



Subject:	UNESCO City of Music Programme Update
Date:	10 th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forester
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell Senior Manager Culture, Tourism & Events Rachael Campbell-Palmer Culture Development Manager

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 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 	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision After Council Decision Sometime in the future Never	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <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	<p>This report provides Members with an update on the delivery of UNESCO City of Music activities against the 2025/26 Workplan.</p> <p>In addition, the report seeks approval for activities within the 2026/27 Cultural Development Workplan approved by the Committee in April described as “Additional UNESCO City of Music Activity”, but in relation to which additional detail is now provided.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to note the contents of this update report and approve the additional aspects of the City of Music 2026/27 Workplan delivery outlined in Appendix 1.
3.0	Update Report
3.1	<p>Belfast City Council continues to support the growth, sustainability and international profile of the city's music sector through the delivery of its music development and UNESCO City of Music programmes. This report provides an update on key activities undertaken during the reporting period, highlighting progress across accessibility initiatives, community engagement, international partnerships and sector support.</p> <p>The Gradam Ceoil bursary scheme has continued in partnership with Duncairn Arts Centre. Each year three young artists receive a bursary towards their artistic and professional development, alongside mentoring, performance opportunities and ongoing support through The Duncairn and its wider cultural network. Many past recipients have gone on to perform nationally and internationally, contributing to a vibrant and evolving traditional music scene rooted in both heritage and innovation. This year’s awardees are guitarist Jack McGoldrick, fiddle player Eimear Magee and multi-instrumentalist Peadar Connor.</p> <p>Micro bursaries available to individual musicians is delivered in Collaboration with Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival (CQAF). Each year 20 artists/bands from all genres and backgrounds receive a £1,000 bursary towards development or music creation that supports their career pathway. Artists and groups supported in this recent round range from singer-songwriters to Irish drone artists, to electronic musicians and more. Those awarded are:</p>

Conchur White | Keith McAlister | Morgana | Robyn Maddox | Erin K Hill | Luke Bell | May Rosa | Alfie Norma | J Shields | SILK | Neil Foster | Reflect | Sarah McCreedy | TUIRSE | Fuzzy Pines | Maeve O'Donnell | Moon Landing | O.S.G. | Heliopause | Tanazaki

The Crescendo Post-Primary Pathway in partnership with Ulster Orchestra seeks continued investment to sustain and expand high-quality music education opportunities for young people in North and West Belfast. This initiative provides a vital progression route into post-primary instrumental tuition, ensemble participation, and long-term musical engagement for students who would otherwise face significant financial and social barriers to access.

Through access to instruments, specialist tuition, orchestral participation, and performance opportunities, the programme nurtures musical talent while also supporting attendance, confidence, wellbeing, and educational attainment. Numerous successes have been noted since the beginning of this partnership, with students going on to pass ABRSM Music Medal assessments, others choosing GCSE Music as a response to this support, and teachers reporting measurable improvements in attendance, confidence, aspiration, and engagement with school life.

Teenage Kicks was launched to provide an expansion of opportunities in Belfast for under 18s audiences to experience high quality live music. Twelve awards made of £2,000 per event in the pilot round, supporting events across an array of music venues and cultural spaces. This year's awardees included venues, promoters, festivals and individuals covering events such a showcase of local artists at the Crescent, a matinee performance of orchestral video game music, a collaborative event with Alternatives Restorative Justice featuring Young Spencer. The awarded groups in this pilot round are:

Accidental Theatre | Irish Video Game Orchestra | EastSide Arts | the Black Box | The Duncairn | Sugru; Claire Kieran | Factory 61 | Niamh McDermott | Chordblossom | Scott's Jazz Club | Girls Rock School | Score Draw Music

NI Music Prize & Sound of Belfast a continued partnership with the Oh Yeah Music Centre with a commitment to a three-year uplift of support following research undertaken and reviewed by Committee. The NI Music Prize is an event celebrating the very best of new, established and emerging Northern Irish music. Sound of Belfast and the Northern Ireland Music Prize took place in November 2025 and will return this year, year two of the tree-year partnership. In 2025 the festival held 66 events across the city, with 166 local artists gaining paid performance opportunities. Total festival attendance was 8694, a significant increase on

previous years. Increased support for the festival allowed for a higher number of artists to be paid as well as enhanced quality of shows and greater marketing to reach a wider audience.

