

# Public Document Pack

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



**Belfast  
City Council**

6th February, 2026

## **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, 11th February, 2026 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. Presentation**

- (a) Belfast One Business Improvement District (BID) (Pages 1 - 4)

#### **3. Restricted Items**

- (a) Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update (Pages 5 - 26)
- (b) 2 Royal Avenue Update (Report to Follow)
- (c) Housing Association Grant (HAG) Update (Report to Follow)
- (d) A Bolder Vision for Belfast Update (Report to Follow)

- (e) City Imagining Investment Programme - Cultural Multi-Annual Grants (Pages 27 - 108)
- (f) Belfast Castle and Malone House Scale of Charges 2026/27 (Pages 109 - 114)
- (g) Belfast Zoo Scale of Charges 2026/27 (Pages 115 - 118)
- (h) Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 Update (Pages 119 - 130)

4. **Requests to Present**

- (a) Visit Belfast (Pages 131 - 134)
- (b) Belfast Harbour Commissioners (Pages 135 - 136)

5. **Positioning Belfast to Compete**

- (a) Events Update - Festive Lights (Pages 137 - 142)
- (b) Culture Night 2026 (Pages 143 - 150)
- (c) Markets Licence Approval (Pages 151 - 152)
- (d) Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition (Report to Follow)



<b>Subject:</b>	Belfast One BID – ballot update
<b>Date:</b>	11 February 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b>	
Insert number	<input type="text"/>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Information relating to any individual</li><li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li><li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li><li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li><li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li><li>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</li><li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li></ol>	

<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	<p>The purpose of the report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the plans for the BID One ballot which closes on 5 March 2026</li> <li>• Secure Committee approval to submit council votes for properties located within the BID One boundary.</li> </ul>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the update on the ballot for the third term of the Belfast One BID (Business Improvement District)</li> <li>• Agree to return yes votes for the Council properties located within the boundary.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that there are three Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in Belfast city centre: BID One which covers the main retail core and runs from the City Hall down to the junction of Royal Avenue and North Street; Linen Quarter which covers the office district to the north the City Hall including the new Transport Hub and Destination CQ which covers the Cathedral Quarter including the Ulster University campus.</p>
3.2	<p>Under government legislation, all BIDs operate on a five-year term. At the end of each term, a ballot must take place in order for the BID to continue its work. BID One is the longest standing of the three BIDs and began operations in April 2016. The ballot for the third term of BID One opened on 22 January 2026 and all votes must be submitted by 5 March 2026.</p>
3.3	<p>In order for the proposal to be successful at ballot, the result will need to meet, as a minimum, three independent criteria, namely:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There must be more yes votes than no votes (volume)</li> <li>2. Total rateable value of yes votes must exceed total rateable value of no votes (value)</li> <li>3. The turnout of ballot papers returned must be no less than 25% of the eligible rate payers entitled to vote in the ballot <i>and</i> total no less than 25% of the eligible rateable value.</li> </ol>
3.4	<p>The BID One area contains around 700 units that are eligible for votes. Each property must pay an annual mandatory BID levy – depending on the NAV (Net Annual Value) of the</p>

	<p>property. The council has seven properties within the BID One boundary including City Hall, 2 Royal Avenue and the former Digital Services building in Gloucester Street. The combined levy total for all properties is around £23,000 annually. The expected levy total for all properties (assuming 100% payment) is around £1million annually. This expenditure will be allocated in line with business plan priorities.</p>
3.5	<p>BID One works closely with the council on a range of issues related to safety, cleanliness and vibrancy in the city centre. The team and the Board are also represented on a number of city centre forums and working groups and, given their mandate, represent a strong conduit for engagement with city centre businesses operating in this geographical area. Their five year business plan for the upcoming term proposes focusing resources on four main areas of work, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Belfast city centre</li> <li>• Enhancing the visitor experience</li> <li>• Supporting local businesses</li> <li>• Shaping a better city centre.</li> </ul>
3.6	<p>Given the ongoing collaboration, the planned engagement and the direct contribution of the BID (both financially and in terms of staff resources) towards shared priorities with the council, it is recommended that members support a yes vote on behalf of the council in the current ballot process.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Financial Implications</b>
	<p>Belfast City Council will be liable for levy payments relating to its properties and assets located within the BID One boundary. These levies are already included in recurring Council budgets.</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</b>
	<p>No specific equality or good relations implications. The Belfast One designated boundary has been approved by DfC. Visitor insights demonstrate that the city centre is accessed by visitors from all parts of Northern Ireland and beyond.</p>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
	<p>None.</p>

