

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast
City Council**

11th March, 2025

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room, City Hall and remotely via MS Teams on Wednesday, 12th March, 2025 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters

- (a) Apologies
- (b) Minutes
- (c) Declarations of Interest

2. Presentations

- (a) Visit Belfast (Pages 1 - 36)

3. Restricted Items

- (a) Vacant to Vibrant Scheme (Pages 37 - 56)
- (b) Sandy Row Revitalisation Update (Pages 57 - 66)
- (c) Markets Update and Business Plan 2025/26 (Pages 67 - 78)
- (d) Belfast Castle and Malone House - Scale of Charges 2025/26 (Pages 79 - 84)

- (e) Financial Reporting - Quarter 3 2024/25 (Pages 85 - 92)
- (f) Belfast 2024 Update and Evaluation (Verbal Update)
- 4. **Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure**
 - (a) Response to the Department for Infrastructure Review of Trust Ports Consultation (Pages 93 - 96)
- 5. **Positioning Belfast to Compete**
 - (a) International Engagement Approach (Pages 97 - 102)
 - (b) Events Action Plan (Pages 103 - 116)
- 6. **Growing Businesses and the Economy**
 - (a) Sub-Regional Economic Growth Update (Pages 117 - 122)
- 7. **Strategic and Operational Issues**
 - (a) Notice of Motion Update (Pages 123 - 128)
- 8. **Issues Raised in Advance by Members**
 - (a) Impact of Belfast Grand Central Station on Grosvenor Road and Durham Street (Councillor Black to raise)
 - (b) Closure of Connswater Shopping Centre - Support for Tenants (the High Sheriff, Councillor McAteer to raise)



Subject:	Visit Belfast Business Plan 2025-26
Date:	12 March 2025
Reporting Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture and Tourism
Contact Officer:	Kerry McMullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager Pièr Morrow, Tourism Development Officer

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 or Summary of main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of the report is to present the request for funding from Visit Belfast for the 2025-2026 financial year and to set out the organisation's strategic development and operational delivery, focused on supporting tourism growth.</p> <p>Members should note that Visit Belfast will be in attendance at Committee to present the detail of its 2025-26 plan.</p>

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the draft Visit Belfast business plan 2025-26. The overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast in the coming financial year has been taken account of in the revenue estimates that have already been approved by Council. - Approve and agree a funding allocation of £2,076,356 for 2025-26, subject to the development of a funding agreement, priority areas of activity and agreed targets.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Members will be aware that Visit Belfast was established by Council as the principal destination marketing and visitor servicing organisation for the city of Belfast. Visit Belfast leads on the tourism marketing activities and targets both the leisure and business tourism markets. It is a membership organisation with more than 460 partner businesses across the wider hospitality industry. Visit Belfast works on behalf of its funders and partners and with a range of public and private partners including Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and Belfast Chamber to promote Belfast as a tourism destination.
3.2	Visit Belfast is a public/private partnership. Its current Chairperson is Marie-Thérèse McGivern; and Belfast City Council has four Councillor representatives on the Board: Councillor Sammy Douglas, Councillor Eric Hanvey, Councillor Tomás Ó Néill and Councillor Séanna Walsh. Also represented on the board are members from the private, public and community sectors.
3.3	The tourism and hospitality industry in Belfast has been going from strength to strength as Belfast continues to drive the regional tourism economy; in 2023 the most recent published Local Government District tourism statistics by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Belfast hosted 1.7 million overnight trips accounting for 31% of all overnight trips to Northern Ireland generating tourism spend of £538 million, which is 44% of Northern Ireland overnight tourism spend. There are no tourism day visitor statistics available at this time.
3.4	Council has worked with Visit Belfast to continue to rebuild city tourism which has resulted in Belfast's visitor economy being stronger and more competitive in a market context that has been challenging. The city has charted a strong recovery, yet challenges such as staffing, higher costs of doing business within the tourism and hospitality sector and the knock-on impact on hospitality opening hours in the city remain.

3.5	The inclusion of tourism as a key growth sector in the City Region Deal, acknowledged the fact that the sector is already a significant economic generator but recognises the need for significant additional investment in order to sustain growth. The Council's 10-year plan for tourism in the city; " <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> " sets out a vision for the future of tourism in the city that is centred on a people-based and sustainable model of development with a focus on: increasing the coherency of the Belfast experience; supporting quality authentic products; developing skills; and strengthening the city's position through marketing and communications.
3.6	Belfast's <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> , Tourism Plan recognises both the challenges to increase tourism and to maximise the positive impact that it can have on the city; whilst the updated Belfast Agenda has set a target to double the value of tourism from £400m to £800m by 2030. As the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) for Belfast, Visit Belfast has an important role to play in realising the vision for tourism. It is in this context that Visit Belfast developed its three-year strategy New Horizons (2024-2027) and its year two business plan 2025-26 to support and promote tourism activity in the city region in a way that enriches the visitor experience, encourages longer stays and achieves meaningful economic and social impact for local people. Further details of activities that will be undertaken as part of this plan with associated targets will be set out in the presentation to the Committee and are included at Appendix A.
3.7	<p>Visit Belfast's three-year strategy New Horizons (2024-2027) and year two business plan (2025-2026) are aligned to the four themes of Belfast's Tourism Plan: <i>Make Yourself at Home</i>, focused on delivering for the city:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grow the visitor economy in the Belfast city region in an inclusive and sustainable way ● Position the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out; ● Enhance the Experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer, and; ● Sustain its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast's sustainability story.
3.8	Tourism Outlook – tourism contributes to the economic and social wellbeing of the city with high potential to create jobs quickly and provide the economic impetus for the wider economy. The analysis of tourism trends, market sentiment, policy context and performance

	indicators underscore the opportunity for growth in the year ahead, despite economic headwinds.						
3.9	With two airports, Belfast Harbour as well as road and rail links, including the recently opened Grand Central Station with the introduction of an hourly train service to and from Dublin, the city is driving overall tourism growth in Northern Ireland. This, combined with its extensive leisure and business offer, is attracting visitors.						
3.10	Visit Belfast 2024-2025 performance - Visit Belfast's focus in year one of the New Horizons strategy was to achieve an economic impact target of £133m through leisure tourism marketing, business events, cruise and visitor servicing activity while adopting a new 'triple-bottom line' approach to measure the economic, environmental and social impact of tourism for Belfast. Visit Belfast is on target to deliver a very strong year one performance in 2024-25 with all KPIs achieved or exceeded.						
3.11	Priorities outlined in Visit Belfast's business plan 2025-26 include: directly deliver on the ambitions and priorities set out in <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> tourism plan for Belfast through key strategic focus areas of growing demand by leveraging major events infrastructure developments to enhance Belfast's appeal; expanding year-round demand with a focus on shoulder season and midweek business; capitalising on increased tourism demand for Belfast to spread the benefits of tourism across the city, within our neighbourhoods and wider region; demonstrating sustainable leadership and innovation with greater measurable environmental and social impact; promoting Belfast's emerging luxury and premium offer; driving growth and innovation through AI, digital and data-driven decision-making; collaboration across industry partnerships						
3.12	<p>Operational Targets for 2025-26 - based on projected levels of growth in 2025-26, Visit Belfast is proposing the following targets for 2025-26 as agreed by their board:</p> <table> <tr> <th>Total Output</th><th>Target</th></tr> <tr> <td>857,328 visits</td><td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cruise 320,328 • Daytrips 250,000 • Overnight leisure trips 250,000 • Delegates 37,000 </td></tr> <tr> <td>450,000 bed nights</td><td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350,000 leisure, • 100,000 business </td></tr> </table>	Total Output	Target	857,328 visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cruise 320,328 • Daytrips 250,000 • Overnight leisure trips 250,000 • Delegates 37,000 	450,000 bed nights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350,000 leisure, • 100,000 business
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3.13	£141m contribution to the city's economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure £62m • Business events £37m • Visitor servicing £19m • Cruise £23m
	805,000 Visitor enquiries	
	100 clients and industry supported on sustainability	
3.13	<p>A detailed business plan has been submitted and reviewed by officers. The targets outlined will form the basis of key performance indicators for Council's 2025-26 funding agreement with Visit Belfast. Regular monitoring against targets will be included and these key performance indicators will relate to the trajectory for growth and align with the implementation phases for Council's tourism plan. This provides a basis for more effective monitoring of performance.</p>	
3.14	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>In the current financial year, Belfast City Council's funding arrangement with Visit Belfast is £2,076,356. An allocation of £2,076,356 has been set aside within the Departmental estimates for the financial year 2025-26.</p>	
3.15	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>No specific equality or good relations implications. Visit Belfast also works with councils outside of Belfast, as part of the Regional Tourism Partnership.</p>	
4.0	Appendices	
4.1	Appendix A: Visit Belfast Presentation of Business Plan 2025-26	