Direct partnership with Score Draw Music. Output is Ireland's biggest one-day music conference and live music showcase. Delivered as a key event within the City of Music programme, the conference features a full programme of panels, workshops and conferences, followed by an evening showcase of live music for free to the public. The conference and subsequent artist showcases took place in September 2025 and will return this year. In 2025, Output welcomed over 110 conference speakers across 34 panels, which was attended by 750 delegates. At the evening showcases, 36 music artists performed in the Cathedral Quarter across 9 venues, to a total audience of 5000 people.

Working with colleagues in Enterprise and Business Growth we are developing a Music Business Accelerator Programme tailored to a spectrum of needs within the music industry. A scoping and consultation exercise has now been undertaken and the first stage of the programme will be delivered this year.

Partnerships with organisations including Soultrane, Beat Carnival and Imagine Festival provided opportunities for people of all ages to develop skills and music knowledge as part of City of Music Industry Sessions, such as the 'Beyond the Blue' event during which participants learned about jazz history and its impact on music today, ending in an open jam session, as well as a two-day instrument building and percussion workshop with Korean band HOOLA where attendees learned about how to use recycled materials to create their own music.

Numerous projects have taken place to support the development and promotion of under-represented genres, such as an inaugural full-day Rap Festival featuring a networking event followed by performances from artists such as Leo Miyagee, Quinncidental and Don Chi. Additionally this strand of support provided the opportunity for a UNESCO City of Music legacy piece, with previous UNESCO Day rap artists Kadesh Flow and Kemet Coleman, from Kansas City US, returning to Belfast to record music with producer Eulogy and several local artists.

The City of Music programme delivers a partnership with University of Atypical continuing a fund for the d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse community within music to run accessible music events. This year, six grants in total ranging between £1,000 and £5,000 have been

awarded to Northern Irish music creators across genres, industry experience, and disabilities for events to take place in Belfast in 2026. Recipients include: Martin della Vecchia, Joe Kenny, Andy Skinner, William McLean, Lauren Martin and Susie Blue.

Continuation of a Strategic Partnership with the Music Venue Trust to support the survival of grassroots music venues in Belfast and the ways in which these challenges can be addressed. Following a successful first NI Venues Day a period of support for NI venues took place to engage in a period of data collection that led to the first ever NI representation within the 2025 Music Venues Trust Annual Report, noted as the most comprehensive picture to date of Northern Ireland's grassroots music infrastructure and the venues that sustain it.

This report was presented at Stormont on April 14th alongside political representatives and local artists, such as Neil Hannon from the Divine Comedy. At this presentation the Music Venue Trust revealed that they will be opening their "Raise the Standard" initiative to venues in Northern Ireland - a new scheme designed to support participating venues with full financial relief for high-quality PA systems, lighting, backline, microphones, stands and leads, along with any maintenance or repairs needed thereafter.

Through a partnership with Native Events a Sustainability Toolkit has been developed. This was preceded by a period of research and consultation with a group of industry stakeholders. The toolkit will be launched alongside an event focused on environmentalism in music and made public in 2026.

Belfast City Council supported Scott's Jazz Club to create high quality films of their weekly performances by renowned local and international jazz musicians. These films are provided to the artists, to use as essential promotional tools. The films will ultimately contribute to an archive of the contemporary jazz scene in Northern Ireland and was delivered under priorities to support organisations to embrace assistive technologies to increase accessibility of music for all and enhancing the visibility of Belfast globally as a key music destination.

Work internationally with the UNESCO Cities Network to deliver shared music, skills and learning opportunities. Artist exchanges and learning opportunities have taken place across UNESCO Cities of Music such as Metz, France; Daegu, Korea; London, Ontario, Canada; and Hannover, Germany, as well as Dublin UNESCO City of Literature. This has included the first part of a Samba exchange with Beat Carnival's BeatNDrum in Germany, a City of Music performance for Belfast queer punk band Problem Patterns in Canada, the formation

	of a Brno-Hannover-Belfast jazz ensemble with local artists Scott Flannigan and Andrew McCoubrey and more.
4.0	Financial and Resource Implications
	There are currently no additional financial implications attached to this report.
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
	The cultural strategy, <i>A City Imagining</i> has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Specific initiatives as required will be subject to a further equality screening.
6.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 Remaining City of Music workplan 2026/27 for approval