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# Agenda Item 3a

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6  
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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# Agenda Item 3e

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# Agenda Item 3f

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# Agenda Item 3g

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# Agenda Item 3h

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<b>Subject:</b>	Request to Present – Visit Belfast
<b>Date:</b>	11 February 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell – Senior Manager – Culture, Tourism & Events
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Pier Morrow – Tourism and events development manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X
<b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b>	
Insert number <input type="text"/>	
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<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval for Visit Belfast to present their annual business plan to Committee on 11 <sup>th</sup> March 2026.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to agree to receive a presentation on Visit Belfast's 2025-26 Business Plan at the Committee meeting in March 2025, including a request for Council support towards the work programme for the coming financial year.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b>Visit Belfast Business Plan</b></p> <p>Members will be aware that Visit Belfast is the city's Destination Marketing Organisation dedicated to marketing Belfast as a city break, conference, day-trip and cruise ship destination. It also, in its visitor servicing role, manages the operation of the gateway Visitor Information Centres (VICs) including Visit Belfast Welcome Centre and the Arrivals Desk at Belfast International Airport and a range of visitor servicing initiatives on behalf of Belfast City Council.</p> <p>Visit Belfast represents over 500 tourism businesses and services across the tourism industry and its core purpose is to attract, welcome and service visitors for Belfast and Northern Ireland in order to generate an economic benefit for the city, creating jobs and wealth. The role of Visit Belfast is to drive visitor numbers and increase visitor spend. As a public private partnership, it provides a singular delivery mechanism for co-ordinating marketing investment and market engagement for the city. The organisation has a portfolio of marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity across both leisure and business tourism. Belfast</p> <p>Belfast City Council is the principal funder of Visit Belfast and as such receives an annual presentation of their business plan as part of the process to approve annual funding for the delivery of marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity.</p>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Financial and Resource Implications</b>
3.4	There are no financial implications attached to this report.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</b>
	There are no Equality or Good Relation Implications attached to this report.

<b>5.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
<b>6.0</b>	

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<b>Subject:</b>	Request to Present - Belfast Harbour Commissioners
<b>Date:</b>	6th February, 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Craig Mealey, Committee Services Officer

## Restricted Reports

**Is this report restricted?**

Yes  No  X

**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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## If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

**After Committee Decision**

  
  
  

**After Council Decision**

**Sometime in the future**

**Never**

## Call-in

**Is the decision eligible for Call-in?**

Yes  No

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	To update the Committee on a request from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners to attend a future meeting to present its draft Masterplan 2025-50.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to agree to receive a presentation from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners on its draft Masterplan 2025-50 at its special meeting in March, 2026.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	The Committee has received a request from Joe O'Neill, Chief Executive, Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC) to attend a future meeting to present the BHC draft Masterplan for 2025-50.
3.2	The <a href="#"><u>Draft Masterplan 2025-50</u></a> sets out a bold 25-year framework for BHC's future, covering 2,000 acres of land and 1,000 acres of water. It focuses on developing this space to create an even more successful port and estate; sustain BHC's role as a port that enables trade, tourism, clean growth and innovation; and shape new places to work, live and invest in.
3.3	Over the past two years, BHC has been consulting with port users, estate tenants, independent industry experts, statutory bodies and the public to shape their plans. The consultation phase has now ended, and the final Masterplan 2025-50 is set to be published in May, 2026.
3.4	The Committee is asked to consider this request and, if agreed, BHC would be invited to attend its special meeting in March, in advance of the final Masterplan being published in May, 2026.
3.5	<b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b> None associated with this report.
3.6	<b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b> None associated with this report.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
	None.



