



Subject:	International Relations quarterly update
Date:	9 September 2026
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Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Some time in the future

Never

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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

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
	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 approval to progress imminent and planned activity in the second part of the year.
2.0	Recommendations
	Members are asked to: • Note the progress of the last five months delivery of the International Relations Framework (April 2026 – August 2026); • Note proposed activity for September 2026 to March 2027, as set out in Appendix 1, including opportunities for Member engagement; • Approve the participation of an officer and the Chair or Deputy Chair of Committee to attend the EuroCities Gothenberg conference with costs fully covered by EuroCities • Approve the participation of the Lord Mayor and two officers in a civic and business visit to Boston and Chicago in Spring 2027, at an estimated cost of up to £12,000 • Approve an EU & International Events & Conference financial contributions budget with a maximum budget of £40,000 for the financial year 2026/2027 • Approve a £5,000 contribution to the annual Belfast International Homecoming in October 2026 as a part of this Conference support scheme.
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 2026/27 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 and the Corporate 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 of collaborative advantage and help focus resources on opportunities that can maximise return on investment, in keeping with city priorities.

3.3	Members agreed that there would be quarterly reports back to the Committee outlining progress and key activities, as well as a look ahead to the coming quarter, including opportunities for Member engagement.
3.4	<u>Progress highlights April to August 2026</u> Since approval of the new framework, a range of international relations activities has been undertaken by council teams and their partner organisations. Under the themes of the framework, key activities include: <u>Trade and Investment</u> • Participation in the June 2026 New York New Belfast annual Business and Investment conference and programme in partnership with Invest NI, Belfast Chamber and the NI Bureau in North America. The Belfast delegation met with key individuals including Comptroller di Napoli who has invested \$110million to date in NI scale up companies and is committed to a further investment. Meetings also took place with a company currently considering Belfast as an investment location, as well as with Bloomberg Philanthropies • The former Lord Mayor undertook a brief visit to Nashville ahead of the North American Comhaltas Convention in Chicago. The Nashville programme focused on neighbourhood development, tourism product development, youth employment and skills and educational collaboration. This work has shaped the inward Nashville Sister Cities Belfast Visit planned for 18-22 October 2026 • Ahead of the early October 2026 Nashville life and health sciences business mission, the council and its partners hosted a planning visit in March 2026. Attendees included nine key Nashville economic partners in the field of life and health sciences. Local partners engaged in the programme development work included the Global Health Connector NI, Catalyst, HIRANI, both universities, Invest NI, Department of Health and City Deal projects such as Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology (CDHT) and Momentum 1.0. The early October visit will include targeted businesses, innovators and investors from the Greater Nashville area who are seeking to develop collaborations with local companies or explore trade and export opportunities • The International Team provided key connections for the visit to Nashville by the former Health Minister Mike Nesbitt MLA in March 2026. Minister Nesbitt's visit focused on exploring good practice in connected health innovations and he met with potential investors and collaborators in this field • Participation at UKREiIF - the UK's leading built environment showcase event in May 2026 in Leeds as part of the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership. The Belfast delegation attended a series of key meetings and engagements with senior UK

Government Ministers, institutional investors and developers, other cities and city regions. This is part of a wider programme of engagement to attract external capital investment into the city and the wider city region

- Ongoing support for Belfast-based partners seeking connections and introductions through our Sister City and other networks. Over the course of the last five months, the international team coordinated seventeen inward visits ranging from civic-based dignitaries, international students, exploratory business fact finding visits and potential future investors. Significant visits included the New York company mentioned above, who have already created twenty jobs in the city ahead of officially launching this year, and the US Teamsters' Union and Massport who have made introductions to high profile investors
- The team has also made introductions on behalf of twenty-eight organisations in this five month period ranging from inclusion of international artists into the Fleadh programme, to Belfast musicians connecting into key contacts in Nashville; as well as connecting two high growth Belfast companies with US-based investors and NI investment diaspora, and introductions leading to 5G investment in the Northern Ireland health estate.

