

# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 14th June, 2023

## HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nic Bhranair (Chairperson);  
Alderman Lawlor;  
Councillors Bunting, Canavan, S. Douglas,  
Duffy, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Lyons,  
Maskey, F. McAteer, McCabe, McCormick,  
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, I. McLaughlin,  
McMullan, Murray and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development; and  
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;  
Ms. W. Langham, Programme Director;  
Ms. E. Henry, Strategic Lead,  
Ms. E. Clarke, Creative Programme Manager;  
Ms. L. O'Donnell, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism;  
Ms. L. Toland: Senior Manager – Economy;  
Mr. A. Cairns, Zoo Manager; and  
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

No apologies were reported.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the 5th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd May, subject to the omission of the minute under the heading Committee Plan 2023-24 and End of Year Report 2002-23, which would be taken back to the Committee for further consideration in due course.

### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Lyons declared an interest in items 3.b) Queen's Island Transport Plan and 4.a) Major Events Update, as he was on the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

In relation to items 4.a) Major Events Update and 4.d) Future of Cultural Multi Annual Grants (CMAG), Councillor McCabe declared an interest, in that she was employed by Féile an Phobail.

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The Chairperson and Councillor Walsh declared an interest regarding item 4.c) Update on the development of Neighbourhood/Local Tourism, in that they were employed by Fáilte Feirste Thiar and left the meeting whilst this item was under discussion.

**Restricted Items**

**The information contained in the report associated with the following six items were restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.**

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following three items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

**Future City Centre Programme - Vacant to Vibrant**

The Senior Development Manager provided an update on the progress of the pilot capital grant scheme, 'Vacant to Vibrant', together with the recommendations from the assessment panel.

The Committee:

- Noted the update in relation to the city centre Vacant to Vibrant pilot capital grant scheme; and
- Agreed to the recommended grant awards as outlined within Section 3.17 of the report.

**Zoo - Quarter 4 Update**

The Zoo Manager provided an update on the Zoo performance during the 2022-23 financial year across the following areas:

- Visitor Services;
- Education Services;
- Animal Collection;
- Marketing & Events; and
- Financial performance.

The Committee noted the Zoo performance update report for the 2022-2023 financial year and the change in membership terms and conditions.

**Belfast Zoo - Scale of Charges 2023-24**

The Director of Economic Development provided an update on the Zoo scale of charges increase for the financial year 2023-24.

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He highlighted that, at its meeting in April, the Committee had agreed to defer consideration of the report to allow further financial information to be provided.

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Flynn,  
Seconded by Councillor Lyons,

The Committee agrees to defer consideration of the scale of charges to allow Fee Benchmarking information to be provided.

On a vote, two Members voted for the proposal and eighteen against and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to the price increases for existing categories and noted that Fee Benchmarking information would be circulated to the Committee.

**Zoo - Conservation Projects Donation Requests**

The Committee was provided with a summary of the requested payments of donation money to the approved conservation projects that were supported by Belfast Zoo.

The Committee:

- I. Noted the amount of donation to each conservation project; and
- II. Approved the donation amount to each conservation project.

**Belfast 2024 update**

The Committee received a presentation from the Creative Programme Manager and Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism in relation to the developments for Belfast 2024 – the Council's ambitious year of creative celebration for Belfast to action in Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 2023/24, which included:

- An update on Belfast 2024 Creative Programme Development including Partners and Open Call;
- Updated B24 Budget allocations;
- Partnership Developments and Partnership Investment;
- An update on streamlined Governance Model;
- Engagement and citizen led development so far; and
- Next Steps.

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of this report and the summary of the strategic case and developments for delivery for *Belfast 2024*, noted details of the developments for Belfast 2024 namely programming and actioning the proposed governance model;

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- Approved the Belfast 2024 outline programme budget of £7.1million;
- Approved the increase in allocation for the local Open Call aspect of programme development from £1.85million and opportunities to enhance current funding programmes within the Culture unit at Council such as the Creative Bursaries and Arts and Heritage Small Grants and Community Festivals Fund;
- Approved the bespoke commissioning partnership with the *Power Plants* project for research and development to the value of up to £20k;
- Approved the additional 3 Creative Bursaries (£30k – giving 16 in total across Culture and Belfast 2024 – 10 had been approved by the Committee in March 22, and a further 3 approved in June 22) for artists to work in residence across the city in the development of and during Belfast 2024 programme;
- Granted delegated authority to the B24 Programme Board for internal approval of expenditure under budget headings noted in the report;
- Approved the progression of applications, pitches and business cases to generate financial, in kind, and match funding commitment from key funders, investors and partners in order to reach fundraising targets for the B24 programme; and
- Noted that a dedicated Committee workshop on Belfast 2024 would be scheduled.

**Markets Unit Update and Development Plan**

The Committee were provided with an update on the development proposals for the city markets in the coming year, together with the proposed re-structured pricing schedule for stall fees and market hire at St George's Market.

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Duffy,  
Seconded by Councillor Lyons and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to stagger the revised Stall Fees with a revised rate of £18 for non-hot food and £28 for hot food coming into effect on 1st September 2023 and a rate of £20 for non-hot food and £30 for hot food following in April 2024.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report, including proposals to move forward with key improvement actions under the Markets Development Plan; and
- Agreed to the revision of fees and charges, as set out in sections 3.11 and 3.12 of the report with the condition that the revised Stall Fee should be staggered with a revised rate of £18 for non-hot food

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and £28 for hot food coming into effect on 1st September 2023 and a rate of £20 for non-hot food and £30 for hot food following in April 2024. The proposed electricity fee and venue hire increases were agreed in line with the recommendation; and

- Agreed that regular quarterly updates be submitted to the Committee on the Markets Performance and Development and that representatives of the Market Traders be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

**Requests to Present**

**Renewed Ambition Taskforce**

It was reported that representatives from the Renewed Ambition Taskforce had requested the opportunity to present at the August meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in order to update Members on the 2022 / 2023 programme; and proposed 2023 / 2024 programme of work, including priority issues and objectives for the Partnership moving forward.

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from representatives of the Renewed Ambition Partnership at the Committee meeting on 9th August 2023.

**Queen's Island Transport Plan**

The Committee considered a request to receive a presentation at a future meeting of the Committee from Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC) and Titanic Quarter Limited (TQL) to provide an update on the development of the Queen's Island Transport Plan (QITP).

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and Titanic Quarter Limited at a future meeting of the Committee to provide an update on the development of the Queen's Island Transport Plan.

**Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP)**

It was reported that Department for Infrastructure were proposing to commence public engagement on the emerging BMTP in the early Autumn. In advance of this, they had offered to meet with the Council to provide an early outline of what was proposed and the process to bring the BMTP to adoption. This offer of pre-launch engagement would provide an opportunity for the Committee to have an early insight and input into the proposed draft Vision, Objectives and Guiding Principles of the BMTP. Officers would then prepare a response to the Consultation documents, taking on board comments from Members, subject to Committee agreement and Council ratification.

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from the Department for Infrastructure on the emerging draft Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan at a future meeting and requested a copy of the presentation in advance of the meeting.

**Positioning the City to Compete**

**Major Events Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Major Events programme; including:**

- An update on the Maritime event;
- the Way Forward approach to St Patrick’s Day 2024-2026
- an update on the bid for the Fleadh Cheoil na h’Eireann
- an update regarding the UK and Ireland bid to host the European Football Championships in 2028

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 It is recommended that Members:**

- Note the contents of this report on the Maritime Festival.
- Note the contents of the update on St Patrick’s Day including the procurement approach for 2024-2026
- Note the update on the bid for the Fleadh Cheoil, give necessary approval for Officers to continue with the bid process for future years, approve the budget for 2023-24 associated with the bid process (including attendance of a delegation at each event including attendance by Lord Mayor at the Fleadh Cheoil in Mullingar in August), note the costs associated with 2024-25 and 2025-26
- Approve the Letter of Offer for Ards Comhaltas for 2023-2024 activity to a value of £22,000
- Note the update regarding the UK and Ireland bid to host the European Football Championships in 2028

**3.0 Main report**

**3.1 Belfast Maritime Festival 2023**

**3.2 The Belfast Maritime Festival will take place on 9th & 10th September 2023. The event will deliver a diverse programme of local talent, local produce and local crafts aligning to the Cultural Strategy, with the creative theme ‘Made in Belfast’ incorporating the best of Belfast. This will be accompanied by a strong Belfast brand displayed throughout the site.**

- 3.3** A focal point will be the Made in Belfast Village, showcasing local producers and performers – with concepts such as Performed in Belfast, Distilled in Belfast, Stitched in Belfast, Crafted in Belfast, and Baked in Belfast. In addition, there will be a full programme animating all available public realm from Donegall Quay to the Titanic Quarter. There will be a number of other focal points – visiting vessels along Queens Quay, workshops/community design at Hamilton Dock, with Abercorn Basin hosting a range of street performances. As always, the festival will showcase the heritage sites along the Maritime Mile, from St Joseph's Church in Sailortown to the recently re-opened HMS Caroline. Titanic Quarter's STEM sector will offer an insight into industry and innovation within the site.
- 3.4** A new Governance Structure has been established in partnership with Maritime Belfast Trust and Maritime Harbour Commissioners to ensure a more cohesive approach to event planning and to drive forward the ambition set out in the Maritime strategy. The Programme Board will oversee a number of working groups with Maritime Belfast Trust delivering elements of the festival programme, managed via an SLA. The value of this will be circa £85,000 and this will include delivery of the community co-design piece.
- 3.5** The 2023 Maritime event has been successful in securing Tourism NI International Events funding to the value of £60,000, to provide international market visibility and enhancement of the event. Officers are regularly engaging with TNI in respect of Council obligations under this arrangement.
- 3.6** **Way Forward St Patrick's Day 2024-2026**
- The purpose of this part of the report is to provide Members with a summary of the 2023 event, and the approach on the way forward for 2024-2026.
- 3.7** Each of the current providers has provided a de-brief to Council Officers. Beat Carnival, Duncairn 174 Trust and Feile An Phobail concluded that their respective offering built upon the pilot of 2022.
- Beat Carnival, with logistical support from the Council Events team, delivered the city centre parade/pageant.
  - Duncairn 174 Trust, again with logistical support from the Events staff, delivered the St Patrick's Eve Concert at Customs House Square.
  - Feile An Phobail delivered their city-wide Trad Trail.

- **Maywe LLP reported a successful project albeit on a lesser budget than 2022. Tales of our City 2023 was a short workshop series combined with a public facing exhibition of stories at 2 Royal Ave from the residents of the city.**

- 3.8 In addition, Council secured £37,000 of TNI Product Development funding to test new Tourism experiences within the City; this included Ceilli Sessions at the Castle and a trad and taster tour. Through the on-going engagement with Ards Comhaltas, in relation to the Fleadh bid, events took place at St George's Market and 2 Royal Ave.**

**Operationally, there were no issues of note, although feedback from Translink requested consideration on the length of road closures in Donegall square North to accommodate the parade.**

- 3.9 The feedback received on the St Patrick's Day events has been positive.**

- **The socio-economic survey presented that the overall estimated direct spend for the St Patrick's Celebrations excluding accommodation was £679,800.00, and the public rating of the events:**
- **68% gave the Concert a rating of 8- 10, including 32% who rated it as 'Extremely good', while 79% rated the Parade between 8-10.**
- **93% of visitors agreed that the event improves NI's reputation as a host for events like these, with 97% believing that events like this encourage people to come to Belfast, and 94% said that such events improve their sense of well-being and community.**
- **92% felt the St Patrick's Celebrations were inclusive for all people from all cultural heritages.**
- **67% said that the alcohol free policy had a positive influence on their decision to attend the concert.**

- 4.0 Anecdotally other feedback suggested the 2023 festival provided a more cohesive event programme. The additional programming has further served to enhance the visitor experience and connectivity across the event assets.**

- 4.1 Officers felt that the Parade (Beat Initiative), Music Trail (Feile) and Storytelling initiatives (Maywe) clearly work, and have scope to develop. The St Patrick's Eve Concert at Customs House Square (Duncairn) currently requires additional delivery support and as such can present hidden costs, in addition it is unfortunately subject to inclement March evening**



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weather and can result in low attendance numbers with low conversion in tickets requested and on the day attendance. It is possible that this element could be revisited as a series of smaller, indoor performances throughout the City over the celebrations.

