



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>City Innovation programme update</b>
<b>Date:</b>	22 August 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Mark McCann, City Innovation Manager

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

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To update Members on current City Innovation initiatives including the submission to the first phase of the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Mayoral Challenge competition.

<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To note the Belfast Alleyways proposal has been submitted to Bloomberg Philanthropies and that a decision on whether we proceed to phase one is expected by the end of August.</li> <li>2. To retrospectively approve Belfast City Council's inclusion in a joint bid to DSIT's Regulators Pioneer Fund to independently map mobile coverage in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.</li> <li>3. To retrospectively approve letters of support to both Ulster University and Queen's Universities for two separate, independent, funding bids to the National Institute for Health and Care Research £50m funding call to tackle health inequalities.</li> <li>4. To approve support for Ulster University and the Agile Ageing Alliance consortium bid to Horizon Europe's 'GenAI4EU' call to deliver a potential €5,000,000 project which would include a demonstrator in Belfast.</li> <li>5. To note the date of the first event in the Belfast: Inclusive Futures series and that invitations have been issued to all Members.</li> <li>6. To approve attendance by two officers to accompany the Belfast Innovation Commissioner to this year's Smart Cities World Congress to develop innovation funding and investment opportunities for the city.</li> <li>7. To approve the participation of an officer from the City Innovation Office in the i30 Inclusive Innovation Medellin visit. Travel costs are included in the project funding</li> </ol>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
	<b>Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayoral Challenge 2025</b>
3.1	Following Member approval, Belfast City Council applied to Bloomberg Philanthropies' Mayoral Challenge with a proposal <i>'to re-imagine Belfast's network of alleyways'</i> . This broad proposal was accepted and over the past few weeks officers have been involved in planning workshops with the Bloomberg team to prepare Belfast's submission for phase one funding by 15 August.
3.2	If this submission is approved by Bloomberg \$50,000 will then be made available to Council to work with local communities and stakeholder over September and October to develop the detailed \$1 million application to deliver a 24-month programme.
3.3	The work of this first phase will be engaging with communities and stakeholders on options delivery mechanisms for a future Belfast alleyway transformation programme. It will examine local demand, types of viable projects, and specifically at co-delivery models with communities and the community and voluntary sector that can be sustained over the long term. Members should note that this phase will not be identifying specific locations for projects. There will be a range of engagement mechanisms including at least five neighbourhood workshops across the city.

3.4	Members are asked to note the submission of the Belfast proposal and that a decision from Bloomberg on phase one is expected by the end of August. Details will follow at a future Committee.
3.5	<p><b>DSIT's Regulators Pioneer Fund</b></p> <p>Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council invited Belfast City Council to be a supporting partner in a £1 million application by Wales, Northern Ireland &amp; Scotland to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's (DSIT) Regulators' Pioneer Fund. The proposal is to map 4G/5G mobile coverage across all of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland at a granular level to help identify coverage gaps within communities and explore opportunities to improve coverage and address digital exclusion.</p>
3.6	The bid is being led by Caerphilly County Borough Council (on behalf of Welsh local authorities), with support from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (on behalf of NI local authorities) and Glasgow City Council (on behalf of Scottish local authorities). If the bid is successful, the project will start in October 2025. No financial or resource commitment is required from Belfast City Council. Belfast City Council will have the opportunity to use the data to support its work and inform decision making.
3.7	Given the short deadline for submission over the summer months, Members are asked to retrospectively approve Belfast City Council's inclusion in the bid.
3.8	<p><b>£50m call to tackle inequalities in cardiovascular disease</b></p> <p>The Council has been approached separately by both Ulster University's Centre for Digital healthcare Technologies (CDHT, and by Queen's University, seeking support for two funding bids to the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) £50m funding call<sup>1</sup> to tackle health inequalities.</p>
3.9	Both proposals seek to develop and implement long-term change in cardiovascular disease outcomes, focusing on digital healthcare interventions, escalating community focused engagement and diet and wellbeing education. Early detection and intervention will be important and as well as encouraging lifestyle changes, support systems changes or adaptations to medicine and treatments.
3.10	To enable both applications to be submitted in time for a 13 August deadline, a letter of support has been given to Ulster and a separate letter of support, with a role as a co-applicant, to Queen's. Members are asked to retrospectively approve both supporting letters, and to note

