community festivals.</p>	<p>Green</p>
	<p>Provision of arts and heritage small grants to a minimum of 15 cultural projects to support the outcomes identified within City Imagining.</p>	<p>All 2025/26 contracts were issued and first payments made with mid-year monitoring returned in November 2025. The application process for the next round of A&H covering the period 2026-27 opened in October and closed in January 2026. Officers scored applications for Arts and Heritage in January 2026 and made recommendations to support 17 grants towards creative, cultural and heritage projects which align with the 'City Imagining' Cultural Strategy.</p>	<p>Green</p>
	<p>Support Belfast based artist studios and creative spaces through targeted investment and work in partnership with Arts and Business NI to deliver a capacity building programme.</p>	<p>A total of 11 organisations were supported through the Artist Studio & Creative Workspace Grants during 2025/26 (£150,000 total investment). This initiative recognises that the impact of artist-led spaces is not adequately captured by conventional metrics such as ticket income or audience numbers. The funding scheme directly supports an estimated 450 artists across Belfast. Organisations or groups operating artist studios and artist led Co-Director spaces 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. In addition, a targeted programme</p>	<p>Green</p>

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
		of skills development workshops, talks, presentations was delivered in partnership with Arts & Business and Visual Artists Ireland.	
	Strategic Partnerships to enhance skills and development across specific art forms, support audience development and enhance accessibility provision including delivery of the Gig Buddies programme.	Partnerships with key organisations supported audience development and accessibility provision including Gig Buddies. Gig Buddies delivered by The Black Box works across venues in Belfast. Venue partnerships also included Oh Yeah Music Centre, Voodoo, 2 Royal Avenue, SSE Arena, Limelight, Telegraph Building, American Bar, The Sunflower Bar, The Reporter, Union Street Bar, Crescent Arts Centre and large-scale cultural events across Northern Ireland such as Belsonic, Stendhal Festival, AVA Festival, Learning Disability Pride Festival, St. Patricks Day Parade, Belfast Pride, Belfast 2024, NI Music Prize and more, demonstrating sector-wide engagement in creating a more inclusive cultural scene and providing access to active involvement in mainstream cultural life. During 2025/26, there were 18 active buddy pairings and a total membership (including associate membership) of 30 participants and 33 volunteers. 90% of participants reported feeling less socially isolated since joining Gig Buddies, with many building long-term friendships beyond the project. 85% of volunteers say they have developed a greater understanding of accessibility barriers and disability rights through their involvement.	Green
	Deliver 'Bank of Ideas', a participatory budgeting programme enabling the people of Belfast to propose and collectively decide on creative projects.	The Bank of Ideas project was delivered in June 2025 with contracts awarded and final monitoring returned during Q3. There were 97 applications received with support of up to £2k each, provided to 34 projects across the city. Delivery of Participatory Budgeting (PB) voting day on 29 th June, with 1,162 votes cast for 69 ideas (from 111 applications) and 34 ideas were funded. The Bank of Ideas programme for 2026-27 was successfully launched and 110 applications were received and processed by end of Q4 with 98 ideas put forward for Voting Day following a criteria check. Voting and delivery of the project will be delivered during Q1 of the 2026/2027 financial year.	Green
	Support capacity building programmes including co-design of programmes for underrepresented groups or where gaps are identified.	Capacity Building for unrepresented genres: Successfully running a programme that develops the production skills of women, female-identifying and non-binary music creators in a safe and trusted studio environment. Delivered in collaboration with Analogue Catalogue Studios, Start Together Studio and Dream Factory Studios with 30 individuals supported. The Sounds Atypical Music Grant Scheme in collaboration with University of Atypical provides funding for Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent musicians to create accessible music events in various performance spaces across Belfast. Supported a partnership with BLAKMEX to promote diverse and under-represented genres.	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	Sectoral development initiatives, including research, support for sectoral forums and establishment of a cultural compact.	The Visual Arts Forum, Festival's Forum and Green Arts Forum have continued to provide sector support providing networking and skills development to artists, galleries, festivals and venues. Forums meet on a regular basis (monthly and quarterly).	Green
	Deliver the 2025 Culture Night programme, a city wide, venue based open call event including supporting marketing activity.	Culture Night returned to Belfast in September 2025 following a six-year absence and was delivered as a venue-led, city-wide programme, prioritising free, accessible and family-friendly activity and operating through a receiving house model. As a pilot to supporting a new approach to Culture Night delivery, a number of artists, cultural organisations and venues were financially supported to participate, and no street-based programming or road closures were included. The event evaluation reported positive audience experiences, sector goodwill and an estimated attendance of 50,000 people with an estimated economic impact of £1.67 million for the city. Audiences also reported feeling safe across the city, supported by coordinated stewarding and emergency planning. Procurement was initiated during Q4 for delivery of the 2026 event.	Green
	Deliver phase two of the Heritage Audit and Roadmap, including the development of targeting skills, and capacity building programmes. Work in partnership with Belfast Stories, the Climate Team and Brink to deliver a pilot programme entitled “Growing a Museum” which will deliver heritage skills-sharing, training and participative public activities across Belfast.	A supplier was contracted during Q4 to support the delivery of a heritage capacity building programme and establish an advisory group which will continue over into the 2026/27 financial year. The unit worked with Brink on the 'Growing a museum' project which was completed during Q4.	Amber
Deliver Year 2 of the music strategy, Music Matters – a roadmap for Belfast	Delivery of UNESCO City of Music activity including programmes to support artists, the music sector and venues, including working internationally with the UNESCO Cities Network to deliver shared music, skills and learning opportunities.	As part of UNESCO City of Music, The 'Sounds Atypical' bursaries were launched with University of Atypical for deaf, disabled and neurodivergent community. These opened in January and were selected in February/March. The 'Teenage kicks' scheme also awarded 11 small microgrants to venues and music organisations to put on gigs for under 18s and increase music attendance/participation for this age range. The Gradam Ceoil bursaries opened in Q4 and will be announced/selected in Q1 of 26/27	Green
	Deliver the NI Music Prize & Sound of Belfast, an event celebrating the very best of new, established and emerging Northern Irish music.	The NI Music Prize awards ceremony took place on 12 th November, at the Ulster Hall, celebrating local music talent, featuring live performances, tributes, and award announcements. This included 66 events across 26 venues in Belfast, 166 NI artists performed to 8,694 (+26% increase).	Green
	Output Belfast – Work in partnership with Score Draw Music to deliver Output Belfast, Ireland’s biggest one-day music conference and live music showcase.	Output Belfast was delivered as a key event within the City of Music programme. The conference took place on 25 th September and featured a full programme of panels, workshops and conferences, followed by an evening showcase of live music (free to the public). Output 2025 was Ireland’s biggest one-day music	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
		conference and live music showcase and attracted 750 daytime guests, 120 daytime speakers and 4,000 evening attendees.	
Deliver Year 4 of Make Yourself at Home, the 10-year tourism plan for Belfast.	Position and promote Belfast in national and international markets through investment in Visit Belfast, the city's destination marketing and visitor servicing organisation to increase the value of tourism to the local economy.	We worked extensively with Visit Belfast for the Maritime Festival including a significant out of state campaign. Investment in Visit Belfast delivered £66m Leisure Economic impact; 400,000 Leisure Bed nights; 455,000 Leisure Day Trips; 150M PR & Comms opportunities to see.	Green
	Deliver the Belfast and Northern Ireland Conference Support Scheme in partnership with Tourism NI and Visit Belfast, to enable Belfast to compete and win national and international conferences.	Delivery as per Service Level agreement, with £200k from BCC and £200k from TNI. Visit Belfast worked to secure bids for conferences, achieving 38,500 business delegates by year end, delivering economic impact of £39m resulting in 100,000 business bed nights for Belfast	Green
	Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme including management of awards to support new or enhanced neighbourhood tourism visitor experiences.	Development of 5 tourism experiences were supported - Arts Across Belfast Tour, Linen & Queen's Quarter Trail, Clifton House Mary Ann McCracken self-guided audio and AR tour, walking tour of Donegal Pass and George Best AR Tour. By Q3, 3 tourism experiences were in market and being delivered and the remaining 2 were launched during Q4.	Green
	Deliver the Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Development Programme.	Accessibility and Inclusion Plan has been developed for Fleadh 2026; 6 organisations have applied for and been successful in being awarded vouchers; Worked with the industry and delivered workshops and information sessions to encourage them to be more accessible and inclusive as they welcome visitors. Seminar delivered during Q4; Tourism Officer was invited and presented to the World Accessible Tourism conference in Turin, Italy (run by the European Network for Accessible Tourism) - learnings shared with wide audience and the presentations are online.	Green
	Deliver the Food and Drink Tourism Development Programme.	Delivered 3 events in total -Three events were delivered including Learning Journey to Taste Causeway; Mixology Event and Fish Event at Belfast Met; Supported the Fleadh food and drink and engagement event during Q4; Delivered Belfast Flavours Live Conference on 23 rd February at ICC Belfast attracting 250 delegates including producers, restaurateurs, industry stakeholders and media - estimated PR value from listings was 100k to 130k AVE and total reach over 2M audience; and Delivered the What's Your Why at Catalyst Belfast focused on food businesses taking the lead in diversification and innovation.	Green