- 4.2 Members should note that the four organisations have made significant efforts to deliver in 2022, and 2023, with the latter year demonstrating event development. It is clear that the initial two years of investment has built foundations for future activity.

4.3 **2024 Way Forward**

At the April Committee, the Tourism and Events Workplan was presented, and members approved the allocation of £300,000 to St Patricks Day 2024.

- 4.4 Given the considerable investment Council has, and the wider City initiatives around St Patricks Day, there is an untapped opportunity to promote the City offering to international markets of appeal. From the £300k, £10k of the 2024 budget will be used for the purposes of international marketing. Therefore, it is proposed that £290k is available to support programming, If any successful submissions require logistical support from Council, as has been the case previously, this will be considered when allocations are being determined.

4.5 **New Commissioning Approach**

Committee were informed at Sept 22 that a new process would be put in place, and therefore a new procurement process is required. A Tender Initiation Request form for a tender for St Patrick's Celebration Events will be presented at Strategic Policy & Resources on 23 June 2023.

Task	Timeline
Finalise ITT and Specification	By end of June 2023
Advertise and issue tender docs	First week of July
Tender Close	Mid August (min 30 days advert plus extra days to take into account July holidays)
Evaluation Period	Last two weeks of August
Internal approvals	First week of September
Mandatory Standstill	Mid September
Contract Award Date	Third week of September

- 4.6** Officers have, in the interim period, drafted a specification which will seek proposals for events and activities for 2024 and beyond.
- 4.7** It is anticipated that a framework of the events and activities akin to 2022 and 2023 will be established. The number of successful awards from this tender will be determined by the financial asks and the finite resources available.

Criteria have been established to ensure alignment to the Cultural Strategy, while other criteria will address value for money and the long-term support of Council:

- Previous Experience of similar scale cultural programmes/projects
  - Capability and Capacity
  - Concept and Feasibility
  - Co-Design & Inclusivity
  - Financial Sustainability
  - Partnership Approach
  - Cost
- 4.8** It is proposed that the tender will be for a period of three years (1 + 1+ 1) to allow for product development. However, projects will be evaluated on an annual basis. Successful organisations would be expected to co-ordinate activity in support of each other.
- 4.9** **Future Proofing - An Executive Summary - A new approach to St Patrick's Programme in Belfast**

The Council's in-house Creative Lead conducted a review of the current approach to the delivery of the St. Patrick's Programme, including a bench marking exercise of St Patrick's Day celebrations across Ireland and has made recommendations for an enhanced operating model moving forward.

The St Patrick's Programme in Belfast is currently commissioned annually by Belfast City Council (BCC) and delivered by outside providers. The benchmarking exercise has shown that there is considerable scope to develop impact, audience and additional investment. To address this, Council should consider allocation of an Executive work package with responsibility of attracting funding, developing partnerships, enhancing the Programme's international profile, and leading the creative commissioning process. Importantly, this role would also ensure and oversee a staged transition of

fundraising responsibility out of the Council taken on by the external suppliers in Year 2 and Year 3. The sustainability of the event relies on broadening the stakeholders involved and of the evolution of a mixed investment model.

- 5.0 The report suggests that the St Patrick's Programme requires a cohesive creative approach across all elements, supported through the dual roles of a Creative Director responsible for the parade and a Creative Programmer responsible for the wider programme of engagement and events around the city, to develop the creative concept and commission the artists, artworks, and experiences. However, given resource pressures within the unit it is proposed that requirement is fulfilled via submitting organisations nominating a lead Creative Director/Programmer and factored into respective project budgets. This individual will be expected to work closely with Council officials in an oversight capacity for all aspects of programme co-design and creative delivery. They will also work with other peers from other successful contractors or delivery partners.

5.1 Using Belfast 2024 as a pivot

Belfast 2024 will enable additional investment in the St Patrick's programme in 2024, potentially allowing for time the additional finance to be sourced for the following years of the tender and will enable development within Council of a collaborative 'producing' model for the future. Governance structures put in place for Belfast 2024 will provide a blueprint for ongoing cultural oversight.

5.2 All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil Na h'Eireann

With members approval Council participated in the bid to host the Fleadh Cheoil in 2023 & 2024, however, the event was awarded to Wexford, who have been bidding for the event since 2016. It is anticipated that Wexford will host the event in 2024 and likely in 2025. As Belfast are now invested in a successful bid for future events, there is an expectation that the city will bid again for the 2025 event.

- 5.3 Normally, bids would be submitted in December. Therefore, for the 2025 bid, it is anticipated that the bid will be required to be submitted by mid December 2023.

In addition, there is the expectation of further visits from the committee as per previous years in January & February 2024.

5.4 2024 Bid Review & Lessons Learned

The Belfast bid received very positive feedback from all sources. Members of the Ard Chomhairle suggested that the Belfast bid had created a new standard for bids. As well as preparing the bid document, BCC officers also secured a number of letters of support which were appended. Some further correspondence was also sent to senior and influential members of the Ard Chomhairle from the US Ambassador to the UK and Consul General Narain.

**5.5 There were specific areas for improvement highlighted by voting members and trusted advisors that are detailed below:**

- More Irish language content within the bid document
- More detailed engagement with Provincial Comhaltas
- Greater attendance at Conventions
- Greater focus on disabled access
- More involvement from Ards CCE

**5.6 More Irish language content within the bid document**

After reviewing other bids, it is clear that it is not normal to produce a dual language bid document. The other documents do seem to have some key messages in Irish, acting as taglines for the bid document; this was absent from the Belfast bidding document.

**5.7 More detailed engagement with Provincial Comhaltas**

As well as the four provincial Comhaltas who are voting members of the Ard Chomhairle, a North American Comhaltas and GB Comhaltas are also voting members. In the previous voting cycle, we engaged with the Ulster Provincial Council, GB Comhaltas and North American Comhaltas. Our information confirms that we received support from voting members of these three Comhaltas. The information received to date indicates that the vote was split with the vote being decided by votes from the Chair and General Secretary with the most significant influencing factor being on those votes being the lack of engagement with all 4 provincial councils. This lack of engagement was due to pressures on human and financial resources. Given the weighting and importance of engagement this approach has been revisited for future requirements.

**5.8 Greater attendance at Conventions**

A breakdown of potential future engagement events in 2023:

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- All-Britain Fleadh 24-25 June (Stirling, Scotland)
- Connacht Fleadh 29 June - 2 July (Ballina)
- Leinster Fleadh 6-9 July (Dublin)
- Munster Fleadh 13-16 July (Tralee)
- Ulster Fleadh 20-23 July (Dromore, Co. Tyrone)
- Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, 6-14 August, Mullingar
  - Ard-Ollamh Award Gala dinner (Wednesday night, 9 Aug)
  - Overseas Reception (Thursday night, 10 Aug)
  - Comhaltas National Folk Orchestra event (Friday night, 11 Aug)
- Tionól Ceoil Leo Rowsome, 1-2 September (Monkstown)
- Comhaltas Christmas Dinner, December (Dublin)

**5.6 Greater focus on disabled access**

Accessibility matters will be further considered in revised bid book.

**6.0 More involvement from Ards CCE**

The Belfast bid is in conjunction with the local Fleadh Executive Committee, Ards/Bangor Comhaltas Branch, who must be seen as fronting the bid. This Comhaltas is made up of volunteers. Previously Committee agreed to supporting the work of Ards CCE via a Letter of Offer (£7,500 CGR approval September 2022).

- 6.1** Given the feedback from the unsuccessful bid, it is anticipated that the contribution of the Ards Branch requires an uplift from the previous bid. This uplift will take the form of partnering on convention visits, increased performances at conventions and other key engagements. This will of course incur additional expenditure for members of the Ards Comhaltas which in turn should be recognised given their status as a voluntary organisation. As with all funding agreements council will only recognise verified costs and any balance remaining will be returned to council. Members should note that Ards CCE will be asked to provide summary information on their objectives on each occasion e.g. lobbying, research; and report back to Council on lessons learned.

- 6.2** Members are also asked to note that while this funding will cover the current financial year, the Ards Branch will require a similar funding for 2024-25 and the following year.

The full resource requirements are appended at Appendix 2. This provides members with a summary of expenditure

associated with the on-going bid process, by year, and also identifies the Ards CCE support, which has been carefully considered. It is anticipated that this expenditure will not be exceeded.

**6.3 Council Attendance at future Fleadh events including Mullingar**

5.2.5 addresses the role of the Ards Branch, and the costs associated with supporting the local Comhaltas throughout the bid process.

Members are reminded that the Council, as the key funders of any successful bid, must also maintain a profile at particular events, as outlined in the Costs appended.

**6.4 Next Steps**

Officers are seeking members approval to submit a bid for the event in 2025. While it is unlikely that Belfast will be successful it is normal practice for bidders to continue to bid. Work to the revised Bid book will include inclusion of Irish language, and a greater focus on disabled access. There is also a requirement for a delegation including Lord Mayor to visit the 2023 Fleadh Cheoil in Mullingar in August to show commitment and therefore garner votes. Representatives from Belfast (Council/Ards) are expected at other events.

**6.5 Bid to host the European Football Championships in 2028**

Officers are working closely with key bid stakeholders (Tourism NI, IFA, Central Bid Team and UK Sport) in the interim period, before the official bid announcement in the Autumn. It is further anticipated that preliminary feedback from UEFA on the UK and Ireland bid is imminent and the opportunity to provide clarification to UEFA will have an end of June deadline. Responses will be coordinated in partnership with TNI and the IFA. Further host City briefings from the Central Bid Team are also planned over the Summer months.

**6.6 Financial & Resource Implications**

**Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no financial implications to this report. All expenditure is within existing departmental budgets and approvals.

**The current events development budget for this financial year is £40,000. Members are asked to note if participation in another bidding cycle for the Fleadh Cheoil is to be undertaken that the current provision within the pre-agreed Events Development Budget may not be sufficient to consider other events development work on other major events bid campaigns.**

**6.7 Equality & Good Relations Implications**

**The Cultural Strategy - *A City Imagining* - carried out an extensive EQIA covering the duration of the strategy 2020-2030. Major events are one of the major outputs of the Cultural Strategy with wide and varied ambition. Promotion of opportunity for all Section 75 groups to be celebrated within the programme is important to it's success."**

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development explained further the approach for St. Patrick's Day events for the coming years and the new commissioning approach.

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report on the Maritime Festival;
- Noted the contents of the update on St Patrick's Day including the procurement approach for 2024-2026;
- Noted the update on the bid for the Fleadh Cheoil, gave necessary approval for Officers to continue with the bid process for future years, approved the budget for 2023-24 associated with the bid process (including attendance of a delegation at each event including attendance by Lord Mayor at the Fleadh Cheoil in Mullingar in August), noted the costs associated with 2024-25 and 2025-26;
- Approved the Letter of Offer for Ards Comhaltas for 2023-2024 activity to a value of £22,000; and
- Noted the update regarding the UK and Ireland bid to host the European Football Championships in 2028.

**Belfast Stories Update**

The Committee received a presentation from the Programme Director and the Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism in relation to the progress of the Belfast Stories Programme and invited Members to visit the sites included in the Programme.

The Committee also considered the following report:

**"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues**

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to:**

- Update Members on the Belfast Stories programme as part of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) including the findings of the public consultation exercise.
- Outline activity to support the next development phase up to the end of RIBA Design Stage 2 and the submission of the Outline Business Case.

