



Subject:	Belfast Region City Deal – update
Date:	20 th June 2025
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services

Is this report restricted?		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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 <input type="text"/>			
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. 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 matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime			
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?			
After Committee Decision			
After Council Decision			
Sometime in the future			
Never			

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	This report is to provide an update to Committee on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD).

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the progress on project development and delivery across the pillars of investment. • Note the update in respect of the BRCD Council Panel.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Deal Delivery</p> <p>Progress on the delivery of the deal continues with a total of 16 Outline Business Cases (OBCs) and 3 Full Business Cases (FBCs) approved with a combined approximate project value of £650m and 13 Contracts for Funding signed for projects. Studio Ulster and the UK Digital Twin Centres have been moving into full operations, there are 2 projects in construction/fit-out stage, 13 projects at design phase, 5 with planning approvals, and 4 skills assessments completed. All of which represents significant momentum since deal signing for the programme of investment.</p>
3.2	<p>Key highlights on progress across the pillars of investment since the last update in December include:</p>
3.3	<p>Innovation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Studio Ulster, specialist virtual production equipment worth almost £20m and funded by City Deal has been installed and filming has commenced over recent months. The official launch of the project has been scheduled for June at its site in Giant's Park in North Belfast. The project is engaged in a number of employability & skills programmes, both on site at Studio Ulster and further afield – providing training opportunities for young people in the creative sector.
3.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the official sod cutting ceremony in February 2025 for iREACH Health, the construction phase for the world-class clinical research centre continues. The demolition phase nears completion on the Lisburn Road site, adjacent to the City Hospital. The centre is scheduled to open in Spring 2027, it will accommodate up to 360 staff and bring together all the essential parts of the clinical trial ecosystem in one space.
3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to Momentum One Zero, QUB have now completed the tender evaluation for the Main Construction Contractor for the site in the Titanic Quarter. QUB are moving through the approvals phase for the Full Business Case ahead of a target construction commencement in September 2025. The project is part of a consortium which has recently been successful in attracting c.€10m for a One Health project bringing together experts in innovation in human, animal and environmental health.

3.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction work continues at the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) at Global Point Park, due for completion in early 2026. The Economy Minister recently announced an investment of £1.8m which will see Angoka in partnership with AMIC and Invest NI develop a new COSMIC solution for the advanced manufacturing sector. The initiative will help to provide a solution to protect manufacturing systems from cyber attacks creating a market leading technology.
3.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Contract for Funding was signed for the Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology in December and the project is progressing well. A demolition contract has been awarded and work will commence at Northland House over the summer period, following positive engagement with a local school.
3.8	<p>Digital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Digital Twin Centre project led by Digital Catapult was officially launched in May marking a major milestone in the UK's digital innovation landscape. The Centre's first six-month Accelerator Programme is now open for pre-application expressions of interest which will support partnerships between tech SMEs and industry to fast-track digital twin adoption. Significant interest in the accelerator programme has been noted. Use cases with founding industry partners in sectors such as maritime and aerospace have been progressing well and capabilities were showcased at the launch event for the centre, which is located in Belfast City Centre.
3.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Augment the City project has continued to successfully deliver through the SBRI model and is designed to provide City Deal partners with learning on the application of XR technologies in the tourism sector. Over 100 people attended the Augment the City Phase Two dissemination event at Belfast City Hall on 3rd April 2025. The six participating companies shared learning about their Proofs of Concepts and have been invited to apply to Phase 3 of the programme. A maximum of three will be chosen and will receive up to £100,000 R&D funding to turn their proofs of concepts into working prototypes – with the project completing early in 2026.
3.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The learning from the delivery of Augment the City has informed the design of the larger c.£5m BRCD Regional SBRI programme which will support a series of SBRI competition calls each of which will focus on a unique challenge area that will be agreed between the six council partners. Each council will have the opportunity to lead on at least one challenge during the lifetime of the programme. A business case has been developed for the project and will be refined by BRCD partners in the coming weeks before formal submission to the Department for Economy. Depending on approval timescales it is envisaged that the first competition will launch in late 2025.

3.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals are also being developed for an AI Adoption Programme (c.£5m), which aims to accelerate the adoption of AI by organisations in both the private and public sectors. The work is being led by Belfast City Council's City Innovation Office in collaboration with other bodies including SIB and the AI Competency Centre. The programme is expected to offer grant funding and support via a series of competition calls aimed at both public and private sector organisations that are seeking to adopt AI solutions into their systems and processes. Funding would allow these organisations to lower the risk associated with the innovative adoption of AI. The solution providers would be expected to be based (or have a significant economic footprint) within the Belfast Region. Work has commenced in relation to a business case which is expected to be considered by BRCD partners in coming months.
3.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An OBC addendum has been completed for the i4C Cleantech Innovation Centre at St Patrick's Barracks with the Contract for Funding signed in May 2025. The addendum reflects planned scaling at the project in response to inflationary pressures in the construction sector. The centre will provide a physical base for businesses and will focus on the development of clean technology.
3.13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good progress has been made in relation to finalising a draft Contract for Funding for the Ards & North Down Innovation Hub, a hub focused on the creative sectors with plans to integrate with Studio Ulster and South Eastern Regional College. Ards & North Down Borough Council continue to finalise plans in relation to the site for the project before it can be further progressed.
	<p>Tourism and Regeneration</p>
3.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At Bangor Waterfront, the Operator for Pickie Fun Park has been appointed, marking an important milestone for this project as operator input is essential in the design development. The concept designs for both Pickie Fun Park and Ballyholme Yacht Club projects are being developed and the procurement of design teams for the Urban Waterfront and Public Realm and Marina projects are being progressed.
3.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key survey works and engagement with both the public and statutory bodies is being progressed at the Gobbins and Carrickfergus Regeneration to allow finalisation of concept designs and completion of RIBA Stage 2 reports. The Operator procurement process for both these projects is also being progressed, to ensure Operator input into key design stages.
3.16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of professional services teams have now been appointed for Destination Royal Hillsborough, with the last appointment expected over the summer. Engagement