	Visitor Signage, Wayfinding and Street Dressing and Signage Upkeep.	Tourism signage content completed - liaison with Grand Central Station re location and update; map content and orientation updated.	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	Enhance the visitor experience within Belfast, including enhancement of visitor experiences at Council owned assets.	Assets Report developed by CHL. A final report has been received and considered internally in order to agree next steps and implementation plan.	Green
	Develop an electronic dashboard for Belfast based tourism data to measure the impact of tourism in Belfast and its contribution to the Northern Irish economy.	A Belfast Visitor Attitude Survey was undertaken by Cognisense, an independent research company, to establish baseline data for Belfast from tourists. A pilot Power BI dashboard has been developed to visualise city tourism performance information. The dashboard will be updated to report the key findings from the research and disseminated wider once the necessary licensing is in place.	Green
	Deliver the Environmental Impact Audit, in partnership with Visit Belfast and the Climate team to improve Belfast's performance in the Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index and maintain its place as a sustainable tourism destination within the GDS Index of 100 cities.	The carbon baseline was completed, and the recommendations has been shared with the wider tourism industry. The GDS Index application was submitted, and it was announced that Belfast retained its top 10 position as a sustainability destination, by being ranked 9th in the index for 2025 out of over 80 cities. Work has been undertaken to understand what is required going forward for next year; a Sustainability Plan for Fleadh 2026 has been developed and further input to be undertaken and sharing with industry. Work has commenced on the application for 2026 GDS Index assessment.	Green
Delivery of the annual City Events programme of large-scale public city events and activities attracting local audiences and out-of-state visitors	Lord Mayors Day - Delivery of a day of family - friendly activity and animation focusing on City Hall, but with satellite activity at three other venues – 2 Royal Ave, the Oh Yeah Music centre and the Green House.	Family friendly activity and animation was delivered as part of Lord Mayor's Day 2025 focusing on City Hall and other venues – 2 Royal Ave, the Oh Yeah Music centre and the Green House. The event was delivered in partnership with the LM charities and key Council venues. Focus on musical performance and workshops, aimed at youth / families. Estimated audience across all venues 6-7,000. Positive feedback with no complaints received. Planning for the 2026 event is now underway with engagement with the Lord Mayors Office. Date for delivery is confirmed as Saturday 9th May 2026 - Theme is "Give it a Try" - sport, wellness and creativity giving back to youth of community.	Green
	St Patrick's Day 2026 - build on the development of the St Patrick's Day Celebrations.	St Patrick's Day celebrations were delivered successfully with approximately 25,000 attendees - no reported incidents or accidents. The 2026 event involved additional support for other projects under this umbrella, procured previously, including Trad Trail, City Centre Music Festival, Seachtain na Gaelige and other smaller programme elements. Excellent media coverage and feedback.	Green
	Christmas - delivery of the Christmas event, with local community and creative sector content on a focal stage at City Hall and supplemented by city centre animation.	The Christmas Lights Switch On was successfully delivered for circa 10,000 attendees. Traditional delivery as per last few years focused on central stage at City Hall showcasing a variety of local talent. Accessible arrangements include accessible platform and audio description. The programme was supplemented by a 6-week programme at 2 Royal Ave 'Winters Den' (50,000 attendees) and a 5-week programme of both music and street theatre throughout the city centre	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
		during the busy Christmas period. No reported incidents or accidents. No complaints received.	
	Deliver the Festive Lighting programme.	Programme delivered for the Christmas period during Q3.	Green
	Belfast Titanic Maritime Festival - Deliver the 2025 Maritime festival in partnership with Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Maritime Belfast Trust and Department for Communities.	Festival successfully delivered to an audience of circa 57,000. Poor weather affected day 2 of the event. Delivered in-house with support from Maritime Belfast Trust and Belfast Harbour, and other partners. Many new elements for 2025 included an Accessible and Inclusive Zone and incorporating the Festival of Fools into the festival. An evening concert was held on the Slipways. Council was successful in securing £30k of Tourism NI support. Feedback was positive and given the audience figures, remarkably no complaints were received. Planning underway for the next event, where the festival is scheduled to be delivered in June 2027.	Green
Support delivery and maximise benefits from international and major events	Host Oireachtas na Samhna, Ireland's oldest Irish language and arts festival, from October 29 to November 2, 2025	Event delivered by Oireachtas with significant local stakeholder support and BCC Staff support.	Green
	Work with city partners to plan for and develop /submit bids for international events that best align to strategic priorities and maximise legacy.	The delivery of this action is dependent on the outworking of the Events Action Plan.	Amber
	Develop an Events Action Plan for the city, incorporating an ongoing approach to bid for events.	FEI were appointed to develop a 5-Year Events Action Plan for City Events underpinning both A City Imagining (10-year Cultural Strategy) and Make Yourself at Home (10-year Tourism Strategy) enabling Council to consider options and make recommendations for the identification, securing, funding and delivering of events and festivals in Belfast. The Events Action Plan is almost complete and will be brought to a future Committee meeting.	Amber
	Develop options for enhanced city animation during the summer.	Options were developed but didn't proceed during Summer 2025. This is linked to decision on a Sunday Trading pilot, and a public consultation exercise was launched during Q4 following the subsequent council decision in July 2025.	Red
	Engage with NI partners on maximising Belfast's position in Euro 2028.	Belfast is no longer a host city for Euro 2028.	Red
Delivery of Fleadh Cheoil	Planning and preparation to host the Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann 2026 in Belfast, including establishment of Fleadh team, development of agreements with partners, commencement of volunteer recruitment and delivery of engagement programme.	The Core Fleadh Team were established including Operations, PMO and Programming. An Outline BCC Resourcing Plan was developed to facilitate delivery in August 2026. Agreements are in place with all key partners including Eventsec, Volunteer Now and The Traffic Management Company. At the year end, more than 1,000 volunteers have expressed an interest in supporting the	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
		delivery of the Fleadh Cheoil - on target to meet the circa 1,500 required. Outline on the ground Volunteering and Deployment Plan in place with training pending.	
	Development of Outline Business Case and implementation of governance structures and arrangements including establishment of a Fleadh Executive Committee.	An Outline Business Case has been progressed and TNI monies secured. Full governance structure has been stood up across Fleadh Executive Committee, Programme Board, Operations, Programming, Marketing, Finance and Risk with various subsets of governance below including Traffic and Transport, Security and Stewarding, Volunteering, Sponsorship. Governance continues to be streamlined and consolidated as the move to delivery continues. A Multi - Agency Group and Safet Advisory Group have also been established.	Green
	Develop and deliver the event Programme Plan and Operational Project Plan and initiate event procurement exercise.	A Full Programme Plan has been developed for Fleadh Cheoil and continues to be delivered through the governance structures. An Operational Project Plan has also been developed to support the delivery of all aspects of the Event Management Plan. Weekly meetings have been progressed over many months with CPS colleagues to ensure all necessary procurement exercises are in place - this is documented in a 'live' action tracker of procurement exercises.	Green
Commercial Assets (Belfast Castle, Malone House, Belfast Zoo and Belfast Bikes)	Effective management and operation of Belfast Castle and Malone House providing a safe, welcoming and attractive venue for all visitors; Promoting both venues as premier conference, event and wedding venues and progressing options to ensure long-term value for money.	Belfast Castle has been seeing positive volumes in relation to events and usage of cafe/restaurant. Malone House is quieter, with an ongoing trend of welcoming 'short lead' event bookings. High operational costs for security and cleaning continue to be analysed; reduced security costs at Malone were introduced in Q3. Both venues have faced operational difficulties with the Council's new security contractor for manned guarding. Belfast Castle has a new financial agreement in place (annual fixed operator fee) with the catering partner. Discussions have taken place with the contractor at Malone House (verbally agreements in place) but this has not yet been formally agreed via contract change. This will be confirmed in the new financial year.	Amber
	Efficient and effective management and operation of Belfast Zoo with a focus on enhancing the visitor experience, safety, conservation, education and animal welfare; and develop proposals to deliver long-term financial sustainability of Belfast Zoo.	Various events and promotions took place during Q1-Q4 to encourage footfall and revenue, including the relaunch of interactive animal experiences, Christmas workshops, discounted admission offers and introduction of a new visitor land train. Health and Safety improvements have continued to be a major focus for improvement during the year. A range of improved measures and documentation are now in place and being followed by zoo staff. The first Member workshop on the zoo's long term financial sustainability took place in Q3, with a site visit and further workshop held during Q4.	Amber
	Oversee the implementation and mobilisation plan for changing to the new Belfast Bikes operator/ operating model in September 2025.	The new operator commenced in September 2025.	Green

