



Subject:	Performance Update on Belfast Bikes Scheme
Date:	7 th December 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Fintan Grant, Operational Development Manager Cathryn Mc Oscar, Assets Development Officer

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To update Members on the performance of the Belfast Bikes scheme in quarter two (1 st July 2023 - 30 th September 2023) of year 8 of operation.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• note the update of the Belfast Bikes performance for Y8 Q2 (July-September); financial year• 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• note an Expression of Interest has been circulated for a new sponsor for the Public Bike Hire Scheme
3.0	Main report
3.1	Background <p>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</p>

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 588 (including those in reserve for new stands) and 56 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
- Kennedy Centre
- Waterworks

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 £980,000 to be invested in the expansion proposal (£480,000 non-recurrent funding for Belfast Bikes expansion and £500,000 non-recurrent reallocated from public space programme).

3.4 Works are ongoing for the design and installation of eight stations in Phase 1 (to be installed throughout 2023):

- North: Shore Road - complete & operational
- West: Coláiste Feirste – complete & operational
- South: Malone Road (Elms Village) - complete & operational
- East: Castlereagh Road – complete & operational
- North: Yorkgate – **on hold due to train station construction**
- West: Glencairn Park – **to be installed in Autumn 2023**
- South: Lisburn Road (Drumglass Park)- **to be installed in Autumn 2023**
- East: Upper Newtownards Road (Sandown Carpark) – **to be installed late 2023**

3.5 There are plans for seven further stations in Phase 2 in year 2023/24. Planning for those are on hold as officers are currently preparing documents for a tender process to appoint a new provider/operator. Locations for the seven stations will be identified and brought back to the AWG and to be implemented in the new scheme.

3.6	<p><u>Operational Performance</u></p> <p>Availability</p> <p>Following the ongoing challenges sourcing replacement bike parts, this issue has now been resolved and the number of bikes on the street during Q2 has increased. The average daily bikes on the street during Q2 was 385</p>
3.7	<p>An additional 180 bikes have been purchased to facilitate the ongoing docking station expansion, and this stock has been filtered onto the street, so availability levels have further increased.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Membership</u></p> <p>There were 26,974 registered Belfast Bike users at the end of Q2. This is a 19% increase of users from the previous quarter. Nextbike by Tier the current provider changed their payment operator during Q4 (2022-2023) 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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Q2 'Pay as you go' (PAYG) memberships remained the most popular form of membership, accounting for 83.5% 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.
3.9	<p><u>Journeys</u></p> <p>There have been 1,422,196 journeys since the scheme was launched including 36,043 journeys during Q2 Year 8.</p> <p>This is a decrease of 36% from the same period in Year 7 (which was a very busy year for the scheme) and also 12% lower than with the 5-year average for Q2.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Vandalism</u></p> <p>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.</p>

3.11	<p>There were 299 instances of vandalism in Q2. This is much higher than in previous periods and higher than the quarterly average by 54%. Vandalism costs payable by the Council for this period is £12,838. Whilst this figure is significantly lower than the same period last year it is higher than the quarterly average (£3,689).</p>
3.12	<p>Members should note that generally the number of vandalism incidents had increased in recent times. However, 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.</p>
3.13	<p>The bikes operator continues to deliver operational improvements and community engagement initiatives with PSNI to help decrease vandalism incidents.</p>
<p><u>Subscriptions and Usage Revenue</u></p>	
3.14	<p>Income from fees and charges YTD is £67,958. This is 57% lower than estimated for this period and is partly due to change of payment provider and associated issues and the fact that there currently is no sponsor for the Bike Share Scheme.</p>
3.15	<p><u>MARCOMMS</u></p> <p>Marketing activity during Q2 included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of a specially animated & fun Belfast Bikes video – promoting the different docking stations across the city. This was promoted on Belfast City Council and Belfast Bikes social media channels. • Promotion of newly installed docking stations on social media channels • Social media messaging on the new Belfast Bike branding of other council assets e.g. Belfast Castle, 2 Royal Avenue, Belfast Zoo, St George's Market <p>Belfast Bikes currently has 5k followers on Twitter; 1.8k on Facebook; and 1.1k on Instagram.</p>
3.16	<p><u>Operator contract</u></p> <p>NSL continues to operate the Belfast Bikes scheme until March 2024. Council staff have reviewed the scheme and a recent Expression of Interest (EOI) was completed as a market testing exercise. This is used to inform the next stage of the tender process. It is suggested to brief parties about the main specifications of the tender documents before it will be</p>

published.

3.17 Sponsorship

Sponsorship has ended and council officers released an Expression of Interest (EOI) seeking a sponsor for the scheme. This process is currently ongoing.

3.18 Response to Notice of Motion

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".

3.19

Belfast Bikes operator, NSL, added date of birth (D.O.B.) as an essential criterion for users from 13 October 2022. From this data we now know that the majority of Belfast Bike users fall within the "25 and under" age group.

3.20

From (October 22 – June 23), the 16 – 25 age group accounted for 52% of users across the scheme.

3.21

If free usage was implemented for under 25's- then it would have resulted in a loss of income for the current financial year and previous 3 years as per the table below.

	Year 20 / 21	Year 21 / 22	Year 22 / 23	Forecasted 23 / 24
Loss 52% of bike usage revenue	£70,205	£177,901	£91,609	£72,169

3.22

At its meeting in September 2023, the Committee considered an update on the Motion. Furthermore, the Committee agreed that it would consider this as part of the rate setting process for 2024/25 and to write to the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Health to request investment in this proposal, to be delivered on an annual basis.

3.23

A response was received from the Department for Infrastructure advising that the operation of the Belfast Bikes scheme is a matter for council. However, if DFI was to consider future capital investment, they would seek assurance that the operation of the Belfast Bike Scheme remains sustainable.

<p>3.24</p> <p>3.25</p>	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p> <p><u>Finance</u></p> <p>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 its operating costs and sustainability.</p> <p>Members are asked to confirm if they wish the additional financial allocation to cover the loss of revenue to be considered as part of the rate setting process however members are advised that any financial implications, from any decision, have not yet been factored into the current rate setting process.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>none</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1: Belfast Bikes - Performance Data Q2 (July 2023- Sept 23)</p>