



Subject:	Major Events Update
Date:	January 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Kerry Mc Mullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A summary of the Maritime Festival Developmental plans• Activity delivered as part of a Christmas programme in November - December 2023• An update on St Patrick's Day Celebrations 2024• Request for funding to support Seachtain na Gaeilge
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• note the contents of this report on the Maritime Festival• note the contents of this report on recent Christmas activity• note the update on St Patrick's Celebrations arrangements

3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Belfast Maritime Festival 2023</p> <p>The purpose of this part of the report is to provide Members with a summary evaluation of the 2023 Maritime Festival held on 9th & 10th September. The report will also give consideration to options for the 2025 Belfast Maritime Festival Programme.</p> <p>This year's 'Belfast Maritime Festival' was held on 9th & 10th September 2023 in the Titanic Quarter with a programme that stretched from Queens Quay to HMS Caroline / Titanic Distillers and Sailortown. The aim was to create an inclusive Maritime event that appeals to all demographics celebrating all that is good and creative about Belfast in neutral accessible locations in the city, highlighting our current tourism, heritage, culture and maritime offering and showcasing our existing landmarks in conjunction with partner organisations and stakeholders.</p> <p>The 2023 festival aimed to meet the development objectives set out in the Connected by Water strategic recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Festival Ready for Investment - A Festival with Diverse Appeal - A Giant Opportunity - A Distinctly Belfast Experience - A Festival Belonging
3.1.1	<p><u>A Festival Ready for Investment</u></p> <p>This years festival carried a budget from the financial reserve from 2022, in addition to the approved 2023 budget. The festival was successful in receiving TNI International Events funding to the value of £60,000. In addition to this, the event received a small income from food traders and sail training opportunities resulting in a top line budget of £409,630.00. The event was coordinated and implemented under a governance structure consisting of 3 subgroups – Marcomms, Production / Logistics and Creative. Each subgroup reported into a Programme Board with senior representatives from Belfast City Council, Belfast Harbour and Maritime Belfast Trust. All groups met on a monthly basis opening the opportunity to increase partner circle and reach, with the aim to strengthen both the commercial and creative festival profile.</p>
3.1.2	<p><u>A Festival with Diverse Appeal</u></p> <p>The brand identity chosen for the 2023 event was determined in line with the TNI International Events Funding criteria and agreed TNI / BCC / VB brand playbook targeting <i>Active Maximisers</i>: Young families wanting inspirational and educational experiences for their children and <i>Culture Connection Seekers</i>: lovers of the arts, history and the outdoors.</p>

Visit Belfast and BCC Corporate Communications developed a regional and out of state campaign, with the initial press release issued to the public on 24th July 2023 with Visit Belfast hosting the festival landing page for all collateral and content relating to the festival and promoting any shared marketing opportunities for partners and stakeholders. The campaign was rolled out on Outdoor, Radio, Digital channels and Social Media platforms, promoting visitbelfast.com as the call to action with the following statistics recorded:

	Format	Adult Coverage	Frequency	Impacts
ROI Maritime	Outdoor	724,000	4	2,896,000
	Radio	917,000	4.2	3,868,000
	Total	1,591,260	6	6,764,000
NI Maritime	Radio	674,260	4.1	2,778,149
	Radio Social	-	-	31,968
	Competition	-	-	2,081
	Total	674,260	4.1	2,812,198
Totals	Radio	1,591,260	4	6,646,149
	Outdoor	724,000	4	2,896,000
	Radio Social	-	-	31,968
	Competition	-	-	2,081
	Total	2,315,260	4	9,576,198

In addition Cool FM hosted a competition on their website for 4 weeks, with a reach of 32,000, an entry page reach over 2000 and 724 entries.

The Maritime Festival Landing Page had 9,535 visits, with the Maritime Festival events page having 7,320 visits totalling 16,855 visits.