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- Note the contents of this report and update on progress against the delivery of the Belfast Stories programme.
- Note the findings of the public consultation exercise, the Equality Impact Assessment and the Rural Needs Screening as summarised in the report and detailed in Appendices 2 & 3.
- Agree the actions as set out in the Engagement Plan detailed in Appendix 4 and summarised at 3.38 to 3.43.
- Note the findings of the Stories Audit detailed in Appendix 5 and summarised at 3.50 to 3.52.
- Agree the actions as set out in the Stories Action Plan detailed in Appendix 6.
- Agree to set up a Members' Working Group to provide advice and oversight on the progression of Belfast Stories as set out in the draft Terms of Reference included in Appendix 7.

**3.0 Main Report**

**3.1 Members will be aware that Belfast Stories is the Council's flagship project under the Belfast Region City Deal and is due to open in 2028/29.**

**3.2 Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed at its meeting on 19th November 2021 to progress a number of key pieces of work, in order to ensure we meet the 2028/29 anticipated opening date including: the appointment of the integrated design team; the appointment of the exhibition design team; and commencement of the stories collection. In May 2022 City Growth and Regeneration Committee agreed to undertake the first public consultation exercise on proposals to date.**

**3.3 Since then, several important milestones have been achieved and are included in the updates provided below. Activities included in the next stage of development are set out for**



agreement and detailed in Appendix 4: Engagement Plan and Appendix 6: Stories Action Plan.

**Programme Update**

- 3.4 Progress against the agreed programme is ongoing.

3.5 **Site Acquisition**

Members will be aware that the majority of the site (95%) was secured by Belfast City Council for Belfast Stories in 2021 with site assembly now complete with the acquisition of the remaining two smaller properties on the site since the last Committee update in May 2022.

3.6 **Business Case**

An interim Outline Business Case was completed in 2020 in advance of the purchase of the site. This work is now being updated to reflect progress and project development with an updated Outline Business Case due to be submitted for approval in 2024, when concept designs will have been further developed to RIBA Stage 2. At this stage the project will then move to departmental casework review with Tourism NI and the Department for Economy. If successful a contract for BRCD funding will be issued.

3.7 **Design Teams**

Work is progressing with Council's physical programmes department to appoint the design teams to enable the project to move to the next phase of development. The procurement of these professional services is ongoing with appointments anticipated in Autumn 2023 of the following teams:

- Integrated Design Team
- Interpretative Planning and Exhibition Design Team
- Project Management and Design Assurance Team.

3.8 **Net Zero Carbon Ambition**

To align with Belfast City Council's Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for Belfast and the Resilience Strategy, a feasibility study was commissioned to assess the viability of using geothermal technology to meet the building's heating and cooling requirements. The study concluded that geothermal energy is a viable option for the site to be considered alongside other sustainable energy solutions. The scope of works for the design teams has included requirements to meet our

ambitions including BREEAM 'Outstanding' sustainability standard to be obtained for the whole project and CEEQUAL 'Outstanding' sustainability standard for the civil/public realm aspects of the scheme. In addition, the building is to be designed to require low energy demand for heating and cooling, as well as utilise onsite renewables. The building design is required to meet Passive House 'Plus' standard to support this need. Further design work will be undertaken by the design teams to determine how these ambitions will be met. Members will be updated in due course.

**3.9 Benefits Realisation**

A Benefits Realisation Framework for Belfast Stories has been developed to define and refine the range of benefits and outcomes linked to the project investment spending objectives and BRCD requirements. A key objective is 'to create and sustain a diversified, vibrant city – an attractive place to live in, invest in and work in' and within this objective we have been examining the potential impacts on the city centre and neighbourhoods, local communities, local residents and the local economy. Crucial to realising the impacts will be identifying the enabling mechanism(s) to deliver against the expected benefits.

- 3.10** An important aspect of the wider benefits of Belfast Stories is the social value opportunity, including better jobs and skills, building ethical and resilient supply chains and promoting wellbeing for citizens. An independent evaluator will support the Belfast Stories team to ensure ongoing review of the benefits and outcomes with an evaluation report due by the end of 2024 to coincide with development of designs to RIBA Stage 2, submission of the outline business case and completion of the second public consultation.

**3.11 Inclusive Growth**

An Inclusive Growth group has been established to ensure that the breadth of opportunities during pre-construction, construction and post opening are maximised. Skills audits considering opportunities in construction, tourism and hospitality, and creative and digital technologies are being completed by the BRCD team and officers will work to ensure these are aligned to corporate priorities across Council including the culture and tourism functions within economic development to support areas such as neighbourhood tourism capacity building.

- 3.12 It is important in the development of the outline business case to be able to demonstrate delivery against social value outcomes. As part of the consultation and engagement process the work strands of the Engagement Plan (Appendix 4) have been developed to ensure all opportunities are maximised that in turn will feed into the overall project Benefits Realisation Framework. This approach will be embedded into all aspects of the programme including opportunities through gathering of stories.

**Public consultation**

- 3.13 Belfast City Council's Consultation and Engagement Framework describes a broad spectrum of two-way communication (from consultation to engagement to involvement) between the council and its residents and stakeholders. It recognises that effective dialogue helps make decisions, policies and services that are better suited to the people they are intended to benefit. It is in line with this that Belfast Stories seeks to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are at its core, supported by a co-designed and inclusive process.
- 3.14 Belfast City Council appointed Smith and Kent Consulting to provide specialist guidance and support, to plan and assist with Belfast Stories consultation and engagement including the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA).
- 3.15 The overall approach seeks to build long-term relationships while using a variety of methods to engage people on the terms they want to be engaged. There are two broad strands to engagement between May 2022 and September 2024. The process includes public consultations at the beginning and end of this development phase with the first of these now being complete with key findings detailed below. The second strand is ongoing engagement with stakeholders including priority groups and the general public.
- 3.16 As an initial step it was agreed at City Growth and Regeneration Committee in May 2022 that a public consultation would be carried out early in the process.

3.17 **Public Consultation**

The first public consultation on Belfast Stories was delivered from August to November 2022 running for 14 weeks. The consultation focused on:

- Raising awareness of Belfast Stories so that people are excited and want to continue to be engaged in its development.
- Making sure that Belfast Stories can be a positive experience for everyone, including consultation on the EQIA, RNIA and Story Collection Framework.
- Asking people how they would like to continue to be involved in the ongoing engagement.

3.18 The Belfast Stories Public Consultation document is included at Appendix 1.

3.19 **Consultation tools and tactics**

Consultation activity was delivered using different tools in different settings and with different audiences and interest groups. Stakeholders were asked for information that was relevant and useful to the decision-making process. This included the Your Say Belfast online consultation hub that hosted:

- Online survey
- Polls
- Downloadable consultation documents
- ISL and BSL videos

3.20 Overall, the online consultation hub welcomed 2,755 visits and 2,495 unique visitors. The documents and videos were downloaded or viewed 234 times, and 149 responses were received to the online survey and two online polls.

3.21 **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

In August 2022, the Belfast Stories equity steering group was set up comprising of 10 experts by experience including: people from Black, Asian, Middle Eastern, inner city, working class and LGBTQ+ backgrounds; older and younger people; disabled and neurodiverse people; and people with caring responsibilities. Two representatives from Belfast City Council's Belfast Stories and Good Relations teams also joined. There were 4 equity steering group meetings during the public consultation, which were attended by an average of 8 people.

3.22 Working through the equity steering group, Belfast City Council and other networks, Smith and Kent facilitated 16 workshops with people and groups who are generally more at risk of missing out. These were attended by 136 people. Smith and Kent also carried out 10 one-to-one meetings with

organisations representing or advocating for people and groups at risk of missing out.

**3.23 Engagement with sectoral stakeholders**

Belfast Stories team ran 31 workshops with the film, tourism, arts, heritage, the voluntary and community, Irish language and public sectors, engaging 238 representatives, including consultees previously engaged by Lord Cultural Resources in the development of the Stories Collection Framework.

**3.24 Engagement with the general public**

Five public meetings took place across the city with information boards also displayed at Clifton House, Girdwood Community Hub, Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre, Crescent Arts Centre, Ulster University, Spectrum Centre, EastSide Visitor Centre and the James Connolly Visitor Centre.

**3.25 Creative Engagement**

In August 2022, Belfast City Council appointed thrive, the audience development agency for NI, and Daisy Chain Inc., a creative practice, to help raise awareness and build excitement for Belfast Stories using an innovative and participatory approach to engagement.

**3.26** Between September and November 2022, thrive and Daisy Chain Inc. engaged a total of 683 participants through a range of creative tools including on-street interviews, street portraits, events and workshops and physical and pop-up consultation hubs in the city centre and surrounding locations.

**3.27 Summary of key performance indicators**

What we did	How well we did it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 2,755 visits and 2,495 unique visitors to Belfast Stories online consultation hub</li><li>- 234 unique visitors viewed or downloaded the consultation documents and videos</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 100% of workshop participants surveyed enjoyed the consultation</li><li>- 96% of workshop participants felt listened to</li><li>- 60% of survey respondents were female</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 149 responses to online survey and polls</li><li>- 65 consultation workshops</li><li>- 1,148 participants engaged through consultation workshops and events</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 21% of survey responses from LGBTQ+ community</li><li>- 20% of survey respondents had caring responsibilities for an older person or disabled person</li></ul>
<p>What difference it made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 82 per cent of those completing the survey or responding at consultation and engagement events are now excited by the concept of Belfast Stories</li><li>- In the survey, 58 per cent of respondents offered stories, experiences, knowledge and networks they could share to help develop Belfast Stories</li></ul>	

### 3.28 Feedback

The consultation exercise was also an opportunity for Belfast Stories to better understand what works well and where there are ongoing challenges in engaging with groups and individuals. Lessons were learnt on the consultation tools that were most effective and where a revised approach should be applied in future. The public consultation produced a wealth of useful information that will be carefully considered to inform the development of Belfast Stories and the next stages of consultation and engagement.

3.29 The full details of feedback received are included in Appendix 2. A summary is outlined below presented in line with the three consultation strands of: *Building excitement*; *Making sure Belfast Stories is for everyone*; and *Continuing the conversation*.

### 3.30 Building the excitement

Across all engagement strands, there was remarkable excitement about the concept of Belfast Stories. For example, in survey responses, 81.6 per cent of survey respondents said they were excited about Belfast Stories. However particular areas of feedback focused on:

- Positive feedback on regeneration and restoration of the heritage building
- Concerns over divisive ‘us’ and ‘them’ perspectives on one hand or the ‘sanitisation’ of the city’s stories on the other hand
- Concerns over displacement and/or lack of investment in existing infrastructure.

**3.31 Making sure Belfast Stories is for everyone**

Responses to these questions indicated that the main barriers that would stop people enjoying Belfast Stories included: concerns over the experience not being considered inclusive; potential to be politically partisan; or lack of trust in how the stories would be represented.

**3.32 Specific barriers in relation to using the building included:**

- Cost
- Feelings of it ‘not being for us’
- Specific design considerations
- Lack of interest/ relevance
- Duplication with what is on offer elsewhere.

**3.33 The role of the community and voluntary sector as trusted intermediaries to engage people was emphasised throughout the consultation, to ensure that people most at risk of missing out were engaged with and barriers to access were addressed.**

**3.34 Over two thirds of survey respondents (68 per cent) agreed that the right people had been identified to be part of the equity steering group.**

**3.35 The majority of people (7 out of 10) agreed that the themes developed as part of the Story Collection Framework are a good foundation for gathering stories. Feedback in this area included:**

- Themes considered most resonant were Authentic, Home and Place.
- Potential barriers identified included lack of authenticity, trust, unconvinced by concept and not inclusive.
- Importance of prioritising the role of local people in collecting stories.
- In practice high levels of willingness to share personal stories.

- A substantial number of consultees raised questions relating to the ethics of story gathering, preservation and presentation.

