



Subject:	Christmas Programme 2022
Date:	9 th November, 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Kerry Mc Mullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a summary of the Christmas programme proposed in November / December 2022.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Note the contents of this report and that further information on the socio-economic impact of Christmas activity will be presented in due course (post event).
3.0	Main report

3.1	<p>On an annual basis, the Council's Culture and Events Units delivers a series of large-scale public events, which are free to access by both citizens and visitors to the city, on behalf of Belfast City Council. This is further supported by the activity of other teams who support a number of annual programmes and activities and the Markets Unit who manage the delivery of the Christmas Market at City Hall in addition to year-round activity at St George's and Smithfield markets.</p>
3.2	<p>Members will recall that in 2021, officers adopted a different approach to the Christmas 2021 programme which replaced the traditional switch - on ceremony. In the context of Covid, the challenge for officers was to design a programme that continued to be cognisant of safety considerations and have the ability to respond to a changing environment whilst meeting the needs of city stakeholders including those businesses impacted by the pandemic. The cessation of the traditional Christmas Light Switch was also in response to safety concerns regarding crowd control raised by colleagues in our Corporate Health and Safety Unit. In addition, feedback from city centre traders on the traditional light switch was not entirely positive, with many highlighting traffic, parking congestion and the event itself acting as a barrier to normal trading at a crucial time of year.</p>
3.3	<p>As well as responding to the pandemic the Christmas programme also aimed to meet the development objectives set out in the ten-year Cultural Strategy, including long-term recommendations for events in the city including better strategic alignment across the Council in the design and, delivery of these event-based programmes and above all ensuring the activities were authentic and utilising our local supply chain.</p>
3.4	<p>Cultural animation and creative interventions were identified as fundamental in welcoming people back into the city and played a significant role in creating an authentic and open environment at Christmas.</p>
3.5	<p>As a consequence, in 2021, the Christmas programme consisted of a combination of creative initiatives such as street performance, projections, music, window dressing and lighting installations all inspired by the theme '<i>Once Upon a Time in Belfast</i>', utilising local artists, creatives and designers to create an authentic and engaging experience for all throughout the festive season.</p>
3.6	<p>The weekend event proved to be successful. Despite concerns over moving away from the traditional switch on format, the new approach offered increased value for money and audience satisfaction in an environment that was designed to prioritise public safety.</p>
3.7	<p>Estimated audiences over the 2 evenings (20 & 21 November) was 15,000, with the event primarily taking place in the City Centre across key zones which included Donegall Place, Cornmarket, Royal Avenue, Fountain Street, Fountain Lane, Queen Street, Castle Street,</p>

	<p>Castle Lane, Berry Street, Rosemary Street and Lower Garfield Street. The audience profile was similar to the previous format with a strong focus on families.</p>
3.8	<p>Belfast City Council also commissioned an independent socio-economic survey for the <i>Once Upon a time in Belfast</i> themed - event. Results included the following feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 65% of visitors were from the Belfast City Council area, and a further 35% from elsewhere with a small percentage of visitors from Republic of Ireland (3%). - 54% attended the event with children. - 84% gave the event a rating of 8 out of 10 or above, including 27% who rated it as 'Extremely good'. - 92% of visitors agreed that the event improves the city's reputation as a host for events like these and as a place to visit. - 69% of visitors said they would 'definitely' revisit the <i>Once Upon a Time in Belfast</i> event in future years, while 99% agree there should be more events like this in Belfast. - 98% believed that events like this encourage people to come to Belfast, and 93% said that such events improve their sense of well-being and community.
3.9	<p>In 2022, it is intended that the 2021 model of Christmas animation and event delivery would be further consolidated through a programme of seasonal animation in the city centre, which would support economic recovery in the city post pandemic and uplift the city and visitors in the context of the current economic climate.</p>
3.10	<p>Benefits would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve the cultural vibrancy of the city - Foster civic pride - Position the Belfast brand - Support the local culture, arts and events sectors - Deliver direct economic benefits - Support businesses
3.11	<p>Christmas Programme 19th November 2022</p> <p>Belfast's Christmas celebrations will officially begin on Saturday 19th November with the '<i>Christmas in Belfast</i>' opening day event, which will take place from 6pm to 9pm.</p>
3.12	<p>In 2022, the opening weekend activity is being reduced from two nights to one and will focus on Saturday night only. This decision has been taken based on the findings of the independent evaluation and feedback from 2021, which evidenced that the opening evening (Saturday) was much better attended than the Sunday. By reprofiling the event and animation budget into the Saturday night only, the programme can be uplifted to</p>

enhance the visitor experience and increase impact. The event schedule will consist of a range of elements including:

