



Subject:	International engagement – update on proposed approach
Date:	26 November 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director, Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Laura Leonard, EU and International Relations Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Some time in the future

Never

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☐

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

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
	The purpose of this report is to share an updated version of the draft approach to council's engagement in international activity for the coming three-year period following discussion at the August, October and November committee meetings, and to propose a new framework for engagement, taking account of the comments received.
2.0	Recommendations
	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the amendments to the previous version, set out in section 3.5 of the report • Approve the proposed approach to council activity in international engagement work for the coming three years, as well as the annual action plan for the current financial year.
3.0	Main report
3.1	At the August and October 2025 meetings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members received draft versions of the proposed International Relations Framework 2025 – 2028 along with an action plan for 2025/26 activity. At both meetings, there was discussion that led to specific proposals for amendments to the draft document. It was agreed that officers would incorporate those amendments into a revised version of both the framework and action plan and that these would be shared at a future meeting.
3.2	<p>At the October 2025 meeting of the Committee, the specific decisions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement to continue Belfast City Council participation in the Eurocities network • Agreement to explore opportunities for collaboration with Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels and other relevant partners, in relation to the potential for an annual event to be held as part of the European Week of Regions and Cities • Agreement to establish an EU stakeholder group • Agreement to extend invitations to attend international engagement stakeholder groups to Members of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.
3.3	Members also asked that the framework was updated to specifically identify how ethical and environmental considerations were taken into account in international relations activity. Finally, they noted that they wished to defer consideration of the proposed approach to Council international engagement work activity for 2025-28 and the Annual Action plan for 2025/26, to enable an updated draft International Relations Framework 2025-2028 to be submitted.

3.4	In November, Members again agreed to defer as although the framework had been updated in relation to ethical and environmental considerations and the action plan had been amended to reflect the above decisions in relation to the EU, the framework had not been updated to reflect the decisions on EU matters.
3.5	Taking account of the points raised above, the revised draft approach to council-led international engagement activity for the coming three-year period is set out in Appendix 1 and the supporting delivery plan for year one (2025-26) is set out in Appendix 2. The three-year “framework” document is intended to be a supporting document to other key strategies and plans such as the Belfast Agenda, the Corporate Plan and Local Development Plan – setting out how priority objectives and ambitions in those documents can be supported through international connections, networks and opportunities. Its purpose is to identify areas of collaborative advantage and help focus resources on opportunities that can maximise return on investment, in keeping with city priorities.
3.5	<p>Specific changes to the content of the documents now include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating the framework to identify specifically how ethical and environmental considerations will be take into account in the planned activity. This includes references to “environmentally sustainable and inclusive economic growth” as part of the vision; additional references to sustainable growth under the key work pillars and commitment to support mission-driven innovation actions focused on addressing social and environmental challenges faced by communities and individuals across the city • Updating the framework on trade and investment, innovation and knowledge exchange and funding and partnership to reflect the decisions on the EU as outlined at para 3.2. • Updating the action plan to include agreed deliverables as identified in 3.2 including network participation and work to develop additional engagement opportunities, including the EU Cities and Regions Work.
4.0	Financial and Resource Implications
4.1	The EU and International Relations budget was approved as part of the 2025-26 estimates setting process. Budgets for individual activities are the responsibility of the respective teams.
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
	No specific equality or good relations implications. Activities will focus on support for Belfast-based organisations and companies.

6.0	Appendices
	Appendix 1: Draft International Relations Framework – 2025-28 Appendix 2: International Relations Delivery Plan – 2025-26