**3.36 Continuing the conversation**

The information published about the consultation emphasised that this was only the first step in six years of planned engagement. For some people, this early stage made engagement difficult with uncertainty over what could meaningfully be fed back at this stage. However, the final question of the public consultation survey asked, ‘What stories, experiences, knowledge and networks can you share to help us develop Belfast Stories?’ Seventy-three substantive responses were received, equating to nearly three in five respondents (60 per cent) who offered a suggestion for the next stage. This information has informed the actions set out in the Engagement Plan detailed in Appendix 4.

**3.37 Recommendations**

The Public Consultation Report made a number of recommendations in relation to ongoing engagement. These are summarised below and detailed in Appendix 2.

**3.38 Recommendation 1: Publish findings and set out details of next stage of engagement informed by consultation.**

**3.39 Recommendation 2: Continue breadth of engagement with stakeholders however ensure specific activities are delivered that address:**

- Communities – building trust and relationship with particular actions to reach geographic communities on the outskirts and in the immediate vicinity.
- Sectors – moving beyond silos to engage on different terms that focus on specific expertise for example interest in or contribution to Belfast Stories – story gathers, tellers, curators etc.
- Tourism sector – need to have specific engagement actions to ensure Belfast Stories can support the overall visitor experience and enhance existing products and providers.
- Commitment to Irish Language and Ulster Scots engagement to explore good relations opportunities, story collection and themes, representation within the building with the option to consider a language policy for the project and specific EQIA if required.



**3.40 Recommendation 3:** Not all planned activity to raise awareness was able to go ahead during the public consultation. A Communications Plan should be developed and integrated with the Engagement Plan. This should include:

- Key messages and a consistent identity with signposting to an updated Belfast Stories website and engaging social media.
- Potential to embed Belfast Stories activity in the calendar of events and festivals across the city.

**3.41 Recommendation 4:** There are a number of suggestions of platforms to support ongoing engagement. These have been considered against current resources and it is proposed that the following are established at this stage of the project with a commitment for further review at the end of this design stage:

- City Stakeholder Forum. This has been revised and it is proposed that this should be a Stories Network to ensure a clear focus to engagement. It is also proposed that within this Network a user panel and/or inclusive design group could be established. Further consideration will be given to this following the appointment of the design teams.
- Equity Steering Group (to continue). The equity steering group has provided vital insight into equality, diversity and inclusion including facilitating conversations with individuals and groups that would otherwise not be known to the Belfast Stories team. The membership of the equity steering group should be reviewed and refreshed to ensure that we are hearing from voices that may otherwise go unheard.
- Stories Panel with a remit to include ethical framework. This would ensure that the Council accesses the necessary expertise and specialist advice to integrate an ethics function into the story gathering processes and tools.

**3.42 Recommendation 5:** There are plans to start gathering stories in 2023. The Engagement Plan includes recommendations for engaging around story gathering. This should focus on active learning by testing processes and tools with groups that are less likely to share stories (because of their culture, identity or circumstances), in particular older people and the very elderly, whose stories are otherwise at risk of being lost. It should also:

- Build on best practice that currently exists, in particular in relation to safeguarding and ethics.
- Uncover the stories and archives that already exist, including at community level.
- Bring different sectors and stakeholders together to share knowledge and experience and build a community of practice through a conference or event.

3.43 **Recommendation 6:** There is a need to ensure that the project team continues to evaluate the effectiveness of its ongoing engagement by adhering to the evaluation framework and using tools.

3.44 Details of actions against each of these recommendations are included in Appendix 4: Engagement Plan.

#### **Stories Audit**

3.45 The collection of Belfast's stories underpins the Belfast Stories concept and is key to the success of the project in meeting its ambition and delivering the benefits. To support this work, Council commissioned Lord Cultural Resources to develop a Stories Collection Framework. The purpose of the Framework is to support the development of the Belfast Stories project and delivery of Council's wider ambitions as set out in the *Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy*, the *Belfast Agenda*, the ten-year cultural strategy *A City Imagining* and the recently finalised tourism plan, *Make Yourself at Home*. This will provide a Framework for future plans and recognises the important role that many city partners representing the community, cultural and tourism sectors have in telling Belfast stories across the city and throughout the year.

3.46 Members will be aware that the Belfast Stories project seeks to strengthen existing structures and networks to ensure that the benefits of the project are realised on multiple levels. The initial concept for Belfast Stories identified the opportunity for a significant new anchor in the city centre that would not only deliver regeneration in the immediate area but also act as an anchor that would help establish a hub and spoke model to strengthen connectivity and flow of visitors across the city.

3.47 Working in collaboration with key stakeholders and subject matter experts across the city we developed the Stories Collection Framework (SCF) in 2022. The Stories Collection Framework outlined the proposed direction on a number of areas including:

- **Guiding principles** – programmes such as the Decade of Centenaries have established good practice in setting clear guiding principles that inform Council's position and partnership approach.
- **Ethical parameters** – there are important ethical considerations that must be assessed, and necessary processes put in place to ensure best practice is reached across engagement, collecting and telling of Belfast stories.
- **Themes** – the purpose of the thematic framework is to assist in what will be a considerable undertaking to collect and arrange stories. This is an organisational tool and is not how the stories will be presented or told as this will be addressed at the next stage when the curatorial approach will be developed as part of public engagement and design processes.
- **Partnership approach** – this sets out a phased approach to a wider programme and partnership model to support cultural and tourism development in relation to collecting and telling Belfast stories. Whilst this will in turn support the building project, the potential benefits are much wider.
- **Governance** – Council is not a collecting organisation. This requires significant infrastructure and expertise. The governance is linked to the partnership model that locates Council within a wider stories ecosystem for the city and acknowledges the considerable expertise that exists in partner organisations.

**3.48 The Stories Collection Framework is a flexible tool that will evolve over time. It is critical to ensuring the authenticity and diversity of the stories represented in Belfast Stories and across multiple initiatives. In its present form, the framework seeks to:**

- **Explore new ways and perspectives of telling the stories of the people of Belfast.**
- **Bring the people of Belfast into the heart of the initiatives.**
- **Increase accessibility of existing collections across the city and beyond.**
- **Identify and address gaps in stories that have not been collected or that lack visibility.**
- **Encourage long term active engagement with partners creating a network across the city and beyond that will increase opportunities to participate in the cultural life and support neighbourhood tourism.**

- Identify efficient and sustainable ways of sharing and putting collections to their best use.

**3.49** One of the key recommendations from the Story Collection Framework as agreed by City Growth and Regeneration Committee in May 2022 was to undertake an initial Stories Audit to better understand what stories have been collected and current levels of access to these collections. The scope of the audit was to:

- Complete an audit of stories, archives and collections relating to the city of Belfast in line with the mapping tool developed as part of the Story Collection Framework.
- Analyse findings including identification of trends and gaps.
- Identify any access issues or barriers to partnership working.
- Recommendations and roadmap for ongoing story collection and partnership programmes.

**3.50** The detailed audit is included at Appendix 5. The research began with sector mapping to identify the range of organisations and bodies involved in collecting. A series of discovery conversations with stakeholders and experts in the field were held, revealing a wide variety of specific collections to be audited and highlighting the depth of knowledge and insight to be gained from collection holders, community representatives and subject matter experts. These complemented the extensive engagement already undertaken as part of the development of the Story Collection Framework and on an ongoing basis by the Belfast Stories project team. Drawing on these discovery conversations four story collection case studies were developed with each one highlighting important considerations for ongoing partnerships, including ethical considerations, accessibility, representation, rights and preservation of collections that can be applied across the audit.

**3.51** The report presents key findings, an initial analysis of the catalogue of story collections, highlighting collections by sector, overarching themes and content tags to provide a sense of the variety of story collections, their context and contents. Finally, the report considers barriers to ongoing partnership working and accessing collections and offers several key recommendations to overcome these. It also proposes a roadmap for ongoing story collection partnership programmes.

**3.52** The roadmap for ongoing story collection partnership programmes is included in Appendix 5 with further detail on the actions to be delivered against this roadmap as part of the Stories Action Plan detailed in Appendix 6. These include:

- Establishing a Stories Panel to include relevant expertise and specialist advice.
- Deliver a pilot programme for gathering stories.
- Work with the culture and tourism team to embed a partnership approach to heritage and neighbourhood development and investment in the city.
- Support the creative and engagement programme of Belfast 2024 in the role of Strategic Delivery Partner.

#### **Next Steps**

**3.53** It is proposed that the actions set out in the Engagement Plan (Appendix 4) and the Stories Action Plan (Appendix 6) are delivered in line with the next project development stage that will culminate in a second public consultation, completion of RIBA Design Stage 2 and submission of the Outline Business Case to the Department for Economy. An update will be provided to Committee later in 2023 with detailed engagement with Members throughout 2024.

**3.54** Given the strategic importance of the Belfast Stories project, the level of investment and the range of benefits to the city, it is proposed that a Belfast Stories Members' Working Group is established. This group would support regular engagement between Members and the Belfast Stories team and provide advice and oversight as the project develops. Draft Terms of Reference for the group are included in Appendix 7.

#### **Financial & Resource Implications**

**3.55** There are no new financial implications to this report. The budget for the delivery of this phase of development was approved by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in November 2021.

#### **Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment**

**3.56** An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is included in Appendix 3. A Rural Needs Impact Assessment was completed, and it was identified that the programme would be unlikely to impact people in rural areas. People in rural areas were invited to consult during the public consultation. The Engagement Plan (Appendix 4) supports

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**ongoing engagement to ensure that Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs implications continue to be addressed and includes integration of mitigating actions identified in the EQIA.”**

During discussion, the Committee raised concerns in relation to the spread of engagement across the city. The Senior Manager advised that the Programme Team welcomed Members’ support on the matter and would liaise with the Committee to further engage with the boundary areas in particular.

During further discussion, officers answered a range of questions in relation to the use of community-based volunteers and story collection methods and the potential benefits of the programme such as employment and tourism across the city.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report and update on the progress against the delivery of the Belfast Stories programme;
- Noted the findings of the public consultation exercise, the Equality Impact Assessment and the Rural Needs Screening as summarised in the report and detailed in Appendices 2 & 3;
- Agreed the actions as set out in the Engagement Plan detailed in Appendix 4 and summarised at 3.38 to 3.43;
- Noted the findings of the Stories Audit detailed in Appendix 5 and summarised at 3.50 to 3.52;
- Agreed to the actions as set out in the Stories Action Plan detailed in Appendix 6; and
- Agreed to the formation of a Members’ Working Group to provide advice and oversight on the progression of Belfast Stories as set out in the draft Terms of Reference included in Appendix 7.

**Update on the development of Neighbourhood/  
Local Tourism**

(Councillor McDowell in the Chair.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the development of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme (the ‘Programme’) and to seek Members’ approval of the proposed funding model and next steps.**
- 1.2 In April 2022 Members of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee approved the draft tourism plan, *Make Yourself at Home* together with the Year 1 2022/2023 Action Plan of**

priorities. This included a commitment to developing a Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Fund for local tourism, recognising this as one of 3 catalyst projects alongside Belfast Stories and Year of Culture 2024. *Catalyst 1 - Our Place - Developing Local Tourism*: the Tourism Plan recognises that Regenerative Tourism is driven by the relationship between people and place, with an emphasis on uplifting the importance of community in the context of tourism and in particular, the relationship between the visitor and the host.

- 1.3 The Programme provides an opportunity to support the development and roll out of *Belfast Stories* and align with delivery of the *Tourism Plan*, *Cultural Strategy* and Tourism NI's *Embrace A Giant Spirit* brand and values, to deliver enhanced experiences for visitors and act as a catalyst to support the social, economic and physical regeneration across the city.
- 1.4 It is envisaged that this will be an iterative, phased programme. Significant work has already been undertaken by the Tourism Development Unit on the initial phase of the Programme (Phase 1: Development), in collaboration with the Belfast Stories and Culture Unit teams.
- 1.5 In order to maximise synergies and outcomes across key programmes, it is anticipated that the second phase of the Programme (Phase 2: Implementation) will launch once *Belfast Stories*, the *Heritage Audit and Development Plan* and the *Visitor Experience Action Plan* have progressed to a more advanced stage.
- 1.6 Since 2017, Council has supported 2 neighbourhood tourism organisations (EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar) to deliver a *City Connections* programme which promotes cohesion between cultural tourism offers in the east and west of the city. It is anticipated that *City Connections* will be replaced by the proposed investment Programme, which will be open to organisations across the city. To facilitate the transition, it is proposed that Council continue to support both organisations in this interim period and provide financial assistance to the end of this financial year (31<sup>st</sup> March 2024).

