



Subject:	Boston Links: Friendship Four Feedback and proposals for February Boston visit
Date:	13 January 2016
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
Contact Officer:	Laura Leonard, European & International Relations Manager

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To provide Members with an overview of the initial impact and outcomes from the inaugural Friendship Four festival and to propose a February visit to Boston in order to develop additional activities for the coming year.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- To note the content of the report- To approve the participation of the Lord Mayor and two Officers to travel to Boston from 4-9 February 2016 to engage in a series of follow-up meetings.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u> Members will be aware that the Friendship Four Festival was held recently in the city and was the first major output from the Boston-Belfast Sister City Partnership. This was the first time that competitive college ice hockey was played outside of the United States. Belfast City Council was a key sponsor of the initiative, along with DCAL, DEL, Sport NI, Tourism Ireland, Tourism NI, CITI, the US State Department and the city of Boston.
3.2	BCC was heavily engaged in project delivery and as well as taking the lead on the media

campaign and recruiting schools and youth groups to attend the afternoon matches on 27 and 28 November respectively.

3.3 In addition, a civic dinner was held on 25 November with 160 people in attendance. A pre-event business and academic breakfast meeting was also held, and an economic briefing was provided for members of the Boston delegation to inform them of the city's key priorities, development plans and economic position. The Boston delegation was led by the newly appointed Chair of the Boston-Belfast Sister City Board, Mr John Donovan.

3.4 The project delivery was led by the European and International Team, supported by Corporate Communications, City Events and externally through Visit Belfast and Belfast Giants staff. W5 were also involved in delivering a month long Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Programme which demonstrated the links between these fields and the sporting world.

3.5 The outputs from this project are as follows:

Project Beneficiaries

- 600 Bostonians travelled to Belfast for at least a 4 night stay - some of whom bookended the visit to make it a week's vacation.
- The Sister City delegation was cross sectoral and included business, academia, government officials and not-for-profit organisations.
- During the month long STEM programme delivered at W5, 12 events attracted 80 schools and 2 colleges of Further Education totalling, 2,776 participants.
- 2,308 school children attended the Friday afternoon game, from 50 schools across the city and a small number from the Belfast Giants outreach programme.
- 2,767 young people from community/youth/uniformed organisations attended the third game played on Saturday afternoon.
- Adults connected with the above games indicated that the overwhelming majority had never experienced an ice hockey match before and would never have been able to without the project support to do so.
- 2,867 tickets were sold, including to fans who travelled from outside Northern Ireland.
- Representatives from the 4 Colleges visited 8 local schools to inspire and connect with young people and learn about our educational and sporting culture.

3.6 Communications

- The project media lead-in commenced in April with the Boston launch and maintained momentum through a series of Sister City and Friendship Four related activities e.g. Visit Belfast window dressing, the October inspection team visit, presentation of bursaries to local schools, STEM events and then the main events.
- Social media played a fundamental role in communication activity. 359,700 Twitter accounts were reached and there were 543,800 impressions on the same channel. Facebook was used continually to build pace and disseminate feeds with substantial results: the November window dressing in Visit Belfast reached 18,533; the “One week to go” message reached over 10,000 people and our Welcome Message had a total reach of almost 9,000. The project also fared extremely well in terms of Council social media activity e.g. the Lord Mayor conducting the inaugural face off was the third most popular tweet of that week.
- Equally, the Colleges’ employment of the channels enabled live cross-Atlantic messages to be conveyed - for example, Brown University posted up a video of their schools visits which they deemed to be the most valuable part of their experience.
- Games were broadcast live to America and Canada through the New England Sports Network (NESN) and The Sports Network Channel 1 (TSN1). NESN reaches 4.2 million homes across New England and TSN has 158,000 subscribed viewers in Western Canada.
- A 20 second advertisement was also placed during the matches to promote the region.
- Friendship Four featured in both of Boston’s major newspapers - The Herald and The Globe. The latter is the most widely circulated daily newspaper in Boston and New England with an average daily circulation of about 232,432, whilst The Herald has a daily readership of almost 96,500.
- Locally, the project received extensive media coverage including:
 - Radio coverage and interviews with Radio Ulster, Cool FM and Citybeat.
 - Peak time television audiences thanks to UTV and BBC incorporating it into the main newsdesks.
 - Written articles and editorials including Ulster Business, Sunday Life, Newsletter and The Irish News.
 - Local written press, for example, Armagh, Down, North West.

3.7

In addition to the sporting events, the business representatives from Boston had a number of meetings with Belfast contacts. They identified a range of opportunities for future business-related activities between the Sister Cities. In order to progress these

	<p>discussions and to put in place a number of activities for the coming year, the Chairman of the Sister Cities Group in Boston invited the Lord Mayor to Boston in February 2016. This visit would also coincide with a future visit to Boston by representatives from the Odyssey, who are planning a repeat of the Friendship Four event in November 2016.</p>
3.8	<p>It is proposed that the Lord Mayor and two officers undertake a visit to Boston in February 2016 to scope out additional opportunities for business-related initiatives between the cities in the coming year. Any proposed actions will be brought to a future of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee for approval.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Travel and accommodation requirements at a cost of approximately £5,600 for 3 persons for a 5 day programme will be met through the International Relations Budget.</p>
3.10	<p>Any future request for a financial contribution to Friendship Four would be brought to Committee for consideration upon clarification of the request from Belfast Giants and assessment of the added value.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>No specific equality or good relations implications.</p>
4.0	Appendices – documents attached
	None