

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 9th September, 2020

REMOTE MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson);
Aldermen Dorrian and Kingston; and
Councillors Beattie, Donnelly, Gormley,
Heading, Howard, T. Kelly, Lyons, Maskey,
McAllister, McLaughlin, McMullan, Murphy,
O'Hara, Spratt and Whyte.

Also attended: Councillor de Faoite.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Councillors Ferguson and Hanvey.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th August were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st September, subject to the amendment of the minute under the heading 'Department for Communities Access and Inclusion Programme 2020-2021' to provide that the Council write to the Department to ascertain whether this would be an annual programme and that a report be submitted to the Committee to consider an Access and Inclusion officer role and any financial implications.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McMullan declared an interest in relation to item 6a) Cultural Strategy Update in that he was a Council representative on the EastSide Partnership Board.

Presentations

EuroPride Bid (Belfast Pride)

The Director of Economic Development reminded the Committee that following on from the Motion - EuroPride of 20th September, 2019 in relation to supporting Belfast Pride and the LGBT Community to support their bid to bring EuroPride to the city, it had agreed, at its meeting on 12th August, to invite Belfast Pride to the meeting to discuss the EuroPride 2023 bid.

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. S. O'Neill, Ms. M. Armstrong and Mr. L. Cripps, representing Belfast Pride.

Mr. O'Neill provided an overview of the Belfast Pride organisation, including its aims and objectives. He stated that Belfast Pride had a clear focus on rights and it aimed to promote visibility and equality for LGBT+ people in Belfast. He highlighted that Belfast Pride needed a large volunteer team to deliver the festival every year.

He explained the work which had been undertaken by Belfast Pride in relation to its bid for EuroPride 2023 to date. He suggested that the bid was a huge opportunity for Belfast to be a beacon for change and to build on the work which had already been undertaken by various groups on issues such as Peace Building, Marriage Equality, Health and Wellbeing, Trans Community Building, Representing Lesbian and Bi Women and addressing the needs of LGBT+ Young people.

He described the outline plan for the bid and presented the programme of events. He highlighted that an action plan had been agreed to collaborate with a range of organisations and community groups.

Ms. Armstrong provided an overview of the funding and volunteer base of the organisation and emphasised that the organisation aimed to use the bid to improve and develop Belfast Pride, organise better events, build capacity and more volunteer opportunities and move the organisation forward using the bid as leverage to bring long term change.

During Members questions, Mr. O'Neill explained further engagement and planned collaboration between Belfast Pride and other LGBT+ community organisations, together with letters of support for the bid which had been received. He also clarified information regarding the organisations constitution, liability and legal status.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development advised that, as the AGM for the EuroPride 2023 bid was due to take place on 3rd – 4th October, the Council could carry out due diligence in the coming weeks and provide assurance that Belfast Pride were robust enough for Council assistance.

The Chairperson thanked the representative's from Belfast Pride for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Maskey,
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

That the Committee agrees to offer corporate Council support and assistance to Belfast Pride for the EuroPride 2023 Bid, subject to the relevant assessment process.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor O'Hara,
Seconded by Councillor Lyons,

That the Committee agrees to offer corporate Council support and assistance to Belfast Pride for the EuroPride 2023 Bid, subject to assessment and due diligence process, to include a review of its constitution, minutes of AGMs and election of officers, clarity of legal status and the ability to hold property or contracts, together with its audited and verified accounts.

Following a vote, twelve Members voted for the amendment and six against and it was declared carried.

The amendment was thereupon put as the substantive motion when twelve Members voted for and six against and it was accordingly declared carried.

Lighting Strategy

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an overview of the report regarding the development of a draft City Lighting Strategy as part of the Future City Centre Programme and draft strategy, 'Luminous City: A Lighting Strategy for Belfast', which would be subject to consultation.

She reminded the Committee that the development of a lighting strategy for the city had been identified as a priority within the Future City Centre Programme and Park Hood had been commissioned to assist the Council with the preparation of a lighting strategy and action plan for the city.

She explained that 'Luminous City – A Lighting Strategy for Belfast' aimed to develop a well-designed, co-ordinated and coherent approach to Belfast's lighting so that lighting design became an intrinsic part of urban planning. It proposed ways to enhance the functional and aesthetic qualities of light in order to support and develop Belfast's social, economic and sustainability targets.

She highlighted that, across a range of key stakeholders, there was a renewed focus on developing an accessible, well connected and sustainable city which supported our social and economic ambitions, celebrating our built environment and heritage as well as improving connections to communities by reducing the severance of harsh infrastructure.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. D. Watkiss, Park Hood Consultants.