## 2.0 Recommendations

To progress development of Phase 1 of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme, we request Members' consideration of the following:

- 2.1 Members are asked to approve investment in independent sectoral facilitation to conduct developmental engagement which will identify needs, gaps and opportunities, alignment of the City Connections programme and further inform and the parameters of the Programme (Phase 2).
- 2.2 Members are asked to approve investment in a 2-year programme to develop and enhance tourism products and experiences across the city, sharing and distributing the benefits of a vibrant tourism sector throughout local neighbourhoods.
- 2.3 Members are asked to approve interim funding to continue support for the City Connections programme until the end of current financial year.

3.0 **Main report**

3.1 **Strategic Context**

To ensure that an investment programme is developed in a robust and cohesive manner to meet sectoral needs, the Programme will be informed by key interdependent strategic priorities and projects, including *Visitor Experience Action Plan*, the *Cultural Strategy*, *Heritage Audit and Roadmap for Development*, and *Belfast Stories*, as detailed below.

- 3.2 Through investment in the development of high-quality tourism products aligned to our core strategic objectives, visitors may be drawn to neighbourhoods beyond the city centre delivering authentic experiences, promoting increased dwell time and spend, uplifting economic growth and capacity in local communities.
- 3.3 Further opportunity has been identified to enhance and extend the visitor experience and promote a cohesive, expanded visitor journey of exploration beyond the city centre. Creating a regenerative tourism offering that takes into consideration the appeal of neighbourhoods in delivering authentic experiences and the benefits of regenerative tourism.
- 3.4 As Members will be aware, Belfast Stories aims to create a unique visitor experience that captures the city through its powerful stories. Offering visitors, a new way to see and understand Belfast, it will generate authentic experiences that engender a greater sense of connection and belonging, both for local people and visitors to our city.



3.5 The offer will become the 'go to' first stop for visitors to Belfast and the wider NI region, orientating visitors and linking them to other city-based / regional visitor attraction.

3.6 At the current time, the hierarchy of stories / stories framework is still at a developmental stage, however in time and when fully developed this will become intrinsically linked to the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme parameters. The development phase will enable industry to fully understand the opportunity presented by Belfast Stories and consider experiences that will enhance and support interconnected Visitor experiences and the role that communities can play in the overarching visitor experience.

3.7 Cultural Strategy

The ten - year Cultural Strategy for Belfast, *A City Imagining* states that in order to truly engage with our visitors and ultimately grow market share, Belfast needs to ensure that visitors connect strongly with the city's people, culture, places and heritage. To help give focus to the challenge of creating unique destination experiences which meet visitor need, the strategy identifies four themes:

- Tell me more (A city of stories) e.g. character and charm of Belfast, make the visitor feel at home
- Not what it seems (A city of contrasts) e.g. intriguing and complex history of Belfast, character of the place
- Hidden depths (A maritime city) e.g. waterways, rivers, loughs and shores
- Homespun (Made in Belfast) e.g. industrial heritage, cultural venues, innovation, creativity.

The proposed Programme will be developed in cognisance of these themes to shape immersive and engaging tourism experiences across the city.

3.8 Heritage Audit

It is also envisaged that the Programme will be shaped in alignment with the *Heritage Audit and Roadmap for Development*, aligning investment that recognises, promotes and protects the city's cultural heritage in all its dimensions, both tangible and intangible including the plurality of the city's cultural narratives. Work on this development plan is currently underway and will provide additional understanding of enabling infrastructure and assets that will support the success of Belfast Stories and visitor engagement.

### **3.9 Tourism Strategy**

In April 2022, Council approved the 'Make Yourself at Home' 10-year Tourism Plan for Belfast, recognising the importance of tourism to the city's economic growth. The *Make Yourself at Home* Tourism Plan places community at its heart. Respect for the local context, to ensure tourism-derived benefits are shared and inclusive, is evident in all four of the strategic themes - Grow, Position, Experience and Sustain.

- 3.10** Need has been identified for a specific programme to support the development of neighbourhood-based tourism experiences. Work to date has demonstrated that some areas of the city are more advanced than others in terms of neighbourhood tourism and leveraging the opportunity it presents. Whilst some areas have organisations undertaking work on visitor servicing and tourism development, it is clear that many neighbourhoods currently lack the capacity to bring forward strong proposals that would appeal to visitors.

The development of a suitable investment programme would be further strengthened by independent engagement with a range of organisations across the city to identify sectoral needs and opportunities and to support and inform future Programme phases.

- 3.11** Benchmarking research work has demonstrated that neighbourhoods are uniquely positioned to offer the visitor the immersive, authentic experiences they are seeking:

- Celebrating local culture, heritage and enterprise.
- Accessing open and green spaces.
- Co-creating authentic Belfast experiences, linked to the city's key stories.
- Enjoying day to night food and hospitality.
- Amplifying and extending the impact of the city's main existing visitor attractions.

- 3.12** Cities across Europe (of comparable size to Belfast) have successfully implemented ambitious programmes which place communities at the heart of regenerative tourism. Research highlights the importance of uplifting capacity, quality of product and visitor experience in local neighbourhoods beyond the city centre and considers how San Sebastian, Ljubljana, and Berlin have employed local tourism initiatives to develop sustainable growth in visitor numbers and product development (*Local Tourism in Belfast: Developing the Offer, Deloitte 2018*).

**Visitor Experience Action Plan**

3.13 At the current time, the *Visitor Experience Action Plan* is at a developmental stage, with a view to driving the effective implementation of the actions set out in the *Visitor Experience Plan*, which identifies neighbourhood tourism as one of six specific gaps in the city's current visitor experience offering. Once fully developed, the Action Plan will prioritise development activity linked to the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme parameters to address identified need and drive economic growth, sharing the benefits of the tourism sector with communities across the city.

3.14 **Purpose of The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme**

The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme aims to:

- Engage in facilitated dialogue with sectoral and community partners across the city to identify needs, gaps and opportunities for tourism offers to drive increased visitor footfall, dwell time and spend in local neighbourhoods.
- Provide short term support (over a maximum period of 2 years) to develop authentic and financially sustainable new cultural tourism products, or enhancements to existing offers, which will bring vitality to local neighbourhoods, local residents and visitors.
- Encourage the development of plans which build capacity for city neighbourhoods to connect to the broader tourism offer, enabling local communities to become part of the Belfast visitor experience.
- Promote enhanced visitor dwell time in the city and extend the economic benefits beyond the city centre.
- Extend the journey of visitors to *Belfast Stories*, encouraging further exploration of its narratives across wider city neighbourhoods.

3.15 **Programme Focus and Scope**

The Programme will facilitate funding of priority outcomes linked to the Tourism Plan and support actions set out under the four strategic themes contained within the *Make Yourself At Home* Tourism Strategy - Grow, Position, Experience and Sustain. It will also provide a flexible approach to Neighbourhood Tourism within the City, while recognising the differing stages of development and capacity across the city. While it is envisaged that the investment programme may be

extended beyond the initial two year period, the first two programme phases will have specific areas of focus:

**Phase One - Programme Development**

- 3.16** In this first phase, significant focus will be placed upon scoping and benchmarking work to inform and define programme parameters, aims and projected outcomes, in alignment with interdependent projects. This work has already been progressed by the Tourism Development Unit, in collaboration with the Belfast Stories and Culture teams.

To further shape Programme parameters, we will prioritise the procurement of independent facilitation services to conduct developmental and engagement activity with the sector and across neighbourhoods in the North, East, South and West of the city. This work will include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Conducting a needs audit and gaps analysis within neighbourhoods.
- Identify visitor needs and opportunities to increase dwell time and spend in neighbourhoods.
- Engage with sectoral stakeholders to build confidence in neighbourhood tourism offers and explore the development of new products and experiences, or enhancements to existing offers.
- Facilitate sectoral dialogue around issues relating to connectivity, sustainability, accessibility and capacity.
- Advise on potential programme linkages to Council's strategic priorities and Tourism NI's Embrace a Giant Spirit brand values and themes.
- Outline opportunities for the alignment and integration of the previous support delivered via City Connections.

- 3.17** Awareness of the initial phase of the programme will be raised via messaging across the council website and digital channels. Active participation will be sought through an open call to potential partners, stakeholders and collaborators from the city's tourism and community sectors. An audit process will also identify appropriate groups and organisations to shape, inform and benefit from the proposed programme.

- 3.18** It is envisaged that the engagement activity will achieve the following benefits for participants:

- Promote a greater understanding of the economic and social value of neighbourhood tourism to both communities and tourism businesses.

- Enhance understanding of the opportunities presented by *Belfast 2024* and *City Deal* programmes to promote economic growth, build capacity and connect communities into the emerging broader tourism offer.
- Enable local communities to become part of the Belfast visitor experience
- Foster collaborative partnerships and networking synergies to promote the development of clustered tourism offers.

3.19 The work outlined above will further inform the Programme to ensure it is robust and fit for purpose when it is opened during Phase 2 of the proposal. Committee will be updated on the outcomes and learnings resulting from the facilitation work in advance of the programme progressing to Phase 2.

Within this first programme phase, we also propose to continue support for the City Connections programme until the end of this financial year in its current format.

3.20 Phase Two – Programme Implementation

Phase 2 will be scoped in response to the work undertaken in Phase 1, with focus placed upon an open call for projects aligned to council's *Visitor Experience Framework, and Action Plan*, which will provide a co-ordinated approach to product and experience development in the city. Phase 2 will also prioritise the development of high-quality tourism products linked to Belfast's key narratives, which encourage visitors to continue their journey beyond the *Belfast Stories* attraction and extend their experience across the wider city.

3.21 Investment Priorities

The investment priorities for this programme are:

- Product Development: development of new, high quality local tourism products and experiences or enhancements to existing high-quality offers across the city.
- Capacity Building: in collaboration with teams across the Economic Development Unit, the Programme will invest in projects to strengthen community capacity to shape, deliver and contribute to visitor experiences. The ambition is to ensure all parts of the city have the opportunity to benefit from tourism investment.

- It is envisaged that applications will be considered for investment in products at one of three distinct phases; concept, planning, operational.

**3.22 Anticipated Programme Outcomes:**

The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme will, in the long-term, support the delivery of the Visitor Experience Framework through the development of financially sustainable tourism products which draw visitors into local neighbourhoods, immersing them actively in the locale, promoting increased dwell time and spend in the area and uplifting skill, capacity and confidence in local communities.

It is anticipated that the parameters and outcomes of the programme may evolve throughout the lifetime of the *Make Yourself at Home* Tourism Plan in response to challenges, opportunities and needs identified across the city.

- 3.23** A post-programme evaluation report will be brought to Committee, incorporating lessons learned and recommendations to shape future funding initiatives in response to programme outcomes, opportunities and sectoral needs.

**Timeframe**

Phase 1 (research and development) of the project is currently underway, with facilitation and engagement activity to commence once investment is approved.

It is anticipated that work will continue until March 2024, with a view to Phase 2 (implementation) commencing from April 2024.

Further progress reports will be provided to Committee in due course.

**3.24 Financial and Resource Implications**

Approval of the Committee is sought for a total investment of £500,000 to support the ambitions of this Programme across a two year period.

It is anticipated that budget will be sought from City Deal reserves for the 2023 – 24 and 2025 periods of activity.