<b>Subject:</b>	Events Update - Festive Lights
<b>Date:</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> February, 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Keith Forster – Director Economic Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell – Senior Manager – Culture, Tourism & Events

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
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<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	To provide members with a report and overview of the 2025 festive lighting scheme.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	Note the contents of this report and request to facilitate a members workshop for planning for 2026.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b>Background and Programme Context</b></p> <p>The Culture Team currently led on the delivery of the Council's Christmas Lighting Scheme, working in partnership with appointed contractors, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), internal Estates and Property teams, and private landowners to deliver a city centre-wide festive lighting programme.</p> <p>In March 2025, a new tender was issued inviting proposals from contractors to deliver the city's Christmas lighting provision. This procurement process reflected a shift in approach, recognising the importance of festive lighting not only as seasonal decoration, but as a strategic cultural and economic intervention supporting city centre vitality.</p> <p>The tender placed particular emphasis on the role of Christmas lighting in contributing to economic recovery, reinforcing Belfast City Centre's position as a major retail, leisure and cultural destination, encouraging increased footfall, and enhancing the overall visitor experience during the peak winter trading period. This approach aligns with the broader principles of the City's Lighting Strategy, which positions lighting as a core component of public realm quality, place identity, safety, and the activation of the night-time economy.</p>
3.2	<p><b>Strategic Objectives of the Christmas Lighting Scheme</b></p> <p>One of the core objectives of the Christmas Lighting Programme is to improve connectivity and coherence across the city centre, creating strong visual and experiential linkages between key destinations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belfast Christmas Market at City Hall</li> <li>• Victoria Square Shopping Centre</li> <li>• CastleCourt Shopping Centre</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary pedestrian corridors such as Royal Avenue and Donegall Place</li> </ul> <p>The lighting scheme is therefore not intended as a series of isolated installations, but as a coordinated city centre network that supports pedestrian movement, wayfinding, and dwell time across multiple retail, leisure and cultural anchors.</p>
3.3	<p><b>2025 Programme Delivery and Performance</b></p> <p><b>2025 Infrastructure Uplift and Enhancements</b></p> <p>As part of the 2025 programme uplift, Department for Infrastructure (DfI) lighting columns were upgraded in line with current electrical and safety standards. This enabled the safe addition of column-mounted Christmas lighting features across the city centre.</p> <p>Additional lighting was installed along Royal Avenue, including illumination of street trees. This intervention was widely recognised by BIDs and private landowners as having a positive impact on the inner city core, contributing to improved ambience and increased evening activity.</p> <p>New lighting curtain installations were introduced on Castle Place and Fountain Lane, alongside colour-controlled festoon lighting on Garfield Street. Going forward, both the Fountain Lane lighting curtain and the Garfield Street festoon installations will remain in situ, with no additional cost to the Council, providing ongoing value from the initial investment.</p> <p>Some minor issues were recorded during the season, primarily relating to servicing and loading vehicles coming into contact with lighting elements. In total, there were approximately 6 contractor call-outs related to maintenance and minor repairs.</p> <p><b>Festive Lighting Commission and Switch-On Event</b></p> <p>The full festive lighting programme was safely installed and fully operational in advance of the official Christmas Lights Switch-On event. Delivery was achieved within required timescales and in compliance with all relevant health and safety requirements.</p> <p>The Culture Team worked closely with: City Centre BIDs, Council Estates and Property Teams, and Private landowners and managing agents to secure approximately 84 wayleave agreements for the installation of eyebolts and fixings, enabling lighting infrastructure to be installed across privately owned frontages and buildings.</p> <p>The successful completion of these agreements in advance of the Christmas period was critical to programme delivery and is acknowledged as a significant collaborative achievement across multiple stakeholders.</p>
3.4	<p><b>Issues for Long-Term Sustainability and Improvement</b></p> <p>While the 2025 programme was delivered successfully, a number of structural and strategic issues have been identified which require longer-term planning and intervention to ensure future viability and growth of the programme. Delivery of</p>

