



Subject:	Update on City Tourism Performance
Date:	15th January, 2020
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Development
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Restricted Reports	
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"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on city tourism performance and to provide details of Visit Belfast's marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity to date.
1.2	The report also seeks authority for Visit Belfast to attend the Committee meeting in March to present its business plan and a request for financial support for the financial year 2020/21.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• note the contents of the report and the progress to date; and• agree to receive a presentation on Visit Belfast's 2020-21 Business Plan at the Committee meeting in March 2020, including a request for Council support towards the work programme for the coming financial year.

3.0	Main Report
	<p data-bbox="272 275 432 309"><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p data-bbox="165 327 1469 658">3.1 Members will be aware that Visit Belfast is the city’s Destination Marketing Management Organisation (DMMO) dedicated to marketing Belfast as a city break, conference, day-trip and cruise ship destination. It also, in its visitor servicing role, manages the operation of three gateway Visitor Information Centres (VICs) including Visit Belfast Welcome Centre, the Arrivals Desk at George Best Belfast City Airport and the Arrivals Desk at Belfast International Airport and a range of visitor servicing initiatives on behalf of Belfast City Council.</p> <p data-bbox="165 730 1469 860">3.2 Visit Belfast represents over 500 tourism businesses and services across the tourism industry and its core purpose is to welcome and service visitors for Belfast and Northern Ireland in order to generate an economic benefit for the city, creating jobs and wealth.</p> <p data-bbox="165 931 1469 1115">3.3 The role of Visit Belfast is to drive visitor numbers and increase visitor spend. As a public-private partnership, it provides a singular delivery mechanism for co-ordinating marketing investment and market engagement for the city. The organisation has a portfolio of marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity across both leisure and business tourism.</p> <p data-bbox="165 1187 1469 1415">3.4 2020-21 is the third year of Visit Belfast’s four-year operational strategy (2018-22). Over the course of the four year plan, the ambition is to deliver a cumulative 1.6m bed nights, welcome 953,000 cruise visitors, service 3.7m enquiries and attract £546m into the local economy. Visit Belfast is on target to achieve the key performance indicators set at this stage of the four-year strategy.</p> <p data-bbox="165 1487 1469 1671">3.5 Visit Belfast’s strategy is a key part of our commitment to grow the visitor economy in Belfast and Northern Ireland and, in particular, in achieving the Belfast Agenda commitment to increase the value of out-of-state tourism to £500million and welcome 1.9m overnight stays by 2021.</p> <p data-bbox="165 1742 1469 1971">3.6 City tourism continues to drive tourism on a global basis and Belfast continues to increasingly lift Northern Ireland tourism, contributing up to half of the NI visitor economy. Belfast continues to receive positive media and travel industry feedback – Conference and Incentive Travel Magazine voted Belfast their Best Events Destination for 2019 whilst Cruise Critic UK Editors’ Picks Awards named Belfast as their Best UK & British Isles Port of Call.</p>

3.7	<p>Tourism, and in particular out-of-state tourism, has become a key economic driver for the city region, generating revenue and contributing to job growth. Private sector investment in hotel development saw a thousand hotel rooms come online in 2018, increasing hotel room capacity by almost a third and delivering the 5-year stretch target set in the Belfast Agenda.</p> <p>An overview of performance to date this year is set out below:</p>
3.8	<p><u>Belfast Hotel Performance (January-October 2019)</u></p> <p>Between January-October, room occupancy stood at 74.1%, down 5 percentage points on the same period of 2018. It is important to note that hotel room supply was 12.3% higher than in 2018 and as a result the volume of room sales increased by 6.7% year-on-year. August continues to be the peak month for hotel occupancy – with 85.7% of rooms occupied that month.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Destination Interest and Visitor Servicing (January-October 2019)</u></p> <p>Interest in Belfast as a destination of choice continues to rise. This is demonstrated by figures from Visit Belfast which show that their visitor servicing team handled 802,664 enquiries and welcomed 293,554 visitors through the doors in the period January-October. The profile of these visitors is broken down as 37% from Europe, 23% from GB, 21% NI, 6% North America, 9% Rest of the World and 4% from the Republic of Ireland. Visitor service support is also provided at core events in the city and beyond, most notably the 148th Open which was held at Royal Portrush in July.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Cruise Belfast</u></p> <p>The City welcomed unprecedented numbers of cruise ships this year. 146 ships arrived into Belfast Harbour, carrying an estimated number of 275,000 cruise visitors to the city, an increase of 46% from 2018. The economic benefit from cruise tourism is estimated to be £12.5 million. During the 2019 season, a new dedicated cruise terminal, the first in Ireland, was opened by the Lord Mayor of Belfast providing a more focussed visitor welcome facility. Planning is already underway for 2020, and it is expected that 2019 cruise visitor numbers will be surpassed.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Conferences in Belfast 2019</u></p>

	<p>Conference wins from Visit Belfast brought 91 conferences to the city in the year to date, generating an estimated 68,905 bed nights. The economic benefit is estimated to be in the region of £31.5 million. Given the long lead-in times, Visit Belfast is also working on attracting future events. They have achieved conference wins for the city worth £33.1m in the year to date. These conferences will take place over the coming years, and will deliver a cumulative total of 74,000 bed nights.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Leisure Tourism and Marketing</u></p> <p>Since April 2019, six marketing campaigns have been delivered by Visit Belfast, worth a combined investment of £743,500. These have targeted potential visitors in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain as well as supporting the City Recovery Campaign in the domestic market. The aim of these campaigns is to generate 255,000 leisure bed nights. Importantly, these campaigns allow Visit Belfast to lever significant partner income: £2 for every £1 of its investment in out-of-state marketing. Additionally, web and digital marketing has generated 1.8m visits to the visitbelfast.com website.</p>
3.13	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no specific financial or resource implications attached to this report. The financial request from Visit Belfast is likely to be in the region of £1.9million for the coming financial year. This allocation will have to be approved by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, as part of the estimates and rate-setting process for 2020/21.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no specific equality or good relations implications. Visit Belfast also works with neighbouring councils to support tourism development and those councils are also investing in tourism development and marketing within their respective areas.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	None