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables	Year End Progress Update	Status
	Oversee the delivery of the Belfast Bikes public bike hire scheme, maximising revenue and reducing vandalism costs.	The new scheme is now fully installed following the delayed arrival of new pedal bikes. Whilst bike rentals were quiet during autumn/winter months, rentals and new users increased in March, as expected, with a 21% Year-on-Year increase compared to March 2025. We expect this growth to continue into the new financial year. The new scheme has a highly reduced vandalism fee for the Council.	Green

Performance Monitoring

The below Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets are used to monitor performance.

Theme	Key Performance Indicator	2025/26 Target	Year End Actual	Status
Our Economy	Number of jobs promoted through business start-up activity. (Statutory indicator)	325	326	Green
	Number of Regional individuals/ entrepreneurs supported through start-up activity.	4,300	5,085	Green
	Number of Belfast individuals/ entrepreneurs supported through start-up activity.	839	873	Green
	Number of Regional businesses supported through business growth activity.	2,000	2,244	Green
	Number of Belfast businesses supported through business growth activity.	380	434	Green
	Percentage of Regional Go Succeed participants engaged who are female	50%	54.6%	Green
	Percentage of Belfast Go Succeed participants engaged who are female	50%	55%	Green
	Percentage of participants who move into a positive outcome from an Employment or Upskilling Academy.	75%	66%	Amber
	Number of participants on Employment and Upskilling Academies	675	928	Green
	Number of organisations accredited as Belfast Business Promise Supporters	100	80	Red
	Occupancy levels at Innovation Factory	70%	77%	Green
Number of social enterprises and co-operatives supported	110	109	Amber	
Our Place	Total number of previously vacant city-wide properties that are occupied as a result of the Vacant to Vibrant intervention.	20	24	Green
	Number of visitor servicing enquiries (Visit Belfast)	805,000	724,514	Red
	GDS-Index ranking	Top 10	9th	Green
	Number of people attending the annual programme of large-scale public city events	111,000	148,500	Green
	Number of attendees at major Cultural Festivals	410,000	669,207*	Green
	Number of people engaged at engaged at arts and heritage organisations	Est. baseline	1,384,133*	Green
	Number of citizens engaged through participatory budgeting and cultural interventions.	Est. baseline	1,162	Green
Number of visitors to St. George's Market	1,000,000	1,048,237	Green	

	Number of external events at St. George's Market	16	14	Amber
	Number of Belfast Bike journeys	142,000	101,074	Amber
	Number of bookings for conferences, wedding and events at Belfast Castle	342	299	Red
	Number of bookings for conferences, wedding and events at Malone House	202	160	Red
	Number of visitors to Belfast Zoo	208,984	152,878	Red
	Total revenue generated from Belfast Bikes scheme	£126,000	£129,952	Green
	Total income generated by Belfast Castle	£282,675	£300,099	Green
	Total income generated by Malone House	£130,848	£98,013	Red
	Total income generated at Belfast Zoo	£1,894,716	£1,800,042	Amber

* Provisional figures based on actual, estimated and projected figures from interim CMAG monitoring reports submitted at the mid-year point.

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City Growth &

Committee Plan



Contents

Introduction	3
Committee Membership	4
Belfast City Council Priorities	5
Our Economy Priorities	7
Our Place Priorities	10
Performance Monitoring	15
Committee Finances	
















Introduction

The City Growth and Regeneration Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and projects directed to the regeneration and growth of the city in the context of the outcomes agreed in the community and corporate plans and other corporate strategy.

