



Subject:	Licensing procedures and the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann
Date:	18 February 2026
Reporting Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control, Ext. 2300
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Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

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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

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. 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 matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. 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

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☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	This report sets out the proposed approach to a number of licensing regimes operated by the Council in relation to the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.
1.2	Location map for the Fleadh road closure area is attached as Appendix 1
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to note the information provided and to agree to the proposed approaches outlined, namely:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the Road Closure application procedures set out; 2. Note that the Building Control service will work to ensure that appropriate pavement café licences are in place for the Fleadh, but that suspension of some licences may be necessary in the lead up to or during the Fleadh for Health and Safety purposes; 3. Note that a further report Street Trading at the Fleadh will be brought to a future committee to determine location and process and agree that any applications received to date will be returned and refunded; 4. Note the ongoing work of the Building Control Service in relation to ensuring appropriate Entertainment Licensing is in place for the Fleadh; and 5. Agree that additional special meeting(s) may be required in July 2026 (dates to be determined)
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	The Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is to take place in Belfast on Sunday 2 to Sunday 9 August 2026
3.2	It is anticipated that the Fleadh will attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city for its duration. The successful hosting of the event will require input from a number of Council functions, communicating on a cross departmental basis within the Council and also multi agency liaison with external organisations. The ability to safely accommodate significant numbers of people within a designated city centre area will require a shared understanding of the programme of events and activities within this designated area in conjunction with planning for crowd safety.
3.3	As the Committee are aware, the Building Control service undertake a number of licensing duties across the city including determining road closure applications, pavement café licensing, street trading licensing and indoor and outdoor entertainment licensing. The Building Control Service therefore has a significant role to play in the event planning process and will be in continual communication with a range of internal and external partners in the lead in to and during this event.
3.4	As the event planning continues, the Building Control service will require the ability to make decisions that are compatible with ensuring the successful delivery of the event. This may require delegated authority on a number of issues that are detailed below.
	<u>Road Closure Order</u>
3.5	Under the Road (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (NI) 2010 and the Road Traffic Regulation (NI) Order 1997 applications can be made to the Council for a Road Closure Order if an event is to be held on a public road.

	<p>The Building Control Service and statutory partners have been engaged in pre-application discussions with the Fleadh Event Team around the extensive road closures necessary to facilitate an event of this size to ensure the safety of citizens and visitors. This has led to significant engagement from the event team with businesses and city centre stakeholders which is being stepped up during February, with a number of further public engagement and information meetings scheduled.</p>
3.6	<p>The road closure application was formally submitted to Building Control on 9th February 2026 and the Service is now embarking on formal consultations with Statutory partners before publishing the public notification, including a list of affected roads with timings and restrictions applied, in local newspapers and on the Council website which is planned for March.</p>
3.7	<p>This will commence a 21-day statutory public notification period which gives an opportunity for members of the public to send written representations / objections to the Council.</p>
3.8	<p>In line with the current Scheme of Delegation if no objections are received during the notification period, the road closure order will be issued under delegated authority.</p>
3.9	<p>If any objections are received during the notification period that cannot be resolved, they will be brought along with the application itself, for consideration by the Committee at your May 2026 meeting,</p> <p><u>Pavement Café Licensing</u></p>
3.10	<p>A pavement café licence authorises a person who operates a business supplying food or drink (in or from premises) to place furniture on a public area for use by customers. As Members will be aware, the Council is not responsible for alcohol licensing, which is administered by the Courts and enforced by the PSNI.</p>
3.11	<p>However, when a premises with a liquor licence, such as a pub, obtains a pavement café licence we inform the Courts, and their liquor licence is automatically extended to include the pavement café area.</p>
3.12	<p>Any business interested in providing such facilities at their premises for the Fleadh is advised of the need to apply in good time to allow the application to be properly considered. Any new pavement café licence applications should therefore be made by the end of April 2026 at the latest if they intend to operate during the Fleadh. These timescales are required for consideration of the application due to the processes that need to be followed in relation to notification, consultation and to allow time for any appeal should that be necessary.</p>
3.13	<p>Existing pavement café licensees are being reminded of their responsibilities in relation to pavement cafés and the Building Control Service continues to carry out enforcement of any illegal pavement cafes in the city centre area.</p>
3.14	<p>Some premises will want to maximise their sales footprint to capitalise on the business opportunity the Fleadh presents. Any proposals to extend an existing pavement café footprint must similarly be discussed with the Building Control service at least 3 months before the event to allow a variation application to be considered.</p>
3.15	<p>Modelling of crowd numbers and crowd management is currently being undertaken by the Fleadh team. This may determine that there are concerns around expected crowd density in certain locations. It may therefore be necessary to suspend some pavement cafes for health and safety reasons, potentially for the duration of the Fleadh, for set periods during the week of the event or as a result of crowd movement during the Fleadh event. Potential crowding</p>

