

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



**Belfast  
City Council**

6th March, 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 March, 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. **Presentations**

- (a) Visit Belfast Business Plan 2026/27 (Pages 1 - 36)

3. **Restricted Items**

- (a) Vacant to Vibrant Programme (Pages 37 - 58)
- (b) Cultural Multi-Annual Grants (report to follow)
- (c) Markets Quarterly Update (Pages 59 - 74)
- (d) Belfast Zoo Quarterly Performance Report (Pages 75 - 82)
- (e) Belfast Bikes Quarterly Performance Report (Pages 83 - 98)

- (f) Financial Reporting - Quarter 3 2025/26 (report to follow)
- (g) Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 Update (report to follow)

4. **Matters Referred Back from Council**

- (a) Notice of Motion - Ormeau Arts Centre (Pages 99 - 100)

5. **Growing Business and the Economy**

- (a) Innovation Factory Update (Pages 101 - 104)
- (b) International Relations Quarterly Update and Forward Plan 2026/27 (Pages 105 - 122)
- (c) Local Economic Partnership Action Plan - Update on Proposed Priority Projects (Pages 123 - 136)

6. **Strategic and Operational Issues**

- (a) Notices of Motion - Quarterly Update (Pages 137 - 146)



<b>Subject:</b>	Visit Belfast Business Plan 2026-2027
<b>Date:</b>	11 March 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Keith Forster, Director Economic Development Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture and Tourism
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Pièr Morrow, Tourism and Events 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>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Some time 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 or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of the report is to present the request for funding from Visit Belfast for the 2026-2027 financial year and to set out the organisation's strategic development and operational delivery, focused on supporting tourism growth.  Members should note that Visit Belfast will be in attendance at Committee to present the detail of its 2026-2027 business plan.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>

2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Note the draft Visit Belfast business plan 2026-2027. The overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast in the coming financial year has been taken account of in the revenue estimates that have already been approved by Council.</li> <li>- Approve and agree a funding allocation of £2,143,073 for 2026-2027, subject to the development of a funding agreement, priority areas of activity and agreed targets.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that Visit Belfast was established by Council as the principal destination marketing and visitor servicing organisation for the city of Belfast. Visit Belfast leads on the tourism marketing activities and targets both the leisure and business tourism markets. It is a membership organisation with more than 500 partner businesses across the wider hospitality industry. Visit Belfast works on behalf of its funders and partners and with a range of public and private partners including Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and Belfast Chamber to promote Belfast as a tourism destination.</p>
3.2	<p>Visit Belfast is a public/private partnership. Its current Chairperson is Marie-Thérèse McGivern; and Belfast City Council has four Councillor representatives on the Board: Councillor Sammy Douglas, Councillor Eric Hanvey, Councillor Tomás Ó Néill and Councillor Séanna Walsh. Also represented on the board are members from the private, public and community sectors.</p>
3.3	<p>The tourism and hospitality industry in Belfast has been going from strength to strength as Belfast continues to drive the regional tourism economy; in 2024, the most recent published Local Government District tourism statistics by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Belfast hosted 1.5 million overnight trips accounting for 31% of all overnight trips to Northern Ireland generating tourism spend of £469 million, which is 43% of Northern Ireland overnight tourism spend. There are no tourism day visitor statistics available at this time.</p>
3.4	<p>Council has worked with Visit Belfast to continue to rebuild city tourism which has resulted in Belfast's visitor economy being stronger and more competitive in a market context that has been challenging. The city has charted a strong recovery, yet challenges such as staffing, higher costs of doing business within the tourism and hospitality sector and the knock-on impact on hospitality opening hours in the city remain.</p>
3.5	<p>The inclusion of tourism as a key growth sector in the City Region Deal, acknowledged the fact that the sector is already a significant economic generator but recognises the need for</p>

	<p>significant additional investment in order to sustain growth. The Council's 10-year plan for tourism in the city; "<i>Make Yourself at Home</i>" 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: increasing the coherency of the Belfast experience; supporting quality authentic products; developing skills; and strengthening the city's position through marketing and communications.</p>
3.6	<p>Belfast's <i>Make Yourself at Home</i>, Tourism Plan recognises both the challenges to increase tourism and to maximise the positive impact that it can have on the city; whilst the updated Belfast Agenda has set a target to double the value of tourism from £400m to £800m by 2030. As the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) for Belfast, Visit Belfast has an important role to play in realising the vision for tourism. It is in this context that Visit Belfast developed its three-year strategy New Horizons (2024-2027) and its year three business plan-2026-2027 to support and promote tourism activity in the city region in a way that enriches the visitor experience, encourages longer stays and achieves meaningful economic and social impact for local people. Further details of activities that will be undertaken as part of this plan with associated targets will be set out in the presentation to the Committee and are included at Appendix A.</p>
3.7	<p>Visit Belfast's three-year strategy New Horizons (2024-2027) and year three business plan (2026-2027) are aligned to the four themes of Belfast's Tourism Plan: <i>Make Yourself at Home</i>, focused on delivering for the city:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Grow</b> the visitor economy in the Belfast city region in an inclusive and sustainable way</li> <li>● <b>Position</b> the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out;</li> <li>● Enhance the <b>Experience</b> for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer, and;</li> <li>● <b>Sustain</b> its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast's sustainability story.</li> </ul>
3.8	<p>Tourism Outlook – tourism contributes to the economic and social wellbeing of the city with high potential to create jobs quickly and provide the economic impetus for the wider economy. The global tourism landscape is being reshaped by shifts in demand, evolving traveller behaviours, and rising economic pressures, creating both opportunities and</p>

	<p>challenges for the city region. The analysis of tourism trends, market sentiment, policy context and performance indicators underscore the opportunity for growth in the coming year.</p>				
3.9	<p>The year ahead presents a significant opportunity to attract visitors to the city and region with Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 set to become the largest cultural event in the city's history. This landmark moment is further reinforced by Belfast's designation as a UNESCO City of Music and European City of Sport, positioning the city firmly on the national and international stage. Beyond Fleadh, the marketing approach will continue to deepen the Explore the Unexpected narrative, showcasing Belfast's neighbourhoods, local voices and authentic experiences, thereby meeting the expectations of visitors seeking experiences that are authentic and inspiring; and where there are strong stories and a cultural connection.</p>				
3.10	<p>Visit Belfast 2025-2026 performance - Visit Belfast's focus in year two of the New Horizons strategy was to achieve an economic impact target of £141m through leisure tourism marketing, business events, cruise and visitor servicing activity. Visit Belfast is on target to deliver a very strong year two performance in 2025-26 with all KPIs achieved or exceeded.</p>				
3.11	<p>Priorities outlined in Visit Belfast's business plan 2026-2027 include: directly delivering on the ambitions and priorities set out in <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> tourism plan for Belfast through key strategic focus areas of growing demand by positioning Belfast as a front of mind destination for leisure city breaks and business events; increasing the value of overnight stays and day trips from NI, ROI and GB markets, prioritising midweek, shoulder season and winter months; leverage major events; marketing will focus on direct access cities within Europe and capitalise on increased US market via Dublin; enhance the experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a culturally diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer and iconic attractions in order to connect visitors with authentic and unique experiences; collaboration across industry partnerships.</p>				
3.12	<p>Operational Targets for 2026-2027 - based on projected levels of growth in 2026-2027, Visit Belfast is proposing the following targets for 2026-2027 as agreed by their board:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="274 1814 1473 1986"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="274 1814 869 1870">Target 2026-2027</th> <th data-bbox="869 1814 1473 1870">Measurement</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="274 1870 869 1986">1.04 m Visits</td> <td data-bbox="869 1870 1473 1986">           Cruise 296,000            Daytrips 425,000            Overnight leisure trips 285,000         </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Target 2026-2027	Measurement	1.04 m Visits	Cruise 296,000 Daytrips 425,000 Overnight leisure trips 285,000
Target 2026-2027	Measurement				
1.04 m Visits	Cruise 296,000 Daytrips 425,000 Overnight leisure trips 285,000				

		Delegates 38,500
	500,000 Bednights	400,000 Leisure 100,000 Business
	£150m economic impact	Leisure £66m Business events £39m Visitor servicing £19m Cruise £26m
	825,000 Visitor Enquiries	Total enquiries across all sites
3.13	<p>A detailed business plan has been submitted and reviewed by officers. The targets outlined will form the basis of key performance indicators for Council's 2026-2027 funding agreement with Visit Belfast. Regular monitoring against targets will be included, and these key performance indicators will relate to the trajectory for growth and align with the implementation phases for Council's tourism plan. This provides a basis for more effective monitoring of performance.</p>	
3.14	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>In the current financial year, Belfast City Council's funding arrangement with Visit Belfast is £2,076,424. An allocation of £2,143,073 has been set aside within the Departmental estimates for the financial year 2026-2027.</p>	
3.15	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>No specific equality or good relations implications. Visit Belfast also works with councils outside of Belfast, as part of the Regional Tourism Partnership.</p>	
4.0	<b>Appendices</b>	
4.1	Appendix A: Visit Belfast Presentation of Business Plan 2026-2027	

This page is intentionally left blank

2024-2027 Visit Belfast Strategy

# New Horizons for Belfast City Region

Year 3 Business Plan 2026-27  
Belfast City Council CG&R Committee

**visit  
Belfast**





# Strategy: Key Pillars aligned to BCC Strategy

## **GROW**

Value of tourism to Belfast City region and its communities

## **POSITION**

Belfast City region as a must-see destination for leisure and business tourism

## **EXPERIENCE**

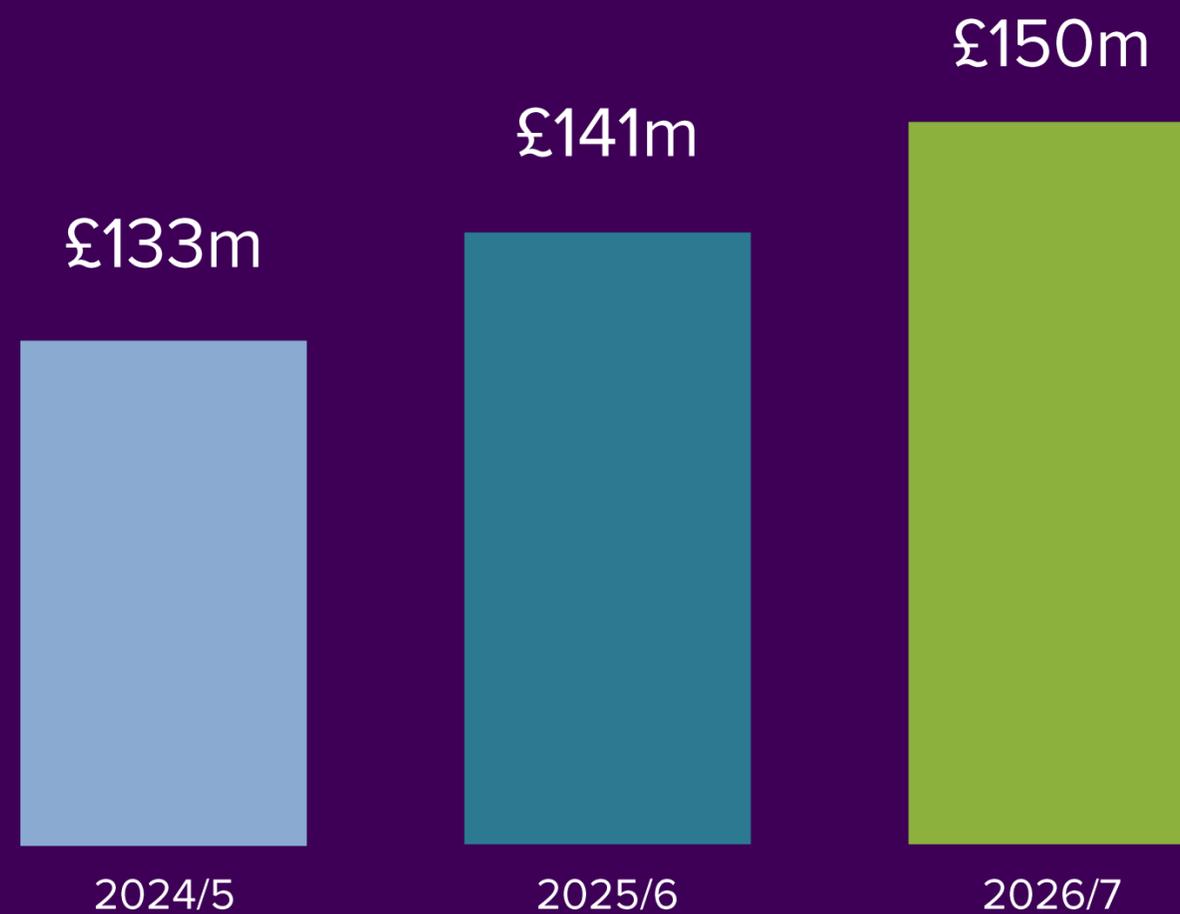
Enhance the visitor experience by showcasing Belfast City region's unique neighbourhood offer

