

# Assessor's full renewal report

2023








*Excellence in managing the  
evening & nighttime economy*







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# Purple Flag assessor full renewal report

Details of entry		Overnight assessment
<b>Location of entry</b> Belfast	<b>Date of assessment</b> Fri 24th November	<b>Night of the week</b> Friday
<b>Name of assessors</b> Julieta Cuneo – Liam O’Hare	<b>Times covered (<i>tick or colour circles</i>)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Entrant’s presentation</li> <li> Early evening: 5–8pm</li> <li> Late evening: 8pm–11pm</li> <li> Night: 11pm–2am</li> <li> Late night: 2–5am</li> </ul>	<b>Anomalies</b> Damp, cold, windy, Black Friday shopping night, City Hall Night market trading.
<b>Author of report</b> Julieta Cuneo – Liam O’Hare		<b>Members &amp; roles of local partnership present</b> Eimear McCracken – Belfast One/Purple Flag Co-ordinator Chris McCracken – Linen Quarter BID Manager Lawrence Tingson – Linen Quarter BID Damien Corr – Destination CQ BID Manager Alan Crowe – Belfast One BID CEO Sgt Dave McKinley – PSNI Con Owen Kelly – PSNI BID funded officer Ex Insp David Gibson – PSNI (retired in October ’23 but has been a huge supporter of Purple Flag since 2018) Clare Guinness – CEO of Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce Lesley-Ann O’Donnell – Belfast City Council, Culture and Tourism Manager Emma McCausland – Director of ValuCabs
<b>Date of report</b> 12.12.2023		

		<p>Michael Stewart – Director of CommonMarket/Ex Belfast Chamber President (2019 – 2021)</p> <p><b>Resilience and continuity</b>  <b>Who is the delegated PF Co-ordinator back-up to cover absence or position change?</b></p> <p>The Purple Flag is funded by three BIDs affording Belfast unique resilience and continuity.</p>
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<p><b>Documents reviewed ( tick or colour circles)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Entry form</li> <li> Map of area</li> <li> Purple flag area snapshot</li> <li> Self assessment chart</li> </ul>	<p><b>Guidelines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attach the itinerary for the assessment.</li> <li>• To achieve an overall standard met no standards should fall within the grey shaded boxes and no more than one attribute in any theme must be below standard.</li> <li>• Please can you explain any significant differences in scoring between yourself and the centre e.g. if a town/city scores themselves “excellent” and you score a “standard met”, why is there such a margin?</li> <li>• Please show entrant’s and your recommended standards on the same chart:</li> </ul> <p> Your recommended standards</p> <p> The entrant’s standards</p>	
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Core agenda and attributes	Assessment	Significantly below standard	Below standard	Standard met	Above standard	Excellent Outstanding
<p><b>Wellbeing</b> (welcoming, clean and safe)</p> <p>Threshold standard: per capita crime and anti-social behaviour rates that are at least average and show an improving trend, or how any declining trends are understood and being managed – taking both residents and visitors into account (see KPI’s).</p>						
<p><b>1. Safety</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While KPIs showed an increase in crime figures across the board, the PNSI and BID-funded police service were confident in indicating the rise is due</li> </ul>				X	

<p>Proportionate level of visible, effective policing and active surveillance.</p>	<p>to a higher public confidence in reporting. No crime or ASB were observed while assessing the PF area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCTV coverage is extensive, high quality and thoroughly monitored – 3 officers on duty the night of the visit. Both retail and Nighttime businesses are directly in contact via radio link.</li> <li>• NTE business representatives highlighted a good working relationship and high level of collaboration with the PSNI.</li> </ul>				●	
<p><b>2. Care</b> Responsible guardianship, customer care and concern for community health.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is strong communication among the PSNI, SIA and volunteer groups – Street Pastors, SOS Bus and Community Rescue Service (CRS) – all of which were present at the PSNI briefing session.</li> <li>• The CRS runs a remarkable boat patrol service on Friday and Saturday night. It runs until 2am and they have intervened in 8 positive interventions this year. There is an intention of funding an extra service on Thursday night.</li> <li>• During the assessment we encountered one incident involving an intoxicated individual. The scene was attended by a number of police and volunteer services.</li> </ul>					X ●
<p><b>3. Regulation</b> Positive and proactive licensing and regulation. Please reference here as to whether certified for the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the night of the visit a representative from the SIA was undertaking a check on licensed premises' security staff licenses and ability to manage potential conflict in a safe manner.</li> <li>• Unlike England &amp; Wales the licensing regime is ran by the police. And magistrates. A team were out on the night and were engaging with Bar operators.</li> </ul>			X	●	
<p><b>4. Services</b> Appropriate levels of public utilities including public conveniences or alternative schemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the assessment we encountered 2 public access toilets, both paid with the possibility of using cash or card. Victoria Square's public toilets are open to the public until 9pm, even though the space qualifies as public realm and employs 24-hour security staff.</li> </ul>			X	●	
<p><b>5. Partnership</b> The active involvement of business in driving up standards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership work among stakeholders is remarkable. This was evident from the relationship between representatives present at the visit, feedback from people encountered along the way and anecdotal evidence from the radio link and Retail Crimewatch services.</li> </ul>			X	●	
<p><b>6. Perceptions</b></p>			X			

