



Subject:	International Relations Activity Update
Date:	11 September 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Laura Leonard, International Relations Manager

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/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval for council engagement in and attendance at a number of international profiling events in USA in early 2025 as well as support for the upcoming Friendship Four event.
2.0	Recommendation
	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the invitations for the Lord Mayor to attend the St Pat's for All event in early March 2025 as well the Nashville Peace Summit in late February 2025 and agree attendance at both events by the Lord Mayor and appropriate senior officers up to a total maximum cost of £12,000 • Note and approve the request for £15,000 financial support towards the Friendship Four event to take place in November 2024 • Note and approve the request for £10,000 financial support towards the touring route for 'The Agreement'. • Note the planned review of international opportunities and potential areas of interest aligned to city priorities and agree to receive a future report to consider how targeted international engagement activity can support and advance our key ambitions. • This will be developed alongside a paper for the committee setting out the principles that will underpin an updated international relations framework.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>St Pat's for All engagement – New York – early March 2025</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that Belfast City Council annually participates in the New York New Belfast Economic Showcase. This showcase event has been running for more than a decade, and for the last three years has been streamlined to focus solely on seeking economic opportunity within New York City and the wider East coast. Over 150 business, civic and political leaders gather to hear the latest Belfast developments and updates on trade and investment opportunities across key growth sectors as well as capital investment development and opportunities.</p>
3.2	<p>At this year's 15th annual event, the Lord Mayor took part in a number of side meetings with City and State political representatives. He was also invited to speak at a key focal point for LGBTQIA rights, the Stonewall Inn. This aligned with the Lord Mayor's inclusive city theme. The event was attended by many influential business, political, academic and civic leaders, including former City Council Speakers Christine Quinn and Corey Johnson, along with NY State Comptroller Tom Di Napoli.</p>

3.3	<p>On the back of this engagement, the Lord Mayor has now been invited to lead the 26th annual “St Pat’s for All” Parade, assuming the role of Grand Marshall. The Parade attracts over 3,500 participants, and around 28,000 spectators. In addition to participating in the parade, the St Pat’s for All President and Board have offered to facilitate a wider programme of engagements around inclusive growth and neighbourhood regeneration, in line with Corporate Plan priorities. The Lord Mayor will also undertake a series of follow-up business meetings arising from the June 2024 New York New Belfast event.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Reframing international and Sister Cities engagement activity</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that Belfast City Council has been a formal Sister City with Nashville and Boston since 1994 and 2015, respectively. The objective of these agreements is to develop and deliver collaborative and mutually beneficial activity for each city in the areas of the economy (both business trade and investment), education (mainly through attracting international students and research partnerships), tourism development and cooperation in culture and music.</p>
3.5	<p>Activity with both cities at civic level has been intermittent since the pandemic. This is due to a number of factors including changes in personnel; competing priorities and immediate funding and resource pressures on other issues. Despite this, organisational partnerships between educational establishments, business and community organisations have continued to strengthen. As we emerge from the recent economic shocks, there appears to be an appetite from both cities to re-engage, with the potential for renewed conversations across a range of areas for collaboration. Officers are undertaking a review of opportunities and potential areas of interest aligned to city priorities and a report will be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee to consider how targeted international engagement activity can support and advance our key ambitions.</p>
3.6	<p>In the interim, the city of Nashville is currently making plans to visit Belfast with an economic mission from 29 September-4 October this year. The council is working with economic partners – in particular Invest NI – to ensure that a targeted programme of meetings and engagement is in place for each of the delegates. Updates on opportunities for engagement with elected members will be flagged once there is greater clarity around timings and attendees.</p>
3.7	<p>Given that 2024 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Belfast-Nashville Sister City link, the City Council in Nashville is planning a number of activities to mark the occasion. One flagship event is a Peace Summit which is being developed by Queen’s University Belfast and Belmont University (who have long standing connections and yearly joint work programmes)</p>