## **SUSTAIN**

Accelerate work on sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives and telling Belfast's sustainability story

# 3-Year Strategy Objectives

**£424m** economic impact  
**20%** growth  
**6.5%** growth p.a  
**30:1** RoI



**Social &  
Environmental**

**Grow commercial  
income**

**Digital  
Innovation**

# Performance Year 1 & 2

## £319m Economic impact

75% of three-year target

110% 3-year impact projected - £469m

## Social & Environmental impact

92% resident support for tourism

Belfast - Top 10 sustainable destination globally

Carbon model developed for tourism & tracked annually

## Innovation

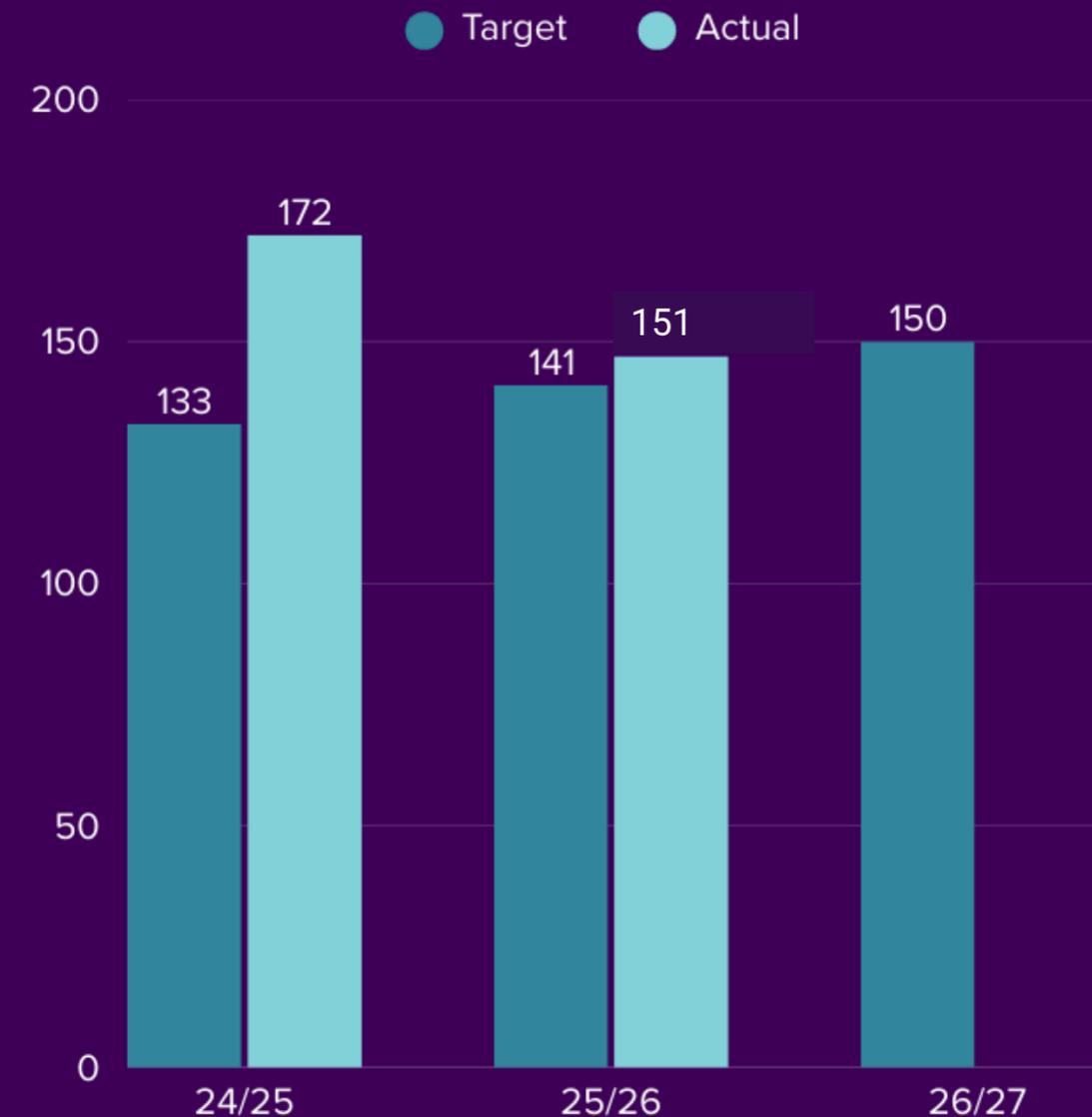
UK's first 'social-first' destination website - 3M visits

Fastest growing social tourism brand – UK & Ireland

Record-breaking 46M video views - innovative AI and CGI use

Next generation accessibility and sustainability tools

(Recite Me, You.Smart.Thing and Bioscore)



## Commercial & project income

£3.9m Year 1 and 2

75% growth in 4 years

55:43 Public-Commercial split

# 2026/7 Outlook: Opportunities

## EVENTS

Fleadh

Euro's Draw & U17 Women's

City events & festivals

America 250

## STRATEGY

NI Business Events Strategy

3-year Enhanced RTP / 20th Anniversary / Dest Stewardship

NI Travel trade strategy

## INVESTMENT

£830m investment

800 additional hotel rooms

Retail, tourism, hotel development - city centre, neighbourhood & regional investment

US & Canada route potential - BIA

City Airport Masterplan

## GROWTH

ROI, GB & US demand

Asian market development

Luxury market

Food and drink tourism

Peace Tourism

# 2026/7 Outlook: Challenges

## ECONOMIC

Cost of doing business

Cost of living

Belfast costs for visitors

Public finances & funding

Softening of city hotel performance - midweek & shoulder

## POLICY

Regional Balance

UK vs ROI VAT

Geo-political uncertainty

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Direct European & International Air access

## EXPERIENCE

Staffing & service levels

Complex lives & anti-social behaviour

# 2026-7 Key development areas

- 1 Fleadh 2026 & 2027
- 2 Next generation visitor servicing
- 3 Belfast's Gateway role and regional growth
- 4 Industry partnership development
- 5 Digital, innovation & AI
- 6 Emerging market development
- 7 NI Business events strategy & funding growth
- 8 Neighbourhood tourism
- 9 30 Years of Cruise





26-27 DELIVERY

# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS



# Marketing & Comms Targets

6% year on year growth



£66m

Leisure economic  
impact

400K

Leisure Bednights

285k

Leisure Trips (O/N)

425K

Leisure Day trips

6 CAMPAIGNS

GB, ROI & NI

Page 15

3m

Web visits

67.6m

Social media  
Impressions

37m

Social views

4.6m

Social media  
Engagements

23K

NEW email  
subscribers

150m

PR & Comms

Opportunities to See

Priority Focus  
Fleadh Cheoil the biggest cultural moment for the City

Neighbourhoods 'Explore the Unexpected' activations that explore local character, culture and new discovery

'30 Years of Belfast Welcomes' with Cruise Belfast

# Key Projects across Marketing and Communications in 26/27



Fleadh - PR, Marketing and Web Support



Expanding Neighborhood Focus across Marketing Channels



Cruise Belfast "30 Years of Belfast Welcomes"



Key City Event Support across Campaigns



Continuous Digital Development across web, screens and AI Roadmap



Regional Tourism Partner Brand Positioning

Priorities for 2026/27

Business as Usual Focuses

# Fleadh Cheoil Integrated Marketing Approach

**“Feel the energy of the Fleadh.”**

A simple message highlighting music, dance and Belfast’s atmosphere designed to create a sense of welcome and shared celebration supported with Digital and PR

Page 17

## Advertising in the Republic of Ireland

9 weeks of television advertising

14 weeks of radio advertising

Billboards in Dublin and border counties

Online advertising and social media promotion

## Advertising in Northern Ireland

12 weeks of online TV advertising

Radio campaign across leading NI stations

Digital outdoor screens in commuter towns

Online advertising with local publishers



# Public Relations & Digital Engagement

Alongside advertising, we are delivering a coordinated public relations and digital programme to build momentum before, during and after the event.

## A three-phase PR and Communications approach:

Build Awareness – National and regional media coverage.

Drive Engagement – Stories on participation and local preparations.

Showcase Impact – Highlighting key moments and long-term benefits.

## Digital Platform – FleadhCheoil.ie

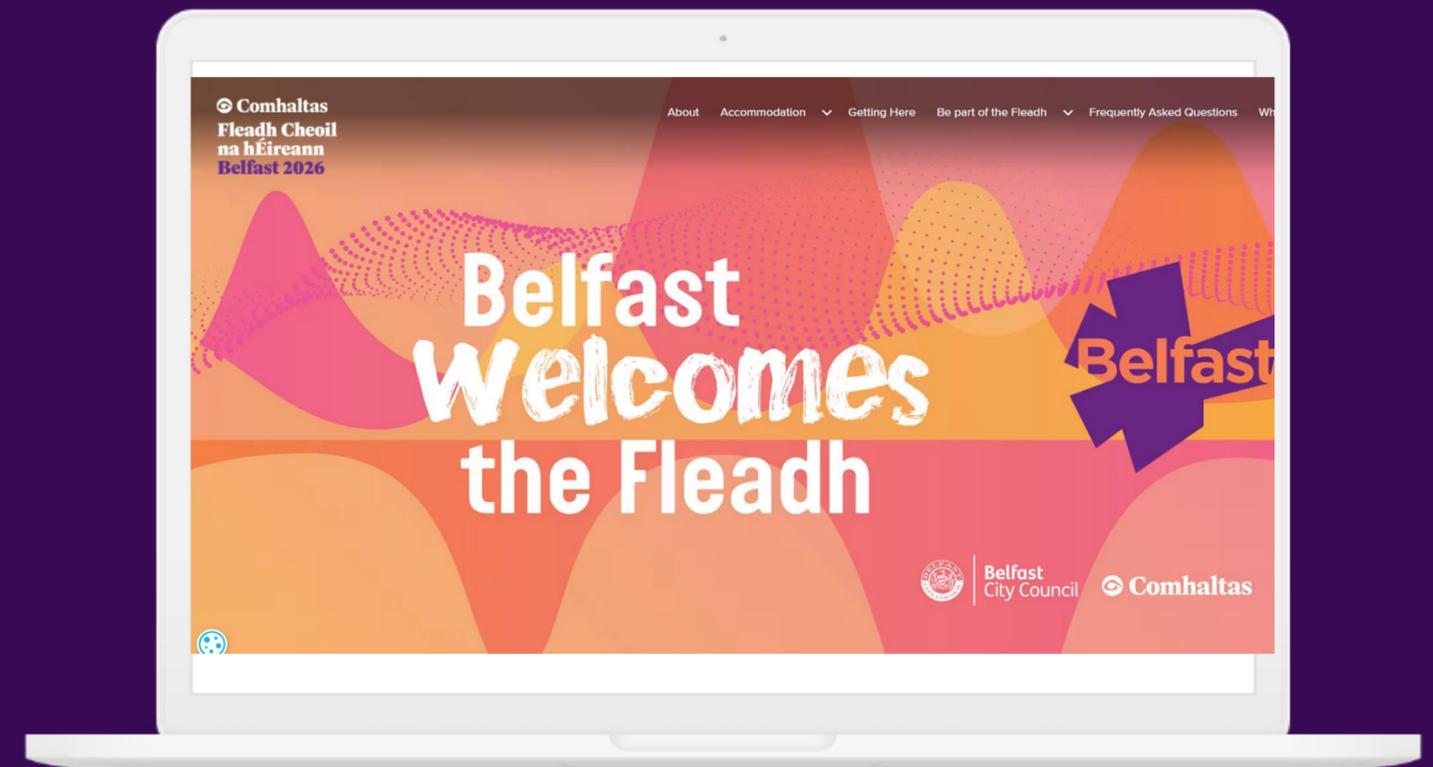
Central online hub for official event information.