The Organic Social Media:

Facebook

Impressions:58,811

Engagement: 2,214

Video Plays: 3,296

Twitter

Impressions:26,016

Engagement:398

Video Plays: 2,104

Instagram

Impressions:7,096

Engagements: 15

Campaign Video Ad

A Social Media Video was created, utilising video content from previous Maritime Festival, to promote this year's Belfast Maritime Festival. The video was shared organically as well as

set-up as an advert across Facebook & Instagram (via TNI social media profile's) and Visit Belfast's Twitter and TikTok Ad account. The advert targeted all of Northern Ireland and Dublin corridor audience.

Total Video Ad Campaign Results:

Impressions: 2,667,646

Engagements: 165,060

Video Plays: 920,509

Visit Belfast Dedicated sponsored E-zine to NI and ROI database

NI E-zine sent: database 37K

ROI E-Zine sent: database 13K

NI E-zine Open rate: 25.6% Click through rate: 4.6%

ROI E-zine Open rate: 18.4% Click through rate: 2.1%

Our corporate communications ran a local campaign for T sides with Translink targeting 464,030 people and digital hubs displaying 100,800 ad plays. The festival was also advertised online with Belfast Telegraph and Daily Mirror/Belfast Live online.

Belfast Telegraph

Total Impressions 72,001

Total Clicks 113

Click Through Rate 0.19%

Daily Mirror/Belfast Live Online

Total Impressions 60,010

Total Clicks 113

Click Through Rate 0.19%

The festival brand Identity chosen was a reflection of the overall programme and the programme was coordinated to maintain a family friendly audience, as well as expanding the appeal to a broader audience demographic.

The festival incorporated a trail experience with a Kids' Zone in Queens Quay, offering creative and educational workshops, showcasing little creatures and sealife from the region, sensory play and interactive activity of various art forms.

The vessels berthed (Granuaille, Gunilla, Leader and Harbour Pilot) at the festival were in situ at Queens Quay and Abercorn basin for the public to get onboard. Sailability (Accessible Sailing) and Brian Boru provided sail opportunities during the festival and Belfast

Yacht club displayed the Titanic Model. There was a 'have a go' water experience on hydrobikes for the public to try.

The Arc came alive with local talent providing circus and street theatre on the hour every hour. We programmed live sketch drawings of the event from local artists for those that wanted a calm relaxed experience watching the artists at work.

Hamilton Dock was a showcase of the community codesign photography exhibition that captured raw images of Belfast making up 8 displays that spelt out 'Maritime', providing an excellent photo opportunity for the festival and complementing the overall theme. Hamilton Dock offered the opportunity to catch site of a rare SS Nomadic Lifeboat for the duration of the festival, along with wooden boat demonstrations, oar making, weaving and rope making.

The Titanic Slipways hosted new additions to the festival, including Science Street for curious minds, the Belfast Bazaar selling quirky Belfast local craft and produce and popup street food selling cuisine made from locally sourced ingredients. The trail ended at HMS Caroline & Titanic Distillers with theatre and trad trails.

There was a full diverse music programme across the entire site showcasing Belfast's local musicians with busking at the Lagan footbridge, local bands at the Soundyard and Hamilton Dock, Trad Trails at HMS Caroline and Titanic Distillers and headline acts on the main stage compared by BBC Radio 1 presenter Gemma Bradley.

There was a 'Sail back to Sailortown' evening music event in St Joseph's Church and 2 evening Tours of the Antrim side of the river each day, as well as tours of the Templemore Baths. We worked with bars and restaurants in the area to highlight the extended evening offering as part of the overall festival.

3.1.3

A Giant Opportunity

Key findings from the Economic Impact Report and Visitor Survey from the 2023 Maritime Festival show a growth in out of state visitors, overnight accommodation and economic return from the 2021 event. The increase is expected as we recover from the effects of Covid.