A valid and positive presentation of the area to customers.

- While overall perceptions of safety were high there is a stark difference between different areas of the PF area, some of which feel disconnected and less looked after than others. However, plans for improvement and development were shared with the assessors.

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Core agenda and attributes	Assessment	Significantly below standard	Below standard	Standard met	Above standard	Excellent Outstanding
<p><b>Movement</b> (a secure pattern of arrival, circulation and departure)</p> <p><b>Threshold standard:</b> some form of appropriate late-night public transport provision (see KPI's) appropriate to each individual destination (size/location etc).</p>						
<p><b>1. Public Transport</b></p> <p>Safe, affordable, well-managed late night public transport.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The night of the visit coincided with the first night of the Translink Nightmovers service, a special late night bus service for the holiday season, already implemented in 2022. There is an intention to make the night bus service available throughout the year, currently stalled by the lack of central administration.</li> <li>• While welcome, the Nightmovers service doesn't seem to be enough to provide for all nighttime users. A conversation with a nighttime worker revealed that the late-night bus routes didn't provide a solution to her late-night commute home and at £6 per journey very expensive.</li> <li>• On the night of the visit taxis were widely available. However, it was a relatively quiet night. Representatives from Valu Cabs, a local taxi company, highlighted challenges in keeping up with the demand for services. Belfast like everywhere else is suffering from not enough drivers.</li> </ul>			X	●	
<p><b>2. Car parking</b></p> <p>An appropriate provision of secure late night car parking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was an appropriate provision of late-night car parking across the PF area. It was also noted that On-Street parking is free after 18:00.</li> </ul>			X	●	
<p><b>3. Pedestrian routes</b></p> <p>Clear, safe and convenient links within the centre and homeward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dublin road was well lit and easily navigable, linking well into Bedford st, Howard St and City Hall.</li> <li>• Donegall Place and Royal Ave were bright and welcoming.</li> </ul>			●	X	

- The Entries linking Anne St to Hight St were really animated, colourful with lots of “Instagram moment” photo opportunities.
- Victoria Square was fully pedestrianised, well-lit and spotlessly clean.
- Linen Quarter was people friendly even with crowds spilling onto the streets at times it didn't feel dangerous.

#### 4. Crowd management

Measures to deal with overcrowding, congestion and conflict between those on foot and moving vehicles.

- The highest congestion points were in Cathedral District, the busiest NTE area. Plans for pedestrianization of the most popular crossings are on the way, but currently stalled due to lack of central administration.

#### 5. Information

Provision of practical information and guidance to town centre users.

- There is good wayfinding signage throughout the PF area, including informative totems marking relevant historical points. Tourists are well catered for in this city and the information points are evenly spread with City Hall serving as an enormous beacon dominating the city centre as it does.

#### 6. Partnership

Business, venues and transport operator commitment and participation to support the safe movement of people and vehicles.

- There was good evidence of a partnership approach between the three BIDs (Belfast One, Linen Quarter and Cathedral Quarter) The Venues had broad representation and the cabs appears to be very well coordinated.
- The PSNI who run licensing link well with community support services and the Guardians who are doing a great job despite dwindling numbers.
- The partnership on display that night really does beg the question, what exactly is the point of the inert executive.

### Core agenda and attributes

### Assessment

#### A Broad appeal (a vibrant choice and a rich mix)

Threshold standard: an evening and late night offer that is broader than youth-oriented and alcohol-based activity (see KPI's).

#### 1. Food and dining

A choice of eating venues and a commitment to good food.