Mr. Watkiss provided an overview of the 'Luminous City: A Lighting Strategy for Belfast'. He advised that the development of the strategy has been informed by an audit of existing infrastructure, analysis of current delivery approaches, and review of international best practice. Given the breadth of interested parties and the often fragmented responsibility for lighting, early and ongoing engagement and consultation has been undertaken which included:

- Belfast Chamber;
- Belfast City Centre Management;
- Visit Belfast;
- Retail sector (Victoria Square, CastleCourt);
- Cultural sector (Cathedral Quarter Trust, Household, Sailortown project);
- Belfast Harbour;
- Titanic Foundation;
- Department for Infrastructure;
- Department for Communities (including the Historic Environment Division);
- Ulster Architectural Heritage Society; and
- IMTAC.

He summarised the consultation responses to date and advised that wider engagement would be undertaken through the ongoing public consultation process throughout September and which would be completed in mid-October, presenting an opportunity to capture the views of local communities and residents.

He presented a number of pilot lighting projects which had enabled further direct engagement with property owners and members of the public, including through interactive 'creative stations' and through Public Engagement Hubs in vacant units. He highlighted the success of the lighting pilot projects on Castle Street, Royal Avenue and Castle Arcade.

The Committee was informed that a review of the existing lighting infrastructure within Belfast City Centre was undertaken between November 2019 and January 2020. The works involved visual inspections during the day and night which allowed for a review of both the aesthetics of the various fittings and the performance of the lighting itself to be observed and analysed.

Mr. Watkiss provided examples of the analysis which had taken place in relation to Streetscape and Building Observations, Points of Interest, Key Gateways, Landmarks and Monuments in Belfast, together with case studies from across the UK. He pointed out that the strategy presented best practice solutions to future proofing through selection of materials, delivering adaptive design, minimising energy use and managing light pollution. He pointed out that this approach aimed to support wayfinding, orientation and accessibility in Belfast.

He explained that the following considerations informed the approach, recommendations and design guidance as set out in the draft strategy: Connectivity; Sustainability; Quality; Safety; Security; Character and Culture; Human Centric; Accessibility; Economic Impact; Technology; Maintenance; Planning and Delivery.

He reported that the next steps for the development of the City Lighting Strategy included engagement and approval of the Strategy, the Strategy to be shared and promoted as guidance, ongoing development of a lighting Action Plan and delivery of projects in partnership

with key agencies, together with alignment with city recovery priorities and funding opportunities with the Future City Centre programme including the Bolder Vision.

During discussion, Members suggested that the Shankill Gateway Junction could be included as a key gateway and the potential to align some of the lighting projects with hidden landmarks, such as the River Farset and the history of Belfast. The Committee welcomed the reduction of light pollution and sustainability of wildlife the strategy recommended.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the information provided in the presentation by Park Hood consultants on the draft lighting strategy 'Luminous City: A Lighting Strategy for Belfast';
- Noted the findings and recommendations of the strategy and how this work related to other initiatives within the Future City Centre Programme and city recovery priorities, with proposals to bring forward pilot projects in line with the strategy and an emerging Action Plan; and
- Approved the draft strategy, subject to the consultation process as outlined in the report.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following two items were restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Finance Update

The Committee considered the Finance Update Report which provided information in relation to the ongoing work in the following areas:

1. Updated forecasts;
2. The financial impact of recovery plans;
3. The financial impact of the member agreed decision to invoice rents for all tenants from Quarter 2; and

4. Employee savings arising from the review of vacant posts.

The Committee noted the contents of the report which had been presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in August, including the August forecast update and the Quarter 1 finance report.

DFC Covid-19 Town Centre Revitalisation Fund Update on Emerging Proposals

The Committee was provided with an update on the programmes that would be delivered under the Department for Communities' (DFC) Town Centre Revitalisation Fund to assist with city recovery measures. This included further information on funding allocation, Initiatives to Support Public Safety, Pavement Café Licences, Physical Interventions and Streetscape Improvements/Reimaging Public Space.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development explained further the eligibility of grants, the funding process and proposals which had been received. He highlighted that, in relation to funding from DfC, the Tranche 2 Letter of Offer was expected to be received around 15th October and until this formal letter of offer was issued, the Council incurred any expenditure at risk. Therefore, to allow officers to plan and procure animation a communications campaign and lighting, approval was sought for officers to plan and procure at risk, in advance of the Tranche 2 Letter of Offer from Department for Communities, due to the tight timescales involved.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the priority areas and interventions that would be supported through the Town Centre Revitalisation Fund under tranche one, with further detail to be brought back to Committee as the projects were further developed;
- Noted the Programme Criteria for the roll out of Business Grants at Appendix 1;
- Noted the emerging proposals for an animation and marketing programme as part of further funding from DfC as part of the Revitalisation Fund tranche two or other recovery funding;
- Noted that further detail would be brought back to the Committee in respect of additional physical interventions to be supported as part of the Revitalisation Fund tranche two, pending confirmation of the funding from DfC and following engagement with stakeholders; and
- Agreed to allow officers to plan and procure animation, a communications campaign and lighting, at risk, in advance of the Tranche 2 Letter of Offer from Department for Communities.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