Innovation & Knowledge Exchange

- The Council's Climate team continues to participate in an EU Horizon-funded project, "Pathways to Resilience", launched in Budapest earlier this year. 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
- In April, Belfast joined several Learning Cities from across Europe and North America in the UNESCO Learning City of Cork to exchange ideas, build momentum and accelerate the journey toward a European and North American Learning Cities network.

City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development

- The Council's Culture team continues to engage in the EuroCities Culture Forum as Vice Chair of the "Culture for Inclusive Cities" Working Group looking at Older People's participation in culture
- The culture team participated in Spancirfest, Varazdin, Croatia, in August 2026 with an opportunity to host Belfast musicians at an inaugural Belfast Music stage at future iterations of the festival

	• The council also took its first steps to re-engage with Europe through attendance at the EuroCities annual conference in June and also attended the inaugural “Liverpool Welcomes Europe” Summit in June. Topics covered included some of the biggest opportunities and challenges facing cities today – AI, Innovation, place-based leadership and city centre growth. Belfast was one of four Core Cities asked to present at a private Cities Roundtable • The Council participated in the inaugural UK-China Cities Alliance, led by Bristol, to begin to look at best practice engagement with China. The NI Executive Office is also looking at how to encourage and develop China-NI relations into tangible outcomes, and Belfast City Council will follow this work closely • The International Unit engaged with TG4 with respect to Nashville Sister City music links, resulting in Nashville artists performing as a central component to the TG4 opening concert on their live stage at the Fleadh on 6 August • City Hall was the venue for PRONI’s launch of its publication “Ulster American Treasures: The Migration Story”. City Hall was also illuminated in USA national colours on 4 July.
3.5	<u>Looking forward – outline plan for rest of financial year</u> The draft action plan for the coming year is attached in Appendix 1. Priority actions that members may wish to note include: <u>Trade and Investment</u> • Planned inward economic and innovation mission led by the Greater Nashville Chamber and Global Health Connector US bringing twenty Nashville businesses, investors and economic development leads from 5-7 October 2026 to connect with city anchor institutions • Participation in the annual Belfast International Homecoming programme 7-9 October. The council will support visit programmes for key delegates as appropriate. Outcomes of the Homecoming 2025 include plans for Belfast Harbour and net zero tenant companies to collaborate with New York State’s Red Hook terminals on green hydrogen, and potential future US investment in NI scaling companies. Members are asked to agree a financial contribution of £5,000 towards the event delivery through the unit’s Conference and Events support budget • Development of new promotional materials and revamp of Invest in Belfast website by year end, to ensure consistent messaging across FDI investment and capital

investment materials as well as development of new innovation-focused investment prospectus

- Undertaking a new programme of work for the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership, with re-focused planning for attendance at MIPIM in March 2027 and UKREiiF May 2027
- Exploratory and planning work on a potential business mission to Boston and Chicago in Spring 2027. The Boston programme will focus on profiling trade and investment opportunities in key growth sectors, particularly life and health sciences while the Chicago visit will build on connections established in the course of last year's participation in last year's North American Comhaltas Convention, particularly focusing on cultural and tourism linkages, and capitalising on the impact of this year's Fleadh. While initial engagements with local partner organisations and key contacts in both host cities has helped shape an outline itinerary, further scoping of additional engagements and opportunities will be undertaken subject to Committee approval of this proposal. Updates on progress will be shared as part of the next quarterly update.

Innovation and Knowledge Exchange

- Visit to Belfast by Head of Mayors' Challenge programme at Bloomberg Philanthropies on 22-23 October to meet with Chief Executive and Lord Mayor
- Participation in significant global innovation events 2026, including Mobile World Congress and Smart City World Congress in partnership with Global Health Connector, pending Council approval (separate approval process)
- City Innovation Team will attend the UK-France Local Government event in Bordeaux in November to promote the City Council's work in AI and innovation programmes
- Chief Executive participation in the Bloomberg LSE European City Leadership Initiative with thirty other European Mayors and Chief Executives.