Showcasing over 2,500 accommodation options.

Live updates, travel information and clear visitor guidance.

Post-event highlights and visitor stories.

Capturing visitor insights to inform future planning.



# New Neighbourhood Marketing and Communications

## One City, Many Local Stories

Bring Belfast's neighbourhoods to life within the city brand, spotlighting the authentic experiences and hidden gems that exist beyond the city centre.

## Unified Narrative

Use Explore the Unexpected to highlight local character, culture, and discovery beyond the city centre.

## One Clear Message Across All Activity

All marketing and communications use the same core message, imagery and themes. This keeps the campaign balanced, easy to understand and recognisable wherever people see or hear it.



# New Neighbourhood Marketing and Communications

## Four Campaign Pillars

### Unexpected Places

Hidden gems and overlooked locations that surprise and delight visitors, from tucked-away cafés to architectural marvels that don't make the guidebooks.

### Unexpected Experiences

Unique activities and moments that can only happen here, whether it's a traditional music session or a cutting-edge cultural event.

### Unexpected Stories

Authentic narratives from the people who make these neighbourhoods vibrant, celebrating local history, creativity, and community spirit.

### Unexpected Welcome

The genuine warmth and hospitality that defines Belfast's character, making every visitor feel like they've discovered something truly special.

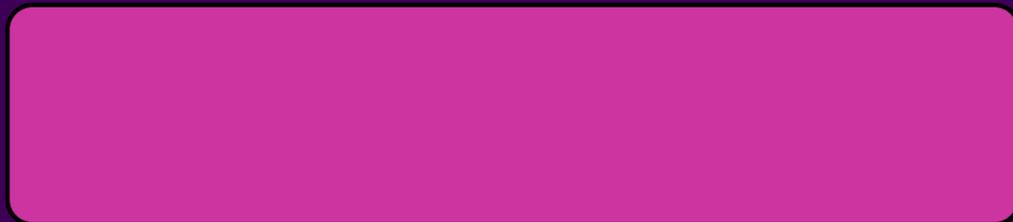
Page 20



### City Areas / Directions

North | South | East | West

Broad geographical quadrants that provide orientation and thematic framework



### Established Quarters

Example: Cathedral | Titanic | Gaeltacht | Queens

Recognized districts with established identities and visitor infrastructure



### Neighbourhoods

Distinct local areas with unique character, culture, and community voice

# Cruise 30 Years of Belfast Welcomes

## Our Aim

The 30th anniversary provides an opportunity to consolidate Belfast's position as a leading cruise destination over the next decade, drawing on our proven heritage while advancing innovation and sustainable growth.

Page 21

## Awareness

Generate earned media coverage across trade, travel, and regional outlets. Amplify the narrative through owned, earned, and partner channels. Reach cruise passengers pre-arrival through compelling onboard content.

## Sentiment

Shift Belfast resident perception from "tourists arriving" to "community benefiting". Reinforce Belfast's reputation within the industry as a trusted, forward-thinking destination. Position BCC, Belfast Harbour and Visit Belfast as steward of long-term cruise success.



# 30 Years of Cruise – Heritage, Community & Future Growth

## 30 Stories, 30 Voices

- Short videos and written profiles featuring port workers, tour guides, taxi drivers and cruise partners.
- Showcasing how cruise tourism has supported local jobs and businesses over three decades.
- Highlighting real community impact and civic pride.



## Cruise & City Week

- A dedicated week of activity designed to engage Belfast residents:
- Cruise Terminal Viewing – Organised opportunities for residents to watch ship arrivals and departures.
- Onboard Ship Visits – Limited family visits to experience cruise operations firsthand.
- Talks & Exhibitions – Accessible sessions explaining cruise tourism's economic and cultural contribution.





26-27 DELIVERY

# BUSINESS EVENTS



# Business Event Targets

5% year on year growth

£39m

Business economic  
impact

38.5k

Business delegates

100k

Business bednights

£140m

Leads

£100m

Bids

2,000

Business buyer  
engagements

100%

Client  
recommendation  
rate

230-250

Forward booked events  
supported – destination  
management

12.5k

MICE database  
6.5K ezine  
subscribers

11k

Social media followers

Real value of business  
tourism in NI  
c£100-£115m p/a  
NISRA (2024)

# Market Context & Opportunities

## Market Context

- Strong optimism and demand but persistent cost pressures
- VFM is key – balancing cost pressures with delegate experience
- 65% of meetings are taking place outside Tier 1 destinations
- Increasing length of stay to maximise value of trips & ‘bleisure’ opportunity
- Sustainability now embedded in event strategy, venue & destination selection

Page 25

## Belfast Opportunity & Approach

- 84% of business events are midweek – source of high spend, year-round visitors
- Belfast well positioned to meet changing demands of organisers – sectors, sustainability
- Re-launch of NI ambassador network – largest sales channel for the city (80%)
- Launch of new sector advisory panels aligned to DfE sector development plans
- Event legacy – economic, education, social impact
- Extreme collaboration – TI, TNI, Industry & 1,400 strong Ambassador Network



# TRAVEL TRADE

# TRAVEL TRADE TARGETS & FOCUS

£2M

Travel Trade Leads  
Revenue Value

20,000

Bednights

8,000

Daytrips

400

Buyer  
Engagements

3,000

Travel Trade  
Operator Database

## Demand Generation & Market Development

- £1.3m of VB leads converted into contracted businesses in the current year
- Balance between maximising business and ROI from established markets vs investing in new emerging markets
- North America, Canada and Asia\* key opportunities
- TNI new travel trade strategy for Northern Ireland (March 2026)
- Luxury - Belfast Luxury Collective action plan

Short curated stress-free  
breaks

Authentic off-grid lesser-known  
experiences for stand-out

Growing integration of AI by OTA and meta sites could help  
NI as a compelling but less familiar destination

Experiential, transformative and sharable travel products  
could position Belfast and NI as a story-driven choice for  
travel trade

Iconic attractions & game-changing hotel investment  
Compelling city and country offer  
Cool-cations / TripAdvisor accolades / Fleadh – hooks  
VB destination support & industry collaboration



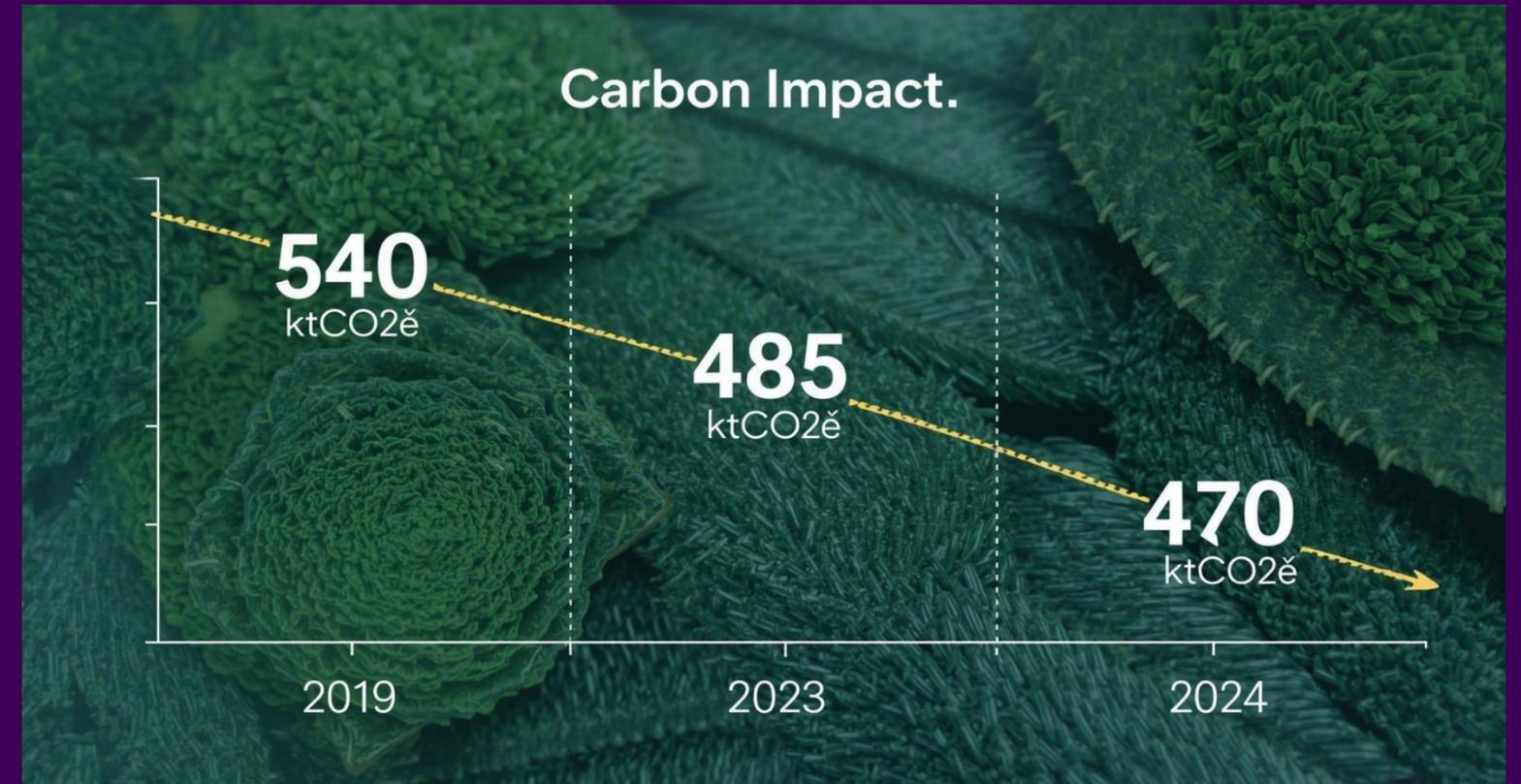
# SUSTAINABILITY & IMPACT



# Environmental Impact

## Visit Belfast now measures Tourism's carbon footprint annually

- Visit Belfast partnered with BCC Climate/Tourism teams and EY Paris to develop a pioneering carbon footprint model for tourism
- Belfast is now one of the few tourism destinations to measure and publish its total carbon footprint annually (inc. travel)
- Today we also launched the Belfast Tourism Net-Zero taskforce with industry & chaired by BCC Climate Commissioner