	<p>with statutory bodies to progress the planning application for the public realm element of this project is also ongoing. Following a change in business needs within Hillsborough since the development of the OBC, the proposed Social Enterprise Café within Hillsborough Forest is to be replaced with a Visitor Hub, and an OBC Addendum is being developed to address this change in scope.</p>
3.17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following approval at the BRCD Executive Board, the Belfast Stories OBC was formally submitted to Departments for review in May, with the DfE Casework Committee scheduled for September. The professional services team continue to progress the development of the design throughout the OBC approval process.
3.18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The procurement process for the contractors for the Theatre & Conference Centre and Civic Hub projects in the Newry Regeneration programme has concluded and the FBC has been formally submitted to DfC for approval. NMDDC await final planning approval for the Civic Hub project, to enable appointment of Contractors and commencement of works on site.
	<p>Infrastructure</p>
3.19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Infrastructure Minister announced the next steps for Phase 2 of the Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT2) project in February, which will see the Glider service extended to north and south Belfast, with an additional £13m allocated from the Department of Infrastructure to deliver a park and ride on the O'Neill Road. The OBC is being finalised and following approval work is expected to begin on this first phase later this year.
3.20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Infrastructure Minister also confirmed in April that the next stage of the procurement process for the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge is now underway. A shortlist of contractors has been invited to bid for the contract to design and construct the scheme. This is the start of the second stage of the procurement process and it is anticipated that the scheme will commence in autumn 2025.
3.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The statutory public consultation process for Newry Southern Relief Road commenced with the Orders exhibition on 21 January 25 and ran until 4 March 25. Following consideration of the feedback from this process, the Minister will determine whether to convene a public inquiry.
	<p>Employability and Skills (E&S)</p>
3.22	<p>Work continues to develop collaborative proposals from BRCD partners including councils universities and colleges to advance the recommendations and actions aimed at addressing the skills gaps identified through skills assessments. This has involved working across BCC</p>

	departments including Business and Enterprise and City Innovation to ensure alignment of programmes on skills activity.
3.23	The BRCD draft Benefits Realisation Framework is currently being refreshed to ensure that benefits are effectively delivered and captured in alignment with the overall programme objectives. Engagement has also taken place with other UK City Deals to explore their approach to developing benefits realisation frameworks. A visit from Cardiff City Deal's Employability and Skills Manager is planned for September providing an opportunity to share lessons learned on benefits realisation and explore potential for future collaboration with other city deals.
3.24	A number of events are being organised to support the effective delivery of social value and to promote upcoming opportunities across the BRCD programme. As more projects progress to the construction phase, a Social Value Training Workshop will be held in June for project leads, contract managers, and those involved in ongoing construction. The workshop will ensure that all participants are fully aware of, and up to date with, SIB social value reporting requirements, enabling them to effectively monitor contractor submissions. Additionally, the team is working with the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) to deliver a Contractor Market Engagement event. This will promote upcoming procurement opportunities within the BRCD programme and highlight the employability and skills support available through city deal partners.
	Mourne Mountain Gateway
3.25	Members will be aware that The Mourne Mountain Gateway Project (MMGP) was a proposal from Newry Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) for a gondola from Donard Park to a visitor centre at the former Thomas Quarry site in the Mourne. The Thomas Quarry site is owned by the National Trust and NMDDC require a lease from the National Trust to build the visitor centre.
3.26	On 1 May 2025, National Trust issued a media statement confirming that a lease for Thomas Quarry will not be granted for the MMGP project. The withdrawal of the support by the National Trust means that the project cannot go ahead. NMDDC are very disappointed by this decision, particularly as an Environmental Impact Assessment was being prepared to consider and address the specific concerns raised by the National Trust.
3.27	When the Deal was being developed the BRCD Partnership agreed principles that if a project does not go ahead the first option would be to allow the project sponsor (in this case NMDDC) to explore an alternative option within the region. This is to maintain regional balance and spread of the funding. The BRCD Executive Board have therefore agreed that NMDDC can explore alternative options for consideration, and they are in the first instance assessing a

	<p>similar proposal to the MMGP in Kilbroney Forest Park. The Council have been engaging with BRCD PMO, TNI and DfE and are aware that any new proposal will be subject to full business case approval.</p> <p>BRCD Council Panel</p>
3.28	The next meeting of the Council Panel will be held in September 2025 and will be hosted by Newry, Mourne & Down District Council
3.29	The minutes from the meeting hosted by Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council on 25 September 2024 are attached at Appendix 1 for information.
3.30	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>All costs associated with the BRCD are within existing budgets. As outlined additional resources have also been leveraged from other funding sources to extend the impact of the deal.</p>
3.31	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The approach taken to develop the City Deal has been subject to independent equality screening and rural proofing and states that;</p> <p><i>‘BRCD is inherently inclusive, affording an opportunity for the region to grow in a way that will benefit the economy of Northern Ireland as a whole, thereby enhancing the lives and well-being of its citizens. If during further development of the programme it becomes apparent that there may be an adverse impact on certain groups or communities then the partnership commits to carrying out further Section 75 work and including screening and EQIAs as and when appropriate.’</i></p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Minutes of the Council Panel Meeting 25 September 2024