The report findings for the event include:

- An attendance figure of 80,000
- 41% of Visitors from elsewhere in NI (32,800)
- 10% of Visitors from GB & ROI (8,000)
- 14% of visitors were staying in accommodation (11,200)
- The estimated direct spend was £1,326,839.26
- 74% gave the festival an overall rating of 8-10, including 25% who rated it as 'Extremely Good'

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 97% of visitors said that the Maritime Festival improves Belfast’s reputation as a host for events like these; and improves the reputation of Belfast as a place to visit • 97% agreed that there should be more events like this in Belfast <p>This years programme increased the creative ambition and programming by introducing the uniquely Belfast Experience and aligning with our 10 year Cultural Strategy in engaging local suppliers, talent and produce with approximately 70% of festival participants from the Belfast area, with 20% from elsewhere in Northern Ireland.</p>
3.1.4	<p><u>A Distinctly Belfast Experience</u></p> <p>The event location lends itself to the many heritage assets on the Maritime Mile and the overall programme worked complementary to the in situ existing asset provision and tourism infrastructure, encouraging visitor attendance. The heritage sites were given the opportunity to share marketing opportunities, additional programming or discounts as part of the overall event programme.</p> <p>To progress the event towards the next iteration in 2025, consideration is required for the strong creative direction and theme at the onset of the new festival planning cycle. The creative subgroup formed under the Maritime Governance Structure, will consider measures to address the wider programming.</p>
3.1.5	<p><u>A Festival Belonging</u></p> <p>Maritime Belfast Trust successfully engaged the local community to deliver the photography codesign piece for 2023. The festival offered sail training opportunities to develop and upskill the community and highlight the potential for future careers in the industry with a positive social impact. Sailability provided accessible sailing throughout the duration of the event.</p>
3.1.6	<p><u>Maritime Festival Development for 2025 Delivery</u></p> <p>Belfast 2024 will review commissions within the 2024 programme, that could potentially lend itself to the overall 2025 Maritime Festival through feedback and participation with large scale programming interventions. Any potential codesigns or programme pieces created locally will be carried forward to the Maritime Programme Board for recommendations.</p> <p>The Maritime Programme Board debrief was held in early December 2023 and a number of event developmental actions were agreed for progression ahead of the 2025 event. It was agreed to establish the financial model based on biannual delivery, while researching more potential avenues to increase revenue/sponsorship. The initial delivery structure will include a planning session with partners to establish the date, footprint, the wider programme and composition of the delivery structures. The festival identity will remain for 2025, with the ambition for a marketing lead and a central</p>

marketing budget to exercise greater lead - in time. Officers will continue to work with the industry to highlight an extended evening / weekend programme, while highlighting offers and discounts available for the festival.

The potential to deliver evening events will continue to be explored with the development of partnerships with hospitality and tourism business / offerings and products in the locality. Through the delivery structure, there will be consideration for wider programming and how the local cultural and creative sector can be engaged at an earlier stage in order to create something new and a unique offering for the festival. There will be a continued focus on the opportunity for skill building, through developing the existing sail training programmes, education and codesign pieces.

3.2 Christmas Programme 2023 Evaluation

In 2021 and 2022 and largely as a result of Covid, the City Events Team adopted a different approach to the Christmas programme which replaced the traditional switch-on ceremony. The programme consisted of a combination of creative initiatives such as street performance, projections, music, window dressing and lighting installations, utilising local artists, creatives and designers to create an authentic and engaging experience for all throughout the festive season. In 2022, 2 Royal Ave hosted an uplifted events programme 'Winter's Den'.

A decision to revert to the traditional format of the Christmas Lights switch-on at the front of City Hall was taken on 4th October 2023. The 'Let's Glow Belfast' Christmas Lights Switch-On event successfully took place on Saturday 18th November 6.30pm-7.30pm, with a celebration of local music, theatre and dance, compered by the Cool FM Breakfast Team (media partnership) with Lord Mayor and special invited guest Dáithí Mac Gabhann officially switching on the lights.