**10%**

Belfast's tourism carbon impact equates to approx 10% of the city's total emissions in line with percentage of people employed in sector

**57%**

Belfast's carbon impact is travel to and from the destination

**-13%**

Tourism's carbon footprint has decreased largely driven by post pandemic market recovery patterns

# Environmental Impact

## Belfast is leading the way in regenerative tourism practice

### Top 10 GDS Index

Belfast ranks 9th in Global Destination Sustainability Index. Top on island of Ireland and second only to Glasgow in UK

### 74% Bedrooms

Belfast Hotel Rooms hold a Green Tourism / B Corp sustainability certification

### 100 Businesses

Industry partners and clients supported on sustainability objectives by Visit Belfast

**First city-wide multi-venue Reusable cup solution to tackle single use plastic**

**96% VB Partners Adopting sustainable practices**

**51% VB Partners Measuring Carbon emissions**

# Social Impact

## Strong Resident Support for - and Pride in Tourism

**92%**

Residents believe tourism is beneficial for Belfast

**93%**

Tourism allows people to learn about Belfast's culture & history

**91%**

Tourism supports local businesses such as bars, restaurants and attractions to remain open

**87%**

Tourism helps to create a more vibrant Belfast with more things to see and do

**84%**

Residents interested in taking part in more tourism activities

## Charity and social impact

**Funds raised**

Over £1.4m raised last year – 25/26 results due in April

**63,456**

Meals provided to vulnerable people in Belfast through VB's Changing the Menu for Good Social Impact programme

**2,131**

Students supported through educational outreach programmes

**Legacy**

From retired teachers donating tutoring hours to Foodstock & cyber safety events with schools



Page 32

# VISITOR SERVICING & CRUISE

visitBelfast

# Visitor Servicing & Cruise

£19m

Visitor servicing  
Economic Impact

825k

Visitor enquiries

4 VICs

BWC / BIA / Cruise /  
Grand Central /Off Site

32%

Regional Dispersal

£26m

Cruise  
Economic Impact

296k

Cruise Pax &  
Crew

138

Cruise Calls  
2026

11

Cruise  
Turnarounds

95%

Visitor  
Satisfaction

9.5% YOY Growth (economic impact)

8.5% YoY Growth in enquiries

Fleadh 2026

D3 planning 2027 for Cruise season 2028

Neighbourhood Tourism - New Framework

# Cruise

**138 cruise ships in 2026**  
**296k cruise visitors**

**£26m economic impact**

## Business Development & Cruise Management

- Busiest single transit hub in UK & Ireland
- Cruise is fastest growing tourism segment in next 5 years
- By 2035 – expected to be worth c£40m
- April – October season
- 11 turnarounds – bed nights
- 73% staying after 6pm – evening economy
- Key growth areas – Luxury & turnarounds
- Cruise Hub will relocate to D3 for 2027 /28
- Deliver a smooth visitor journey: welcome, VIC provision, shuttle buses, logistics
- Cruise animation programme with partners & communities
- Gateway role

# 26-27 Business Plan Conclusion & Summary

## Plan Progress

60% through plan – 75% of target achieved

## Triple Bottom Line

Economic, social & environmental strategy working

## Business Critical

Commercialisation, digital innovation, sustainability

## Key Themes

Fleadh, Luxury, Peace, Neighbourhood, Culture, Food, Titanic, Fashion

## Key Focus

Low occupancy, business events, GB, ROI, Direct Access

£150m

Economic Impact

55:43

Public / Commercial

£1:71

BCC ROI

£1:£1.23

BCC Leverage

This page is intentionally left blank

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

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

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

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

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

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

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

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

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

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

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

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

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

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

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

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Notice of Motion – Ormeau Arts Centre</b>
<b>Date:</b>	11th March, 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Craig Mealey, Committee Services Officer

<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>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<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 or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	To consider a motion in relation to an Ormeau Arts Centre, which was referred to the Committee by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 24th February, 2026.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to note that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure or fall within the remit of a particular Committee must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.</p> <p>At this stage, the Committee is asked to note that the notice of motion has been received and that, if agreed, a subsequent report will be brought back to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the motion and the potential cost implications.</p>

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<b><u>Key Issues</u></b>
3.2	<p>At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 24th February, 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor de Faoite and seconded by Councillor McKeown, was referred to the Committee for consideration:</p> <p><b><u>Ormeau Arts Centre</u></b></p> <p>“Belfast City Council acknowledges the thriving and inclusive arts and cultural scene in Ballynafeigh and the benefits this brings not just to the local area, but to the city and region more widely;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• notes the growing aspiration in the community, particularly emerging through the Open Ormeau Community Visioning project which took place in 2025, for a dedicated arts and cultural space in Ballynafeigh, recognising the strong local interest in the arts, music and culture, and the area's increasing status as a destination for both residents and visitors to Belfast;</li> <li>• and therefore agrees to fund a feasibility study to examine the potential for a dedicated arts and culture space in Ballynafeigh, working with Open Ormeau and the local community.”</li> </ul> <p><b>Proposer:</b> Councillor Séamas de Faoite  <b>Secunder:</b> Councillor Gary McKeown</p> <p>3.3 The motion calls upon the Council to fund a feasibility study to examine the potential for a dedicated arts and culture space in Ballynafeigh.</p> <p>3.4 <b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the Notice of Motion. Details of any financial and resource implications will be reported at a subsequent meeting.</p> <p>3.5 <b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	None.



<b>Subject:</b>	Innovation Factory update
<b>Date:</b>	11 March 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Nial Borthistle, Enterprise and Business Growth Manager

**Restricted Reports**

**Is this report restricted?** Yes  No

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

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input 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

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. 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 matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
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
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

**Call-in**

**Is the decision eligible for Call-in?** Yes  No

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
	The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the ongoing work of the Innovation Factory (IF), the council-owned enterprise workspace operated on behalf of Belfast City Council by Oxford Innovation since 2016.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the contents of the report, including current performance at the Innovation Factory and the planned activity for the year ahead</li> <li>• Agree to receive an update from the centre management team at a future Committee meeting to provide an overview of the work of the centre and plans for the coming year.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	The Innovation Factory opened in 2016 on the site of the former Mackie's factory on Springfield Road. The project was designed to address historically low levels of entrepreneurship in West Belfast, inspire young people considering self-employment, and act as a catalyst for wider regeneration of a site that had been derelict for more than two decades.
3.2	Oxford Innovation has operated the centre since opening. The original five-year contract included three optional three-year extensions. The centre is currently in year two of the second extension period (year three will be 2026/27). Over the past year, council officers have worked closely with Oxford Innovation to streamline processes, review targets, and capitalise on collaboration opportunities. This work has focused on reducing duplication of effort, improving operational efficiency, and identifying opportunities for shared delivery with council teams and partner organisations in order to maximise revenue generation and reduce the financial liability to the council for the centre.
3.3	The Innovation Factory comprises 115 small offices spaces – capable of accommodating anywhere from 2-20 people – as well as hot-desking and communal working space. There are also a number of meeting rooms on site, and these are used by both tenants and by external organisations. The building is around 50,000sqft in total – with around 35,000sqft of net lettable space.

3.4	<p>As we approach the end of the financial year, the current occupancy rate within the centre is around 91% which is the highest level achieved since the centre opening. The new tenants come from a range of sectors including financial services, beauty services, artists and media services. Strong interest from production companies continues and they often take multiple rooms with the centre which boosts the occupancy rate and income levels. However, the downside of the production companies is the short-term nature of the lettings and the need to build a strong backfill pipeline to plug the gap once they move on.</p>
3.5	<p>The forecast outturn for 2025/26 is a net expenditure of £80k compared to an agreed Business Plan and approved budgeted surplus of £47k. The forecast deficit is as a result of reduced income, due to lower-than-expected occupancy levels (particularly in the early part of the year) and less income than planned for business support services (e.g. co-working space, re-charges for services such as cleaning). The approved budget for the 2026/27 financial year is a surplus of £47k which is in line with the agreed Financial Model and Business Plan. The annual service plan for the coming year contains a series of actions to ensure achievement of these financial targets and progress will be monitored through regular engagement with the Enterprise and Business Growth team as well as quarterly Board meetings involving OI senior management.</p>
3.6	<p>Tenants benefit from a range of business support provided directly by on-site staff and through external partners. Council teams also deliver events at IF and encourage delivery partners to use the centre to support tenant growth. Collaboration continues with other local workspace providers in the area such as WorkWest, Ortus and Argyle. A newly appointed Centre Director has begun a programme of engagement with key stakeholders, strengthening local partnerships and exploring opportunities to support early-stage FDI prospects and indigenous start-ups.</p>
3.7	<p>Given the nature of the location as an interface site, the team has always been keen to actively engage with local communities – particularly through schools-based and employability-based activities. The core service delivery plan is underpinned by a range of social and economic regeneration activities including providing work placements in tenant businesses. There are currently three business in the centre that take on local apprentices annually and twelve tenants have provided a range of work placement opportunities this year. The Centre also contracts local companies to carry out maintenance, cleaning and catering services, thereby retaining the spend in the local area.</p>

3.8	<p>Oxford Innovation has submitted its annual service plan for 2026/27. Given the broader economic context and Council's increasing focus on asset efficiency, priorities for the incoming year include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining strong occupancy levels in a challenging market</li> <li>• Achieving financial stability on behalf of Council</li> <li>• Strengthening the pipeline of prospective tenants to manage more effectively the "drop-off" from production companies and other larger tenants</li> <li>• Delivering targeted business support events to increase footfall</li> <li>• Enhancing engagement with professional services and commercial real-estate partners to generate leads and collaboration opportunities.</li> </ul>
3.9	<p>It is proposed that the Centre Management Team attends a future meeting of the Committee to give a more detailed overview of the work of the centre and plans for the coming year.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Finance and resource implications</b>
	<p>The financial provision to meet the 2025 / 2026 and 2026/2027 financial commitment for the operation of the Innovation Factory is included in the recurring Enterprise and Business Growth Unit Budget.</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</b>
	<p>The centre is located on an interface site and is accessible to all communities.</p>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
	<p>None.</p>



<b>Subject:</b>	International Relations quarterly update and forward plan 2026/27
<b>Date:</b>	11 March 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Laura Leonard, EU and International Relations Manager

**Restricted Reports**

**Is this report restricted?** Yes  No

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

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input 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

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. 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 matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
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
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

**Call-in**

**Is the decision eligible for Call-in?** Yes  No

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
	The purpose of this report is to provide a quarterly progress update on delivery as part of the council's new International Relations Framework 2025-2028, as agreed at the November 2025 Committee meeting and to seek a number of outlined approvals required to progress imminent and planned activity in the first part of the year.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the progress of the first quarter delivery of the International Relations Framework (November 2025 to March 2026)</li> <li>• Note proposed activity for April 2026 to March 2027, as set out in Appendix 1, including opportunities for Member engagement</li> <li>• Approve the participation of the Lord Mayor and an officer in a civic visit to Sister City Nashville in April 2026 at a cost of £4,000</li> <li>• Approve the proposed EU engagement activity, including participation of an All-Party delegation and one officer in the annual European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels October 2026, as well as the payment of the 2026 Eurocities Membership fee. Costs in respect to this activity include £8,000 for the proposed Brussels visit in October plus Eurocities annual membership of £15,000</li> <li>• Approve the purchase of a one-year pilot CRM system as a means of tracking and measuring the impact of international activity at a cost of around £7,000</li> <li>• Approve Council's annual participation in the New York New Belfast event, including stakeholder sponsorship, travel and attendance for the Lord Mayor, the Chief Executive, senior officer (or nominees) and one accompanying officer at a cost of £15,000.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	At the November 2025 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members approved the International Relations Framework 2025 – 2028, along with an action plan for 2025/26 activity.
3.2	The three-year "framework" document is intended to be a supporting document to other key strategies and plans such as the Belfast Agenda, the Corporate Plan and Local Development Plan – setting out how priority objectives and ambitions in those documents can be achieved through international connections, networks and opportunities. Its purpose is to identify areas