**Future City Centre programme –
Physical and Environmental Improvements**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of the report is to:

- Update Members on the 5Cs Public Realm Catalyst Project, including design development, and the stakeholder and public engagement plan, including opportunities for direct engagement with Councillors.
- Update Members on the continued progress of projects within the ‘Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements’ strand of the Future City Centre Programme, including the proposal for a second phase of the Entries and Lanes project.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee are requested to:

- i. Note the continued progress with the 5Cs public realm project, including proposals for further Member, stakeholder and public engagement in respect of emerging concept designs.
- ii. Note the proposal to bring forward a second phase of the Entries and Lanes project, including concept and design development work, with officers continuing to explore funding opportunities to deliver the physical interventions.
- iii. Note the completion and opening of the pop-up park at Cathedral Gardens.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

The Future City Centre (FCC) Programme has been developed in line with the Belfast Agenda, the Local Development Plan, the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the Cultural Strategy (A City Imagining), and has been informed by the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy. Projects within the Programme are also being considered in the context of COVID-19 to ensure that it addresses the range of challenges facing the city centre, including the need to facilitate social distancing and assist businesses with enhanced external spaces.

3.2 FCC Programme: Physical Regeneration and Environmental Improvements

A number of physical projects are currently underway within the city centre, which align with Council and wider city Covid recovery priorities.

3.3 Public Realm Catalyst Projects- 'The 5 C's'

In November 2018, SP&R Committee granted approval to part-fund a pilot public realm 'catalyst' project at College Court, College St, College Avenue utilising historic developer contributions (specifically agreed in the legal agreements for public realm) to the value of £475,650 with the remainder of funding to be provided by the Department for Communities. In October 2019, CG&R Committee agreed to proceed with design development and delivery, in partnership with DfC, of further public realm improvements in Chichester St and Callender St, utilising developer contributions (also for public realm) with a value of £293,120, subject to approval by SP&R Committee. DfC subsequently confirmed commitment of additional funding.

3.4 A public realm project with a total value in the region of £2m has now been developed incorporating the streets referred to above, which will include improvements to footway surfaces, street furniture, lighting and soft landscaping. The project is being delivered by the Department for Communities in partnership with Council through existing governance arrangements established by the Belfast Streets Ahead Board.

3.5 This project is being undertaken in the context of ongoing work to transform connectivity across the city, and will be delivered in line with the principles set out in the City Centre Connectivity Study 'A Bolder Vision', which has recently received Ministerial endorsement from both DfC and DfI. During the design development stage, opportunities to accommodate emerging best practice in terms of social distancing and enhanced active travel provision will also be explored to ensure the scheme supports short to medium term recovery, as well as longer term sustainable and inclusive growth.

3.6 In January 2020, DfC appointed Doran Consulting as the Integrated Design Team to take forward the project, including engagement with a range of stakeholders. Following Covid related programme delays, a presentation and webinar was hosted for Elected Members on 23rd June 2020 detailing the scope of the project.

- 3.7 A BCC Stakeholder and Engagement Group has also been formed to provide cross Departmental input into the design development process. The group comprises representation from Open Spaces and Street Scene, Planning, Resilience, City Innovation and Growth, Safer Cities, Landscape and Development, Children and Young People and the Ageing Population.
- 3.8 Initial engagement with key stakeholders including DfI has also been undertaken and will continue throughout the project.
- 3.9 With concept designs now developed for the scheme, further engagement is planned during August and September, with a Councillor virtual workshop being arranged for mid-September, which represents an opportunity for Members to engage prior to public consultation which is programmed to commence at the end of September for a period of 12 weeks.
- 3.10 Cathedral Gardens Pop-Up Park
- 3.10 As reported to Committee in August a pop-up park at Cathedral Gardens was nearing completion, aimed at providing a multi-functional family-friendly space, pending development of a permanent scheme being developed. This has since been completed and was launched by the Lord Mayor on 27 August. Photographs are included at [Appendix A](#). The provision of this park is seen as a key element in seeking to diversify the city centre and provide more family centric facilities and quality open space.
- 3.11 Belfast Entries and Lanes
- As previously reported to City Growth and Regeneration Committee in August the Entries Scheme is well underway and a number of artworks have since been completed, with bespoke feature lighting installation to commence during September. The intention is to ensure these spaces benefit adjoining businesses, particularly in light of COVID-19 and requirements for social distancing. The work has received positive feedback and officers have received further requests from property owners, business tenants and residents to consider additional interventions in other city centre entries and lanes, and on streets directly adjoining businesses who are keen to maximise external space to facilitate the re-opening of businesses and facilitate social distancing.