**2023 - 24 (Research and development phase)**

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**City Connections current funding                      £50,000**

*Committee meeting on 5 April 2023 approved £25k each to Fáilte Feirste Thiar and EastSide Tourism to support City Connections programme of work, 1 April to 30 September 2023.*

**City              Connections              extension              of              funding,  
1 Oct to 31 March 2024      -      £50,000**

**Independent facilitation services      -      £50,000**

**2024 – 25      (Implementation phase)----- Investment  
programme- £350,000**

**3.25      Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs  
Assessment**

**The Tourism Plan: *Make Yourself at Home* has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EAIQ) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNS). Any issues raised during the public consultation have been addressed in the final plan, which was approved at committee meeting on 6 April 2022. No further public consultation will be required will be required for this investment fund.**

**Neighbourhood tourism is one of the outputs of the Tourism Strategy, promotion of opportunity for all Section 75 groups to be celebrated within the programme is important to it's success."**

During discussion, the Director explained further the role of Belfast as a gateway for Tourism across Northern Ireland and confirmed there were plans to cluster relevant visitor experiences later in the programme. He highlighted that there was a Heritage Audit underway which was considering signage, products and wayfinding.

After discussion, the Committee:

- **Approved investment of £50,000 for independent sectoral facilitation to conduct developmental engagement which would identify needs, gaps and opportunities, alignment of the City Connections programme and further inform and the parameters of the Programme (Phase 2);**
- **Approved an investment of £350,000 in a 2-year programme to develop and enhance tourism products and experiences across the city, sharing and distributing the benefits of a vibrant tourism sector throughout local neighbourhoods; and**

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- Approved interim funding of a further £50,000 to continue support for the City Connections programme until the end of the current financial year.

(Councillor Nic Bhranair in the Chair.)

**Future of Cultural Multi Annual Grants (CMAG)**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in August 2019, a new ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast, A City Imagining, had been agreed. As part of this strategy a new investment approach was approved including phased implementation of new funding programmes. Similar to the Belfast Agenda, the recommended investment model for culture proposed a new partnership approach to supporting the cultural sector, with the aim of sustaining and developing accessible cultural activity and infrastructure across Belfast. This investment was central to creating positive cultural, social and economic impacts for the city, delivering on our overall targets for the period, positioning Belfast as a regional driver, and creating the conditions for long-term transformation.

The first phased implementation of the cultural investment model commenced with the opening of a competitive funding programme for cultural multi-annual grants for the period April 2020 to March 2024. It was agreed that these multi-annual grants would cover two main areas:

- Arts and heritage organisations, which had a year-round programme of cultural activity (Anchor four-year grants and enable two-year grants); and
- Festivals and events organisations, which had a festival or event with an audience of 65,000 or more (Imagine four-year grants), or an audience of 10,000 or more (Activate two-year grants) by end of grant period.

The Director of Economic Development advised that, in advance of the new financial year in April 2024, it was planned to launch CMAG in August 2023 with approval of awards and contracts by March 2023. He outlined the following summary of the timeline:

- Open call for application submissions – early August 2023
- Information sessions for applicants – August 2023
- Submission deadline for application – September/October 2023
- Eligibility check, scoring, officer assessment and independent assessment – October to December 2023
- Committee Approval of awards - January 2024
- Council Ratification approval of awards - February 2024

Similar to other grants, Cultural Multi-Annual Grants would be advertised widely and assessments would be made, and scoring applied under three key areas of criteria:

- Quality of programme: this included their vision, content, audience experience and marketing and audience development;



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- Impact of activity: this included how the programme contributed to the four strategic themes (A City Belonging, A City Challenging, A City Creating and A City Exploring) and how they will monitor and evaluate that impact; and
- Readiness for investment: this included planning, financial management, staff, governance, and environmental impact.

The Director of Economic Development provided an overview of the Principles of the Assessment Process, together with the findings of the review of the current scheme. He highlighted that detailed feedback across each area was available in [Appendix 1](#).

He summarised the recommendations from the review, and pointed out that the report highlighted a range of recommendations intended to further enhance the grant process, impact and evaluation, namely:

***Relationship management and support***

- The report highlighted the importance of one-to-one relationship management, stating that 'staff in BCC should also be supported to take on a more developmental role, including training, time to develop relationships and time in lieu to attend funding events and activities.'. Whilst much of this developmental work was impacted by the pandemic and staff changes in the Culture Unit, the importance of relationship management had been reflected in the new structure of the culture team and its corresponding workplans.
- Respondents also reflected the importance of wraparound support, particularly on areas such as accessibility and environmental sustainability. This support, including establishing a Green Arts Forum and a partnership with the University of Atypical to train disability champions, had been reflected in the Culture Workplan 23-24 which was agreed by members in the April 2023 Committee.
- Several respondents also indicated their desire to build relationships with Councillors. To address this need, officers would explore options for information and networking sessions between CMAG clients and members.

***Eligibility criteria***

- Arts and heritage eligibility criteria, including audience and turnover were based on historic baselines. However, the impact of the pandemic had created peaks and troughs and recent baselines were no longer robust. It was therefore recommended that arts and heritage organisations be allowed to base their application on projections (as per festivals and events applicants) with the caveat that historic performance would be used to assess whether projections were realistic.

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- Similarly, the pandemic had had an impact on audience numbers over the previous three years. It was recommended that the Council analyse recent monitoring returns to consider whether audience eligibility criteria was still appropriate.
- It was recommended that the Council should consider removing the requirement for a minimum number of volunteers. Instead, it should ensure that it was satisfied that volunteering was considered within the assessment criteria as an indicator of A City Belonging, Challenging or Creating.

***Duration and level of funding***

- To manage expectations, the Council should agree in advance whether applicants could expect a significant change in funding or should request an incremental increase or standstill and communicate this to applicants. The Council should also consider telling applicants the average value of grants made in the first round and the number and value of grants it intended to make in the second cycle.
- The report stated that Council should consider awarding all grants on a four-year basis, subject to developing a longer-term project fund of scale that could support new and emerging organisations. Officers were mindful of this feedback and the desire for longer term funding from across the sector. However, such a material change to the scheme would require extensive screening and consultation and would be considered for any subsequent reviews of CMAG.
- The report recommended that the Council should review existing project funding with a view to introducing a longer-term project fund of scale that would reduce pressure on CMAG and help support a diverse ecosystem. Officials would all engage with the sector to investigate opportunities for dynamic and longer-term project funding.

***Application process, evaluation and monitoring***

- The report identified the need to provide support for applicants through information sessions and advice clinics, alongside clear consistent messaging to ensure that all applicants understand the purpose of the fund. These information sessions had been built into the planned rollout of the programme alongside a communications plan to announce the dates of opening and closing the grant as far in advance as possible. A more enhanced evaluation process, in consultation with grantees, would be implemented to enable evidence to be collected throughout the next four-year cycle.

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- Many respondents across all sectors recommended that the Council should change the names of the funds. It was recommended to change the name of the funds to refer to them by their descriptors (For example: four-year arts and heritage, two-year festivals).

***Assessment process***

- There were several recommendations relating to the assessment process, including providing applicants with more detail on the assessment process and criteria, using external subject matter expertise to assess at least Imagine applications, providing training to new assessors and reviewing the application form should be reviewed to identify any questions or attachments (such as board minutes) that could be removed or made only applicable to four-year applicants. It was also recommended that the administration of all grants should be migrated back to Central Grants Unit. All of these recommendations would be incorporated into the planned rollout of the programme.

***Transition***

- The Council should consider how it would support any existing Imagine or Anchor client that applies unsuccessfully in the second cycle. However, it was not recommended that the Council provides a formal scheme such as Transition. Rather, given the variance in Anchor awards in particular, this should be done on a case-by-case basis.

In relation to Pathfinder for 2023/24, the Director of Economic Development explained that, in February 2022, £79,768 had been agreed in relation to four Pathfinder grants which had been designed to address a specific gap in funding. Members had agreed that awards were extended for a further two years from 2022-24. The programme was designed to support those organisations that had a specific development need and were currently not in a position to drawdown core funding from the public sector. Based on monitoring of these awards to date, agreement was sought to continue this scheme for the second of the two years in line with the portfolio of two-year Cultural Multi-Annual Grants 2022-2024.

He advised that, given that the establishment and future of Pathfinder was directly related to CMAG, officials would continue to assess whether the scheme was still applicable during and after the rollout of CMAG. Recommendations on whether to continue the scheme beyond 2024 would be brought to the Committee for consideration in late 2023.

He pointed out that there were no new financial commitments relating to Cultural Multi Annual Grants and would be met with existing departmental budgets for 2023-24. An allocation of £79,768.00 would be made in 2023/24 year to extend the Pathfinder Awards and again this would be met from existing departmental budgets.

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After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report and agreed to open cultural multi-annual grants in August 2023 for Arts and Heritage organisations and Events and Festivals for funding from 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2028, subject to final recommendations being agreed by Committee in January 2024; and
- Approved the continuation of the Pathfinder Awards in 2023/24.

**Update on Music Strategy**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in December 2022, members agreed the music strategy, ‘Music Matters: A Roadmap for Belfast’ including its corresponding priorities. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on progress to date and seek approval to the allocation of funding to a number of important strands of the music strategy.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- **Note the contents of this report and the progress made against areas of the music strategy, ‘Music Matters: A Roadmap for Belfast’**
- **Approve the allocation of £5,000 towards the costs of an international exchange with London, Ontario Canada**
- **Allocate £20,000 to the creation of a pilot micro grants scheme for artists.**

**3.0 Main report**

- 3.1 At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in December 2022, members agreed the final ‘Music Matters: A Roadmap for Belfast’. Mirroring A City Imagining cultural strategy the music strategy has 4 strategic themes, each having 4 strategic priorities. There are a number of actions and recommendations given for each priority catering to many areas of need across the music sector.**

**Theme 1: Place artists at the heart - Recognising the value of creators**

**Theme 2: Nurture the sector - Strengthening the structures to support those who guide and invest in creators**

**Theme 3: Ignite the live experience - Liberating the live music sector as a major catalyst for cultural and economic growth**

**Theme 4: Unlock the unifying power of UNESCO - Sharing the gift of music with the people of Belfast.**

**3.2 Update on Music Board**

The Music Strategy sets out governance recommendations for Belfast Music, including the formation of a Belfast Region Music Board, comprising between 15 and 20 members, to bring to life the UNESCO City of Music designation.

The board will help to embed music in all communities across the city to make music a sustainable career option for creators and people who support them. Following agreement of the full Music Strategy in December 2022, an open call was launched for applications to join the Belfast Region Music Board with applications closing in February 2023.

Members received an update on the recruitment process and selection of the board in April 2023. Since this meeting, the final selection of board members is confirmed and details of board members are available in Appendix 1.

- 3.3 As noted by members in the April 2023 Committee, there was a lack of applications from the marching bands community. Officials have engaged with members of this sector and the music board has agreed to co-opt a representative from this sector to the board from June 2023.**

The board is meeting monthly, with two meetings held to date, to map further initiatives to roll out in this financial year and beyond. A Chair and Vice-Chair will be appointed at the July meeting.

**3.4 Update on current initiatives**

In April 2023, Members received an update and agreed financial allocations for a range of ongoing initiatives. At this meeting, members agreed to allocate £20,000 to work in conjunction with the Music Venue Trust (MVT) to run a programme specifically targeted at venues in Belfast. Officials have been engaging with MVT to launch the scheme and this will be announced in mid-June 2023.