	<p>of collaborative advantage and help focus resources on opportunities that can maximise return on investment, in keeping with city priorities.</p>
3.3	<p>As part of this Framework, it was agreed that there would be quarterly reports back to the Committee outlining progress and key activities over the previous three months as well as a look ahead to the coming quarter, including opportunities for Member engagement.</p>
3.4	<p><b><u>Quarterly progress highlights November 2025 to March 2026</u></b></p> <p>Since approval of the new framework, a range of international relations activities has been undertaken by council teams and their partner organisations or are scheduled to take place before the end of the month. Under the themes of the framework, key activities include:</p> <p><u>Trade and Investment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in the November 2025 inaugural China/NI Economic Summit event, co-hosted by Invest NI, the Chinese Consulate and Chinese Chamber UK. The event was attended by Chinese Ambassador to the UK Mr Zeguang</li> <li>• Planning work undertaken on a March 2026 recce visit to Belfast by key Nashville economic partners. This visit is ahead of a planned inward economic mission involving senior government, business and innovation partners from Nashville that will take place in October 2026. The recce and the full programme will involve stakeholders including the Global Health Connector NI, Catalyst, HIRANI, Department of Health and Invest NI</li> <li>• Facilitation of a two-day fact finding programme for the NI Health Minister to Nashville in March 2026 to look at best practice connected health innovations and to meet investors and collaborators in this field</li> <li>• Attendance at MIPIM international real estate and property investment event in March 2026 as part of a Belfast City and Region Place Partnership delegation</li> <li>• Preparatory work ahead of the annual New York-New Belfast event in June 2026, working with Invest NI, Belfast Chamber, New York State Comptroller Di Napoli's office and new Mayor Mamdani's office, to maximise our positioning this year. Included in this is collaboration with Tourism Ireland to incorporate strong messaging around Belfast Stories and Fleadh Cheoil</li> <li>• Work is ongoing under the banner of the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor Partnership. The Political Advisory Group meeting was hosted in Belfast City Hall in December 2025 and the second meeting of the DBEC Industry Advisory Group was hosted by Belfast Harbour in February 2026</li> </ul>

- Ongoing support for Belfast-based partners seeking connections and introductions through our Sister City and other networks. Over the course of the last three months, we made introductions on behalf of 16 organisations.

#### Innovation & Knowledge Exchange

- The Council's Resilience team participated in the launch of an EU Horizon funded project "Pathways to Resilience" in Budapest in February. This is a €200,000 funded programme to support the development of a Climate Resilience Baseline report, a Climate Resilience Strategy, Action Plan and Investment Plan. The team also attended the Katowice-based PGM UPSURGE project General Meeting of partners before submission of the final report in February 2026
- In December 2025, we supported Queen's University's celebratory event to mark the departure of 90 North Eastern University students who had spent the previous semester in the city. This is directly linked to our Belfast-Boston Sister City relationship
- The EU and International Relations Team hosted two US academic inward missions including one from Belmont University in Nashville and also facilitated a visit from US College Counsellors who were in Belfast on a fact-finding mission to promote Belfast as an international study location
- The EU and International Relations Team connected the Innovation Commissioner to the Global Health Connector worldwide network. This led to opportunities for showcasing roles and meetings with potential investors at two key global health-related events.

#### City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development

- The council supported the annual Friendship Four ice hockey NCAA tournament in November and the Women's Friendship Series in January 2026 as part of the ongoing Boston Sister City connections
- The Council's Culture team engaged in EuroCities Culture Forum planning for the year ahead and in particular, as Vice Chair, contributed to the Work of Culture for Inclusive Cities Working Group looking at Older People's participation in culture
- The Culture team also enabled 2 Belfast musicians to participate in an event in Germany – the inaugural Hannover-Brno-Belfast collaboration with plans for further activity in 2026/27

- The Council’s Music Officer took part in the Daegu, South Korea Global World Forum where she presented opportunities for collaboration with other UNESCO Cities of Music. A Belfast artist also performed at the Daegu Opera House
- The Lord Mayor and elected members recently supported a number of Chinese New Year celebration events and the council demonstrated its support to the celebrations by lighting the City Hall in red on the eve of Chinese New Year
- The EU and International Relations Team facilitated key connections for the January 2026 conference and showcase Your Roots Are Showing. This is Ireland’s largest folk music event and strong connections with our partner city of Nashville.

3.5

**Looking forward outline plan for 2026/27**

The draft action plan for the coming year is attached in Appendix 1. Priority actions that members may wish to note include:

**Trade and Investment**

- Participation in New York New Belfast in June 2026 including key engagements and investment meetings
- Planned inward economic visit by Nashville businesses, investors and economic development leads: recce visit in March 2026 and full delegation to visit in October
- Engagement with NI Office in Brussels with regard to opportunities for EU-based trade promotion and engagement activities
- Development of new promotional materials and revamp of Invest in Belfast website to ensure consistent messaging across FDI investment and capital investment materials.

**Innovation and Knowledge Exchange**

- Preparatory work on application for European Capital of Innovation 2027
- Participation in significant global innovation events including Mobile World Congress and Smart City World Congress
- Development of new innovation investment prospectus.

**City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development**

- Supporting Fleadh team with key messaging to international audiences
- Ongoing engagement and collaboration as part of UNESCO city of music network
- Exploring potential for engagement opportunities as part of Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU (from July 2026).

	<p>Updates on progress against commitments as well as any developments as part of this plan will be brought back to the Committee on a quarterly basis for information and approval.</p>
3.6	<p>As previously noted as part of the November 2025 report to Committee, it can be challenging to track outcomes of much of the international relations activity. This is because progress can often come from an initial introduction that we made but that takes a while to develop. In order to track the impact of our work more effectively, it is proposed that we undertake a one-year subscription to the Amplify CRM system. This system is used by many other partners that work in this field and it appears to support more effective tracking of impact which should be helpful for the regular updates to Committee. The total cost for a one-year subscription is around £7,000.</p>
3.7	<p>There are a number of specific activities that will require Committee approval to progress in the coming quarter. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for Lord Mayor’s visit to Nashville: Following an invitation recently received from the Mayor of Nashville, it is proposed that the Lord Mayor – accompanied by one officer – undertakes a two-day programme in Nashville. This will include meetings and visits to key government, academic, civil society and Sister City representatives. The estimated cost of the visit is £4,000</li> <li>• Confirmation of participation at EU Week of Regions and Cities: Following elected members’ agreement that the EU &amp; International Unit augments its European activity, officers have commenced scoping activities that align with strategic need and seek to increase Belfast’s profile. The EU Week of Regions and Cities takes place annually in Brussels. It offers an opportunity to consider and profile the role that cities and regions play in shaping and transforming Europe’s economy, innovation, urban and societal landscapes. It is proposed that an all-party delegation led by one Council Officer attends this year’s event which is scheduled for 13-15 October 2026. It is proposed that upon approval the EU and International Unit will convene a working group of members to prepare for the event. The Unit will also work in partnership with NILGA, the NI Bureau in Brussels and The Irish Regional European Office to create a bespoke programme of side meetings and events. The total estimated cost for delivering this initiative is £8,000</li> <li>• Eurocities membership: Since the ratification of the new International Relations Framework, officers have also been engaged in conversations with the Eurocities staff to also identify opportunities to benefit from membership. Eurocities staff recently agreed to provide additional support to assist with the identification of good practice, showcasing opportunities and learning exchange opportunities with relevant cities.</li> </ul>

	<p>The annual membership fee is now due for renewal at a cost of £15,000 and elected members are asked to approve this cost</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New York New Belfast: This annual conference is a key moment to position Belfast, its innovation, economic ambitions and tourism developments to a select audience of strategic decision makers who represent government, business, civic society and investors. In recent years, the Belfast representation has enhanced to include tourism and economic development agencies, Belfast Chamber of Commerce, local entrepreneurs and media influencers. In addition to the conference the Council delegation undertakes bespoke meetings which serve to contribute to communicate the city's investment and development portfolio. It is proposed that the Lord Mayor, Chief Executive, one Senior Manager (or nominees) and accompanying officer with a total cost for a three-day programme plus conference sponsorship amounting to £15,000.</li> </ul>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Finance &amp; Resource Implications</b>
4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lord Mayor's Nashville civic visit estimated at £4,000</li> <li>• All party delegation to EU Week of Regions and Cities – travel, accommodation and subsistence estimated at maximum £8,000</li> <li>• EuroCities annual membership fee £15,000</li> <li>• A 1-year pilot CRM system to monitor and measure International Relations activity at a cost of £7,000</li> <li>• Annual sponsorship and participation in New York New Belfast at maximum cost of £15,000.</li> </ul> <p>The EU and International Relations budget was approved as part of the 2026-27 estimates setting process. Budgets for individual activities are the responsibility of the respective teams.</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</b>
	No specific equality or good relations implications. Activities will focus on support for Belfast-based organisations and companies.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
	Appendix 1: International Relations Delivery Plan April 2026-March 2027

This page is intentionally left blank

## Appendix 1 - International Relations Delivery Plan 2026-2027 (DRAFT)

Trade and Investment						
Project/Initiative	Brief Overview	Belfast City Council Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Priority outputs and benefits	Opportunities for Member Engagement
New York, New Belfast 2026 “Belfast: a City of Talent & Tech”	Annual event and supporting side programme focused on engaging with key east coast USA economic “champions” and pipeline FDI companies considering investing in Belfast as well as potential trade opportunities for local companies. Also opportunity to position Belfast’s latest Tourism messaging (Fleadh 2026) and capital assets for investment	EU and International Relations Team (EUIRT)	Event organisers; Invest NI US office and Belfast Chamber	June 2026	Investment leads for City assets and trade leads for Belfast businesses  Support Invest NI for investment and trade pipeline  Promotion of major events and capital investments including Fleadh and Belfast Stories	Lord Mayor attends annually
Homecoming 2026	Business conference promoting Belfast to diaspora communities, particularly US based.	EUIRT	Event organisers	7-9 October 2026	Tailored messaging and engagement to focus on capital investment opportunities	Lord Mayor plays key role in welcoming incoming delegation and speaking at main event.  Opportunity for Chair/Deputy/nominees to attend event and/or dinner

<b>Trade and Investment</b>						
<b>Project/Initiative</b>	<b>Brief Overview</b>	<b>Belfast City Council Lead</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority outputs and benefits</b>	<b>Opportunities for Member Engagement</b>
US Sister City collaboration engagement - Boston	Development work to explore potential collaborative “Team Belfast” visit to Boston. Exploratory work to scope partner interest and potential key events as “hook”	EUIRT; Enterprise and Business Growth Team	ICB; universities; Catalyst; individual businesses	Indicative working date – Q2 2026 (subject to partner agreement)	Partnerships & access to finance / trade for Belfast businesses, with focus on L&HS Promotion of Belfast as a study and tourism destination	Potential for Lord Mayor or Chair of CGR for outward mission 2026
US Sister City collaboration engagement - Nashville	Nashville inward trade mission: engagement with VCs and sector bodies to develop and deliver inward business mission, focusing on life and health sciences. Recce 23-24 March 2026; Inward Economic & Innovation Mission – 5-9 October 2026	EUIRT, working with EBG Team	Invest NI; Global Health Connector; HIRANI	Oct 2026 (indicative date)	Exploring FDI opportunities in key med tech sector; expanding business base in Belfast for key growth sectors	DLM will meet recce March 2026 delegation. Opportunity for all CGR members to meet October inward delegation
EU-based trade connections	Exploratory work with NI Executive Office in Brussels and Invest NI to explore opportunities for additional engagement in EU/Brussels-based activities, with a focus on increasing business engagement in new markets	EBG (linked to LEP work on developing new export opportunities)	NI Executive Office Brussels; other Brussels-based partners	Exploratory work underway; agreed way forward by June 2026	Agreed action plan for way forward – and identification of new market opportunities	Link to all party delegation to Brussels for EU Week of Regions and Cities, 12-14 October 2026