	<p>enhancements as part of the future strategy would be dependent on additional finance being available</p> <p><b>Benchmarking and Tourism-Led Lighting Models</b></p> <p>Comparable cities such as Dundalk have demonstrated the economic value of treating festive lighting as a tourism product, capable of attracting regional visitors and extending dwell time.</p> <p>In December 2025, representatives from the Culture Team, BIDs, the Night Czar's Office, Belfast Chamber and CGR committee undertook a benchmarking visit to Dundalk to review their Christmas programme and large-scale lighting installations, including programme structure, infrastructure models and governance arrangements.</p> <p>Learning from this model will inform future strategic direction for Belfast's Christmas lighting offer.</p> <p>It is suggested that a future strategy should address four critical and interdependent components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>City Spectacle:</b> Developing a format and programme capable of functioning as a large-scale tourism product.</li> <li>• <b>City-Wide Reach:</b> Exploring how to achieve greater lighting density and presence beyond the core city centre.</li> <li>• <b>Pathways:</b> Building local skills, knowledge and career pathways within cultural sector for lighting and production</li> <li>• <b>Infrastructure:</b> Addressing key infrastructure challenges and mitigating future operational risks.</li> </ul>
3.5	<p><b>Infrastructure Challenges and Electrical Supply</b></p> <p>The current Christmas lighting infrastructure is heavily reliant on private electrical feeds, which presents a number of risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased health and safety considerations</li> <li>• Reduced operational control for the Council</li> <li>• Vulnerability to changes in property ownership, tenancy, or redevelopment</li> </ul> <p>In addition, ongoing city centre development has led to the gradual loss of previously available fixing points and electrical connections. This has resulted in a resource-intensive annual process to maintain lighting density and secure new permissions and access arrangements.</p> <p>This environment limits the Council's ability to plan multi-year installations or invest in more permanent and resilient infrastructure solutions.</p>

	<p><b>Future Technologies and Adaptive Approaches</b></p> <p>There is a need for a more agile and future-focused approach to festive lighting, recognising that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lighting technologies are evolving rapidly</li> <li>• Energy efficiency and sustainability expectations are increasing</li> <li>• Audience engagement is shifting towards immersive and interactive experiences</li> </ul> <p>Any future strategy should therefore allow flexibility to adapt to emerging technologies, sustainability standards and new artistic approaches over the next decade, rather than relying on static formats or short-term installations.</p> <p><b>City-Wide Approach: Geographic Spread and Equity</b></p> <p>At present, festive lighting remains heavily concentrated within the city centre core, with limited provision across city neighbourhoods and local high streets.</p> <p>This raises concerns regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equitable distribution of cultural investment</li> <li>• Support for neighbourhood retail centres</li> <li>• Opportunities for community-led festive identity and participation</li> </ul> <p>Future models should explore scalable and adaptable approaches that allow festive lighting to support local place-making across a wider geographic footprint, while maintaining overall programme coherence and quality.</p>
3.6	<p><b>Stakeholder Engagement and Current Actions</b></p> <p>The Culture Team is currently working with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Centre BIDs to gather structured feedback from businesses</li> <li>• The lighting contractor to evaluate operational improvements</li> <li>• Internal Council departments to review infrastructure and permissions processes</li> </ul> <p>This feedback is being collated to inform refinements to the 2026 programme and longer-term strategic considerations.</p> <p>In addition, the Culture Team is developing a Members' Workshop, which will provide an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review current challenges and constraints</li> <li>• Consider alternative delivery and infrastructure models</li> <li>• Explore funding and partnership opportunities</li> <li>• Begin development of a longer-term Christmas Lighting Strategy for the city</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Next Steps and Strategic Direction</b></p> <p>The intention is to move towards a more strategic, sustainable and place-based approach to Christmas lighting, which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports economic regeneration objectives</li> <li>• Enhances the city's cultural offer and visitor experience</li> <li>• Reduces operational and safety risks</li> <li>• Builds local creative and technical capacity</li> <li>• Enables more equitable city-wide participation</li> </ul> <p>Following the Members' Workshop and further stakeholder engagement, officers will bring forward proposals outlining potential strategic options, investment requirements and delivery models for Member consideration.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Financial and Resource Implications</b>
	There are currently no financial implications attached to this report.
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</b>
	There are no Equality or Good Relation Implications attached to this report.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>



