

Public Document Pack

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
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**Belfast
City Council**

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE- REPORT TO FOLLOW

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet both online and in-person, in the Lavery Room - City Hall on Wednesday, 8th November, 2023 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

4. Positioning the City to Compete

- (b) Mid -Year Update on Make Yourself at Home Tourism Plan (Pages 1 - 12)

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a mid-year update on progress against the Belfast - <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> Tourism Plan Year 2 Action Plan 2023/2024 Tourism and Events, including bids for large-scale events.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	Members are asked to: Note the contents of this mid-year update report on Tourism and Events Year 2 Action Plan 2023/2024.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Driving the success of our leisure and business tourism market in Belfast is the ten year <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> Tourism Plan which was approved by Council and launched along with the Year 1 implementation plan in March 2022. Year Two of that implementation plan was approved by Council in April 2023 and this report will update members on what has been delivered at this mid-way point in the financial year.
3.2	The <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> Tourism Plan 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the coherency of the Belfast experience • Supporting quality authentic products • Developing skills • Strengthening the city's position through marketing and communications
3.3	The plan sets out a shared vision for tourism in the city and is supported by 4 strategic themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Belfast • Experience Belfast • Position Belfast • Sustain Belfast <p>All four of these strategic themes are underpinned by the need to support inclusive economic growth and to differentiate the Belfast offer in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. A fifth strand to the plan considers key strategic opportunities that could bolster investment in the sector to support recovery and future growth.</p>
3.4	

Strategic theme 1: Grow Belfast

The following activity has been delivered against the theme of **Grow Belfast**:

3.5

Visit Belfast - Management of the Visit Belfast contract in respect of the delivery of marketing, destination management and visitor servicing - to deliver on increased visitor numbers staying longer and spending more, thereby supporting tourism jobs, economic impact and social benefits across Belfast. Monitoring the delivery of KPIs set for marketing of Belfast as leisure & business tourism destination. We have delivered a five-year extension of the Lease Sharing Agreement with Visit Belfast and a three-year sharing agreement with Translink for the operation of a ticketing desk within the Belfast Welcome Centre.

Visit Belfast will update Officers in December 2023 on mid-year progress. A synopsis of current high-level data available for the year to date is as follows:

- Through its activities, Visit Belfast has generated circa £35 million for the local economy to date, generating an economic impact of £11 million through dealing with 477,424 enquiries and £26 million through winning 77 conferences, equating to 55,543 bed nights and 20,819 delegates.
- Throughout 2023, Visit Belfast has delivered four campaigns, generating a minimum economic impact of £21 million, including a City Branding and Marketing campaign in the lead up to, and duration of, the global One Young World Belfast Summit.
- Visit Belfast has also won a number of awards throughout the year, with the Business Tourism Team securing the Conference and Incentive Travel Award for Best Conference Destination for the 3rd year in a row and the Meeting Industry Award for Destination Team of the Year for the 2nd year in a row. The Visitor Servicing Team also secured the NI Travel and Tourism Award for Best Tourist Information Centre for the 19th time.
- Visit Belfast is now ranked joint second for the best performing DMMO out of 100 destinations and Belfast is ranked 11th out of 100 city destinations, increasing the city's overall score by 2% this year in the Global Destinations Sustainability Index.

3.6

Conference Subvention Programme

Members will be aware that in January 2021, Council agreed ongoing support for Conference Support in line with an updated criteria and support to ensure that Belfast, including ICC can compete internationally as a business tourism destination to win

conferences for Belfast in an everchanging marketplace. This fund, which is match - funded by our partner Tourism NI, has ensured that Belfast, including ICC, remains competitive as a business tourism destination.

Officers continue to deliver the Conference Subvention Programme in partnership with Tourism NI and Visit Belfast. In the first 6 months of this year, our subvention scheme has contributed to supporting business tourism with an economic impact of £18 million, equating to 32,000 bednights and 12,000 delegates.

3.7

Strategic Theme 2: Position Belfast

The following activity has been delivered against the theme of ***Position Belfast:***

3.8

Positioning of Belfast in national and international Markets and Gateway role of Belfast for Visitors

Officers have been working with Visit Belfast, Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to strengthen the position of Belfast in national and international markets through marketing campaigns and PR activity. Work has included ensuring that Belfast is positioned as a Gateway city, a must-see urban destination on the island of Ireland by capturing GB and ROI city break market and attracting a greater share of out of state visitors to Ireland - primarily through contract management of Visit Belfast targeting leisure and business visitors.