3.12 Work is therefore underway to begin scoping a Phase 2 Entries and Lanes Scheme with a view to development, design and delivery of additional entries and interventions, subject to funding. Potential funding opportunities for delivery may include the next tranche of the DfC Town Centre Revitalisation Fund, with other external funding opportunities also being explored.

3.13 Entries and Lanes Phase 2 would follow the same place-making approach to enhance the permeability of the city centre and make spaces more welcoming and vibrant as pedestrian links, as well as maximising opportunities to accommodate the use of external space by businesses in line with COVID 19 recovery initiatives. Additionally, through increased footfall, a further aim would be to reduce instances of anti-social behaviour.

3.14 Finance and Resource Implications

The Council's contribution to the 5Cs public realm project is being provided from developer contributions (which total £768,770), subject to SP&R approval in relation to the developer contribution element of £293,120 for the public realm improvements for Chichester St and Callender St. Approval was previously given to the use of developer contributions to the value of £475,650. The remainder of funding is to be provided by the Department for Communities.

Work to support the design development of the Entries Phase 2 Scheme will be met from the previously approved City and Regeneration budget. External funding opportunities are being explored to progress delivery.

3.15 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment

The Department for Communities have completed an Equality Screening for the 5Cs project which is published on the Department's website. Belfast City Council Equality Screening is currently being undertaken."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**DfI Call for Evidence on a potential Infrastructure
Commission for NI - draft response**

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy provided an overview of the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 This report is to update members on the current status of the potential Infrastructure Commission as proposed by DfI Minister Nicola Mallon in July 2020, and to provide detail on the draft response to the Call to Evidence regarding the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission for NI.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- **Note the Minister for the Department for Infrastructure’s intention to undertake a review of the need for an Infrastructure Commission for NI, and the ongoing process to provide recommendations to the Minister on the role and scope of a potential Infrastructure Commission;**
- **Note that the Belfast Commissioner for Resilience, the Belfast Digital Innovation Commissioner and Solace will provide evidence to the Call for Evidence currently underway by the panel established to undertake the review and report.**
- **Agree the draft response for Belfast City Council to the Call for evidence that was uploaded to the panel on the 3rd September, subject to committee approval and council ratification.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 In July 2020 the Minister for the Department for Infrastructure, Nicola Mallon, announced the establishment of a panel to advise her on the specific row and value of an Infrastructure Commission and how it might be established and operate.

3.2 The role of the panel is to undertake a short, sharp, focused exercise to reflect the hard infrastructure that falls within the remit of the DfI; drainage and inland waterways, public transport, roads and cycling infrastructure. A final report, including a number of recommendations is to be presented to the minister by the end of September 2020.

- 3.3 Council were notified on the 28th of August that the panel is now established and that a call for evidence would be held between the 3rd and 7th September. The panel members include senior representatives from the following organisations; Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE); Confederation of British Industry (CBI); Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT); University of Ulster Economic Policy Centre; Infrastructure Commission for Scotland; Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL).
- 3.4 Given the timeframes set by the panel council officers provided a draft response to the Call for Evidence, subject to committee and Council approval. Members should also note that the Belfast Commissioner for Resilience, Grainia Long, the Belfast Digital Innovation Commissioner, Jayne Brady, and that Solace, represented by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council CX) provided evidence to the panel on the 7th September.
- 3.5 The copy of the draft response for Belfast City Council as updated on the 3rd September is available [here](#)).
- 3.6 The draft response supports the establishment of an independent, expert-led Infrastructure Commission, accountable to the executive and reporting to either the Minister for Infrastructure or the Minister for Finance. A recommendation is made that the Infrastructure Commission should be involved in the early process of strategic planning and the prioritisation of strategic project delivery, and that the commission should also have a challenge/oversight role in the delivery of infrastructure projects to ensure adherence to, and delivery of green, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure in the delivery of the longer-term aspirations and outcomes.
- 3.7 The draft response recommends that the commission should have the authority to challenge and to provide advice on infrastructure delivery and prioritisation, and to ensure that infrastructure delivery is not undertaken in a siloed approach, but should take into account community and place making focused infrastructure to enable the long-term sustainable development of the city's social, environmental and economic inclusive growth.
- 3.8 The response also identifies the need for Belfast, as the region's economic driver to have a strategic role in influencing, leading and delivering cross-cutting infrastructure requirements based on community planning, and enabling enhanced greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. It identifies Global cities as taking on a greater role in leading economic and place making provision, and

collaborative working such as the Bolder Vision for Belfast as shown how local authorities in NI can lead and influence the direction of travel for the city residents and users across economic, social and sustainable provision.

