



Subject:	Presentation - Visit Belfast 2020/21 Business Plan
Date:	4th March, 2020
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Eimear Henry, Senior Manager – Culture and Tourism

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 or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of the report is to present the request for funding from Visit Belfast for the 2020/21 financial year and to set out the organisation's strategic plan, focused on increasing visitor numbers and tourism spend in the city. Members should note that Visit Belfast will be in attendance at the Committee to present the detail of its 2020/21 plan.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. note the draft Visit Belfast business plan 2020/21 and the areas where Council funds will be invested. The overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast in the coming

	<p>financial year has been taken account of in the revenue estimates that have already been approved by the Council; and</p> <p>ii. approve the funding allocation of up to £1,997,465 for 20/21 expenditure, subject to the development of a funding agreement establishing priority areas of activity and agreed targets.</p>
3.0	Main Report
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 Belfast has recently been recognised by the leading industry body as the Best Events Destination 2019.
3.3	Visit Belfast is a public/private partnership. Its current Chairman is Michael Williamson from the ASM Chartered Accountants. Belfast City Council has four Councillor representatives on the Board: Councillor Fred Cobain, Councillor Eric Hanvey, Councillor Paul McCusker and Councillor Séanna Walsh.
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 2018 (last published Local Government District tourism statistics by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency), Belfast hosted one third of all tourism trips to Northern Ireland (1.7m trips) and tourism spend amounted to £395m, 41% 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 largest growth areas has been cruise tourism, with 131 ships expected to dock in Belfast in 2020, bringing around 350,000 cruise visitors.

3.6 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.

3.7 The inclusion of tourism as a key growth sector in the Belfast Region City Deal acknowledges the fact that the sector is already a significant economic generator but recognises the need for significant additional investment in order to move to the next level. The council's Cultural Strategy "A City Imagining" identifies the importance of growing the city's sustainable cultural tourism product through a creative approach that respects the city's heritage and communities. Our engagement with partners in developing the cultural strategy identified four key priorities for tourism development in the context of this new cultural strategy:

- Enhancing and enriching the visitor experience
- Supporting tourism development across the city's neighbourhoods
- Focusing the tourism marketing and communications
- Supporting skills development to enhance tourism growth and development

3.8 We are taking forward a range of interventions under these priority areas, working in collaboration with Visit Belfast and with other partners including Tourism Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland and locally-based tourism organisations.

3.9 Visit Belfast's 2020/21 operational plan is the third year of the Visit Belfast Strategy 2018-2022. The organisation has flagged a number of challenges that are impacting on the operational environment including:

- Uncertainty caused by the protracted Brexit negotiations
- 10% reduction in air capacity (with the majority of visitors to Belfast from outside NI coming by plane).

3.10	While the organisation considers that there may be an impact on its ability to deliver on targets set within this year, it is working hard to remain on course to achieve its four-year cumulative targets.
3.11	<p>With a proposed 2020/21 budget of £3.9m, Visit Belfast's marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity aims to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 350,000 bed nights, both leisure and conference; • 350,000 cruise visitors; • 916,000 visitor enquiries;
3.12	Details of specific activities that will be undertaken to meet these targets will be set out in the presentation to the Committee.
3.13	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>In the current financial year, the Council's funding arrangement with Visit Belfast is £1,997,465. An allocation of £1,997,465 has been set aside within the Departmental estimates for the financial year 2020/21.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></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	Documents attached
	Visit Belfast presentation