3.9

Media Monitoring - Officers are exploring how we can implement media monitoring to measure the impact of positioning, consumer sentiments and changing perceptions which will be delivered by end March 2024, in partnership with NI Tourism Alliance and Tourism NI and other strategic partners. This will assist us in future planning for tourism and enable more accurate targeting of marketing, PR and social media campaigns.

3.10

Establish Research baselines, dashboard & examine digital opportunities for data capture - Officers are working with colleagues in Policy and research, Tourism NI, the NI Statistics and Research Agency and Tourism Ireland, to explore opportunities that will enable us to measure the impact of tourism both economically and socially for Belfast as there are sizeable gaps in the data currently available.

3.11

Strategic theme 3: Experience Belfast

The following has been delivered against the theme of ***Experience Belfast.***

3.12

Neighbourhood Tourism Programme

This was approved by Committee in June 2023, with an investment of £500,000 in a 2-year programme to develop and enhance market-led tourism products and experiences across the city, with a view to sharing the benefits of a vibrant tourism sector throughout local neighbourhoods. The Investment Programme includes interim funding support for the City Connections programme until the end of current financial year.

Scoping of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme continues to support development of market-led cultural tourism products. The programme aims to promote enhanced visitor footfall, dwell time and spend across the city's neighbourhoods and extend tourism's economic and social benefits to communities throughout the city.

Work has been undertaken on draft guidance notes, application form, scoring matrix and potential FAQs in preparation for an 'open call'.

Work is also underway to commence a period of sectoral developmental engagement to inform the parameters of the Programme, identify needs, gaps and opportunities and consider alignment of the City Connections Programme. This will be delivered through the appointment of an independent facilitator to undertake sectoral engagement and audit activity to inform and support the Programme's investment criteria, whilst continuing to strategically align with 'Belfast Stories'. Timeline for this engagement is from November through to February, with recommendations brought back to Committee end March.

3.13

City Connections

The Tourism Investment Programme includes interim funding to two organisations (Fáilte Feirste Thiar in West Belfast and EastSide Tourism in East Belfast) to support their City Connections programme until the end of the current financial year. Both organisations are currently delivering on their agreed action plans.

3.14

Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Programme

Officers continue to roll-out this programme which improves visitor accessibility to tourism facilities, products, and services. A Year 2 programme to deliver further training, which will strengthen skills and capacity building within the tourism sector to improve the accessibility of Belfast's tourism offer and increase the spend of the 'purple pound' is under way, aiming to support a minimum of 50 businesses this year.

The work undertaken to date will be consolidated in the next 6 months as Officers will:

- Submit a sponsorship proposal to Tourism NI to secure financial support for the implementation of the programme.
- Deliver an Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Seminar where experts and activists in access and inclusion will share their expertise with a target audience of 60 businesses including decision makers, policy makers and influencers.
- Development of 3 new online training programmes/assets that will be available free of charge to industry partners.
- Delivery of 2 free Living Library Accessible and Inclusive Workshops.
- A new industry engagement video profiling best practice to industry leaders and decision makers measured via audience viewers and engagement.
- 2 new public facing accessible and inclusive tourism video itineraries.
- Assets developed and those in the pipeline will be adapted to be included and promoted on the new Tourism NI eLearning Platform.
- All above will be delivered by a newly established Lived Experienced Team of individuals with a range of disabilities to ensure authenticity; and there will be ongoing consultation with the tourism industry and partners to ensure actions meet need and demand; and we have set up a new advisory group which will ensure that the impact of resources is maximised.

3.15

Food and Drink Tourism Programme

Work on this programme has been progressing against this workstream with the following update:

- Establishment of the Belfast Food and Drink Network representing 16 businesses. Further collaboration will take place to progress the programme.
- Submission of a successful application to the NI Regional Food Programme administered by the Department of Agriculture, Rural Affairs and the Environment. 40% towards total project cost has been offered.
- New positioning guidance for marketing and promotion of Belfast as a leading food and drink destination which has attracted in-kind support to a value of £10k from Visit Belfast.
- Development of 4 industry workshops to include two learning journeys to regional producers and networks building towards a “meet the buyer” event in March 2024, with the aim to develop new business leads between city providers and producers.
- Delivery of a high-quality, sustainable, local Food and Drink Village at the Belfast Maritime Festival held in September 2023. The diverse offering generated a lucrative economic return for local businesses and producers. The village strengthened our

status as a leading culinary destination, garnered positive feedback from our visitors and provided an exemplar visitor experience for all.