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Year 2 Business Plan

New Horizons for Belfast

2024-2027 Strategy
2025-26 Business Plan

**visit
Belfast**

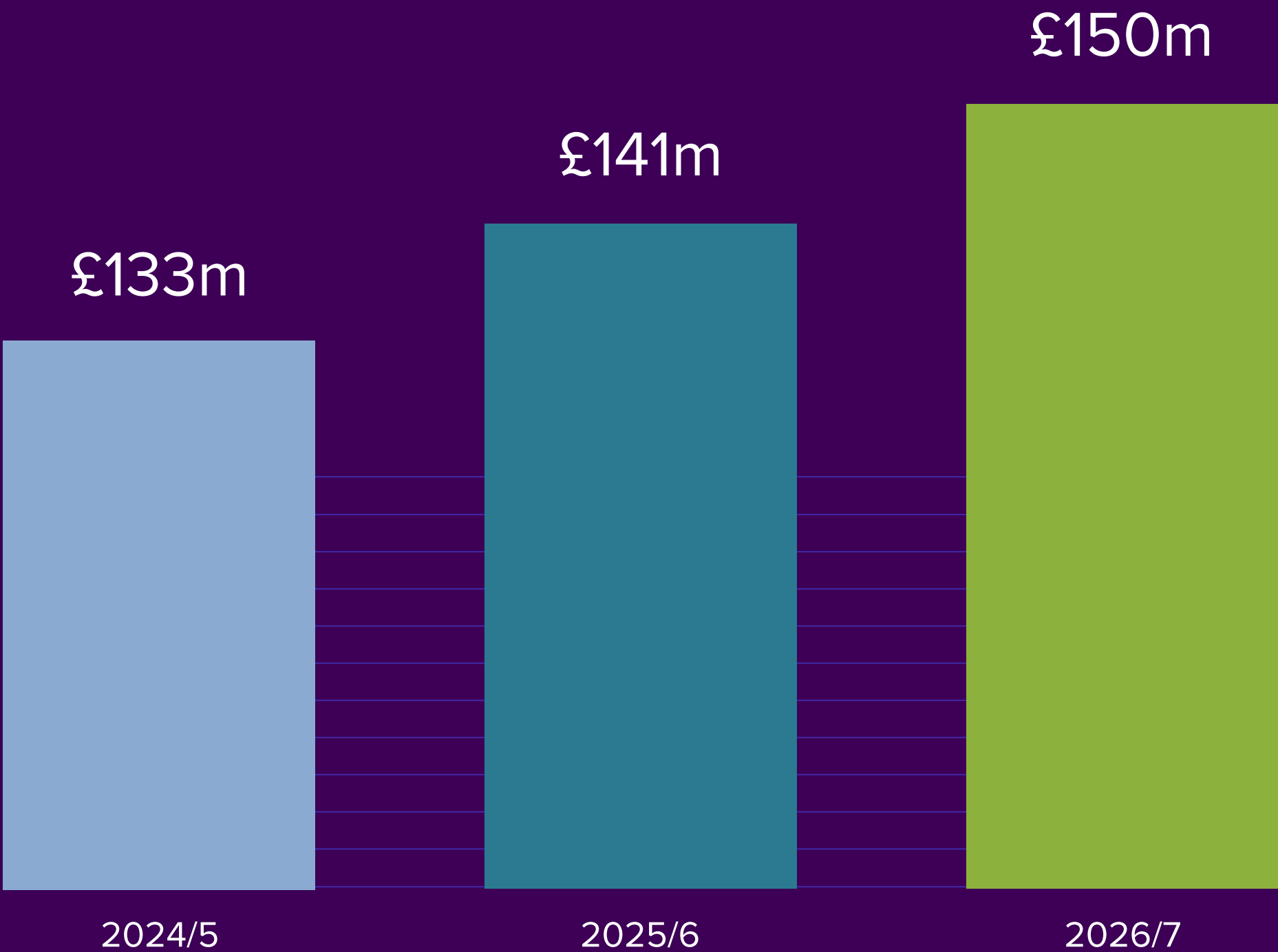


Belfast

3-Year Growth Targets

£424m economic impact
20% growth
6.5% growth p.a
30:1 RoI

Social
Environmental
Impact





Strategy: Key Pillars

GROW

Value of tourism to Belfast City region and its communities

POSITION

Belfast City region as a must-see destination for leisure and business tourism

EXPERIENCE

Enhance the visitor experience by showcasing Belfast City region's unique neighbourhood offer

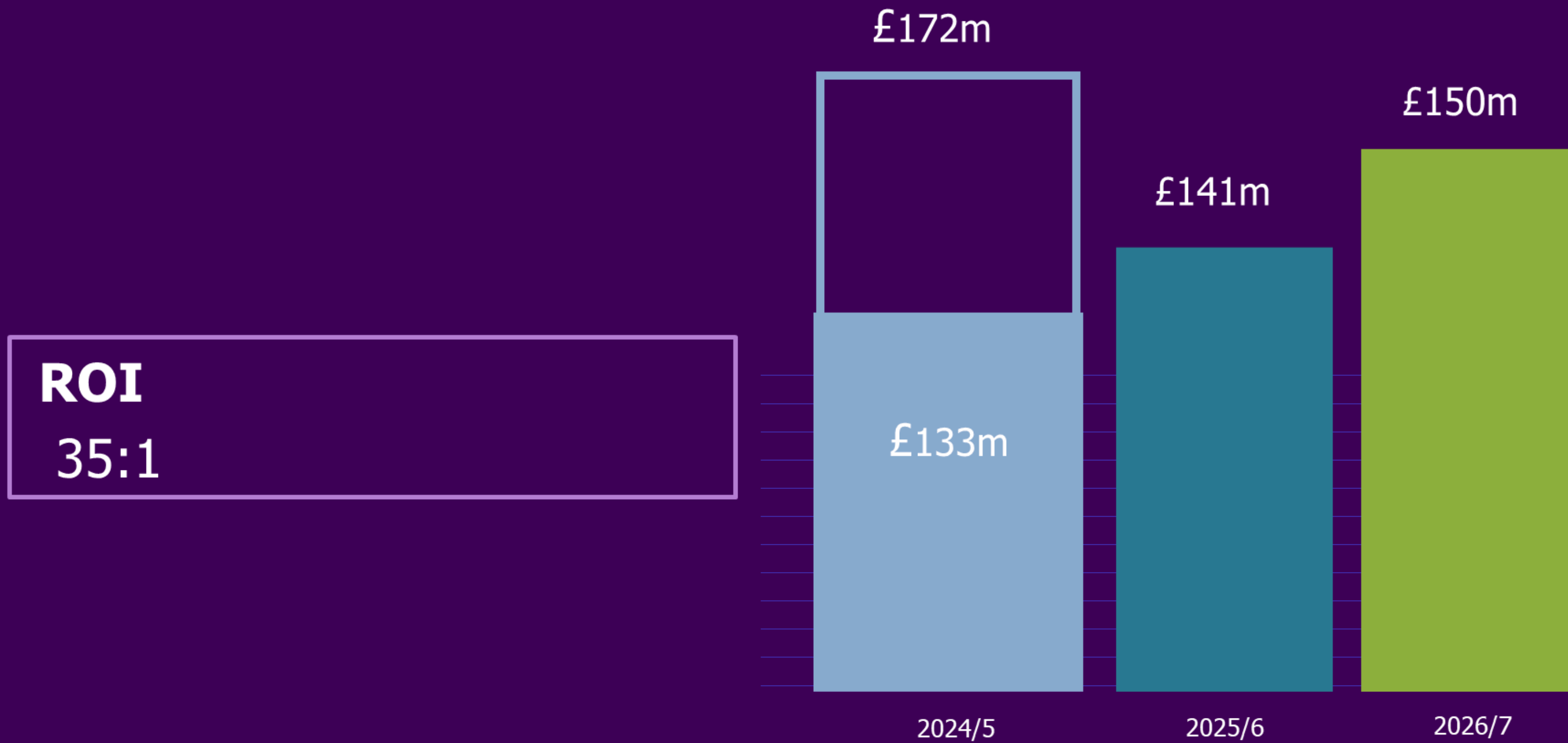
SUSTAIN

Accelerate work on sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives and telling Belfast's sustainability story

24-25 PROGRESS TO DATE

YEAR ONE
PERFORMANCE

24/25 Economic Impact



24/25 Performance Highlights

£102M	1.8M	45M	205M	625K BEDNIGHTS
Leisure economic impact	Web visits	Social media views	WOTS	8 leisure marketing campaigns

£32M	114	31K	89K	2 GLOBAL AWARDS
Business events economic impact	Business event wins	Delegates	Bednights	Best CVB 2024 Best events destination 2024

£33M	618K	259K	100%	NO.1
Visitor servicing & cruise economic impact	Visitor Enquiries	Cruise Pax 2024	Visitor Satisfaction	Best TIC 20th Year

Social Impact

First Belfast resident survey on tourism sentiment

92%

Residents believe tourism is beneficial for Belfast

93%

Tourism allows people to learn about Belfast's culture & history

91%

Tourism supports local businesses such as bars, restaurants and attractions to remain open

