



Subject:	Belfast Region City Deal – update
Date:	21 st August 2026
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services

Is this report restricted?		Yes ☐	No ☒
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.			
Insert number ☐			
1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime			
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?			
After Committee Decision		☐	
After Council Decision		☐	
Sometime in the future		☐	
Never		☐	

Call-in		
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒	No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	This report is to provide an update to Committee on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) and seek approval for the BRCD Annual Report 2025/26 and for Belfast City Council to commence work on the AI Adoption Programme on behalf of BRCD.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Approve the BRCD Annual Report for 2025/26 • Approve the commencement of work on a £4.6 million AI Adoption programme on behalf of Belfast Region City Deal partners (subject to DfE business case approval).
3.0	Main report
	Annual Report 2025/26
3.1	The agreed reporting arrangements for all City and Growth Deals requires both the production of an Annual Report and a meeting with the Northern Ireland Delivery Board in order to discuss deal progress as part of an 'Annual Conversation' which is scheduled for 25 th August 2026.
3.2	A high level, outward focused Annual Report has now been produced for 2025/26 to outline the progress made at programme level. A number of notable achievements are included in this reporting year. To date at Programme level: • 22 projects with Outline Business Cases and 5 with Full Business Cases approved. • More than £674m investment committed to the BRCD in signed Contracts for Funding. • More than £86m paid out to partners for the projects. • 22 contracts - with an estimated value of £158m - initiated across the Programme. Together these contracts have committed more than 15,000 in social value points. • Two projects now have their Operators appointed, 3 are at Fit Out stage, 3 more at construction stage and 12 are at design stage. • Further information on emerging benefits and real world impacts can be found in section 3 of the report. During the year at project level: • Construction was completed at AMIC's Factory of the Future in Newtownabbey. • The first productions were filmed and broadcast at Studio Ulster. • Construction continued at iREACH Health and Momentum One Zero and planning permission was granted for CDHT. • An operator was appointed for I4C Innovation and Cleantech centre. • The UK Digital Twin Centre completed its first Industry Accelerator. • A funding agreement was signed for the £4.4m Regional Contracts for Innovation and a £2m BRCD Innovation Centre Collaborative Grants Programme was approved. In addition an OBC was approved for the Enabling Infrastructure Fund.

	• DFI approved the OBC for BRT2 and procurement for a contractor for the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge is underway. Newry Southern Relief Road awaits a decision on the need for a public enquiry before it can be further progressed. • Belfast Stories OBC was approved and progress is continuing on Bangor Waterfront, and Destination Royal Hillsborough. • Construction for the theatre and conference element of Newry Regeneration was scheduled to commence in June and engagement continues at Carrickfergus Regeneration. • An additional cross deals skills assessment was completed for the Life and Health Sciences sector – bringing the total completed to 5 – and engagement is underway to strengthen the contribution projects make to inclusive growth particularly through skills.
3.3	The Annual Report, which was approved by the BRCD Executive Board in June, is attached at Appendix 1 for Members’ consideration. The individual BRCD partners will also be seeking approval for the Annual Report through their own governance structures. The report will be formally published after all approvals have been secured.
3.4	The report will then be shared with the Department of Finance and used to inform the Annual Conversation.
3.5	Moving into Year 5 (2026/27) we will see significant progress across the programme with: • Construction due to commence on CDHT and Newry Regeneration Theatre and Conference Centre and continuing for iREACH Health and Momentum One Zero. • Design Teams will be appointed for Bangor Waterfront Urban Waterfront and Public Realm and Marina. • Belfast Stories Contract for Funding will be signed, the planning application submitted and a Contractor appointed. • Carrickfergus Regeneration planning applications will be submitted and the Supply Team Contract packages will be issued to market. • The BRCD Regional Contracts for Innovation programme and the BRCD Innovation Centres Collaborative Grants programme will be launched. • Further business cases to support adoption of innovative projects utilising advanced wireless and AI technologies will be submitted and approved. • The OBC Addendums for Destination Royal Hillsborough, i4c Innovation & Cleantech Centre and The Gobbins Phase II will be approved, enabling design development and submission of planning applications. • Our final Skills Assessment on Tourism and Hospitality will be produced.

	Financial and Implementation Plan
3.6	The overarching deal document is supported by a Financial and Implementation Plan and the annual submission for 2025/26 sits alongside the Annual Report.
3.7	As the programme is now firmly in delivery phase this year's financial and implementation plan has again been combined into one document. The document includes the expenditure profile of all the projects broken down annually and the high level project milestones based on the Quarter 4 financial and performance returns. The PMO engaged closely with partners and following consideration by the Finance Directors' Group and the Executive Board it was formally submitted to the Department of Finance at the end of June as required by the governance and assurance arrangements.
3.8	During 2025/26 a further £46.2m was drawn down from both the Department for the Economy and the Department for Communities demonstrating the positive progress being made across the programme. Up to 31st March 2026, claims totalling £87m have been processed by Programme Management Office (£46m in FY25-26).
3.9	Belfast Region AI Adoption programme Belfast City Council, on behalf of Belfast Region City Deal partners, has submitted a business case proposal to the Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver a £4.6 million AI Adoption programme across the region.
3.10	The new programme will provide rounds of competitive grants of between approximately £20,000 to £100,000 to support organisations in the innovative adoption of AI in ways that contribute to increased productivity and improved service delivery. The programme will also offer expert guidance to organisations during the bid development phase and afterwards during the implementation of those projects that are awarded funding.
3.11	The AI Adoption programme will directly contribute to the growth ambitions of the Belfast Region City Deal Digital pillar and it also aligns well with a key recommendation of the recent NI Science Panel AI report to <i>'establish new programmes of support for established companies-integrating AI into their organisations and operations'</i>.
3.12	Subject to DfE approval of the business case, which is expected imminently, Members are asked to approve the commencement of work on the programme by Belfast City Council. The business case includes funding to Belfast City Council for staffing and programme costs. It also includes funding for the Council to commission technical third-party support, approval for which is included in this month's Contracts Report.

3.13	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> All costs associated with the BRCD are within existing budgets. Belfast City Council’s staffing and programme costs for the delivery of the Belfast Region AI Adoption programme will be funded by Belfast Region City Deal.
3.14	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> The approach taken to develop the City Deal has been subject to independent equality screening and rural proofing and states that; <i>‘BRCD is inherently inclusive, affording an opportunity for the region to grow in a way that will benefit the economy of Northern Ireland as a whole, thereby enhancing the lives and well-being of its citizens. If during further development of the programme it becomes apparent that there may be an adverse impact on certain groups or communities then the partnership commits to carrying out further Section 75 work and including screening and EQIAs as and when appropriate.’</i>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Appendix 1 – BRCD Annual Report 2025/26 – RESTRICTED