



<b>Subject:</b>	Operational Amendments to: Christmas Lights Switch-on 2017 & St Patrick's Day 2018
<b>Date:</b>	13 September 2017
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Gerry Copeland, City Events Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
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"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	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	This paper is to seek approval from Members in regard to proposed operational changes to the 2017 Christmas Lights Switch-on and the 2018 St Patrick's Day celebrations.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Approve the proposed road closure arrangements for the 2017 Christmas Lights Switch-on (Saturday 18 November) and for such changes to be utilised for all future Christmas Switch-on events subject to the Council's Events and Festivals strategic</li></ul>

	<p>review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agree that the Council amends its operations for the 2018 St Patrick's Day (Saturday 17 March) celebrations to a parade only event and not to stage a concert in Custom House Square.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p>As Members are aware, the issue of health and safety is an ongoing and changing dynamic. Across Council, staff continually work to ensure the safety of the public, staff and contractors when staging BCC's events programme. This involves a continual review of arrangements, whether the event is a one-off, an annual or multi-annual project. As part of this review process Members are being asked to endorse changes to two of the city's traditional events – Christmas Lights Switch-on and St Patrick's Day Celebrations. These changes are designed to increase the robustness of health and safety plans attached to the delivery of both projects.</p>
3.2	<p>Members may be aware that the switching on of the city's festive lighting dates back to the early 1970s. Over the years, the staging of the Belfast Christmas Lights Switch-on has become a bye-word for the start of the Belfast Christmas Festive period. Hundreds of thousands have attended the event over the years, with an annual audience of over 10,000. As the event has grown additional elements have been added in order to cope with crowd numbers and in doing so provide a safe and welcoming space. However, since the introduction and growth of the city's very successful Christmas Market it has become apparent that the complexity of setting up for two major events, the Christmas Market and Switch-on, requires a change in approach to increase the level of safety for all. Therefore, Members are asked to note that Officers, with the endorsement of the Council's Events Advisory Panel (non-statutory advisory group made of a range of Council Officers, PSNI, BCCM, Department for Infrastructure (Roads), NI Ambulance Service, NI Fire &amp; Rescue, etc.) would intend to apply for road closures along: Wellington Place; Donegall Square North and Chichester Street from 21:00 hours, on Friday 17 November to Sunday 19 November, at 07:00 and restrictions to traffic in Donegall Square East. This arrangement would restrict vehicular movement to contractors (involved in the Christmas Lights and Christmas Market build) and require the Council to work with partners such as Belfast City Centre Management, PSNI, Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Translink and the Department of Infrastructure (Roads) to enforce such road closures. The intended outcome would be to reduce the level of pedestrian and vehicle interaction in an area that</p>

is heavily congested even before the Christmas Market and Lights Switch-on construction has started. This interaction has become an area of grave concern with many pedestrians taking risks at road junctions where temporary layouts are in place, often ignoring directional signage, advice of stewards and breaking through directional barriers. Given these issues, Officers, and members of the Events Advisory Panel are now of the opinion that the current traffic/pedestrian management arrangements present an unacceptable level of risk to the many pedestrians, motorists and other road users during the final set-up for both the Christmas Market and Switch-on. These amendments have been notified to Belfast City Centre Management and Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce. Therefore, Members are asked to support Officers in their efforts to increase the levels of safety in an area of the city that experiences exceptionally high vehicular and pedestrian footfall even before the staging of the city's two biggest Christmas festive events.

3.3 The second approval which Members are being asked to endorse is the removal of the concert element of the Council's annual St Patrick's Day festivities – the day normally involves both a concert and a parade. Over the last eleven years, both events have been staged to mark the Bank Holiday, with a city centre audience in excess of 20,000. However, the capacity to host the concert, at Custom House Square, has become an issue of concern in the last number of years. The key is the number of people trying to access the concert site post the parade, with significant congestion and safety issues at the intersection of High Street, Victoria Street and Queen's Square/Custom House Square. It is expected that the level of congestion will increase significantly given that the 2018 event will be staged on a Saturday. In addition to this, it is notable that after the initial influx, audience numbers tend to fluctuate, particularly depending on the weather. Therefore, for 2018, and subject to the Council's Events and Festival strategic review, Officers are seeking to expand the parade element of St Patrick's Day. This would involve a larger procession which would assemble in Custom House Square and then follow a city centre route which would traverse through the main retail district and return to Custom House Square. To enable this to happen it would mean there would be no concert on the day. Recent surveys by Belfast City Council indicate that the best way to improve the St Patricks Day event would be the upscaling of the parade.

3.4 Therefore, given that St Patrick's Day, in 2018, will be delivered by Belfast City Council on a Saturday, there is a unique opportunity to attract a wider, representative audience to the event by growing the parade and carnival aspect of the day. This would involve an increase in spend to provide additional workshops, performers, props and expenses to allow more groups to participate from across the community. Any expenditure on this aspect would be

	<p>found within the existing event budget. Plus if permission is given, to rethink the musical element of the event, by moving away from a main stream concert at Custom House Square, and instead look towards 'pop up' musical and street performance to be staged within Belfast city centre in areas such as, Writers Square, Bank Square, Corn Market, St Anne's Square and Cotton Court. The time frame for the event activities would also be increased to run from 11:00 to 17:00, contributing to a more festival feel throughout the city for the day. Such changes would adhere to suggestions from Belfast City Centre Management and Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce.</p>
3.5	<p>Overall, it is envisaged that these changes would assist in reducing significant health and safety concerns that now pose a major risk to the public, contractors and Council staff for both the Christmas Lights Switch-on and St Patrick's Day events. However, additional health and safety elements may be required, for both events, due to ongoing reviews connected to overall security in public spaces in the light of recent terror attacks. Any arrangements would be introduced and conducted in conjunction with PSNI and would be subject to ongoing analysis.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>As with all major public facing cultural projects, the above events have the potential to bring together people from a wide range of backgrounds and therefore promote good relations in the city and across Northern Ireland.</p>
3.7	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>It is envisaged that there will be limited additional costs connected to the proposed amendments. Any changes would be subject to input from PSNI and the Department for Infrastructure (Roads). However, Officers would be hopeful that any cost implications would be found within the Development Department's City Events Unit budget for 2017-18.</p>
4.0	<p><b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b></p>
	<p>None</p>