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/new-50m-funding-to-tackle-inequalities-cardiovascular-disease>

	that in the event of either bid making through to an initial selection stage, a more detailed report will be brought back to Committee in advance of any further commitments being made.
3.11	<p><b>Horizon Europe Call: Generative AI in Health Care</b></p> <p>The Agile Ageing Alliance is working with an EU wide consortium to submit a bid to the Horizon Europe GenAI4EU call which is making €15,000,000 available for three projects.</p>
3.12	<p>The Alliance have invited Belfast City Council and Ulster University's CDHT to partner in a bid which will focus on '<i>end user-driven application of Generative Artificial Intelligence models in healthcare</i>'. The consortium wishes to have 5 to 6 demonstrator sites over the four-year period of the project to test/further develop the infrastructure in real world settings. Belfast has been proposed as one of the health care demonstrator sites (locations might include social housing estates, retirement villages, care homes, or hospitals. The consortium will engage with local partners on potential local options.</p>
3.13	<p>Members are asked to approve support from Belfast City Council ahead of the 15 September deadline. This will involve brokering opportunities and building relationships to support the local demonstrator.</p>
3.14	<p><b>Belfast Inclusive Futures</b></p> <p>In May Committee approved a 'dialogue series' to inform new thinking on inclusive growth opportunities from the Belfast Region City Deal and other investments. Specifically, the series called '<i>Belfast: Inclusive Futures</i>' will bring together city leaders (private, public and community) and senior policymakers to build understanding and consensus about the challenges and opportunities that digital technologies represent for our city existing shared commitment to inclusive growth.</p>
3.15	<p>Invitations have been issued, including to all Members, for the first in the series which will take place on Tuesday, 16 September at City Hall from 4:30pm. The first speaker is Professor Kate Devlin, Chair-Director of the Digital Futures Institute, King's College, whose research focuses on AI and its benefit to people, communities and society. The sessions will be introduced by the Chair of SP&amp;R and co-hosted by our Chief Executive and the Belfast Innovation Commissioner. This first session will explore the implications of AI and automation across a broad range of social and economic policies associated with 'inclusive growth'. The event aims to encourage a common, pro-active, positive response to the challenges and opportunities.</p>

3.16	<p><b>Smart Cities World Congress 2025</b></p> <p>Innovation City Belfast's (ICB) is participating at the Smart Cities World Congress from 4th to 6th November 2025. SCWC is the world's biggest and most influential event for urban innovation. Each year it attracts around 900 cities and 1,000 digital companies, bringing together a powerful ecosystem of leaders from global companies, city governments and funders.</p>
3.17	<p>The Belfast Innovation Commissioner, Adrian Johnston, is attending this year on behalf of ICB, which is hosting a Belfast presence as part of the UK Pavilion. The ICB stand at the United Kingdom Pavilion will provide rich opportunities for Belfast partners for networking, the promotion of Belfast's ambition, City Deal Digital innovation investments, the work of our universities, and the success of our innovative companies. (Members should note that Belfast's participation in a Bloomberg city network event last year that directly led to our successful bid to their Mayors Challenge outlined above.)</p>
3.18	<p>This year Belfast City Council has been invited by the SCWC organisations to present on inclusive innovation. ICB has also encouraged its members to attend and is making a small number of Congress passes available free of charge. (These normally cost up to €950 each).</p>
3.19	<p>Members are asked to approve attendance by two officers from the City Innovation Office to accompany the Innovation Commissioner to this year's Congress.</p>
3.20	<p><b>ESRC Inclusive Innovation city workshop</b></p> <p>Members previously approved Belfast City Council's participation in an £85,000 project led by Newcastle University and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Working with the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Oslo and EAFIT University, the project is exploring how City Deal and other place-based innovation investments can better contribute to local inclusive growth outcomes. The project will deliver a policy toolkit, guidance, and inform a future large scale funding bid.</p>
3.21	<p>Subsequently, Queen's University's QCAP team and Innovation City Belfast have become part of this work. QCAP received an additional £15,000 from ESRC to become involved.</p>
3.22	<p>The first city visit is planned for early December to Medellin. A delegation from Belfast, including community representatives working with QCAP, and the Innovation Commissioner, are planning to attend. This will be an opportunity to share inclusive innovation practice with Medellin city government officials, local community organisations, and business leaders. Return visits to Belfast and to Newcastle Upon Tyne are planned for the new year when representatives from</p>

	Medellin and Pittsburgh will visit both cities. This will include work with local communities here in Belfast.
3.23	Members are asked to approve the participation of an officer from the City Innovation Office in the Medellin visit. Travel costs are included in the project funding. Details of the return visit will be shared with Members in the coming months.
	<b>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</b>
3.24	Resources for these initiatives have been identified within the existing departmental budgets.
	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</b>
3.25	None at present. A successful Bloomberg proposal will be subject to an Equality screening.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	None.