Due to the nature of the t-shaped event site comprising Donegall Square North and Donegall Place (Fountain Lane and Castle Lane cross), a busy city centre with live traffic and heavy pedestrian footfall, it was necessary to close roads to facilitate event infrastructure installation and de-rig. The City Events Team engaged extensively with stakeholders such as Translink, MarketPlace Europe, DfI, public hire taxi and the business sector, as well as with internal council units, to coordinate the build, event delivery and de-rig with as minimal impact as possible to normal business. Various road closures and suspensions were in place 2am Saturday 18 through to 5am on Sunday 19 November.

In excess of 10,000 citizens and visitors gathered to enjoy the event. The event was free and ticketed via Visit Belfast. There was an initial release on the morning of 8 November, with

Members further requesting a second release to accommodate those who couldn't secure tickets during the morning release. The City Hall Christmas Market opened at 12 noon the same day.

The geographical breakdown of tickets booked through Visit Belfast revealed 53% Belfast postcodes and 45.5% Rest of NI postcodes. Less than 0.5% were Republic of Ireland or Rest of UK postcodes and less than 1% were unknown.

Marketing and Communications Activity

Council operated a digital campaign with online advertising to promote the Let's Glow Belfast Christmas Lights switch-on event taking place on 18th November, as well as Winters Den season in 2 Royal Avenue. Council directed people to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/christmas URL, where the 18th November event information was displayed prominently on the page.

Bauer NI were the official media partner and offered a strong package across Cool FM and Downtown from 1 Nov – 18 Nov, including promo trails, competition package, live reads, 2 interviews with Lord Mayor, and outdoor broadcast with Downtown's Neal McClelland. Pete, Paulo and Rebecca from Cool FM's Breakfast Team were comperes on stage at the event.

Visit Belfast offered box office and visitor servicing, as well as related marketing activity such as digital screen display and social and digital campaign.

The event was featured on the front cover of City Matters, circulated to just under 160k homes w/c 6th November and full event details of the switch-on and Winter's Den were highlighted on page 4 and in the What's On section.

A press release was issued 2nd November to promote the event. From 2 Nov – 25 November, media coverage was secured on Belfast Live, Belfast Telegraph, NewsLetter, Belfast Media Group, Yahoo UK, 4NI, Belfast Times and Planet Radio. In addition the media partnership with Bauer NI included coverage across Cool FM and Downtown.

Christmas Market

The Christmas Market ran this year from Saturday 18th November to Friday 22nd December. The opening weekend welcomed approximately 63,000 people. Market Place Europe Limited (MPEL) has held the Continental Markets contract for the past 18 years and were awarded the contract for the next 3+2 years. Changes to the contract this year include a larger seating area and food court area and an enhanced Christmas experience with themed and animated walkways. There was over 100 stalls and the new contract also set out the requirement for 40% local traders and 60% continental traders. There was a Santa's Grotto supporting the Lord Mayors Charity and a return of free school educational tours, which was extended this year to out of school hours childcare and youth service providers.

