



Subject:	St Patrick's Celebrations 2024
Date:	29 May 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">on St Patrick's Day Celebrations 2024forward planning for 2025
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the contents of the reportNote the Year 2 award for Féile an PhobailNote the approach to Lot 2 for retenderingAgree to a funding allocation of £30,000 to Conradh na Gaeilge as per 2024 which will be drawn from existing budgets.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree the way forward in respect of the Parade, with officers recommending option 2. • Agree to officers arranging a member workshop to review lessons learnt. • Agree the proposed allocation of £300,000 from pre-agreed departmental budgets for the St. Patricks Day Festival to be allocated as below, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parade/Pageant - £95,000 - City Centre Weekend Music Programme - £90,000 - Cross City Music Showcase (£50k) – Awarded for year 2 to Féile an Phobal - Conradh na Gaeilge - £30k for delivery of Seachtain na Gaeilge - Marketing/Engagement/Logistics - £35,000
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>St Patrick’s Day 2024 Process</p> <p>Belfast City Council’s previous model for the delivery of St. Patrick’s 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 and 2023. Following an Expression of Interest process, 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.</p> <p><u>2024 Approach</u></p> <p>It was further agreed at CG&R in September 2022, that a new Design Contest would be run in a timely manner for any required service contracts to support the delivery of St Patrick’s Day in 2024 and beyond. This was conducted with the support of CPS to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Publics Contracts Regulations.</p> <p>A tender for a similar approach to the Expression of Interest was developed and as before, fully aligned to the Cultural Strategy.</p> <p>This resulted in four Lots being offered for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Parade / Pageant (£95k) • City Centre Weekend Music Programme (£70K) • Cross City Music Showcase (£50k) • An “Open Call” (£50k) <p>The remaining budget was retained for parade logistics (circa £35k) and some other programming and marketing activity.</p> <p>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.</p>

Further to discussions with CPS, Beat Carnival and Tradfest were approached at the end of October 2023 to deliver the Parade element and City Centre Weekend Music Programme respectively. Tradfest subsequently agreed to deliver Lot 2 and this was agreed at SP&R in November 2023.

It was further agreed that Lots 2 and 3 were to be delivered by Feile and Tradfest respectively. Beat declined the opportunity to deliver Lot 1 in mid-November. Officers then took forward the option to deliver Lot 1 (the Parade) in-house, due to timescales and the limited availability of organisations to provide assets. Subsequently, there was engagement with a number of organisations on the provision of professional performance, community engagement, and parade assets.

Lot 4 sought to consider open call proposals. There was no response to this tender and subsequently Council received a request to support Seachtain na Gaeilge, a 17 - day festival organised by Conradh na Gaeilge. The festival proposal provided an opportunity to for attendees 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 organised 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, Spraio Cois Lao, with over 5000 attendees from all cultures and backgrounds on the day. Members agreed to a funding agreement to the value of £50k for delivery in 2024, budgets were sought from within current departmental allocation in repurposing the Lot 4 monies.

3.1.1 2024 Programming

In the lead-up to St. Patrick's Day and the day itself, a series of additional activities were orchestrated across the city, significantly enhancing the festive atmosphere. These were a combination of curated partners and Council:

Delivered by Féile an Phobail, TradTrail celebrated Belfast's status as a UNESCO City of Music with performances from the best local and national trad musicians from Sunday 10th to Sunday 17th March, offering free music performances in bars, restaurants, hotels and visitor attractions across the city. Performers from Clare & Cork participated in the sessions across the City.

Seachtain na Gaeilge, presented by Conradh na Gaeilge began on Friday 1st March and continued until St Patrick's Day itself. This included an Irish language family fun day - Spraio Cois Lao – which took place at Custom House Square on Saturday 9th March, the biggest

fun day of its kind. This event included musicians, dancers, activities, games, food and entertainment, all celebrating the Irish language, and was free to access. Almost 5,000 attended this, even with inclement weather. Across the period of the festival, over 10,000 attended over 80 diverse events and activities.