Its specific functions, as outlined within the Belfast City Council Constitution Appendix 3 – Standing Orders, include:

- Influencing and contributing to regional regeneration and growth strategies and activities
- Developing and implementing city-wide economic strategies and policies
- Managing and maximising the impact of major physical developments in the city
- Coordinating and promoting major city-wide events
- Sourcing and providing support to attract and utilise European and other grants which contribute to the growth of the city
- Providing support for economic development initiatives
- Supporting the development of culture, heritage and the arts
- Working with other agencies to promote Belfast as a key investment and tourism opportunity
- Developing programmes and actions to support local businesses and attract inward investment
- Managing the Council's markets and maximising their benefit to the city
- Influencing and contributing to strategies and policies affecting skills, employability, transportation and energy in the City
- Overseeing the delivery of the following services:
 - Economic Development;
 - Tourism;
 - Culture and Arts;
 - European and International Relations;
 - City Markets;
 - City Events;
 - Belfast Castle;
 - Malone House;
 - Belfast Zoo;
 - City Centre Development; and
 - The transferring car parks.

Committee Membership

 <p><u>Cllr Ian McLaughlin</u> (Chair) Party: Democratic Unionist Party District Electoral Area: Court</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Joe Duffy</u> (Deputy Chair) Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Collin</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Fiona McAteer</u> Party: Alliance Party District Electoral Area: Titanic</p>
 <p><u>Ald James Lawlor</u> Party: Democratic Unionist Party District Electoral Area: Ormiston</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Christina Black</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Court</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Sarah Bunting</u> Party: Democratic Unionist Party District Electoral Area: Balmoral</p>
 <p><u>Cllr Séamas de Faointe</u> Party: Social Democratic and Labour Party District Electoral Area: Lisnasharragh</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Sammy Douglas</u> Party: Democratic Unionist Party District Electoral Area: Titanic</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Aine Groogan</u> Party: Green Party District Electoral Area: Botanic</p>
 <p><u>Cllr Eric Hanvey</u> Party: Alliance Party District Electoral Area: Lisnasharragh</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Donal Lyons</u> Party: Social Democratic and Labour Party District Electoral Area: Balmoral</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Áine McCabe</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Black Mountain</p>
 <p><u>Cllr Siobhan McCallin</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Collin</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Andrew McCormick</u> Party: Democratic Unionist Party District Electoral Area: Ormiston</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Emmet McDonough-Brown</u> Party: Alliance Party District Electoral Area: Botanic</p>
 <p><u>Cllr Conor McKay</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Botanic</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Ronan McLaughlin</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Black Mountain</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Luke Meenehan</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Castle</p>
 <p><u>Cllr Sam Nelson</u> Party: Alliance Party District Electoral Area: Castle</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Tomás Ó Néill</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Oldpark</p>	

Belfast City Council Priorities

Since its launch in 2017 and subsequent refresh in 2024, the [Belfast Agenda](#) has been and remains a key city framework, coalescing partners beyond the core legislative requirements of community planning with a shared focus on addressing key city challenges. The approach adopted has enhanced the relationship between the public/statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors to drive forward real change, address inequalities and improve quality of live within and across the city

The Belfast Agenda sets out a bold level of ambition and demonstrates strong collective leadership commitment to delivering the long-term vision and outcomes previously agreed. It is both delivery and outcome focused and is positioned as an overarching city strategy which identifies the major transformational programmes and investment opportunities for the city. The strategy also sets out several specific ‘calls to action’ for local, regional and national partners to work together to bring forward important strategies, programmes and investment which will help deliver the city’s ambitions.

The council’s corporate plan reflects what people in Belfast have told us they want and the type of leadership they feel the city needs. It takes the priorities of the Belfast Agenda and sets out the ways in which the council will support and deliver these to grow a sustainable, inclusive economy and equitable society; and sets out the work we will do as an organisation to continually improve and develop to continue to deliver excellent services. The council’s five strategic themes are cascaded down from the Belfast Agenda and include:



1. **Theme 1: Our people and communities** - Making life better for all our residents.
2. **Theme 2: Our economy** - Creating inclusive, innovative and sustainable growth, learning and opportunity.
3. **Theme 3: Our place** - Creating a liveable and connected, vibrant and competitive city.
4. **Theme 4: Our planet** - Creating a sustainable, nature-positive city.
5. **Theme 5: Compassionate city** - Making Belfast a welcoming, caring, fair and inclusive city – leaving no one behind.

The City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan is aligned to both the recently refreshed Belfast Agenda 2024-28 and newly developed Corporate Plan 2025-2028. It identifies the priorities that this committee will be focussed on over the year ahead and primarily relate to the 'Our Economy' and 'Our Place' themes. The key areas of work have been identified, and specific in-year deliverables are set out in the section that follows.



Our Economy Priorities

To support our economy in 2026/27 we will:

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
Support business start-up and growth by managing and overseeing the delivery of the Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service (NISS) and deliver targeted support in Belfast to meet funder and statutory targets	Undertake the 'Lead Council' role on delivery of NISS on behalf of the 11 councils to improve business start-up rates and support business growth. Undertake further work to develop a more sustainable funding model for the service and commence the commissioning process for service delivery beyond April 2027 (subject to available resources).
	Deliver a flexible menu of support through the Enterprise Support Service (Go Succeed) for Belfast entrepreneurs wishing to start a business; tailored support for existing businesses wishing to grow or scale including grant assistance to support their growth (subject to funding).
	Undertake targeted outreach and engagement, particularly where there is a need for cultural change amongst under-represented groups to attract more people into the entrepreneurial pipeline.
Support the development of the social enterprise sector	Develop the social economy sector by providing mentoring, workshops and upskilling support
	Support social enterprises to increase their levels of earned income and explore appropriate investment models to support this
Maximise the benefits emerging from Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) and Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC)	Regular engagement with BRCD and Innovation City Belfast to ensure alignment of plans and programmes of support.
	Support delivery of the benefits of first phase of BRCD delivery by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investing in business incubation support delivered by Studio Ulster & the Ulster Screen Academy that aims to give creative businesses access a dedicated desk space for 6 months within a professional working Virtual Production studio and environment • promoting and supporting local SMEs to access opportunities emerging through BRCD investments and funding programmes.
	Finalise and publish the Belfast Economic Proposition demonstrating the critical role of the city and the wider region in creating good jobs, supporting innovation and driving productivity; outlining the attributes that make our city an ideal destination for investment; and showcasing our innovation-driven indigenous businesses competing on a global scale or successfully trading around the world.
	Contribute to the development of a new strategic approach as part of the DBEC, focusing on promoting economic linkages along the corridor.
Establish Local Economic Partnership to support delivery of sub-regional economic development fund priority actions	Provide strategic leadership through the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) convening meetings and bringing partners together to address local economic barriers, boost productivity, and support job creation.
	Oversee the delivery and monitoring of three projects identified within the local Action Plan including Northern Lights - Studio Ulster; Capital Investment for creative growth; and business growth and innovation support.
Develop and maximise international linkages to support inclusive economic growth	Engage and collaborate with city partners on collaborative business engagement activities with the cities of Nashville, Boston and New York to explore the potential for developing business-to-business opportunities, investment in capital and innovation programmes, and facilitating cultural/ tourism and educational linkages with partner organisations in host cities.
	Deliver a new approach to international engagement activity by creating new connections and engaging in key networks to ensure that Belfast is optimally positioned on the world stage and that