- Christmas lighting scheme
- Lighting projections
- Music programme
- Procession
- Window animation
- Street animation
- 2 Royal Avenue
- Christmas Market
- Lord Mayor Role
- Marketing and Communications Activity

3.13 **Christmas Lighting Scheme**

2022 will be year 3 of the existing Christmas Lighting Scheme which will begin on the 19th of November and run until the 4th January. The scheme will be identical to the 2021 programme, with the addition of icicles on Ann Street and the positioning and lighting on 12 additional trees on Donegall place.

3.14 **Lighting Projections**

City Hall will be illuminated from 18th November to 7th January inclusive. This has consistently generated a positive response from the public. A temporary lighting scheme will also be devised for 2 Royal Avenue at the former Tesco site and the Bank of Ireland building. This will include mapped projections which will operate from 19th November to 1st January.

3.15 Another highlight for the Christmas period will be the lighting of the old Bank of Ireland Building at the bottom of Royal Avenue which will run from 19th November to 1st February. The lighting up of the Bank of Ireland building received significant coverage on social media in 2021. This will be repeated for 2022, raising awareness of the significant ongoing work on the Belfast Stories project. Additional illuminations across the city on the 19th November will include Fountain House above Primark on Donegall Place and the Mayfair building in Cornmarket.

3.16 **Music Programme**

On the evening of the 19th, a music and animation programme will take place across the city across a number of zones (subject to change):

- **Zone 1** - Donegall Place (From Carroll's to McDonald's (both sides of street) and Fountain Lane)
- **Zone 2** - Waterstones, Fountain Street, College St, Fountain Mezzanine, St Mary's Church, Queen's St and Castle Street

- **Zone 3** - Berry Street, Rosemary St, Tesco Metro, Castlecourt Front, Lower Garfield Street, BOI Building (All Royal Avenue)
- **Zone 4** - Lombard St, Castle Place / Kiosk and front of Bank buildings
- **Zone 5** - Cornmarket - Dunnes Stores, Ann St, Arthur St, Castle Arcade, Castle Lane and Calendar Street

3.17 A raised platform will also be in situ on the evening of the 19th (likely location in front of 2 Royal Avenue - TBC) with a three-hour set from 6pm to 9pm showcasing local musicians. In addition, a music programme will be curated across the Christmas period including several music elements for the opening night including performances at Rosemary Street Presbyterian Church and music on Berry Street and Lower Garfield Street.

3.18 A 4 week 'weekend programme' of Christmas Animation will also be delivered. The activity will primarily take place in the city centre from 1pm-5pm each Saturday and Sunday in the build- up to Christmas.

3.19 **Procession**
An external provider (Lux) have been engaged to create an interactive 'White and Bright' cavalcade of props and performers which will move through Royal Avenue / Donegall Place on the evening of the event. It is likely that some props will also remain static for the event duration. This will be complemented by a community engagement programme of choreographed costumed performances, creating a real festive spectacle.

3.20 **Window Animation**
US Folk have been engaged to produce winter-themed window vinyls to create a more aesthetically pleasing city centre offering over the festive period. These vinyls are designed to remain in situ throughout winter and are therefore not completely focused on the Christmas theme. BCCM will independently operate a 'Christmas for All' themed window dressing competition for businesses in the city centre.

3.21 In addition, the programme will also include 'live' window animation on the opening night (19 November) in two of the main retail stores on Donegall Place. This will include music and comedy theatre sketches running throughout the event. This proved to be extremely popular in 2021. The Visit Belfast window will also be dressed during this period.

3.22 **Street Animation**
A range of 50+ Belfast - based organisations from the cultural, arts and theatre / performance sectors will be engaged to take part in this event and provide the animation over the opening night. The entertainment onsite will be a mix of music, dance, street performance, comedy and theatrical performance under the overall creative banner of *Christmas in Belfast*.