New for 2024, Belfast Trad Fest, presented the St Patrick's Day Music Weekend - three days of concerts, céilís, displays, taster sessions and workshops in venues throughout the Cathedral Quarter. Combining traditional music with bagpipes, Highland dancers, Irish dancing and bodhrán circles, a festival village located at Cathedral Gardens included a host of free performances, alongside food stalls, céili workshops and more. In addition, there were a number of ticketed performances too, including a Kiddy Céili at Belfast Cathedral on Saturday 16th March as part of Belfast Children's Festival, a gala concert with Frankie Gavin and Dé Dannan at Ulster Hall on the same evening and a finale event with Stockton's Wing and John Spillane at the MAC Belfast on Sunday 17th March. Anúna played to an audience of 550 at St Anne's Cathedral. The music weekend was hugely successful in creating new partnerships across the City, with an audience of over 16,000 attending the events at 13 indoor and outdoor venues.

Council provided further family friend programming in 2 Royal Ave, via the Council - appointed operator Maywe which was well attended by families for a day of free events, including art workshops, dance performances, music, games area. Over 2,100 attended the venue which also accommodated a sensory area.

Council, in partnership with Ards Comhaltas, programmed live music in St George's market on both Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th March, which further brought the venue to life, showcased the asset and profiled the ongoing bid for Fleadh Cheoil.

The St. Patrick's Day Parade was held on Sunday 17th March, was a significant event aimed at providing a family-friendly experience in celebration of the cultural heritage. The St Patrick's Day Parade was curated and delivered by the Council Events team incorporating engagement, animation and participation from a number of professional, voluntary and community organisations with 500 plus participants; dance troupes, schools, community groups and musicians who joined the floats for a free multi-cultural, cross-community celebration, focusing on 'People, Place and Planet' – the key themes in the council's Belfast 2024 programme, which is celebrating the city's creativity throughout the year. Commencing from Belfast City Hall, the parade followed a circular route and concluded back at the City Hall, ensuring a vibrant celebration which was accessible to the large audience.

There was an estimated visitor attendance of 30,000 in the City Centre on the 17th for the Parade and Village.

The St Patrick's Celebrations were delivered within the budget allocation of £300,000. Members should note that Good Relations funding of £20k was also secured to enhance the community offering within the parade. It is worth noting that our partners did comment on the need for further financial resources to continue to develop this overall event, not only in the City centre but across the City. The levels of support for the original tendered 'Lots' was also a factor in the lack of submissions.

3.1.2 Outcomes

In summary, while the procurement process for the provision of programming for the 2024 celebrations undoubtedly faced a series of challenges, ultimately the programme was delivered on budget, was very well attended, and positively received. All partners have been very positive in their feedback with further details on public reception available in 3.1.3.

A previous challenge associated with the festivities was the lack of dwell time around the parade in previous years. This year, there was considerable evidence of elongated dwell time in the City with the hubs and parade wrap around, particularly in the Cathedral Gardens, and 2 Royal Ave. This enhanced experience will be further developed via bringing other Council owned assets into play - positioning and the stories piece - all linking through to the opening of Belfast Stories in the coming years.

Operationally the parade route needs consideration of elongation next year due to the high density of the spectators attending; this will be considered in consultation with the H&S Advisory and other stakeholders.

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, *A City Imagining*, 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.

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.

Members should note that officers are reviewing this as an ongoing piece of work and will forward a report to committee in August that looks at the implications of revisiting city events and associated resource implications. As part of this process officers wish to host a member