3.9 The draft response also identifies the role of the potential Infrastructure Commission in ensuring that infrastructure delivery is focused on the challenges of changing climate and decarbonisation of the economy, on increasing recognition of the value of the environment to the economy and social well-being and the importance of improving air quality, increasing efficiencies of infrastructure behavioural change, as well as the realisation of benefits with increasing digitalisation.

3.10 A recommendation is also made that when considering stakeholder engagement the commission should take into account the importance of the role of local communities when considering infrastructure provision, ensuring that communities are adequately represented, informed and enabled to take part in the formation of infrastructure planning, design and decision making.

3.11 Members are asked to note that further updates and reports from the panel and the potential Infrastructure Commission will be brought back to committee when made available from the Department of Infrastructure.

3.12 **Finance and Resource Implications**

There are no financial implications at this time.

3.13 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

It will be the role of the DfI to consider the Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Growing Business and the Economy

**Inclusive Growth - Update on the Development of the
City Charter and Inclusive Growth Network Launch Event**

The Committee was reminded that, in March 2020, the Council's commitments to Inclusive Growth document was published and included the development and implementation of an Inclusive Growth City Charter for Belfast. Since then, a cross council team, led by Strategy, Policy and Partnerships had been progressing the development of this charter.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an update on progress to date and proposed key activities going forward and pointed out that the report had already been agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 21st August, 2020.

She advised that this work included the development of an Inclusive Growth City Charter for employers across the city – setting a city wide standard in relation to procurement, employment and civic / neighbourhood engagement.

She informed the Committee that an initial employer workshop was held, in partnership with Allstate NI, in Jan 2020, with over 70 employers from a wide range of sectors represented. It had been agreed that a small working group would be convened with broad representation from this group, to help the Council shape and co-design the charter, however, although nominees had been received, the work was paused until May 2020 due to COVID-19.

She informed the Committee that the first virtual working group was held in July and the meeting aims and outcomes were to:

- Bring working group members together to co-design the charter;
- Discuss and test emerging ideas, building on the January workshop, to scope the charter;
- Agree the purpose and role of the working group; and
- Agree high level actions and responsibilities for the next 3 months.

She explained that, over the coming months the cross council team would complete: A Draft scoping note; Extensive engagement; Members Workshop; Public consultation and a Charter launch.

In relation to the Inclusive Growth Network, hosted by the Centre for Progressive Policy and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had been invited to attend the virtual launch event of the Inclusive Growth Network (IGN) on 17th September.

The Committee:

- Noted the progress to date in relation to the development of the charter and agreed to an elected members workshop / engagement following the initial developmental stages;
- Noted the proposed key stages of work going forward to shape the council's future ambitions with regard to the development and implementation of a city charter for Belfast; and
- Noted the proposed attendance of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at the IGN virtual launch event.

Positioning Belfast to Compete

Cultural Strategy Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 At a meeting of City Growth and Regeneration Committee in April 2020 the annual work programme to support year one of the ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast, *A City Imagining* was approved. Given the current circumstances and the specific ongoing challenges for the cultural sector, the purpose of this report is to update Members on:

- The current status of the work programme relating to the delivery of the cultural strategy.
- The current and projected impacts of Covid-19 on the cultural sector.
- The initial response and emerging priorities to help stabilise and support cultural development in the city.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and the contribution that the work programme for 2020/21 will make to supporting the recovery of the cultural sector.
- Note the further detail supplied on specific projects within the overall programme and the breakdown and allocation of existing budget to specific projects as outlined at 3.27 and [Appendix A](#).
- Grant delegated authority to the Strategic Director of Place and the Economy to award grants up to a maximum of £20,000 following open and competitive processes in relation to specific projects within budgetary controls as outlined at 3.27 and in [Appendix A](#).
- Agree to make a submission to the Department for Communities on the impact of Covid-19 on the cultural sector including Council’s position on emerging priorities and response as set out in this paper.

3.0 Main report

Members will be aware that at the August meeting of City Growth and Regeneration an update on tourism was presented with an agreement that a further update on cultural activity would be provided in September 2020.