Trade and Investment						
Project/Initiative	Brief Overview	Belfast City Council Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Priority outputs and benefits	Opportunities for Member Engagement
Belfast City and Region Place Partnership	Rolling plan of work to include engagement in key events such as MIPIM (France, March each year) and UKReiiF (UK, May each year). The Partnership also produces resources such as a website and investment prospectus. Priority focus in coming year to include investment opportunities in new housing	City Regeneration and Development team	Other BRCD councils, Belfast Harbour, Universities, Invest NI, developers	Annual programme of work, with attendance at a number of flagship events	Leads generated in support of investment attracted and developments supported	CGR Committee approval in place for Members to attend UKREiiF 19-21 May 2026, to attend a devolution focused event and support wider BCRPP engagement, including attendance at a Belfast City Region Investment Showcase event
Messaging and comms	Develop and maintain updated Belfast's city proposition messaging and new products	Ongoing work to review and revamp investment info and develop new materials as required	Internal BCC teams	Invest NI; universities/ BMC; BMC projects	Review current: Q2 2026 ; revised products: Q4	All materials will be made available to members
Inward delegations	Facilitating requests for presentations on Belfast's ED proposition  Note: we are developing a "qualification" process to identify projects with potential for positive impact – too many requests with no return	EUIR; EBG teams	Dependent on area of interest	Ongoing	Promotion of Belfast as a visitor destination/ investment location	Follow up engagement leading to more specific plans for investment /trade or collaboration

**Trade and Investment**

Project/Initiative	Brief Overview	Belfast City Council Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Priority outputs and benefits	Opportunities for Member Engagement
Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor	Ongoing support for civic/business engagement work, including developing lobbying approach on key infrastructure investments. Focus on collaboration with new Industry Advisory Group	EBG	DBEC partners	Ongoing	Ongoing work programme agreed with partner councils	Member representation through Political Advisory Group

<b>Innovation and Knowledge Exchange</b>						
<b>Project/Initiative</b>	<b>Brief Overview</b>	<b>Belfast City Council Lead</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority outputs and benefits</b>	<b>Opportunities for Member Engagement</b>
European Capital of Innovation bid 2026	Belfast City Council to bid to European Innovation Council for the annual award for €1 million	City Innovation Office	Innovation City Belfast and other innovation partners	Closing date June	Profiling Belfast as a “city of innovation”	Members will feature in engagement in the development of the bid – and in any shortlisting process
Bloomberg Philanthropies 2025 - 2028 Mayors Challenge	Alongside 23 other cities, this is two year programme harnessing digital and innovation. In Belfast the focus is on supporting an alleyway transformation programme	City Innovation Office /City & Neighbourhood Services	Bloomberg and the other 23 cities	Feb 2026 to March 2028	Sustainable, scalable alley-ways transformation programme. Plus supporting BCC leadership to lead on innovation	Members are/will be involved in the local programme design
Bloomberg Philanthropies Citylab	An international network of city mayors sharing practice and opportunities on city innovation	City Innovation Office/Deputy Chief Executive	Extensive global network	Annual workshop in April 2026	Support for Deputy CX in shaping transformation in Council by harnessing CityLab opportunities	Lord Mayor has been invited to April event. Still awaiting confirmation.
Smart City World Congress (Barcelona)	Promotion of city messaging, focusing on opportunities for partnership, investment, research and trade in relation to digital innovation	Innovation City Belfast	ICB Partners	November 2026 – Attendance TBC	Leads in relation to partnerships, investment, research and funding opportunities	Not clear at this point

<b>Innovation and Knowledge Exchange</b>						
<b>Project/Initiative</b>	<b>Brief Overview</b>	<b>Belfast City Council Lead</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority outputs and benefits</b>	<b>Opportunities for Member Engagement</b>
Mobile World Congress 2026	International network of cities and industry partners in Barcelona	Innovation City Belfast	ICB Partners	March 2026	Potential to sign a number of MoU with industry partners. Engaging on major investment opportunities for Belfast	Not clear at this point
I30 Inclusive Innovation city network	Research exchange and visits with Medellin, Pittsburgh and Newcastle Upon Tyne	City Innovation Office	ICB partners	Feb – with potential future programme	Policy recommendations to inform the inclusive growth agenda	n/a ICB led
Belfast Innovation value proposition	Developing a shared investable value proposition for the Belfast innovation ecosystem – including the City Deal funded investments	City Innovation Office	Innovation City Belfast partners	November 26	Greater coherence and clarity of messaging to priority market segments	Members will be briefed on this asset
Upsurge Initiative	EU funded climate demonstrator project linking Belfast to Maribor, Budapest, Breda, Katowice. Project includes officer visits to each partner city	Climate Team	CNS Team; Neighbourhood Services; QUB; EU Partners; Community orgs	Netherland visit October 2026	Inform and evidence viability of nature-based solutions for sustainable food production	tbc

## Innovation and Knowledge Exchange

Project/Initiative	Brief Overview	Belfast City Council Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Priority outputs and benefits	Opportunities for Member Engagement
Support education partners' international activity (focus on sister city links)	Use civic linkages to enhance international collaborations in innovation, research and attraction of international talent	EUIRT, City Innovation, ICB	Third level education partners	Ongoing	Education partners secure research income; attract international students	Members will be made aware of any opportunity
EU Week of Regions and Cities	Participation in largest programme of urban specific workshops, seminars and briefings with additional side programme developed with strategic partners	EUIRT	NILGA Irish Regions Office NI Bureau (BxIs)	Ongoing	Informing Belfast-EU work plan; identification of key European partners; profiling Belfast	All party Members representation (pending CGR approval)

<b>City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development</b>						
<b>Project/Initiative</b>	<b>Brief Overview</b>	<b>Belfast City Council Lead</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority outputs and benefits</b>	<b>Opportunities for Member Engagement</b>
Supporting strategic tourism stakeholders in attracting and promoting major tourism and cultural events	Collaborating with Visit Belfast, Tourism Ireland and Tourism NI to drive sectoral growth and positioning Belfast as a host city for major events and international exhibitions – focus on Fleadh Cheoil for coming year	Fleadh & Tourism teams	Visit Belfast Tourism Ireland Tourism NI	Engagement plan finalised – October 2025; comms campaign operates from January 2026	International positioning and profiling opportunities; increasing visitor numbers	Members involved in wider plans for Fleadh and other major events
Friendship Four – Men and Women’s Tournaments	US College Ice Hockey Tournaments linked to Boston Sister City	EUIRU, LM Office	Odyssey Trust NI Connections DfC Tourism NI	Q3	Economic impact on city – bed nights, TV coverage	Lord Mayor is usually invited for puck drop
Your Roots Are Showing	Folk music conference and trade fair which attracts over 100 artists – scheduled for January 2027	Culture Team	Visit Belfast ICC Belfast	January 2027	Improved city positioning (focusing on music/culture)	n/a
Celebrate Chinese New Year	Participation in city partner events to mark New Lunar year	Civic Offices (esp. Lord Mayor) EUIRT	Good Relations Team; Chinese partners locally	Q4	Enhances civic relations with Chinese players locally and internationally at civic, business and community level	Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor attended various official events in Feb 2026

City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development						
Project/Initiative	Brief Overview	Belfast City Council Lead	Partners	Timeframe	Priority outputs and benefits	Opportunities for Member Engagement
UNESCO City of Music	Ongoing collaborative exchanges and investment in local music sector – as one of 70+ awarded Cities of Music within the UNESCO Cities of Culture network.	Culture Team and activity led by Culture Officer (Music)	Cultural sector	Ongoing programme of year-round activity (approved annually via CGR workplan)	Support development of local music sector; profile sector on international stage; present opportunities for international engagement by local artists	Attendance at various events; potentially speaking at international events
Engagement in activities to mark Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU	Working with local and Brussels-based partners to explore opportunities for civic engagement in Irish Presidency activities via Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group	EU	NILGA; CoR UK Contacts Group	Potential event planned for September 2026	Opportunities to showcase Belfast and explore opportunities for wider civic and cultural partnerships	Tbc – subject to details of the event being finalised

**In addition to above workstreams, Council teams currently participate in strategic thematic networks aligned to the above themes including:**

Council for Global City CIOs	Information and opportunity exchange between innovation cities across the world including virtual speaking opportunity at UN Global Health Connector event for Belfast Innovation Commissioner and attendance and participation at the Connector Innovation Summit in Las Vegas
European & UK Learning Cities Networks	Exchanging best practice and developing initiatives to support community learning including officer engagement in Learning Cities network events in Paris and Shenyang, promoting Belfast’s best practice programmes., including the role of lifelong learning in aging societies. (fully paid by network)

UNESCO City of Music	Active participation in UNESCO cultural networks with reciprocal benefits between the cities including but not limited to partnerships with UCoM cities Kansas City (US) Hannover (Germany) Daegu (South Korea), Conde (Brazil), Ghent (Belgium) and Bologna (Italy). This year an officer will travel to each partner city (fully paid by network)
IETM	International cultural network representing over 500 member organisations and individual professionals working in the contemporary performing arts worldwide. Belfast City Council and several of its cultural partners locally are members of the network
Eurocities	European network of over 140 cities and municipalities which serves to connect, showcase and develop policy and projects which highlight role of cities in shaping the economic, cultural, innovative and sustainable landscape of the continent.



