



Subject:	UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities: Memorandum of Understanding - “All-Island Network of Learning Cities”
Date:	23rd August, 2019
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1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval for Belfast to sign a joint Memorandum of Understanding, as part of an all island Network of UNESCO Learning Cities including Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Derry and Strabane and Belfast.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to: (i) consider and agree that Belfast signs a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with an all-island Network of Learning Cities to further enhance relationships with other cities who are members of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. If agreed, the MOU would be signed by the Lord Mayor; (ii) note the engagement and discussions underway around UNESCO and ‘Belfast A Learning City’ to explore and identify opportunities for alignment with Belfast Agenda; and (iii) note the recent consultation review undertaken on the future focus of the existing BSP Lifelong Learning Group and the intention that this will inform the creation of a revised Learning City action plan.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Background</u> In early 2018, Belfast became a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) with a focus on the use of learning to tackle inequalities within the city. UNESCO GNLC is an international policy-orientated network which supports the sharing of best practice and

capacity building; providing access to experts from across the world and allowing Belfast to showcase how the city is using learning to address inequalities and make life better for citizens.

3.2

The Belfast Agenda recognises that learning has a vital role in empowering citizens and helping lay the foundations for sustainable social, economic and environmental development and well-being within the city. The principles of learning are fundamental in helping alleviate and address some of Belfast's persistent societal-inequalities such as health, educational attainment and well-being. The inclusive growth focus of the Belfast Agenda is about improving the economy and ensuring the benefits of this can be felt by across the city. Learning is one mechanism through which inequalities can be addressed by raising aspirations, removing barriers and increasing emotional resilience. Enabling individuals to cope better in difficult times, create access to more and better jobs, build good relations, make healthier choices and empower individuals to reach their full potential.

3.3

Reflecting the importance of learning it has a key role in the four priority themes of the Belfast Agenda: Working and Learning, Living Here, Growing the Economy and City Development. Key work streams focused upon the importance of learning have been reflected across the Belfast Agenda including a commitment "to develop the city's status as a learning city by becoming a member of UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning Global Network of Learning Cities".

3.4

Learning as a concept has far reaching consequences incorporating traditional forms of learning such as educational and skills development through to learning for health and community benefit. Additionally it should be recognised that the scope of the council's statutory responsibility in this area is limited, with the remit for learning spanning across a number of government departments. Action in this area will require collaborative approaches across a range of stakeholders including education, employment, community living and access to services and opportunities.

UNESCO

3.5

Developed to promote lifelong learning in urban communities, UNESCO sets out six areas of focus which reflect the major building blocks of a learning city. It includes key features for each of these areas and possible indicators on progress. The six areas of focus are:

- Inclusive learning throughout the education system (from basic to higher);
- Revitalised learning in families and communities
- Effective learning for and in the workplace
- Extended use of modern learning technologies

- Enhances quality and excellence in learning
- Fosters a vibrant culture of learning throughout life

Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP)

3.6 The Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP), comprising Belfast City Council, the Public Health Agency and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust led on the submission of the UNESCO application supported by the Belfast Health Development Unit. The UNESCO application was submitted by the Council on behalf of the partnership and signed by the Lord Mayor.

3.7 Facilitated through the Life Long Learning Group (a subgroup of BSP), the application focused upon the learning as a means to address life inequalities, one of the five priorities of the BSP. The application created a connection between educational attainment, learning opportunities and life inequalities, and the extent to which family, community and environmental influences impact learning opportunities, particularly within population groups facing the highest level of deprivation.

3.8 Key activities undertaken to demonstrate the city's commitment to learning has included the recent Belfast Festival of Learning which took place between 4th and 10th March, 2019. This week long programme of activities incorporated interactive learning events and workshops as well as showcasing the range of learning opportunities that exist within the city for health, wellbeing and educational benefit. Events were specifically targeted towards the participation of groups and individuals who have experienced barriers in accessing learning opportunities.

3.9 In February 2015, BSP launched the 'Belfast a Learning City' strategic document, including a Learning Charter for Belfast, (Appendix 1) which sets out a vision of Belfast where learning is used as a positive force to expand and enhance life chances for all citizens in Belfast. The aim of the publication was to ensure that all Belfast citizens have equal access to learning opportunities, creating conditions for a better quality of life for everyone in the city.

All Island Network of Learning Cities – Memorandum of Understanding

3.10 The Lord Mayor's office recently received correspondence (Appendix 2) from the Mayor of Cork inviting Belfast to sign a joint Memorandum of Understanding between a number of cities who are part of an all island Network of UNESCO Learning Cities including Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Derry and Strabane and Belfast. The purpose of the joint MOU is to further strengthen the co-operation across the Network, committing the cities to continue to work together on the Learning City agenda for the next three years, share good practice and support. If the Committee agree

to enter into the Memorandum of Understanding it would require the signing of the Lord Mayor on behalf of the City.

Potential Future Focus of a Learning City

3.11 Members should note that engagement and discussions are taking place within the context of BSP and with key partners, including a recent consultation exercise undertaken by Colin Neilands, Communitus, to examine the future role and focus of the existing Lifelong Group with the view to inform the possible creation of a revised action plan for developing a learning city and a framework for collective action across partners to address inequalities. It is anticipated that the findings of the consultation exercise will become available in August.

3.12 Ongoing discussions are taking place to consider how elements of the existing or emerging plans around UNESCO and Lifelong Learning may be aligned and progressed, as appropriate, under community planning. Key points of note regarding this include:

- The UNESCO Learning City action plan incorporates a broad spectrum of activity that spans beyond the statutory powers of the council into the education, health and employability arenas;
- A commitment to support the development and implementation of the UNESCO Learning City action plan will require the support from a range of external stakeholders including government departments;
- Indications suggest there is an increasing expectation that the scale of delivery and ambition of the Life Long Learning action plan will need to be increased. Requests such as the All Island Network of Learning Cities MoU will place an increasing focus upon this work. Consideration will also need to be given to resource implications and if this can be managed through existing mechanisms.

3.13 A further report will be submitted to a future meeting of Committee outlining potential opportunities for further collaboration taking account of the emerging findings/recommendations from the recent consultation undertaken to identify the future focus and priorities for a Learning City Plan.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.14 There are no financial or resource implications attached to this report or the proposed signing of the Memorandum of Understanding. Whilst the current dedicated support being provided around Learning City is through the Belfast Health Development Unit, any renewed focus or proposals for an enhanced programme of activity will need to be considered in terms of

3.15	<p>resource implications for the council as well as wider community planning partnership if appropriate.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>There are no equality or good relations implications attached to this report.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1: Belfast a Learning City Charter (BSP)</p> <p>Appendix 2: Memorandum of Understanding – All Island Network of Learning Cities</p>