



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

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
After Council Decision
Sometime in the future
Never

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

1.0	Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues
1.1	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.
2.0	Recommendations
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>
3.0	Culture Night 2025 Review & Recommendations
3.1	<p>3.1 Background</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>Key Findings from Thrive Evaluation</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"> 93% of participants stated they would like to take part again in future Culture Nights. <p>Safety and Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No incidents were recorded by Council or PSNI that were directly linked to Culture Night 2025. Audiences reported feeling safe across the city, supported by coordinated stewarding and emergency planning.
3.3	<p>Proposal for Culture Night 2026</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>Recommendations for Culture Night 2026</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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. 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. 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 & safety considerations. 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. Ensure city-wide engagement and participation through partnerships with neighbourhood cultural venues in North, South, East, West and community consultation.

3.4	<p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • 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. • 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).
4.0	<p>Financial and Resource Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are seeking approval for £150,000 Culture Night 2026 Delivery budget from the 2026/2027 Culture budget.
5.0	<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <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>Appendices – Documents Attached</p> <p>Appendix 1- DFC response regarding funding for Belfast Culture Night</p>