	<p>MPEL also ran the Jolly Big Business Boost offering a free chalet to a young business. When the Continental Market trades at the front of the city hall the footfall increases into St Georges Market and throughout the city Centre. This year the market was the busiest ever.</p>
<p>3.2.1</p>	<p><u>Alignment to the Cultural Strategy</u></p> <p>The `City Imagining Strategy` approved by Council has a focus on supporting developing local arts and cultural organisations, through funding, commissioning and capacity building. In this regard, Oh Yeah were engaged to arrange a performance by FYA Fox, who is a graduate of their creative talent development programme; Lyric Theatre were invited to show an extract of their upcoming Christmas production Hansel and Gretel; DU Dance were engaged to choreograph a dance piece by their youth performance group `Belfast Boys` and Fortwilliam Musical Society were invited to produce a medley of singalong Christmas favourites. Also on the bill were leading NI soul band Manukahunney and by invitation of Lord Mayor, St Patrick's Primary School choir. Meet and greet performers were also engaged from 4 local companies.</p> <p>Following on from 2022's model of uplifting the Christmas programme in 2 Royal Avenue, the Winters Den opened on Saturday 18th November and continues to Sunday 7th January 2024. The Winters Den season features a selection of free entry festive activities. Belfast based design agency UsFolk were re-engaged to provide artwork for Winters Den, comprising decoration inside the building, an AR interactive game and animation. The Winter's Den footfall from 18th Nov- 13th December is 30,255.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening weekend footfall 4919 (3353 18th & 1566 19th) with outdoor animation provided by Firepoise and Play Make Believe, with live music and a twilight market inside. • UsFolk animation projections in situ 1st Dec-2nd Jan 2024. Very well received by the public and building users evidenced by feedback online • 37 funded workshops/events, supported by 27 external events/markets/performances. All events advertised as part of Winter's Den are free to the public. • 27 community groups and 14 schools engaged including 15 community/school musical performances • 9 markets including approximately 140 makers/groups/artists (Potters Markets, Twilight Markets, BCC Pop up Markets and the Big Art Sale) • Collections for Cash for Kids, Stuff a Bus and Community Search and Rescue • Santa's Post Office (Belfast One BID) opened 18th Nov- 17th Dec and remains very popular • Venue dressed by MayWe including a living 12ft tree that will be replanted in January, an art installation by local artist Elaine Taylor and themed with cut out stands and a supporting AR trail by UsFolk. • Lord Mayor in attendance at Dog Fashion Show and Jingle and Jazz events.

<p>3.2.2</p>	<p><u>Let's Glow Belfast Christmas Lights Switch-On 18th November - Socio-Economic Survey results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A total of 118 face-to-face interviews were conducted with visitors to the Let's Glow Belfast event. A further 137 interviews were completed online by visitors who had booked tickets to the event. 255 interviews were completed in total. The overall estimated direct spend for the Let's Glow Belfast event was £193,950. • 50% of survey respondents were from the Belfast City Council area, and a further 45% were from elsewhere in Northern Ireland. A small number of visitors were from GB (1%), ROI (1%) and outside the UK and Ireland (2%). 6% of survey respondents were staying in accommodation away from home. • The total average spend per group was £86.20. 78% ate out during the event. • 75% of survey respondents attended the event with children. • 46% said they had no preference on when tickets became available, with 28% preferring them to be released in the morning and 24% after work hours. • Over half (52%) said they preferred the setup for this event, while 40% would prefer a ticket free event with entertainment hubs and a parade at various sites across the City Centre. • 51% gave the Let's Glow Belfast event an overall rating of between 8 and 10, including 19% who rated it as '10 - Extremely good'. At the other end of the scale, 14% gave it a rating between 1-3. • 90% thought that events like these encourage people to come to Belfast, while 93% of those living in Belfast said that events like these improve their sense of well-being and community. • 62% of respondents living outside NI confirmed that the event makes them more likely to visit Belfast again, while 75% commented it makes them more likely to recommend friends and family to visit Belfast. • 92% agreed that there should be more events like this in Belfast. • 94% said that they felt safe during the event. • 83% of respondents stated the Let's Glow Belfast event improves the reputation of Belfast as a place to visit; 80% said it improves Belfast's reputation as a host for events like these.
<p>3.3</p>	<p>Festive Lighting Scheme</p> <p>The Switch On event marked the turning on of the festive lighting scheme throughout the city centre, comprising a number of cross street features and pole mount features. In liaison with Facilities Management, the lighting of the City Hall façade also took place the same evening. Belfast Christmas Market.</p>

4

St Patrick's Day Update

At the SP&R Committee held in November, members requested a report be submitted to CG&R at the earliest opportunity to outline the challenges of the 2023 procurement process and an update on the award of the other elements of the St Patrick's Day programme.

Belfast City Council's previous model for the delivery of St. Patricks Day celebrations in Belfast, consisted of a Carnival Parade along a city centre route, followed by a free music concert for all ages in the city centre from 1.30pm-4pm. In 2021, a new approach was adopted for St Patrick's Day Belfast 2022 & 2023. Following an expression of interest, Council agreed to directly invest in the local sector through four Creative Development Awards. These projects then progressed from feasibility to pilot stage for the Festival in 2022. Following the delivery of the pilot projects in March 2022 an evaluation process was completed, with all four projects again supported in 2023.