87%

Tourism helps to create a more vibrant Belfast with more things to see and do

84%

Residents interested in taking part in more tourism activities

Charity and social impact

£1.3M*

Raised by VB industry partners for charitable and social causes (30% responses to date*)

56,672

Meals provided to vulnerable people in Belfast through VB's Changing the Menu for Good Social Impact programme

MANCHESTER & CAMBRIDGE

rolled out Changing the Menu for Good supported by VB

1,384

Students supported through educational outreach programmes via VB business events

Environmental Impact

Measuring Belfast's Tourism Carbon Footprint

- VB BCC and EY - developing a pioneering tool to measure and model Belfast's tourism carbon impact
- Industry forum being established
- VB carbon footprint being measured and monitored
- Visit Belfast Gold Award - Green Tourism
- First multi--venue citywide reusable cup pilot to reduce SUP at concerts/events



Top 10 sustainable destination in the world - 2024

Accelerating sustainability action at city, industry and visitor level

9TH/100

Belfast is ranked Top 10 globally in the Global Destination Sustainability Index

HIGHEST RANKED UK & IRELAND DESTINATION

76% HOTELS

Belfast Hotel Rooms hold a Green Tourism / B corp sustainability certification

77 BUSINESSES

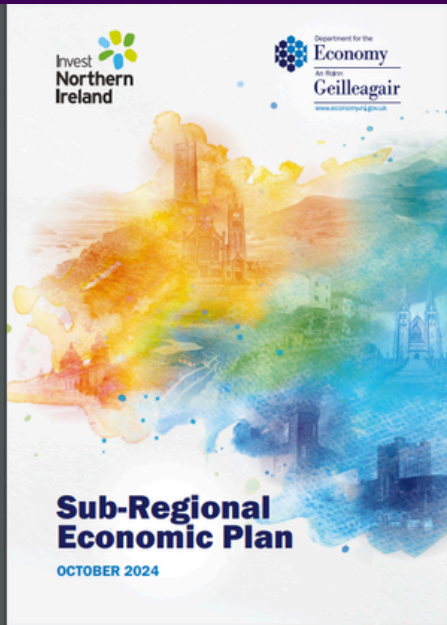
Industry partners and clients supported on sustainability



CONTEXT & OUTLOOK

Policy Context

NATIONAL CONTEXT



CITY CONTEXT



Market Context

8 super trends

- 1 Strong Tourism Demand vs. Climate Concerns
- 2 Diverging Consumer Behaviours (Cost-of-living vs luxury)
- 3 Business Resilience Amid Rising Costs
- 4 Over-tourism and Resident Sentiment
- 5 Sustainability vs. Value for Money
- 6 Evolving Urban Tourism
- 7 Seasonal Shifts
- 8 The Digital Frontier



2025/6 Outlook: Opportunities

MAJOR EVENTS

153rd Open

Oireachtas na Samhna

Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann

STRATEGY

NI Tourism Action Plan

Neighbourhood tourism

BRCD projects & regionality

NI travel trade strategy

INVESTMENT

+700 - 1355 rooms

Private Sector Investment

Grand Central - Dublin hourly

D3 Cruise Hub & growth

GROWTH

ROI, GB & US demand

Premium/luxury demand

Food and drink tourism

Peace Tourism

2025/6 Outlook: Challenges

ECONOMIC

Cost of doing business

Cost of living

Belfast costs for visitors

Public finances & funding

POLICY

ETA roll out

Regional Balance

Green Claims Directive

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hotel capacity (peaks)

Air connectivity

Transport - nighttime economy

Coach parking

EXPERIENCE

Staffing & service levels

Complex lives & anti-social
behaviour

2025-26 Focus Areas

- Growing demand by leveraging major events and infrastructure
- Expanding year-round demand - shoulder season & midweek
- Capitalising on increased tourism demand for Belfast to spread benefits of tourism including into our city neighbourhoods
- Demonstrating sustainable leadership and innovation
- Promoting Belfast's emerging luxury and premium offer
- Extreme collaboration across industry partnerships
- Driving growth and innovation through AI, digital and data
- Developing our people and next-generation talent within Visit Belfast and across our industry



25-26 DELIVERY

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Page 21

etgusto.com

visitBelfast

Targets & Outputs

350,000 bed nights
250,000 day visits

£62m leisure tourism spend

Page 22

6 marketing
campaigns
100m impacts

2.6m
web visits

26.9m
video views

18,000
new email
subscribers

6 publications
1.5m readership

49m
social media
impressions

495,000
social media
followers

150m PR WOTS

3.8m
social
engagements



2025-26 Digital Focus

To stay ahead of digital trends, we will focus on:

Enhancing visitbelfast.com – A user-centric, accessible, and interactive platform with improved SEO and personalisation.

Prioritising short-form video – Leveraging Instagram Reels, TikTok, and user-generated content for authenticity and engagement.

Optimising social media – A balanced organic and paid strategy to maximise visibility.

Building creator partnerships – Strengthening audience connections through long-term collaborations.

Advancing email marketing – Personalised, automated, and seasonally aligned campaigns.

Leveraging AI – Enhancing content, search, and user experiences.

Adopting a test-and-learn mindset – Continuously refining digital channels, messaging, and content formats.

Next Generation for VisitBelfast.com

Next-gen VisitBelfast.com: Launching June 2025, with partner workshops showcasing new functionality.

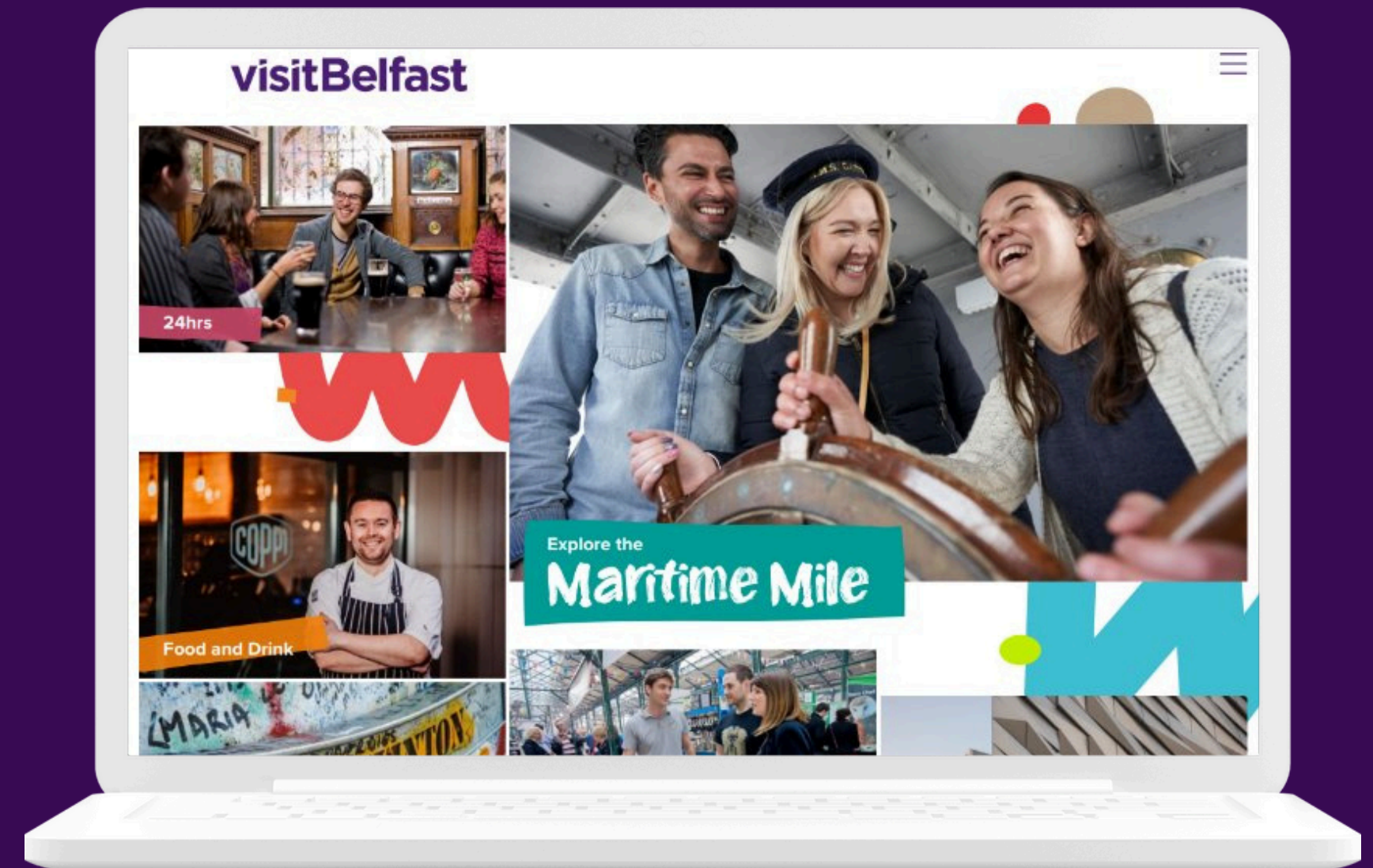
New Digital Partner Approach: Focused on enhancing partner opportunities with banner ad formats and sponsored sections while prioritising user experience.

