



Subject:	Major Events Update
Date:	August 2025
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture & Tourism

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

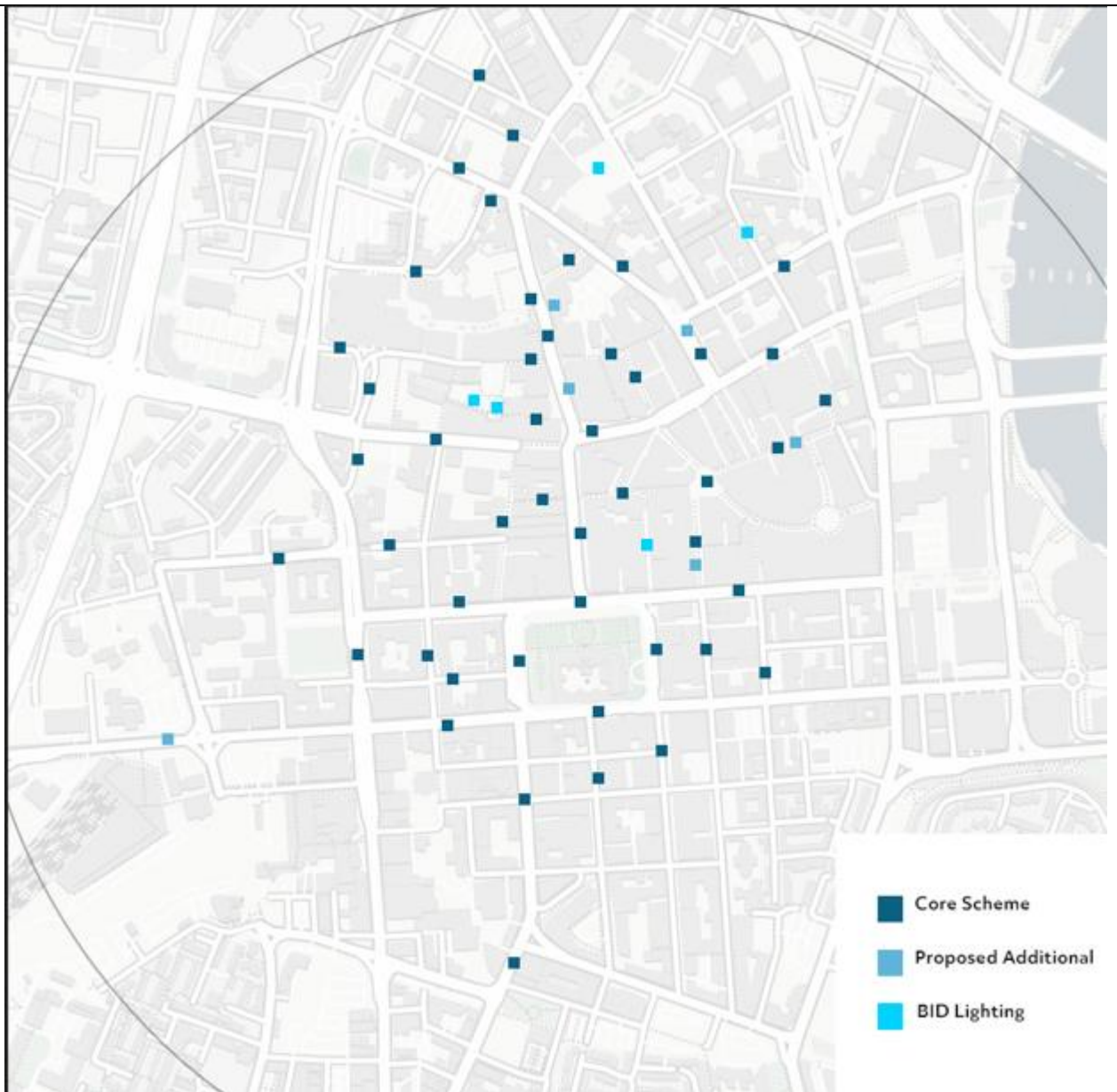
Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To provide an update on Fleadh Cheoil• To provide an update on Oireachtas• To provide an update on festive lighting• To provide an update on America 250• To provide an update on New Years Eve
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the update regarding Fleadh Cheoil• Note the update regarding Oireachtas festival

