

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



**Belfast
City Council**

30th May, 2025

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room, City Hall and remotely via MS Teams on Wednesday, 4th June, 2025 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. Restricted Items

- (a) Vacant to Vibrant Programme (Pages 1 - 16)
- (b) Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition (report to follow)
- (c) Housing Led Regeneration - PSP Update (report to follow)
- (d) Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Update (report to follow)
- (e) Markets Quarterly Update (Pages 17 - 24)
- (f) Belfast Zoo Q4 Performance Report (Pages 25 - 30)
- (g) Belfast Bikes Q4 Performance Report (report to follow)

- (h) Belfast Bikes: Tariff Structure for New Operation (report to follow)
- (i) York Street Interchange Placemaking and Active Travel Development (PATD)
- Committee Response (report to follow)

3. **Positioning Belfast to Compete**

- (a) International Relations - Draft Framework (Pages 31 - 58)
- (b) City Events Update (Pages 59 - 70)
- (c) Launch of Cultural Multi-Annual Grants (Pages 71 - 76)
- (d) City of Music Update (Pages 77 - 112)

4. **Strategic and Operational Issues**

- (a) City Growth and Regeneration Final Committee Plan 2025/26 (Pages 113 - 128)
- (b) Notices of Motion Quarterly Update (Pages 129 - 136)

5. **Presentation**

- (a) Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) Taskforce

6. **Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) 2025/26 Programme (report to follow)**

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:	International engagement – proposed approach
Date:	4 June 2025
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Laura Leonard, EU and International Relations 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"/>
<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: 40px;" 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 	

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
	The purpose of this report is to set out a proposed approach to the council's engagement in international activity for the coming three year period, with a view to focusing resources on areas that can generate most investment for the city and its partners and adding value to planned activity through our civic resources and networks.
2.0	Recommendations
	Members are asked to approve a new 3 year International Relations Framework and annual action plan of council wide international activity.
3.0	Main report
3.1	At the March 2025 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members received an update on engagement with internal and external partners around the development of a new approach to international engagement for the council, following the previous international relations framework that had been in place from 2017-2021.
3.2	<p>Since the conclusion of that framework, there have been significant internal and external shifts that require a change of focus. Some of these present opportunities while others are potential threats. The global operating environment is facing significant headwinds and is highly volatile at the present time. Macro-level factors mean that it can be difficult to plan activities with any degree of certainty given that changes such as the introduction of tariffs can impact directly on commitments and ambitions around trade and FDI activity, visa restrictions impact on student mobility and research, and cuts in international funding may impact on international cultural activities.</p> <p>At a regional level, The Executive Office is expected to issue a new International Relations Strategy in the coming period aimed towards using our international engagement to deliver PfG priorities and council teams have been working closely with officials to ensure that our thinking is aligned in this area.</p> <p>Invest NI has released a new business strategy, including an enhanced focus on both FDI and international trade activity. That strategy also places a significant focus on sub-regional growth – with a focus on sub-regional growth. There have also been significant developments in relation to the trading relationship with the EU.</p>
3.3	Locally, the recent Belfast Agenda refresh and collective commitment to a series of agreed priority actions means that any future approach needs to align with and support these actions. Within the council, the changing operational structures – with new teams established over recent years focusing on activities such as Innovation, Climate and City Regeneration and Development– mean that many officers are engaging in international networks and

	<p>partnerships as part of their “business as usual”. This would not have been the case when the original international relations framework was established in 2017. In addition, the increased focus on international events such as One Young World and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, as well as the planned investment in Belfast Stories demonstrate an enhanced focus on attracting international visitors to Belfast. This presents additional opportunities not only for developing and implementing a strong city narrative for key audiences, but also to consider opportunities for “layering” business and cultural investment opportunities.</p>
3.4	<p>Over the last number of months, officers have been engaging with internal teams and external partners (including Invest NI; Visit Belfast; British Council; TEO, local universities and Catalyst) to understand what the role and purpose of the new international framework should be and what priority areas of focus would add value to their core workplans. Feedback from these engagement sessions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals and organisations are involved in many international networks; collaborations; partnerships; joint ventures and exchanges. It’s built into “business as usual” or is resourced through specialist teams e.g. university research/student attraction • Partners would benefit from shared resources e.g. publications; website – an integrated economic proposition supported by authentic cultural offering and also positive quality of life considerations. They see significant value in multiple voices carrying consistent messaging – and would welcome council support in pulling this together • Acknowledgement of need to “sharpen the ask” and be clear about what is unique in Belfast – many narratives look similar. There is a consistent view that emerging assets such as the City Deal portfolio of investments have the potential to add something unique to the offer – need to ensure that these are integrated and that the USPs are clear • Potential to do more with existing relationships in line with city priorities – subject to resources (and reliant on support from partner city). Positive experiences of engaging in international relations team-led activity, including recent Nashville mission (additional feedback set out below) • Complexities and opportunities of EU exit identified – business; students; research • KPI tracking – can be challenging but all recognise need to do better at this. Some partners have recently introduced new systems e.g. CRM to do this more effectively – potential for shared resources of this type.
3.5	<p>The draft International Relations Framework is set out in Appendix 1 and the supporting delivery plan for year one (2025-26) is set out in Appendix 2. The framework document is</p>

	intended to be a supporting document to other key strategies and plans such as the Belfast Agenda, the Corporate Plan and Local Development Plan – setting out how priority objectives and ambitions in those documents can be supported through international connections, networks and opportunities. Its purpose is to identify areas of collaborative advantage and help focus resources on opportunities that can maximise return on investment, in keeping with city priorities.
3.6	<p>The role of the council is positioned as using our civic leadership and convening role to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise existing relationships and connections to generate investment, both in our business and in key infrastructure such as housing, increase trade and tourism • Enhance Belfast’s global visibility in key markets and communicate its unique assets and offer • Coordinate and amplify messaging to maximise return on investment • Support our partner organisations to deliver targets aligned with the Belfast Agenda ambition – with a focus on inclusive economic growth.
3.7	<p>Evolving from the 2017-2021 document, the draft framework comprises three key pillars around which activity is likely to focus, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade and investment • Innovation and knowledge exchange (including promotion of education and skills pathways offer) • Tourism development and city positioning.(including promotion of cultural, music, and major events) <p>Each pillar contains a series of headline actions and the specific deliverables against each of these in the 2025-26 financial year is set out in Appendix 2.</p>
3.8	<p>One element that came out strongly in the engagement sessions was the value of the Lord Mayor and the wider civic offices – including access to City Hall and engagement of elected members through events, receptions and visits. This is seen as a unique element of added value that the council can bring to city-level international engagement activities. It is something for us to build on through this new framework, including additional avenues for engagement and access to elected members– subject to availability and based on an assessment of whether this is required for the specific case in point and is a good use of resources.</p>

3.9	<p>In reviewing the previous framework and looking ahead to what should happen with the new framework, ways of working were discussed. While these are largely operational matters that may have limited visibility to elected members, it is hoped that they will improve overall delivery. Key considerations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a better mechanism for “qualifying” opportunities for engagement in international events/activities, to ensure that resources are focused on activities that can have greatest impact • Improving the tracking of outcomes and results – taking account of the fact that outcomes may take some time to be realised. We recognise that this is a challenge that all locations face and we have taken some learning from partners and will introduce a new CRM system to help with this, as well as continuing to collate case studies and impact testimonies. • Need for greater accountability and visibility of “what comes next” as a result of international engagement activity. Officers are proposing regular (half yearly) updates to committee along with improved communication of results and deliverables once these are identified • Maximising the value of existing partnerships: there was a consistent view that we should focus on exploiting existing partnerships and relationships instead of seeking (initially at least) to develop new formal partnerships. Feedback from the recent Nashville mission demonstrated the fact that some existing relationships have additional opportunities that can be explored further e.g. strong focus on business-to-business opportunities and R&D and VC investment that had not previously been considered – with positive outcomes for those participating. However, partners also conceded that – in a rapidly-changing environment, it is important to remain alive to new opportunities, including enhanced trading relationship with the EU, emerging markets, and consider these on their merits, where appropriate.
3.10	<p>The draft framework is a three-year document and this will be supported by an annual plan, focusing on priority activities for that year. In 2025-26, those activities will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade and investment: focus on external engagement to profile opportunities for capital investment to bring forward critical projects (e.g. housing, place making, net zero). • Delving deeper on sister city links to support business to business engagement trading opportunities (with Invest NI). An emerging area of interest/ potential is leveraging VC support for local small businesses, particularly in US markets • Utilising international links to encourage and support ODI – Outward Direct Investment for local businesses.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation and knowledge exchange: renewed focus on maximising inclusive innovation opportunities through Innovation City Belfast – building international partnerships; showcasing emerging opportunities (linked to City Deal and net zero projects) – focus on engagement in key events and networks e.g. Smart Expo – integrating project-based opportunities and wider city promotion messaging. <p>The importance and value of international students, as well as the unique offering providing by the skills academies component of our investment proposition will also be supported within this.</p> <p>Reviewing membership and enhancing engagement with Eurocities, particularly for untapped economic and innovation opportunities, in partnership with Universities and INI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism development and city positioning: developing an international engagement plan to promote Fleadh Cheoil na h-Éireann in key markets – exploring potential to sharpen the tourism narrative to reflect this significant investment; reviewing and refining existing assets (digital; print) to build stronger, more coherent city narrative to support further investment in agreed priority areas – creating new products and ensuring that these are shared with and used by all local partners to maximise impact.
3.11	Nashville Trade & Civic Mission February 2025 – summary and initial feedback
	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mark 30 years Sister City Relationship - Meet economic leaders and explore business, partnership and investment opportunities - Support Queens, Fisk and Belmont Universities' led Peace Summit
	<p>Highlights;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 Year Sister City milestone-strengthened long standing civic diplomacy through official LM engagements, including with the Mayor of Nashville, and high level meetings • Trade & Innovation-connected Belfast start-ups, researchers and civic leaders with over 40 stakeholders in Tennessee's Life & Health Sciences, Venture Capital, Tech, Sports and Culture • Education & Research -laid groundwork for bilateral student exchanges, collaborative research and medical education partnerships • Culture & Heritage – deepened creative and heritage links including connections for 250th Anniversary of the USA, country music programming and Scots Irish initiatives
4.0	Finance & Resource Implications

4.1	The EU and International Relations budget of £100K which supports the work of the EU and IR Team was approved as part of the 2025-26 estimates setting process.
4.2	Budgets for individual activities will be approved by the relevant Committees.
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
	No specific equality or good relations implications.
6.0	Appendices
	Appendix 1: Draft International Relations Framework – 2025-28 Appendix 2: International Relations Delivery Plan – 2025-26

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Appendix 1: Draft International Relations Framework 2025-2028

Background

For many years, Belfast City Council has been actively engaged in international relations activity – working with and in support of our local partners. The nature of that work has changed over time and in response to changes in the internal and external operating context.

The most recent framework document (2017-2021) set out a strategic approach for engagement, focused on three key pillars, namely:

- Business – investment (including capital), export/trade activity and supporting the development of business-to-business collaboration
- Tourism development and promotion – for both business and leisure markets
- Education – professional development partnerships, research and innovation exchanges, student mobility and global education initiatives.

Global changes in the last number of years have been unprecedented in recent history. This makes long-term planning more challenging – and requires flexibility and responsiveness to adapt to the new ways of working. In response, our proposal is for a three-year framework approach, supported by a series of one-year action plans. We are mindful of the need to remain responsive to opportunities that can help deliver on strategic objectives, in the context of limited resources. We note the need to develop a more rigorous approach to the assessment of emerging opportunities, ensuring that these support the city's inclusive growth ambitions as set out in the Belfast Agenda.

In addition to external changes, there have been significant internal changes since the previous framework was established. New teams are focused on international engagement activity as part of their day to day working. The EU and International Relations Unit (EUIRU) is likely to remain the focal point for the council's international civic engagement work, coordinating the critical civic engagement activities (alongside the office of the Lord Mayor), managing key sister city relationships and facilitating relevant inward visits. Individual teams will be responsible for leading out on their own areas of work and will be accountable for associated outcomes.

This current framework provides a strategic approach that seeks to focus our financial and staff resources to position Belfast as a globally-connected, forward looking city that is open, inclusive and ambitious, attracting trade, investment, talent and visitors while sharing the city's unique story and values with the world.

Our international partners

As with all International Relations activity, the success of transnational partnership working is dependent on a mutual willingness of partners to reciprocate and support project initiation and development.

Given the resources available (both human and financial), Belfast City Council has strategically focussed a significant element of its international relations activity on its established Sister City relations. However, it remains open to partner with other cities and locations on strategic initiatives where this collaboration fulfils council's objectives as outlined in the Belfast Agenda, Corporate Plan and associated plans and frameworks . An example of this flexible approach is the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2023 with Sejong which supports city-city working in the field of innovation.

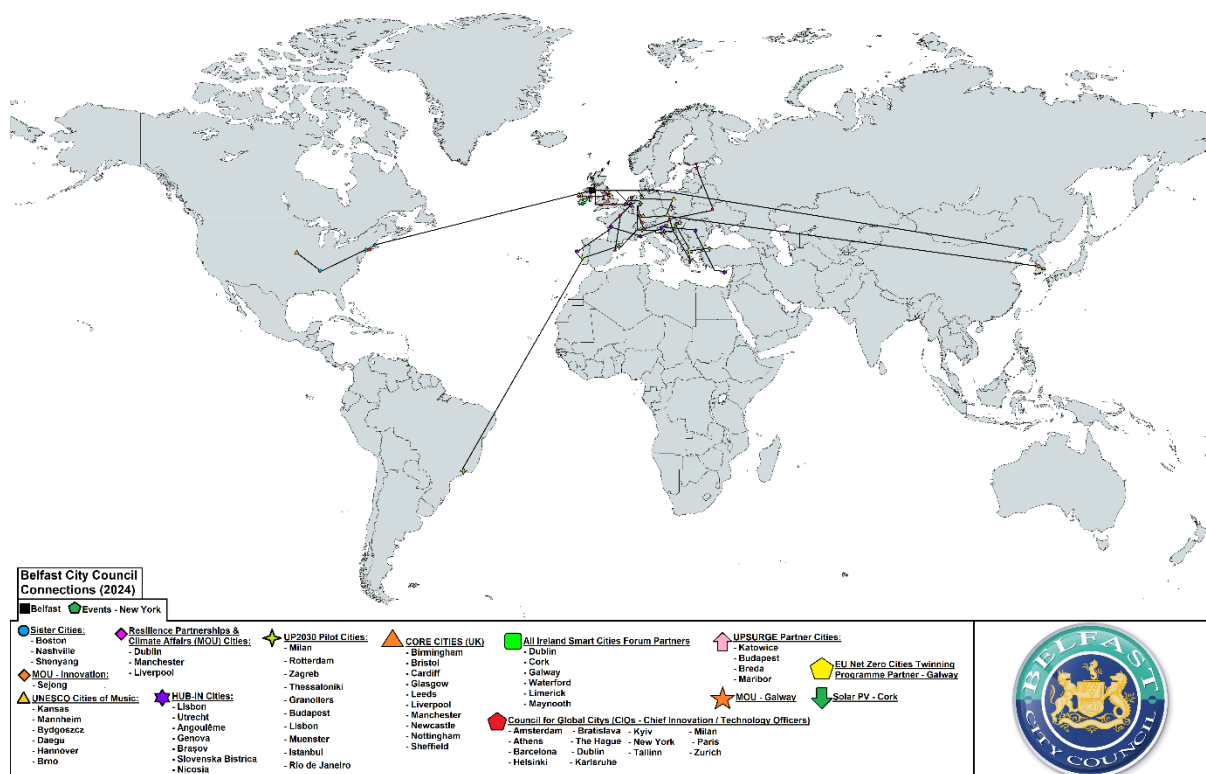
Belfast City Council has three established Sister City partnerships:

- Nashville (Tennessee) – council's oldest Sister City relationship signed in 1995
- Boston (Massachusetts) – signed in 2014
- Shenyang (China) – agreed in 2016

It is also part of other networks such as Eurocities (incorporating more than 140 cities and municipalities across Europe) as well as other sector-specific and issue-based networks that are critical for learning, information-sharing and city promotion. A refreshed approach to Eurocities is required if Council remains a member of this network, working with Universities and Invest NI to identify and maximise opportunities, particularly in the areas of culture, economic development, research & innovation and net zero,. The UK/EU Reset along the unique NI trading relationship offered through the Windsor Framework presents new opportunities for European engagement overall.

As previously noted, international connectivity is not restricted to the work of the EUIRU and this framework and supporting action plan encompass and profile the international engagement work across other departments and units such as Innovation City Belfast, the City Innovation team, Climate and Resilience team, and the City Regeneration and Development team.

The map below demonstrates how council is engaged in international partnership working.



Strategic Context

Belfast City Council's International Relations Framework is not a stand-alone document. It is, rather, a supporting document, creating opportunities for the delivery of city priorities as set out in critical strategies such as the Belfast Agenda and the new Corporate Plan in particular (see illustration below).