	<p>risk may necessitate that pavement café furniture be removed to enable the free-flow of people on the footpath/street.</p>
3.16	<p>It will be important that information on locations that require pavement cafés to be removed due to crowd density and health and safety, and areas where pavement cafés could remain or even be expanded is provided as soon as possible to allow decision making on individual pavement cafes to be clearly communicated to licensees. It is expected that crowd modelling will be able to determine in the next month whether pavement café licences may need to be suspended.</p>
3.17	<p>In line with the relevant legislation, there are two mechanisms to suspend a pavement café licence or have furniture removed. For the purposes of doing so during the Fleadh the most appropriate options are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where a potential health and safety risk has been identified through crowd modelling prior to the event, a licensee will be notified of a reasonable request to remove furniture and / or barriers at least 21 days before the event (to allow time for any representation or appeal to be made). A licence condition is applied to all pavement café licences (previously agreed by Committee) and this will be used to make the reasonable request. This states: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">The Licensee will comply with any reasonable request from a duly authorised officer of the Council to remove such furniture and barriers from the licensed area as is necessary to facilitate the safety of the public, including the safe movement of vehicles, during special events*. Licensees will be notified of any such special events at least 14 calendar days before the event where possible.</p> <p>*Special Events</p> <p>A special event includes, but is not restricted to, an event such as a rally, procession, marathon or other sporting event or an open-air concert.</p> 2. Where a health and safety risk is identified during the event and immediate action is needed to in the public interest to remove any risk from a pavement café (and / or its furniture), the power delegated to the Strategic Director of Place and Economy as outlined in the Corporate Scheme of delegation, (I) v. below will be used: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">(I) Exercising all powers in relation to the issue, but not refusal, of pavement café licences, including the setting of trading hours in relation to pavement café licences, but excluding provisions relating to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. applications for the grant, renewal or variation of licences where adverse representations are received; ii. compulsory variation of licences; iii. revocation of licences; iv. setting of licence fees; v. suspension of licences except where in the public interest the Strategic Director, in consultation with the City Solicitor, considers that there are particular circumstances which make it necessary to suspend a licence immediately;
3.18	<p>Prior to the commencement of the Fleadh, notice will be given to any licensed premises where it is believed a health & safety risk may be posed in relation to crowd safety and the placement of temporary street furniture is required to be suspended.</p>
3.19	<p>Where a premises does not hold a pavement café licence, direct formal action will be commenced to ensure the removal of any temporary furniture.</p>