- 3.2 A new ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast was approved by Council and became operational in April 2020 supported by a one-year work programme. The strategy was the culmination of extensive public and sector engagement. It recognised the need for long-term commitment over a decade in order to drive transformation. However, it also presented a dynamic model for change to ensure resilience to external factors and potential social, economic and environmental shifts. Consequently, while the full scale and impact of Covid-19 remains unknown and the level of structural change to the city's overall and cultural ecosystems is uncertain, the strategy remains valid presenting a strong framework for any recovery plans.

3.3 Background

A *City Imagining* provides a framework for the city's transformation through cultural engagement and participation and supports wider council strategies such as the Belfast Agenda. It is now critical that the implementation of the strategy recognises the impact of Covid-19 on the cultural sector, responds accordingly and plans for long-term stability. The strategic aims and projects contained within the strategy can now become vehicles for recovery if public and private sectors stakeholders work collectively to ensure that the sector is protected and supported whilst recognising the cultural dimension to successful economic and social recovery.

- 3.4 The immediate impact of the pandemic illustrated the importance of engaging with the arts and creativity. This reinforced the relationship with education, health and wellbeing highlighting that the personal and societal benefits of cultural participation cannot be wholly measured through an economic lens. The public health restrictions have limited the possibility of shared cultural experiences, and research has indicated that 93% of people surveyed felt that the absence of live events has had a detrimental impact on quality of life, highlighting the intrinsic value of arts, culture, events and festivals in our lives.

3.5 In addition, the cultural sector generates significant levels of revenue and ancillary work that supports employment and skills. As articulated in our cultural strategy, a vibrant cultural offer is core to the city's appeal locally, nationally and internationally and is a bedrock of our tourism and hospitality, which alongside the arts are currently one of the most challenged sectors in Belfast.

3.6 Current analysis of impact

Whilst the impact of Covid-19 is ongoing, the majority of economic sectors are now operating again though often at reduced levels. Unfortunately, the cultural sector remains one of the sectors severely limited in what can be operationally delivered within the current restrictions. Should these limitations be reduced opening up the possibility of return of cultural programming, further work is still required to analyse the viability of re-opening and to better understand audience sentiment and confidence. Further consideration also needs to be given to the complexities associated with cultural engagement in a participatory environment.

3.7 The Arts Council has estimated that the cultural sector in NI is facing an estimated initial loss of box office income of £25 million and have stated that it could take up to a year-and-a-half for the arts sector to recalibrate itself after the crisis. Given the level of cultural infrastructure and workforce in Belfast this has clear implications for the city. Recent findings include:

- Cultural organisations in NI are reporting losses of £9.5 million in box office revenue to date since March.
- They also expect losses of £5.3 million in ancillary income.
- On average, cultural organisations lost 72% of their anticipated 2020-21 box office revenue.
- £1.3 million has already gone towards refunds and vouchers from cancelled performances or programmes this year.

3.8 The business operating environment is extremely challenging across the city for all organisations due to the immediate impact on revenue streams and functionality. The ongoing restrictions on physical contact, cultural performances, group gatherings and public events have meant that the cultural sector and the hospitality and tourism sectors it works in tandem with, continue to have major barriers to re-opening and generating income. This includes not only box office but other investment such as sponsorship and project specific restricted grants. This should also be considered in the context of existing financial and operational vulnerabilities prior to Covid-19, including lower public investment in the arts in comparison with the

rest of the UK and ROI and restricted ability to generate income due to regional audience reach and corporate footprint.

3.9 ACNI has also stated that as a result of the pandemic, the creative sector in Northern Ireland is projected to lose 20% (6,000) of its creative jobs and see a 23% (£300 million) drop in creative industries Gross Value Added, while the funded arts sector currently supports approximately 7,500 jobs as per the Annual Funding Survey 2018/19 published by ACNI. It must be borne in mind that the cultural sector also supports a huge range of individuals working freelance or as independent artists who are part of the overall ecology of the city. The timing of the pandemic has also coincided with organisations addressing the potential implications of Brexit on project and partnership development, revenue, and artist mobility. The long-term impact of the pandemic is as yet unknown however it is likely to include:

- Loss of sectoral knowledge (organisational)
- Loss of talent (individuals)
- Behavioural changes (audiences)

3.10 Given the commitment set out in the cultural strategy and the role of Belfast in the region it is important that Council formulates a response to the pandemic that supports cultural recovery through mitigating actions in each of these areas that ensures practical support aimed at stabilisation as well as long-term strategic initiatives to support resilience and transformation.