Our approach in developing the framework

In developing this new framework, the EU and International Relations team undertook extensive engagement with a range of internal teams involved in this work. They also engaged directly with key city partners such as the universities, Invest NI, Visit Belfast, British Council, TEO and Catalyst. The findings from these engagements have formed the basis of this revised framework, shaping not only the content but also considerations on ways of working and opportunities for data-sharing and resource maximisation, as well as focusing on what specific areas of added value the framework can support.

The vision, purpose and strategic objectives are set out below and delivery against these is to be focused on three key work pillars, namely:

- Trade and investment
- Innovation and knowledge exchange

- Tourism, cultural development, and city positioning.

Vision

To position Belfast as a globally-connected, forward looking city that is open, inclusive and ambitious, attracting trade, investment, talent and visitors while sharing the city's unique story, culture and values with the world.

Purpose

The purpose of this framework is to identify areas of collaborative advantage and help focus resources on opportunities that can maximise return on investment, in keeping with city priorities.

Council's International Role

Council will work alongside its strategic partners to :

- Develop and utilise international relationships and connections to generate investment, trade and tourism;
- Enhance Belfast's positive global visibility in key markets and communicate its unique assets and attractions;
- Coordinate and amplify messaging to maximise return on investment
- Support delivery of priority targets aligned with the Belfast Agenda vision for inclusive economic growth

Our priority work pillars

Building on our work on international relations to date as well as our analysis of emerging market issues and taking account of the discussions through our engagement with internal and external partners, we have identified three core pillars of activity to focus our work under this framework.

Pillar 1: Trade and investment

While FDI investment may have dominated the narrative in more recent years, there is an increasing focus on trade development. An emerging regional entrepreneurship strategy is likely to include a specific focus on high-growth businesses – Innovation Driven Enterprises. These businesses are global by nature and need new sources of capital and international research and business partnerships. There is an opportunity to explore how Belfast's existing civic relationships can support greater

business to business collaborations – with a focus on creating jobs; driving productivity, developing new partnerships, as well as supporting ODI (outward driven investment)

Successive economic strategies have noted that export-led growth is a key economic driver. In 2023, external sales by NI companies were estimated to be £33.3 billion, a 15.7% increase from the previous year. The USA is a critical sales market for Belfast-based Invest NI client companies, accounting for more than half of all sales by value (£). Despite the current headwinds, it is likely to remain a strong market for Belfast-based businesses – in particular opportunities aligned to our growth sectors (tech and digital; life and health sciences). New relationships – still in their infancy – with partners in our sister city of Nashville have the potential to generate positive business-to-business connections.

The need for external capital is not confined to trading businesses. It is also critical for bringing forward key infrastructure and investment projects.. As the council and its city partners double down on the delivery of its high-level ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda – particularly focusing on job and population growth – developers and project promoters are increasingly exploring opportunities for international mobile, patient capital to support delivery. In the short term, the need to drive investment in housing is a strategic priority and will be a priority activity in the coming year, following previous progress in relation to Grade A office, Purpose Build Student Accommodation and Hotels.

Pillar 2: Innovation and knowledge exchange

Belfast Region City Deal is a £1billion programme of investment that aims to create more than 20,000 new jobs over the next decade. Digital transformation and sectoral growth are at the heart of many of the Belfast-based projects. These emerging centres of excellence present an opportunity not only to compete globally on collaborative research activities but also to attract additional talent and investment to the Belfast Region. As these centres are established, they will become critical components of the city's investment narrative, enabling a focus towards higher-value jobs and helping drive productivity in line with city ambitions.

There has been a recent resurgence of work through Innovation City Belfast – a partnership focused on bringing together public and private sector partners along with academia to generate investment; maximise the societal and economic impact of the innovation ecosystem; improve the reach and quality of the city's digital infrastructure and grow the entrepreneurial ecosystem to support the development of more innovation-driven enterprises (IDEs). Active engagement in global networks to support this work is critical to ensuring that our investments are world-class and that the Belfast offer

is heard and understood among key decision-makers. ICB is currently mapping out an engagement plan to take account of critical events and activities. We will work with them to consider shared and consistent messaging and to explore opportunities for participation by relevant partners. One specific angle that we want to learn from and share learning on is “inclusive innovation” – in keeping with our commitments to support inclusive economic growth.

Belfast has a number of FDI and indigenous companies across a range of growth sectors that are world leading in their field and competing in a global marketplace – as illustrated through the Invest NI trade statistics. Sectors include net zero; life and health sciences and digital technology. The challenge is to drive more businesses to think and operate globally. We will work closely with Invest NI and sector support organisations to identify opportunities for market access and market engagement activities as well as opportunities to secure capital to support growing businesses in these sectors –including through our sister cities, wider civic connections in the USA, and rebuilding European relations to exploit the unique trading position secured through the Windsor Framework. We will also seek new opportunities through Eurocities membership, such as access to Horizon Europe for Innovation City Belfast, and Smart Belfast initiatives.

Belfast is home to two leading universities – both of whom are extremely active in international markets for the purpose of developing research collaborations, attracting talent and increasing international student numbers. Through this framework, we will explore opportunities to support this work, principally through the civic office and by identifying new opportunities with our partner cities.

Pillar 3: Tourism, Cultural Development and City Positioning

Belfast is a culturally vibrant destination that attracts growing numbers of visitors each year. It is a UNESCO city of music – one of only 59 across the world and the only one on the island of Ireland. The rich cultural traditions – and the music in particular – are at the core of our unique and authentic tourism product.

Attracting international visitors (either for conferences, other business or leisure) is an important element of any international relations framework. Belfast is the gateway for most visitors to Northern Ireland and the council has already demonstrated its commitment to growing tourism numbers by investing in ICC Belfast – to drive new and high-value business tourism to the city. As a new business tourism strategy emerges, it is critical that the role of Belfast is reinforced. For leisure tourism, the value of large-scale events in attracting visitors – particularly Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann – is likely to

present significant opportunities in the coming two years in particular. Early engagement and promotion in key markets – working closely with partners in Visit Belfast, Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland – will be essential if we are to deliver on the economic regeneration benefits from this large-scale event.

A recurring insight from international partners is the strength of the networks in Belfast and the value of the “Team Belfast” approach in helping them to access key decision-makers and expediting decision-making. A priority for the period of this framework will be to develop a suite of assets that can be shared by all partners involved in international activity, including Belfast Region partners, focusing on the key investment messaging – both the ask and the offer.

The important role of the Lord Mayor and the civic office

In addition to playing a convening and complementary role with our partners, Belfast City Council’s civic role in international relations is a critical one. It enables and facilitates access to key influencers and networks. The role of the Lord Mayor, in particular, is a critical asset that can elevate the messaging and create a positive experience of engagement in outward visits and in hosting delegations that visit the city. This factor was widely recognised and acknowledged by our city partners as providing significant added value. Likewise, the ability to involve our elected members in conversations with investors and visitors to the city was seen as a key part of the “Team Belfast” ethos. We will ensure that our elected members play a key civic leadership role where their involvement supports our strategic objectives and will continue to work with the Lord Mayor and the team to identify opportunities for involvement in critical inward visits and international engagement activities.

How we work

In addition to considering **what** we do, it is equally important to consider **how** we do it. Through our engagement with partners, we have identified a number of key principles that sit behind our activity plan and that, if properly considered, can help make our individual and collaborative efforts more effective. These include:

Objective assessment of opportunity

A recurring discussion during our engagement with internal and external partners was the need to create a consistent approach to due diligence around requests to host inward visits; attend international events and enter into new formal partnerships.

The scale of interest in Belfast from external partners is welcome. In the last year alone, the EU and International Relations Team supported more than 45 inward visits. In the context of constrained resources across all partners, it is clear that a more robust process of evaluating and assessing opportunities presented in order to make recommendations as to how (and whether) these are supported is essential. Work has already been undertaken on a new approach and this will be further refined before being introduced across all teams in the coming year.

Measuring and communicating success

Another recurring theme in engagement meetings was the challenge associated with assessing and measuring impact directly related to specific international engagement activities. A new UK Soft Power Council has been established to recognise that soft power is one of our greatest national assets, and that our global standing has direct and indirect impact on our cities' economic objectives.

Our research into experiences from other locations highlighted that this was not unique to Belfast and it is something that most locations are challenged by. This is because the relationships required to attract capital investment or develop new research or business-to-business partnerships can often take a long time to develop. Likewise, engagement at a single event will rarely deliver an immediate outcome; it may take a number of follow up engagements or it could be that fortuitous connections are made which ultimately lead to outcomes that had not been previously foreseen.

Given that the framework is a supporting document rather than a stand-alone strategy, the outputs and benefits delivered by this framework will support are aligned to high-level benefits aligned to the Belfast Agenda outcomes and other key strategies highlighted elsewhere in this framework. These are likely to include securing additional investment for local businesses; increasing investment in

innovation; supporting delivery of housing targets (through investment attraction) and increasing visitor numbers. The supporting action plan that sits with this framework will identify relevant outputs and performance measures and progress against these will be reported back to Committee on a regular basis (suggested six-monthly).

In order to help track outputs and benefits from inward and outward visits, a new CRM system will be introduced. This will enable officers to record support offered and identify outputs and outcomes as a result of that support (where information is available). It will enable us to take a more informed approach to how we deal with requests that have not, to date, generated a return and will support better information-sharing across the various teams involved in this work.

Accountability

While the CRM system will help coordinate and manage data better, it can only be effective if officers can get access to the information they require from other partners. This document and the associated action plan provide an overarching perspective of the council's international engagement activity across a number of teams. Each team is accountable for securing delivery against their stated objectives and associated reporting through committee. The EU and International team will endeavour to coordinate this information where available and share with Committee as appropriate. In terms of engagement with external teams and partners, the EUIR team generates connections for businesses and organisations, but the responsibility and accountability for follow-up sits with the individual organisation.

Maintaining strong partnerships

Belfast's international focus aligns well with the emerging approach from the NI Executive and that of key city and Belfast Region partners. Recent years have seen a new impetus behind our Sister City agreements in North America in particular as well as China. There has been a revitalisation of support for the work of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and there are numerous opportunities for collaboration with partners along the corridor to support inclusive economic growth, positioning this seamless cross-border corridor in a global context. Maximising the outcomes from these agreements, rather than developing new partnerships, will be a focus throughout the period of this framework. Complementing their activity and amplifying its impact is both a core role of the Council and a core principle of this framework.

We will work with these partners to ensure our role contributes to theirs for the benefit of the city; our measures of success will be developed in conjunction with these partners to further cement this

‘additionality’ role and ensure our resources are deployed towards shared outcomes. In practical terms, this will mean continuing to work closely with our partners through formal and informal relationships – including the stakeholder engagement groups that provide opportunities for information-sharing and forward planning for collaborative activities.

Appendix 1: Case studies-here are some examples of the value and benefits of recent international activity

Case Study: Nashville Economic & Civic Mission Feb 2025

Objectives:

- Mark 30 years Sister City Relationship
- Meet economic leaders and explore business, partnership and investment opportunities
- Support Queens, Fisk and Belmont Universities' led Peace Summit

Highlights:

- 30 Year Sister City milestone-strengthened long standing civic diplomacy through official LM engagements, including with the Mayor of Nashville, and high level meetings
- Trade & Innovation-connected Belfast start-ups, researchers and civic leaders with over 40 stakeholders in Tennessee's Life & Health Sciences, Venture Capital, Tech, Sports and Culture
- Education & Research -laid groundwork for bilateral student exchanges, collaborative research and medical education partnerships
- Culture & Heritage – deepened creative and heritage links including connections for 250th Anniversary of the USA, country music programming and Scots Irish initiatives

Output: Specific follow-up actions, with sectoral focus identified and communicated with partners

Case study: Aflac

Belfast, the 'city of talent and innovation' became the standout choice for company investment due to its talent pool, digital capability, and alignment with the company's overall strategy. Not to mention the personality of the city felt by the key decision makers on a fact-finding trip.

The start up and ongoing success of Aflac NI has been strongly supported and elevated with the continued backing of Belfast City Hall, which has been greatly appreciated by the co.

BCC ensures that VIP global visitors from Aflac are given a special city hall welcome to show how the city values the investment, job creation, and further growth.

Case study – TalentSensus

The International Relations function is an invaluable asset to Belfast City Council and the businesses it supports. It has been instrumental in driving significant growth for my business, Upskill Enterprise, in the USA.

It has provided invaluable support in hosting numerous high-profile delegations from the United States and played a crucial role in facilitating an important trade mission to Northern Ireland for a delegation from Pennsylvania.

The impact of these visits has been truly remarkable. Thanks to the connections fostered, our company, Upskill Enterprise, and our TalentSensus Technology have gained direct access to key

individuals in the US public workforce system. This has resulted in an impressive \$4.2 million in revenue for 2025.

Case study: Friendship Four

Friendship Four is the most substantive, longest running output of our Sister City relationship with Boston. Running since 2015, it is the first and only NCAA Division One Hockey tournament to be held outside of the United States. The tournament brings over 1,000 Bostonians to Belfast for a week over the Thanksgiving period.

The tournament is important to Belfast as it aligns to a number of corporate objectives:

- economic development: Boston Irish Business Association is developing its collaboration with the Belfast ecosystem to further mutual economic cooperation. In the past there have also been business showcases profiling local companies' innovation and talent in the sports technology, analytics and performance domains.
- education and skills: in addition to participating student athletes' mobility, the players also undertake education outreach. Visits to Belfast schools profile how sport can support educational pathways and community cohesion. University partnerships have also spun out of tournament participation e.g. Northeastern University has developed a partnership with Queen's University Belfast, bringing almost 200 students to study in Belfast for a semester over the last two years.
- tourism development: taking place during the tourism "off-season" spend by international guests are in Belfast during the week of Friendship Four amounts to £500,000 and generates 3,000 new bed nights for local hotels. During game intermissions, Belfast is profiled directly into millions of Canadian and American households through a series of promotional messages aired on TV channel NESN.

From 2026, the tournament will encompass four women's teams – building on the prior success and reach of the female Friendship Series which engaged two colleges - proof that the appetite for these quality experiences for international visitors, and Belfast's reputation for delivering them continues to grow.

Case study: St Mary's University College

As a small institution with limited international resources, St Mary's struggled to engage with the US market or make significant connections. That changed when Belfast City Council introduced us to Nashville Sister Cities.

Positive PR created through undertaking outward and inward visits with Nashville has been priceless - positioning St Mary's University College as an international, outward looking institution with talented students – both domestically across Northern Ireland and in the States.

The development of our students' skillset has been phenomenal. The relationship also gave St Mary's the confidence to launch our International Summer school.

St Mary's would like to acknowledge the incredible work of Belfast City Council's International Unit who have been invaluable to the development of a footprint for St Mary's in the US.

Case study: Eurocities

Belfast hosted a three-day Eurocities Culture Forum in September 2025, attracting 136 participants from 64 cities and 23 countries. The Forum focussed on "Culture as the Connector: how cities recreate to adapt and thrive" - exploring how integral culture is to city regeneration and competitiveness.

Belfast as host city showcased 14 Belfast 2024 projects, 22 venues and spaces, and engaged 33 local artists and culture sector representatives. The economic impact of hosting the Forum in the city was estimated to be over £350,000 (based on the official recognised rate for each out of state delegate staying overnight). Delegate and partner feedback was very positive, with a number of potential partnerships being explored and activated as part of the Forum's legacy. This will help to maximise Belfast 2024's legacy and that of council's investment in projects which can be showcased in other cities in the coming years.

