



Subject:	Christmas Programme Update
Date:	14 th June 2023
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 or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with further information on the Christmas event as previously requested.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– In light of further information being provided, Members agree on the approach/format to Christmas 2023– Note the contents of the report in relation to the Lighting Scheme
3.0	Main report

3.1	<p>Christmas Programme 2023</p> <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>The purpose of this report is to provide Members with further information and the costing of the various options for the delivery of Christmas 2023. This report follows on from a report to City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 8th March 2023, which focused on an Evaluation of the Christmas 2022 Programme.</p>
3.2.1	<p>At the March 2023 meeting, officers further presented an option to merge the old Christmas switch-on format (preferred option prior to the pandemic) with the city-centre-wide programme used in 2021 and 2022 which would have seen a small stage at Castle Junction/Donegall Place, allowing the audience within Donegall Place to view the lighting of the Tree and Festive Lighting within the immediate City Centre, without the requirement to close Donegall Square North. The entertainment throughout the City Centre could then be programmed</p>
3.2.2	<p>As per Members request, this report will give cognisance to the resumption of the traditional ‘switch on’ event while considering health and safety, community engagement and local organisation involvement, choir competitions, a procession, environmental impact, budget availability, comparison of event feedback of recent Christmas programmes and the extension of the lighting schemes. All of which will assist the forward planning of the future Christmas programme for 2023 and beyond.</p>
3.2.3	<p>At April City Growth and Regeneration Committee, a budget of £122,864 was agreed for the Christmas 2023 programme as part of the in-year work programme for the Tourism unit and It is important to note that the Christmas 2023 programme is the launch pad into the ‘Belfast 2024’ programme and whilst programming will deliver against core thematic alignment, there may also be opportunity for additional budget uplift as part of this.</p>
3.3	<p>Officers have considered and presented three possible programming scenarios and associated budget requirements as below:</p>

3.4

Option 1: Return to the “Pre-Covid” Switch on Style event.

The table below summarises the anticipated expenditure. Forecasts are based on 2019 event costs with an allowance for inflation and additional measures required to facilitate a safe event (as recommended in the external H&S report). These additional measures have distinct cost implications due to the longer build and de-rig period of the event: equipment will be hired for a longer period and will require security for the duration. There will be further road closures to accommodate stakeholders. It is important to note that consultation with both PSNI and Translink is considered in line with event management and the impact of intended road closures to the delivery of their core services and associated cost implications.

Category	Description	Indicative cost
Entertainment	on stage performance, music and show pieces	£18,000
Production	production management, stage, PA, ancillary equipment, screens,	£65,000
H&S, licensing, legal	licenses, first aid, insurance, H&S advisor, stewarding	£24,000
Traffic Management	road closure, parking bay suspension, traffic management contractor	£8,000
Survey	Socio-economic survey	£8,000
Total		£123,000

3.5

Option 2: Continue with a city-centre wide programme of animation and entertainment as per 2021 and 2022:

Costs are based on 2022 event costs, with an allowance for inflation.

Category	Description	Indicative cost
Entertainment	Variety of performer throughout city centre, window animation, parade, small allocation to 2RA	£41,000
Lighting	Lighting projections, displays, lighting for window animation, includes equipment	£26,000
Production	production management, Riser stage, PA, ancillary equipment,	£12,000

H&S, licensing, legal	licenses, first aid, insurance, H&S advisor, stewarding	£20,500
Traffic Management	road closure, parking bay suspension, traffic management contractor	£4,200
Survey	Socio-economic survey	£5,100
	Programming 2 Royal Ave for the evening	£5,000
Total		£115,000

It is important to note that neither of the above two options includes provision for subsequent weekends. Since 2019, there has been an allocation for animation of the 4-5 weekends in the run up to Christmas, funded from non-recurrent reserves. Which is not available in 23/24 financial year.

3.6

Option 3: Combination of a Switch-on event and city-centre wide programme of animation and entertainment as per 2021 & 2022 (as per March Committee report), with an allocation for subsequent weekends.

A solution could be found in taking attributes of the old format, hosted within the 2021/2022 event space. A 'switch on' element, could take place on a small riser stage/platform at Castle Junction/Donegall Place, close to 2RA - allowing the audience within Donegall Place to view the lighting of the Tree and Festive Lighting within the immediate City Centre, without the requirement to close Donegall Square North. A larger PA system would be required for this element. The entertainment throughout the City Centre would be programmed over a two-hour period and would accommodate the parade element delivered in 2022.

3.7

An allocation of the budget would deliver activity at 2 Royal Ave (a success in 2022, and wet weather contingency offering) and weekends in the run up to Christmas, supplemented by other city centre activity. However, to accommodate this expenditure there would be a reduction in the allocation to both entertainment and lighting displays.

