



Subject:	International Relations quarterly update and forward plan 2026/27
Date:	11 March 2026
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input 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	

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
	The purpose of this report is to provide a quarterly progress update on delivery as part of the council's new International Relations Framework 2025-2028, as agreed at the November 2025 Committee meeting and to seek a number of outlined approvals required to progress imminent and planned activity in the first part of the year.
2.0	Recommendations
	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the progress of the first quarter delivery of the International Relations Framework (November 2025 to March 2026) • Note proposed activity for April 2026 to March 2027, as set out in Appendix 1, including opportunities for Member engagement • Approve the participation of the Lord Mayor and an officer in a civic visit to Sister City Nashville in April 2026 at a cost of £4,000 • Approve the proposed EU engagement activity, including participation of an All-Party delegation and one officer in the annual European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels October 2026, as well as the payment of the 2026 Eurocities Membership fee. Costs in respect to this activity include £8,000 for the proposed Brussels visit in October plus Eurocities annual membership of £15,000 • Approve the purchase of a one-year pilot CRM system as a means of tracking and measuring the impact of international activity at a cost of around £7,000 • Approve Council's annual participation in the New York New Belfast event, including stakeholder sponsorship, travel and attendance for the Lord Mayor, the Chief Executive, senior officer (or nominees) and one accompanying officer at a cost of £15,000.
3.0	Main report
3.1	At the November 2025 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members approved the International Relations Framework 2025 – 2028, along with an action plan for 2025/26 activity.
3.2	The three-year "framework" document is intended to be a supporting document to other key strategies and plans such as the Belfast Agenda, the Corporate Plan and Local Development Plan – setting out how priority objectives and ambitions in those documents can be achieved through international connections, networks and opportunities. Its purpose is to identify areas

	<p>of collaborative advantage and help focus resources on opportunities that can maximise return on investment, in keeping with city priorities.</p>
3.3	<p>As part of this Framework, it was agreed that there would be quarterly reports back to the Committee outlining progress and key activities over the previous three months as well as a look ahead to the coming quarter, including opportunities for Member engagement.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Quarterly progress highlights November 2025 to March 2026</u></p> <p>Since approval of the new framework, a range of international relations activities has been undertaken by council teams and their partner organisations or are scheduled to take place before the end of the month. Under the themes of the framework, key activities include:</p> <p><u>Trade and Investment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in the November 2025 inaugural China/NI Economic Summit event, co-hosted by Invest NI, the Chinese Consulate and Chinese Chamber UK. The event was attended by Chinese Ambassador to the UK Mr Zeguang • Planning work undertaken on a March 2026 recce visit to Belfast by key Nashville economic partners. This visit is ahead of a planned inward economic mission involving senior government, business and innovation partners from Nashville that will take place in October 2026. The recce and the full programme will involve stakeholders including the Global Health Connector NI, Catalyst, HIRANI, Department of Health and Invest NI • Facilitation of a two-day fact finding programme for the NI Health Minister to Nashville in March 2026 to look at best practice connected health innovations and to meet investors and collaborators in this field • Attendance at MIPIM international real estate and property investment event in March 2026 as part of a Belfast City and Region Place Partnership delegation • Preparatory work ahead of the annual New York-New Belfast event in June 2026, working with Invest NI, Belfast Chamber, New York State Comptroller Di Napoli's office and new Mayor Mamdani's office, to maximise our positioning this year. Included in this is collaboration with Tourism Ireland to incorporate strong messaging around Belfast Stories and Fleadh Cheoil • Work is ongoing under the banner of the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor Partnership. The Political Advisory Group meeting was hosted in Belfast City Hall in December 2025 and the second meeting of the DBEC Industry Advisory Group was hosted by Belfast Harbour in February 2026

- Ongoing support for Belfast-based partners seeking connections and introductions through our Sister City and other networks. Over the course of the last three months, we made introductions on behalf of 16 organisations.

Innovation & Knowledge Exchange

- The Council's Resilience team participated in the launch of an EU Horizon funded project "Pathways to Resilience" in Budapest in February. This is a €200,000 funded programme to support the development of a Climate Resilience Baseline report, a Climate Resilience Strategy, Action Plan and Investment Plan. The team also attended the Katowice-based PGM UPSURGE project General Meeting of partners before submission of the final report in February 2026
- In December 2025, we supported Queen's University's celebratory event to mark the departure of 90 North Eastern University students who had spent the previous semester in the city. This is directly linked to our Belfast-Boston Sister City relationship
- The EU and International Relations Team hosted two US academic inward missions including one from Belmont University in Nashville and also facilitated a visit from US College Counsellors who were in Belfast on a fact-finding mission to promote Belfast as an international study location
- The EU and International Relations Team connected the Innovation Commissioner to the Global Health Connector worldwide network. This led to opportunities for showcasing roles and meetings with potential investors at two key global health-related events.