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
	collaborative opportunities for promoting economic development are maximised.
Support the development and delivery of the Belfast Business Promise scheme	Create a community of organisations committed to doing “business for good” and work with local partners to drive engagement in activities aligned to key service commitments
Oversee the management of the Innovation Factory to maximise occupancy levels and optimise inclusive growth opportunities for existing tenants.	Support the efficient operation of the Innovation Factory, in line with the agreed Annual Service Plan obligations, while actively working to reduce the net cost to council.
Support access to sustainable employment opportunities and improve skills levels for target groups.	Delivery of Employment Academies (into work) within sectors with high job demand/good jobs or sustainable self-employment options such as caring professions, practical sectors and professional services, in line with business demand.
	Work with partners to deliver Upskilling Academies targeting those working in low paid sectors to achieve higher level qualifications and gain a better job, in line with business demand.
Support the management and development of the Belfast Labour Market Partnership (LMP).	Convene and chair up to six LMP meetings, to identify key labour market challenges and co-design solutions and co-ordinate delivery of agreed programmes of work.
	Work with partners to progress the 'Health & Work' agenda, influencing policy direction on integrating health and employability/employment systems in line with the NICS Transformation Programme
	Design of the Belfast Employer Hub driven through a working group with key partners including EPIC Futures, DfC, DfE and Invest NI.
	Develop a new three-year LMP Action Plan 2027-2030 underpinned by a Strategic Assessment of supply, demand, policy and provision.
	Host localised jobs fairs and meet the employer events in partnership with Jobs and Benefits Offices and explore other jobs and skills events.
Deliver social value while supporting the wider employability and skills ecosystem.	Consolidate the Employability and Skills Provider Network to focus on engaging groups and organisations within local community infrastructure as well as those supporting target groups for those with barriers to work. This will include acting as the convenor of a Belfast-wide employability and economic inactivity ecosystem.
	Continue to operate as an RSA City of Learning, hosting other providers to be able to create and issue digital badges and work with other cities to enhance the functionality and ease of use of Digital Badging for the benefit of residents gaining vocationally specific credentials.
	Ensure Employability and Skills considerations are included within Developer Contributions by providing statistical data and analysis on labour market shortages. Review and recommend interventions regarding Skills Plans where applicable.
	Provide guidance to contractors to meet their Social Value job requirements and support inclusive recruitment practices on current labour market issues.
Improve the visitor experience at St George’s Market to drive footfall and enhance customer satisfaction and provide support for city markets.	Undertake a development plan with a focus on usage maximisation. This will consider a number of elements including: potential for additional market days; revamping the existing market days (with a specific focus on the Friday market); considering the balance between market days and other commercial uses; exploring opportunities for third-party market operations and/or market hire.

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
	Maximise stallage income by monitoring payments and addressing vacancies. Track weekly stall income in line with projections, addressing non-payments through enforcement process.
	Develop effective systems to manage the market operations, utilising CRM system to track and monitor all trader interactions, including correspondence issued and compliance data.
	Maintain engagement with all traders and their representatives to ensure effective communication of planned activities and develop terms of reference for engagement with the National Market Traders' Federation group to clarify roles and responsibilities.
	Manage and promote the delivery of the annual Christmas Continental Market and additional market events such as Twilight Markets and investigate the potential for additional market days and explore opportunities for third-party market operations and/or market hire.
	Ensure that St George's Market is a central focus of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann programme

Our Place Priorities

To support our place in 2026/27 we will:

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
<p>Support and work with partners to address housing challenges and delivery high quality housing-led regeneration and place-making</p>	<p>Progress the housing-led regeneration programme, working in partnership with the Private Sector Partner (PSP) and other external partners including Housing Associations. Includes PSP workstreams aligned to the Strategic Partnership Agreement for the seed sites and additional opportunity sites as agreed- including agreement on site specific business plans, funding options, progression of planning and stakeholder engagement as appropriate; progressing the Strategic Site Assessment Phase 2 sites including delivery routes for development as appropriate; progressing the development of the lands within the Inner North West Development Brief area, in conjunction with the nominated Housing Association. Progress land assembly as appropriate as part of the Housing Led Regeneration Programme, subject to funding and investment criteria, Consideration of funding, financing, intervention options, models for delivery and aligned advocacy and engagement to advance the Housing Led Regeneration Programme.</p>
	<p>Undertake detailed analysis in relation to the changes to the Total Cost Indicator and Housing Association Grant rates to inform a detailed evidence base around emerging implications for the delivery of social housing within the city, particularly in respect of the city centre.</p>
	<p>Lead and support a collaborative approach to housing led placemaking regeneration action plans as agreed.</p>
<p>Address the challenges facing the city to maximise investment, generate rates and support growth in the surrounding neighbourhoods and wider region</p>	<p>Advance the strategic engagement programme aligned to the Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition, working in partnership with city, regional and national government bodies to secure place-based and regeneration investment funding.</p>
	<p>Progress an overarching City Development and Investment programme aligned to city strategy, the council's regeneration assets and vacancy and dereliction work programmes. This includes implementing the recommendations from the City Centre Investment Fund Review and progression of a Targeted Regeneration Investment Strategy; advancing the next stages in relation to the Assembly Rooms Cluster; progressing options for vesting and/or acquisition by agreement of the Tribeca site in whole or in part (as agreed by Members); progressing options for the future use and development of the Sixth in partnership with the council's LLP partner; and progressing a Castle Street Regeneration Plan (aligned to Inner North West Masterplan).</p>
	<p>Develop future use /development proposals and investment strategy for Regeneration Assets to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assembly Rooms Cluster • 2 Royal Avenue • 33-39 Royal Avenue • The Sixth • Commission House as part of the Dunbar Cluster • Housing Led Regeneration Sites (including lands at Joy Street/ Cromac Street) • Consideration of future targeted investment /strategic acquisitions approach (subject to funding)
	<p>Deliver the City Wide Vacant to Vibrant capital grant scheme as part of the Vacancy & Dereliction Toolkit Programme.</p>