Category	Description	Indicative cost
Entertainment	Variety of performer throughout city centre, window animation, parade,	£37,700
Lighting	Lighting projections, displays, lighting for window animation, includes equipment	£15,000

Production	production management, Riser stage, Larger PA, ancillary equipment,	£16,000
H&S, licensing, legal	licenses, first aid, insurance, H&S advisor, stewarding	£15,000
Traffic Management	road closure, parking bay suspension, traffic management contractor	£4,200
Survey	Socio-economic survey.	£5,100
Subsequent Weekends	Programming of 2 Royal Ave from opening weekend, throughout period, with additional weekend animation & music	£30,000
Total		£123,000

3.8

Health and Safety Consultation:

As per Members request, the Events Team have sought independent health and safety advise on each of the above options, the salient findings of this are as follows:

- the traditional Switch On Event in front of City Hall, has a long history and evolved over more than two decades
- The challenges faced over that period have influenced the evolution of the event
- The most recent iterations present a variety of health & safety implications for both the public and staff involved in the build, delivery and de-rig of the event. Similar public civic events, where incidents took place, illustrate the implications on local authorities.
- By contrast the 2021 & 2022 format carries relatively low risk from a health & safety perspective.
- Stakeholders have clearly stated a preference for the more recent format but accept that the ‘traditional’ switch on could still take place with mitigations in place.
- These mitigations will result in additional resources being required to deliver a safe event, which also meets the expectations of stakeholders.

The full report is attached in Appendix 1

3.9

Public Engagement on Christmas (conducted by Thrive)

This provided insight on people's behaviours and how Christmas events make them feel/shape their sense of place, although did not focus on the format of the switch on event.

Some General key findings on how people in Belfast feel about the city centre:

- Everyone repeatedly mentioned how important publicly owned spaces are to keep people coming in and feeling proud of Belfast, a reflection of civic pride in the architectural heritage which exists throughout the city and a desire to preserve it for future generations to enjoy.
- There was a desire to see more public spaces be used throughout the town centre: outdoor seating, green areas, nice places for people to exist without having to spend money. This connected to the panel's desire for the city centre to be a space where many people live, reflecting the diversity of the rest of the county.

3.10

Creative Programming & Alignment with the Cultural Strategy – A City Imagining

Members are asked to note that the newer format compliments the Cultural Strategy – A City Imagining.

Several priorities are actioned via the Christmas Programme. For example, Priority 1 of 'A City Belonging' is to *develop and deliver a co-design model for all cultural programmes* while Priority 9 under 'A City Creating' specifies to *involve creative and cultural practitioners in service design across Council*; In 2021, 33 Belfast based organisations from the cultural, arts and theatre/performance sectors were engaged to take part in this event and provide the animation over the 2 nights, with an additional 2 companies coming in from GB and 1 from Ireland. A smaller number were used in 2022, however, this was only one night.

An action under priority 4 is *further develop the city as a gallery* – something the newer format delivers comprehensively through street art, static window displays, and various lighting initiatives. In a similar vein, Priority 5 (A City Challenging) focuses on placemaking - one action being *'deliver playful city initiative to improve the quality, accessibility and openness of public spaces'* The expansive nature of the Christmas programme of 2021 & 2022 across the City centre, transformed underused public spaces into vibrant, bright, intriguing and theatrical space via music, animation and window dressing.

Pending final decision, and as per Members request the Events Team will work with Culture colleagues in the Belfast 2024 Team to deliver 'community engagement and local organisation involvement, choir competitions and a procession'.

3.11	<p>Environmental Impact:</p> <p>As per Members request, Officers have viewed all options presented through the lens of Environmental Impact. Over the last 5-6 years the events team have tried to remove as much physical infrastructure as possible that lends to creative development and delivers a more organic event creating higher levels of sustainability in increasing employment of local talent performing at the event, creating live hubs of music and animation across city centre. The Events team give cognisance to sustainability throughout and where possible utilise existing power supplies, infrastructure and natural spaces lending to live programming, the footprint for the original format exceeds the current format with additional infrastructure requirements.</p>
3.12	<p>Future Extension of the Lighting Scheme:</p> <p>At March Committee, Members were advised that Christmas Lighting Scheme in 2022 was year 3 of the existing Christmas Lighting Scheme. The scheme was 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. Feedback on the scheme was positive, however, there continues to be requests for an extension of the scheme to include arterial routes. This also includes lighting projections and additional illuminations across the city.</p>
3.13	<p>The budget for the Christmas lights has remained unchanged in the last three years and the Economic Development division do not have budget available to fund the expansion of the lighting scheme. Members should also be aware that any extension would require a significant lead in time to secure permissions, infrastructure and lighting.</p>
3.14	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p>
3.15	<p>There are no financial implications to this report. All expenditure is within existing departmental budgets and approvals.</p> <p>However it should be noted, that in relation to Christmas 2024 neither option 1 or 2 allows for subsequent weekend activity. Should there be a desire to integrate this element under options 1 or 2 additional resource would need to be allocated.</p> <p>Any extension of the existing Festive Lighting Scheme would require additional resources.</p> <p><u>Equality & Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Christmas external H&S report</p>

