



<b>Subject:</b>	Tourism Delivery Plan 2017/18
<b>Date:</b>	10 May 2017
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Clare Mullen, Tourism, Culture, Heritage & Arts Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Some time in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<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</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Provide Members with an update on the work to date on the Integrated Tourism Strategy.</li><li>- Seek Members' approval to progress a number of priority actions in the 2017/18 financial year.</li></ul>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Note the contents of the report, in particular the role of tourism as a key priority for City Development and Growing the Economy themes of the Belfast Agenda.</li><li>- Consider the key areas of focus for 2017-18 set out in sections 3.11 and 3.12 and</li></ul>

	endorse delivery of the actions and associated budgets as outlined.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Integrated Tourism Strategy was approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in May 2015. The strategy was developed in tandem with the City Centre Regeneration Strategy and Investment Plan and the proposals are aligned to support the future development, economic growth and profile of the city.</p>
3.2	<p>The vision is to develop Belfast as a city that wants to welcome the world and share its history by creating a destination that the world wants to experience firsthand. The strategic goal is to double the value of tourism by 2020 with the focus on achieving this by generating discretionary tourist overnight stays, especially higher value leisure and business tourism.</p>
3.3	<p>The strategy sets out a number of priority areas for investment, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visitor management – providing excellence in visitor management standards through all platforms.</li> <li>- Capacity building development – building the capacity of locally-based tourism providers to develop their products and sell more effectively.</li> <li>- Business tourism – supporting investment in business tourism in line with new capital expenditure.</li> <li>- Increased tourism product – diversifying the tourism product to meet demand from key customer segments.</li> <li>- Improved quality of service – improving customer service standards across all hospitality establishments.</li> <li>- Increased marketing activity – targeting key market segments and partnering with organisations on campaigns.</li> </ul>
3.4	<p>Since the publication of the strategy, the tourism economy continues to grow in the City. Statistics published by NISRA show that, in the year to September 2016, visitors to Northern Ireland spent £821m in the local economy with 74% coming from external visitors making tourism worth £606m as an export business. This is an increase of 10% in overall visitor spend and a 14% increase in external visitor spend when compared with the year to September 2015. Overall visitor numbers increased by 1% to 4.6m compared with the year to September 2015. Increases in bed nights and spend have been driven by</p>

a continued growth in external visitors, particularly from GB and overseas. External visitor numbers have increased by 8% in the year to September 2016, up to 2.5 million.

3.5

In terms of the City's performance in 2016, the rise of tourism was clearly evident through:

- 82% room occupancy in our hotels throughout the year, with occupancy levels as high as 95% at some points.
- 83 cruise ships docked in Belfast (up 42% on 2015), bringing 143,000 people to the City.
- The City hosted 77 conferences in 2016 many in the re-opened and newly-extended Belfast Waterfront Hall. These conferences generated 75,000 bed nights for our hotels – up 41% on the previous year.
- More than 700,000 visitor enquiries handled at the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre, visitor information points at the two airports, and self-service kiosks at key locations, showing an increase of 12% on 2015.

3.6

#### Strategic Context

The Belfast Agenda has at its core a commitment to inclusive economic growth. Growing the Economy and City Development are the two pillars that set out our ambitions for growing tourism in the city. Under these two pillars, the priority is to increase tourism spend as well as the number of bed nights. Members will also be aware of the agreement to proceed with a bid for European Capital of Culture in 2023. If successful, this will have a significant impact on tourism demand in the run up and during that year.

3.7

Additionally, the importance of tourism as a priority sector is evident in a number of key documents including the draft Programme for Government. One of the indicators in the PfG is 'to improve Northern Ireland's attractiveness as a destination'. This relates to improving the profile of Northern Ireland as a business and tourism location, as well as improving the quality of life for those that live here.

3.8

Members will be aware that a new Northern Ireland Industrial Strategy has just closed for consultation. The Council response to this document drew attention to the limited references to the tourism and hospitality sector as critical elements of future economic growth across the region. It is understood that the draft Northern Ireland Tourism Strategy is currently awaiting ministerial approval but has been held up given the current suspension of business at the Northern Ireland Assembly.

3.9

Proposed Action Plan 2017/18

Members will be aware that a significant proportion of the Council's investment to support tourism development in the City is allocated to Visit Belfast. They act as the Destination Management Marketing Organisation (DMMO) for the City covering activities such as visitor servicing, tourism marketing and business tourism support. Visit Belfast presented their plans for the 2017/18 financial year to the Committee in March this year. Members will recall that they drew attention to the impact of their activities by demonstrating that their work generated £122million for the local economy last year.