- 3.5 On 1st and 2nd June, the Output Conference was delivered as a key event within the City of Music programme, featuring a full programme of panels, workshops and conferences, followed by an evening showcase of live music for free to the public. Activity included music and creative digital showcasing and networking events, business development panels and workshops and meetings and networking with key international creative digital companies. The second day of output featured a community engagement and networking event at 2 Royal Avenue, followed by a Music Industry Session where delegates heard from delegates from Hannover, Germany regarding their journey as a UNESCO City of Music.
- 3.6 Priority 2.2 within Theme 1 of the Music Matters strategy relates to sourcing performance opportunities for Belfast music creators to perform internationally. In April 2023, Members received an update on an international exchange with UCoM City London, Canada, that will begin in July 2023. This opportunity will allow for two folk-music artists, namely Ciara O'Neill and Niall McDowell, to be provided with attendance at a song-writing camp, two pre-festival performances, one main-stage performance at Home County Music and Art Festival, as well as music industry 1-1 meetings across Ontario with agents, bookers and other personnel that will benefit the Belfast artists. In October 2023, two artists and talent agents from Ontario will arrive in Belfast to appear at the Belfast International Arts Festival and take part in a wraparound programme of similar activity. It is proposed to allocate £5000 towards the costs of this exchange, matching the contribution from UCoM City London, Canada
- 3.7 Ongoing development
- UNESCO Music delivery is funded from existing recurring and non-recurring departmental funds. At the meeting of the Special Policy and Resources Committee in April 2021, members agreed an allocation of resources to the delivery of the music strategy. As contained in the Belfast 2024 paper, £900k has been allocated towards City of Music and the Music Strategy for delivery on key developmental activities across 2023/24 and 2024/25 respectively.
- 3.8 There are a range of pre-existing commitments for the remaining financial year, including Gradam Ceoil bursaries, the creation of a music support service, delivery of the Output Conference, the delivery of a Music Industry Mentoring Programme, international exchanges and the Pipeline Investment Fund for music venues.

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- 3.9 With the remaining budget for the 2023/24 financial year, Council is collaborating and consulting with the Belfast Music Region Board on the priorities most necessary to fulfil during this period. The budget will be split between the four themes of the strategy and each theme will have priorities that will be completed. It is anticipated that the profile of spend against themes will be:**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Areas covered within initiatives</b>	<b>Budget profile</b>
<b>One – Placing Artists at the Heart</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enhancing funding programmes for music creatives – e.g micro-grant scheme for artists</li><li>• Professional development opportunities to educate and equip music creators</li><li>• Opportunities for music creatives to connect and collaborate with their peers locally, nationally and internationally.</li><li>• Series of initiatives to ensure that music is inclusive, accessible and open to everyone in our city.</li></ul>	<b>£90,000</b>
<b>Two - Nurture the Sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial assistance available to freelancers, organisations and businesses whose primary role is to enable, support and develop creators.</li><li>• Professional development opportunities to educate and equip music organisations and businesses</li><li>• Funded opportunities to engage and support the future generation of creative freelancers, cultural leaders and music business entrepreneurs</li></ul>	<b>£70,000</b>

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<b>Three – Ignite the Live Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a thriving, sustainable and strong live music sector including a review existing licensing frameworks</li> <li>• Enhance Belfast’s night-time economy, culture and governance</li> <li>• Implementing initiatives to ensure the health and safety, both physically and in terms of mental well-being, of performers and attendees at live music events.</li> <li>• Supporting greening the live music sector</li> </ul>	<b>£40,000</b>
<b>Four - Unlock the unifying power of UNESCO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced strategic communications to make it easier for locals and visitors to find out about the music events and activities taking place across Belfast.</li> <li>• Ensuring citizens and visiting audiences have access to incredible and unique music experiences</li> <li>• Partner with tourism bodies, Sister Cities and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network to promote Belfast as a world class music destination</li> </ul>	<b>£40,000</b>

**3.10** A detailed and profiled delivery plan, containing initiatives to address these areas, will reviewed and discussed at the Music Board in June and July 223. A further paper outlining the initiatives and their detailed corresponding budgets will be presented to members in August 2023.

**3.11 Micro-Grant scheme**

Theme 1 of the Music Strategy has a focus on artist development, with priority 9.5 including a commitment to fund



initiatives to alleviate the costs incurred by music creators in Belfast. It is proposed to allocate £20,000 to develop a micro-grant programme, available to individual musicians, to assist with costs incurred within their artform. The structure and criteria for this scheme will be developed in collaboration and consultation with the Belfast Music Region Board and will be launched in Autumn 2023.

### **3.23 Financial and Resource Implications**

- Allocate £5,000 towards the costs of this exchange, matching the contribution from UCoM City London, Canada
- Allocate £20,000 to the creation of a pilot micro grants scheme for artists.

These costs are to be met from existing departmental budgets allocated to music development.

### **3.13 Equality & Good Relations Implications**

This music strategy is part of the overarching cultural strategy for Belfast that has been subject to EQIA. An equality screening has been completed and mitigating actions will be considered as part of any initiatives.”

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of this report and the progress which had been made against areas of the music strategy, “Music Matters: A Roadmap for Belfast”;
- Approved the allocation of £5,000 towards the costs of an international exchange with London, Ontario Canada; and
- Approved the allocation of £20,000 to the creation of a pilot micro grants scheme for artists.

### **Department for Communities' Access and Inclusion Programme 2023-24**

It was reported that the Council was expected to be invited to apply for and administer the Department for Communities' Access and Inclusion Programme 2023-24 on behalf of Belfast based arts, culture (including leisure) or heritage organisations in early July 2023.

The Director of Economic Development explained that the Department expected to formally launch the programme as a competitive process in late June 2023 and the Council had been advised that a total fund of £624,000 was available for this programme.

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He advised that the Department for Communities' Access and Inclusion Programme aimed to:

- i. Improve access to arts, culture and active recreation venues across NI for people with disabilities;
- ii. Make arts, cultural and active recreation venues more inclusive across society; and
- iii. Increase participation in arts, culture and active recreation activities by people with disabilities.

The Director of Economic Development highlighted that the Council oversaw the assessment and recommendation of projects via a competitive open call internally and externally and would be responsible for delivery of all projects in receipt of funding.

The Culture Development Unit managed the 2018/19 and 2019/20 Access and Inclusion Programme within Belfast and received support for 24 projects with total value of £412,554, of which five were Council projects. In 2020/21, they administered 11 Access and Inclusion grants with a total value of £185,443 and 9 Programme grants in 2021/22 with a total value of £143,667.

The Director of Economic Development pointed out that the total fund available in 2022/23 reduced by almost 50%, they administered 3 external projects and one Council project with a total value of £99,701. Examples of projects supported included improved access to the City Hall and the Tropical Ravine; easier access for audience and participants to not for profit cultural venues across the city; installation of new specialised playground facilities and changing spaces; and provision of equipment to provide immersive theatrical experiences for children with complex needs.

He explained that capital works and equipment costs were eligible under this programme. The maximum grant available was £30,000, (the maximum project cost could not exceed £80,000), and applicants were required to contribute at least 10% of the total project costs. To receive a £30,000 grant, therefore, applicants must provide a contribution of at least £3,000.

He advised that, this year, the Department for Communities was particularly keen to welcome applications for Changing Places facilities, accessible equipment for play parks and projects that would impact positively on sustainability and climate change. Projects must be completed on or before 31st March, 2024. The Department for Communities had advised that no extensions would be considered to the project completion date.

He confirmed that contribution of at least 10% of project cost was an eligibility condition. This resource would need to be sourced by the applicant and the Council had staff resources to oversee the administration of the Programme.

During discussion, one Member raised concerns in relation to the time constraints of the programme and the need for the Council to have projects prepared for the anticipated annual funding for successive years. It was suggested that the Council write to the DfC to highlight this reoccurring issue.

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After discussion, the Committee agreed that the Chief Executive exercise his delegated authority to grant permission for the Council to apply for, promote, assess and manage the Access and Inclusion Programme 2023-24.

The Committee also agreed to write to the Department for Communities to reaffirm its concerns in relation to the short timeframe available for the delivery of the Fund.

**Christmas Programme Update**

The Committee considered the following report:

**“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:**

- 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 Christmas Programme 2023**

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.

- 3.2 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.**

- 3.2.1 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

3.2.2 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.

3.2.3 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.

3.3 Officers have considered and presented three possible programming scenarios and associated budget requirements as below:

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.

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

**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.

<b><u>Category</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>	<b><u>Indicative cost</u></b>
<b>Entertainment</b>	<b>Variety of performer throughout city centre, window animation, parade, small allocation to 2RA</b>	<b>£41,000</b>
<b>Lighting</b>	<b>Lighting projections, displays, lighting for window animation, includes equipment</b>	<b>£26,000</b>
<b>Production</b>	<b>production management, Riser stage, PA, ancillary equipment,</b>	<b>£12,000</b>
<b>H&amp;S, licensing, legal</b>	<b>licenses, first aid, insurance, H&amp;S advisor, stewarding</b>	<b>£20,500</b>

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<b>Traffic Management</b>	road closure, parking bay suspension, traffic management contractor	<b>£4,200</b>
<b>Survey</b>	<b>Socio-economic survey</b>	<b>£5,100</b>
	<b>Programming 2 Royal Ave for the evening</b>	<b>£5,000</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>£115,000</b>

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.**

<u>Category</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Indicative cost</u>
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<b>Entertainment</b>	<b>Variety of performer throughout city centre, window animation, parade,</b>	<b>£37,700</b>
<b>Lighting</b>	<b>Lighting projections, displays, lighting for window animation, includes equipment</b>	<b>£15,000</b>
<b>Production</b>	<b>production management, Riser stage, Larger PA, ancillary equipment,</b>	<b>£16,000</b>
<b>H&amp;S, licensing, legal</b>	<b>licenses, first aid, insurance, H&amp;S advisor, stewarding</b>	<b>£15,000</b>
<b>Traffic Management</b>	<b>road closure, parking bay suspension, traffic management contractor</b>	<b>£4,200</b>
<b>Survey</b>	<b>Socio-economic survey.</b>	<b>£5,100</b>
<b>Subsequent Weekends</b>	<b>Programming of 2 Royal Ave from opening weekend, throughout period, with additional weekend animation &amp; music</b>	<b>£30,000</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>£123,000</b>

**Health and Safety Consultation:**

**3.8 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 Environmental Impact:

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.

### 3.12 Future Extension of the Lighting Scheme:

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.**

- 3.13 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.**

**3.14 Financial & Resource Implications**

**There are no financial implications to this report. All expenditure is within existing departmental budgets and approvals.**

**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.**

**Any extension of the existing Festive Lighting Scheme would require additional resources.**

**3.15 Equality & Good Relations Implications**

**None.”**

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development explained further the lighting scheme costs and the additional Health and Safety measures required to return to a “Pre-Covid” Switch on Style event, as outlined in Option 1. In response to a Member’s question regarding events outside the City Centre, he advised that the potential for Christmas events on arterial routes across the city could be investigated, however, the budget of the Programme was limited, and that a report would be submitted to the Committee for consideration in due course.

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Maskey,  
Seconded by Councillor Lyons,

Resolved - The Committee agrees to Option 3: Combination of a Switch-on event and city-centre wide programme of animation and entertainment as per 2021 and 2022 (as per March Committee report), with an allocation for subsequent weekends, as outlined in the report, and that a report be submitted to a future meeting regarding the potential for Christmas events on arterial routes across the city.

Accordingly, the Committee:

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- agreed on the approach/format to Christmas 2023 outlined in option 3 –namely a Combination of a Switch-on event and city-centre wide programme of animation and entertainment as per 2021 and 2022 (as per March Committee report), with an allocation for subsequent weekends;
- Noted that a report be submitted to a future meeting regarding the potential for Christmas events on arterial routes across the city; and
- Noted the contents of the report in relation to the Lighting Scheme.

**Growing Business and the Economy**

**Response to Place 10x - Call for evidence**

The Committee was reminded that the Department for the Economy (DfE) had launched its 10X Economic Vision in 2021. This was the Department's plan to create a pathway to transform the economy in a way that is inclusive, innovative and sustainable.

Since its publication, the Department had been working to consider how the practical implementation of overarching objectives set out in the 10X Economic Vision was to be achieved. It had issued a number of related documents such as the Skills Strategy (Skills for a 10X Economy) and had been working on appropriate metrics to track progress. While the budget situation in all departments was currently unclear, it was proposed that DfE investment would be re-profiled to align with the 10X ambition – and this would mean that all delivery supported by the Department would be directed towards activity that could support the 10X ambition.