<b>Subject:</b>	Culture Night Belfast 2026
<b>Date:</b>	11 <sup>th</sup> February 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Keith Forster – Director of Economic Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Erika Clark – Creative Producer, Culture Tourism and Events

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

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the proposed approach to the delivery of Culture Night 2026. The recommendations are informed by the draft independent evaluation of Culture Night 2025 undertaken by Thrive and build on the delivery model approved by Committee in April 2025.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <p>Note the contents of the report in relation to the delivery of Culture Night 2025.</p> <p>Approve the proposed approach for Culture Night 2026 as outlined in this report including £150,000 commitment to delivery of Culture Night 2026 through a procurement process including an option to extend the contract to cover delivery of Culture Night 2027 upon successful delivery in 2026.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Culture Night 2025 Review &amp; Recommendations</b>
3.1	<p><b>3.1 Background</b></p> <p>Culture Night returned to Belfast in September 2025 following a six-year absence precipitated by the Covid crisis, and the host organisation (Cathedral Quarter Trust) folding operations. The 2025 event was delivered as a venue-led, city-wide programme, prioritising free, accessible and family-friendly activity and operating through a receiving house model. As a pilot to supporting a new approach to Culture Night delivery a number of artists, cultural organisations and venues were financially supported to participate, and no street-based programming or road closures were included. In August 2025, Belfast City Council commissioned Thrive to undertake an independent evaluation of Culture Night 2025. The evaluation assessed audience experience, participation, accessibility, economic impact and delivery effectiveness, and identified learning to inform future iterations.</p>
3.2	<p><b>Key Findings from Thrive Evaluation</b></p> <p>The evaluation concluded that the pilot for a new approach to Culture Night 2025 was a success, generating positive audience experiences, sector goodwill and an estimated attendance of 50,000 people. Audiences valued the safe, welcoming and family-friendly atmosphere, while participants reported high levels of satisfaction and willingness to take part again.</p>

Areas identified for further development included improved signage and navigation between sites, earlier engagement with the cultural sector, including artists, venues and organisations, and continued strengthening of activity across all areas of the city beyond the city centre and Cathedral Quarter. Key findings are:

### **Economic Impact**

- Estimated attendance of approximately 50,000 people across the city.
- Average spend per attendee who spent money was £33.33.
- Estimated total economic impact of approximately a minimum £1.67 million for the city.

### **Audience Feedback**

- 86% of audiences rated their overall experience as good or very good.
- 95% of attendees spent two or more hours at Culture Night, with 33% spending five or more hours.
- 44% of audiences reported visiting venues or places they had not previously visited.
- Audiences particularly valued the safe, welcoming and family-friendly atmosphere.

### **Audience Profile**

- Audiences were younger and more diverse than typical arts audiences in Belfast.
- 14% of attendees lived in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland.
- 20% of respondents identified as disabled, including people with invisible and neurodivergent conditions.
- 14% of respondents identified as LGBTQ+.