- There is a rich mix of independent and chain food outlets and food markets in the city, in addition to a seasonal Christmas market open at the time of the visit. Notable was the town centre options AMPM which was

Significantly below standard	Below standard	Standard met	Above standard	Excellent Outstanding
		X		
		X		
			X	
			X	

buzzing. Kelly's Cellars goes from strength to strength and seems to be expanding at every visit. The Garrick appeared busy and looked attractive.

- However, options were reduced to a handful after 11pm, something particularly noticeable at closing time, where we observed a high concentration of young people in Mc Donald's., manned by 2 security staff.
- We encountered one kebab shop and one small take away offering food and hot drinks until 2am.

## 2. Pubs and bars

Well-managed venues, to meet varied tastes, and offering more than just alcoholic beverages.

- There is a solid offer of pubs and bars, all of which appeared to be well managed. There was no congregation of people by the doors, an acceptable level of noise and the fronts and surrounding areas were pristine clean after closing time.
- Belfast has many great bars, we visited The Crown, Robinsons, the wonderful Bittles.
- Hellcat Maggie's affords its guests with lovely views across city hall and the night market.
- However, there seemed to be a lack of non-alcoholic options, such as shisha bars and ice cream parlours, open until late. The several food markets in the city also close down by 11pm.

## 3. Late night venues

A late-night offer that complements the diverse appeal of the centre as a whole.

- During the visit we encountered a few late-night venues, located in different locations of the PF. They mostly seemed to cater to a very young audience except for one live-music venue, which was open until 3 but had stopped playing music by 2.30. Voodoo deserves special mention with a very strong music culture running through its program of events.
- The telegraph Building is a fine example of what to do with the abundance of buildings around the cathedral quarter. I went to a gig the night after the assessment where the Undertones had a sold-out event. Impressive place.

## 4. Early evening activity

An active early evening period, including late opening shops, sporting and leisure opportunities.

- The early evening period was busy and buzzing, with a wide variety of people around. This was probably increased by the fact that it was Black Friday, but overall, it felt that there was a healthy variety of retail and food options available, as well as the Christmas market.
- The retail offering was very impressive and late-night shopping was abundant with a strong representation from small independents.
- The Cinema in Castle Court was very impressive. Multi screens show Film as well as Sport, Opera, Concerts and plays. 9 screens showing 3 shows per



day. Very well managed by managed by Emma Robinson who explained the quirks of NI licensing by telling us that you need a ticket go get an alcoholic drink.

- City Hall had the late night market, which was a tale of two halves, Outside the hall the broad pavements allowed a parade of attractive huts all with retail late into the night; inside the city hall the ergonomics were far from satisfactory. Narrow walkways, too many food traders with nowhere to sit or stop. Prams and wheelchairs felt unwelcome or not considered and the journey around the grounds was not nice which is a great shame and a missed opportunity for the traders and City Hall.

### 5. Public buildings

Creative and imaginative use of public/civic buildings in the evening and at night.

- There is a remarkable amount of beautiful public buildings in the PF area and, following previous assessor comments, lighting has been expanded to highlight them, in turn contributing to enhancing public realm lighting.
- A highlight of the visit was 2 Royal Avenue, a former bank now turned into an ‘indoor park’ providing safe and free public space. It features a community library, café and event space that everybody is welcome to use. Works are underway to open a back entrance, thus connecting two parts of the PF area. Unfortunately, it is only open until 6pm.

### 6. Arts and culture

A vibrant, inclusive arts and cultural scene.

- The arts and culture scene are thriving, with a full agenda of events and venues. This will be increased next year with Belfast 24, a city-wide cultural programme. We also observed several venues playing live music.
- We were told by Victoria Square manager Ryan Mc Avoy that there are Belfast School of Music concerts every day in November and December.

## Core agenda and attributes

## Assessment

### Place (a stimulating destination and a vital place)

Threshold standard: a mix of pleasing and functional spaces.  
A convenient and attractive destination at night (see KPI’s).

#### 1. Location

Appropriate location, clustering and capacity of venue types.

