



<b>Subject:</b>	European City of Sport 2026
<b>Date:</b>	20 March 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Jim Girvan Director Neighbourhood Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Cate Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b></p> <p>Insert number <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information relating to any individual</li> <li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li> <li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li> <li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li> <li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li> <li>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</li> <li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li> </ol>	
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	To provide Members with an update on the European City of Sport 2026 designation for the city including:

	<p>I. our related monitoring and progress reporting obligations to the awarding body ACES</p> <p>II. the request for non-recurrent additional resources to allow us to enhance programme delivery from April – December 2026, as well as ensuring adequate resource for communications activity.</p>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note the successful bid to ACES, note the planned programme of activity under the bid which is based on existing council and partner activity, note the programme monitoring and progress reporting obligations and consider the limitations for delivery in the absence of an approved budget to support additionality for collaborative impact.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p>ACES Europe have confirmed that Belfast was successful in securing the designation of European City of Sport for 2026 (Jan-Dec). ACES is a non-profit association based in Brussels and award this accolade each year, recognising the best cities, towns and regions across Europe to take part in sport. The successful bid will give the city an opportunity to showcase the excellent sports and leisure facilities/services provided by Belfast City Council along with the rich sporting heritage of the city.</p>
3.2	<p>Following a successful community launch weekend in late January 2026 (see appendix 1), our focus has now moved from application to delivery and officers are continuing to work with relevant internal services and strategic partners to expand the outline programme of activities and branding opportunities into a robust detailed programme.</p> <p><b><u>City of Sport Planned Programme Delivery for 2026/7</u></b></p>
3.3	<p>Our programme reflects ACES' manifesto pledges – enjoyment in exercise, willingness to achieve, sense of community, learning to play and improvement in health – and focuses on five key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investment made into sport in Belfast over the last 10 years</li> <li>support provided to elite athletes</li> <li>contribution of our leisure centre staff, local clubs, coaches and volunteers</li> <li>ensuring everyone feels welcome and included, and</li> <li>how sport is delivering better health outcomes for our residents.</li> </ul>
3.4	<p>2026 will see lots of great sports events delivered across the city, as well as more work to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>promote use of our leisure centres</li> <li>showcase the variety of sports available in our city</li> <li>celebrate the contribution of sports clubs and athletes, and</li> <li>highlight how everyone can get involved.</li> </ul>

3.5	<p>Activities will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the Phoenix Energy Belfast City Marathon and other sports events</li><li>• our annual Belfast Primary Schools' Cross Country Championships</li><li>• our try-it events in our community and leisure centres, and</li><li>• activities celebrating the contribution of athletes, coaches and volunteers.</li></ul>
3.6	<p>In December 2026 we will conclude the year with an end of year event and in Jan 2027 we will present the end of year report to ACES.</p>
3.7	<p>The current programme is limited to activity already planned within existing council and GLL revenue budgets. It also includes the activities and events planned by the range of delivery partners who have committed to support the Belfast City of Sport 2026 programme.</p>
3.8	<p>In order to maximise the impact of already planned activity, it is critical that the Project Co-ordinator proactively works with partner organisations to ensure that their programmes come under the banner of the City of Sport with the relevant branding and comms requirements.</p>
3.9	<p>The project has to date been supported entirely as extra work by the Senior Manager of Campaigns, Press and Social. This was for the bid and launch, which was being carried out on top of management duties. However, given existing resource pressures within the CMEA department, this is unsustainable.</p>
3.10	<p>For City of Sport to be successful, a full planned and resourced programme of events and a fully planned and resourced communications programme is required. City of Sport has the potential to present risk to the organisation if the programme and required communications cannot be adequately delivered.</p>
3.11	<p>To maximise the impact of the existing activity programme, we are asking members to consider a non recurrent budget of £160,000 which will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• £40,000 for MarComms support in the form of an additional temporary officer to support the extensive marketing and communications requirements involved in the year long programme.</li><li>• £15,000 to build a stock of CoS support materials, for example, infographics, mesh banners, branded sport products, for council facilities and events and to gift to partner delivery bodies.</li><li>• £85,000 for additional programme support which would include:</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ £25,000 to deliver targeted events/activities where gaps are identified in the programme particularly in relation to gender, disability, ethnic background, etc. This is in line with our commitment to removing barriers to physical activity to ensure we get more people playing sport, keeping fit and having fun.</li> <li>○ offer up to £5k for up to 12 Sporting Organisations to deliver key events in the city linked to the themes outlined in the City of Sport Bid Document – Total £60,000.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● £20,000 for an end of year celebration and final report including evaluation.</li> </ul>
3.12	<p>Officers are continuing to engage a range of strategic partners to explore how they can collaborate on the City of Sport status in order to maximise benefit and legacy for the city. Identified partners currently include DfC, Sport NI, PHA, BHSCT, UU, QUB, Tourism NI, etc. The intention is to further secure their strategic commitment, collaborative resourcing and legacy arrangements.</p>
3.13	<p>We have met with DfC and Sport NI to further interrogate their commitment to resource support the programme. DfC Sports Branch have agreed they will fully allocate their modest capital budget (circa £60k) in 2026 towards the City of Sport. While welcome, this is restricted support in that it is fully allocated to their hosting of Celebration of Sport events at locations throughout NI each year, bringing local school children together for taster sessions of a wide range of sports.</p>
3.14	<p>They have agreed to locate all events in 2026 in Belfast to celebrate the City of Sport. They propose to host 3 events March 2026:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● NewForge                                      Primary Schools                      13th March</li> <li>● Brook LC                                        Primary Schools                      20th March</li> <li>● Girdwood Community Hub              General Public                        28th March</li> </ul>
3.15	<p>They hope to allocate two further events in Sept/Oct subject to available funds. We will continue to work with DfC to ensure a citywide spread is achieved via the Autumn events. While DfC Sports Branch indicate they have no unrestricted budget to allocate, they have asked Sport NI about their potential input.</p>
3.16	<p>One of the core CoS themes is how sport is delivering better health outcomes for our residents, and we are working closely with colleagues in BH DU to brand any of their planned programme activity or campaigns in the 2026 calendar year. We are also exploring any additional resource support they, PHA or the Belfast Trust can commit in order to extend the programme.</p>