2024 - 2026 Approach

A tender for a similar approach to the Expression of Interest was developed and as before, the alignment to the Cultural Strategy.

This resulted in four Lots being offered for:

- A Parade / Pageant
- City Centre Weekend Music Programme
- Cross City Music Showcase
- An "Open Call"

Tender issued 28th July 2023, closed 30th August 2023.

The outcome of this process was that one submission was received for Lot 3 only, which was subsequently awarded to Féile an Phobail. Lots 1, 2 and 4 received a Nil return.

Further to discussions with CPS, Beat Carnival and Tradfest were approached at the end of October to deliver the Parade element and City Centre Weekend Music Programme respectively. Tradfest subsequently to deliver Lot 2, and this was agreed at SP&R in November.

Lots 2 and 3 are being delivered by Feile and Tradfest respectively. With Beat declining the opportunity to deliver Lot 1 in mid November, Officers have taken forward the option to deliver Lot 1 (the Parade) in-house, due to timescales and the limited availability of organisations to provide assets. However, discussions have since taken place with a number of organisations on the provision of professional performance, community engagement, and parade assets.

	<p>Lot 4 sought to consider open call proposals. There was no response to this tender and subsequently council have received a request to support Seachtain na Gaeilge, a 17 day festival organised by Conradh na Gaeilge. The festival gives an opportunity to everyone to enjoy Irish, whether a fluent speaker, learner or someone with a cúpla focal, with a calendar of entertaining and fun events for every type of interest and every age group. Voluntary and community groups, local councils, schools, libraries, and music, sports, arts and culture organisations organise events for Seachtain na Gaeilge le Energia in their local area. In 2023, Belfast City held over 100 events during Seachtain na Gaeilge and held the flagship event, Spraoi Cois Lao, with over 5000 attendees from all cultures and backgrounds on the day.</p> <p>Members are asked to consider granting this via a funding agreement to the value of £50k for delivery in 2024, budgets will be sought from within current departmental allocation in repurposing the Lot 4 monies.</p>
<p>3.5</p>	<p>Major Events</p> <p>Members will be aware that at a meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 28 August 2019, a new ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast, <i>A City Imagining</i>, was agreed. As part of this strategy a new investment approach was approved and this model committed to a partnership approach to supporting the cultural sector, with the aim of sustaining and developing accessible cultural activity and infrastructure across Belfast and creating the conditions for long-term transformation. It was agreed that this partnership model should be applied to the direct delivery of City events by Council as well as funded programmes of activity.</p> <p>Supporting Belfast to become a recognised cultural destination through a coherent approach to events and festivals. This would include a range of approaches from bidding for major events to supporting local festivals and importantly creating a portfolio of Signature homegrown Belfast Events.</p> <p>Members should note that officers are reviewing this as an ongoing piece of work and will forward a report to committee in due course that looks at the implications of revisiting city events and associated resource implications.</p>
<p>3.6</p>	<p>Financial and Resource Implications</p> <p>The events budgets had been approved at the City Growth & Regeneration Committee on 8th March 2023, and this included Maritime, Christmas, St Patrick's Day Celebrations and the Events Development Fund.</p>

	<p>The Maritime Festival was delivered within budget.</p> <p>Seachtain na Gaeilge funding agreement to the value of £50k for delivery in 2024 will be sought from within current departmental allocation.</p> <p>Circa £123,000 was allocated to the Christmas Opening Event. However, the format change and necessary logistical arrangements resulted in a slight overspend on this figure; although it had been forecast that the return to the format would be circa £129k.</p> <p>Currently, there is no budget allocation for Halloween activity. All other expenditure is within existing departmental budgets and approvals.</p>
3.7	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessment</p> <p>None.</p>
3.8	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None.</p>