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Appendix 2: Belfast City Council – International Relations: Delivery Plan 2025-2026

Trade and Investment					
Project/Initiative	Brief Overview	BCC Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Priority outputs and benefits
New York, New Belfast 2025	Annual event and supporting side programme focused on engaging with key east coast USA economic “champions” and pipeline FDI companies considering investing in Belfast and potential trade opportunities for local companies. Also opportunity to position Belfast’s latest Tourism messaging (Fleadh 2026) and City Deal Assets for investment	EU and International Relations Team	Event organisers Invest NI US office and Belfast Chamber	June 2025	Investment leads for City assets and trade leads for Belfast businesses Support Invest NI for investment and trade pipeline Promotion of major events
Homecoming 2025	Business conference promoting Belfast to diaspora communities for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism including business tourism - FDI including Housing, City Deal Assets - Partnership - Major events including Fleadh 2026 	EU and International Relations Team	Event organisers	October 2025	Priority leads and follow up for City assets- City Deal, housing led regen, Support for decisions made on FDI pipeline / trade opportunities Promotion of major events /opportunities like Fleadh, Belfast Stories
US Sister City collaboration engagement	Action planning to consider next steps following successful Nashville visit (Feb 2025) and potential re-engagement with Boston, using same successful “ Team Belfast” model used for Nashville	EU and International Relations Team supported by Economic	ICB; universities; Catalyst; individual businesses	Date tbc	Partnerships and access to finance for Belfast businesses, Innovation Centres

	mission. Boston focus will also be Life and Health Sciences inc access to innovation partnerships and VC s I	Development team		Q4	and City Deal assets, with focus on L&HS Promotion of Belfast as a study and tourism destination
Belfast City and Region Place Partnership	Joint public and private sector-led initiative focused on place positioning to attract investment and deliver on inclusive growth. Critical events include MIPIM (France, March each year) and UK ReiiF (Leeds, May each year). Other special/one-off events may also be involved, in line with opportunities. The Partnership also produces resources such as a website and investment prospectus	City Regeneration and Development team	Other BRCD councils, Belfast Harbour, Universities, Invest NI, developers, construction companies, legal and financial services	Annual programme of work	Leads generated in support of investment attracted and developments supported
Develop and maintain updated Belfast's city proposition messaging	New and updated collateral to validate and demonstrate Belfast's economic ambitions	Business Research and Development supported by Corporate Communications City Regeneration City Innovation Office ICB Economic Development EUIRU	Invest NI and active stakeholders working internationally	End Q2 2025 and ongoing	Ensuring that consistent and updated city messaging products (including economic, place making, innovation, net zero, tourism , culture etc) that are shared and used by all city stakeholders
EU Trade and Investment	Develop updated approach to EU engagement with City and Regional	EUIRU City Innovation Office	Invest NI and TEO	Q3 2025	Agreed approach to enhanced EU engagement

	Partners, building on work of Universities, Innovation and Smart teams	ICB Economic Development			
Inward Delegations: Facilitate requests for presentations on Belfast's proposition.	Facilitating bespoke inward visits, showcasing opportunities and delivering presentations to visiting delegations to outline opportunities for investment, trade collaboration & showcase best practice	EUIRU with input from Thematic Experts in BCC	Broad range of city stakeholders; Thematic & industry specialists	Ongoing	Follow up engagement leading to more specific plans for investment /trade or collaboration
Support implementation of city educational institutions' international activity	Support development of global education partnerships, research exchange , study mobility programmes and funding opportunities through Horizon and other EU funds	EUIRU, City Innovation, ICB	QUB UU BMET Stranmillis St Mary's British Council	Ongoing	BCC contributing to attracting more international students, research and EU funding partnerships, which contribute to sector and city economic & cultural impact
Innovation and Knowledge Exchange					
Belfast Innovation value proposition	Developing a shared investable value proposition for the Belfast innovation ecosystem – including the City Deal funded investments.	City Innovation Office	Innovation City Belfast partners Plus most of the city's other innovation partners including INI and DfE	Working towards an agreed proposition by autumn 2025 – with testing likely at Smart Cities World Congress in November 2025	New product in suite aligned with new and updated overall economic proposition
Bloomberg Philanthropies 2025 Mayors Challenge	A two phase, 12-month programme with 50 other cities aimed at delivering urban innovation solutions	City Innovation Office	Innovation City Belfast and challenge partners	First international workshop	Collaborative proposals for solving

				planned for late Spring 2025	urban innovation challenges
Sejong Memorandum of Understanding	City-city cooperation on innovation and technology Includes a potential visit by Sejong Mayor in Q3	City Innovation Office	ICB	Ongoing	Support for partner workstreams
Smart City World Congress (Barcelona)	Promotion of city messaging, focusing on opportunities for partnership, investment, research and trade in relation to digital innovation There will be a particular focus on identifying Horizon Europe opportunities with other cities.	Innovation City Belfast	ICB Partners	Q3 –	Leads in relation to partnerships, investment, research & funding opportunities
Upsurge Initiative	EU Funded climate demonstrator project linking Belfast to Maribor, Budapest, Breda, Katowice	Climate Team	BCC CNS Queens University Friends of Botanic Gardens Friends of the Field EU Partners	Ongoing	Demonstrate alternative nature based solutions (NBS). Inform and evidence the viability of nature based solutions and building within communities for sustainable food production.
Tourism development and city positioning					
Supporting strategic tourism stakeholders in attracting and promoting major	Collaborating with Visit Belfast, Tourism Ireland and Tourism NI to drive sectoral growth and positioning Belfast as a host city for major events and international exhibitions – such as Fleadh Cheoil	Tourism, Culture, Heritage & Arts	Visit Belfast Tourism Ireland Tourism NI NITA ICC	Ongoing	Number of strategic opportunities in which opportunity integrated aligned to tourism growth

tourism and cultural events					Media coverage / promotion Belfast as host destination
Friendship Four – Men and Women’s Tournaments	US College Ice Hockey Tournaments linked to Boston Sister City; associated STEM Festival and promotion of city via US TV airtime	EUIRU	Odyssey Trust NI Connections DfC Tourism NI	Q3	Economic impact on city – bed nights, Arena venue, US and global press coverage value, socially and also impact on schools and community groups making US ice hockey links for future cooperation
Your Roots Are Showing	Folk music conference and trade fair which attracts over 100 artists. Potential to be held in Belfast Jan 2026.	Tourism, Culture, Heritage & Arts	City’s cultural venues – part of music trail	Q4	Economic impact on city – including bed nights, conference venue, socially Plus enhanced global reputation of Belfast as a business tourism destination within this sector
Celebrate Chinese New Year	Participation in city partner events to mark New Lunar year	EUIRU	China stakeholders – CWA, Chinese Chamber, Chinese Consulate, Confucius	Q4	Enhances civic relations with Chinese players locally and internationally at govt, business and community level

In addition to above workstreams, BCC participate in a number of strategic thematic networks as outlined below aligned to framework

Council for Global City CIOs	Information and opportunity exchange between innovation cities across the world.	City Innovation Office
European & UK Learning Cities Networks	Engage in each Network to exchange best practice and develop initiatives to support community learning	City & Organisational Strategy
UNESCO City of Music	Active participation in UNESCO cultural networks with reciprocal benefits between the cities including but not limited to partnerships with UCoM cities Kansas City (US) Hannover (Germany) Daegu (South Korea), Conde (Brazil), Ghent (Belgium) and Bologna (Italy). Includes BCC representation on UNESCO Music subnetwork meetings.	Tourism, Culture, Heritage & Arts



Subject:	City Events Update
Date:	June 2025
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture & Tourism Kerry Mc Mullan, Tourism and Events 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
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a summary of the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• St Patrick's Day Celebrations 2025 post event information and forward planning for 2026• Christmas Planning Update for 2025• Update on Oireachtas Festival• Update on Maritime Festival• Update on Halloween and the Open
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• note the contents of this report on the 2025 St Patrick's Day Programme

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the outline approach for delivery of the St Patricks Day 2026 Programme • note the on-going festival contracts position in respect of St Patrick's Day • note the updates in approach to Christmas 2025 delivery including festive lights • note the update on Oireachtas festival and approval funding provision to Foras na Gaeilge up to the value of £30,000 • note update on Martime Festival • note update on Halloween and the Open.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>St Patrick's Day - Background to procurement</p> <p>Members will be aware that the 2024 procurement was split across a number of lots; .Lot 1: A Parade / Pageant (£95k)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lot 2: City Centre Weekend Music Programme (£70K) • Lot 3: Cross City Music Showcase (£50k) • Lot 4: An "Open Call" (£50k) <p>With remaining budget retained for parade logistics (circa £25k) and support for programming and marketing activity.</p> <p>The outcome of this process was that Lot 3 only, was subsequently awarded to Féile an Phobail – for a three - year agreement (2024 to 2026). St Patrick's Day 2026 will be the final year of this contract.</p> <p>Tradfest were appointed to deliver Lot 2 and approved at SP&R in November 2023, initially for a one year agreement. Tradfest subsequently secured a new tender for the city centre music programme for 2025, with the option to renew for 2026 and 2027.</p> <p>In regards to Lot 1 Council Officers took forward the option to deliver the Parade in-house for 2024,. This involved engagement with a number of organisations on the provision of professional performance, community engagement, and parade assets. Following the 2024 event, a number of parade specific procurement exercises took place with 2025 being the 1st year of up to three year arrangements.</p>
3.1.1	<p>2025 Programming</p> <p>In the lead-up to St. Patrick's Day and the day itself, a series of additional activities were delivered across the city, significantly enhancing the festive atmosphere. These were a combination of curated partners and Council:</p> <p>Delivered by Féile an Phobail, TradTrail celebrated Belfast's status as a UNESCO City of Music with performances from the best local and national trad musicians from Monday 10th</p>

to Monday 17th March, offering free music performances in bars, restaurants, hotels and visitor attractions across the city.

Seachtain na Gaeilge, presented by Conradh na Gaeilge began on Saturday 1st March and continued until St Patrick's Day itself. This included an Irish language family fun day - Spraoi Cois Lao – which took place at Custom House Square on Saturday 8th March, the biggest fun day of its kind. This event included musicians, dancers, activities, games, food and entertainment, celebrating the Irish language, and was free to access.

Belfast TradFest presented the St Patrick's Music Festival – four days of concerts, céilís, displays, taster sessions and workshops in venues throughout the Cathedral Quarter. Combining traditional music with bagpipes, highland dancers, Irish dancing and bodhrán circles, a festival village located at Cathedral Gardens included a host of free performances, alongside food stalls, céilí workshops and more. In addition, there were a number of ticketed performances including:

- Cara Dillon at Ulster Hall
- Afro Celt Sound System at Mandela Hall
- Máirtín O'Connor, Zoë Conway & Dónal O'Connor at St Joseph's Church
- Anúna at St Anne's Cathedral (to an audience of 550)
- Céilí events and workshops across the Cathedral Quarter
- Performances by Glengormley School of Traditional Music, Tír na nÓg Irish Dancers, and various pipe bands

Council provided further family-friendly programming in 2 Royal Ave, via the Council - appointed operator MayWe, which was well attended by families for a day of free events, including art workshops, dance performances, music and a games area.

Council, in partnership with Ards Comhaltas, programmed live music in St George's market on both Saturday 15th and Sunday 16th March, to showcase the asset and profile the successful bid for Fleadh Cheoil in 2026.

The St. Patrick's Day Parade was held on Monday 17th March, a large scale participatory event aimed at providing a family-friendly experience in celebration of cultural heritage. The St Patrick's Day Parade was curated and delivered by the Council Events team incorporating engagement, animation and participation from a number of professional, voluntary and community organisations; dance troupes, schools, community groups and musicians who joined the floats for a free multi-cultural, cross-community celebration. Commencing from Belfast City Hall, the parade followed a circular route and concluded back at the City Hall, ensuring a vibrant celebration which was accessible to the large audience.

	<p>The St Patrick's Celebrations were delivered within the budget allocation of £300,000. Members should note that Good Relations funding of £20k was also secured to enhance the community offering within the parade.</p> <p>Officers are continuing to work with good relations and wider units across council to identify opportunities to enhance the cultural offering and connect communities in how they can be associated and engaged with the St Patricks Day Celebrations. This can provide a pathway into engagement and programming work associated with the delivery of the Fleadh Cheoil given in 2026.</p>
<p>3.1.2</p>	<p>Outcomes</p> <p>In summary, the programme was delivered on budget, was well attended, and well received. All partners have been very positive in their feedback, and there was less risk with event delivery given that many key creative contractors were working under multi-year agreements.</p> <p>There was an estimated visitor attendance of 25-30,000 in the City Centre on the 17th for the Parade and Festival Village – similar numbers to 2024, when the weather was better. Over 700 performers and community participants took part in the parade</p> <p>In 2025, audience response was overwhelmingly positive. Over 16,000 people attended events across 13 venues as part of the St Patrick's Music Festival, with an estimated 12,000 visitors engaging with programming at Cathedral Gardens alone over the course of the weekend. The festival featured 410 participants, over 60 hours of content, and performances from a diverse range of artists including Cara Dillon, Afro Celt Sound System, Máirtín O'Connor, Zoë Conway, Dónal O'Connor, Anúna, and various traditional pipe bands, dancers, and community music groups.</p> <p>The TradTrail, delivered by Féile an Phobail, extended across 60 venues citywide, featuring 87 artists, reinforcing Belfast's status as a UNESCO City of Music and supporting businesses in hospitality and tourism through accessible trad programming. The partnership model across venues and artists has proven both sustainable and impactful.</p> <p>Spraoi Cois Lao – which took place at Custom House Square on Saturday 8th March, the biggest fun day of its kind. Almost 6,000 attended this event.</p> <p>At 2 Royal Avenue, over 3,550 visitors engaged with a tailored programme of family-friendly activity, including arts, dance</p> <p>As with previous years, there was clear evidence of elongated dwell time in the city, with footfall clustering in Cathedral Gardens, Writers' Square, and 2 Royal Avenue before and</p>

	<p>after the parade. This wrap - around experience will continue to evolve, with plans to expand the storytelling element across Council-owned assets in future years. This will align with the future opening of Belfast Stories and the wider place-making strategy.</p> <p>A key consideration for 2026 will be the redevelopment of Cathedral Gardens, scheduled to begin in October 2025 and lasting approximately 12 months. This will impact use of that site for next year's programme, requiring early planning around alternate locations and infrastructure.</p> <p>Operationally, while the parade route does have pinch - points due to the high density of the spectators attending; new measures (such as a screen) were introduced in 2025 to mitigate against these particular risks, in consultation with the H&S Advisory and other stakeholders. There was also the addition of audio description for those with limited sight.</p>
3.1.3	<p>Alignment to the Cultural Strategy</p> <p>The 'City Imagining Strategy' approved by Council has a focus on supporting developing local arts and cultural organisations, through funding, commissioning and capacity building. In this regard, there was engagement with local arts, voluntary and community organisations to create props or coordinate performances of varying nature to enhance the overall production of the parade and highlight the local arts and culture within Belfast. Additionally, partners worked with the sector in the delivery of the wider programme.</p> <p>The ongoing development work aligned to an events action plan will continue to consider development opportunities for St Patricks Day.</p>
3.1.4	<p>Key Findings: Belfast St Patrick's Day 2025 socio-economic survey</p> <p><u>Visitor profile:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 51% of visitors from Belfast City Council area • 30% from elsewhere in Northern Ireland • 4% Republic of Ireland; 9% Great Britain, 6% other regions • 44% of those outside Northern Ireland, the event was the main reason for their trip • 24% staying in accommodation away from home • 32% attended the event with children • 58% had attended a St Patrick's Day event in Belfast before, 42% had not • 27% heard about the events by family /friends <p><u>Visitor Spend:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 93% ate out during the event, average spend per group £72.95 • Total average spend per group <i>excluding</i> accommodation £91.10 • 20% staying in accommodation in Belfast region

Overall estimated direct spend for the St Patrick's Celebrations excluding accommodation £788,062.28

Overall Rating:

- 86% gave the Parade a rating of 8-10, including 30% who rated it as 'Extremely good'.
- 97% of visitors agreed that the event improves NI's reputation as a host for events like these.
- 97% of visitors agreed that the event improves the reputation of NI as a place to visit.
- 90% agree /strongly agree events like this have can help shape a more accepting citizenship in our city.
- 100% of respondents believe that events like this encourage people to come to Belfast.
- 93% said that such events improve their sense of wellbeing and community.
- 96% felt the St Patrick's Celebrations were inclusive for all people from all cultural heritages.
- 94% agreed that there should be more events like this in Belfast.
- 98% would recommend the event to other people.
- 94% likely/very likely to visit St Patrick's Day celebrations in future years.

3.1.5 Marketing and Communications

An integrated marketing and PR campaign was delivered beginning in October 2024 with headline announcements and built to a full programme launch in February 2025.

The marketing and communications campaign achieved widespread positive media coverage across broadcast, print and online media, plus strong interest and engagement on social media.

Coverage spanned BBC, UTV, Cool FM, Q Radio, and major print and digital outlets including the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, and Belfast Live. Notably, Cool FM delivered a 4-hour live broadcast from 2 Royal Avenue.

Council operated a digital and outdoor advertising campaign from 24th February to promote the events taking place under the St Patrick's Celebrations banner, including all partner activity and the events at St George's and 2 Royal Avenue.