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note and approve costs associated with Festive lighting scheme • Note the update regarding America 250 • Note the update regarding New Years Eve
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Fleadh Cheoil</p> <p>August SPR committee considered a report on the strategic case for the Fleadh and its significant economic impact and return on investment. Members were updated on the financial plan associated with hosting the Fleadh and the Committee approved the draft outline expenditure budget for Fleadh Cheoil 2026.</p> <p>Following consideration of the proposed governance arrangements, including detailed proposals in relation to governance of Finance Risk, Members agreed not to establish a Members Working Group but that a further report should brought back to the Committee on governance, following engagement with Comhaltas, and on the use of delegated authority.</p> <p>SPR Committee Members were also advised that an engagement plan is being developed to ensure early engagement with stakeholders and local communities which is essential to ensure inclusivity and impact. This will include a city stakeholder group which will help to inform the work undertaken in relation to programme development and operational planning and will be closely aligned with the work of the marketing and communications group.</p> <p>Following attendance at Wexford 2025 a dedicated Party Group Leader session has been scheduled to discuss lessons learned and to update on key areas of work.</p> <p>A number of core work packages are currently under way, being overseen by the internal Programme Board and the Fleadh Executive Committee, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of all governance structures (subject to further report to SPR Committee) • Financial plan, funding & sponsorship • Audit & risk • Lessons learned from Wexford • Brand, marketing and communications • Operations and logistics planning • Ground footprint • Traffic management planning • Core programming • Venue mapping

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licencing • Planning • Accommodation • Volunteering • Visitor servicing
3.2	<p>Oireachtas na Samhna 2025</p> <p>Planning is well under way for the Oireachtas with final technical site visits occurring early September. Core venues remain as ICC, Ulster Hall, City Hall and the Europa.</p> <p>Dedicated brand work has been developed and is being utilised across all partner marketing. Exhibition space within ICC has been identified for BCC which is being led by language officer aligned to ongoing work for the language action plan. Visit Belfast will also avail of exhibition space to facilitate visitor servicing.</p> <p>Officers have been working with core venues to ensure there is a provision of Irish language speaking staff on front of house duties and integration into announcement systems</p> <p>Through the ongoing work of the programme board, Oireachtas have facilitated an ongoing engagement to encourage participation and competition entries as well as a Schools engagement programme.</p> <p>Additional support packages of work in partnership with Visit Belfast are focused on visitor management with the addition of translated city maps, a familiarisation video, web content and industry front of house briefings.</p> <p>Key programme highlights include;</p> <p>Wednesday 29th October</p> <p>Official opening – ICC Belfast</p> <p>Media awards – Belfast City Hall</p> <p>Thursday 30th October</p> <p>Competition schedule commence – ICC Belfast</p> <p>Live Broadcasts – TG4, RTE and BBC NI – Multiple venues</p> <p>Club Celi and festival club - Europa</p> <p>Friday 31st October</p> <p>Competition schedule -ICC Belfast</p> <p>Live Broadcasts – TG4, RTE and BBC NI - Multiple venues</p> <p>Festival club - Ulster Hall</p>

	<p>Saturday 1st November</p> <p>Park run</p> <p>Competitions – ICC Belfast</p> <p>Festival club - Ulster Hall</p> <p>Sunday 2nd November</p> <p>Final live broadcast</p>
3.3	<p>Festive lighting</p> <p>Officers have conducted a number of site visits with the supplier to identify any adjustments to the core lighting scheme to allow for ongoing building works, access to wayleaves and power sources.</p> <p>As part of this work a number of potential additional sites have been identified to enhance the core scheme and address areas where there has previously been limited lighting; namely additional infrastructure in: Royal avenue trees, Ann street, Arthur street, Bank Square and Bridge Street</p> <p>This is at an additional cost of £47,531 to the core scheme.</p> <p>Festive lighting budget allocation is £300,000, with management support previously facilitated through BCCM. Council have been in ongoing discussions with the BIDs about future provisions of the management of the scheme but for 2025 this will remain as council led delivery.</p> <p>In addition to this officers have engaged with the BIDs to identify additional areas that the BIDs will support through allocation of their own funding for Callender Stret, Blackstaff Square, Transport hub, Writers Square and Hill Street. Discussions are on going about potential for co-funding of some of the additional features.</p>



As part of the development work contractors have identified an ongoing issue with the power sources linked to DFI lighting columns. Where they do not currently meet safety standards the points require a full upgrade at a cost of £400/ point, this is a one off upgrade required to ensure a compliant and safe installation with BS7671. This impacts the majority of columns in use for the festive pole mounted features

The remedial works to bring the rest of the city up to standard and safety against the core scheme is a total of £77,600 and to facilitate additional scheme elements would cost £29,000 – totalling £106,600

Discussions have been held with DFI officers and they have advised that while DFI own the columns the infrastructure that lighting power supplies are drawn down from are within BCC ownership and therefore upgrade costs fall to BCC. This allows for access to isolate the power supply for festive lights therefore if a fault occurs only the festive light elements are impacted.

Wayleaves

BCC estates team are continuing to engage with business owners to complete the development of new wayleave agreements to support the scheme. All new wayleaves have been issued with circa 20% returned and ongoing dialogue being facilitated with all key partners. Discussions are well advanced and are being supported by the BIDs to access the appropriate building owners.

3.4 America 250

Following agreement at Committee last month in relation to options to support the marking of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the US Declaration of Independence in 2026, Officers are engaging with stakeholders in relation to planning and activities aligned to America 250.

Tourism Ireland

Tourism Ireland's approach to the 250th commemoration of the founding of the United States of America is pivoted around a number of key themes i.e. food and drink, music, history/heritage, and key attractions or experiences.