3.17	<p>Officers are continuing to work with council staff teams across Neighbourhood Services and Parks Outreach and Events to brand existing programme delivery including some of our external grant support where appropriate. We are keen to engage with other Departments to raise awareness of the European City of Sport 2026 programme and to identify collaborative opportunities to extend the programme and build the legacy.</p> <p><b>Obligations to ACES as a designated European City of Sport for 2026.</b></p>
3.18	<p>Belfast as a European City of Sport must comply with the general regulations as set out by ACES for successful cities these in summary include:</p>
3.19	<p>Quarterly reporting submission of reports to ACES commencing from 1 Apr 2026 and focusing on the noted requirements. Each report should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A summary of the activities carried out,</li> <li>• Photographic material,</li> <li>• Media coverage and press impact.</li> </ul>
3.20	<p>These reports allow ACES to monitor the correct use and promotion of the title, ensure compliance with the Regulations, and coordinate actions and events in the most effective manner.</p>
3.21	<p>At the end of the year, a final report must be submitted. This report must include a dedicated Legacy section, outlining the positive impact of the award on Belfast and its long-term outlook.</p>
3.22	<p>We have agreed a performance framework for the CoS programme and a simple monitoring return to capture information from council and GLL activities and from our delivery partners. Our ability to report to ACES on the related measures and targets will depend on the further development of the programme and available resourcing.</p>
3.23	<p><u>Financial Implications</u></p> <p>The bid phase costs were estimated at £30,000 and this amount was agreed by People and Communities committee with funding provided on a 50/50 basis shared between BCC and GLL. The bid phase was delivered within budget.</p> <p>To deliver an enhanced programme and ensure we have sufficient comms support to capture current planned activity, we have outlined a growth bid of £160k as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Corporate Comms (towards temp officer role) £40,000</li> <li>- Branding and support materials £15,000</li> <li>- Programme support £85,000</li> <li>- End of Year celebration event and programme report £20,000</li> </ul>

3.24	<p>Members are asked to consider a non-recurrent budget be allocated to city of sport for the 2026/27 financial year. CNS will ringfence any underspends over the 2067/27 year to cover the costs.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>This will be considered throughout and any appropriate issues highlighted to Members. Any amendments to existing scheme or new scheme will be considered in the context of any equality/Good Relations and rural needs considerations.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Dcouments Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 – City of Sport Launch