The advertising campaign included online advertising, radio and outdoor promotion in the form of adshels, impact wraps, digital hubs, adshel lives and bus T-sides. The campaign directed people to belfastcity.gov.uk/stpatricks where the event information was displayed

	<p>prominently on the page. Editorial features were also placed with Belfast Media Group and EasyJet magazine.</p> <p>Additionally, further details could be found on programming at partner and stakeholder websites and social media platforms including Visit Belfast, Tourism NI, TradFest, Conradh na Gaeilge, Féile, Beam Creative and MayWe.</p> <p>A press release was also issued on 21st February to promote the finer and confirmed details of the event schedule and this was followed by a traffic reminder and update on plans closer to the event. TradFest issued additional press to promote the music activity.</p> <p>Visit Belfast provided analytics of their Spring campaign which included the St Patrick's Day Celebrations.</p> <p>This included a double page spread in Belfast City Spring Guide, of which 30,000 copies were printed with a 150,000 Readership.</p> <p>The St Patrick's Day landing page - live from 24th February https://visitbelfast.com/ideas/st-patricks-day-in-belfast/ had 21,280 web visits.</p> <p>Social media advertising was across Meta & Tik Tok - 2x weeks targeted to NI region and Greater Belfast area closer to the event. The final stats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic Social = 254,458 Impressions, 87,637 Views, 63,625 Engagements • Content Series = – Best Place for Guinness – 94,277 Views, 187,869 Impressions, 2,879 Engagements • Paid Social = Meta - 240,370 impressions - 55,877 engagements, 94,100 video plays • TikTok - 206,486 impressions, 3,220 clicks, 204,912 video views <p>Additionally, there was a dedicated E-Zine and blog posts, and a small number of organic posts.</p>
3.2	<p>Way Forward 2026</p> <p>.</p> <p>A number of multi-year agreements are now in place with regards to the delivery of the wider St Patrick's Celebrations allowing for earlier planning and programme development for the 2026 event. The budget for the Celebrations is currently as per 2025.</p> <p>Members are advised that ongoing future developmental approaches will be addressed in the Events Action Plan and findings brought back to Committee in due course. This will address holistically the challenges and opportunities in relation to city events in their current form. For example, we know that SPD in particular requires consideration of a multi year planning approach.</p>

3.2.1	<p>As per the outlined procurement processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Féile an Phobail will progress into Year 3 of their award to deliver Trad Trail • Tradfest will progress into year 2 of their agreement to deliver the City Centre Music Programme • The Council will again in 2026 deliver the parade in-house with 'creative' contractors on year 2 of a three - year agreement on parade floats, professional performers and community engagement respectively.
3.3	<p>Christmas Lights Switch On Planning Update</p> <p>Members will be aware that Officers were asked to consider the engagement of a 'celebrity' to headline a future Christmas Lights Switch On. Officers have considered the proposal and consulted with contracted Health & Safety advisor. There are a number of concerns on how the reintroduction of a celebrity after a number of years would affect the existing crowd dynamics. The current demographic is mainly a family audience, and the inclusion of a celebrity with mass appeal could diversify the audience. Additionally, the current programme of entertainment has proven popular since the return of the switch on event post covid, currently programming demonstrated wide appeal to key audience segments, programming output is almost entirely Belfast based which represents good value for money. This aligns with the Cultural Strategy of supporting the local creative sector. Officers are seeking approval to continue with the existing approach to programming.</p> <p>Members will be aware that after a large audience descended on the City centre for the 2013 Switch On, it was agreed that the event necessitated ticketing. With the implementation of ticketing the event, officers face the challenge of converting a live city centre into a ticketed event space in a 15–20-minute window. Upon review of the 2024 event, a small number of additional operational measures can be implemented for 2025, including a wider perimeter on the approach to the ticketed zone supported by VMS advisory signage, and restricting parking within the event site on the day of the event. Furthermore, the start time could be 15-30 minutes later when shopping footfall continues to diminish.</p> <p>With previous years, there is always a high demand for tickets, yet a significant number of no-shows on the evening. This additional capacity does allow the Events team to admit non-ticket holders in the city centre.</p> <p>In addition to the core programming for the switch on event officers are developing plans to include a weekend animation programme up to the value of £50,000</p> <p>The Christmas lights switch on event marks the opening of the festive season and is aligned to the opening of the continental market and the implementation of the festive lights scheme.</p>

	<p>Members will be aware that an ongoing tender exercise has been underway to appoint a contractor to facilitate and deliver the festive lights programme. A contractor has been appointed with kick off site meetings occurring in early June. As part of the tender process indicative designs, core footprint and critical paths for delivery were sought.</p> <p>Officers will work with the incoming supplier and key stakeholders to engage with the detail regarding the scheme proposals, with additional support from the BCC estates team to secure the associated wayleaves and bring these under BCC ownership as previous schemes have utilised wayleaves via BCCM.</p> <p>Following the site visits in June officers propose to bring back a more detailed plan to August committee.</p>
3.4	<p>Oireachtas Festival</p> <p>Members will be aware of the decision taken at CG& R committee in August 2023 and again in October 2023 to approve proceeding with the Bid and consideration of any subsequent financial commitments to support the delivery of the Oireachtas na Samhna in 2025.</p> <p>The event takes place from the 29th October to 2nd November 2025. The festival is a significant cultural event that celebrates Irish language, arts and traditions. It is an annual event that attracts as many as 10,000 participants and spectators from across Ireland and beyond. Hosting the festival provides both economic and cultural benefits to the city; namely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A unique opportunity to celebrate the Irish language • Attracting visitors and generating economic impact through bed nights and day spend • Marketing and promotional opportunities • Community engagement • Opportunity to engage with a significant number of first time ROI visitors • Opportunity to build relationships with key media partners ahead of the Fleadh Cheoil <p>A programme board has been facilitating the event planning as well as identifying opportunities to support wider engagement and development of additional activities which will augment fixed Oireachtas programme.</p> <p>The event will take place across a number of city centre venues including the ICC & Waterfront Hall, Ulster Hall, City Hall and Europa Hotel. Officers are continuing to engage with the event organisers to support on delivery, marketing and visitor servicing for the event.</p> <p>To maximize the impact of such a festival, a small grants scheme for community groups has been identified as providing additional benefits. This scheme can provide the necessary financial support to grassroots organisations, enabling them to actively participate and contribute to the festival's success.</p>

	<p>The aim of this initiative is to generate community-based arts activity and engagement with civic events being hosted as part of Oireachtas na Samhna 2025 in Belfast city centre.</p> <p>Through Foras na Gaeilge's <i>Scéim Forbartha Líonraí Gaeilge</i> (Irish language Networks Development Scheme, or SFLG), Foras na Gaeilge fund 6 community-based projects in the Belfast City Council area to implement programmes of Irish language activity on a language planning model with a view to increasing awareness and usage of the Irish language in the community.</p> <p>Due to capacity and restricted timeframes to deliver a small grants programme it is proposed that a small events and activities fund of £30,000 to be divided among these 6 Belfast-based groups in 2025 and administered by Foras na Gaeilge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ionad Uíbh Eachach • Glór na Móna • Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain • Ionad na Faiseoige • An Droichead • Croí Éanna <p>One of the primary benefits of this small grants scheme is the empowerment of community groups. These groups often operate on limited budgets and may lack the resources to participate in large-scale events. By providing small grants, the scheme enables these groups to develop and implement projects that align both with the festival's objectives and the Belfast Agenda. Community groups can use the grants to organise events, workshops, and performances that highlight different aspects and provide pathways into participation of the competition elements of the event.</p> <p>Delivering tangible benefits in local communities, in businesses and in tourism, this support for local Irish language groups in Foras na Gaeilge's SFLG scheme will help the Oireachtas na Samhna festival achieve its full potential, creating a lasting and positive impact on the city.</p>
3.5	<p>Maritime festival</p> <p>Planning is well underway for the Maritime Festival to be delivered across the weekend of the 6-7th September 2025</p> <p>As per previous years this is delivered in partnership with Maritime Belfast Trust (MTB). The event is supported by a programme board delivery structure with key partners Maritime Belfast Trust, Visit Belfast, Belfast Harbour, DfC. Planning is well underway with new additional activation of the Slipways, Hamilton dock and the City Quays Gardens. This year will be the</p>

	<p>first year that MTB are delivering co funded programming including a Saturday evening concerts with Hot House Flowers.</p> <p>Maritime Belfast Trust (MBT) have entered into a delivery partnership with Council under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to programme Hamilton Dock and Titanic Slipways as part of the Belfast Maritime Festival 2025. Within the existing SLA, MBT will programme daytime activity but have also proposed to extend the Maritime offering to include an evening programme with a food and drink offering and a 'live' concert headlined by 'Hothouse Flowers.'</p> <p>As in previous years, Council would provide further in-kind support; covering daytime security, medical and health and safety provision, - all of which were in addition to the SLA.</p> <p>This in-kind support will now also extend to the evening offering, with Council covering security costs to further assist the delivery of the MBT concert. This allocation will be taken from existing project budgets.</p>
3.6	<p>Halloween</p> <p>In September 2024 members considered and approved proposals from BID one to support enhanced Halloween animation within the city centre.</p> <p>Officers are continuing to explore partnership proposals and associated costs through the BIDS to support animation activity in 2025 and will bring further details to the August committee.</p>
3.7	<p>The Open</p> <p>Officers are working in partnership with Tourism NI to support city dressing options at city hall and also with Visit Belfast to deliver visitor servicing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the front of house Visitor Servicing team participating in TNI Get Open Ready customer service training designed to enhance visitor engagement. • Development of a comprehensive "Open 153" fact sheet to assist frontline teams across all 4 VB Visitor Information Centres (VICs) in handling inquiries. • Frontline staff will be kept informed and updated on any promotional offers from partners related to the Open event. • Key visitor information regarding the Open will be shared in the upcoming Quarterly Industry Briefing at the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre (VBWC) on June 3rd, attended by approximately 40-45 participants. • Visit Belfast in partnership with Fáilte Ireland hope to have a staffed presence at the Tourism Northern Ireland stand during the Open on July 18th and 19th.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The VBWC and the Belfast International Airport (BIA) will feature golf-themed branding and VBWC develop a front window display with golf merchandise, in the lead-up to the event. • Golf-related materials, including "Made for Golf" leaflets, are available at the VBWC and BIA, along with a selection of golf merchandise for sale. <p>Publications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The upcoming Summer Publication of Belfast City Region Guide (30,000 printed and distributed) will include a "Beyond the Open" article, highlighting activities and showcasing golf partners for visitors interested in golfing during their stay. This content will also be adapted into a blog on the website. <p>Digital Engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A "Beyond the Open" blog will be created to provide guidance on navigating the city, including coach and travel information. • Social media content will be developed, focusing on activities available to visitors during breaks between rounds and after the event, utilising existing footage to streamline content creation. Featuring restaurants, bars and attractions alongside golf theme. • Open-related Landing page featuring offers and events collated from industry partners will be promoted on the visitor website visitbelfast.com . • Consumer E-Zine featuring Open-related offers and events, as well as a planning guide for city activities, will be distributed to various databases including Great Britain, Rest of World, and core markets. <p>Overall, Visit Belfast is actively enhancing visitor engagement and promoting the city through targeted activity, staff and industry briefings, training, city publications, and engaging digital content to maximise opportunities and enhance the visitor experience leading up to and during The Open event.</p>
4.0	<p>Financial and Resource Implications</p> <p>Financial resources will be met from within existing departmental budgets.</p>
5.0	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessment</p> <p>The cultural strategy, A City Imagining has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Specific initiatives as required will be subject to a further equality screening.</p>
	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None.</p>



Subject:	Music Strategy and UNESCO City of Music update
Date:	4 June 2025
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Chris McCreery, Culture Development Manager

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: 40px;" 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: 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"/>
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<p>Call-in</p>									
Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>									

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	
1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update members on the work relating to the UNESCO City of Music designation and seek approval of the 25/26 workplan related to the music strategy.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of this report and the progress made against areas of the music strategy, “Music Matters: A Roadmap for Belfast” • Agree the actions for 2025/26 as set out in the report and in Appendix 1 including budget implications to be met from existing departmental budgets
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in December 2022, members agreed the “Music Matters: A Roadmap for Belfast”. Mirroring A City Imagining cultural strategy the music strategy has four strategic themes, each having four strategic priorities. There are a number of actions and recommendations for each priority addressing various areas of need across the music sector, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1: Place artists at the heart - Recognising the value of creators • Theme 2: Nurture the sector - Strengthening the structures to support those who guide and invest in creators • Theme 3: Ignite the live experience - Liberating the live music sector as a major catalyst for cultural and economic growth • Theme 4: Unlock the unifying power of UNESCO – Connecting Belfast internationally
3.2	Detail on the substantive progress against each of these initiatives in 2024/25 is detailed in Appendix 3.
3.3	<p>The rest of this paper speaks to workplan proposals for 2025/26</p> <p><u>The Belfast Music Board</u></p> <p>The Music Strategy recommended establishing a Belfast Region Music Board to oversee the roadmap's implementation. Appointed in April 2023, the board comprises 22 members from diverse backgrounds and has co designed initiatives under the core themes of the strategy.</p> <p><u>Theme 1 - Placing Artists at the Heart</u></p>
3.4	A range of programmes under this theme are recommended. Highlights include the continuation of:

3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output Belfast - Delivered as a key event within the City of Music programme, the conference is due to take place on 25th September, features a full programme of panels, workshops and conferences, followed by an evening showcase of live music for free to the public. • Micro Bursaries scheme - This programme provides up to £1,000 to individual musicians, to assist with costs incurred within their artform. In 2023 and 2024, this programme was delivered in Collaboration with Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival, through enhancing their existing bursary programme to include a music micro-bursary. 38 musicians have received support to date • Gradam Ceoil bursary scheme - Running since 2021, the Gradam Ceoil Bursary Scheme is a series of three annual awards awarded to young (18–25-year-old) traditional musicians in Belfast, in partnership with Duncairn Arts Centre, Red Shoe productions and TG4. • Health and wellbeing - In 2023/24, officials have worked on a range of partnerships with key organisations such as the Music Leaders Network to co-design practical wellbeing events and initiatives focusing on the physical and mental health of music creators. This has manifested as a number of practical schemes, including a pilot programme with NI Alternatives entitled “Fit to March” which launched in September 2024. • Music Industry sessions - In 2024/25, officials delivered 6 industry free industry sessions for musicians. Proposed events thus far include focuses on women in sound design, managing your vocal health, radio plugging and tour booking. The UNESCO City of Music Hannover have agreed to partner with BCC on these sessions, supplying industry experts from their city for relevant topics.
3.6	<p>A new initiative under this years planning would be to introduce Teenage Kicks: Youth Music Programme</p> <p>The music strategy includes several key commitments aimed at engaging young people in the local music scene. Notably, commitment 1.7 focuses on “ensuring that music activities are accessible in safe spaces for all ages,” while commitment 4.4 seeks to “amplify and encourage the influence of young people within the music sector.” Furthermore, the UNESCO Creative Cities network has embraced the principle of “Bringing youth to the table for the next decade” as a core commitment during the UNESCO 2024 Annual General Meeting.</p>

	<p>To fulfil these commitments, we propose the development of a pilot youth music program specifically designed for individuals under 18. This initiative aims to boost attendance and raise awareness of music events among young people in the city. By hosting concerts across a variety of venues, we will showcase the diversity of Belfast's music scene and cultivate a vibrant community of young audiences. Additionally, the program will foster sector engagement through the introduction of micro-grants (up to £2,000) available to promoters, venues, and festivals, enabling them to organize high-quality music events tailored for under-18s in Belfast.</p>
3.7	<p>NI Music Prize/Sound of Belfast</p> <p>At the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on September 13, 2023, members agreed to support an independent review of the NI Music Prize and Sound of Belfast. Assessing alignment with the music strategy and potential for a long-term strategic partnership, with associated resources. It involved consultations with peers and benchmarking against similar events nationally and internationally, resulting in a series of recommendations that form a roadmap for development. The findings of this review are detailed in Appendix 2 of this report</p>
3.8	<p>The Northern Ireland Music Prize honours and celebrates the best of new, established, and emerging Northern Irish music, serving as a key event for Belfast and its UNESCO City of Music status. Organized annually by the Oh Yeah Music Centre, the awards night takes place at the Ulster Hall during the Sound of Belfast Festival, reflecting similar efforts in other regions of the UK and Ireland.</p>
3.9	<p>It is a significant milestone for Belfast, acting as a regional driver for the music industry in Northern Ireland. Belfast City Council is the primary funder of both the NI Music Prize and the Sound of Belfast programme. In 2023, the £30,000 funding from Belfast City Council was allocated to support the NI Music Prize, increasing to £45,000 in 2024, marking the first time it was shared between both Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize. The additional £15,000 allowed Oh Yeah to enhance its marketing efforts (£5,000) and cover rising travel and accommodation costs for visiting industry professionals (£10,000), which had significantly increased compared to the previous year. Funding acted as a lever for broader partnerships and investments, including Arts Council NI, BBC, PPL, PRS for Music, Arts & Business, Musicians' Union, Help Musicians, Rio Ferdinand Foundation, PRS Foundation, and others, contribute to this initiative.</p>
3.10	<p>The report recommends that:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast City Council support the NI Music Prize and Sound of Belfast through a multi-year agreement, enabling organisers to plan effectively, strengthen delivery, and focus on long-term goals. • Funding be increased to enhance, scale, and strengthen the activities delivered at Sound of Belfast, including the NI Music Prize. • Dedicated marketing and communications campaign to champion artists, promote the events, and engage new audiences with Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize.
3.11	<p>Based on the recommendations from this report and consultation with the Music Board, it is proposed to enter into a three-year multi-year agreement covering the event from 2025 to 2028. While the review suggests an investment of £65,000 per annum, it is important to consider the financial pressures on the music development budget across various themes. Therefore, it is recommended to allocate £55,000 annually to the NI Music Prize and Sound of Belfast, ensuring we can support these initiatives while addressing the broader funding needs across the music sector.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Theme two – Nurture the sector</u></p> <p>A range of initiatives are proposed within this theme with highlights including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sounds Atypical Scheme - The Sounds Atypical Music Grant scheme provides funding for d/Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent musicians to create accessible music events in various performance spaces across Belfast. This initiative was developed in collaboration with the University of Atypical for Arts and Disability (UofA), a disabled-led organization dedicated to arts and disability. • Music Business Accelerator Programme - partnering with colleagues in Economic Development to develop a Music Business Accelerator Programme tailored to the spectrum of needs within the music industry
3.13	<p><u>Theme 3 - Igniting the Live Experience</u></p> <p>A range of programmes are recommended for 2024/25, highlights including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Partnership with Music Venue Trust - The Music Venue Trust is a UK wide charity which acts to protect, secure and improve Grassroots Music Venues. The organisation has been a key partner during both the formation of the Music Strategy and at implementation stage. • Greening the Sector - we have partnered with Native Events on the creation of a Sustainability Toolkit for the music industry. We have completed Stage One where a

	steering group was formed and a sustainability survey was sent out to the sector to identify needs and priorities.
3.14	<p><u>Theme 4 – Unlocking the unifying power of UNESCO</u></p> <p>Theme 4 of the Music Strategy aims to provide more opportunities for embedding music in all corners and communities of the city and also seeks to position the Belfast City of Music brand on the international stage as a gateway to visitors and investors.</p>
3.15	<p>As part of Belfast’s application and status as a City of Music, member cities are committed to “<i>work internationally with the UNESCO Cities Network to deliver shared music, skills and learning opportunities.</i>”. Between 2023 - 2025, support has been provided for local music creators and industry to undertake international exchanges with other UNESCO Cities of Music such as Kansas City, USA, Hannover, Germany, Brno, Czech Republic, and London, Ontario Canada. In addition, a partnership with the Belfast International Arts Festival has provided a platform for a special UNESCO day each year featuring acts from other UNESCO cities at the Festival. It is proposed to continue this partnership with the Belfast International Arts Festival through hosting a UNESCO City of Music day in November 2025, featuring musicians from Daegu, Korea.</p>
3.16	<p>As well as collaboration between cities, UNESCO Member cities are also expected to take part in official UNESCO events, including the annual UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) conference and UNESCO Music subnetwork meetings. The UCCN Annual Conference, a key component of the Network, offers all member cities a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation which has led to the establishment of long-term, impactful international partnerships and initiatives. Attendance at this AGM is a mandatory requirement for creative cities and officials from the Culture Development team will attend this two-day event scheduled on 24th and 25th June at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France.</p>
3.17	<p>UNESCO monitoring and evaluation</p> <p>It is important to note that 2025 will mark four years since Belfast was awarded the title of UNESCO City of Music. As part of this year, Belfast City Council has to complete and submit its Membership Monitoring Report highlighting each Creative Cities’ contribution to UCCN’s implementation. This report is mandatory for member cities every four years and will require a detailed analysis of progress against commitments in the music strategy alongside a plan and</p>