The Director of Economic Development advised that one of the key considerations for the strategy was the issue of “place”. He explained that, to consider how this should be reflected in departmental investment, the DfE had recently launched a call for evidence relating to sub-regional economic approaches – working title “Place 10X”.

The call for evidence involved the following six prescribed questions:

1. What is the problem we are trying to solve?
2. What geographic areas should Place 10X cover?
3. What is expected of delivery partners?
4. What interventions could or already occur?
5. What does success look like?
6. Is the Department's view of place and use of Place 10X correct?

He highlighted that the issue of place-based approaches to economic development and investment had been a recurring theme in recent policy documents.

In 2022, the 11 councils had commissioned a piece of research on “A place-based approach to supporting economic development in Northern Ireland”. The high-level findings of this work were:

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- Place-based approaches were closely aligned with the devolution debate. However, in practice, they could range from stronger partnership working on basis of agreed plans (for example - community planning model) to additional devolution of responsibilities (regeneration of particular interest in this field);
- The need for all regional approaches to identify sub-regional variations – but with the ability to flex depending on the issue and in line with local geographies/working areas;
- Opportunity to use Shared Prosperity funding to re-position role of councils in developing and delivering solutions that reflected local needs (within an overall framework); and
- City and Growth Deals demonstrate value of aggregating demand – are the current structures the right ones on an ongoing basis and for all economic matters?

A summary of the six questions posed and draft responses to each of these had been collated and were attached in [Appendix 1](#).

The Director of Economic Development pointed out that the Committee should note that this was a ‘call for evidence’ rather than a fully-developed approach to place-based economic development – this would follow once responses to this consultation were analysed.

The Committee noted the Place 10X call for evidence and agreed to the draft response to the call, as set out in [Appendix 1](#).

### **Strategic and Operational Issues**

#### **Notice of Motion - Update**

The Committee was provided with an update on the Motions which had been assigned to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee. It was highlighted that the following three Motions had been recommended for closure:

***Category 1 Recommended Closures:***

- Letter to DfI re Belfast Cycle Network Delivery Plan; and
- Presentation re GP services in Belfast.

***Category 2 Recommended Closure:***

- Development of Community Wealth Building framework.

The Committee:

- Noted the updates to all Motions that this Committee was responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1; and

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- Agreed to the closure of the 3 Motions, as outlined.

**Belfast Bikes Quarter 4 Report**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

- 1.1 To update Members on the performance of the Belfast Bikes scheme for 2022-2023 financial year (year 7 of operation).**

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to:**

- note the update of the Belfast Bikes performance for 2022-2023 financial year (year 7 of operation)
- note the update to the notice of motion regarding free access for young people;
- note the progress regarding phase one and phase two expansion.
- note the update that tender will be prepared for a procurement of a new Public Bike Hire Scheme

**3.0 Main report**

**3.1 Background**

The Belfast Bikes scheme was launched in 2015 as part Belfast City Council’s physical investment programme. The Department for Regional Development provided initial capital funding for the scheme as part of their Active Travel Demonstration Projects budget. The scheme launched with a network of 30 docking stations and 300 bikes. The scheme has been operated by NSL continually since inception using bikes and supporting infrastructure from ‘Nextbike by TIER’. The scheme currently operates with 455 bikes (including those in reserve for new stands) and 52 docking stations.

**3.2 Expansion of the Scheme**

At CG&R on 12 May 2021 it was agreed that an additional four Belfast Bikes docking stations would be deployed using DFI Active Travel funding. All stations below are now operational

- Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre
- Olympia Leisure Centre

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- Kennedy Centre
- Waterworks

Council officers are currently liaising with the operator and supplier to improve the supply chain issues for future installations.

- 3.3 At CG&R on 9 June 2021 it was agreed to proceed with an additional 15 docking stations. At SP&R on 18 June 2021 members agreed for £500,000 to be invested in the expansion proposal.
- 3.4 Works are ongoing for the design and installation of eight stations in Phase 1 (to be installed in 2023):
- North: Yorkgate and Shore Road
  - West: St Mary's College and Shankill Road
  - South: Lisburn Road and Malone Road
  - East: Castlereagh Road, Upper Newtownards Road.

There are plans for seven stations in Phase 2

- 3.5 As previously agreed by the committee, discussion and agreement through Area Working Groups is required to determine exact locations and consider those against the Site Expansion Matrix. These site options and discussions with Area Working Groups commenced in November 2022. The AWGs have agreed the exact locations in their respective areas.

#### **Operational Performance**

3.6 **Availability**

Following the ongoing challenges sourcing replacement bike parts, this issue has been resolved and the number of bikes on the street during Q4 has increased. The average daily bikes on the street during Q4 was 295.

- 3.7 An additional 180 bikes have been purchased to facilitate the ongoing docking station expansion, and this stock will be filtered onto the street, so availability levels are expected to further increase in coming months.

#### **Membership**

- 3.8 There were 16,282 registered Belfast Bike users at the end of Q4. Nextbike by Tier the current provider changed their payment operator during Q4 and as such the details of non-

active members are no longer recorded as registered users. Going forward all active users will need to update their information with the new supplier.

- In Q4 'Pay as you go' (PAYG) memberships remained the most popular form of membership, accounting for 83% of users.
- Annual memberships accounted for 15% of users. There is an ongoing trend of users switching from annual membership to PAYG.
- Casual memberships have greatly reduced, accounting for just over 1% of memberships, due to the introduction of PAYG.

### Journeys

- 3.9 There have been 1,350,153 journeys since the scheme was launched including 24,118 journeys during Q4 Year 7.

Although this is a decrease of 20% from the same period in Year 6 (which was an exceptionally busy year for the scheme), journeys during this period also decreased by 24% against Q4 average since the scheme commenced, which poor weather contributed to.

### Vandalism

- 3.10 Members will be aware that vandalism is an ongoing problem. Upgrades to the forks to help prevent the unauthorised removal of bikes has been successful however, damage is now being caused to the rear wheels and to the docking points while bikes are being forced from docking stations.
- 3.11 There were 52 instances of vandalism in Q4. This is much lower than previous periods and lower than the quarterly average by 31%. Vandalism costs payable by the Council for this period is £5,782. Whilst this figure is significantly lower than the previous quarter, it is higher than the quarterly average (£2,734)
- 3.12 Members should note that generally the number of vandalism incidents has decreased in recent times, however vandalism costs have increased due to the higher cost of parts associated with a higher quality of bike. Bikes were upgraded to 'SMART' bikes in 2021. For comparison, in the same period in 2017, there were 154 instances of vandalism at a cost of £5,237 i.e. lower incidents but at a higher cost. See Appendix 1 tables 2 and 3 for annual comparison.

- 3.13 Members should also note that following the upgrade to 'SMART' bikes, the amount of theft has decreased due to GPS tracking in the bike allowing for recovery. The operator is very proactive at retrieving missing bikes.
- 3.14 The bikes operator continues to deliver operational improvements and community engagement initiatives with PSNI to help decrease vandalism incidents.

**Subscriptions and Usage Revenue**

- 3.15 Income from fees and charges in Q4 was £19,930. This is 48% lower than average for this period. This could be due to a number of contributing factors including poor weather and change of payment provider. Income from fees and charges for the 2022-2023 financial year was £176,171

3.16 **MARCOMMS**

Marketing activity during Q4 included:

- Social Media messaging and video promotion on 'Lock it Dock it'
- Article in Winter City Matters magazine (circulation of 160k homes); on new stations at Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre, Olympia Leisure Centre, The Kennedy Centre and the Waterwork.

Belfast Bikes currently has 5.1k followers on Twitter; 1.7k on Facebook; and 1.1k on Instagram.

3.17 **Operator contract**

NSL continues to operate the Belfast Bikes scheme, with a contract renewal available until 2024. Council staff are currently reviewing the scheme and will make future recommendations for the management, operation and potential expansion of the scheme as part of a new procurement package.

3.18 **Sponsorship**

Sponsorship ended in September 2022 and council officers are currently assessing procurement options for a new sponsor of the scheme.

**Response to Notice of Motion**



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- 3.19 Following a Notice of Motion from Councillor O'Hara the Committee agreed on 4th March 2020 to investigate '*as part of the current strategic review of the Belfast Bikes Scheme, consideration be given to granting free access to young people 25 years of age and under to the scheme*'.
- 3.20 Belfast Bikes operator, NSL, added date of birth (D.O.B.) as an essential criteria for users from 13 October 2022. It would be prudent to wait approximately six months to allow the majority of users to upgrade their information before accurate age demographics can be determined.
- 3.21 However, initial reports indicate 53% of users fall within the '25 and under' age group. Providing free usage to under 25's is likely to have a significant detrimental impact on revenue generated from the bike scheme, which directly contributes to operating costs.

3.22 **Update on Covered Cycle Stands city-wide**

Whilst Covered Cycle Stands are not part of the Belfast Bikes scheme, both initiatives are aligned to the Bolder Vision with a focus on improvements in the active travel provision and infrastructure across the city. Covered Cycle Stands are part of the Active Travel Enablers project.

3.23 **Phase 1**

Under the DfI Sustainable and Active Travel elements of the DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, 10 covered cycle stands were funded city-wide. Locations were agreed in previous CGR Committee and the status is as follows:

<b>Gasworks</b>	<b>Installed July 2022</b>
<b>St. George's Market</b>	<b>Stand delivered but still awaiting DfI approval</b>
<b>Grosvenor Community Centre</b>	<b>Installed September 2022</b>
<b>Shankill Leisure Centre</b>	<b>Installed July 2022</b>
<b>Belmont Park</b>	<b>Installed August 2022</b>
<b>Inverary Community Centre</b>	<b>Installed August 2022</b>
<b>Belfast Zoo</b>	<b>Installed August 2022</b>

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<b>Waterworks</b>	<b>Installed August 2022</b>
<b>Belvoir Activity Centre</b>	<b>Installed August 2022</b>
<b>Mary Peter's Track</b>	<b>Installed September 2022</b>

**3.24 Phase 2**

Members received an update on the DfI funding for the Active Travel Enabling Projects in March 2022 that outlined the projects, budget and timeframe for delivery. In terms of the covered cycle stands, officers drew upon the priority areas identified by Sustrans, and these locations were also assessed in terms of the deliverability within the timeframe as well as the key criteria aligned to cycle infrastructure provision.

Following a procurement process, a supplier has been appointed for the next 10 covered cycle stands being delivered currently.

**3.25 Financial & Resource Implications**

**Finance**

There are no specific financial or resource implications contained within this report.

**3.26 Equality or Good Relations Implications**

**None.”**

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development answered a range of Members' questions regarding the installation dates of Phase 1, the potential for an eBikes scheme, sponsorship, patterns of use and return rates. In response to a Member's question regarding the Belfast Cycle Network Plan linking with the Belfast Bikes Scheme, the Senior Development Manager confirmed that the presentation from the Department for Infrastructure on the Metropolitan Transport Plan would set out the proposed plans for the future of sustainable travel.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the update of the Belfast Bikes performance for 2022-2023 financial year (year 7 of operation);
- Noted the update to the notice of motion regarding free access for young people;
- Noted the progress regarding phase one and phase two expansion; and

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- Noted the update that tender will be prepared for a procurement of a new Public Bike Hire Scheme.

**Issues Raised in Advance by Members**

**Cultural Mapping Report (Alderman Lawlor to raise)**

Alderman Lawlor requested an update on the Cultural Mapping Report (Phase One), in particular, the research gaps which had been raised at a previous Committee in relation to the omission of some Musical Venues and Theatres across the City.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development clarified that the Report was not publicly available and the report was being amended to rectify the issues which had been raised.

The Committee noted that an updated report on the Cultural Mapping Project would be submitted to the Committee in September for consideration and the Director of Economic Development would continue to engage with Members on the issues which had been raised.

Chairperson