### **Geographic Spread**

- Events took place across all parts of the city, including North, South, East and West Belfast.
- 43% of events were located in Cathedral Quarter and 28% in the city centre.
- Venues outside the city centre experienced lower footfall, reflecting the event's first year back in a new format, and need to build on city-wide offer.

### **Programme and Participation**

- A total of 158 events were delivered by 182 participating organisations, venues and artists.
- 73% of participants delivering events were taking part in Culture Night for the first time.
- 75% of events were suitable for all ages, reinforcing the family-friendly focus.
- Music was the most represented artform, accounting for 51% of events.

### **Funding and Artist Support**

- 48% of events submitted for the programme requested financial support to participate.
- £49,482 was distributed to support artists and venues.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>93% of participants stated they would like to take part again in future Culture Nights.</li> </ul> <p><b>Safety and Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No incidents were recorded by Council or PSNI that were directly linked to Culture Night 2025.</li> <li>Audiences reported feeling safe across the city, supported by coordinated stewarding and emergency planning.</li> </ul>
3.3	<p><b>Proposal for Culture Night 2026</b></p> <p>Culture Night 2026 is proposed to take place on Friday 18 September 2026, in line with other Culture Night events across the island of Ireland. The event will continue to build on the successful 2025 delivery model, while addressing areas for development identified through the Thrive evaluation.</p> <p><b>Recommendations for Culture Night 2026</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve signage and site information through clear, visible and consistently branded signage across all event locations. This requirement can be embedded within the updated event specification.</li> <li>Continue strengthening Culture Night activity across all areas of the city by engaging working group and existing forums in North, South, East and West Belfast. These groups will support information sharing, coordination and collaborative event planning with local venues and participants.</li> <li>Provide increased lead-in time for artists, venues and organisations via an early 'Save the Date' communication will be issued for Culture Night 2026 to raise awareness and enable advance planning in tandem with the procurement process for a delivery contractor.</li> <li>Maintain and build upon the successful event model by continuing to prioritise a free, accessible and family-friendly programme delivered through a receiving house approach, similar to Dublin Culture Night where activity is venue-based. This ensures most of the available budget is directed towards the payment to the cultural sector and artists for delivering the programme rather than large-scale production costs which come with increased risk and health &amp; safety considerations.</li> <li>Plan proactively for any changes to key event locations. With the uncertainty of 2 Royal Avenue and ongoing construction at Cathedral Gardens, alternative suitable city centre locations for main event activity will be identified in advance to ensure successful delivery in 2026.</li> <li>Ensure city-wide engagement and participation through partnerships with neighbourhood cultural venues in North, South, East, West and community consultation.</li> </ul>

3.4	<p><b>Next Steps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject to Committee approval, officers will commence planning for Culture Night 2026 from March, including initial engagement with cultural sector and opening the procurement process for Culture Night Delivery Contract via tender, this will include an option for contract extension to deliver 2027 Culture Night upon successful delivery of 2026.</li> <li>• Officers will also explore options for an early engagement/ launching focused on 'Save the Date' messaging to secure diary holds and increase public and cultural sector awareness of the event in anticipation of the contractor coming on board for delivery by April.</li> <li>• Officers will continue to engage with Department for Communities to understand possibility of any financial support within the 2026/27 financial year (see appended reply to previous correspondence).</li> </ul>
4.0	<p><b>Financial and Resource Implications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are seeking approval for £150,000 Culture Night 2026 Delivery budget from the 2026/2027 Culture budget.</li> </ul>
5.0	<p><b>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture Night 2026 will continue to align with Belfast City Council's statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and its commitments to equality, diversity and good relations under the EQIA for our city's Cultural Strategy 2020-2030.</li> </ul> <p>The evaluation of Culture Night 2025 highlighted that audiences were younger and more diverse than typical arts audiences in Belfast, with participation from people living in areas of higher multiple deprivation, disabled audiences (including those with invisible and neurodivergent conditions), and LGBTQ+ communities. The free, city-wide and venue-led nature of the event supported broad access and positive shared experiences across communities.</p> <p>For 2026, the continued emphasis on a family-friendly, accessible and free programme, alongside improved signage, clearer information and strengthened activity across North, South, East and West Belfast, will further support inclusive participation. Early engagement with venues and organisations will also allow for better consideration of accessibility requirements and community needs at a local level.</p>
6.0	<p><b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b></p> <p>Appendix 1- DFC response regarding funding for Belfast Culture Night</p>