Tourism Ireland alongside Tourism Northern Ireland has undertaken a scoping exercise in respect to what sectoral stakeholders may be able to contribute to an overall tourism programme for the 250th commemoration centred around key sites, local anniversaries and marketing opportunities to drive US footfall into the region.

Tourism Ireland will also undertake a digital promotions campaign through e-mail, articles on US websites which will include videos, and instate market opportunities. In terms of media outreach, they will look to undertake:

- Inviting American celebrities who have an Ulster Scotch heritage to come over to Northern Ireland and investigate their roots
- Focused familiarisation trips
- Bespoke food tours for media
- Working on our musical strengths to attract inward visitors
- Targeting the travel trade market via themed webinars outlining key opportunities such as the Fleadh 2026 in Belfast and Ulster American Folk Park's 50th anniversary as components to consider.

Public Records Office NI (PRONI)

PRONI staff coordinate the US NI Cultural Working Group on behalf of the Department for Communities. DfC will coordinate the communications strategy on finalised components. Work is currently taking place to agree the delivery mechanism for the publicly announced small grants programme which is anticipated to go live in Autumn 2025.

Details shared regarding potential programming included:

- National Museums events centred around key dates and music festivals
- Hillsborough Royal Palace visitor engagement initiatives which may include a joint loan of an original copy of the Declaration of Independence to be co-hosted by HRP and PRONI
- Series of public lectures in PRONI Offices

Ulster Scots Agency

The Ulster Scots Agency is considering a number of avenues to commemorate the 250th anniversary:

- Publications: refresh of the Pioneers Trail map and conversion into booklet format;
- Digital projects: applications have been invited regarding a landmark digital project to narrate the role of Ulster Scots/Scots-Irish in American Independence
- Art: potential for a public art trail in a number of local authorities which have an Ulster Scots-US connection
- Gallery: extension of the Visitor Centre gallery to include a special US 250 exhibition with a long-term ambition of including a permanent loan of a copy of the Declaration of Independence. The Agency has also commenced discussions with Dublin's EPIC Museum with a view to using the Ulster Scots impact on the foundations of America to drive footfall to Belfast.
- Talks: Outreach events to highlight the role of Scots Irish in America's history
- Music: a strategic and signature event which pivots around Belfast-Boston-Nashville relationships. Initial concept is in regard to a weekend event centred around 4 July using American artists who also have a link to Belfast/NI e.g. Getty Music. This could act as a hook to attract inward visitors from both Sister Cities and present a cultural offering around an economic mission, should Belfast City Council agree to develop such a programme. Given the scale of such an event, the Agency would also propose city dressing on NI-US 250 within its communication and promotional channels

Linenhall Library

Linenhall Library has expressed willingness to develop and house an exhibition and are prepared to do so around a theme identified by BCC e.g. links between city's emigrants which had economic impact on founding of the US

Our Sister Cities

Research on the State Commission websites for both our Sister Cities shows that both have small grants programmes to commemorate the Semi quincentennial (Massachusetts has assigned funding, whilst Tennessee is seeking applications). Initiatives appear to be centred around museums and heritage sites.

	Officers will liaise with the Department for Communities and with stakeholders with a view to bringing back a further report.
3.5	<p>New Years Eve</p> <p>The Millennium Celebrations was a significant celebration across the globe and was celebrated in Belfast with an event outside City Hall. It was felt at the time that there was some merit in continuing to provide an event in subsequent years, this included two years of a Radio One Dance Party and a small concert at City Hall.</p> <p>However, this particular event was discontinued for a number of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appetite – while there will always be some voicing of the wish for a New Years event in the City, there are questions over the appeal of attending a late concert in mid-winter. • Cost of staging this event was significant, both in respect of suppliers charging high ‘holiday’ rates but also artists. Costs a decade ago were circa £250k for an audience of 3,000-4000, and with event delivery costs rising significantly post-pandemic, the cost of an New Years Eve event could be north of £400,000. • The opportunity cost to Council is very significant. <p>As part of the development of the cultural strategy recommendations were that Council did not host an outdoor New Years Eve event and as Members are aware there is no budget for supporting NY celebrations in 2025 and there are already considerable pressures on both the Culture Tourism and Events Teams. Officers will however engage with city partners to understand their plans for New Year 2025 and a report on this will be brought back to the committee.</p> <p>As part of the agreed work in relation to the events action plan officers are continuing to benchmark and assess the costs and impact of hosting NYE celebrations for future years.</p>
4.0	<p>Financial and Resource Implications</p> <p>4.1 The Fleadh will be delivered in accordance with draft expenditure budget and agreed financial plan. Remaining financial resources will be met from within existing departmental budgets and officers are continuing to work with partners to reduce the financial burden on council.</p>
5.0	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessment</p> <p>5.1 The cultural strategy, A City Imagining has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). The Fleadh will be subject to a further equality screening and officers are engaged with the equality unit on progressing this</p>
	Appendices – Documents Attached

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