and which will take place from 25-28 February 2025. The programme for this event is still being finalised but it is likely to involve recognition of the work on Civil Rights through storytelling, history, music, community, and building peace in Nashville and around the world. The event will focus on issues related to past, present, and future movements and the connections between Civil Rights and peacebuilding. Primary partners include Belmont University, Fisk University, and Queen's University Belfast. The Lord Mayor has been asked to speak at the event on the Belfast experience of peace building and community and place building. Nashville Metro Council through the Office of Mayor Freddie O'Connell, along with the Sister City Board have endorsed the invitation and have extended an offer to organise a series of wider business engagements. These meetings will provide a helpful re-introduction to some of the key local business partners, on the assumption that we have commitment from Nashville to engage in this area of work in the future. Our engagements with Invest NI have confirmed the specific opportunities for collaboration between NI and the Nashville/Tennessee area and they have committed to working with us on opportunities arising from the discussions.

3.8 Friendship Four

Members will be aware that, since 2015, the Council has supported the work of the Odyssey Trust in developing and delivering the Friendship Four series. This tournament and wraparound activity have been an important element of the Belfast-Boston Sister City relationship and have been used as a platform to promote Belfast as a study, investment, and tourism destination.

3.9

In 2019, the Friendship Four was expanded to incorporate a Women's Tournament. Both events attract positive international TV exposure for Belfast in the United States and Canada, reaching over 150 million households.

3.10

The 2024 Friendship Four series is due to take place in November and is divided into two distinct parts, namely the delivery of the tournament (29-30 November 2024) and the Friendship Four Legacy Project (25-28 November 2024). This year's tournament will involve teams from Notre Dame, Harvard, Boston University and Merrimack College. It will attract over 1,000 overseas visitors to the city and account for over 3,000 bed nights to the Belfast economy. Each team will travel with 40-50 players and immediate staff members as well as 10 match officials, with typical homes crowds of 3,000 fans attending their respective games. It is estimated through the Tourism NI return on investment calculator that the visitor spend during the event will be £500K and the total direct economic spend will be in the region of £750K generated for the city over the event.

3.11

3.12	<p>The Legacy Project will extend beyond the main sporting activities and will include a schools cultural exchange programme involving over 400 young people. The main tournament event will be used as a “hook” to draw out discussion topics such as confidence, resilience and self-esteem, mental health and wellbeing and diet and nutrition. It will also involve a two-day STEM conference focusing on science and youth empowerment through sport. Finally, the overall event will be supported through a large-scale volunteer skills development programme which will see the recruitment, training and development of 60 volunteers to support a variety of roles across the weeklong programme.</p>
3.13	<p>Alongside the main event, there will also be a series of side programmes involving representatives from business and educational, sports and cultural institutions. Building on previous programmes, collaborative arrangements have already been made involving student engagement and faculty collaboration across the key educational establishments in Belfast and this year’s programme will seek to support and enhance these. With the introduction of new teams this year, there are opportunities to provide additional opportunities, not just for university-to-university collaboration, but also for business-to-business collaboration. Several opportunities have already been identified by universities competing in the 2024 tournament around the areas of cyber security and AI, sports tech and data reporting and STEM.</p>
3.14	<p>The event receives financial support from a range of partners including Tourism NI, the Department for Communities and the US Consulate alongside ticket income and corporate sponsorship. To continue this longstanding partnership, the event organisers are seeking a financial contribution of £15,000 towards the November 2024 event.</p>
3.15	<p><u>The Agreement</u></p> <p>The cultural unit have been engaging with The Lyric theatre in relation to a request to support the touring route for ‘The Agreement’ up to the value of £10,000. The Agreement is an award-winning play by renowned playwright Owen McCafferty. It examines the negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement revealing the drama behind this complex, pivotal moment for Northern Ireland.</p>
3.16	<p>The Lyric Theatre, Belfast and the Gate Theatre, Dublin are bringing this important work to audiences during Dublin’s Theatre Festival for four weeks from end Sept – Oct 2024.</p> <p>Other key partners in this initiative include Tourism NI and officers are in discussion on leveraging the opportunity this presents to host key ROI/International media and</p>