<p>3.18</p> <p>3.19</p>	<p>budget for the following four years. Officials are actively working on this report which is due for submission in July 2025.</p> <p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no new financial implications. The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2025/26 budget from existing departmental budgets allocated to music development for the Culture and Tourism section of the Economic Development division of the Place and Economy.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining</i> and the Music Matters Music Strategy have both been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Specific initiatives as required will be subject to a further equality screening.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Music Workplan 2025-26</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Strategic review of Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Update on progress against 2024/25 Music Workplan</p>

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Appendix 1 – 2025-2026 Music Strategy Initiatives

Theme 1 <i>Placing Artists at the Heart</i>	1.4	Gradam Ceoil bursary scheme (multi year commitment)	Partnership with Duncairn Arts Centre. Including 3 bursaries for emerging musicians	February 2026	£18,000
Theme 1 <i>Placing Artists at the Heart</i>	1.4	Micro bursaries programme, available to individual musicians, to assist with costs incurred within their artform.	Following a successful pilot round with 20 musicians supported, continue to partner with the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival to provide grants for local music creators.	October 2025 to March 2026	£25,000
Theme 1 <i>Placing Artists at the Heart</i>	1.7 4.1	Support and enhance initiatives which provide instruments for local communities across Belfast to ensure individuals, regardless of age, sex or background, have the opportunity to learn or engage with music	Partnership with the Ulster Orchestra to identify former Crescendo pupils from Years 8 and 9 (as of Sept 24) who wish to avail of a free bursary scheme providing tuition and instruments which the school and/or pupils cannot access otherwise. Support for approximately 70 pupils who would not have the means to own an instrument or have tuition beyond primary education.	June 2025 to March 2026	£20,000
Theme 1 <i>Placing Artists at the Heart</i>	1.8 2.8	Co-design with sectoral stakeholders and fund a programme of practical wellbeing events and initiatives to ensure the physical and mental health of music creators is safeguarded and protected throughout the year.	Partnership with key organisations such as the Fit to March programme, Help Musicians and Tonic Rider	June 2025 to March 2026	£10,000

Theme 1 <i>Placing Artists at the Heart</i>	1.7 2.2 3.2	Co-design with sectoral stakeholders a series of projects that will allow for the Priorities within Theme 1 that require ongoing activity to be addressed.	Partner with key stakeholders and groups to launch initiatives that address an array of 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 2025 – March 2026	£12,000
Theme 1 <i>Placing Artists at the Heart</i>	1.7 4.4	Teenage Kicks: Youth Music Programme	Programme targeting young people (under 18s). This programme will encourage attendance and increase awareness of music events in the city by young people. Concerts in a range of venues will open up the diversity of the music scene and foster a community of young audiences for acts in the city. The programme will ensure buy-in from the sector through a pilot of micro grants (up to £2,000) open to promoters, venues and festivals, to run high quality music events for under-18s in Belfast.	Start date October 2025	£20,000
Theme 2 <i>Nurture the Sector</i>	2.5 3.3 5.3	NI Music Prize & Sound of Belfast	Event celebrating the very best of new, established and emerging Northern Irish music. Additional support to include enhanced support for musicians and increased marketing elements.	November 2025	£55,000
Theme 2 <i>Nurture the Sector</i>	2.1	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	Continuation of the Music Connections website and online directory and support service for musicians.	February 2026 to February 2027	£30,000

Theme 2 <i>Nurture the Sector</i>	2.1 14.1	Continuation of Belfast Music Social Channels and platforms	Continuation of the “OurBelfastMusic” social channels.	September 2025 to September 2026	£15,000
Theme 2 <i>Nurture the Sector</i>	2.4 2.5	Output Belfast	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.	September 2025	£33,000
Theme 2 <i>Nurture the Sector</i>	7.1 5.3 6.2 2.3 2.5	Music Business Accelerator Programme	Working with colleagues in Economy we are developing a Music Business Accelerator Programme tailored to a spectrum of needs in the music industry, repackaging existing support programmes and connecting to specific industry events across 2025/26.	Start date June 2025	Costs met with existing budgets allocated to Enterprise and Business Growth
Theme 2 <i>Nurture the Sector</i>	2.4 2.5	City of Music Industry Sessions	Continued programming of free and accessible educational events around an array of topics within the music industry. A space to allow local music creators and entrepreneurs to network together.	June 2025 to March 2026	£10,000
Theme 2 <i>Nurture the Sector</i>	5.4	Allocate programming funding to support organisations who seek to develop and promote diverse and under-represented genres	Continue to support projects, including a partnership with BLAKMEX, that develop and promote diverse and under-represented genres where gaps are identified.	June 2025 to March 2026	£15,000
Theme 2 <i>Nurture the Sector</i>	1.1 5.2 5.4	Allocate programming funding to support organisations who seek to provide opportunities for disabled musicians in performance spaces across Belfast	A partnership with University of Atypical that will support the charity in continuing a fund for the d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse community within music to run accessible music events.	September 2025 - March 2026	£30,000

Theme 2 <i>Nurture the Sector</i>	6.1 6.2 6.3 6.4 7.4 7.7	Co-design with sectoral stakeholders a series of projects that will allow for the Priorities within Theme 2 that require ongoing activity to be addressed.	Partner with key stakeholders and groups to launch initiatives that address an array of Priorities across Theme 2, such as providing pathways for artist and industry representative attendance at international conferences to develop new networks, sourcing alternative education opportunities for continuous upskilling of the local music sector and creating pathways for local music businesses to be nurtured.	June 2025 – March 2026	£15,000
Theme 3 <i>Igniting the Live Experience</i>	9.1 9.3 9.4 9.5	Music Venue Trust	Continuation of 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.	July 25 to March 2026	£12,000
Theme 3 <i>Igniting the Live Experience</i>	12.2 7.5	Aligning with UNESCO ambitions, delivery and rollout of “Go Green” Sustainability toolkit with Native Events	Roll out of phase two and implementation of Music Sustainability Toolkit for music sector.	June 2025 to March 2026	£10,000
Theme 3 <i>Igniting the Live Experience</i>	10.3 11.1 11.2 11.6	Co-design with sectoral stakeholders a series of projects that will allow for the Priorities within Theme 3 that require ongoing activity to be addressed.	Partner with key stakeholders and groups to launch initiatives that address an array of Priorities across Theme 3, such as enhancing 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 2025 – March 2026	£12,000
Theme 4 <i>Unlock the unifying Power of UNESCO</i>	16.1	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.	Ongoing	£5,000

Theme 4 <i>Unlock the unifying Power of UNESCO</i>	UNESCO City of Music Commitments	Work internationally with the UNESCO Cities Network to deliver shared music, skills and learning opportunities.	<p>Support active participation in UNESCO cultural networks with reciprocal benefits between the cities including but not limited to partnership with UCoM cities Kansas City (US) Hannover (Germany) Daegu (South Korea), Conde (Brazil), Ghent (Belgium) and Bologna (Italy).</p> <p>Includes BCC representation on UNESCO Music subnetwork meetings and UNESCO Celebration Day hosted by the Belfast International Arts Festival.</p>	June 2025 to August 2024	£30,000
Theme 4 <i>Unlock the unifying Power of UNESCO</i>	15.2 16.1	Co-design with sectoral stakeholders a series of projects that will allow for the Priorities within Theme 4 that require ongoing activity to be addressed.	Partner with key stakeholders and groups to launch initiatives that address an array of 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 2025 – March 2026	£15,000

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Strategic review of Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize

Final report and recommendations



Researched and presented by Fourth Pillar



January 2025

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1. Introduction

"There are high hopes for what music can do in NI and big ideas on how to make it happen."
- Charlotte Dryden, CEO, Oh Yeah Music Centre

In April 2024, following a competitive tender process, Belfast City Council appointed Fourth Pillar to undertake a strategic review of the *Sound of Belfast* festival and the *NI Music Prize*. These flagship events are cornerstones of Belfast's music calendar and hold immense cultural and economic significance for Northern Ireland (NI).

This review builds upon the Council's earlier initiatives to support the city's music sector, most notably its *Music Matters* strategy. Developed by Fourth Pillar in collaboration with Morgan Young Consulting and ScoreDrawMusic, *Music Matters* outlines a comprehensive roadmap to nurture talent, embed music into the fabric of Belfast, and enhance access to musical opportunities across the city. Its publication in November 2021, followed by Belfast's designation as a UNESCO City of Music, marked a pivotal moment for the city's cultural community.

Recognising the potential of Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize to deliver on these strategic objectives, the Council commissioned this review to explore how its support and investment can maximise the impact of these events. The aim of this project is not merely to assess the strengths and challenges of these two important events, but to provide forward-looking recommendations that can help maximise their potential and which align with the Council's cultural vision and UNESCO commitments.

To inform the review's findings, Fourth Pillar conducted an extensive consultation with over 30 key stakeholders. Feedback was sought from local industry representatives as well as artists from various genres and from the organisers of some of the UK and Ireland's leading conferences and awards.

Derived from the insights collated, a series of actionable recommendations are proposed that reflect the value and potential of these much-loved events.

The Council has a clear commitment to placing culture and creativity at the heart of Belfast's development. In line with this, the review aims to ensure that Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize continue to thrive as catalysts for local talent, cultural vibrancy and economic growth, while reinforcing Belfast's standing as a UNESCO City of Music.

2. Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize: the story so far

"The NI Music Prize is a masterclass in organisation; the event outclasses most other industry events in the UK. – Beverly Whitrick, Music Venue Trust

To provide meaningful recommendations for the development of Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize, it is essential to first understand their origins, purpose and evolution. Although the NI Music Prize takes place within the overarching programme of Sound of Belfast, this report considers them as two separate events.

a. About Sound of Belfast

Sound of Belfast began its journey in 2011 as *Belfast Music Week*, an initiative launched by Belfast City Council to coincide with the city hosting the MTV European Music Awards. The Council initially committed to delivering the festival for three years. When this period ended in 2014, the Oh Yeah Music Centre assumed leadership of the citywide festival, recognising its potential as a catalyst for developing the local music sector and ensuring its continuity and growth for the benefit of both Belfast and NI.

Having celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2024, Sound of Belfast has grown into a ten day celebration of musical talent, powered by passion, expertise, and collaboration. The festival is embraced by the local music community, from venues and artists to audiences and local retail and hospitality – all of whom contribute to and benefit from its ecosystem. Its impact resonates across Belfast - North, South, East, West – and beyond, bringing people together in a way that only music can.

Full details on Sound of Belfast 2024 can be viewed via its dedicated website: soundofbelfast.com

b. About the NI Music Prize

The NI Music Prize stands as Northern Ireland's largest annual music event under one roof and the region's only dedicated music awards show. Hosted at the iconic Ulster Hall as part of the Sound of Belfast festival, it brings together 1,000 music fans, media, artists and industry professionals each year to celebrate the rich talent of NI's music scene.

The Prize has expanded over the years to feature seven award categories: Album of The Year, Single of The Year, Live Act of The Year, Video of The Year, BBC Radio Ulster ATL Introducing Award (emerging talent), Outstanding Contribution to Music and the Oh Yeah Legend Award. Recipients of the prestigious Legend Award have included artists and groups from NI such as Paul Brady, Henry McCullough, Ash, The Divine Comedy, Therapy?, Terri Hooley, Snow Patrol and Eric Bell.

The significance of the NI Music Prize extends far beyond the local scene. Nationally and internationally, it highlights the diversity and inclusivity of NI's music landscape, showcasing its broad and eclectic talent to the world. Its growing reputation has inspired other regional awards across the UK and Ireland, firmly placing NI music on the cultural map.

Its growing success has helped to attract a diverse range of respected sponsors and partners including YouTube Music, Shine Promotions, PPL, IMRO, PRS For Music, the Rio Ferdinand Foundation, Destination CQ, Bushmills Irish Whiskey, Arts Council NI, Help Musicians, Tourism NI, Invest NI and BBC Northern Ireland.

For more information on the NI Music Prize, visit nimusicprize.com

c. About the Oh Yeah Music Centre

The Oh Yeah Music Centre, founded in 2007 by a group of music advocates, including Gary Lightbody (Snow Patrol) and Stuart Bailie (author and broadcaster), is the driving force behind Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize. Named after one of Ash's iconic songs, Oh Yeah is a Belfast-based music charity rooted in the belief that music can be a catalyst for positive change in NI.

Based in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter, it supports, develops and celebrates NI music. It combines the verve of the music industry with a programme of social value and has welcomed more than one million people through its doors since opening. In 2024, it became the first NI venue to win the coveted *Music Week Grassroots Venue: Spirit of the Scene* award. It also played a pivotal role in securing Belfast's UNESCO City of Music designation, with its CEO, Charlotte Dryden, appointed as Chair of the Belfast Music Steering Group which led the charge on securing the prestigious international accolade.

In addition to hosting Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize, Oh Yeah's small and dedicated team – supported by part time staff, freelancers and volunteers – manages the following:

- A 300 capacity music venue, NI music exhibition and bus tour
- Talent development and artist showcasing activities
- Youth outreach and skills development programmes
- Music projects for older people
- Facilities including office rentals, a recording studio, performance and rehearsal spaces, and meeting rooms
- Partnerships and advocacy for NI's music sector

Oh Yeah continues to be a cornerstone of NI's music community, combining passion and expertise to amplify its cultural and social impact. Recognising the significant and extensive work undertaken by Oh Yeah, the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Micky Murray, selected the organisation as one of his four official charities for 2024/25.

To read more about the Oh Yeah Music Centre, visit ohyeahbelfast.com

3. Our approach to the brief

Between June and November 2024, the Fourth Pillar team met with a diverse range of stakeholders (see Appendix 1), including local artists from a variety of genres, industry representatives, and organisers of leading music conferences and awards across the UK and Ireland.

These meetings, each lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, were held both virtually and in person. A member of the Fourth Pillar team travelled to Output Belfast to host additional meetings. We ensured a broad representation of perspectives, considering diversity in genre, ethnicity, and gender.

Additionally, we engaged with the Oh Yeah Music Centre, as the organiser of these two events, and held a two hour workshop with the Belfast Region Music Board to gain further insights into the strategic priorities for these events.

Our aim was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities for advancing these events and helping them achieve their full potential with additional support from Belfast City Council.

The feedback, which has informed the key areas identified for development and recommendations, is outlined in the following sections.

4. Feedback from local music industry stakeholders

This section presents feedback gathered from local music professionals in Belfast regarding Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize. The overall sentiment is one of deep appreciation and enthusiasm for both events, with strong support for their continued growth and success. Many see these events as vital to the city's music scene and culture, and there is a shared desire to see them flourish.

