

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



**Belfast
City Council**

5th June, 2026

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

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

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. **Routine Matters**

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

2. **Presentations**

- (a) Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (to follow)
- (b) Destination Cathedral Quarter Business Improvement District (BID) (Pages 1 - 4)

3. **Restricted Items**

- (a) Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update (Pages 5 - 26)
- (b) Assembly Rooms Cluster Update (to follow)
- (c) Sailortown to Titanic Quarter Bridge Update (to follow)

- (d) UUEPC - Review of Housing Association Grant Changes (to follow)
 - (e) Bad Debt Write-Off (Pages 27 - 28)
 - (f) Belfast Zoo Quarterly Performance Update (Pages 29 - 36)
 - (g) Belfast Bikes Quarterly Performance Update (Pages 37 - 58)
 - (h) Markets Quarterly Update and External Market Approval (Pages 59 - 64)
 - (i) Artist Studio and Creative Workspace Update (Pages 65 - 130)
 - (j) Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 Update (Pages 131 - 154)
4. **Requests to Present**
- (a) Department for Infrastructure - Castle Street Plans (Pages 155 - 158)
5. **Matters referred back from Council/Motions**
- (a) Notice of Motion - Silent Fireworks (Pages 159 - 162)
6. **Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure**
- (a) Local Growth Fund Consultation Response (to follow)
7. **Positioning Belfast to Compete**
- (a) Belfast City and Region Place Partnership Update (to follow)
 - (b) Culture Night Update (Pages 163 - 166)
 - (c) Festive Lights Update (Pages 167 - 172)
 - (d) UNESCO City of Music Programme Update
 - (e) Department for Communities Consultation on Museums Policy - Draft Response (Pages 173 - 204)
8. **Strategic and Operational Issues**
- (a) Committee Plan 2025/26 End of Year Report and 2026/27 Performance Information
 - (b) Notices of Motion Quarterly Update (Pages 205 - 208)
 - (c) Minutes of the Zoo Long-Term Financial Sustainability Group - 27th May 2026 (to follow)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

3.0	Main report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u>
	<p>At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 26th May, 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor Flynn and seconded by Councillor Smyth, was referred to the Committee for consideration:</p>
3.2	<u>Silent fireworks</u>
	<p>“This Council recognises the distress caused by high-noise fireworks to many residents, including autistic people, those with sensory issues or PTSD, elderly residents, pets, livestock and wildlife.</p>
	<p>Council notes that low-noise fireworks are increasingly used at public events and can provide the same visual impact while significantly reducing noise disruption to communities.</p>
	<p>Accordingly, Council agrees to:</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the use of low-noise fireworks at Council-run and Council-funded events.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include low-noise alternatives in future procurement processes.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Receive a report on implementation options and costs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Write to the Justice Minister calling for a review of fireworks legislation and the sale of high-noise fireworks in Northern Ireland.”
	<p>Proposer: Councillor Anthony Flynn</p>
	<p>Seconded: Councillor Brian Smyth</p>
	<p>The motion calls upon the Council to explore the use of low-noise fireworks at events and include low-noise alternatives in future procurement processes. The motion also calls for a report to be submitted in respect of implementation options and costs and that a letter be sent to the Justice Minister calling for a review of fireworks legislation and the sale of high-noise fireworks in Northern Ireland.</p>
	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
	<p>None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the Notice of Motion. Details of any financial and resource implications will be reported at a subsequent meeting.</p>
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
	<p>None associated with this report.</p>

4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None.