3.20	During the Fleadh, it is planned to have an enforcement team on hand to remind premises, if necessary, that for health and safety reasons the placing of furniture in a particular location has been suspended and, should compliance not be achieved, to promptly remove any furniture that may be deemed to be potentially hazardous.
3.21	It is hoped that with prior notification and engagement, formal enforcement action will seldom be required.
	<u>Street Trading Licensing</u>
3.22	<u>Existing Stationary Street Traders</u> The locations of all designated pitches that have a current operating licence within the city centre have been mapped out and provided to the Fleadh team for consideration and inclusion in their planning.
3.23	It has been established that there are 3 licensees who may be affected by the proposed event plan trading Hot and Cold Food & Drink on pitches at Writers Square, as this location is proposed for the official event merchandiser. Discussions are being held to accommodate those traders or provide alternative pitches for the duration of the event within the Food Village area being set up in the Cathedral carpark.
3.24	The modelling of crowd numbers and crowd management currently being undertaken by the Fleadh team and ongoing discussions on the Road Closure Order and health and safety arrangements will determine where there are opportunities for Street Trading within the proposed pedestrianised zone. Once those opportunities have been identified, a further report will be brought before the Licensing Committee to agree the locations and commodities to be sold (e.g not food and drink).
3.25	Committee will also then be able to consider how any identified pitches can be operated and whether applications will be taken from individuals to operate from those locations. If applications are to be invited, it is likely that this will be within a certain timeframe and that delegated authority will be sought from the Committee for officers to determine between any competing applications. This would save significant time as such matters would then not have to be referred to Committee for determination.
3.26	The Council has, however already received a number of applications for street trading during the Fleadh. In order to ensure fairness if applications are to be invited within a set timeframe it is proposed that all applications received to date are returned and refunded.
3.27	Due to crowd control health and safety measures that are being implemented during the event it will be necessary to robustly prevent the setting up of illegal stalls or any illegal activity that causes the infringement of free flow of people especially in areas that are known to have limited space.
	<u>Entertainments Licensing</u>
3.28	The Building Control Service has a well-established regime to complement an Entertainment Licence granted by the Council. This involves engagement with licensees, and their consultants, at the initial grant of their licence. Further to this, engagement continues at the renewal and/or variation stage(s) of their licence. Additionally, these processes are then complemented with a during performance inspection process involving unannounced inspections of venues when entertainment is being facilitated.
3.29	In preparation for the Fleadh, when it is anticipated that an increased footfall will be experienced by the hospitality sector, an enhanced frequency of during performance

	<p>inspections has been introduced across licenced venues in Belfast. In delivering this, the Service has sought to remind licensees of their responsibilities to manage their venues in accordance with the Entertainments Licence granted to them by the Council. In particular, licensees of indoor venues and their staff, are being encouraged to be familiar with the conditions set out within the BCC Rules of Management; conditions which they must adhere to when granted a licence. This inspection regime will continue over the duration of the Fleadh.</p>
3.30	<p>Recognising that entertainment will not solely be confined to indoor venues, the Service have been proactive in its consideration of outdoor entertainment. To upskill relevant parties, an invite to attend training delivered by an internationally recognised expert on crowd management was extended to, and availed of by the Fleadh team.</p>
3.31	<p>Many event spaces in the city which are commonly used for outdoor entertainment continue to be licenced and may therefore be available for activities associated with the Fleadh. The Service remains available to assist event organisers in developing their event management plans when using such spaces.</p>
3.32	<p>For operators of any venue who wish to consider providing indoor or outdoor entertainment, or existing licensees who wish to modify their venues in preparation for the Fleadh, it is essential that engagement with the Service takes place prior to commencement of any work. It is a statutory requirement to have in place an Entertainments Licence prior to any such offering. Notification, or discovery, of entertainment being provided without an Entertainments Licence will result in investigation by the Service.</p>
3.33	<p>To assist operators of venues which do not currently have an Entertainments Licence, the Service advises that any submission of an application for the grant or variation of an Entertainments Licence should be made before the end of April 2026 to allow at least three months for consideration of the application. These timescales are required for consideration of the application due to the processes that need to be followed in relation to notification, consultation and to allow time for any appeal should that be necessary.</p> <p><u>Licensing Committee</u></p>
3.34	<p>The last planned Licensing Committee before the Fleadh is scheduled for the 17th June 2026. Given the extent of organisation underway for the Fleadh and the expectation that this will continue to involve licensing issues up until the date of the event, officers believe that it may be prudent for the Committee to have a special sitting in July 2026 to cater for such matters.</p>
3.35	<p>In addition, where Committee is being asked to make decisions on certain matters, this may be accompanied by a recommendation to agree that the decision is not subject to normal call-in processes. This would allow more responsive decisions to be made in the lead into the event in association with any delegated authority sought. This will be vital in ensuring that the licensing functions of the City Council can be undertaken quickly to address any health and safety issues identified. Any report will be clear as to whether this is required for a particular decision.</p>
4.0	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p>
4.1	<p>There is an additional resource requirement for the carrying out of enforcement activities in the run-up and during the Fleadh period, a time when particularly outdoor musical entertainment is already at its peak in the City.</p>

5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
5.1	There are no issues associated with this report.
6.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix 1 – Road Closure Location map