



Subject:	Festive lights
Date:	10 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin – Strategic Director Place and Economy Keith Forster – Director Economic Development
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Restricted Reports	
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="checkbox"/>	
<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	<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 <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

- Primary pedestrian corridors such as Royal Avenue and Donegall Place

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.

3.3 **2025 Programme Delivery and Performance**

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.

Despite these operational challenges BCC officers worked well with suppliers to secure the necessary approvals and alternative power sources or locations where required

2025 Infrastructure Uplift and Enhancements

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.

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.

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.

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.

Festive Lighting Commission and Switch-On Event

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.

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>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