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Subject:	Culture Night update
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture, Tourism & events Rachael Campbell-Palmer – Culture Development Manager

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

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

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

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

3.2 **Programme Development and Engagement**

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

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

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

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

Key Milestones

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

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

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

4.1	None
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Subject:	Festive lights
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin – Strategic Director Place and Economy Keith Forster – Director Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell – Senior Manager – Culture, Tourism & Events

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

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

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

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

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

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

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

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

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

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

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

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Section 1: Draft Policy Vision

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

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

Response: Strongly Agree

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

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

Section 2: Policy Aims – PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES

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

Q2. Supporting positive health and wellbeing through engagement

Strongly Agree

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

Q3. Inspiring creativity and lifelong learning

Strongly Agree

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

Q4. Supporting access to trusted information and resources

Strongly Agree

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

Q5. Working innovatively to drive participation and engagement

Strongly Agree

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

Section 3: Policy Aims – PLACES

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

Q6. Providing safe, accessible and inclusive spaces

Strongly Agree

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

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

Strongly Agree

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

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

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

Strongly Agree

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

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

Strongly Agree

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

Section 4: Policy Aims – PARTNERSHIPS

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

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

Strongly Agree

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

Q11. Investing in a vibrant and connected accredited sector

Strongly Agree

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

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

Strongly Agree

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

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

Strongly Agree

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

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

Strongly agree

Commentary:

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

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

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

Strongly agree

Commentary:

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

However, this ambition should be accompanied by:

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

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

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

Strongly agree

Commentary:

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

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

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

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

Strongly agree

Commentary:

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

We recommend that this programme:

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

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

Q17. Programme to support care of significant collections.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

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

We emphasise:

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

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

Q18. Assessment of capital needs across HCC sectors

Strongly agree

Commentary:

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

We recommend that this assessment:

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

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

Q19 Research programme on social and economic value of museums

Strongly agree

Commentary:

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

Such research should:

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

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

Q20 Assessment of skills requirements across museums

Strongly agree

Commentary:

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

This should include:

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

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

Q21. Development of networks to catalyse innovation and partnerships

Strongly agree

Commentary:

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

We particularly emphasise:

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

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

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

Agree

Commentary:

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

However, we emphasise that:

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

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Place and Economy Department

Economic Development Division



Belfast
City Council

Dealt with by Lesley-Ann O'Donnell

Date June 2026

Email odonnelll@belfastcity.gov.uk

Department for Communities Northern Ireland

Dear Officer

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

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

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

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

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

Cultural Strategy Alignment

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

Alignment with Place-Based Cultural Development

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

Neighbourhood Tourism and Place-Making

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

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

Preservation and Promotion of Heritage

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

Partnership Working

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

Animation of Spaces and Public Engagement

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

Innovation and Belfast Stories

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

Alignment with Belfast Stories and Strategic Cultural Infrastructure

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

Sector Sustainability and Skills

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

Sustainable Funding and Long-Term Resilience

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

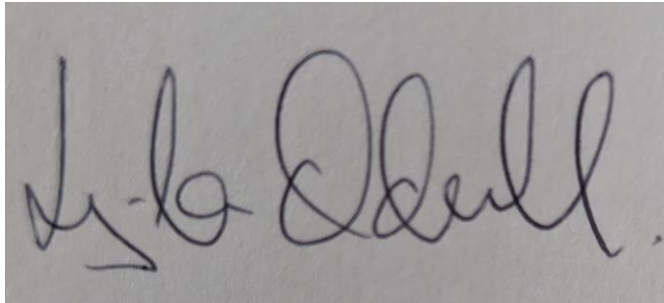
In conclusion, Belfast City Council is supportive of the development of a new Museums Policy and believes it provides a strong opportunity to strengthen the sector, enhance collaboration, and maximise the role of museums in delivering social, cultural and economic outcomes.

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

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

Thank you for considering our response.

Yours sincerely

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

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

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Department for

Communities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Museums Policy NI: Consultation



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

OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MUSEUMS POLICY NI: CONSULTATION

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



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

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

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

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

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

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Lyons', written in a cursive style.

GORDON LYONS MLA
Minister for Communities

27/04/2026

MUSEUMS POLICY NI: CONSULTATION

Introduction and Context

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

The Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme

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

Guiding Principles for Policy Development

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

The purpose of a new Museums Policy

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

Current areas of support

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

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

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

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

The Role, Contribution and Value of Museums

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Opportunities and Challenges: Policy Priorities and Potential Direction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Draft Vision for the New Museum Policy

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

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

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

The Draft Policy Aims

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

City Growth & Regeneration Notice of Motions

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

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

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