Personalised Content: Tailored to key personas for improved engagement.

Social-First Approach: Leveraging CrowdRiff to highlight user-generated content across site and partner profiles

Enhanced Partner Profiles: New features like image feeds for better promotion across site

Smart Mapping Tool: Launching "You Smart Thing" to create tailored user maps.





25-26 DELIVERY

VISITOR SERVICING & DESTINATION MANAGEMENT



Targets & Outputs

805,000 visitor enquiries
4 VIC sites

£19m economic benefit

£878k
commercial
revenue

VIC satisfaction
levels 95%

Servicing
252k gateway
enquiries

Enhancing the
visitor experience

Delivering
economic / social
benefit
neighbourhoods

Stewardship
of visitor
experience

Cruise

320,328 cruise visitors

£23m economic benefit

- £90m investment by Belfast Harbour - Cruise Hub will relocate to D3 for 2027 /28
- Belfast is the number 1 transit port in the UK and Ireland
- Fastest growing travel segment in next 5 years
- Working with BH Harbour to grow 'turnaround' business - drives bednights and spend
- Deliver Year 3 of Cruise Sustainability plan
- Welcome team in place to maximise the visitor experience and create opportunities for local tourism businesses
- Gateway role
- Commercial opportunity to cover VB operating costs & encourage to "buy local"
- Cruise animation programme with partners, community groups and neighbourhoods

Neighbourhood Tourism

- 17,000 NEW referrals - 25-26 target
- 100 Neighbourhood tourism partners identified
- Three-year plan with cross company focus
- "Dial up" neighbourhood messaging in relevant VB activity
- Solid progress across all areas – early focus on East & West, further outreach North & South
- Mentor and support successful NT projects awarded under BCC NT Investment Fund
- City connectivity mapping using sustainable travel - Interactive digital mapping technology
- 25-26 improved measurement and tracking of referrals and impact at a product / experience level



Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

- Largest ever event held in Belfast
- Economic Impact Potential 700k visitors, delivering £60M economic impact
- VB key delivery partner for BCC - accommodation, visitor servicing and destination management, marketing and comms, industry engagement, ticketing, neighbourhood tourism, sustainability and impact
- 2-9 August 2026 and 1-8 August 2027
- Increase ROI and International visitors



25-26 DELIVERY

BUSINESS EVENTS



Targets & Outputs

37,000 delegates
100,000 bednights

£37m* delegate spend
120 conference wins

+9% YoY
growth

£130m
Leads

£100m
Bids

2,000 buyer
engagements

20% increase
Corporate
RFPs

150 new
ambassadors

Destination
management
137 events

95% Clients
Recommend
Belfast

Outlook: Forward bookings (to date)

Year	Events	Dels	Bednights	Economic Impact
2024	133	31,394	77,766	£32,053,274
2025	106	38,113	114,762	£38,913,373
2026	22	10,426	33,227	£10,644,946
2027	15	10,250	33,990	£10,465,250
2028	2	1,608	5,027	£1,641,768
2029	1	600	1,500	£612,600
2031	2	1,400	4,700	£1,429,400
Total	281	93,791	270,972	£95,760,611

84% midweek events

2024 vs 2025
+22% economic impact
+48% bednights



25-26 DELIVERY

LEISURE TRADE



Targets & Approach

£2m leads value
20,000 bednights

8,000 daytrips
175 partner referrals

Development & demand



Key Issues



2025-26 Summary

£141m

Economic impact

30:1

ROI

**Social
Environmental
Economic**
Impact

**BCC investment:
Leverage - £1:£1.13
ROI - 68:1**

**VFM
Efficiency
Delivery**

Thank you & Questions

visit
Belfast



Belfast

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of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Subject:	Review of Trust Ports Consultation
Date:	12 March 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager, City Regeneration and Development Jamie Uprichard, Business Research and Development Manager

Restricted Reports											
Is this report restricted?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No								
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number</p> <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 											
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>				After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	X	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to agree a Belfast City Council Response to the Review of Trust Ports Consultation..
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that the Committee agree a response to the consultation questions 1-2 as outlined below.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The Department for Infrastructure is inviting the public to have their say on a review of its policy relating to Ports and any legislative changes that are necessary for this sector.</p> <p>In Northern Ireland, four out of the five main commercial ports – Belfast, Foyle, Warrenpoint and Coleraine are known as ‘Trust Ports’ and most of the consultation focuses on matters relating to the trust ports.</p> <p>Trust ports effectively own themselves. The Ports Good Guidance, published by the Department for Transport in England, says that “Trust Ports are a valuable asset presently safeguarded by the existing board whose duty it is to hand it on in the same or better condition to succeeding generations. This remains the ultimate responsibility of the board and future generations remain the ultimate stakeholder”. Since Trust Ports have no shareholders or beneficial owners any surplus generated is returned back into each Port. Trust Ports have two main duties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they are charged with a statutory duty to improve, maintain and manage harbour facilities; and - they are required to make a commercially acceptable rate of return, with all profit re-invested in delivery of their statutory functions and to the benefit of their stakeholders.
3.2	<p>The consultation addresses a number of issues as outlined but it is proposed in the Council response to focus just on the first issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ONS classification - Commercial Powers available to the Trust Ports# - New and Amending Harbour Orders - Marine Safety Legislation.
3.3	<p><u>ONS classification</u></p> <p>In April 2005 our Trust Ports were reclassified from Private Non-Financial Corporations to Public Non-Financial Corporations by the ONS. This reclassification is an accounting classification only and has no legal effect whatsoever on the statutory powers and functions of our Trust Ports. The main issue with the classification of Trust Ports here is that any borrowings by Trust Ports, irrespective of where the funds come from, count against the Departments Capital Delegated Expenditure Limit budget. Under their 2002 Harbour Orders, each Trust Port has a commercial borrowing limit, and they can borrow commercially up to that limit without approval from the Department. Belfast has a limit of £45m. Beyond these limits the Department can stop the Ports borrowing if it has insufficient capital funds to cover the proposed amount. This would mean the Trust Ports cannot borrow and hence their plans would have to be put on hold. This could result in</p>

3.4	economically important projects being put on hold or disruption to harbour operations until money becomes available.
3.5	<p>Reclassification would remove this public expenditure link between trust port borrowing and the Department's budget and Trust Port borrowing would not be competing with Departmental spending priorities. The ONS will only consider the issue of classification after a thorough review of the evidence.</p> <p>Seeking to remove our Trust Ports from public corporation status would involve at a minimum removing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the power of the Department to compel the sale of a Trust Port, contained in the Ports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994; - the power of the Department to give a Trust Port directions of a general or specific nature as to the exercise of its functions, contained in the Harbours (Northern Ireland) Order 2002; and - powers of the Department (or the council in the case of Coleraine) to appoint a majority of the members of Trust Ports, contained in individual harbour orders made in 2002.
3.6	<p>The consultation notes that there have been a number of reasons put forward by the Trust Ports as to why their current classification is a problem. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The rules which govern government departments are not necessarily suitable for commercial enterprises, such as those which dictate borrowing; - Trust Ports trade commercially while receiving no government funding; - There is deemed to be too much red tape, disadvantaging Trust Ports by impeding agile decision making in a commercially competitive environment; - There are fears that future changes and requirements in guidance could place an even greater burden on the Trust Ports e.g., the inclusion of Trust Ports within Whole of Government Accounting; - Reclassification would remove the challenge to government departments to make budgetary account for Trust Port commercial borrowing.
3.7	<p><u>Proposed response</u></p> <p>It is proposed that a brief response is made as outlined below.</p> <p><i>"Belfast City Council recognises the important role of Belfast Harbour as a key partner in the economic development and regeneration of the city, including delivering on the Cities ambitions in relation to net-zero and responding to the need for more housing.</i></p> <p><i>To enable the Harbour to operate effectively in a competitive environment and to fulfil its full potential, the Council supports the reclassification of trust ports to provide the Harbour with the ability to increase our borrowing in a prudent way. The Council would request that the changes necessary to enable the reclassification are brought forward within this Assembly mandate.</i></p>
3.8	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.</p>

4.0	Appendices
	None



Subject:	International Engagement – emerging approach
Date:	12 March 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director, Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager Economy

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

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
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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

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☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on work to date on developing a new approach to international engagement activity by the council and to set out emerging thinking ahead of a final draft being presented to a future meeting of this committee, as well as to request approval for council engagement in the June 2025 New York-New Belfast event.
2.0	Recommendation
	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the range of engagement to date and feedback from internal and external partners • Note and consider the emerging thinking on the content and approach for the new international engagement activity • Share any additional feedback on the emerging propositions in order to inform the final report that will be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee • Agree to support and engage in the annual New York-New Belfast event in June 2025 at a cost of £5,000 towards sponsorship and up to a maximum of £7,500 towards travel and accommodation costs for the Lord Mayor and relevant senior officers.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At the October 2024 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members noted and agreed a series of high-level considerations to shape the work around a new approach to international engagement and agreed that a more detailed report setting out the proposed approach would be brought back to a future meeting.
3.2	Since that time, officers have been engaging with teams across a number of relevant council departments as well as key external partners and have also looked at how other cities carry out this work. We have distilled the findings from that engagement and research work into a series of emerging proposals that we consider will shape the final draft report.
3.3	The global operating environment is obviously facing significant headwinds and is highly volatile at the present time. Macro-level factors such as these mean that it is difficult to plan activities with any degree of certainty given that changes such as the introduction of tariffs can impact direct on commitments and ambitions around trade and FDI activity. At a regional level, Invest NI has released a new business strategy, including an enhanced focus on both FDI and international trade activity.