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
	<p>Progress the proposed Homes On Upper Spaces for Everyone (HOUSE) Programme as the next delivery workstream of the Vacant to Vibrant Toolkit Programme, including actively seeking funding to deliver the proposed pilot project.</p> <p>Undertake a scoping study on vacant offices (as part of the Vacancy & Dereliction Toolkit Programme), to include financial, economic and regeneration implications and future use and funding options.</p> <p>Progress the Dunbar Regeneration Scheme (including council lands and private sector assets) and bring forward an action plan and route map to deliver a comprehensive regeneration scheme for the combined lands assets.</p> <p>Conclude the Sandy Row Revitalisation Scheme, administering Department for Communities funding in the Sandy Row area to support eligible businesses and the wider revitalisation of the area.</p> <p>Creative /Artists Workspaces – Progress options for capital investment for creative growth in line with LEP and Belfast Creative Workspaces Action Plan, explore capital investment in seed-funding approach to act as a catalyst in addressing initial viability challenges that the creative sector experiences in securing their own assets.</p> <p>Progress work programmes and city marketing and investment initiatives aligned to ‘Positioning the City to Compete’, working in partnership with the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership.</p> <p>Conclude the EOI for the sustainable long - term use of the ground floor for 2 Royal Avenue, aligned to overall building development and management considerations.</p> <p>Work with external partners to deliver the Future City Centre Programme, as part of the Community Planning ‘Our Place’ Board governance structures.</p>
Transform connectivity within the city	<p>Deliver an overarching programme to support enhanced Connectivity, Active and Sustainable Travel across the city under the strategic design lens of A Bolder Vision (ABV) including support for the Late-Night Service pilot project, development of strategic projects aligned to the Waterfront Promenade Framework and ABV and progression of Section 76 public realm improvements at Little York Street, Little Patrick Street, 5Cs and Blackstaff Square & Environs.</p> <p>Approve and implement the full ABV Strategy, which will unlock critical design considerations, with a particular focus on connectivity with surrounding communities. Work in partnership with city stakeholders, government departments, and delivery partners to align with the Council’s investment priorities as set out in the Belfast Place-Based Growth Proposition, and secure collaborative funding and delivery mechanisms for the successful implementation of ABV.</p> <p>Work collaboratively with partners and government to facilitate, progress, and deliver major infrastructure projects, policies, and strategies in alignment with the approved ABV Key Moves and updated interventions. This includes shaping the Council’s consultation response to the Eastern Transport Plan and other relevant emerging strategies and strategic projects.</p>
Deliver Year 6 of A City Imagining, Belfast’s 10-year cultural strategy.	<p>Deliver Core Multi-Annual Grant (CMAG) funding to sustain accessible cultural activity (Festivals and events grants) and infrastructure (arts and heritage grants) within Belfast.</p> <p>Provision of Community Festivals Fund small grants (in partnership with the Department for Communities) to assist Community and Voluntary organisations to celebrate their identity, enhance community relations by delivering community festivals.</p> <p>Provision of arts and heritage small grants to cultural projects to support the outcomes identified within City Imagining.</p>

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
	<p>Support Belfast based artist studios and creative spaces through targeted investment and work in partnership with Arts and Business NI to deliver a capacity building programme.</p> <p>Manage strategic partnerships to enhance skills and development across specific art forms, support audience development and enhance accessibility provision including delivery of the Gig Buddies programme.</p> <p>Deliver a Fleadh themed 'Bank of Ideas' participatory budgeting programme enabling the people of Belfast to propose and collectively decide on creative projects.</p> <p>Support capacity building programmes including co-design of programmes for underrepresented groups or where gaps are identified.</p> <p>Sectoral development initiatives, including research, support for sectoral forums and establishment of a cultural compact.</p> <p>Deliver the 2026 Culture Night programme, a city wide, venue based open call event including supporting marketing activity.</p> <p>Deliver next phase of the Heritage Audit and Roadmap, including the development of targeting skills, and capacity building programmes.</p> <p>Work in partnership with Belfast Stories to build on the Neighbourhood heritage programme which will build capacity within communities to gather and shape stories of place and embed heritage skills within communities.</p>
Delivery of Fleadh Cheoil	<p>Oversee the delivery of the Fleadh Cheoil na hEirean in August 2026, stimulating a sense of belonging and pride amongst local people, attracting international visitors and showcasing Belfast and Northern Ireland on a local, national, and international platform.</p> <p>Undertake an evaluation of the 2026 Fleadh, capturing lessons learned (both strategic and operational) to feed into the delivery of the 2027 event.</p> <p>Create a lasting legacy from hosting the Fleadh by enhancing Belfast and Northern Ireland's international reputation as a destination for investment, tourism, and social impact, while promoting traditional music and cultural awareness across the region.</p> <p>Planning and preparation to host the Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann 2027.</p>
Deliver Year 3 of the music strategy, Music Matters – a roadmap for Belfast	<p>Delivery of UNESCO City of Music activity including programmes to support artists, the music sector and venues, including working internationally with the UNESCO Cities Network to deliver shared music, skills and learning opportunities.</p> <p>Deliver the NI Music Prize 2026 and Sound of Belfast 2026, an event celebrating the very best of new, established and emerging Northern Irish music.</p> <p>Work in partnership with Score Draw Music to deliver Output Belfast, Ireland's biggest one-day music conference and live music showcase.</p>
Deliver Year 5 of Make Yourself at Home, the 10-year tourism plan for Belfast.	<p>Deliver the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme to include support of new or enhanced neighbourhood tourism visitor experiences.</p> <p>Deliver the Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Development Programme to include industry planning session, annual seminar, capacity building, training toolkit and innovation vouchers.</p> <p>Deliver the Food and Drink Tourism Development Programme including delivery of Food and Drink Village for Fleadh 2026; Food Toolkit for industry; secure support from DAERA to enhance 2026-2027 programme; expand the network to 100 businesses.</p>

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
	<p>Position and promote Belfast in national and international markets through investment in Visit Belfast, the city's destination marketing and visitor servicing organisation to increase the value of tourism to the local economy and social impact.</p> <p>Deliver the sustainability programme in partnership with Visit Belfast and the council's Climate team to improve Belfast's performance in the Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index and maintain its place as a sustainable tourism destination; and support the delivery of the sustainability promises as part of Fleadh 2026.</p> <p>Deliver the Belfast and Northern Ireland Conference Support Scheme in partnership with Tourism NI and Visit Belfast, to enable Belfast to compete and win national and international association conferences.</p> <p>Enhance the visitor experience within Belfast, including enhancement of the visitor experiences at Council owned assets; secure expertise to examine the delivery of visitor servicing at key sites in Belfast in a changing environment.</p>
Delivery of the annual City Events programme of large-scale public city events and activities attracting local audiences and out-of-state visitors	<p>Lord Mayors Day 2026 - Delivery of a day of family - friendly activity and animation focusing on City Hall, but with satellite activity at other venues such as 2 Royal Ave,</p> <p>Christmas 2026 - delivery of the Christmas Lights Switch on event, with local community and creative sector content on a focal stage at City Hall and work with partners to align plans.</p> <p>St Patrick's Day 2027 - build on the development of the St Patrick's Day Celebrations, featuring the in-house delivered parade and city-wide projects delivered by partners. Work will also commence in 2026-27 on the new tender for Creative provision for St Patricks Day 2028-2030</p> <p>Belfast Titanic Maritime Festival - Plan the 2027 Maritime festival in partnership with Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Maritime Belfast Trust and Department for Communities.</p>
Support delivery and maximise benefits from international and major events	<p>Work with city partners to plan for and develop /submit bids for international events that best align to strategic priorities and maximise legacy. Continue to explore other opportunities for the city to host significant international events, aligning with the outcomes of the d Events Action Plan.</p> <p>Agree the new five-year Events Action Plan for the city, incorporating an ongoing approach to bid for events.</p> <p>Develop options for enhanced city animation.</p> <p>Engage with NI partners on maximising Belfast's position as part of the UK-wide bid to host the FIFA Women's World Cup 2035</p>
Commercial Assets (Belfast Castle, Malone House, Belfast Zoo and Belfast Bikes)	<p>Effective management and operation of Belfast Zoo, maintaining its reputation as a popular family-focused visitor attraction and welcoming and inclusive experience for all ages and abilities.</p> <p>Develop proposals to deliver long-term financial sustainability of Belfast Zoo, generating additional revenue and achieving efficiencies, to reduce the net cost to council.</p> <p>Maintain Belfast Castle's reputation as a premier wedding, tourism, function and event venue in the north or the city, generating additional revenue and achieving efficiencies, to reduce the net cost to council.</p> <p>Maintain Malone House's reputation as a premier wedding and conference venue in the south of the city, generating additional revenue and achieving efficiencies, to reduce the net cost to council.</p> <p>Oversee the delivery of the Belfast Bikes public bike hire scheme, maximising journeys and subsequent revenue.</p>

Performance Monitoring

The following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets are used to monitor performance and will be reported to committee on a six-monthly basis as well as the year-end.

