



Subject:	Events Update - Festive Lights
Date:	6 th February, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster – Director Economic Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="text"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To provide members with a report and overview of the 2025 festive lighting scheme.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Note the contents of this report and request to facilitate a members workshop for planning for 2026.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Background and Programme Context</p> <p>The Culture Team currently led on the delivery of the Council’s Christmas Lighting Scheme, working in partnership with appointed contractors, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), 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>Strategic Objectives of the Christmas Lighting Scheme</p> <p>One of the core objectives of the Christmas Lighting Programme is to improve connectivity and coherence across the city centre, creating strong visual and experiential linkages between key destinations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Christmas Market at City Hall • Victoria Square Shopping Centre • CastleCourt Shopping Centre

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary pedestrian corridors such as Royal Avenue and Donegall Place <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>2025 Programme Delivery and Performance</p> <p>2025 Infrastructure Uplift and Enhancements As part of the 2025 programme uplift, Department for Infrastructure (DfI) lighting columns were upgraded in line with current electrical and safety standards. This enabled the safe addition of column-mounted Christmas lighting features across the city centre.</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>Festive Lighting Commission and Switch-On Event The full festive lighting programme was safely installed and fully operational in advance of the official Christmas Lights Switch-On event. Delivery was achieved within required timescales and in compliance with all relevant health and safety requirements.</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>Issues for Long-Term Sustainability and Improvement 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>Benchmarking and Tourism-Led Lighting Models 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"> • City Spectacle: Developing a format and programme capable of functioning as a large-scale tourism product. • City-Wide Reach: Exploring how to achieve greater lighting density and presence beyond the core city centre. • Pathways: Building local skills, knowledge and career pathways within cultural sector for lighting and production • Infrastructure: Addressing key infrastructure challenges and mitigating future operational risks.
3.5	<p>Infrastructure Challenges and Electrical Supply</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"> • Increased health and safety considerations • Reduced operational control for the Council • Vulnerability to changes in property ownership, tenancy, or redevelopment <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>Future Technologies and Adaptive Approaches</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"> • Lighting technologies are evolving rapidly • Energy efficiency and sustainability expectations are increasing • Audience engagement is shifting towards immersive and interactive experiences <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>City-Wide Approach: Geographic Spread and Equity</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"> • Equitable distribution of cultural investment • Support for neighbourhood retail centres • Opportunities for community-led festive identity and participation <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>Stakeholder Engagement and Current Actions</p> <p>The Culture Team is currently working with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Centre BIDs to gather structured feedback from businesses • The lighting contractor to evaluate operational improvements • Internal Council departments to review infrastructure and permissions processes <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"> • Review current challenges and constraints • Consider alternative delivery and infrastructure models • Explore funding and partnership opportunities • Begin development of a longer-term Christmas Lighting Strategy for the city

	<p>Next Steps and Strategic Direction</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"> • Supports economic regeneration objectives • Enhances the city's cultural offer and visitor experience • Reduces operational and safety risks • Builds local creative and technical capacity • Enables more equitable city-wide participation <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>
4.0	Financial and Resource Implications
	There are currently no financial implications attached to this report.
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
	There are no Equality or Good Relation Implications attached to this report.
6.0	Appendices – Documents Attached