



<b>Subject:</b>	Local Tourism Programme – Support for Product Development
<b>Date:</b>	7th February 2018
<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	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advise Members of work that is currently under way to support the development of new tourism products across the City</li><li>• Seek Members' approval to commission external consultancy support to improve the volume and quality of local tourism products and to explore the viability of new product development opportunities, in the context of potential investment opportunities through the City Deal and other relevant funding streams including the re-casted Social Outcomes Fund to support the city's growing tourism infrastructure.</li></ul>

<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 contents of the report; and</li> <li>- Agree to provide up to £25,000 to commission external support to test the viability of emerging product development ideas in the City's neighbourhoods with a view to helping the Council and partners to focus their investment on those products that are most likely to become sustainable businesses.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p><u>Strategic Context</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 first-hand. The strategic goal is to double the value of tourism by 2020 with a focus on achieving this by generating discretionary tourist overnight stays, especially higher value leisure and business tourism. Currently, the tourism and hospitality sector contributes around 5% of the city's GVA. In other comparable locations, this is around 11% and this points to the significant potential for growth within the sector.</p>
3.3	<p>In this context, product development has been identified as one of the key pillars of the Strategy. In order to encourage visitors to stay longer, they need to be assured that there is a sufficient volume of high-quality tourism product that will allow them to fill their visit programme. The increased importance of social media and the ability of visitors to share their experience immediately, as well as the competitive global market for tourism, mean that it is essential that the products are of a high quality standard and that their overall visit to the city meets and exceeds their expectations.</p>
3.4	<p>The Tourism Strategy runs to 2020. Each year, the Council and partners prioritise specific areas of work within the Strategy that require additional focus in order to deliver on the overall ambitions. Members will be aware that, as part of the 2017/18 Action Plan that was presented to the Committee in May 2017, approval was given to support the development</p>

	<p>of local tourism in order to ensure that the benefits of tourism growth were felt across Belfast – not just in the City Centre. This is line with the Belfast Agenda commitments to increase the number of overnight stays, grow visitor spend and support inclusive economic growth.</p>
3.5	<p>Since then, Officers have been working with partners including Tourism NI and local tourism organisations such as East Belfast Partnership and Fáilte Feirste Thiar to identify and explore opportunities for supporting the development of local tourism and encouraging improved visibility of and access to the tourism product. Some of the emerging ideas include the need for investment in local capacity building (skills development, quality standards) as well as the need to support the development of new tourism product to capture the unique offer in each of the areas and to present the authentic Belfast experience to the visitor in a way that is in keeping with the wider city narrative.</p>
3.6	<p>Additionally, Members will be aware that approval was given to carry out a mid-term review of the current Tourism Strategy as a means of testing its focus in the light of local, national and international developments since 2015. Some of the emerging findings from that work highlight the need for increased focus on ensuring high quality product development to service the need generated by the significant increase in hotel accommodation in the city in particular. The evidence for this is based on having more unique, authentic Belfast “things to see and do” that will attract more visitors to the City, get them to stay longer and spend more. Visitors are increasingly seeking unique and tailored experiences and it is essential for the City to consider how these can be delivered.</p>
3.7	<p>While Visit Belfast is taking the lead in marketing the city, the Strategy review points to the need for more focused investment around a number of “supply-side” activities. These include skills development, tourism infrastructure and product development. Members will be aware of the volume of activity under way on the Employability and Skills side, particularly with the Hotel Academies that have been designed to meet the growing demand from the 1000 new bedspaces that will be created in the City this year.</p>
3.8	<p>In terms of tourism infrastructure, Members will also be aware of the investment from the private sector in the new hotel accommodation as well as the investment in the wider hospitality offer that is driving a significant part of the City’s economic growth. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has agreed to support a number of local tourism infrastructure projects. However, it is recognised that there is much greater potential to develop additional local tourism infrastructure projects in order to capture the growing</p>

	<p>demand generated by increased tourism numbers. In addition to the capital infrastructure investment, it is essential to consider wider product development support. This can include activity such as trails and tours as well as “packaged” programmes designed with the visitor in mind and building on the unique offer in each of the locations.</p>
3.9	<p>The draft Tourism Strategy for NI also emphasises the need for additional investment in world class product and experience development. Tourism NI see this as essential to the NI “offer” to the visitor, as a means to increasing the dwell time and spend.</p>
3.10	<p>Members will also be aware of the development work under way on the Belfast Region City Deal. Tourism has emerged as one of the priority strands of this City Deal work, both in terms of opportunities for investment in skills development and infrastructure development to support economic growth. There is a need to establish a Tourism Product Development Framework which is aligned to the City Region Industrial Framework as well as the Tourism Strategy for NI. This framework needs to not only focus on the development of tourism in the City Centre but it also needs to identify the product development opportunities within neighbourhoods that can be strengthened and further developed as part of City Deal or other funding mechanisms. This approach will ensure that tourism can support the commitment to inclusive growth across the City. Sitting alongside the proposals for the Destination Hub (Belfast Story) Visitor Attraction in a City Centre location, there is an opportunity to consider how the local tourism product can link to this wider story and how visitors can be encouraged to move beyond the City Centre to appreciate the local “Belfast Story” within the City’s neighbourhoods.</p>
3.11	<p>While the work on the Local Tourism Programme will continue and extend to cover all areas of the City, it is considered that there is a need to commission external support to test out the feasibility and viability of a number of the product development concepts. This will establish whether there is merit in seeking further investment support to help bring these new products to market. It will also consider how the emerging product development opportunities can be better “packaged” to meet the needs of the visitor and will also inform the due diligence work being undertaken with regard to neighbourhood tourism projects being taken forward under the Social Outcomes Fund.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Funding for the development of the programme will be resourced from the Departmental budget allocations for the current financial year. The total budget available for this testing</p>

3.13	<p>and viability work is up to a maximum of £25,000.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>The Local Tourism support can improve community cohesion, build local prosperity and help address issues of inequalities across the City.</p>
4.0	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	None