A major recurring theme that stood out from the feedback is the crucial role Belfast City Council can play in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the two events, particularly through multi-annual funding. This support is seen as essential to providing the stability required to help each one reach its full potential and further cement Belfast's position as a hub for music and creativity.

Key takeaways

- **Financial support: Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize return significant value to Belfast and Northern Ireland, despite being underfunded and under-resourced**

There is strong agreement across this community that both Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize are underfunded and under-resourced. This has been heightened by the increased cost of doing business as well as NI-wide cuts to the Arts sector's funding in recent years.

Industry stakeholders want to see the Oh Yeah team enabled and empowered to deliver the event year on year through a multi-annual funding commitment, giving security and stability. Rather than the same funding conversations taking place every year, which creates uncertainty and is a drain on resources, the frequency of these funding reviews should be reduced to once every three years to allow for planning and growth.

The organisational team behind these large scale events comprises 4 full time staff (including the CEO and Director of Operations), 5 part time staff, 10 contractors and up to 15 volunteers, with Oh Yeah's core staff managing curation, logistics, venue coordination, in house production, marketing, sponsorships and more - on top of their daily responsibilities.

Despite their dedication, minimal funding results in heavy reliance on goodwill to sustain the ambitious citywide programme. Sector professionals recognise the festival's significant demands on such a small and committed team. The team is to be commended for all it does.

A strategic partnership with Belfast City Council, with financial and in-kind benefits, will allow Oh Yeah to grow its team, curate with confidence and plan for the future.

- **Artist support: through a combination of career development and financial rewards for artists, Sound of Belfast / NI Music Prize could help artists smash the glass ceiling and drive breakthrough success for local talent**

Sound of Belfast is an excellent platform for showcasing local talent, while – as also noted by artists later in the review – an NI Music Prize nomination is a badge that artists wear with pride. Nominated acts benefit from social media promotion and a reception on the evening of the awards show. Prize winners receive media attention and often benefit from increased bookings, health and wellness support, and access to funding.

Feedback from the Belfast Region Music Board and industry stakeholders demonstrates an appetite for enhancing this wraparound artist support at both Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize. This could take the form of a meet and greet during the Sound of Belfast for all nominated acts or the opportunity to meet industry professionals / journalists who can open more doors for artists, as well as larger financial rewards for Prize winners and other career development opportunities to help artists build a sustainable career in music.

The Council's support for this type of activity would deliver on the Strategy's core theme of "placing artists at the heart" of its commitments to music.

- **Marketing: the NI Music Prize is one of the region's best kept secrets – we should be shouting about it from the rooftops**

The NI Music Prize has been described as the "jewel in the crown" of Sound of Belfast. It is an incredible resource for music in the city and a veritable stage for showcasing burgeoning talent in this small – but musically renowned – part of the world. However, underresourcing forces the organising team to focus on event delivery over promotion.

The NI Music Prize should be a front page story for local media and resonate beyond the industry. Feedback highlighted the need for a dedicated marketing and communications professional / agency to develop an overarching strategy, with artist outreach and engagement at its core, supporting emerging acts and leveraging success stories from local names such as Hannah Peel, Snow Patrol, Bicep, Foy Vance, Jordan Adetunji and Bronagh Gallagher to raise its profile. High-profile artists advocating for the Prize and Sound of Belfast, equipped with promotional toolkits, could attract greater attention and increase ticket sales.

There is significant potential for the Council to help the Prize build even more muscle and attract more attention from both the music industry and the general public. The Council's

existing machinery of marketing and communications can play an important role in this, in addition to any financial support it can provide to ensure these fantastic flagship music events can be accessed, enjoyed and attended by new audiences.

- **Partnerships and sponsorships: an “all hands on deck” approach to promoting music in Belfast in November would benefit the local economy and wider society**

Each year, Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize attract music fans, tourists and industry stakeholders to the City, many experiencing the city’s vibrant music, culture and hospitality for the first time. Beyond live music, delegates can engage in topical discussions about music and attend educational workshops to develop a career in this exciting business.

The potential to expand on this impact is huge. A collaborative effort involving the Council and its partners – such as Visit Belfast, Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland, UNESCO Cities Network and Belfast’s Sister Cities (e.g. Nashville) – could develop a dedicated music tourism campaign in the autumn (if not all year round).

To aid with the funding and reduce reliance on public funding and ticket sales, the event must also attract more top tier sponsors. The Council can play a role in introducing Oh Yeah to new sponsors from within its business community. Music is an attractive space for employers to step into and the Council can be an important gateway to introducing Oh Yeah to these entities.

5. Feedback from the local artist community

A critical part of this review has been speaking to the local artist community to understand its experience of Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize. This feedback has helped to shape our recommendations on how investment and backing from Belfast City Council could help the event organisers to enhance and build on the measures and initiatives already in place to support career development for creatives. The artists we spoke to included previous winners and nominees of the NI Music Prize, as well as the wider artist community.

Artist feedback demonstrated the strong sense of community fostered by the event as well as the importance of being acknowledged and celebrated by your peers. With artists in NI often feeling “disconnected”, the Prize provides an opportunity to be part of a broader network. It was described as “genuinely special” to win the Prize and it was noted that the Prize does a great job of celebrating NI music and being broadly representative.

The accolade of winning or being nominated is an asset for artists’ bios or promotional materials (such as press releases), helping to elevate a performer to a new level in the eyes of the press or industry stakeholders. The artists we spoke to said that being part of the Prize was incredible; it is gratifying, the sense of community is strong, and it is an accolade that strengthens an artist’s CV.

Key takeaways

- **The Prize as a “pathway”: a request for more wraparound artist support**

Some of those we spoke to explained that whilst it was an incredible experience, being associated with the Prize did not always help to materially progress their career. It was felt that this could be influenced by more wraparound support for those who are nominated or win an award.

For example, the facilitation of industry connections with record labels, broadcasters, digital music services, festival bookers, live agents and industry bodies – not just in Belfast but, importantly, across Ireland, the UK and internationally. This kind of outward facing approach could propel artists to the next stage in their careers beyond Belfast's borders. It was suggested Belfast City Council use Sound of Belfast as an opportunity to host a Music Summit, bringing together professionals and creatives from across the industry to focus on career development, learning and networking.

Reintroducing a streaming partner, like the previous collaboration with YouTube, could further amplify the NI Music Prize's impact. Beyond streaming, partners have the potential to offer career advice to artists and help build meaningful business connections with those based outside NI. Additionally, dedicated funding for travel and accommodation would enable Oh Yeah to invite senior industry representatives as well as UK / international journalists to Belfast, fostering valuable networking opportunities for local talent.

- **Connections and collaborations: facilitating artistic innovation within the community**

Despite the relatively small size of the NI music community, interviewees said it can be isolating and lonely to be an artist in this part of the world. Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize already provide a moment in the calendar for the sector to come together, fostering connections and collaborations for attendees.

On this theme, it was suggested that multiple nominees could perform together at the Prize, providing an opportunity for a bespoke collaboration and giving more nominees the chance to perform to a large audience.

Building upon this, it was suggested by artists, echoing the industry interviewees, that a specific event be organised for all nominees to come together to meet one another. This would provide a more structured opportunity for networking and relationship building.

- **Embracing diversity: recognising and reflecting the strength of the NI music community**

Northern Ireland has a thriving music community. General feedback highlights the positive strides in diversifying Sound of Belfast and NI Music Prize to reflect this, with 2024 involving and showcasing broader representation than ever before across the festival's events, panels, awards nominations and performances. It was noted how passionate and dedicated the Oh Yeah team is to openness, inclusivity and to supporting underrepresented communities, both in professional and personal capacities.

It was said repeatedly that the Prize should not and cannot be "all things to all people" and that it must continue to focus on showcasing the very best in NI music. However, there is a desire to further deepen the commitment of these events to inclusivity, ensuring that more voices, genres and communities feel represented and celebrated.

Feedback stated that more could be done to keep engaging with musicians making music in genres like Soul, Hip Hop, Rap, and RnB as well as those across other ethnicities in NI, showcasing the incredible diaspora who make up the musical fabric of the region. This includes those from the Indian, African and Asian music communities, to ensure the events reflect the growing demographics of the region.

Genre diversity was also a topic of feedback, with electronic music being singled out for its relative absence. The electronic music scene has long been a strength of the NI music scene, with brands like Shine, AVA and Emerge demonstrating its popularity. Despite this, feedback highlights that the genre remains relatively underrepresented in both the Sound of Belfast programme and the NI Music Prize.

Suggestions to address this include introducing a new category for electronic music, which would elevate its status and place it alongside more traditional forms of music. Alternatively, hosting an afterparty / rave as part of the Prize could provide a dynamic platform to showcase electronic artists. It was also suggested that, if not already in place, an experienced representative from the community could join the voting panel for the Album Prize category, giving the scene a seat at the table for the event.

It is hoped that greater marketing, audience engagement and outreach will help to engage and attract the interest of diverse communities and genres. It was also suggested that curators (drawn from leaders within diverse communities) be appointed, empowered and funded to deliver significant elements of the Sound of Belfast programme. These events, supported by Sound of Belfast's existing infrastructure of venues, would provide an outlet for talent development and musical discovery, bringing new music to new audiences and ensuring diversity is core to these flagship events.

- **Spread the word: more marketing is a must!**

The Prize continues to receive strong and positive press coverage; however, feedback stated that this tends to focus too heavily on the recipient of the Legend Award, who is an established and usually high profile / household name from the local music industry, as opposed to newer talent, who would benefit from increased promotion.

Both artists and industry professionals have expressed a clear consensus: there is significant untapped potential to elevate the marketing and communications of Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize. By enhancing these efforts, the events could reach a wider audience of music fans across NI, sell more tickets, attract sponsors and raise their profile nationally and internationally. Inviting and hosting journalists at the Prize is one key recommendation to address this.

There is also a desire for more artist promotion as part of the marketing strategy, with social media playing a central role. Suggestions include introducing a red carpet on the night of the Prize, launching a dedicated marketing campaign for the voting stage of the Prize, and increasing targeted investment into both B2B and B2C advertising.

This is one area where Belfast City Council is well positioned to make a real difference relatively easily. Council can leverage its in-house resources, offer advertising inventory across the city and facilitate connections with potential sponsors. Allocating ringfenced funding would enable Oh Yeah to appoint a dedicated marketing agency that can design and drive an integrated campaign across social media, radio and TV, and print (trades, national and international).

6. Learning from leading events across the UK and Ireland

As part of this review, Fourth Pillar met with founders and representatives of some of the UK and Ireland's leading conferences and events, namely **The Choice Music Prize**, **The MOBOs** and **The Great Escape**.

These deep dives provided an opportunity to understand how similar events are resourced, delivered and evaluated and how they have developed over time to become anchor events in the music industry calendar, garnering national and international attention for their respective communities. Our findings feed into the recommendations at the end of this report.

a) The RTÉ Choice Music Prize (Dublin)

Founded in 2005, the RTÉ Choice Music Prize is an annual award celebrating the best album by a band or solo artist from the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland. For bands, the majority of members must be Irish born. The Prize was created to encourage, highlight, and promote excellence in Irish music and its mission is to showcase the growth and vibrancy of Ireland's music scene at that specific moment in time.

The RTÉ Choice Music Prize is judged solely on artistic merit, without consideration for commercial factors such as sales, streams, or airplay. Awards presented on the night include Irish Album of the Year, Song of the Year, Artist of the Year, Breakthrough Artist, and Classic Album. However, the highlight of the event is a live showcase, where the ten nominees for Album of the Year each perform three songs.

In terms of media partners and sponsors, RTÉ became the main sponsor in 2016, providing additional support with social media, design assets, radio airplay, and promotion. The partnership includes a one-hour TV highlights package and live radio broadcast, making RTÉ's involvement integral to the award's visibility, success and its artist-focused approach.

The Prize has a set calendar for its media announcements; in January, the shortlist is revealed, with RTÉ drip-feeding the album nominations daily, whilst February sees the announcement of the Conversations conference, which happens alongside the Prize and provides an opportunity for aspiring talent and industry professionals to come together for career development, learning and networking. Between January and March, a number of other announcements are promoted on RTÉ, ensuring consistency and frequency in the Prize's promotional efforts.

Thanks to RTÉ's support, the Prize has become a must-see event in the Irish music calendar, generating a buzz that elevates all artists involved. It's not just about winning, though the winner has been awarded a €10,000 prize since its inaugural year; being nominated is an achievement in itself, with all album nominees gathering backstage together just before the winner is announced on the night.

In terms of resourcing, the Prize is run by a small core team, with freelancers and contractors engaged to deliver the production and to ramp up marketing and social media activity at key moments in the promotional calendar. Revenues are generated via ticket sales, sponsorships and partnerships. Culture Ireland also provides EUR €1,000 per album nominee to be used towards travel expenses to attend and perform at the event.

Key takeaways

- **Clear purpose:** The Prize has clarity of purpose by focusing primarily on the Album Award as the main event, delivering for audiences on cultural relevance and musical excellence.
- **Strategic marketing:** An engaged media partner across traditional and digital media (including a one hour televised package) combined with a defined marketing calendar further the reach of the Prize to national audiences.
- **Artist costs:** The provision of funding to cover travel costs enables all Album nominees to attend, whilst a €10,000 award is considered a meaningful prize for the winner.

b. The MOBOs (various locations across the UK)

The MOBO organisation supports Black talent across the industry, adapting to the ever-shifting music landscape, fuelling the Black talent pipeline and celebrating the achievements of those who have become household names, from Stormzy and Dave to Central Cee and RAYE.

Its flagship event, The MOBOs, champions music of Black origin in multiple genres including hip hop, grime, UK Drill, R&B, soul, reggae, jazz, gospel, and African music. Established in 1996 by Kanya King and Andy Ruffell, The MOBOs have become a cultural cornerstone, promoting the evolution and success of Black music.

Behind this hugely successful and popular event is a small core team which, like many others in the music landscape, face significant challenges, from limited resources to changing consumer tastes and trends. With no public monies, the funding of the event relies on ticket sales, sponsorships and partnerships. As such, multi-year funding agreements have become essential for its long-term success, providing the financial stability needed to host a live awards show broadcast on national TV and sustain an international marketing campaign.

Whilst the event and the organisation strive to promote new talent, this goal is balanced by celebrating those who are representing music of Black origin on the global stage. Both emerging and established names co-exist on the bill, with high profile acts often acting as ambassadors for the MOBOs' globally renowned brand. Worn as a badge of honour, the accolade of winning an award is promoted via a dedicated PR campaign that reaches national and international audiences via broadcast, radio and social media platforms.

Partnerships, like the long-standing one with the BBC, are invaluable for producing exclusive content and engaging audiences, whilst the MOBOs' partnerships with the likes of Help Musicians and Marshall are a critical way of supporting artists at the early stages of their career through access to equipment, studio time and mentoring.

Key takeaways

- **Financing:** Multi-annual funding commitments are essential to the event's stability and success.
- **Strategic use of big name acts:** The event maximises the use of established artists; this approach attracts new audiences, inspires emerging talent, helps to sell tickets and provides ambassadorial roles for successful stars within the community.

- **Partnerships mean prizes:** Partnerships with third parties such as Help Musicians and Marshall provide additional wraparound support for emerging and developing artists in a tough financial climate.

c. The Great Escape (Brighton)

The Great Escape Festival is a four-day music event held in Brighton every May, operated by MAMA Festivals. Since its launch in 2006, it has become a premier showcase for emerging talent across various genres. With around 500 bands performing at 30 venues, it offers fans the chance to discover new music in intimate settings before these acts hit the main stages of major festivals.

Attracting a strong music industry presence, The Great Escape hosts a four-day conference with over 4,000 delegates. The conference features panels, debates, keynotes, and valuable networking opportunities, making it a must-attend event for industry professionals.

The Great Escape is run by two full-time staff, with support from a Marketing Manager, a central Finance Team, and a team of designers and freelancers, many of whom work on other events run by MAMA Festivals.

Artist development is a key driver of both the conference and the showcases, with many learning and networking opportunities for emerging talent. All performing artists receive a wristband to attend showcases and a delegate pass for the conference.

Crucial international collaborations, like those with export offices, facilitate festival exchanges, while local partnerships with universities help attract next generation talent. The Great Escape has 100 stage “hosts”, all of which take the lead on proposing talent to perform, with the final selection being agreed with The Great Escape’s booking team.

With 25 media partners, ranging from national press to music trades, media coverage boosts visibility, drives industry attendance, and amplifies exposure for emerging artists through association with the festival. Media partners do not pay for the opportunity; rather, they provide platforms for artist exposure and promotion, lend credibility to the event and raise awareness of The Great Escape with national and international audiences.

The event does not receive public funding; however, it does work closely with the Arts Council England on different projects. There is no public money in the P&L; the event is fully commercialised (in part by charging partners to showcase) and relies on sponsorships and ticket sales to generate revenue.

Key takeaways

- **Support of a parent company** – while many events are run in-house by small teams, The Great Escape benefits from the support of its parent company for core operations (e.g. finance), with personnel able to focus more on creative delivery and programming.
- **Reaching international artists and audiences** – partnerships with Export Offices and other international bodies help The Great Escape to attract new talent, attendees and funders.
- **Quid pro quo with media** – The Great Escape has an extensive number of media partners who do not pay to attend but return the favour by writing about the event

and adding to the buzz around its programming. This takes its media coverage to a national and international level.

