



Subject:	City Innovation programme update
Date:	24 th April 2026
Reporting Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services
Contact Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet, Transport & Open Spaces and Street Scene Mark McCann, City Innovation Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any 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="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To update Members on a number of City Innovation programme initiatives including Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors' Challenge competition.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the outline workplan for the Belfast City Council Alleyways programme (developed in accordance with the Bloomberg's processes) and the intention to engage with Mid-Falls Alleyways Regeneration group. 2. To approve a budget contribution for a Connected Places Catapult twelve-month embedded role within the Council who will support work on SME scaling and commercialisation associated with City Deal and similar innovation investments.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors' Challenge update</p> <p>Following Belfast City Council acceptance of a letter of offer (for approx. £750,000) from Bloomberg Philanthropies, work is now underway to design, in collaboration with Bloomberg's facilitators, a two-year programme that will put in place a new sustainable, Belfast City Council 'Alleyway Service Commitment' that's responsive and supportive of the individual needs and ambitions of neighbourhoods across the city.</p>
3.2	<p>As part of the letter of offer Belfast City Council is committed to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By June 2026 – recruit a programme manager who will lead on the development of this new integrated Council approach and report to a new programme board with direct accountability to the chief executive. - By July 2026 – Completion of a Bloomberg-approved implementation plan and budget with work-packages that will support the council and its partners to work towards this ambition. This is likely to include activities such as service modelling, baselining costs and savings, testing data gathering and engagement approaches, piloting approaches such as provision of training, materials and possibly microgrants; and working towards a final long-term service proposal for Council to consider by Spring 2028. - By January 1, 2028 completion and approval of the long-term sustainability plan. - By Spring 2028 – transforming up to 20 miles of alleyways with interventions that will range for the modest to the transformational.
3.3	<p>At March Committee Members requested that officers consider how the Bloomberg programme might support an application for £70,000 from Mid-Falls Alleyway Regeneration. As this new Council programme is developed it will be important for officers to work closely with those residents and neighbourhoods that have the capability and interest in alleyway transformation. As such officers will be seeking to engage with Mid-Falls Alleyway Regeneration to help inform</p>

	the new programmes and the range of tools and interventions that reflects the project's long term sustainability ambitions.
3.4	<p>Connected Places Catapult Embedded role</p> <p>The City Innovation Office and City Deal Programme Office have been approached by the Connected Places Catapult with the offer of providing a twelve-month Catapult officer to be embedded with Belfast City Council. The Catapult is establishing similar posts in city regions across the UK, including Scotland and Wales, with the aim of helping regions to best maximise the impact of innovation-style investments such as City Deal.</p>
3.5	The person would be a Connected Places Catapult member of staff but would be based in Belfast City Council and work with a group of local stakeholders to manage a workplan based on local needs. This would include supporting pathways to scaling, commercialisation and investment by local SMEs engaged in City Deal initiatives. And working with public procurement teams from councils to enhance our role as first customers for innovation.
3.6	Connected Places Catapult are proposing to contribute £45,000 for the post; with an additional contribution of £20,000 being offered by Belfast Region City Deal partners. Members are asked to approve a £25,000 contribution from Belfast City Council to ensure that there is the requisite match funding.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.7	<p>Bloomberg Philanthropies will provide funding of \$1.2 million for a two-year programme which includes funding for a Project Manager.</p> <p>Other expenditure has been identified within existing departmental budgets.</p>
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.8	Equality and Rural screenings will be completed as part of the Bloomberg programme design process.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None