<b>Subject:</b>	LEP action plan – update on proposed priority projects
<b>Date:</b>	11 March 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy

**Restricted Reports**

**Is this report restricted?** Yes  No

**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
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. 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 matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
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
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

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

<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"/>

**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	The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on progress with the development of the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) – a key element of the Department for the Economy’s (DfE) sub-regional economic plan and to identify a number of proposed priority projects to be funded through the Regional Balance Fund.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the update on work being undertaken as part of the Local Economic Partnership (LEP)</li> <li>• Note and endorse the emerging priority work areas set out in section 3.6 and agree that further engagement can now take place with DfE on the basis of these areas with a view to securing resources to support delivery.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	At the 12 March 2025 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members were updated on the Department for the Economy’s “sub-regional economic plan”, including the commitment to establish Local Economic Partnerships in each council area with an overall financial allocation of £45million over three years.
3.2	Members were also advised that the financial allocations for each council area had been confirmed. Belfast City Council will receive up to £956,000 per year – a total of £2,868,000 over three years (commencing March 2025). At that time, DfE noted that they were in the process of finalising the business case for the funding. In September 2025, officials confirmed that the business case for year one funding (2025-26) had received endorsement and draft Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were issued to each council. It was always recognised and accepted that the spend profile in year one will be lower than in other years – given the time taken to mobilise partnerships, agree priority projects and recruit staff to lead and oversee project development and delivery. DfE have also recently confirmed that there may be an opportunity for councils to carry over expenditure into a fourth financial year (although there will be no additional funding in year four).
3.3	<p>In line with the Minister’s vision and the sub-regional economic plan, the priority outcome for activities supported through the Local Economic Partnerships funding is higher productivity. The guidance notes suggest that there are a range of categories that are eligible for support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commercial property/land development</li> <li>• Entrepreneurship support</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sectoral entrepreneurship support</li> <li>• Scaling support</li> <li>• Sectoral scaling support</li> <li>• R&amp;D investment</li> <li>• Energy efficiency</li> <li>• Upskilling/reskilling in digital/engineering skills</li> <li>• Sectoral cluster development.</li> </ul>
3.4	<p>At the March 2025 meeting, members agreed that, given the potential for alignment with existing work and the constraints on partner resources, our initial approach should be to utilise the Labour Market Partnership structure as the “partnership” – through which priority projects would be developed and to which progress would be reported. This extended partnership has been meeting since November 2025 and has been contributing to the process of project identification and prioritisation. The committee agreed that we explore this option as an initial way forward – but that we keep it under review in order to ensure that it remains appropriate for the priority work areas agreed. Partners involved in the combined LMP/LEP include private sector representative bodies (FSB; CBI; Belfast Chamber); BMC; DfE Careers Service; Advice Sector; VCSE Panel; LEA representative; Partnership Boards; Invest NI and Trade Unions.</p>
3.5	<p>The partnership agreed a number of principles or key considerations in prioritising projects for support. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement to focus on a small number of more impactful areas - may mean lower volume of activity – but has the potential to effect most change. This is more important in Belfast given budget limitations</li> <li>• Ruling out funding for projects that “will happen anyway” or that could be funded from other sources</li> <li>• Agreement that City Deal “benefits realisation” projects should feature – otherwise we will limit the capacity of our residents to access opportunities and our businesses to develop capability in key growth sectors. There is also the potential for these projects to become a “proof of concept” for how we can make more sustainable local impact with these capital investments in the future</li> <li>• Projects more likely to be revenue (programme) than capital focused – given the limited budgets and short funding timelines</li> <li>• Important to recognise that these projects will be delivered within the context of a wider support ecosystem – can’t do everything but it is important to seek alignment and added value where possible.</li> </ul>

3.6

Proposed priority work areas

Following a series of iterative engagements with the Partnership as well as targeted engagement with projects and partners working in this space, an action plan covering three broad areas is proposed. A more detailed overview of the three areas is included in Appendix

1. At a high level, the programme of work will include:

- **Creative sector incubation support:** working with Studio Ulster to develop and deliver a targeted business incubation support intervention for local companies. Businesses will have access to a range of supports including dedicated desk space for 6 months within a professional working virtual production (VP) studio and environment; access to VP studio facilities and resources for IP development, testing and validation; structured mentorship programme with leading industry experts in business, creative and technical fields; access to industry masterclasses ensuring knowledge of key sectoral developments and access to skills and peer support. This project has the potential to act as a catalyst for a wider creative sector support initiative (not all of which will be funded by LEP). This will include exploring how the Belfast Stories space can act as a focal point for new business development in this sector. An important factor in this wider approach will be to consider more inclusive approaches and pathways into the sector through non-traditional avenues
- **Capital investment for creative growth:** The proposal is to undertake a business case to identify the optimal funding model and route to market for a capital scheme that can support creative workspace development. Subject to the business case identifying a model that is acceptable to DfE, consideration will be given to how the funding is allocated, specific criteria etc. that will be developed in conjunction with the creative sector and brought into Committee prior to finalising. The capital investment is likely to include a seed-funding approach to act as a catalyst in addressing initial viability challenges that the creative sector experiences in securing their own assets, and to support the sector to address the urgent need for creative workspace provision. This will be complemented by targeted wrap-around support that will focus on business resilience and growth, including support for management and leadership
- **Business growth and innovation support:** this will involve a series of connected business support activities aimed at helping existing businesses to identify new markets; invest in their management and leadership capabilities and implement new technologies. We also propose to develop new interventions focused on reshaping the support available to “AI native” businesses who require a different approach to current SME-focused support activities – but who have the potential to generate significant revenues and position Belfast as a hub for new innovation-driven businesses. A critical

	<p>pillar of this support is to consolidate the Go Succeed service which is currently moving into a new funding phase and to which all councils have been asked to increase their match funding contribution.</p>
3.7	<p>At their most recent meeting (3 March), the group agreed the broad priority projects. In keeping with the agreed LEP governance structures, these are now being presented to the Committee for consideration and approval. Subject to members agreeing to these priority projects and/or taking account of any suggested amendments, officers will engage with the team at DfE and proceed to issuing an MoU in line with the approvals received.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Financial and Resource Implications</b>
4.1	<p>DfE has confirmed that the resources for the Local Enterprise Plan in Belfast are £956,000 per annum over three years. This includes an element of staff resources to manage the programme of work. An MoU has been issued for year one expenditure for staffing costs to date – subject to final decision on the projects, a further MoU will be issued to cover all project expenditure.</p>
4.2	<p>The indicative funding breakdown for each of the project areas is set out in Appendix 1. The final amounts may be subject to further engagement with DfE and other partners as well as any respective commissioning processes that may be required.</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</b>
5.1	<p>All activities to be undertaken will be subject to equality screening. This funding formula was determined by the Department for the Economy.</p>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b>
	<p>Appendix 1: Overview of draft priority project areas – Belfast LEP funding</p>

This page is intentionally left blank

## Creative sector incubation support: Northern Light Incubator

<p><b>Project overview/summary</b></p>	<p>Six-month business incubation programme (to be repeated annually for two years), designed to support the growth of creative screen enterprises by providing targeted support, access to facilities and expertise needed to de-risk IP development, provide access to world-leading technologies and accelerate business growth opportunities, helping businesses to test and validate workflows, support new product development and commercialise more rapidly.</p>
<p><b>Key activities/outcomes</b></p>	<p>The programme aims to identify and support a minimum of 20 businesses annually (x2). There will be two tiers of support provided. Tier one support will involve a dedicated programme of industry-led support and mentoring, as well as incubation space at Studio Ulster. At least six companies will receive the higher-level support in each programme cohort.</p> <p>Tier two will be available to at least 14 additional businesses per cohort. They will be able to access the programme of industry-led workshops and training support. However they will not access the incubation support or the additional in-house mentoring from Studio Ulster team.</p> <p>Businesses taking part will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harnessing IP development for business growth</li> <li>• Developing, testing and validating IP, workflows, tools</li> <li>• Develop robust and viable use cases</li> <li>• Business growth strategy development</li> <li>• Value proposition development and market testing</li> <li>• Leadership and management skills</li> <li>• Building customer pipelines</li> <li>• Approaches to funding and investment</li> </ul> <p>Businesses will have access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated desk space for 6 months within a professional working VP studio and environment (tier one only)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to VP studio facilities and resources for IP development, testing and validation (tier one only)</li> <li>• Structured mentorship programme with leading industry experts in business, creative and technical fields (tier one only)</li> <li>• Industry masterclasses</li> <li>• Peer to peer cohort networking and cross cohort support</li> <li>• Access to the Northern Light Network, a community of businesses, funders and investors and researchers</li> <li>• Work placement students from Ulster Screen Academy courses</li> <li>• Research and industry expertise from Ulster Screen Academy and CoSTAR Screen Lab</li> <li>• Signposting to wider business support (including Go Succeed; Invest NI support; Catalyst support; funding support (depending on specific need).</li> </ul> <p>At least 40 companies will take part over the two-year programme. Key outcomes will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New products developed (from innovation to commercialisation)</li> <li>• Skills developed – consolidating the local skills base in order to create a more stable indigenous business base</li> <li>• Cluster development/sector development – growing the creative sector, with a focus on new technologies (future-proofing) – establishment of peer-to-peer Northern Light Network for ongoing engagement and support.</li> </ul>
<b>Ability to deliver LEP objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sector development support for creative sector – focus on virtual production</li> <li>• Aims to support companies to develop new products and explore new markets – both of which will drive productivity improvements</li> <li>• Creating “good jobs” – supporting high value roles</li> <li>• Also has potential to align to a wider creative support approach – can have more of an “inclusion” focus (potential to fund separately)</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment to wider activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belfast Stories: development of new studio space to act as “anchor” and focal point for creative and screen businesses – potential to use this space to showcase new products developed</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Also potential to align this support to wider screen production (not just virtual production) support – early-stage engagement with Belfast Stories team re: future programming ahead of capital build completion</li> <li>• Opportunities to link to current skills development work (e.g. E3 courses on creative media/media make up) as well as UU courses – exploring work placements/employment opportunities within growing businesses – also look at how the masterclasses/open events might be available to the emerging talent in BMC/UU.</li> </ul>
<b>Indicative annual budget</b>	Two-year budget profile iro £700k (c£350k+ p.a.). Some flexibility in budget to extend numbers if required
<b>Project timelines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project mobilisation (resourcing; development of space; sector engagement): April-June 2026</li> <li>• Year one cohort sign-up: May-July 2026</li> <li>• Core delivery: August 2026-February 2027</li> <li>• Year one review and evaluation: March-April 2027</li> <li>• Year two cohort sign-up (taking account of year one learnings): April-May 2027</li> <li>• Core delivery: June-December 2027</li> <li>• Year two review and evaluation: January-February 2028</li> </ul>

## Business growth and innovation support

<b>Project overview/summary</b>	<p>A range of business growth and innovation supports focused on growth-focused start-ups and existing businesses to help them create jobs; explore new markets and improve their understanding of new technologies such as AI. There will be a combination of generic and sector specific supports.</p>
<b>Key activities/outcomes</b>	<p>This package of support measures will focus on growth-focused businesses not currently engaging with Invest NI or other supports.</p> <p>The supports will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing Go Succeed support, covering both start-up and growth activities – but with the potential to focus on/target specific locations (parts of the city) and/or specific sectors (including creative – aligned to Northern Light) through top-up support</li> <li>• Introduction to export support – identifying companies currently accessing Go Succeed and other supports with the potential to explore new markets (including first time exporters)</li> <li>• AI empowering business support – working in partnership with AICC Transform Programme and BRCD AI capital grant programme to extend the reach of support to ensure uptake by SMEs outside of traditional tech sectors</li> <li>• Management and Leadership support – improving business productivity by upskilling SME leaders to equip them to lead their companies more successfully.</li> <li>• REAP next steps approach – building on methodology developed via MIT but with a growing focus on AI-based innovation driven businesses – customised interventions focused on commercialisation; investor-readiness; focus on inclusion.</li> </ul>
<b>Ability to deliver LEP objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on helping businesses to grow (new markets; job creation; management and leadership skills)</li> <li>• Aims to support companies to develop new products and explore new markets – both of which will drive productivity improvements</li> <li>• Creating “good jobs” – supporting high value roles</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Also has potential to align to wider support interventions: BRCD investments; Local Innovation Partnership Fund; creative support approach – can have more of an “inclusion” focus (potential to fund separately)</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment to wider activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BRCD</li> <li>• Local Innovation Partnership Fund</li> <li>• Enhanced Investment Zones</li> <li>• AICC work, including Transformer programme</li> </ul>
<b>Indicative annual budget</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go Succeed growth support: £280k p.a. x 2</li> <li>• New export support: £50k p.a. x 2</li> <li>• AI support: £50k p.a. x 2 – timing dependent on mobilisation of BRCD work</li> <li>• AIDE starts: £250k over two years (subject to further scoping – second half of y2 start)</li> <li>• Management and Leadership support: £100k over two years (subject to further scoping)</li> </ul>
<b>Project timelines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go Succeed growth support: delivery from 1 April 2026</li> <li>• New export support: scoping and mobilisation April-June 2026; delivery August 2026-Feb 2028</li> <li>• AI support: scoping and mobilisation April-June 2026; delivery August 2026-Feb 2028</li> <li>• AIDE starts: scoping work with BRCD and potential delivery partners – April-June 2026; delivery August 2026-Feb 2028</li> <li>• Management and Leadership support: scoping and mobilisation April-June 2026; delivery August 2026-Feb 2028.</li> </ul>