	Significantly below standard	Below standard	Standard met	Above standard	Excellent Outstanding
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5. Public buildings Creative and imaginative use of public/civic buildings in the evening and at night.			●	X	
6. Arts and culture A vibrant, inclusive arts and cultural scene.				●	X
Place (a stimulating destination and a vital place) Threshold standard: a mix of pleasing and functional spaces. A convenient and attractive destination at night (see KPI’s).					
1. Location Appropriate location, clustering and capacity of venue types.				X	

- As we moved from the evening into the night the activity also moved towards Cathedral Quarter, where there is a high clustering and good mix of venues.
- The tide of trade is moving towards the Cathedral Quarter with its lack of residential property is allowing a buoyant nighttime economy not afraid to make a bit of noise.
- The street hosting the Duke of York pub, and the surrounding area was very colourful and attractive. Several high-quality bars in this area makes it an attractive and diverse destination area.
- The previous Golden Mile has seen better days but the Linen Quarter BID have used vinyl's imaginatively to bring old buildings back to life including murals . One notably of Terri Hooley which caught the eye but was not lit well, a missed opportunity.

## 2. Diversity

A successful balance of uses and brands.

- There is a good mix of restaurants, pubs and bars, and an incipient LBGTO+ area. The Cathedral Quarter also hosts the new university campus, where we observed a late-night opening gym which someone was using. However, there didn't seem to be any non-alcohol related options available.
- The Grand Opera House is a very impressive building with a strong culture program bringing, music, plays, comedy and a bit of panto to the town centre.
- The Telegraph Building is delivering a strong live music program in a dramatic post-industrial space.

## 3. Clarity

Well-designed links and visible signs.

- Signage is good in terms of landmarks and highlighting of relevant historic spots, with informative totems scattered around the city. However, there seems to be a disconnect between the busiest hubs and other parts of the city. Apart from taxi stops, which are well spread, there wasn't signposting towards public transport.

## 4. Animation

Attractive, well-used public places, active streets and building frontages.

- There are a number of parklets and well-lit and set up public spaces across the city. Some areas are pedestrianised, and we observed groups of people making use of them while eating late-night takeaway.
- There is a high contrast between the busiest NTE spots and other parts of the city, which were very dark in comparison – i.e. the Golden Mile area and the stalled Tribeca regeneration project. Plans are underway to improve this.

			●	
		X	●	
			X	
		X	●	

- The Linen Quarter is home to a pedestrianised entertainment area that offers seating and performance space and a pétanque court that the public is encouraged to use. The area is inviting and well-lit but was not being used by anyone on the night of the visit.

### 5. Design

Thoughtful and imaginative design for the night.

- Public art and interventions are scattered across the city. However, there are areas of improvement such as the murals in the Linen Quarter, which were very poorly lit.
- The Entries are a good example of thoughtful and imaginative design for the night, with artistic intervention and place-making interventions that helped made the narrow alleyways feel inviting and safe, even late at night when venues were closed.

### 6. Identity

The appropriate use of natural and built features to reinforce appeal.

- Buildings are in general well-kept and well lit, and they convey a sense of city identity.

## Core agenda and attributes

## Assessment

### The Policy Envelope (a clear aim and a common purpose)

Threshold Standard: a momentum of collaboration between sectors, agencies, service providers and policy-makers (See KPIs’).

#### 1. Data

A sound statistical base for policy-making and action.

- The statistical base provided is good starting point, but there is plenty of room for improvement, for example by splitting footfall data by time of the day, collecting spend data and providing analysis of different demographics accessing the PF area at night.
- The perceptions survey is a good addition to the KPIs, but the lack of contextual information makes it difficult to understand how representative it is.

#### 2. Strategy

Positive strategic objectives and targets.

- There is a strong strategic direction, with the council’s Agenda 2023-2027 and the Future City Centre programme, backed by investment coming into the city and the expansion of the new university campus. However, the

Significantly below standard	Below standard	Standard met	Above standard	Excellent Outstanding
			X	
			●	
			X	
			●	
			X	
			●	
			X	
			●	

focus seems at times too geared towards tourism over the local population: i.e. a total of 5 new hotels will be built in the near future.

**3. Coordination**

Public policy coordination and focus.

- Coordination among the membership of the PF is strong. Following previous assessor comments the group has incorporated a member of the City Council into the Steering Group, which facilitates decision making in a context of lack of central government.

**4. Leadership**

Clear responsibilities for policy and action.

- Leadership by the three city centre groups is strong and well-coordinated. The group manifested an intention to establish a Night Time Economy coordinator/ mayor, which would be a step forward and could strengthen leadership further once central government functions are eventually restored.

**5. Partnership**

Multi-sector endorsement and commitment.

- There is good representation of different sectors, including the police, Translink, the Belfast Chamber of Commerce and trade bodies, as well as the City Council, which is a welcome addition from the last assessment.

**6. Community**

A dialogue with consumers and residents.

