



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Visit Belfast Business Plan 2019/20</b>
<b>Date:</b>	6th March, 2019
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Greer, Director of Economic Development, ext. 3470
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<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 or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of the report is to present the request for funding from Visit Belfast for the 2019/20 financial year and to set out the organisation's strategic plan, focused on increasing visitor numbers and tourism spend in the city. Visit Belfast will be in attendance at the Committee meeting to present the detail of its 2019/20 plan.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- note the draft Visit Belfast business plan 2019/20 and the areas where Council funds will be invested. The overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast in the coming financial year has been taken account of in the revenue estimates that have already been approved by the Council; and</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- approve the funding allocation of up to £1,997,500 for 2019/20 expenditure, subject to the development of a funding agreement establishing priority areas of activity and agreed targets.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	Members will be aware that Visit Belfast is the principal Destination Management and Marketing Organisation for the city of Belfast. Visit Belfast leads on the tourism marketing activities in Belfast. It is a membership organisation with more than 500 member businesses across the wider hospitality industry. Visit Belfast works, on behalf of its members, with a range of public and private partners such as the Belfast Chamber and the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to promote Belfast as a tourism destination.
3.2	Visit Belfast targets both the leisure and business tourism markets. It has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ICC Belfast to drive new business to the city. There have been significant successes in this field and business events and conferences taking place in the city in this financial year are projected to deliver a return of around £60 million.
3.3	Visit Belfast is a public/private partnership. Its current Chairman is Howard Hastings OBE from the Hastings Hotel Group. Belfast City Council has four Councillor representatives on the Board: Councillor Arder Carson, Councillor John Hussey, Councillor Kate Nicholl and Councillor Mairead O' Donnell.
3.4	The tourism and hospitality industry in Belfast continues to go from strength to strength. Belfast continues to drive the regional tourism economy; in 2017 (last published Local Government District tourism statistics by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency), Belfast hosted 30% of all tourism trips to Northern Ireland (1.4m trips) and tourism spend amounted to £328m, 35% of Northern Ireland tourism spend.
3.5	Forecasts suggest that the sector will account for around 15% of new jobs in the coming decade. While it currently accounts for only 5% of the regional GDP, in many other locations, this is more than 10% of the GDP. This illustrates the potential for additional growth within the sector. One of the key growth areas is in hotel accommodation: over the past twenty years, annual hotel room sales increased by 314%, from 324,000 hotel rooms sold in 1999 to 1.34m in 2018. Visitor enquires have also increased by 343% reflecting the growing interest in visiting Belfast. One of the biggest tourism successes has been the growth in cruise visitors – in 2018, this had increased to 115 ships carrying an estimated 189,000 passengers and crew.

3.6	<p>Visit Belfast is focusing on growing overnight stays, servicing the day trippers, increasing the length of overnight trips and increasing visitor expenditure in the city. Visit Belfast continues to drive visitor numbers and spend focussing its activities in the areas that offer the biggest market opportunity; namely short-breaks, business tourism, day-trips and cruise arrivals. It also manages three gateway visitor information centres, one in Belfast city centre at one at each of the two Belfast airports.</p>
3.7	<p>The mid-term review of the Integrated Tourism Strategy for Belfast, references the “demand-side” and the “supply-side” interventions in the tourism industry. Visit Belfast – along with Tourism Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland and other marketing partners – are largely responsible for the “demand-side” activities, principally marketing the city to those interested in visiting. In parallel, “supply-side” activities such as local tourism initiatives, product and experience development, skills development and infrastructure investment are required in order to build the sector and ensure that there is a credible, quality product that can be marketed to target audiences. The review notes that the Council has a significant role to play in supporting and shaping the product development, which will be driven through the new Cultural Transformation Strategy. Additionally, the report recommends skills development activity and investment in tourism marketing – driven by Visit Belfast – is at least maintained in the context of an increasingly competitive tourism market.</p>
3.8	<p>The 2019/20 operational plan is the second year of the Visit Belfast Strategy 2018-2022 and although Year 1 results are yet to be reported, Visit Belfast expects to achieve targets set out for 2018-19 and remain on course to achieve its four-year cumulative targets.</p> <p>With a proposed 2019-20 budget of £4.2m, Visit Belfast’s marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity aims to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 390,000 bed nights, both leisure and conference;</li> <li>• 286,000 cruise visitors;</li> <li>• 946,000 visitor enquiries;</li> </ul> <p>Details of specific activities will be set out in the presentation to the Committee.</p> <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p>
3.9	<p>In the current financial year, Belfast City Council’s funding arrangement with Visit Belfast is £1,997,500. An allocation of £1,997,500 has been set aside within the Departmental estimates for the financial year 2019/20. This will include income from Tourism NI towards</p>

3.10	<p>the delivery and marketing of the annual Maritime Festival - £35,000 allocation from Tourism NI to be allocated to Visit Belfast for the marketing of the event.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>No specific equality or good relations implications. Visit Belfast also works with Councils outside of Belfast, as part of the Regional Tourism Partnership.</p>
4.0	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	N/A