3.4	<p>More locally, the recent Belfast Agenda refresh and collective commitment to a series of agreed priority actions means that any future approach needs to align with and support these actions. Within the council, the changing operational structures – with new teams established over recent years focusing on activities such as Innovation, Climate and City Regeneration – mean that many officers are engaging in international networks and partnerships as part of their “business as usual”. This would not have been the case when the original international relations framework was established in 2017. In addition, the increased focus on international events such as One Young World and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, as well as the planned investment in Belfast Stories demonstrate an enhanced focus on attracting international visitors to Belfast. This presents additional opportunities not only for developing and implementing a strong city narrative for key audiences, but also to consider opportunities for “layering up” business and cultural investment opportunities.</p>
3.5	<p>Officers have now met with numerous teams across the council involved in international activity in order to understand planned activity as well as the level of financial and staff resources allocated to that activity. We have also met some of our key external partners involved in international activity (including universities; colleges; British Council; Invest NI; Visit Belfast). We noted an extensive programme of engagement in formal and informal networks, partnerships and programmes across a range of disciplines – much of which is carried out as discreet, stand-alone activity relating to those specific business areas. Teams identified some areas where they could benefit from (and contribute to) added value products and services such as improving information sharing; insights and data collation – particularly focusing on key messages and unique selling points. It was recognised that emerging investments such as the City Deal projects present an opportunity for enhancing that messaging.</p>
3.6	<p>The role of the Lord Mayor remains a key resource in “fronting up” engagements with potential investors or supporting on city promotion activities. Access to the City Hall is widely valued by partner organisations and can be a very useful tool in our wider menu of investment and city promotion support.</p>
3.7	<p>Taking account of the issues raised during the engagement work, officers are of the view that there are a number of opportunities for establishing more effective ways of working across internal teams and with external partners, as well as considering new products that can be used by all partners to generate a coherent, positive messaging around the city as a vibrant business and investment location. We also consider that there is value in focusing on a small number of areas in which we can add value – while recognising that partner organisations and internal teams will be moving ahead on a wider range of activities that are fairly self-contained or which they are able to deliver independently.</p>

3.8	<p>By way of areas of focus, these may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital investment – focus on engagement at key events and targeting specific investment opportunities/funds to deliver corporate and city ambitions • Digital innovation – focus on engagement in key events and networks – and considering how to integrate project-based opportunities (including emerging City Deal investments) into wider city promotion messaging • Trade and investment – helping more local businesses to engage in export and supporting Invest NI in FDI promotion activity • Education – we expect that this work will be led by universities but that there may be opportunities to add value e.g. through civic engagement.
3.9	<p>To move this forward, it is proposed that the collective range of international engagement activity will be “packaged” together and presented to the committee as a cohesive programme of work on an annual basis, but as part of a wider strategic approach. Delivery responsibility will sit across a number of council teams and partner organisations but the collaborative programme of work will give members a picture of the scale of engagement – as well as demonstrating the added value that is being generated from relevant individual connections.</p>
3.10	<p><u>New York New Belfast – request for financial support and agreement to attend</u></p> <p>As noted above, the plan for the coming years is to present an overarching programme of work sets out the collective commitments for that coming year. Each team will be responsible for securing individual approvals – including budgetary approvals – to progress their planned activities. Ahead of this more strategic approach being implemented, it is likely that there will be a number of activities that need to come to the committee for approval, given timelines for decision. One of those activities is New York New Belfast (NYNB). Member will be aware that this is an annual event which takes place in New York and which promotes business and investment opportunities in Belfast to a selected audience of government, private business and civic leaders. The 2025 event will take place on 12 June 2025. Over 150 delegates are expected to attend the event which incorporates discussions on the themes of tourism, innovation, infrastructure and excellence in technology.</p>
3.11	<p>While the focus to date has been on selling Belfast as an investment location, the 2025 programme will include an enhanced focus on Belfast’s indigenous entrepreneurial strengths. Under the banner of “Meet the Belfast Maker” a number of city CEOs will highlight their contribution to the capital’s economy and outline opportunities for collaboration and investment from external partners. This June’s event will also include a delegation of businesses from the Belfast Chamber of Commerce. Members are asked to agree to sponsor the event at a</p>

	cost of £5,000 and to agree to attendance at the event by the Lord Mayor and appropriate senior officers, at a cost not to exceed £7,500.
3.12	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>New approach to international relations: no specific resource implications at this point. The action plan that will be presented to a future meeting of this committee will include a detailed breakdown of expenditure on relevant activities.</p>
3.13	<p>New York New Belfast event: Members are asked to contribute £5,000 towards sponsorship for the 2025 event and to agree to attendance at the event by the Lord Mayor and relevant senior officers, up to a maximum estimated cost of £7,500. The above costs are set aside within the existing International Relations budget 2025/26.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no direct Equality or Good Relations implications associated with this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	None

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Subject:	Proposal for Development Tourism Events Action Plan
Date:	12 th March 2025
Reporting Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manger Culture, tourism and events
Contact Officer:	Kerry McMullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision
After Council Decision
Sometime in the future
Never

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☐

Call-in

☐

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No
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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the proposed approach to development of a Tourism Events Action Plan - .
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of this paper and subsequent next steps for the development of a Tourism Events Action Plan. • Recommendations relate to the information contained in section 8.0 of the report, Members are asked to agree to the development of an action plan, and associated ToR with budget of up to £40,000
3.0	Main Report
	<p>Strategic Context of City Events:</p> <p>Belfast Agenda:</p> <p>The Council has set out a strategic mandate to develop a city for everyone in its Community Plan the Belfast Agenda, where the vision is that:</p> <p><i>Belfast will be a city re-imagined and resurgent. A great place to live and work for everyone. Beautiful, well connected and culturally vibrant, it will be a sustainable city shared and loved by all its citizens, free from the legacy of conflict. A compassionate city offering opportunities for everyone. A confident and successful city energising a dynamic and prosperous city region. A magnet for talent and business and admired around the world. A city people dream to visit.</i></p> <p>City Imagining:</p> <p>To achieve this vision, the Council launched a ten-year Cultural Strategy in 2019 - <i>A City Imagining</i> which sets out a long-term commitment to facilitating a new integrated phase of culture-led progress and development for Belfast. The strategy brings together the culture, events and tourism functions within Council, as well as identifying areas of cross departmental working to support the Belfast Agenda.</p>

Belfast's Cultural strategy, *A City Imagining*, recognises the importance of events and programming to the wider cultural and tourism profile of Belfast. Events can tell stories, connect people and present new perspectives on our place.

As cities move on from the impacts of COVID-19, consumer sentiment research has indicated that events will take on a new significance as motivators for travel and an opportunity for destinations to differentiate their offer. Events can also create immersive spaces for the visitor to become part of an ever-evolving story.

The benefits of events and cultural programmes to cities are considerable. Many cities have used events to engage with local people, build civic pride and transform their reputation internationally. Events are one of the best ways to measure the economic, social and environmental impact of tourism as they bring together a cross-section of city stakeholders. Importantly they also have the ability to create legacy.

Make Yourself at Home:

To realise the ambitions of the Cultural Strategy, Council developed the Tourism Plan *Make Yourself at Home*, which is a ten-year blueprint to develop and grow tourism in the city with its four directional themes – Grow, Sustain, Experience and Position.

The plan recognises the need to expand the city's experience mix that will encourage visitors to stay longer and increase dwell time to increase economic development and support the environment.

Events also have a key role to play as a motivator to travel as well as delivering direct economic impact

Make Yourself at Home also states that a sustained programme of activity including an annual calendar of signature events, will help attract visitors back to our city following Covid, providing a much-needed boost for citizens as well as the cultural and hospitality sectors and the wider tourism industry.