3.11 Summary of government support to date

Department for Communities and Arts Council NI

As the lead body to distribute central government cultural investment, ACNI has operated the Artist Emergency Programme (AEP), since April distributing up to £500,000 of National Lottery funding. Over 200 artists have so far benefited from grants of up to £5,000.

ACNI have commenced distribution of a £4m funding package called the Creative Support Fund, allocated from Department for Communities to support the arts, creative industries and cultural sector during the current pandemic.

- This includes Individuals Emergency Resilience Programme (IERP), worth £1m from the Department for Communities and an additional £100,000 from Future Screens NI, offering individuals up to £5,000 each.
- The Organisations Emergency Programme (OEP), is worth almost £2m to support 150 small and medium sized arts organisations with grants of up to £25,000 each.
- Some resources are yet to be committed.

3.12 In addition and as a result of the Barnett consequential Northern Ireland will receive a £33m support package as part of the £1.57 billion investment in cultural, arts and heritage announced by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The allocation of this funding will be determined by the Northern Ireland Executive.

3.13 In line with the Cultural Strategy for Belfast there is an opportunity for this funding to help mediate the current crisis whilst also supporting innovative approaches that will promote longer term stability, resilience and transformation in the cultural sector in order to overcome longstanding structural issues

3.14 Current status of restrictions

On 12 May 2020, the NI Executive published a five-stage recovery plan to easing the current restrictions. This has been based on scientific evidence, the ability of the health service to cope, and the wider impact on our health, society and the economy.

- The current status of restrictions is updated regularly but currently still limits cultural engagement:
- Under the current regulations, theatres, live performances in active venues, and concert halls remain closed for audiences. These venues had been due to reopen on 8 August 2020 but this guidance was revised due to an increase in Covid-19 cases diagnosed.
- Indoor gatherings are restricted to six people from two households, and up to 15 people outdoors.
- Whilst museums, galleries, some sporting facilities and libraries have been able to reopen as long as they adhere to restrictions on capacity etc, some organisations have been reluctant or unable to open due to operational or physical adjustments required (e.g. staff being on furlough, limited staff for rotas, training, preparation of venues such as installation of signage, panels, etc)

3.15 Impact on programming and audiences

Attending live events and venues

Various recent UK-based reports (After the Interval, Does Culture Matter, and the Scotinform Cultural Survey) reveal that audiences are concerned about safety at indoor venues. Recent research has indicated that audiences wouldn't feel comfortable attending live cultural events even if restrictions were lifted, and this figure has held true during both 'early lockdown' (May through mid-June) and 'later lockdown' (mid-June through July). Only 16% of survey respondents were currently booking events. More than two thirds would feel more confident if measures were in place such as 2m distance, avoiding queues, hand sanitiser and signage, and limits on attendance. This in turn poses issues for cultural organisations in terms of the economic viability of operating events. Furthermore the majority of organisations deliver extensive engagement and participation based programmes. These introduce an additional layer of issues in terms of contact, interaction and social distancing.

Accessing cultural content online

3.16 According to research (Thrive's *After the Interval* and NESTA), approximately half of people in the UK have never engaged with cultural content online, and of those, between 1/5 and 1/3 are new to online cultural content. This shows us that cultural organisations now have new audiences online, and this has been backed up through recent client surveys conducted by Thrive in partnership with Belfast City Council.

3.17 It will be important for organisations to capture and maximise audience development opportunities as a result of this time of experimentation and new ways of engagement. However similar to other sectors while there is an ongoing need to build the digital capability of the cultural sector this is not a long-term replacement for live performance.

3.18 Innovation

Many of the city's cultural organisations have demonstrated great resilience in the face of challenge including new online platforms, digital engagement, and experimenting with open air events such as promenade theatre, inside-out galleries and cinemas, drive-ins and open-air cultural events. Many arts organisations have demonstrated their ability to adapt their business and operating model to engage audiences in new ways.

3.19 Festivals and other organisations across Belfast have attracted new audiences and increased reach connecting with new audiences in US, Australia, and Singapore through digitised programmes. Despite challenge most of Belfast’s festivals are still taking place by operating ‘blended’ programmes and experimenting with different presentation models. Festivals such as Feile an Phobail and ArtsEkta’s Mela broadcast high quality performances online of differing lengths and artforms, whilst EastSide Arts Festival hosted socially distanced outdoor events.

3.20 However, we also know from the Belfast Baseline research into audience engagement that there remain sections of society less likely to actively participate in the breadth of cultural life. An additional factor such as the current pandemic can increase access issues.