7. Recommendations

"Sound of Belfast can help Belfast City Council to deliver on its music strategy. It's one of the only resources that properly shines a light on what we do here." - Member, Belfast Region Music Board

This review highlights the crucial role that Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize play in delivering Belfast City Council's music strategy. However, these events have the potential to do even more with consistent and strategic support.

To facilitate discussions for Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize in 2025 and beyond, it is helpful to have an overview of the events' engagement and impact in 2024.

a) Sound of Belfast / NI Music Prize 2024

2024 saw the Sound of Belfast reach new heights, engaging and reaching more people than ever before. Thanks to new events and partnerships, the festival showcased more than 200 artists across 90 events held in 43 venues and spaces throughout the city. Notable new partnerships included the PRS Foundation Talent Development Network annual conference and *Output Belfast*, Ireland's largest one-day music conference. The expanded programme engaged an audience of 56,500 - an increase of 80% compared to 2023 with average audiences of between 9,000 to 10,000. This growth was driven in part by a Sound of Belfast concert during Belfast's Christmas lights switch on, demonstrating the potential for larger partnerships in the run up to the festival.

Of the 56,000 people who attended, there was a strong local presence – 88% of attendees were from Belfast, 8% from elsewhere in Northern Ireland and 4% visiting from outside the region.

The full event programme for Sound of Belfast, including the NI Music Prize, attracted a predominantly young audience, with nearly half (47%) of attendees aged 18–24, indicating strong resonance with Gen Z. A further 33% were aged 25–34, showing meaningful engagement from younger millennials. Together, these two groups accounted for 80% of total attendees, suggesting the event's content, branding and marketing successfully appealed to a digitally native and culturally engaged demographic. Attendance tapered off with age, with only 13% aged 35–44 and just 7% aged 45 and above, underscoring a potential opportunity to broaden intergenerational appeal in future editions.

The gender breakdown included 42% female, 55% male and 3% identifying as other. The audience also included groups often underrepresented in cultural participation: 12% were older people aged 65 and above, 6% identified as LGBTQ+, 6% were newcomers or from ethnic minority backgrounds, 10% were from deprived neighbourhoods and 5% were unemployed. Additionally, 4% of attendees identified as disabled. These figures reflect the event's inclusive reach across age groups, backgrounds, and communities.

b) Looking ahead

A clear theme from stakeholder feedback was the urgent need for multi-annual funding to ensure the sustainability, growth and development of these flagship events. **This supports**

our primary recommendation: that Belfast City Council commit £65,000 per annum over a three-year period to fund Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize. In addition, the Council may be able to offer further in-kind support, such as providing its owned assets, e.g. the Ulster Hall, at a reduced hire rate or free of charge.

This level of funding is essential in the face of rising delivery costs and would also enable the Oh Yeah Music Centre to act on key feedback gathered during this review. In recent years, the Council has provided funding to help deliver the NI Music Prize.

In 2023, the £30,000 funding from Belfast City Council was used exclusively to support the NI Music Prize. In 2024, this funding increased to £45,000 and was allocated across **both** Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize for the first time. The additional £15,000 enabled Oh Yeah to strengthen its marketing efforts (£5,000) and cover the rising costs of travel and accommodation for visiting industry professionals (£10,000), which were significantly higher than the previous year. This uplift played a key role in enhancing the overall visibility and impact of both events.

This additional support from Belfast City Council came at a time when the cost of delivering high-quality music events started to rise significantly:

- The hire fee for the Ulster Hall increased by 35%, from £2,000 to £3,030 plus VAT.
- Sound engineering and production fees rose by 30%.
- Hotel rates more than doubled, increasing from £70 per night to between £165 and £250.
- Production costs grew from £5,000 to £7,000, despite longstanding supplier relationships that keep costs below market value.
- Audiovisual services increased from £1,500 to £4,000.
- Flights, especially last-minute guest bookings, rose by 25–35%.
- Venue staff costs continued to rise in line with real living wage recommendations.
- Marketing costs are now approximately £20,000, including PR, branding, social media and advertising.
- Photographer fees have increased from £1,500 to £5,000; videography costs have doubled from £2,500 to £5,000.

In addition to its support for the NI Music Prize, the Oh Yeah Music Centre receives £56,000 per year through the Council's Cultural Multi-Annual Grants (CMAG) programme, which helps cover core staff salaries at Oh Yeah for its year round programme of cultural and socially impactful initiatives, outlined earlier in Section 2 of this report (page 5). This funding is not allocated to any event, curator, producer or programme costs for Sound of Belfast or the NI Music Prize.

A multi-annual commitment from the Council of £65,000 per year would enable the Oh Yeah Music Centre to plan ahead, strengthen delivery and focus on long-term goals rather than short-term survival. It would also increase the events' credibility with sponsors and partners, allow for better resource allocation and provide resilience against unforeseen costs.

This recommendation aligns with two priorities in the Council's music strategy:

- Priority 3: Open up the Belfast music sector by creating opportunities for music creatives to connect and collaborate with their peers locally, nationally and internationally.

- Priority 5: Increase the financial assistance available to freelancers, organisations and businesses whose primary role is to enable, support and develop creators.

To maximise the impact of this funding, we recommend that the Council and Oh Yeah explore ringfencing a portion of the £65,000 budget to respond to feedback captured during this review. As such, the report outlines below a set of practical recommendations that can be used as a framework for joint discussion, decision-making and eventual spend.

Ultimately, multi-annual investment will help transition Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize from successful annual events into sustainable, city-defining cultural assets for the enjoyment of all.

Recommendation 1: Expand the team and hire new skills

Description	<p>As Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize expand, the increased activity brings with it the need to resource the ambition.</p> <p>Additional headcount will be required to execute the agreed deliverables, be that in marketing, artist development, event production or partnerships (particularly in revenue generating / fundraising activities).</p> <p>Oh Yeah needs to be enabled and empowered to grow the event and build on its success to date, taking its biggest year in 2024 to new heights in 2025 and beyond.</p> <p><i>Funding will help to hire a new staff member / consultant to implement new initiatives.</i></p>
Music strategy priority being met	<p>Priority 5: Increase the financial assistance available to freelancers, organisations and businesses whose primary role is to enable, support and develop creators.</p> <p>Priority 8: Work with stakeholders to drive forward the creation of funded opportunities to engage and support the future generation of creative freelancers, cultural leaders and music business entrepreneurs.</p>

Recommendation 2: Offer more wraparound artist support

Description	<p>Oh Yeah has an existing talent development programme that has supported the careers of hundreds of emerging artists in recent years.</p> <p>Additional funding from the Council will support the development of new opportunities, collaborations and connections specifically for nominees and winners of the NI Music Prize.</p> <p>Alongside the wraparound support provided by Oh Yeah, both Belfast City Council and Oh Yeah should take this opportunity to direct musicians to existing resources, such as the opportunities and</p>
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	<p>directories being made available on the Music Connections website as well as the Council's own initiatives related to its UNESCO City of Music investment.</p> <p><i>This funding could be used to cover the costs of travel and accommodation for industry guests / journalists at Sound of Belfast; provide an increased Prize fund for winners to align with the Prize Funds at the Scottish Album of the Year Award (£20,000) or The Choice Music Prize (€10,000); host a new networking event for NI Music Prize nominees during Sound of Belfast or a speed dating event between Prize nominees and industry experts to develop artists' understanding of and network within the music business.</i></p>
Music strategy priority being met	<p>Priority 2: Explore and develop professional development opportunities to educate and equip music creators with the critical knowledge, contacts and tools for building a sustainable career within the sector.</p> <p>Priority 3: Open up the Belfast music sector by creating opportunities for music creatives to connect and collaborate with their peers locally, nationally and internationally.</p>

Recommendation 3: Hire more marketing expertise

Description	<p>The need for bigger and bolder marketing of these events is evident. However, as it stands, Oh Yeah does not have the bandwidth or budget to scale its efforts up in this regard.</p> <p>Additional funding from the Council will allow for the appointment of dedicated marketing expertise to promote the events, not just to different communities in Belfast but across NI, Ireland, the UK and further afield.</p> <p>There is a real opportunity to create a buzz about local music and local venues, whilst also celebrating Belfast's UNESCO City of Music status and the important role music plays in our past, present and future.</p> <p><i>This funding could be used to facilitate the appointment of a marketing agency / consultant to drive ticket sales, raise the profile of the events and the artists taking part, and attract footfall to the city in November.</i></p>
Music strategy priority being met	<p>Priority 13: Give the people of Belfast greater ownership over and involvement in music activities and events across the City.</p> <p>Priority 14: Through improved and enhanced strategic communications, make it easier for locals and visitors to find out about the music events and activities taking place across Belfast.</p>

Recommendation 4: Contract curators to engage and deliver events to promote underrepresented musicians and musical communities

Description	<p>As outlined in the report, Sound of Belfast is open to all residents across the city, regardless of sex, race, disability or any other protected characteristic. In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to engage with and celebrate music and musicians from a diverse array of genres and ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>To further enhance this initiative, we recommend that additional funding be allocated to support the appointment of dedicated curators. These curators would be instrumental in building upon the existing framework, ensuring that Sound of Belfast and the Prize not only reach but actively engage with underrepresented communities.</p> <p>By investing in these curatorial roles, Sound of Belfast can strengthen its commitment to diversity and inclusion, ultimately enriching the cultural tapestry of the city and ensuring that all voices are heard and celebrated.</p> <p><i>This funding would facilitate the hiring of curators to engage underrepresented communities and develop, deliver and promote the events as part of Sound of Belfast</i></p>
Music strategy priority being met	<p>Priority 4: In partnership with local communities, design and implement a series of initiatives to ensure music is inclusive, accessible and open to everyone in our city.</p>

Recommendation 5: Broaden the events' network of partners

Description	<p>Sound of Belfast 2024 enjoyed more partnerships than ever, expanding its reach and increasing its local impact. There is significant potential to build on this with the Council's support.</p> <p>The Council's network could see the involvement of its twinned Music City, Nashville, or one or more of its fellow UNESCO Cities of Music. Equally, by working together and inviting the involvement of Tourism NI, Visit Belfast or other strategic partners, the Council can support Oh Yeah in its mission to make Belfast a real music destination for visitors.</p> <p>The Council could also help Oh Yeah to strengthen and deepen its relationships with existing partners. Working together, there is an opportunity – for example – to pitch a TV highlights package to the BBC, focusing on elevating Belfast as a great music city and showcasing the talent being developed on these shores.</p> <p><i>This recommendation does not require Council expenditure. This in-kind support would facilitate greater promotion of Sound of Belfast by Council's strategic partners; the invitation of more international delegates to attend Sound of Belfast or bands to perform international</i></p>
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	<i>showcases by a fellow UNESCO City of Music. It would also see the Council and Oh Yeah come together to jointly pitch to the BBC for a TV highlights package of the NI Music Prize to bring the event to a wider audience.</i>
Music strategy priority being met	Priority 16: Partner with tourism bodies, Sister Cities and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network to promote Belfast, and Northern Ireland, as a must-visit destination for any music lover.

8. Next steps

This report is designed to support a conversation between Belfast City Council and the Oh Yeah Music Centre, with advice from the Belfast Region Music Board, about how any extra funding should be used. Decisions should reflect the priorities of the Belfast Music Strategy, the needs of the local music sector, and the ability of the Oh Yeah team to deliver results while managing rising costs.

The report will lead to two key outcomes:

1. An agreed funding amount over a set period.
2. A clear list of goals that this funding will help achieve.

9. Conclusion

It is abundantly clear that the City's artists, its industry executives and all those who experience Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize, view these events as treasured assets.

There is a real desire to see them develop further, building on the success and learnings of the last ten years to generate more opportunities for musicians and those who work hard to help them achieve success.

But this cannot be done on a shoestring. It takes sustained investment, a long term vision and a belief in the power of music to build communities, enliven cities and strengthen local economies.

As a UNESCO City of Music, with a commitment to placing artists at its heart and nurturing the sector, Belfast City Council is the right strategic partner to ensure that Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize fulfil their potential in the future.

Fourth Pillar has greatly enjoyed conducting this review on behalf of Belfast City Council and would like to thank all those who gave of their time so willingly and views so freely.

Appendix1 : List of individuals consulted

James Ayo	Hot Box Entertainment
Graham Best	PRS for Music
Mick Bonnar	Moving On Music
Siobhan Brown	Musician / Soultrane Festival
Brian Coney	Musician / Music Connections / Editor
Paul Connolly	Musician / Songwriter / Workshop facilitator
Joe Dougan	Shine / Belsonic
Charlotte Dryden	Oh Yeah Music Centre
Mark Gordon	Output Belfast
Joel Harkin	Musician / Songwriter
Charlene Hegarty	Oh Yeah Music Centre / Artist Manager
Kanya King	MOBOs
Ciaran Lavery	Musician / Songwriter
Ben Magee	New Champion Management
Davy Matchett	Third Bar
Sarah McBriar	AVA
Mark McCambridge	Musician / Songwriter
Chris McCreery	Belfast City Council
Glenn Millar	Marching bands / Made to Parade podcast
Andrew Moore	Harbour Music Society
Cheylene Murphy	Musician / Songwriter
Maurane Ramon	Thrive
Dave Reid	Choice Music Prize
Joe Ricketts	Nxgen Music Group
Abbie Triggs	On Music
Nathalie Von Rotz	The Great Escape

Five additional individuals contributed to the report but requested to remain anonymous. Efforts were also made to arrange meetings with individuals from two other conference or awards organisations in Scotland (Scottish Album of the Year award / Wide Days) and Berlin (Pop-Kultur) respectively, as well as representatives from different music genres. However, some were unavailable at the time while others did not respond.

Appendix 3 – Update on progress against 2024/25 Music Workplan

<u>Programme/Action</u>	<u>Status</u>
Delivery of the Output Conference, Ireland's biggest one-day music conference and live music showcase	Delivered in November 2024
Continuation of Gradam Ceoil bursaries	Launched in January 2025 and continuing to June 2025
Micro bursaries programme, available to individual musicians, to assist with costs incurred within their artform. Delivered in Collaboration with Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival	Launched in December 2024. 18 musicians/bands received awards of £1,000 in January 2025.
Educator Pathway Programme for music educators and talent developers, a free, professional development programme that will cover music career pathways, industry trends, music rights and fanbase-building.	Two day conference hosted in January 2025
A partnership with the Music Venue Trust to host a day for NI music venues to network, develop skills and receive support, alongside gathering local statistics needed to build a report detailing regional needs for venue survival.	Completed in March 2025, research ongoing
Launch of Safe Home Campaign with Equity NI, including the creation of an online video resource, hard copy Safe Home posters for Belfast venues outlining their commitment to the principles and a website listing of those who have signed up across the city, including additional advice for venues.	Launched in March 2025
Launch of Crescendo Project with the Ulster Orchestra, a bursary scheme providing tuition and instruments which the school and/or pupils cannot access otherwise.	Delivered from September 24 to May 2025 with over 30 young people in deprived areas supported with access to instruments and tuition. This scheme will be continued in 2025/26

Belfast Music marketing channels	Supplier appointed August 2024
Delivery of the Sounds Atypical grant programme, a new funding programme supporting d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent music creators across the city	Completed in March 2025 supporting six artists and collectives
NI Music Prize Review	Completed in December 2024
The NI Music Prize	Delivered in November 2024
City of Music Industry sessions – series of free information sessions for the local music community	Delivery of 6 sessions across 2024/25
Fit to March programme, a pilot initiative providing physical and mental health support to marching bands	Delivery from April 2025 to September 2025
Creation of a digital music support service in collaboration with Music Connections	Continued throughout 24/25
Programme to develop the production skills of women, female-identifying and non-binary music creators in a safe and trusted studio environment.	Partnerships with Analogue Catalogue Studios, Start Together Studio and Dream Factory Studios with 30 individuals supported
Health and Wellbeing sessions for musicians and the industry	2 programmes delivered by February 2025
Music Industry Sustainability toolkit with tangible recommendations and measures for implementation in partnership with Native Events	Partnership with Native Events launched November 2024. Toolkit to be launched on Music Matters Website September 2025
Music Matters Internship Programme – Supporting 4 paid internships across the music industry	Supplier appointed in August 2024, programme launch in September 2024 and Four internships awarded in December 2024.
Support for international exchanges with other UNESCO Cities of Music.	Exchanges held with Hannover, Germany, Brno, Czech Republic, and Kansas, USA.



Subject:	City Growth and Regeneration Final Committee Plan 2025/26
Date:	04 June 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director, Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Jamie Uprichard, Business Research and Development Manager

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: 40px;" 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%;"> <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 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To present the final draft City Growth & Regeneration Committee Plan for 2025-26.