- While partnership representation is strong it does feel like there is a lack of community and grassroots representation. It would be good to see the University/ youth representation involved, as well as representatives from communities that make use of the PF zone in a non-consumer capacity, such as night workers, religious groups, and minorities.

		X		
		X		
		X		
		X		

# Purple Flag summary chart

Purple Flag core agenda		Significantly below standard	Below standard	Standard met	Above standard	Excellent Outstanding
1. <b>Wellbeing</b> Welcoming, clean and safe.					X ●	
2. <b>Movement</b> A secure pattern of arrival, circulation and departure.				X ●		
3. <b>A broad appeal</b> A vibrant choice and a rich mix.					X ●	
4. <b>Place</b> A stimulating destination and a vital place.					X ●	
5. <b>Policy envelope</b> A clear aim and a common purpose.				X ●		

NOTE. All five Themes must be at least 'Standard met' if the area is to be recommended for a Purple Flag.

# Assessors' conclusions

## Recommendation



### Purple Flag accreditation

- Standard met or exceeded on all five core agenda themes.



### Not yet ready for Purple Flag accreditation

- Standard not met on one or more core agenda themes.

### Any matters to be referred to accreditation panel before a final decision is made:

*The only difference in scoring is related to the 'Diversity' entry, and it is due to the fact that, while it is true that the offer is diverse, there seems to be a lack of non-alcohol related venues, such as shisha bars, desert parlours and etc., to cater for those who can't or choose not to drink on a night out.*

### Guidance to applicant on any priority issues to address prior to purple flag renewal:

1. *KPIs on Crime and Disorder Anti-Social behaviour and Sexual Violence need to be addressed. While it is great to hear from the police that people are feeling better about reporting crime the assessors are less convinced and more work needs to be done to get the numbers down. They are too high.*
2. *It would be helpful to have figures broke down into NTE crime and domestic figures should be removed for clarity. It would be helpful to see figures on a month-by-month basis to target busy months.*
3. *A perception study needs to occur before the next assessment.*
4. *Relaxed licensing laws need to be analysed to see if they have had a positive impact, or not.*
5. *Belfast should have its next assessment on a busy Saturday, traditionally the busiest night of the week.*

### Guidance to applicant on any general issues to address *(please note that any issues noted will be reviewed in the next interim renewal assessment):*

1. *There is a lack of representation and consideration towards the needs of night workers – we heard about issues with night transport, but no mention was made of other types of support available, such as mental health support for Hospitality workers, an issue that is becoming increasingly relevant.*
2. *It would benefit the Purple Flag to have the Victoria Sq. Dome open at night, even seasonally or occasionally for an "Belfast at night" experience*
3. *On another note, there is a variety of plans for growth and investment coming into the PF area, including more hotels, student accommodation and housing. This could present potential threats to existing venues related to noise complaints. It is recommended that plans are made to prevent this from happening.*
4. *Public transport is too expensive late at night. The executive when functioning again needs to address this and look at supplementing the cost of a single journey which at £6 is not going to encourage use and drive football into the town centre.*
5. *Belfast should consider integrating the Queens University area into PF, also Waterfront, Titanic & St Georges market if night events are happening there still.*

6. *The assessors would like to see effective VAWG policies for the licensed trade and buy in from the trade before the next assessment.*
7. *Belfast must engage with the executive as soon as they begin functioning as an administration again. An ENTE strategy should be developed which engages with all stakeholders and creates a common purpose and goals for everyone to work towards especially important if, and, when the executive makes apolitical decisions not to function again. The ENTE must not suffer this kind of stasis again.*

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**Specific policies and actions that are excellent or outstanding, and especially worthy of note:**

*The coordination between the police, volunteer groups and businesses are worthy of note. One representative from the hospitality sector highlighted that there is a good working relationship with the PSNI.*

*The Transformation of 2 Royal Avenue from a TESCO to a not for profit “indoor park” which the assessors assert must be brought into the early evening as it an exemplar project which can only get better with the development explained to us at our visit. The fact it closes at 18:00 falls outside the early evening provision which is a shame.*

*The assessors would like to acknowledge the outstanding achievements of the boat service.*

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# Need help?

ATCM wants to help all those who are going for Purple Flag, or are thinking of it, to be as successful as possible. That way everyone wins. If you have visited the Purple Flag website or have attended an ENTE event and would like further support a range of workshops are also available for different stages of the application process.

Full details of all the workshops can be found by contacting the Purple Flag Team:

**For further information contact  
the Purple Flag team:**

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**ATCM**  
association of town & city management