3.23

2 Royal Avenue

Maywe, the council-appointed provider in 2 Royal Avenue will operate an uplifted events programme over the festive period. This will include a Winter's Den in 2 Royal Avenue commencing on 19th November. This will create a welcoming hub for all to enjoy. Visitors will be able to experience a range of sustainable events including:

- Up-cycling Christmas decoration programme
- Up-cycling Christmas jumper workshops
- Creating own advent calendars
- Sustainable Christmas crackers
- 'Swap - shop'
- Santa's Post Box (open Thursday-Sunday weekly, with late night opening Thursday and Friday evenings)
- Advent Calendars
- Alpine Lodge
- Teddy Bear Hospital and Toy repair café
- Sustainable Wrapping service (cash for Kids drop-off point)

3.24

In addition, a wide range of free events will be on offer also from 19th November in 2 Royal Avenue, this will include twilight pottery and art markets, fashion swap nights, Christmas carolling events, storytelling, music, festive jazz for seniors, family silent discos, sustainable arts and craft and workshops and a Crufty Christmas Fashion Show in aid of Guide Dogs NI. Throughout the festive period the venue will welcome a range of community-based choirs, musical events and musicians both inside and outside the venue.

3.25

Council have also commissioned US Folk, a Belfast-based agency representing some NI's top illustrative and design talent. They will create an overall look and feel for 2 Royal Avenue's Christmas programme - The Winter's Den - this will include a suite of characters and folk illustrations which will come to life via a bespoke AR App made especially for Christmas. Audiences will be encouraged to engage with this AR app on their mobile devices where they will discover the Christmas characters come to life through animation on their screens when they visit 2 Royal Avenue. They will discover a secret treasure hunt via the AR, where they can collect stickers as they discover. The characters will also be incorporated on vinyl décor across vacant shop unit windows on Royal Avenue, as well as in shop windows across the city meaning the public can interact with the designs and treasure hunt via the AR App throughout the city centre during the festive season. This will run throughout the Christmas period from 19th November into January.

3.26

Christmas Market

The Christmas Market will run this year from Saturday 19th November to Thursday 22nd December. Market Place Europe Limited (MPEL) has held the Continental Markets contract for the past 17 years and have been awarded the contract for the next 3+2 years. Changes

to the contract this year include a larger seating area, an enhanced Christmas experience with themed and animated walkways. There will be over 100 stalls and the new contract also sets out the requirement for 40% local traders and 60% continental traders. There will be a Santa's Grotto supporting the Lord Mayors Charity and a return of free school educational tours, to be extended this year to out of school hours childcare and youth service providers. MPEL also ran the Jolly Big Business Boost offering a free chalet to a young business. When the Continental Market trades at the front of the city hall the footfall increases into St Georges Market and throughout the city Centre. The Christmas Market and the local Christmas offer in St George's trade side by side very successfully. MPEL has offered a free pitch to St Georges Market traders this year and in previous years to further enhance trade for the local traders.

3.27

Role of Lord Mayor

The Lord Mayor will play a key role in leading the Christmas procession, as well as the official opening of the 2 Royal Avenue Christmas programme on 19th November. An opportunity will also be possible for the Lord Mayor to speak from the raised platform in the city centre on the 19th November to those in attendance at the event.

3.28

A video message from the Lord Mayor to citizens and visitors to the city will be issued online on Monday 19th November to coincide with the opening of the Christmas programme (this will be pre-recorded on the evening of the 18th in front of City Hall).

3.29

Marketing and Communications Activity

Council will operate a digital campaign with pulse screens and online advertising to promote the fact that there is an event taking place on 19th November, as well as weekend entertainment thereafter and seasonal activities in 2 Royal Avenue. Council will be directing people to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/christmas URL, where the 19th November event information will be displayed prominently on the page. As information is finalised on the event schedule, online messaging will be strengthened.

3.30

Promotion will take place across digital platforms and via key partners including BID One and Visit Belfast. City Matters went to print before event details were confirmed, but a generic update was provided to highlight 19th November and 2 Royal Avenue in edition to be circulated to just under 160k homes w/c 7th November. A press release will also be issued w/c 7th November to promote the finer and confirmed details of the event schedule.

3.31

Economic Context

Following Covid and within the context of a cost-of-living crisis, Council are cognisant of providing support to city traders, with a focus on hope and optimism at Christmas.

Council's Christmas campaign will have the following principles,

- Sustainability

<p>3.32</p> <p>3.33</p> <p>3.34</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Giving back ○ Sense of Home <p>Christmas lights are an essential part of dressing the city, in 2019 Council secured a new lighting scheme which features more energy - efficient lights. In addition, the lighting scheme will be turned on each evening between 3pm / 4pm and will be turned off at 1am. The pole mounted features operated by DFI will operate from dusk to dawn.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no financial implications to this report. All expenditure is within existing departmental budgets and approvals.</p> <p><u>Equality & Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None.</p>