- Work has commenced to develop a new Dynamic Purchasing System for the provision of quality and sustainable food and drink at future events and festivals.
- Work has been ongoing with Belfast 2024 to ensure our food and drink offering will align with the aims and ambitions of the Food and Drink Tourism Plan.
- Preliminary scoping work has been undertaken to enable us to work towards our aspiration to achieve an international culinary accreditation/award.

3.16

Audit of and Production of Development Plans to enhance the Visitor Experience at Council- owned Tourism Assets

Make Yourself at Home identified the need for Council to utilise existing assets across the city to drive the visitor experience. Officers have been working with our colleagues across Council on background scoping of a Terms of Reference. This has been completed to secure expertise to undertake an audit and make recommendations for the enhancement of the visitor experience at Council-owned assets including Belfast Zoo, Belfast Castle, Tropical Ravine, City Cemeteries, Malone House, Ulster Hall, St George's Market and City Hall. It will be issued to market in the coming weeks through an open tender, with the aim to deliver a prioritised action plan for future implementation which creates synergy with the city's 'Belfast brand' and Tourism NI 'Embrace A Giant Spirit' brand to deliver on experiential tourism, thereby ensuring we enhance Belfast's reputation as a visitor destination and to deliver on our aim to increase visitor satisfaction, spend and longer stays.

This work will be delivered through extensive consultation with our colleagues across Council, strategic tourism partners and the tourism industry and preliminary findings which will make recommendations regarding how Council assets can contribute to the visitor experience in Belfast will be brought to Committee at end March 2024.

3.17

Belfast Visitor Pass

Officers have worked with input from stakeholders including Tourism NI and Visit Belfast, to finalise an agreed Terms of Reference to develop a feasibility study to benchmark against other cities and to scope the potential and options for a tourism visitor pass similar to what operates in other cities. This is being progressed through the engagement of expertise to work with visitor attractions and transport providers to provide recommendations of viable options for the delivery of a Visitor Pass for Belfast by end March 2024.

3.18

Enhancing the Visitor Experience

Work is progressing with an experienced provider to develop and implement a phased, prioritised Visitor Experience Action Plan to enhance the visitor experience across the city over the next decade and outline key tourism projects which may be suitable for development and introduction to market within 1 year, 2 years and 5 years. The action plan will be completed by March 2024.

3.19

Visitor Signage, Wayfinding, Street Dressing

The Tourism Plan identified the need for improvements in connectivity and accessibility through signage, wayfinding and interpretation. To maximise market opportunities and ensure that interventions will address long-term sectoral needs, there is a requirement to undertake an audit of visitor signage and city dressing. The audit will inform what investment is required to upgrade, update and future-proof our visitor signage, with particular consideration to be given to the use of appropriate digital mechanisms, as well as investment into city dressing. Officers are working on a brief for a scoping exercise to be undertaken in the coming months which will provide a detailed investment recommendation and action plan, with a report on outcomes and recommendations to be presented to Committee in the period January / February 2024.

3.20

Strategic theme 4: Sustain Belfast

The following has been delivered against the theme of ***Sustain Belfast***:

3.21

Global Destination Sustainability Index

Members will be aware that following Committee approval in August 2020, Belfast signed up to the Global Destination Sustainability Index, which is one of the world's leading benchmarking and performance Index for cities, their events, and their visitor economy. It's purpose is to engage, enable and inspire cities to become more sustainable places to visit, meet and thrive in. In addition to benchmarking a city's environmental strategy and social sustainability performance, the GDS-Index assess criteria that are industry specific: industry supplier support (restaurants, hotels, conference centres) and convention bureau strategy and initiatives.

The Index is based on 69 Indicators broken down into four categories:

- City Environmental Performance
- City Social Performance
- Supplier Performance
- Destination Management Performance

3.22

Officers have worked with Visit Belfast and a range of partners and Belfast has now completed its third year of benchmarking resulting in being rated 11th out of 100 destinations, increasing year on year score by 2% and maintaining our place within the top 20 cities. This assists in ensuring Belfast is globally competitive in securing conferences and business events for Belfast, resulting in associated economic benefit and sectoral support. We will be working with our colleagues in the Resilience Team, Visit Belfast, TNI and industry partners to encourage continuous improvement to ensure that Belfast is a sustainable tourism destination.

