



Subject:	Smart Belfast: Inclusive Innovation programme
Date:	23 May 2025
Reporting Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services
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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="text"/>			
<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			
After Council Decision			
Sometime in the future			
Never			

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 seek Committee approval for the design and delivery of a Belfast inclusive innovation public dialogue series that will inform a new programme of work that seeks to unlock new inclusive growth opportunities from the Belfast Region City Deal and other investments.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To approve the Inclusive Innovation public dialogue series at City Hall as part of the development of an Inclusive Innovation programme. 2. To note that the £85,000 proposal by Newcastle University to work with Belfast and three other cities to develop tools and techniques for inclusive innovation, has been accepted by the Economic and Social Research Council and that the project will commence in June 2025 with a planning workshop with partners in Newcastle Upon Tyne.
3.0	Main report
3.1	The innovative adoption of technology by all sectors of the economy is a core element of the Government's strategy for increasing productivity, generating new jobs and businesses. By way of example, in the realm of AI tech adoption alone the Government is projecting a boost to UK's GDP by over 10% by 2030. To support this approach the Government is encouraging cities and regions to build the conditions that will encourage collaborative innovation by all actors including industry and business, government, academia and communities.
3.2	The Government's approach is echoed in the strategic rationale for the Innovation, Digital and Skills pillars of the Belfast Region City Deal. These investments are designed to foster a regional innovation ecosystem that encourages R&D, innovation, tech adoption in ways that generate inclusive benefits for SMEs, communities and individuals.
3.3	However, an innovation-driven economy offers both opportunities and challenges for city leaders committed to inclusive growth. While such an economy will generate significant growth and wealth for a region, there is evidence that without well-planned, citizen-focused interventions, such an economy can actually widen inequalities and generate new barriers to jobs, services, and business opportunities.
3.4	'Inclusive innovation' is an increasingly popular term for the types of interventions that are required to address such risks. While there is no settled opinion as to which interventions are likely to be the most effective, there is important, current research in this area by institutions including King's College, Cardiff University, Newcastle University, Nesta, and locally at Queen's University. Much of this research is being considered by UK Government as it seeks to ensure an inclusive approach to the national economic strategy.
3.5	Locally, the Belfast Innovation Commissioner recently co-authored a new paper with Robyn Klingler-Vidra and Alex Glennie of King's College on measuring inclusive innovation. The

	research draws on the Belfast experience and will be published in Global Policy Journal ¹ on 16 May.
3.6	Working with the Belfast Innovation Commissioner, and City Deal partners, the Council's City Innovation Office is aiming to unlock this research and practice to generate new inclusive growth opportunities through the Belfast Region City Deal investments. While there is recognition nationally about the inclusion risks and challenges of an innovation-driven economy, there has been only limited local discussion on the mitigations that need to be put in place to address them.
3.7	As a first step the City Innovation, Office working with the Commissioner, is therefore proposing an initial series of public engagements at City Hall aimed at politicians, leaders and policy makers to build shared understanding about the challenges that inclusive innovation represents, and work towards a series of interventions and programmes at scale. (It's proposed that this would take a similar format to the Council's influential ' <i>Belfast: State of the City</i> ' dialogue that sought to engage on urban policy in the period leading up to the Review Public Administration.)
3.8	Co-chaired by the Council's Chief Executive and the Belfast Innovation Commissioner, each session would bring leading thinkers to bear on the critical elements of any future Belfast inclusive innovation programme. A small steering group working with ICB would establish the final programme themes such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activating community infrastructure to realise the benefits of inclusive innovation • The impact of AI on education and learning • Skills for Good Jobs in a rapidly changing economy • New models of entrepreneurship in the era of AI • Measuring inclusive innovation
3.9	The series would support a number of outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help shape a shared understanding and approach to inclusive amongst Belfast partners. • It would ensure a framework for citizen co-design and collaboration is informed by thought leaders across inclusive skills, economies and innovation. • Shape the inclusive innovation programme of Belfast City Council and partners including the work of Innovation City Belfast • Inform decision-making on projects associated the Skills, Innovation and Digital pillars of BRCD. • Support Belfast in engaging with potential funders of inclusive innovation initiatives at both the national and European levels.

¹ <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/16/05/2025/we-need-better-framework-measuring-inclusive-innovation-efforts>

3.10	Members are asked to approve the Inclusive Innovation dialogue series as part of the development of the inclusive innovation programme.
	Current inclusive innovation initiatives
3.11	While a full inclusive innovation programme is still to be developed, the City Innovation Office has been working on a number of 'pilot' inclusive innovation projects. These include a one-year 'citizen science' project in collaboration with Queen's University's QCAP team that will work with two inner city communities and is due to begin this Spring. The City Innovation Office is also working with Ulster University on a new £2.5 million EPSRC funded project that is seeking to maximise the place-based social and economic impact of the new Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology (CDHT).
3.12	Finally, Members will recall that the Council was approached by 'i30' a research collaboration between Newcastle University, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Oslo and EAFIT University. i30 has been particularly interested in how 'City Deal'-type investments have supported inclusive innovation ambitions in cities in the UK and elsewhere. Their work is helping Newcastle City Council to shape its social inclusion strategy, while their work with Pittsburgh is ensuring that that their city's innovation district is having wider social impact. Belfast has been invited to be the fourth city in this inclusive innovation project.
3.13	Members should note that the £85,000 proposal has been accepted by the Economic and Social Research Council and the project will commence in June 2025 with a planning workshop with partners to which officers have been invited to attend. The project will build on i30's existing work to deliver a range of tools, policy guidance and practice that can support cities in delivering their inclusive innovation outcomes.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.14	Resources for these initiatives have been identified within the existing departmental budgets. Based on costings for similar events it's estimated that the series would require a budget of approximately £40,000 (This would include travel, AV, promotional materials, write-ups, catering, etc). The series would be organised in-house.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.15	None at this stage.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None.