	workshop which will invite certain suppliers to provide direct feedback on councils' approach to commissioning events. This information will then educate the August report.
3.1.3	<p>Alignment to the Cultural Strategy</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, Streetwise Circus were engaged to execute a stilt walking programme, teaching the youth the art of stiltwalking and showcasing in the parade. Circusful ran a circus skills programme with the youth circus to perform in the parade along with their professional performers. There was engagement with local arts, voluntary and community organisations to create props or coordinate performances of varying nature to enhance the overall production of the parade and highlight the local arts and culture within Belfast. Additionally, partners worked with the sector in the delivery of the wider programme.</p>
3.1.4	<p>Key Findings: Belfast St Patrick's Day 2024 socio-economic survey</p> <p><u>Visitor profile:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 58% of visitors from Belfast City Council area • 29% from elsewhere in Northern Ireland • 1% Republic of Ireland; 9% Great Britain 9%, 6% other regions • 44% of those outside Northern Ireland, the event was the main reason for their trip • 3% staying in accommodation away from home • 43% attended the event with children • 50% had attended a St Patrick's Day event in Belfast before, 50% had not • 40% heard about the events by family /friends <p><u>Visitor Spend:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% ate out during the event, average spend per group £50.63 • Total average spend per group <i>excluding</i> accommodation £77.65 • 12% staying in accommodation in Belfast region <p>Overall estimated direct spend for the St Patrick's Celebrations £1.274m.</p> <p><u>Overall Rating:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86% gave the Parade a rating of 8-10, including 30% who rated it as 'Extremely good'. • 96% of visitors agreed that the event improves NI's reputation as a host for events like these. • 95% of visitors agreed that the event improves the reputation of NI as a place to visit. • 96% agree /strongly agree events like this have can help shape a more accepting citizenship in our city.

- 100% of respondents believe that events like this encourage people to come to Belfast.
- 92% said that such events improve their sense of wellbeing and community.
- 98% felt the St Patrick's Celebrations were inclusive for all people from all cultural heritages.
- 95% agreed that there should be more events like this in Belfast.
- 98% would recommend the event to other people.
- 81% likely/very likely to visit St Patrick's Day celebrations in future years.

Events & activities

- 79% also attending 2 Royal Avenue activities
- 26% also attending music weekend
- 16% also attending St George's market activities

Respondents were also asked about whether the event should be held on a weekend or the 17th. 50% preferred the weekend, while 44% indicated a preference for the 17th March

3.1.5 Marketing and Communications

Council operated a digital campaign and online advertising to promote the events taking place under the St Patricks Celebrations banner, including all partner activity and the events at St George's and 2 Royal Ave. Council directed people to www.belfastcity.gov.uk URL, where the event information was displayed prominently on the page. Additionally, further details could be found on programming at partner websites.

Promotion took place across digital platforms and via key partners including Visit Belfast. A press release was also issued in early March to promote the finer and confirmed details of the event schedule.

Stats from Belfast City Council as below:

Social media review- St Pat's 2024

Facebook

9 posts

Total post reach: 170,000

#BelfastStPats hashtag was used in 52 posts (including posts from partners and stakeholders) with overall reach of 2.3million.

Our post following the event with the pics was the best performing post reaching nearly 40,000 accounts organically.

Instagram

4 posts

Total post reach: 15,000

#BelfastStPats was mentioned in 197 posts (including posts from partners and stakeholders)

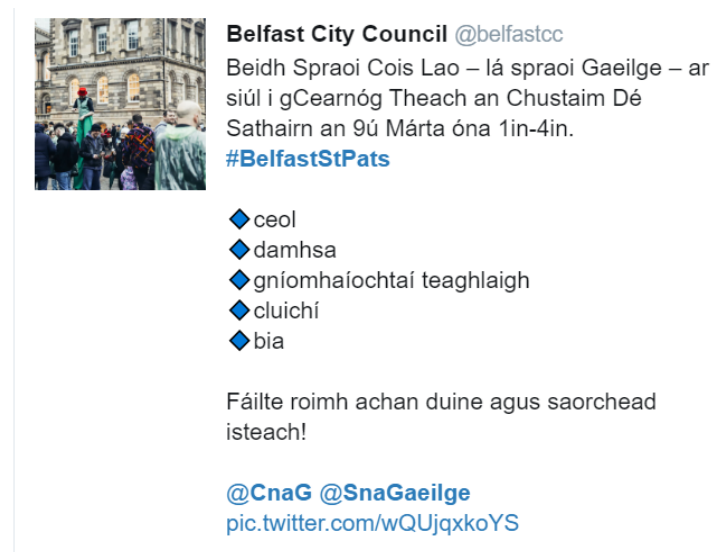
Our best performing post was the video following the event with the aerial footage, parade features and performers – it was played 6,700 times

Twitter

31 posts

Total impressions: 82,500

Standout tweet:



