



Subject:	City Innovation programme update
Date:	21 June 2024
Reporting Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services
Contact Officer:	Mark McCann, City Innovation manager (Acting)

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime 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	To update Members on City Innovation initiatives and to seek approval on a number of key projects developing over the next few months.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note Belfast City Council’s participation in the Ulster University’s ‘Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator’ bid to EPSRC, and to approve officer involvement in the design phase, (subject to a successful bid). And note that a further update on a successful bid would be presented in September. 2. To note the success of the Lord Mayor’s Innovation Twins mission to South Korea and to approve the issuing of an invitation to the mayor of Sejong to visit Belfast in May 2025. 3. Members are asked to approve acceptance of a further £50,000 from Connected Places Catapult to support work on the Innovation Twins programme including preparation for the Mayor’s visit through to March 2026. 4. To note Innovation City Belfast’s participation at the Smart Cities World Congress in November 2024. Members are asked to approve attendance by a small number of officers to support work on the Sejong Innovation Twins, ICB, engagement on City Deal opportunities, and the current Belfast 5G Innovation regions programme.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>The Smart Belfast urban innovation programme encourages collaboration on digital innovation projects between government, industry, SMEs, academia and communities. The aim is to harness innovation to address public policy challenges, while at the same time encouraging greater investment in innovation to stimulate economic growth. The following initiatives seek to contribute to both these aims:</p>
3.2	<p>(1) Belfast Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator</p> <p>Ulster University and University College London have submitted a £2 million bid to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) to establish a Belfast-based ‘Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator’ that will build capacity amongst the city’s digital health tech companies by encouraging more collaboration with university researchers, clinicians and industry. The accelerator is also committed to a place-based approach that seeks to have positive health outcomes for local communities.</p>
3.3	<p>The Life and Health Science sector is important to the local economy, contributing 25% to the region’s entire economic output. The sector grew by 75% between 2019 and 2022 and now has 170 companies employing over 20,000 people. It’s a sector dominated by Innovation Driven Enterprises (IDEs) and is responsible for 75% of all of the region’s university spin-out companies. The Accelerator aims to build on this success by meeting the innovation needs of these IDEs and spin-outs.</p>

3.4	Members had previously approved an in-principle Council commitment to the programme in the form of in-kind staff time to the value of £100,000 over four years. There is also potential for Belfast Region City Deal partners to develop a complementary funding proposal to encourage the wider participation of start-ups and IDEs.
3.5	The Ulster University bid has now been shortlisted by EPSRC for final consideration, with a decision on funding expected by the end of June. Ulster have requested that an officer from the City Innovation team attend the final selection interview to support the application. This is scheduled for 18 June.
3.6	If the bid is successful design work on the programme is expected to commence from early July. With this timeline in mind, and assuming a successful bid, Members are asked to approve officer participation in this design work. An update will be then brought to Members in September on the final agreed programme and Belfast City Council's role.
3.7	(2) Belfast Sejong Innovation Twins programme As part of the UK South Korea 'Innovation Twins' programme the Lord Mayor led a mission to Sejong in April. During the visit the mayors of both cities signed off/endorsed a roadmap to deliver a series of joint projects over the next few years. These initiatives include a Global Innovation Network that will support SMEs from both cities to develop trade opportunities; a satellite-based 'Security in Space' project with Queen's University; a cyber-security event; a Net Zero accelerator project with the Belfast Climate Commission; an autonomous transport project with Belfast Harbour; and a 5G project with Ulster University and Digital Catapult. Invest NI are also supporting an inward investment mission by Sejong SMEs to Belfast in 2025. Partners from both cities also explored joint cultural opportunities. Senior officials from Sejong are visiting Belfast later in June to agree an approach with local cultural and tourism organisations including Titanic Belfast, Belfast Stories, the Ulster Museum and others, to take forward joint opportunities.
3.8	Following the visit, the Mayor of Sejong wrote to Belfast City Council explaining that he will be visiting the UK in May 2025 and has indicated that he and his team would like to visit Belfast as part of their visit and would welcome an invitation from Belfast's Lord Mayor.
3.9	Initial feedback on the Belfast missions from Connected Places Catapult, who have been facilitating the Innovation Twins programme on behalf of UK Government, has been extremely positive. The Belfast Sejong twinning is being highlighted to UK Government as exemplar for other cities in the programme to follow. Connected Places Catapult has also indicated that they wish to make a further £50,000 available to Belfast City Council and its partners to take forward

work into 2025 including preparation for the inward visit of the Sejong Mayor and to support engagement work at this year's Smart Cities World Congress at which Sejong and South Korea are participating.

3.10 Members are asked to note the success of the April Mission to Sejong and to approve the issuing of an invitation to their mayor to visit Belfast in May 2025. Finally, Members are asked to approve acceptance of a further £50,000 from Connected Places Catapult to support the continuation of work on the programme through to March 2025.

3.11 **(3) Barcelona Smart Cities World Congress**

The Smart Cities Congress is an annual event that attracts 850 cities and over 1,100 digital companies. It is an opportunity for cities to promote their innovation ecosystem and build relationships with industry partners and investors in innovation.

3.12 Belfast has had a limited presence at the previous events, with individuals from Belfast City Council, the universities and Belfast Harbour attending. More recently Invest NI have taken a stand at the event to promote their client companies.

3.13 This year Innovation City Belfast (ICB) has been approached separately by both Invest NI and Connected Places Catapult to explore how Belfast partners can promote a shared story about the city's ambition, our City Deal Digital Innovation investments, the work of our universities, and the success of our innovative companies.

3.14 This year Connected Places Catapult have been commissioned by Government to host a pavilion that will accommodate up to 10 UK smart cities. The Catapult are organising a series of panel discussions, meeting spaces, shared collateral, and presentation opportunities for the participating cities. They are also keen to support opportunities for Belfast and Sejong (who are also attending as part of a large South Korean delegation) to present on the innovation twins work noted above to a wider audience. In addition, Sejong want to discuss with Belfast and other cities and industry partners joint opportunities associated with their 'Smart District 5.1' where \$4 billion will be invested over the next decade.

3.15 The Belfast presence will be led by Innovation City Belfast's new Innovation Commissioner who is expected to be in post by the time of the conference. The City Innovation Office has already secured a speaking slot for the Commissioner in the main Congress programme. The Commissioner has also received invites to participate in the Microsoft and Bloomberg's 'City Innovation Commissioners' programming at the event.

3.16	<p>Members are asked note to ICB's planned attendance at the Smart Cities World Congress.</p> <p>Members are asked to approve attendance by a number of officers to support work on the Sejong Innovation Twins, ICB, engagement on City Deal opportunities, and the current Belfast 5G Innovation regions programme. Belfast City Council officer travel costs would be funded by the relevant project budgets.</p>
	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p>
3.17	<p>Budgets for the initiatives noted above are funded via third-party sources, with any Council contributions identified within the existing Council budgets. Officer travel for the Smart City World Congress will be sourced from the Innovation Twins and 5G IR engagement budgets.</p>
	<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</p>
3.18	<p>None.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>