It further recognises that events will be an exemplar for the four strategic themes of the plan: Grow, Position, Experience and Sustain. These events will:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly contribute to the growth of the tourism industry in Belfast through an increase in out-of-state visitors, dwell time and spend • Challenge perceptions of Belfast and raise awareness of the diversity and richness of the city's culture, arts and heritage • Create authentic and contemporary Belfast Experiences of quality • Establish a model for carbon neutral activity. <p>Finally, <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> notes that events of ambition within the city have the potential to be truly transformative. They will tell contemporary Belfast stories with an unprecedented international reach by fusing digital and real-life experiences. They will leave a lasting legacy of skills and capacity, that will support future generations of tourism ambassadors, creative talent and storytellers.</p>
4.0	Impact of Covid 19:
	<p>The Covid-19 pandemic had a considerable impact on events across the globe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass gatherings were unsafe for an extensive period • Public confidence in events was affected • Considerable negative impact on suppliers to the event industry - staff shortages, redundancies, business closure • Spiralling costs. <p>Within Council, all events were cancelled during 2020, and in 2021, those which returned were delivered differently, recognising the on-going need for social distancing.</p> <p>Council events have now in - large returned to pre - pandemic delivery levels, however that is not withstanding the fact that events staff, suppliers and providers are now more difficult to source, with many moving to work in other sectors during the pandemic, infrastructure and ancillary costs have as a result increased substantially and the Council events budget does not currently fully reflect this 'new world' of event delivery post - Covid.</p>
5.0	Status Quo - Current Delivery:
	Traditionally the Events team within the Tourism and Events Unit are responsible for a range of event activity which can be largely categorised below:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of civic events in the City - the St Patrick's celebrations, Lord Mayors Day, and Christmas Lights Switch on. This would also include ad hoc events of this scale, recent examples being Operation Shamrock and the King's Coronation • The development and delivery of the Belfast Maritime Festival – a signature event for Belfast – now on a biennial basis as a result of a major strategic review • Thirdly, the team have a multitude of roles in respect of major or mega events. Often, these are events involving NI wide stakeholders with a number currently in the pipeline, namely; , The Oireachtas in 2025 and Ongoing Bidding for the All Ireland Fleadh Cheoil in 2026/27 Past examples included the Giro D'italia, World Police and Fire Games, MTV Music awards, Tall Ships, One Young World <p>Delivery of these events, no matter the scale, involves a vast spectrum of tasks which range from stakeholder liaison, consultation, managing contractors, health and safety, legal and insurance, traffic management, community co-design, and significant procurement. Whilst ensuring strategic alignment and maximising the opportunities presented for the city.</p> <p>Whilst the cultural strategy recognises the opportunity that hosting of major events has for city positioning it recommends delivery of 1 major event every 5 years, and should we be successful in our current bidding we could be in the position of one major every year for the next 3 years.</p> <p>The remit of the Events team also includes management of funding streams (Support for Sport) and oversight and contract management of the City's Festive Lighting Scheme.</p>
6.0	Other events associated with Council:
	<p>Managed by the Culture Unit in Council, the CMAG budget is £2.43m annually. This is broken down as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £473,425 to 16 Festivals and Events organisations for two years (minimum audiences of 10,000)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 600,240 to four Festivals and Events organisations for four years (minimum audiences of 65,000) • £791,783 to nine Arts and Heritage organisations for four years (audiences over 50,000). • £564,562 to 27 Arts and Heritage organisations for two years <p>Finally, City and Neighbourhood Services also deliver a series of community and parks events throughout the year, with key projects being the Spring and Autumn Fairs.</p> <p>These events make up the calendar of city events and present an opportunity for cultural vibrancy and visitor experience but also opportunities for closer alignment of delivery, coordinated marketing and initiatives on sustainability and inclusivity.</p>
7.0	Previous development work
	<p>In July 2017, Council commissioned Festivals and Events International (FEI) to undertake a review of our investment in and support for Events and Festivals, with a view to developing a new Events strategy for the Council and its strategic partners.</p> <p>In March 2018, a Committee paper to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee presented the key FEI recommendations and proposed a way forward, in conjunction with key partners.</p> <p>The consultancy team's key recommendations focused on a number of areas including Funding Streams, Capacity Building Support, Evaluation and Measurement and Governance and Delivery.</p> <p>CG&R adopted the recommendations within the report on 7th March 2018, these were subsequently integrated into the long term cultural strategy 'A City Imagining'. While these reports refer to the 'integration' of the recommendations within the FEI report, there was a definitive shift in strategic direction which resulted in no stand-alone 'Festival and Events strategy' or Action plan being developed at that time.</p> <p>That decision was also taken within the context of a number of important developments and milestones, such as the cessation of the European Capital of</p>

	<p>Culture bidding process, initial recommendations arising from the draft Festival and Events Strategy and the conclusion in March 2020, of the current Cultural Framework and Tourism Strategy.</p> <p>It is important to also remind Members that the subsequent period of strategy development took place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and there has been significant change in market demand as well as delivery models, supplier infrastructure and costs.</p> <p>Tourism currently has a stand - alone plan to underpin 'A City Imagining' in the form of 'Make Yourself at Home' while City Events does not.</p>
8.0	<p>Need for an Updated Events Action Plan</p> <p>After significant scoping work , Officers are now of the view that while the FEI report still contains important and relevant information which needs reflected in an updated Events Action Plan to underpin both ' A City Imagining' and 'Make Yourself at Home' through the remainder of their life span (2029 / 2030), a new Events action Plan should be considered</p> <p>Additionally, Officers have experienced key 'Lessons Learned' in the period since both <i>City Imagining</i> and <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> began operational roll - out in relation to Council Managed Events - these should be reflected in an updated resourced Events Action Plan with review milestones, KPI's and associated ownership.</p> <p>This Events Action Plan will require in its formation a period of sectoral, strategic and Elected Member engagement to ensure future 'best fit' of Council - managed events and will address the following points,</p> <p>Strategic Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic alignment to <i>Belfast Agenda</i>, <i>City Imagining</i> and <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> as well as other regional strategies (eg <i>DfE Tourism strategy</i>, <i>ACNI strategy</i>) is needed,

- Ensure that Council city events delivered align to the strategic ambitions and priorities of Council
- Consideration of the Council city events portfolio within the context of the events life cycle and rejuvenation points needed at specific future gateways
- Clear articulation and rationalisation needed on what events Council should deliver - 'who, what where, when and why' approach
- Horizon scanning is needed for Officers to identify emerging trends and opportunities for new events
- An aligned approach to ensure that Council events align to the new Tourism NI Events Strategic Vision.
- Consideration of bidding process and decision making frameworks for major/bid for events

Filtering Mechanism:

- Review and rationalisation of both the quality and quantity of Council events currently being delivered and to be delivered in the future
- Consideration is also required as to the appropriateness of Council as the delivery agent for each event in the portfolio or whether other city stakeholders are best placed to deliver certain events or city animation e.g. ongoing work to consider councils role in delivery of culture night.

Development Plans:

- Developmental pathway for each Council event with a Tourism lens and associated budget profiling is needed to ensure tourism and positioning potential is fully exploited.

Budget / Procurement:

- The Council Events Team has a developmental remit, which is not being fully exploited due to constraints on current resources – multi-annual budget consideration is required to allow for developmental pathways- annual budgets present developmental challenges meaning that focus is often on in year delivery.
- The Council events budget has been 'stand still' without 'year on year' developmental or inflationary increases –

- Cultural co-design capability requires enhancement
- Lead-in time for the sector needs to be longer and 2 - 3 year procurement deals are required to allow events to develop / grow

Segmentation:

- Clear visitor segmentation for events is required for each event and Council delivery approach tailored accordingly - much of the portfolio is currently a 'Family Fun' segment, with a limited offering for other identified market segments – there are opportunities to reach some of the more targeted segments.

Programming:

- Balance is needed between cultural co-design / commissioning and 'buying in' programming content as needed for event standout (capacity and capability to deliver must be reviewed). Local input on programming v international input needs considered.
- Internally, a balance is also needed on robust event governance, event development and operational delivery for Officers - all of which are functions associated with the internal Tourism and Events Unit.

Events Team Resourcing:

- The role of the Events Team is currently varied - Event Delivery Agents v Event Development v Major Event / Bidding, a clear resource plan is needed and staffing structure allocated accordingly
- Contingency / flexibility is needed in future event resource planning, especially in relation to major event planning and delivery, as period of high / peak season.
- Flexibility to deal with and respond to ad hoc opportunities

Major Events:

- A new approach needs developed for Major Event Bidding in the City - this is currently reactive for Officers
- A direction is needed on the number of major events to be delivered over the coming years with associated resourcing

Alignment between Culture and Events:

- Further integration on how CMAG events and Council-managed events can best deliver for the culture and tourism offering within the city
- Benchmarking of synergies between tourism and cultural events with other Local Authorities is required reflecting 'best practice' – beyond NI
- The role of city events within the existing Festivals Forum
- The legacy impact of Belfast 2024 on cultural / tourism event delivery. Belfast 2024 puts Belfast on an international stage as a culturally vibrant destination and this will present ongoing opportunities to deliver a compelling proposition for the city as a home of events.