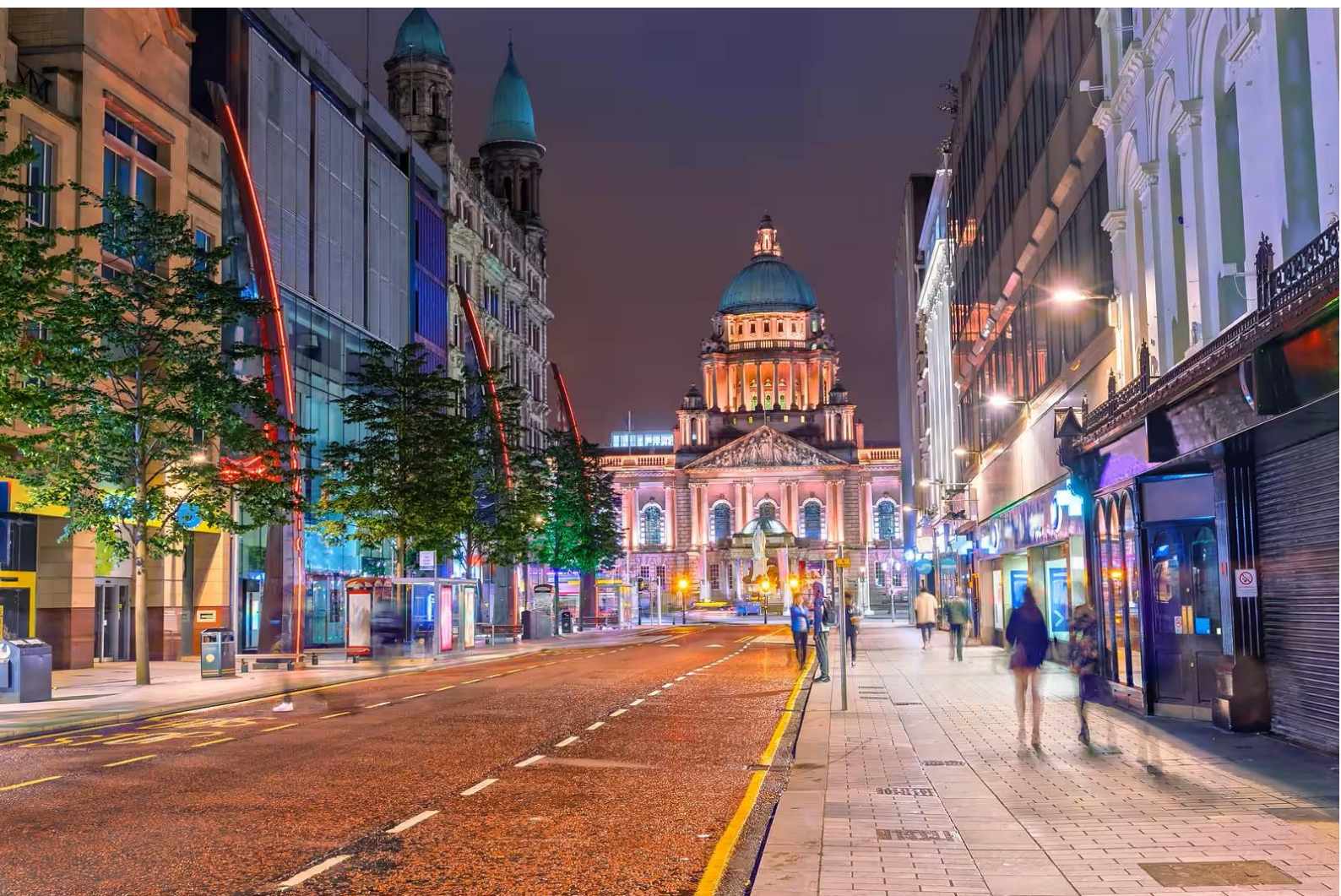
Theme	Key Performance Indicator	2025/26 Baseline	2026/27 Target
Our Economy	# of jobs promoted through business start-up activity. (<i>Statutory indicator</i>)	326	325
	# of participants engaged at the early stage of the entrepreneurial life cycle.	839	712
	# of regional individuals/ entrepreneurs supported through start-up activity.	5,085	3,655
	#of Belfast individuals/ entrepreneurs supported through start-up activity.	873	712
	# of regional businesses supported through business growth activity.	2,244	1,700
	# of Belfast businesses supported through business growth activity.	434	323
	% of regional Go Succeed participants engaged who are female	55%	50%
	% of Belfast Go Succeed participants engaged who are female	55%	50%
	% of participants who move into a positive outcome from an Employment or Upskilling Academy.	66%	75%
	# of participants on Employment and Upskilling Academies	928	675
	# of social enterprises and co-operatives supported	109	110*
	Our Place	# of previously vacant city-wide properties that are occupied as a result of the Vacant to Vibrant intervention.	24
# of visitor servicing enquiries (Visit Belfast)		724,514	825,000
GDS-Index ranking		9 th	Top 10
# of people attending the annual programme of large-scale public city events		148,500	46,000
# of attendees at major Cultural Festivals		669,207*	410,000
# of people engaged at engaged at arts and heritage organisations		1,384,133*	500,000
# of visitors to St. George's Market		1,048,237	1,000,000
# of external events at St. George's Market		14	16
# of Belfast Bike journeys		101,074	129,520
Total revenue (£) generated from Belfast Bikes scheme		£129,952	£80,000
# of bookings for conferences, weddings and events at Belfast Castle		299	300
Total income (£) generated by Belfast Castle		£300,099	£263,737
# of bookings for conferences, weddings and events at Malone House		160	160
Total income (£) generated by Malone House		£98,013	£122,340
# of visitors to Belfast Zoo		152,878	175,000
Total income (£) generated at Belfast Zoo		£1,800,042	£1,932,645

* Provisional figures based on actual, estimated and projected figures from interim CMAG monitoring reports submitted at the mid-year point.

Committee Finances

The expenditure for the 2026/27 City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan is based on a total planned investment of £23.96 million, as agreed at the Strategic Policy & Resources committee meeting on 13th February 2026, as follows:

Service	Budget 2026/27
Off-Street Car Parking	-1,042,160
City Regeneration	2,578,657
Economic Development	19,718,245
Place and Economy Directorate	2,703,812
Committee Total	23,958,554



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Subject:	Notices of Motion – Quarterly Update
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Jamie Uprichard, Business Research and Development Manager

Restricted Reports											
Is this report restricted?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No								
X											
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 											
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>				After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>										
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>										
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>										
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>										

Call-in			
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes	X	No

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance allocated to the City Growth & Regeneration (CG&R) Committee.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>It is recommended that the Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes the updates to all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance that this Committee is responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1.