City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development

- The council supported the annual Friendship Four ice hockey NCAA tournament in November and the Women's Friendship Series in January 2026 as part of the ongoing Boston Sister City connections
- The Council's Culture team engaged in EuroCities Culture Forum planning for the year ahead and in particular, as Vice Chair, contributed to the Work of Culture for Inclusive Cities Working Group looking at Older People's participation in culture
- The Culture team also enabled 2 Belfast musicians to participate in an event in Germany – the inaugural Hannover-Brno-Belfast collaboration with plans for further activity in 2026/27

- The Council’s Music Officer took part in the Daegu, South Korea Global World Forum where she presented opportunities for collaboration with other UNESCO Cities of Music. A Belfast artist also performed at the Daegu Opera House
- The Lord Mayor and elected members recently supported a number of Chinese New Year celebration events and the council demonstrated its support to the celebrations by lighting the City Hall in red on the eve of Chinese New Year
- The EU and International Relations Team facilitated key connections for the January 2026 conference and showcase Your Roots Are Showing. This is Ireland’s largest folk music event and strong connections with our partner city of Nashville.

3.5

Looking forward outline plan for 2026/27

The draft action plan for the coming year is attached in Appendix 1. Priority actions that members may wish to note include:

Trade and Investment

- Participation in New York New Belfast in June 2026 including key engagements and investment meetings
- Planned inward economic visit by Nashville businesses, investors and economic development leads: recce visit in March 2026 and full delegation to visit in October
- Engagement with NI Office in Brussels with regard to opportunities for EU-based trade promotion and engagement activities
- Development of new promotional materials and revamp of Invest in Belfast website to ensure consistent messaging across FDI investment and capital investment materials.

Innovation and Knowledge Exchange

- Preparatory work on application for European Capital of Innovation 2027
- Participation in significant global innovation events including Mobile World Congress and Smart City World Congress
- Development of new innovation investment prospectus.

City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development

- Supporting Fleadh team with key messaging to international audiences
- Ongoing engagement and collaboration as part of UNESCO city of music network
- Exploring potential for engagement opportunities as part of Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU (from July 2026).

	<p>Updates on progress against commitments as well as any developments as part of this plan will be brought back to the Committee on a quarterly basis for information and approval.</p>
3.6	<p>As previously noted as part of the November 2025 report to Committee, it can be challenging to track outcomes of much of the international relations activity. This is because progress can often come from an initial introduction that we made but that takes a while to develop. In order to track the impact of our work more effectively, it is proposed that we undertake a one-year subscription to the Amplify CRM system. This system is used by many other partners that work in this field and it appears to support more effective tracking of impact which should be helpful for the regular updates to Committee. The total cost for a one-year subscription is around £7,000.</p>
3.7	<p>There are a number of specific activities that will require Committee approval to progress in the coming quarter. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for Lord Mayor’s visit to Nashville: Following an invitation recently received from the Mayor of Nashville, it is proposed that the Lord Mayor – accompanied by one officer – undertakes a two-day programme in Nashville. This will include meetings and visits to key government, academic, civil society and Sister City representatives. The estimated cost of the visit is £4,000 • Confirmation of participation at EU Week of Regions and Cities: Following elected members’ agreement that the EU & International Unit augments its European activity, officers have commenced scoping activities that align with strategic need and seek to increase Belfast’s profile. The EU Week of Regions and Cities takes place annually in Brussels. It offers an opportunity to consider and profile the role that cities and regions play in shaping and transforming Europe’s economy, innovation, urban and societal landscapes. It is proposed that an all-party delegation led by one Council Officer attends this year’s event which is scheduled for 13-15 October 2026. It is proposed that upon approval the EU and International Unit will convene a working group of members to prepare for the event. The Unit will also work in partnership with NILGA, the NI Bureau in Brussels and The Irish Regional European Office to create a bespoke programme of side meetings and events. The total estimated cost for delivering this initiative is £8,000 • Eurocities membership: Since the ratification of the new International Relations Framework, officers have also been engaged in conversations with the Eurocities staff to also identify opportunities to benefit from membership. Eurocities staff recently agreed to provide additional support to assist with the identification of good practice, showcasing opportunities and learning exchange opportunities with relevant cities.

	<p>The annual membership fee is now due for renewal at a cost of £15,000 and elected members are asked to approve this cost</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New York New Belfast: This annual conference is a key moment to position Belfast, its innovation, economic ambitions and tourism developments to a select audience of strategic decision makers who represent government, business, civic society and investors. In recent years, the Belfast representation has enhanced to include tourism and economic development agencies, Belfast Chamber of Commerce, local entrepreneurs and media influencers. In addition to the conference the Council delegation undertakes bespoke meetings which serve to contribute to communicate the city's investment and development portfolio. It is proposed that the Lord Mayor, Chief Executive, one Senior Manager (or nominees) and accompanying officer with a total cost for a three-day programme plus conference sponsorship amounting to £15,000.
4.0	Finance & Resource Implications
4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lord Mayor's Nashville civic visit estimated at £4,000 • All party delegation to EU Week of Regions and Cities – travel, accommodation and subsistence estimated at maximum £8,000 • EuroCities annual membership fee £15,000 • A 1-year pilot CRM system to monitor and measure International Relations activity at a cost of £7,000 • Annual sponsorship and participation in New York New Belfast at maximum cost of £15,000. <p>The EU and International Relations budget was approved as part of the 2026-27 estimates setting process. Budgets for individual activities are the responsibility of the respective teams.</p>
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
	No specific equality or good relations implications. Activities will focus on support for Belfast-based organisations and companies.
6.0	Appendices
	Appendix 1: International Relations Delivery Plan April 2026-March 2027