Delivery Structures / Governance:

- Streamlining of governance arrangements across events in the City events calendar across delivery partners
- The potential establishment of new Events Forum for the city needs explored

Belfast Event Positioning:

- The status of Belfast as gateway events destination for the region needs further exploration - to include benchmarking within the NI context and beyond
- Event themes aligned to our tourism positioning require further analysis - UNESCO City of Music, Maritime etc, ensuring Belfast can position itself as a 'Home of Events' and international events destination
- An updated events SWOT for the city and event gap analysis against thematic areas is required. This will inform event development as well as funding and bidding strategies
- New and emerging event 'hooks' through the ongoing 'Belfast Stories' project needs to be considered, including developing accessible and sustainable events
- The consideration of how new tourism product is developed around the city managed events portfolio requires further exploration, as well as how visitor experience can be maximised.

Categorisation / Events Criteria:

- A clearly defined event criteria and purpose is required - tourism, civic, community, cultural, business, corporate (or a combination of these) and the associated hierarchy of city events and subsequent growth potential
- This new pyramid structure should include definitions and criteria for segmentation, programming, categorisation of events which best lend themselves to co-design / commissioning as well as measuring impact / success
- Consideration of event city centre and geographic dispersal across the city centre and neighbourhoods is needed, in line with Neighbourhood Tourism
- A resourced evaluation / monitoring mechanism is required for each category and tier of event and metrics need considered in light of existing models, such as eventIMPACTS and emerging industry updates, while considering Council's own bespoke evaluation, monitoring and reporting needs that take into account social and cultural impact in addition to economic.

Marketing:

- An analysis is needed of the Communications, PR and MARCOMM's approach to each Council-managed event and 'best fit' future direction on the consumer / corporate approach with associated budget requirements.
- Consideration to opportunities to leverage international marcomms opportunities

Funding Synergies / Sponsorship:

- Consideration is needed as to how Council aligns with other event funders in terms of maximising budgets in the current economic climate – the use of co-investment models
- Sponsorship options for Council events also need consideration within the context of financial sustainability.

Policy Context:

- An analysis is needed in terms of gaps on current event policy such as Charity and Community / Business Engagement - considering benchmarking data and recommendations for future approach.

Training / Education:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of current and future training, networking and advocacy needs of the city events sector is needed to consolidate Council's role as 'leaders' in 'best practice' tourism / cultural event delivery. <p>To this end, Council Officers are proposing the development of an Events Action Plan for City Events which would underpin both <i>City Imagining</i> and <i>Make Yourself at Home</i>, which would consolidate the previous findings of the FEI report from 2018, while incorporating new recommendations from the 'Lessons Learned' of Officers, and delivery partners, over the last two plus years.</p> <p>This would include an assessment on issues highlighted as above, while detailing a future approach to events, including internal resourcing requirements and associated staff skills, governance arrangements and budget requirements to ensure city events are maximised to their full potential in the years ahead.</p> <p>This Action Plan would allow Officers to agree formalised developmental pathways for the Council-managed portfolio. Findings will be brought back to Committee for consideration in due course. This will inform the Events Unit business planning over the period of the new Action Plan.</p> <p>Officers are therefore requesting permission to develop a Terms of Reference for issue to market in the coming weeks, for providers to assist with the development of this Events Action Plan, with an associated budget requirement of up to £40,000 to be financed within core budgets.</p> <p>The commissioned work will incorporate a process of sectoral consultation with relevant stakeholders and Elected Member engagement to inform the Action Plan.</p>
9.0	Financial and Resource Implications:
	The development of an Events Action Plan has a budget of up to £40,000 to be allocated for existing budgets.
10.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment:
	Any future Events Action Plan will be screened as required.

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Subject:	Sub-regional Economic Growth – update
Date:	12 March 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director, Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1	The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on progress with the development of the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) – a key element of the Department for the Economy’s (DfE) sub-regional economic plan.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the update on the Department for the Economy’s Sub-Regional Economic Plan • Note the agreed financial allocations for Belfast City Council • Note the emerging priority areas of focus, subject to further engagement with internal and external partners • Agree to renew the council’s membership of and contribution to the work of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre for a 2-year period at a cost of £40,000 per year • Consider the merits of engagement in the Local Enterprise training being delivered via NAC (NI) and, if there is agreement to participate, nominate elected members to take part in this training.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At the 6 December 2024 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members were updated on the Department for the Economy’s “sub-regional economic plan”, including the commitment to establish Local Economic Partnerships in each council area with an overall financial allocation of £45million over three years.
3.2	Since the December meeting, the Department has made some progress on both finalising the financial allocation to each council area and also on agreeing broad areas of eligible spend and metrics to track progress.
3.3	<p><u>Financial allocations</u></p> <p>The financial allocations for each council area have now been confirmed. Belfast City Council will receive up to £956,000 per year – a total of £2,868,000 over three years. DfE is currently in the process of finalising the business case for the funding. Based on feedback from councils, it is expected that the spend profile in year one will be lower than in other years – given the time taken to mobilise partnerships, agree priority projects and recruit staff to lead and oversee project development and delivery.</p>
3.6	As previously noted, it is disappointing that the narrative on sub-regional growth appears to start from the premise that the recent economic progress in Belfast means that additional investment should be focused in other parts of the region. As members will be aware, Belfast

	<p>is a major economic generator for the rest of NI – almost half of the people that work in Belfast do not live here. However, Belfast also has significant economic inclusion challenges - 6 of the top 10 most deprived wards in NI are in Belfast while the top 15 most deprived wards for the Education, Skills and Training domain are all in Belfast. Officers will be actively working to develop proposals to help ensure that the economic importance of the city and the challenges facing many of our citizens are more clearly understood and to develop approaches to inclusive innovation that maximise benefits across society.</p>
3.7	<p><u>Eligible activity</u></p> <p>In line with the Minister’s vision and the sub-regional economic plan, the priority outcome for activities supported through the Local Economic Partnerships funding is higher productivity. The guidance notes suggest that there are a range of categories that are eligible for support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial property/land development • Entrepreneurship support • Sectoral entrepreneurship support • Scaling support • Sectoral scaling support • R&D investment • Energy efficiency • Upskilling/reskilling in digital/engineering skills • Sectoral cluster development
3.8	<p>In order to maximise the available resources, there will be a requirement on LEPs to consult and where possible to work in partnership with bodies doing existing work in an area they are seeking to address. There is potential therefore to supplement funding for existing programmes to drive additional impact in a local area.</p>
3.9	<p>Each LEP will be required to submit an annual action plan outlining priority areas for action in the year ahead. As previously noted, DfE have made a number of stipulations as to mandatory representation on any Local Economic Partnership (including from Local Enterprise Agencies, Chambers of Commerce and FE Colleges). They have also confirmed that DfE and Invest NI are to be involved in each partnership to provide advice on project selection and delivery and to ensure alignment with wider activity and investment.</p>

3.10	<p><u>Potential approach to partnership</u></p> <p>As previously advised at the December 2024 meeting, officers considered a number of options as to the most appropriate structure to perform the role of the LEP. This included utilising existing structures such as the Labour Market Partnership, the “Our Economy” Board for Community Planning or the Innovation City Belfast Board or alternatively, creating another structure for this specific purpose. Given the available resources, the alignment with existing work and the constraints on partner resources, our initial proposal was to utilise the Labour Market Partnership structure as the “partnership” – through which priority projects would be developed and to which progress would be reported. Having had further clarification as to eligible areas of spend and available resources, officers remain of the view that the most appropriate, expedient and effective conduit to act as the local LEP is the Belfast Labour Market Partnership – in the interim at least. It is our understanding that this approach is to be used in a number of councils. If this is agreed, officers will work with both DfE and DfC to consider how the partnerships can align most effectively and also to ensure that the governance requirements for both funders can be met. Our proposal is that we explore this option as an initial way forward – but that we keep it under review in order to ensure that it remains appropriate for the priority work areas agreed. Regular updates will also be provided to committee and the final action plan for each year will be brought to the committee for endorsement.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Potential priority work areas – initial considerations</u></p> <p>At the December 2024 meeting, a number of indicative work areas were set out for consideration. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive employment pathways to high value roles: through the council’s employability and skills work, we have been able to develop targeted responses to meet employer needs across a range of sectors. In more recent years, we have explored opportunities to move up the value chain and create better paid roles with opportunities for career progression. There is currently engagement work underway with DfE to develop a new “inclusive apprenticeship” approach and this would enable us to provide a seamless transfer from the employment academy into an apprenticeship. While these activities are working well at a small scale, there may be an opportunity to scale up much more significantly, with the potential to make an impact on our economic inactivity levels which have remained stubbornly high over decades • Maximising the impact of City Deal investments for local SMEs: the original business case for the City Deal identified the potential to create 20,000 new and better jobs. As the projects begin to come forward, there are opportunities to consider how our local businesses can access the research expertise and facilities established through the City Deal funding – helping them develop new products and increase their employment