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Our ref: TOF-0976-2025

Your ref: CGR250925

Date: 9 October 2025

Craig Mealey  
Belfast City Council  
Legal and Civic Services Department  
City Hall  
Belfast  
BT1 5GS

Via email: [mealeyc@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:mealeyc@belfastcity.gov.uk)

Dear Craig

## **2026 BELFAST CULTURE NIGHT**

Thank you for your recent correspondence to Minister Lyons MLA further to my letter of 4 June (TOF-0527-2025) regarding funding for the 2025 Belfast Culture Night which the Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee considered on 6 August. I have been asked to reply.

The potential for any funding support for the 2026 Belfast Culture Night and beyond is unknown at this point as it would fall into future budget cycles.

While the Department is unlikely to have any direct funding streams available, I am happy to engage with the Council to explore if there are any avenues of support we may be able to provide.

If you would like to contact me via the above email address my colleagues will arrange a mutually suitable date for us to meet.



Yours sincerely

**Louise Hyland**  
**ALB Sponsorship Branch – Culture Division**



Subject:	Approval of Markets Licence		
Date:	11 February 2026		
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development		
Contact Officer:	Clodagh Cassin, Markets Development Manager		
<b>Restricted Reports</b>			
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>		<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Call-in</b>			
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>		
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the granting of a market licence for markets to take place at Belfast Castle.		
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>		
2.1	Members are asked to approve the granting of a licence to The Artisan Market to hold markets on multiple dates over the coming year at Belfast Castle.		
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>		
3.1	Belfast City Council has exclusive rights to hold markets in Belfast. Anyone wishing to operate a market or car boot sale within Belfast must apply to the council for permission to do so.		

3.2	The Markets Unit has received an application from Artisan Markets NI to hold a number of markets in Belfast Castle over the period April to November 2026. Around eight markets are scheduled, each involving around 40 stalls for shopping, crafts and food will take part in this market. Visitors will be able to purchase goods on the day.
3.3	The organisers have been successfully running artisan craft markets in various locations since 2014 and currently operate regular markets in Portballintrae, Greyabbey, Killyleagh and Greenisland. As makers themselves, they are passionate about promoting and encouraging appreciation of the wide variety, originality and incredibly high quality of goods created by artists, creators and producers in Northern Ireland.
3.4	Their proposal is to run markets on eight dates, from 11.00 am until 4.00 pm, through 2026. Indicative dates are: 19 April, 21 June, 19 July, 2, 8 and 9 August (to coincide with the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann), 13 September and 28 November, with a selection of around 36 stalls at each market. In line with the 10 September 2025 Committee approval on this, it will require “multiple markets” licence, at a cost of £1,250 to the event organisers.
3.5	In addition to their own multi-event insurance, each of their vendors will be required to hold Public & Product Liability Insurance with cover of at least £5million. All vendors are also required to provide proof of compliance with other regulations, for example Food Safety, General Product Safety Regulations, Cosmetic Certification, CE Toy Safety.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Finance &amp; Resource Implications</b>
	The licence will be granted and managed by the Markets Team. The income generated for the council from the licence will be £1,250. Separate venue hire fees will be payable to Belfast Castle.
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</b>
	No specific equality or good relations implications – the market will be open to visitors from all areas.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
	None.