3.23

Green Tourism Accreditation

Officers have supported and enabled the tourism industry to commence their sustainability journey to increase their sustainability credentials through the implementation of the Green Tourism Accreditation Programme. It provides access to the GreenChecktool, enabling tourism businesses including accommodation, hospitality providers, events and attractions to complete assessments and take steps to achieve accreditation. Cultural organisations and festivals also have access to the programme. This has resulted in 75% of hotel rooms in Belfast being accredited, 100 businesses are now members of Green Tourism of which 50 have completed accreditation and we are continuing to work with a range of tourism providers to encourage them to gain their bronze accreditation. Visit Belfast is working towards achieving it's silver accreditation.

Officers are working with key stakeholders to ensure that sustainability is embedded in tourism products, experiences and events across the city. We will be continuing to work with the supply chain to incentivise change programmes and raise awareness of the importance of sustainability.

3.24

City Events

At April 2023 Committee, Members agreed the Year 2 Action Plan of Event Delivery against *Make Yourself at Home* - The 6-month update against these targets and deliverables is as follows:

- 1 large - scale city event (Maritime Festival) delivered attracting local audiences and out of state visitors, with two to follow (Christmas 2023 and St Patrick's Day 2024).
- Maritime Festival successfully delivered in September 2023, including an audience of 80,000, securing TNI funding of £60,000. In lieu of a large-scale creative piece (Council decision), a Maritime village including craft, food and science fair was delivered as part of the wider programme.

- The out of state marcomms reach was 6,764,000 impacts with the overall Visit Belfast campaign being over 9.5 million impacts. Organic social media on Facebook also had 58,811 Impressions.
- Our Corporate Communications team ran an extensive successful local campaign including newspapers. A Translink T-side campaign also targeted 464,030 people.
- 41% of visitors from elsewhere in NI.
- 10% from GB & ROI.
- 14% stayed in accommodation.
- The Estimated Direct Visitor Spend was £1,326,839.
- 74% of visitors gave the festival an overall 8-10, including 25% who rated it as 'Extremely Good'.
- 97% of visitors said that the Maritime Festival improves Belfast's reputation as a host for events like these and improves the reputation of Belfast as a place to visit.
- 97% agreed that there should be more events like this in Belfast.
- Debrief report and Developmental Action plan to follow in coming months for Committee approval.
- Christmas 2023 - after consideration of event health and safety considerations and programming options as brought by Officers, Members have agreed to the traditional format and Officers have continued to research initiatives with local creatives to enhance co-design of creative offering. Event planning and developmental work continues with all relevant stakeholders.
- St Patrick's Day 2024 - Officers continue to progress delivery via tender of the new model and associated commissioning approach to the creative sector to ensure delivery of elements such as parade, music programme and community engagement. Good Relations Unit have advised there will be no budget enhancement available for the 2024 event. A marketing campaign is currently being scoped.
- Lord Mayor's Day 2023 delivered with engagement of the Lord Mayor's Networks. Debrief report previously brought back to Committee.
- Eurovision - event delivered in May 2023 in 2RA through provider Maywe and Council engaged in a UK wide partnership approach, led by the BBC. Debrief report previously presented to Committee.
- International Events - As part of the international events programme for 2025-2028, Officers continue to participate in the ongoing bidding process for Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann for 2026 and beyond (Members have been provided with regular update reports in-year on this).
- Euro 2028 has been secured as part of a 5 Nation Bid (regular reports have been provided and a further report will be provided before the end of the financial year

3.25	<p>when the governance and human and financial resourcing has been more clearly mapped). Members will also be aware of the ongoing bid for the Oireachtas na Samhna (report previously presented to Committee in-year).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A collaborative programming approach continues to be adopted to the Council managed portfolio of events intertwined with bidding and securing international events. • One Young World - this event was successfully delivered by the Tourism and Events Team with summit partners during October 2023, with 2,200 delegates and corporates in attendance from over 190 countries which profiled Belfast on an international stage through world media and was a memorable week for all involved. Debrief and Evaluation collateral continues to be collated and a full debrief report will be brought to Committee in the second half of the financial year. • Sports Events Grants continue to support local organisations with 9 organisations funded within - year. • Belfast 2024 - scoping continues across the Tourism and Events Team to work with colleagues in Belfast 2024 to plan and support the delivery of Belfast 2024. • The Events Unit continues to scope the governance requirements across the city in relation to both the council managed events portfolio and international events bid programme in conjunction with stakeholders.
3.26	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are currently no immediate new financial implications to this report. Further detail on proposals for investment in local tourism will be presented to Committee in due course.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are currently no immediate new financial implications to this report. Neighbourhood Tourism is currently progressing through equality screening.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices - Documents Attached</p>
	<p>N/A</p>

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