City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development

- Reviewing and planning for VIP support delivery for Fleadh 2027, including early engagement at UK, ROI and NI government level for VIP participation, working with interested international artists to integrate into the programming, and also targeted sponsorship activity, including live interest from international partners
- Hosting a Nashville Sister City delegation with a cohort of fifteen politicians, diplomats, University representatives, music and cultural leads 18-22 October. The

	focus of the engagement will be to explore collaboration in culture, music, academia via teacher and student exchange, and political peer to peer cooperation • Ongoing engagement and collaboration as part of UNESCO city of music network with a September 2026 sub-network meeting planned in Sanliurfa, Turkey to plan UNESCO Music partnerships for the year ahead • Sixteen Irish traditional artists will be supported to take part in the Oulu Irish Festival in September 2026, with a strong Fleadh promotion planned • UNESCO Creative City of Film, Galway will host a Belfast artist/band at their own sub network of film meeting in September 2026 • Participation as speaker and Vice-Chair of Working Group, Culture for Inclusive Cities at EuroCities Culture Forum in Gothenburg 30th Sept – 2 Oct 2026. Opportunity for one officer and Chair or nominee to attend. Special ‘Political Track’ events on 1 October • Facilitation of the all-party delegation to Brussels to participate in the annual EU Week of Cities and Regions in October 2026 to re-engage with EU peers, explore relevant funding and policy opportunity and develop connections with other UK and Irish cities active in EU activity, including exploring potential for engagement opportunities as part of Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU (from July- December 2026). Culture Unit to present a paper on heritage collaboration at the event • Participation in the annual commemoration for the Founding of the Chinese People’s Republic, September 2026, and the inaugural celebration of India’s National Day in January 2027 • Participation in the 15-16 October meeting of the European and North American Learning Network in the Learning City of Lausanne, Switzerland. Purpose of the meeting is to define how the network will operate with opportunity to explore city to city exchange and joint projects/funding bids • The World Monuments Fund are organising a delegation of their donors to Belfast for an event known as “Escapades”. As part of their programme there is a planned reception in City Hall on Thursday 17 September.
3.6	<u>Measuring EU & International Activity impact</u> 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, a new CRM system is now

	operational. This should allow more effective tracking of our impact, as well as facilitating data collection.
3.7	<u>Supporting EU & International Conferences and Events</u> The EU and International Team is regularly asked to sponsor/financially support events and conferences in areas that – to a greater or lesser extent – are associated with the unit's priorities, as set out above. While these events can often act as a useful promotional vehicle for Council interventions and can help position Belfast internationally, some of can be last-minute requests for relatively small amounts of money and/or provide little measurable return or opportunity for promotion of the council's investment. In order to assess the impact of the requests, officers have developed a process to measure and score these requests based on their alignment to the International Relations Framework. The total budget to support contributions to events and conferences in this financial year is £40,000 and it is proposed that each application for support will be capped at a maximum of £5,000. Objectives and outputs will be agreed through a funding agreement with the event organisers and this will be signed off by the Director under delegated authority. This approach will help ensure that our resources are focused on areas of maximum return and will provide an objective rationale for assessing the relative merits of individual applications. Any events that will have wider corporate impact will be brought back to the Committee for consideration and endorsement.
4.0	Finance & Resource Implications
	• Establishment of an International Unit Conference and Events fund of £40,000 for the 2026/2027 financial year • Annual sponsorship and participation in the Belfast International Homecoming at a maximum cost of £5,000 • A maximum of £12,000 to deliver a business and tourism mission to Boston and Chicago in Spring 2027. The EU and International Relations budget was approved as part of the 2026-27 estimates setting process. The amounts indicated above were included within those estimates. Budgets for individual activities (apart from those set out above) are the responsibility of the respective teams.
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 September 2026-March 2027