	<p>numbers. This may include innovation and technology transfer activities; access to challenge programmes and funds and use of the specialist facilities and equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancement of “Go Succeed” activities: Go Succeed is the core business support offer for those starting or growing a business. Over the last year, the service has been funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). Following the recent budget statement, the government has announced a one-year extension of SPF – albeit with a 40% reduction in the overall budget. Officers are still working through the implications for Go Succeed but, as a collective, councils are considering whether there is an opportunity to use their LEP resources to “top up” any budget shortfall.
3.12	<p>Officers have undertaken some engagement work with key partners over recent weeks to validate this early thinking and to test other potential actions that may emerge, in keeping with the priority areas for action identified by the Department. It is our view that these indicative areas remain valid. There may also be an opportunity to consider net zero interventions given that this is one of the key areas of focus within the Sub-regional Economic Plan. Subject to member agreement, we will use these early concepts as well as the economic insights generated through both the Community Planning refresh process and the development of the annual labour market assessment for the Labour Market Partnership, supplemented by wider research, to work towards a draft final action plan. One of the key principles that we are considering is that we should focus on a smaller number of impactful interventions – rather than having a range of small schemes. This aligns with the Department’s requirements around impact measurement. It also recognises that the financial allocation to Belfast is the smallest of all council areas (alongside Antrim and Newtownabbey).</p>
3.13	<p><u>Support for UU Economic Policy Centre</u></p> <p>Ulster University’s Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) has provided research and insights to the council over many years to develop the underpinning monitoring framework of the Belfast Agenda, undertake research for the Local Development Plan and more recently Local Policies Plan. The Centre has also supported our work on addressing economic inactivity, including undertaking the Belfast-level analysis that formed the foundation pillar of the large-scale event that we hosted in UU Belfast last year. To support the development of local actions for the Local Enterprise Partnership, alongside wider insights relating to skills, planning and regeneration issues, it is proposed that the Council renews its membership and contribution to the work of the UUEPC for a further 2-year period.</p>
3.14	<p><u>NAC training on Enterprise issues</u></p> <p>The Chief Executive has recently received correspondence from the NI branch of the National Association of Councillors (NAC) regarding a series of four training workshops that they are</p>

	<p>organising for local councillors and officials involved in enterprise issues. The objective of these sessions is to enhance participants' insights and knowledge of these matters and create a council-wide network of "Local Enterprise Champions".</p>
3.15	<p>The dates and themes for each of the workshops have been set and are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday 25 April, 12pm-4pm, Belfast – Overview of the Local Economy • Friday 30 May, 12pm-3.30pm, Derry/Londonderry – Strategies, Funding and Key Partners • Friday 20 June, 12pm-3.30pm, Craigavon – Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors • Friday 5 September, 12pm-4pm, Mallusk – Enterprise site visit and forward planning.
3.16	<p>In order to maximise the learning opportunities, NAC (NI) is keen that all participants share, learn and develop their own enterprise insights, using the principle of co-design. As such, the workshops will be interactive, collaborative and outcomes driven via core, specialist facilitation rather than "top-down" presentations. To ensure the very best outcome for all proposed Local Enterprise Champions, they are encouraging councils to nominate up to four elected members including – at council's discretion – a senior support officer. Members are asked to consider the merits of engagement and, if there is agreement to participate, nominate elected members to take part in this training.</p>
3.17	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>DfE have now confirmed that the resources for the Local Enterprise Plan in Belfast are £956,000 per annum over three years. This includes an element of staff resources to manage the programme of work.</p> <p>UUEPC: The annual £40,000 contribution to the UUEPC has been included in Departmental estimates.</p> <p>Local Enterprise training – the cost per participant for attendance at the four workshops is £395. This can be met within existing budgets.</p>
3.18	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>All activities to be undertaken will be subject to equality screening. This funding formula was determined by the Department for the Economy.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	None



Subject:	Notices of Motion – Quarterly Update
Date:	12 March 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Jamie Uprichard, Business Research and Development Manager

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Notices of Motion and Issues

	Raised in Advance allocated to the City Growth & Regeneration (CG&R) Committee.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>It is recommended that the Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notes the updates to all Notices of Motion/ Issues Raised in Advance that this Committee is responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1.
3.0	Main report
3.1	At the SP&R Committee meeting on 25th October 2019 , members agreed “ <i>that this Council notes that other Councils produce a monthly status report in relation to Notices of Motion; and agrees Belfast City Council adopts a similar practice and produces a monthly Notice of Motion Update which will be brought to each full Council Meeting.</i> ”
3.2	<p>It was subsequently agreed that quarterly updates would be brought to the council’s statutory committees providing a regular update on the progress of each motion for which the committee is responsible for. At the SP&R Committee on 20th November 2020, members approved the arrangement for the future management of motions, which included recommendations that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Category 1 – Notice of Motion contained an action that has been completed. All Notices of Motion within this category contained a specific task that has since been complete. It is worth noting that, when Committee agree to action a Motion, there are sometimes additional actions agreed alongside the Motion. As these are not technically part of the Notice of Motion, they are taken forward through normal committee decision making processes. The Notice of Motion can therefore be closed, but additional actions related to it will continue to be progressed and reported to the committee. Category 2 - Notice of Motion has become Council policy or absorbed into a strategic programme of work. These Motions did not contain a specific task that could be completed but rather they are more strategic in nature and require changes in Council policy and/ or strategy for long term outcomes. Those listed within this category have all been agreed by Committee and are now either Council policy or are currently being implemented through a Council strategy that is managed by a Standing Committee through the corporate planning process.
3.3	There are presently 8 Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which the CG&R Committee is responsible.
3.4	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no additional financial implications attached to this report. Finance and resource implications are considered by Committee when taking decisions on the specific Notices of Motion and Issues Raised by Members.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached

	Appendix 1: Notices of Motion Live Database – CG&R Committee
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City Growth & Regeneration Notice of Motions

Notices of Motion and Issued Raised in Advance that remain OPEN:

ID	Date	Notice of Motion	Proposed By	Referral Route	Lead Officer	Latest Status Update
208	04/10/2021	Belfast City Nightlife and Night-time Economy	Cllr de Faoite	Notice of Motion – straight to CG&R	Damien Martin	Following a presentation by the Night Tsar to the City Centre All Party Working Group in December 2024 it has been agreed that ongoing engagement and closer working arrangements are established between Elected Members and the Purple Flag Steering Group. The Night Tsar has agreed to provide updates to the working group. Officers are in the process of writing to the BIDs to enquire if the Chair of the City Centre All Party Working Group can represent council on the Purple Flag Working Group.
217	01/11/2021	Tourism Street Signage (Enlightenment Period)	Cllr M Long	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell	Officers have undertaken initial desk-based research on the Belfast Enlightenment Period, its potential tourism appeal and a list of proposed options. Further work on the motion has been delayed due to other priority work areas.
289	01/12/2022	Translink - Night-time provision of services	Cllr D Lyons	Notice of Motion – debated at council	Cathy Reynolds	In December 2024, during committee discussions on the proposed closure of this motion, it was acknowledged that the activity related to this motion has been mainstreamed into community planning, where the Belfast Agenda action plans include the following action: “Expand the timetable with a greater service in the evenings and funding for the provision of night-time services”, for which Translink are the lead partner. Nevertheless, at the request of Elected Members, this motion remains open.
309	22/02/2023	Rent Controls	Cllr C Beattie	Issue Raised in Advance (Special CG&R)	Nora Largey	A letter has been drafted to be sent to the DfC Minister.
416	06/11/2024	Women's Safety in the City	Cllr T Kelly	Issue Raised in	Sharon McNicholl	The council have been supporting the NI Executive to roll out their Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy . This has included a number of interventions including a Local Change

				Advance (CG&R)		Fund (a grant scheme for community and voluntary groups to deliver projects up to 31 March 2026); free training for community and voluntary groups (to better understand the issues around ending violence against women and girls and how they can support this work); personal safety events in our community centres during January and February 2025; Area events reflecting specific priorities in each area of the city; and "It's a team effort", a conference for male and female leaders in sport at the Titanic Hotel on 23 March 2025.
418	21/11/2024	Retail Business in Sandy Row	Cllr T Kelly	Notice of Motion - (CG&R)	Damien Martin	A paper was presented to the February and March meetings of the CG&R Committee outlining how DfC are working to form the task group. BCC are working with DfC to bring forward a Revitalisation Scheme in advance of the planned DfC Sandy Row Public Realm Improvement Works.
425	15/01/2025	Gary Moore Statue	Cllr B Smyth	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Sinead Grimes	NEW: This is to be considered at the City Hall/ City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group for further consideration.
431	05/02/2025	Bristol Music Fund	Cllr S de Faoite	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Damien Martin	NEW: No update yet available