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the final draft City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan for 2025-26 attached at Appendix 1.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At its May meeting, committee approved the draft City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan for 2025/26, subject to additional performance information being brought back to members. In addition, members requested additional information in relation to consideration of the long-term sustainability of the council's commercial assets.
3.2	At its recent committee workshop on 27 th March 2025, Members again asked for consideration be given to measuring progress and reporting performance with the addition of annual targets for agreed Key Performance Indicators. (KPIs). The development of a refreshed planning and performance management framework has been an internal priority for council and a renewed set of corporate KPIs was included within the 2025/26 Corporate Delivery Plan and Performance Improvement Plan which were both approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23 May 2025. The Performance section on page 13 of the final draft Committee Plan (attached at Appendix 1) includes the corporate indicators for which the CG&R committee is responsible for in addition to additional indicators to measure the detailed deliverables included within the Plan. In total there are 26 KPIs with corresponding targets. Progress on each deliverable and an update for each KPI will be reported to committee on a six-monthly basis.
3.3	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The draft Committee Plan 2025-26 and the subsequent work plans are aligned with the budget agreed by the Special Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on 31st January 2025, namely a cash limit for the CG&R Committee of £22.9 million as set out in Appendix 1.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>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.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - CG&R Committee Plan 2025-26

FRONT COVER

Image from Alex in Commis (taken from City Matters)

City Growth &

Committee Plan

Belfast

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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 Sam Nelson</u> (Chair) Party: Alliance Party District Electoral Area: Castle</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Ian McLaughlin</u> (Deputy Chair) Party: Democratic Unionist Party District Electoral Area: Court</p>	 <p><u>The Deputy Lord Mayor, Cllr Andrew McCormick</u> Party: Democratic Unionist Party District Electoral Area: Ormiston</p>
 <p><u>The High Sheriff, Cllr Fiona McAteer</u> Party: Alliance Party District Electoral Area: Ormiston</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 Séamas de Faoite</u> Party: Social Democratic and Labour Party District Electoral Area: Lisnasharragh</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Davy Douglas</u> Party: Democratic Unionist Party District Electoral Area: Lisnasharragh</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Joe Duffy</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Collin</p>
 <p><u>Cllr Eric Hanvey</u> Party: Alliance Party District Electoral Area: Lisnasharragh</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Tracy Kelly</u> Party: Democratic Unionist Party District Electoral Area: Botanic</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Donal Lyons</u> Party: Social Democratic and Labour Party District Electoral Area: Balmoral</p>
 <p><u>Cllr Conor Maskey</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Castle</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Áine McCabe</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Black Mountain</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Emmet McDonough-Brown</u> Party: Alliance Party District Electoral Area: Botanic</p>
 <p><u>Cllr Ron McDowell</u> Party: Traditional Unionist Voice District Electoral Area: Court</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 Tomás Ó Néill</u> Party: Sinn Fein District Electoral Area: Oldpark</p>	 <p><u>Cllr Brian Smyth</u> Party: Green Party District Electoral Area: Lisnasharragh</p>	

Belfast City Council Priorities

Since its launch in 2017, the [Belfast Agenda](#) has been 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 life within and across the city

The refreshed Belfast Agenda 2024-28 maintains the same level of ambition and collective leadership commitment to deliver the long-term vision and outcomes previously agreed. It is 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 a number of 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 ambitions of the Belfast Agenda.

The council's corporate plan is a reflection of 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 5 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 section that follows.



Our Economy Priorities

To support our economy in 2025/26 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 (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.
	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.
	Support 30 SMEs to access finance to support investment and growth through the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF).
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.
	Deliver the Social Economy Incentive Fund, with a renewed focus on establishing new social enterprises addressing barriers in areas of deprivation across Belfast.
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.
	Develop an updated economic proposition demonstrating the critical role of Belfast and the Belfast Region in creating good jobs, supporting innovation and driving productivity.
	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.	Establish the Local Economic Partnership (LEP), building on the Labour Market Partnership in the first instance.
	Agree priority projects for financial support and draw down year one funding to mobilise activity
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.
	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.
Support the development and delivery of the Belfast Business Promise scheme	Undertake a review of the pilot phase of the Belfast Business Promise (BBP) programme to inform the future approach of the scheme.
	Deliver six Belfast Business Promise Learning Days for existing member organisations.
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.

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
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.
	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.	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.
	Deliver the Gateway to Choices service, providing independent advice and guidance and encouraging informed decision making to find the right provision for people.
	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.
	Host localised jobs fairs in partnership with Jobs and Benefits Offices and explore other jobs and skills events.
	Expand the Labour Market Partnership to encompass the work of the Local Economic Partnership, developing priority projects 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.
	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.
	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.
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.
	Benchmark St George's Market with other comparable visitor attractions in terms of customer experience and visitor feedback.
	Manage and promote the delivery of the annual Christmas Continental Market and additional market events such as Twilight Markets.
	Review the markets rights policy to ensure that it supports the operation of independent 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.

Our Place Priorities

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
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.
	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).
	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)
	Progress Tranche 2 sites (from the Strategic Site Assessments Phase 2) through feasibility and development options for subsequent consideration by CGR/SP&R.
	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).
	Develop Placemaking Action Plan for lands at Joy Street/ Cromac Street/ Stewart Street.
	Work with partners in relation to developing Placemaking Action Plans for Cregagh Green, Shankill / Glencairn and Tullycarnet.
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.
	Develop future use /development proposals for Regeneration Assets including 2 Royal Avenue and 35-39 Royal Avenue.
	Deliver the Vacant to Vibrant City Wide capital grant scheme to support the reduction of vacancy and promote the revitalisation of the city.
	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.
	Undertake a scoping study on vacant offices, to include financial, economic and regeneration implications and future use and funding options.
	Deliver 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.
	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.
	Ensure City Regeneration and Development considerations are included within Developer Contributions to maximise the regeneration benefits.
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.
	Progress the Under the Bridges project to design development RIBA Stage 3 (Spatial Coordination).

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
	Progress the Sailortown/Titanic Quarter (TQ) bridge project to design development RIBA Stage 2 (Concept Design).
	Progress public realm improvements through design development and statutory approval at Little York Street, Little Patrick Street, 5Cs and Blackstaff Square & Environs.
	Deliver the UP2030 Net Zero Neighbourhoods Framework (NZNF).
	Support the delivery of relevant priorities in the Climate Action Plan for 25/26
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.
	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.
	Facilitate investment and development related follow ups aimed at positioning the city to compete and promote inclusive development for the city.
	Manage and maintain the Invest in Belfast website and complimentary digital platforms and collateral.
Future City Centre Programme	Working with internal and external partners, deliver agreed priorities in the Future City Centre 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).
Deliver Year 5 of A City Imagining, Belfast's 10-year cultural strategy.	Deliver Core Multi-Annual Grant (CMAG) funding to sustain accessible cultural activity (Festivals and events grants) and infrastructure (arts and heritage grants) within Belfast.
	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.
	Provision of arts and heritage small grants to a minimum of 15 cultural projects to support the outcomes identified within City Imagining.
	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.
	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.
	Deliver 'Bank of Ideas', a participatory budgeting programme enabling the people of Belfast to propose and collectively decide on creative projects.
	Support capacity building programmes including co-design of programmes for underrepresented groups or where gaps are identified.
	Sectoral development initiatives, including research, support for sectoral forums and establishment of a cultural compact.
	Deliver the 2025 Culture Night programme, a city wide, venue based open call event including supporting marketing activity.
	Deliver phase two of the Heritage Audit and Roadmap, including the development of targeting skills, and capacity building programmes.

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
	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.
Deliver Year 2 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 & Sound of Belfast, an event celebrating the very best of new, established and emerging Northern Irish music.</p> <p>Output Belfast – 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 4 of Make Yourself at Home, the 10-year tourism plan for Belfast.	<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.</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 conferences.</p> <p>Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme including management of awards to support new or enhanced neighbourhood tourism visitor experiences.</p> <p>Deliver the Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Development Programme.</p> <p>Deliver the Food and Drink Tourism Development Programme.</p> <p>Visitor Signage, Wayfinding and Street Dressing and Signage Upkeep.</p> <p>Enhance the visitor experience within Belfast, including enhancement of visitor experiences at Council owned assets.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</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 - 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.</p> <p>St Patrick's Day 2026 - build on the development of the St Patrick's Day Celebrations.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Deliver the Festive Lighting programme.</p> <p>Belfast Titanic Maritime Festival - Deliver the 2025 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>Host Oireachtas na Samhna, Ireland's oldest Irish language and arts festival, from October 29 to November 2, 2025</p> <p>Work with city partners to plan for and develop /submit bids for international events that best align to strategic priorities and maximise legacy.</p>

Strategic Priority	In-Year Deliverables
	Develop an Events Action Plan for the city, incorporating an ongoing approach to bid for events.
	Develop options for enhanced city animation during the summer.
	Engage with NI partners on maximising Belfast's position in Euro 2028.
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.
	Development of Outline Business Case and implementation of governance structures and arrangements including establishment of a Fleadh Executive Committee.
	Develop and deliver the event Programme Plan and Operational Project Plan and initiate event procurement exercise.
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.
	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.
	Oversee the implementation and mobilisation plan for changing to the new Belfast Bikes operator/ operating model in September 2025.
	Oversee the delivery of the Belfast Bikes public bike hire scheme, maximising revenue and reducing vandalism costs.

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 Target
Our Economy	Number of jobs promoted through business start-up activity. (Statutory indicator)	325
	Number of Regional individuals/ entrepreneurs supported through start-up activity.	4,300
	Number of Belfast individuals/ entrepreneurs supported through start-up activity.	839
	Number of Regional businesses supported through business growth activity.	2,000
	Number of Belfast businesses supported through business growth activity.	380
	Percentage of Regional Go Succeed participants engaged who are female	50%
	Percentage of Belfast Go Succeed participants engaged who are female	50%
	Percentage of participants who move into a positive outcome from an Employment or Upskilling Academy.	75%
	Number of participants on Employment and Upskilling Academies	675
	Number of organisations accredited as Belfast Business Promise Supporters	100
	Occupancy levels at Innovation Factory	70%
	Number of social enterprises and co-operatives supported	110
Our Place	Total number of previously vacant city wide properties that are occupied as a result of the Vacant to Vibrant intervention.	20
	Number of visitor servicing enquiries (Visit Belfast)	805,000
	GDS-Index ranking	Top 10
	Number of people attending the annual programme of large-scale public city events	111,000
	Number of people engaged at engaged at arts and heritage organisations	Establish baseline
	Number of citizens engaged through participatory budgeting and cultural interventions.	Establish baseline
	Number of visitors to St. George's Market	1,000,000
	Number of external events at St. George's Market	16
	Number of Belfast Bike journeys	142,000
	Number of bookings for conferences, wedding and events at Belfast Castle	342
	Total income generated by Belfast Castle	£282,675
	Number of bookings for conferences, wedding and events at Malone House	202
	Total income generated by Malone House	£130,848
	Number of visitors to Belfast Zoo	208,984
	Total income generated at Belfast Zoo	£1,894,716

Committee Finances

The expenditure for the 2025/26 City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan is based on a total planned investment of £22.9 million, as agreed at the Strategic Policy & Resources committee meeting on 31st January 2025, as follows:

Service	Budget 2025/26
Off-Street Car Parking	-963,673
City Regeneration	2,521,194
Economic Development	18,820,722
Place and Economy Directorate	2,519,119
Committee Total	22,897,361





Subject:	Notices of Motion – Quarterly Update
Date:	04 June 2025
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	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"> Information relating to any individual Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) Information in connection with any labour relations matter Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 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 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> <tr> <td>After Committee Decision</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td><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/ Issues Raised in Advance that this Committee is responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1; and • Agrees to the closure of four Notices of Motion, as referenced in Appendix 1 and noted in paragraph 3.3 below.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>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>”</p>
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	<p>There are presently twelve Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which the CG&R Committee is responsible for. Members are asked to approve the recommendation to close four motions (detailed below) and note status updates for the remaining eight motions which remain open. Additional information is included at Appendix 1.</p> <p>Category 1 Recommended Closures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 418 - Retail Business in Sandy Row. • 437 - Impact of Belfast Grand Central Station on Grosvenor Road and Durham Street. • 438 - Closure of Connswater Shopping Centre - Support for Tenants. <p>Category 2 Recommended Closures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 416 - Women's Safety in the City.

3.4	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> There are no additional financial implications attached to this report. Finance and resource implications are considered by Committee when taking decisions on the specific Notices of Motion and Issues Raised by Members.
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

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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	Following a presentation by the Night Tsar to the City Centre All Party Working Group in December 2024 it has been agreed that ongoing engagement and closer working arrangements are established between Elected Members and the Purple Flag Steering Group. The Night Tsar has agreed to provide updates to the working group. Officers have written to the BIDs requesting that the Chair of the City Centre All Party Working Group represents council on the Purple Flag Steering Group to enhance elected members engagement on Belfast's nightlife and nighttime economy.
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.
289	01/12/2022	Translink - Night-time provision of services	Cllr D Lyons	Notice of Motion – debated at council	Cathy Reynolds	In December 2024, during committee discussions on the proposed closure of this motion, it was acknowledged that the activity related to this motion has been mainstreamed into community planning, where the Belfast Agenda action plans include the following action: "Expand the timetable with a greater service in the evenings and funding for the provision of night-time services", for which Translink are the lead partner. Nevertheless, at the request of Elected Members, this motion remains open.
309	22/02/2023	Rent Controls	Cllr C Beattie	Issue Raised in Advance (Special CG&R)	Nora Largey	A letter has been drafted by the City Solicitor to be sent to the DfC Minister.
418	21/11/2024	Retail Business in Sandy Row	Cllr T Kelly	Notice of Motion - (CG&R)	Damien Martin	A paper was presented to the February and March meetings of the CG&R Committee outlining how DfC are working to form the task group. BCC is working with DfC to bring forward a Revitalisation Scheme in advance of the planned DfC Sandy Row Public Realm Improvement Works.

425	15/01/2025	Gary Moore Statue	Cllr B Smyth	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Sinead Grimes	This motion is currently being considered by the City Hall/ City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group.
431	05/02/2025	Bristol Music Fund	Cllr S de Faoite	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Keith Forster	Officers have met with counterparts in Bristol City Council in April 2025, in relation to the establishment of the Bristol Music Fund. Further information will be brought back to a future committee meeting.
450	07/05/2025	Proposed US Tariff on Films Made Outside of the US	Cllr S de Faoite	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Damien Martin	NEW: No update yet available.

Notices of Motion and Issued Raised in Advance recommended to CLOSE

ID	Date	Notice of Motion	Proposed By	Referral Route	Lead Officer	Update / Latest Status
416	06/11/2024	Women's Safety in the City	Cllr T Kelly	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Sharon McNicholl	<p><u>Recommend to close (Category 2)</u></p> <p>The council have been supporting the NI Executive to roll out their Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. This has included a number of interventions including a Local Change Fund (a grant scheme for community and voluntary groups to deliver projects up to 31 March 2026); free training for C&V groups (to better understand the issues around EVAWG and how they can support this work); personal safety events in our community centres during Jan/Feb 2025; Area events reflecting specific priorities in each area of the city; and "It's a team effort", a conference for male and female leaders in sport, held at the Titanic Hotel on 23/03/25. This work is now mainstreamed within the council's Corporate Delivery Plan 2025/26, approved by the SP&R Committee on 23/05/25 which has an action to "Deliver a programme to help end violence against women and girls (EVAWG)". A further report will be brought to a future SP&R meeting in the Autumn asking members to continue their commitment to this priority by signing up to the Women's Night Safety Charter.</p>
418	21/11/2024	Retail Business in Sandy Row	Cllr T Kelly	Notice of Motion - (CG&R)	Damien Martin	<p><u>Recommend to close (Category 1)</u></p> <p>As reported to committee in March 2025, a Sandy Row Revitalisation Scheme has been launched, supported by funding from DfC. It should be noted that the Department advised that despite its best efforts, other government departments declined to nominate a senior official to the proposed Cross Government Working Group.</p>
437	12/03/2025	Impact of Belfast Grand Central Station on Grosvenor Road and Durham Street	Cllr Tina Black	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Cathy Reynolds	<p><u>Recommend to close (Category 1)</u></p> <p>Correspondence was sent to the Minister for Communities in line with the issue raised by Cllr Black. A report was presented to members in May 2025, including Committee approval around the potential eligibility criteria for the Grosvenor Road Area Revitalisation Scheme which would be subject to DfC approval. Note that DfC has advised that despite its best-efforts, other government departments have declined to nominate a senior official to the proposed Cross Government Working Group.</p>

438	12/03/2025	Closure of Connswater Shopping Centre - Support for Tenants	Cllr F McAteer	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Keith Forster	<p><u>Recommend to close (Category 1)</u></p> <p>Following this motion, a paper was brought to members at the April meeting, seeking approval for an information session be organised to ensure that affected organisations were aware of support available across a range of current council programmes. This in-person session was held with officers from Economic Development and City Regeneration on 07/05/25. During the session, officers outlined available support, such as Go Succeed and the city wide Vacant to Vibrant programme. Following the event, officers from Economic Development have also contacted groups with details on the Council's Go Social programme to support social enterprises and officers from City Regeneration have followed up with details on the Council's property matchmaking service.</p>
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