3.10

In addition to providing financial support to Visit Belfast and overseeing the management of the investment, the Council's activities in tourism development focus principally on strategic engagement with partner organisations (Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland, key visitor attractions), supporting the development of local tourist product and strategic investment in new infrastructure to support tourism growth. This will include the new 'Belfast Story' visitor attraction as well as our engagement with the private sector to encourage investment in new hotel and leisure developments.

3.11

Key areas of activity for 2017/18 will include:

- Business Tourism Investment: Members will be aware that the Council and Tourism NI have, for a number of years, co-invested in a conference subvention scheme for the city. This has been a key element of the business tourism support activity over recent years and will be critical if the growth ambitions are to be achieved in the coming years. Council investment of £200,000 will be matched by investment from Tourism NI. A review of the scheme was conducted at the end of 2016 and, as a result, new guidelines will be developed in order to streamline the process and ensure that the fund meets the changing needs of the conference sector. In addition to the subvention scheme, the Council will continue to provide access to City Hall for key functions such as conference receptions as this is a critical element of added value and a unique selling point for the city.
  
- Developing Local Tourism Infrastructure: While the commitment to double the value of tourism will require focused investment on the key tourism assets and the development of new assets (including the planned city centre visitor attraction) it is also important to support the development of local tourism products across the city. This will ensure that the benefits of tourism growth are felt across Belfast – not just in the city centre. Officers will work with existing and potential tourism assets across the city to explore opportunities for development. This may include

the development of tourism trails, support for marketing and customer service improvements, development of new products and management of online presence. A budget of £130,000 has been set aside for this work and officers will also engage with partners including Tourism NI to lever additional budgets to increase the investment in this area of work.

- Improved Tourism Research and Analysis: As the tourism and hospitality sector in the City grows, the need for improved research and analysis, including real-time data becomes more critical. Following engagement with Tourism NI, officers have identified the potential to invest in the development of new data capture and research work. This will help create a shared resource to generate improved visitor insights and will plug existing gaps in both qualitative and quantitative data. This work will align to the emerging Smart City framework for Belfast. Officers will also collaborate with the City Centre team to bring forward refreshed research to support hotel developments in partnership with the private sector. A budget of £45,000 has been set aside for this work.
- Visitor Management: Many tourists in Belfast arrive as part of organised tour groups. This means that there is a need to provide appropriate coach parking facilities – particularly secure overnight parking for the coaches. Officers have worked for some time with Visit Belfast to identify relevant sites but there are ongoing challenges regarding the location of these and the need to ensure appropriate levels of security. It is proposed that officers continue to work with Visit Belfast to find a solution. A nominal budget of £10,000 has been set aside for this activity but it is clear that additional investment will be required from other partners.
- Food Tourism: Building on the success of the Year of Food & Drink in 2016, Tourism NI are currently in the process of developing a Food and Drink Strategic Plan. This initiative will help to inform all partners on the future strategic plan for Food and Drink in NI as well as providing a legacy from the 2016 investment. Officers will therefore work in partnership with Tourism NI to develop a food and drink plan for Belfast through a partnership approach with the industry. This is likely to involve investment in a number of food-related events. These will be delivered by Food NI and they will manage, secure additional sponsorship and evaluate their success. The budget set aside for these initiatives is £40,000.

	<p>Given the impending Regional Tourism Strategy as well as the finalisation of the Belfast Agenda in the coming months, it is proposed that there will be a mid-term review of the current Integrated Tourism Strategy in the course of this year. This will ensure that it continues to provide a relevant framework for cooperation between the key partners responsible for tourism development and promotion in the city. It will also take account of factors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The potential impact of Brexit on the tourism economy, including currency fluctuations.</li> <li>- The recent growth in hotel developments in the city and the continued push to grow the tourism accommodation provision in Belfast.</li> <li>- The ongoing investment in the city centre and the buoyant private sector investment profile, illustrated by the recent public-private partnership approach of MIPIM.</li> <li>- Council proposals for a new city centre visitor attraction to complement the existing infrastructure.</li> </ul>
3.13	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Activities identified will be resourced from the agreed Departmental budget allocations for the current financial year. These have already been approved by the Committee as part of the estimates process.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>The Tourism Strategy was screened out and any major projects will be taken forward in consultation with the Council's Equality and Diversity Officer.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	None