This tweet had nearly 10k impressions

#BelfastStPats hashtag was used in 312 Twitter posts with an overall reach of 3.8 million (including posts from partners, RTs, etc)

Stats from Visit Belfast as below:

Social Media Advert Campaign:

- Advert placed across facebook and istagram
- Advert targeted NI and ROI
- Call to action visit <https://visitbelfast.com/ideas/st-patricks-day-in-belfast/>
- Campaign live 20th Feb – 17th March

Results

- Impressions – 1,862,387
- Engagements – 312,121
- Video Views – 1,296,625

Organic Results

- Organic Impressions – 504,708

- Organic Video Views – 11,938
- Organic Video Views – 151,850



Overall Results	Result
Website Visits	33,708
Total Social Media Impressions	2,345,685
Total Social Media Engagements	333,069
Total Social Media Video Views	1,425,223
Total E-zine Impressions	19,063

3.2 Way Forward 2025

The tender developed for 2024 resulted in four Lots being offered for:

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

While the outcome of this process was that one submission was received for Lot 3 only (Féile an Phobail), subsequently there was a direct award for Lot 3 (Tradfest) and Lot 4 was repurposed to support Seachtain na Gaeilge.

Lessons Learnt

	<p>Taking into consideration the procurement position from 2024 the following elements have been reviewed in order to achieve better engagement for 2025 delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timings, procurement will hit market earlier to allow for better responses. Due to challenges with late market entry previously many suppliers had pre committed to other events already. • Pre market engagement – a process of pre market engagement is underway to understand available resources, appetite and ability to deliver – this will inform any final tender specification requirements • Simplified tender documentation • Subject to committee approval increased value for the city centre music weekend • Parade/pageant to remain at £95k in recognition of 2024 delivery and engagement outcomes
<p>3.2.1</p>	<p>As per the tender process, both Féile an Phobail, on the back of a successful 2024, will progress into Year 2 of their award.</p> <p>It is recommended that the element City Centre Music programme delivered by Tradfest in 2024 is procured for year 2 of the delivery in 2025 given the success of this activity in 2024. This would be required to be retendered given that SPR provided approval for one year only. Given the success of this element of the event officers propose increasing the contribution this year by £20,000 for a total of £90,000.</p> <p>Conradh na Gaeilge, has been assessed and successful under CMAG to the value of £20,000. However, organisers have indicated that this will not be sustainable in 2025 as they are preparing for a significant increase in pricing and as such are seeking additional funding that would equate to the total provision of £50,000 made in 2024. As a result, officers are seeking approval to allocate £30,000 to Conradh na Gaeilge for the delivery of an event in 2025. This will be drawn from existing departmental budgets.</p> <p>In summary the proposed allocation of the pre-agreed £300,000 is as below,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parade/Pageant - £95,000 - City Centre Weekend Music Programme - £90,000 - Cross City Music Showcase (£50k) – Awarded for year 2 to Féile an Phobal - Conradh na Gaeilge - £30k for delivery of Seachtain na Gaeilge - Marketing/Engagement/Logistics - £35,000
<p>3.2.2</p>	<p>Officers have engaged with CPS to establish options for the Parade delivery in 2025.</p>

	<p>Option 1: re-tender the Parade Lot for one organisation to provide the entire parade lot. Council would continue as per previous years to provide all logistical support. Members should note that no submissions were received in 2024 for this Lot and there will be no change in value or specification for 2025.</p> <p>Option 2: continue with in – house delivery. Council officers would continue to work with CPS to test the market initially and establish the best means to explore procurement of the services required to successfully deliver a fresh parade, particularly with respect to floats, professional performance and community engagement. It is very evident that professional parade provision is very competitive on the island of Ireland due to the high demand for the St Patrick's Day celebrations. Early approval and engagement would give Belfast the opportunity to progress options for the 2025 Parade.</p>
4	<p>Financial and Resource Implications</p> <p>The events budgets were presented to City Growth & Regeneration Committee on 8th May 2024 as part of the committee plan and associated workplans, this includes St Patrick's Day Celebrations to the value of £300k. Its is proposed this is allocated as below,</p> <p>-</p>
5	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessment</p> <p>Events form part of the overarching City Imagining 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.</p>
	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None.</p>