3.0	Main report
3.1	At the SP&R Committee meeting on 25th October 2019 , members agreed “ <i>that this Council notes that other Councils produce a monthly status report in relation to Notices of Motion; and agrees Belfast City Council adopts a similar practice and produces a monthly Notice of Motion Update which will be brought to each full Council Meeting.</i> ”
3.2	<p>It was subsequently agreed that quarterly updates would be brought to the council’s statutory committees providing a regular update on the progress of each motion for which the committee is responsible for. At the SP&R Committee on 20th November 2020, members approved the arrangement for the future management of motions, which included recommendations that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Category 1 – Notice of Motion contained an action that has been completed. All Notices of Motion within this category contained a specific task that has since been complete. It is worth noting that, when Committee agree to action a Motion, there are sometimes additional actions agreed alongside the Motion. As these are not technically part of the Notice of Motion, they are taken forward through normal committee decision making processes. The Notice of Motion can therefore be closed, but additional actions related to it will continue to be progressed and reported to the committee. • Category 2 - Notice of Motion has become Council policy or absorbed into a strategic programme of work. These Motions did not contain a specific task that could be completed but rather they are more strategic in nature and require changes in Council policy and/ or strategy for long term outcomes. Those listed within this category have all been agreed by Committee and are now either Council policy or are currently being implemented through a Council strategy that is managed by a Standing Committee through the corporate planning process.
3.3	There are presently ten Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which the CG&R Committee is responsible for and which all remain open and ongoing. Members are asked to note their status updates included at Appendix 1.
3.4	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> There are no financial implications attached to this report.
3.5	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix 1: Notices of Motion Live Database – (CG&R Committee Motions)

City Growth & Regeneration Notice of Motions

Notices of Motion and Issued Raised in Advance that remain OPEN:

ID	Date	Notice of Motion	Proposed By	Referral Route	Lead Officer	Latest Status Update
208	04/10/2021	Belfast City Nightlife and Night-time Economy	Cllr S de Faoite	Notice of Motion – straight to CG&R	Damien Martin	An evening workshop / roundtable discussion was held at 2 Royal Avenue on 23 March 2026 for members of the City Centre All-Party Working Group and representatives of key stakeholder organisations to discuss the city's nightlife and night-time economy. The session enhanced the ongoing engagement and closer working arrangements between Elected Members, representative of the Purple Flag Steering Group (PFSG) including the Night Czar and wider stakeholders.
217	01/11/2021	Tourism Street Signage (Enlightenment Period)	Cllr M Long	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Keith Forster	Officers have undertaken initial desk-based research on the Belfast Enlightenment Period, its potential tourism appeal and a list of proposed options. Further work on the motion has been delayed due to other priority work areas however consideration and audit of associated tourism experiences will form part of the ongoing Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDP) development work.
431	05/02/2025	Bristol Music Fund	Cllr S de Faoite	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Keith Forster	Officers are continuing to engage with Bristol and facilitate a meeting to discuss shared learnings.
465	06/08/2025	Artist and Creative Studio Space	Cllr A Groogan	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Keith Forster	Officers from both the Culture and City Regeneration and Development teams have been progressing work on the Artist and Creative Studio Space and a report detailing Year 1 of a 5-Year Action Plan for Artist Workspaces is being presented to the June meeting of the CG&R Committee.
472	10/09/2025	Rosetta Quietway	Cllr S de Faoite	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Cathy Reynolds	DfI confirmed in November 2025 (Autumn Report presented to Special CG&R Committee) that the Knockbreda Crossing is scheduled in their future programme. It was noted that whilst the scheme is delayed, it remains a priority for DfI.
475	23/10/2025	Bike Bunkers Trial	Cllr B Smyth	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Cathy Reynolds	Officers have carried out detailed analysis around requirements for providing a Bike Bunker Scheme in Belfast, a number of further follow ups including engaging with Dublin City Council is scheduled. A detailed report will be brought back to a future meeting of the CG&R Committee.
485	20/11/2025	Priority for our local traders	Cllr J Doran	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Keith Forster	Officers have been in contact with Cllr Doran seeking further information in relation to the actions contained within the motion.

497	11/02/2026	Newtownards Road Corridor - Vision and Intervention	Cllr R Brooks	Issue Raised in Advance	Cathy Reynolds	Stakeholder meeting took place in April 2025. It is understood via engagement with Eastside Partnership and Cllr Brooks that work is underway in respect of reviewing the Newtownards Road 2030 plan against the actions set out therein, with any necessary time-bound interventions identified.
499	24/02/2026	Ormeau Arts Centre	Cllr S de Faoite	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Keith Forster	No update is yet available regarding the open Ormeau feasibility study. Officers are exploring budget requirements and further information will be brought to a future committee meeting.
523	26/05/2026	Silent Fireworks	Cllr A Flynn	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	TBC	NEW: No update yet available.

Zoo Long-Term Financial Sustainability Group

Wednesday, 27th May, 2026

MEETING OF THE ZOO LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY GROUP

Members present: Councillors Anglin, Flynn,
Murphy and Nelson.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive (Chairperson);
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. N. Simpson, Zoo Development Manager;
Ms. J. Bryans, Zoo Commercial Support Officer;
Ms. A. Fox, Assets Development Officer;
Ms. S. Kalke, Client Manager (Physical Programme); and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Brennan and R. McLaughlin.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th December, 2025, were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

Terms of Reference

The Group approved the terms of reference as outlined by the Strategic Director of Place and Economy. The Strategic Director highlighted the Group's purpose which would be to examine options in relation to the long-term financial sustainability of Belfast Zoo and complementary assets, and to make recommendations to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee by February, 2027.

Workshop Recap

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy provided the Group with an overview of the issues discussed and raised at its workshop held on 4th March, 2026.

Updates and Next Steps

The Zoo Development Manager provided the Group with an update in relation to a range of operational matters including staff recruitment and training, and the development of the Zoo's Annual Business Plan for 2026/27.

The Zoo Commercial Support Officer outlined the work which had been undertaken in respect of marketing, corporate sponsorship and outreach activity. She also provided the Group with further detail in respect of the upcoming events at the Zoo.

The Group was provided with an overview of the Zoo's current position in relation to conservation, which included detail on the species cared for which are threatened with extinction and the species which are managed as part of the European Endangered Species Programmes (EEP's).

In relation to next steps, the Development Manager and the Commercial Support Officer outlined a range of short to medium-term measures and actions, such as the ongoing health and safety and animal welfare capital improvements, small-scale changes to animal habitats and changes to improve and enhance customer experience.

A copy of the key findings from the n-gage.io industry insights report '*UK Zoo and Wildlife Attraction Benchmark Survey 2026*' was submitted for the Group's information to provide an overview of the industry's strategic priorities, operational pressures and future direction.

The Director of Property and Projects highlighted potential site visits for the Group's consideration.

During discussion, officers answered a range of questions in relation to Zoo improvements and challenges, increasing footfall, conservation, enhancing customer experience, operating models, and customer journey mapping.

A Member highlighted the critical role of the Zoo in respect of conservation and the importance of increasing awareness regarding its work to care for and manage vulnerable and endangered species through breeding programmes and supported conservation projects.

The Group requested that, at future meetings, it be provided with financial and visitor data. The Group also requested that further information be submitted to its next meeting in relation to the Zoo's Annual Business Plan for 2026/27 and corporate sponsorship.

Chairperson