## Capital investment for creative growth

<p><b>Project overview/summary</b></p>	<p>Capital investment programme to enable security of tenure for creative workspace provision in Belfast, build business resilience; support regeneration and build new clusters.</p> <p>A study has been undertaken on Creative Workspaces to provide a clear picture of the current provision of creative workspaces within Belfast, define workspace requirements for the city’s creative ecosystem and make recommendations to advance the delivery of future creative workspace. A recommendation that emerged from the study identified a capital investment requirement that could help support feasibility, business case development to support a sustainable approach to infrastructure provision.</p> <p>The business case will identify the optimal funding model and route to market including financing levels to ensure viability for long term ownership of asset model. The capital investment will include a seed funding approach to act as a catalyst in addressing initial viability challenges and the urgent need for creative workspace provision and will be complemented by targeted wrap-around support that will focus on business resilience and growth, including support for management and leadership within organisational leads.</p>
<p><b>Key activities/outcomes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial feasibility study and business case to test existing assumptions around demand and to identify appropriate funding models and “route to market” in order to launch and deliver this solution within the lifetime of the LEP</li> <li>• Roll-out of capital funding intervention focusing on creative businesses – addressing current issue of short-term/precarious letting arrangements and enabling organisations to focus on resilience, sustainability and growth</li> <li>• Supporting local regeneration and economic growth activities by placing creative businesses at the heart of the city’s growth</li> </ul>

<b>Ability to deliver LEP objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on capital/commercial development, with specific focus on creative sector</li> <li>• Focus on entrepreneurship and business capacity building and resilience – moving creative businesses from short-term planning to longer-term business sustainability</li> <li>• Cluster support interventions involving both capital and revenue support</li> <li>• Considering opportunities for re-use of older buildings to address net zero and focus on environmental sustainability/energy saving measures</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment to wider activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of wider programme of support across the creative/cultural sector (including Belfast Stories work and the proposed Northern Light incubator)</li> <li>• Alignment to Belfast City Council work around city development and regeneration – with a focus on addressing vacancies and exploring opportunities for targeted regeneration in key locations</li> </ul>
<b>Indicative annual budget</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicative overall budget of £800,000. Proposed that an initial expenditure of up to £50k is set aside for feasibility study and business case on the funding model and approach.</li> <li>• In line with emerging DfE indications around the timing of expenditure, it is proposed that this funding may run into financial year 2028/29 to enable all relevant preparatory works (planning approval etc.) to be put in place ahead of redevelopment work.</li> </ul>
<b>Project timelines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feasibility study and business case: April 2026-June 2026</li> <li>• Agreement on model and launch of “commissioning”/application process for bids: August – September 2026</li> <li>• Project mobilisation and delivery: October 2026-January 2029</li> </ul>

**Summary budget position (draft – subject to DfE agreement)**

<b>Total available budget (subject to DfE confirmation)</b>	£2,868,000
<b>Northern Light business incubation</b>	£700,000
<b>Business Growth and Innovation</b>	£1,100,000
<b>Capital investment for creative growth</b>	£800,000
<b>Staffing</b>	£268,000



Subject:	Notices of Motion – Quarterly Update
Date:	11 March 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Jamie Uprichard, Business Research and Development Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>											
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b>								
<b>X</b>											
<p><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></p> <p><b>Insert number</b></p> <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>											
<p><b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;"><b>After Committee Decision</b></td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>After Council Decision</b></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Sometime in the future</b></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Never</b></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>				<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>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>	<b>X</b>	<b>No</b>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance allocated to the City Growth & Regeneration (CG&R) Committee.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>It is recommended that the Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notes the updates to all Notices of Motion/ Issues Raised in Advance that this Committee is responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1; and</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agrees to the closure of a single Notices of Motion, as referenced in Appendix 1 and noted in paragraph 3.3 below.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	At the <a href="#">SP&amp;R Committee meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2019</a> , members agreed <i>“that this Council notes that other Councils produce a monthly status report in relation to Notices of Motion; and agrees Belfast City Council adopts a similar practice and produces a monthly Notice of Motion Update which will be brought to each full Council Meeting.</i>
3.2	<p>It was subsequently agreed that quarterly updates would be brought to the council’s statutory committees providing a regular update on the progress of each motion for which the committee is responsible for. At the <a href="#">SP&amp;R Committee on 20th November 2020</a>, members approved the arrangement for the future management of motions, which included recommendations that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Category 1 – Notice of Motion contained an action that has been completed.</b> All Notices of Motion within this category contained a specific task that has since been complete. It is worth noting that, when Committee agree to action a Motion, there are sometimes additional actions agreed alongside the Motion. As these are not technically part of the Notice of Motion, they are taken forward through normal committee decision making processes. The Notice of Motion can therefore be closed, but additional actions related to it will continue to be progressed and reported to the committee.</li> <li><b>Category 2 - Notice of Motion has become Council policy or absorbed into a strategic programme of work.</b> These Motions did not contain a specific task that could be completed but rather they are more strategic in nature and require changes in Council policy and/ or strategy for long term outcomes. Those listed within this category have all been agreed by Committee and are now either Council policy or are currently being implemented through a Council strategy that is managed by a Standing Committee through the corporate planning process.</li> </ul>
3.3	<p>There are presently ten Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which the CG&amp;R Committee is responsible for. Members are asked to approve the recommendation to close one motion (detailed below) and note status updates for the remaining nine motions which remain open. Additional information is included at Appendix 1.</p> <p><b>Category 2 Recommended Closures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>425 – Gary Moore Statue – as the project has been added to the council’s Capital Programme.</li> </ul>
3.4	At its meeting on the 10 September, members agreed to close motion 450, which requested the Committee to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister for the Economy, the UK Minister of State for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism and the Irish Minister for Arts, Culture, Communications, Media and Sport to highlight the importance of the local film and creative industries to Belfast and its concern in relation to the potential impact of any proposed US tariff on films produced outside of the US. During the September meeting, the Committee noted the responses that were received from TEO, DfE and DCMS. A final response has been received from the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport and is attached at Appendix 2.

3.5	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no additional financial implications attached to this report. Finance and resource implications are considered by Committee when taking decisions on the specific Notices of Motion and Issues Raised by Members.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.</p>
4.0	<p><b>Appendices – Documents attached</b></p>
	<p>Appendix 1: Notices of Motion Live Database – CG&amp;R Committee</p> <p>Appendix 2: Correspondence received from the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport</p>

This page is intentionally left blank

## City Growth & Regeneration Notice of Motions

Notices of Motion and Issued Raised in Advance that remain OPEN:

ID	Date	Notice of Motion	Proposed By	Referral Route	Lead Officer	Latest Status Update
208	04/10/2021	<a href="#">Belfast City Nightlife and Night-time Economy</a>	Cllr S de Faoite	Notice of Motion – straight to CG&R	Damien Martin	An evening workshop is being arranged at 2RA (on 23 March 2026) for members of the City Centre All-Party Working Group. This session will aim to further enhance the ongoing engagement and closer working arrangements between Elected Members and the Purple Flag Steering Group (PFSG) including the Night Czar.
217	01/11/2021	<a href="#">Tourism Street Signage (Enlightenment Period)</a>	Cllr M Long	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Keith Forster	Officers have undertaken initial desk-based research on the Belfast Enlightenment Period, its potential tourism appeal and a list of proposed options. Further work on the motion has been delayed due to other priority work areas however consideration and audit of associated tourism experiences will form part of the ongoing Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDP) development work.
431	05/02/2025	<a href="#">Bristol Music Fund</a>	Cllr S de Faoite	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Keith Forster	Officers are continuing to engage with Bristol teams as they have only recently introduced the scheme. Officers work closely with Bristol on knowledge transfer as part of the UNESCO network. There is currently no financial provision to deliver an equivalent scheme within unit budgets.
465	06/08/2025	<a href="#">Artist and Creative Studio Space</a>	Cllr A Groogan	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Keith Forster	Officers from Culture and City Regeneration and Development have been progressing work on the Artist and Creative Studio Space and a report will be presented at the April CG&R Committee.
472	10/09/2025	<a href="#">Rosetta Quietway</a>	Cllr S de Faoite	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Cathy Reynolds	Council officers are progressing engagement with DfI in respect of the proposal to deliver a “Rosetta Quietway”.
475	23/10/2025	<a href="#">Bike Bunkers Trial</a>	Cllr B Smyth	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Cathy Reynolds	Council officers have commenced analysis and research with regards to a bike bunker scheme in Belfast and have been in contact with Cllr Smyth in relation to this.
485	20/11/2025	<a href="#">Priority for our local traders</a>	Cllr J Doran	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Keith Forster	Council officers are currently collating and analysing information in relation to this motion and will be bringing a report to Committee in April 2026.
497	11/02/26	Newtownards Road Corridor - Vision and Intervention	Cllr R Brooks	Issue Raised in Advance	Cathy Reynolds	NEW: No update yet available

499	24/02/26	Ormeau Arts Centre	Cllr S de Faoite	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Keith Forster	NEW: No update yet available
-----	----------	--------------------	------------------	--	---------------	------------------------------

Notices of Motion and Issued Raised in Advance recommended to CLOSE

ID	Date	Notice of Motion	Proposed By	Referral Route	Lead Officer	Update / Latest Status
425	15/01/2025	<a href="#">Gary Moore Statue</a>	Cllr B Smyth	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Sinead Grimes	<p><b><u>Recommend to close – Cat 2 closure</u></b></p> <p>This has now been included as a Stage 1 project on the Council's Capital Programme. Discussions ongoing with a view to securing a potential site. The group are continuing with fundraising for the statue.</p>

This page is intentionally left blank



Mr. Craig Mealey  
[MealeyC@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:MealeyC@belfastcity.gov.uk)

11<sup>th</sup> February 2026

Our Ref: CHG-MO-01303-2025

Dear Mr. Mealey,

I am writing to you on behalf of Patrick O' Donovan T.D., Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport. I refer to your correspondence of 24th June 2025 and 15th August 2025 regarding US tariffs in the Film Industry, and I apologise for the delay in replying.

Ireland is a small open economy, supportive of free trade in goods and services. There is a symbiotic relationship between incoming productions and the indigenous sector that affords significant benefits to the home-grown screen industry. As a result of the number of incoming productions, the demand for highly skilled crew at all levels has grown substantially over the past few years.

U.S. President Donald Trump's statement at the end of September 2025 of his intention to impose a 100% tariff on movies made outside the U.S. mirrors a similar statement made on 4th May 2025. Following the May 2025 statement, there were no details of how and when the tariff would be imposed. This seems to continue to be the case. Most films today are created, developed and filmed across two or more jurisdictions, including the U.S. While there is no doubt that tariffs are bad for trade and for growth, it is not possible to assess the impact of any action by the U.S. without further detail.

The recent British-Irish Council (BIC) held its 44th Summit meeting on 5th December 2025, hosted by the Welsh Government in the Vale of Glamorgan, Wales. Leaders discussed the importance of the sector to the Creative Industries, both culturally and economically, as well as the opportunities and challenges facing the sector, and efforts by administrations to support the industry and those working within it.

Engagement with the Irish screen sector will continue as further details emerge.

Yours sincerely,

Darren Clarke  
Private Secretary

This page is intentionally left blank