Belfast’s arts organisations have again taken innovative approaches to staging performances to engage those most vulnerable in our society and hard to reach audiences. For example, Replay Theatre Company are touring the homes of families with children with complex needs and performing in gardens /public spaces. Implementing the necessary safety measures live performances have also reached outdoor settings at care homes and hospitals.

3.21 Belfast City Council Response

While government continues to take the lead on delivering direct support package it is important that Council is active in supporting cultural recovery through:

- Engagement with the sector
- Reframing of existing work programmes to ensure that they effectively support recovery
- Advocacy and strategic input into wider regional responses and interventions.

3.22 To date the work programme agreed by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in April 2020 has provided critical support to the cultural sector. This has included administering of grants to support core and programme costs as well as ongoing development work in a number of areas:

- Cultural organisations have benefitted from Belfast City Council support through *A City Imagining* cultural strategy investment programme including commitment of full or majority of core funding in 2020/21 to:
 - 49 arts and heritage organisations, (11 one-year Transition grants, 9 four- and 29 two-year Cultural Multi Annual Grants)
 - 18 festivals and events (2 one-year grants, 4 four- and 12 two-year Cultural Multi-Annual Grants)
- Engagement with stakeholder groups in order to gather information and ascertain the cultural sector's needs over the short and longer term to ensure effective implementation of strategy.
- Development and delivery of the following programmes of support to directly target sectoral need at this time in line with work programme presented to Committee in April 2020:
 - Delivering sectoral capacity building programme rescoped to ensure impact of Covid-19 is addressed.
 - Supporting new collaborations and artistic development including up to four long-term cultural commissions exploring themes celebrating the city, building towards 2023.
 - Ongoing review of city events including Culture Night Belfast and Belfast Maritime Festival including identifying new models of delivery.
 - Delivering cultural animation programme to support city centre and neighbourhood recovery supported by Department for Communities Revitalisation funding.
 - Ensuring strategic alignment between cultural strategy and new 10 year tourism recovery plan including maximising opportunities for sustainable tourism development through local and cultural initiatives.
 - Developing leadership, capacity and profile for the wider music sector considering the high level of impact on this sector.
 - Commissioning research into new approaches to audience development including new ticketing model and integration of digital models piloted during pandemic.
 - Cultural mapping including infrastructure audit to identify cultural facilities and activities, and utilise digital innovation to create a civic resource and promote cultural engagement and participation across the city.
 - Ongoing support for city and sectoral local, national and international work through existing and new partnerships and collaborations.

3.23 Responding to the pandemic

It is however important to note that the work programme as set out in April 2020 required further project design and development with a view to further updates being provided to Committee as appropriate. This work has been ongoing and has provided an opportunity where appropriate to rescope commitments in light of the impact of Covid-19. Further detail on this work programme and how it is responding to the specific needs and priorities emerging from the pandemic is included at [Appendix A](#).

3.24 It has been categorised into six main strands of work in line with existing approvals and budget. These are:

Strand 1: Stabilisation by optimising existing organisational support programmes and ensuring a joined up response across public and private stakeholders including:

- Administration of CMAG grants and wraparound support service
- Cultural mapping and audit

Strand 2: Developing the sector through opportunities to support new, emerging and transitioning organisations including:

- Award of up to 4 development grants at a maximum value of £20,000

Strand 3: Increasing capacity through tailored, cross-cutting and new approaches to co-design including:

- Delivery of capacity building programme targeting agreed groups and cognisant of the impact of Covid-19.

Strand 4: Rewarding innovation through support programmes specifically targeting individual artists, practitioners and producers including:

- Award of 10 creative bursaries in support of strategic initiatives such as 2023 and City of Music.

Strand 5: Building audiences through increased understanding, research and engagement including:

- Commission detailed audience research to ascertain the longer term impacts of Covid-19.

3.25 Strand 6: Promoting cultural place-making through the delivery of cultural animation, activation and programming in the city centre and neighbourhoods.

- This is a new strand of work in direct response to Department for Communities Revitalisation Fund however it is clearly aligned to existing priorities within the cultural strategy linked to use of public space and cultural participation.

3.26 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no new financial implications. The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2020/21 budget for the Culture and Tourism section of the Economic Development division of the Place and Economy Departmental budget in line with the work programme approved in April 2020.

3.27 However, this report presents an additional level of detail aligned to existing approvals following programme design and consideration of the impact of Covid-19 as set out at 3.24 and in [Appendix A](#) including:

- four development grants at a maximum of £20,000 per grant
- ten creative bursaries at a maximum of £10,000 per bursary
- Audience data and research in partnership with Thrive at a maximum of £30,000

3.28 All existing programmes are subject to ongoing review with cost savings identified where projects cannot proceed due to Covid-19.

**3.29 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

The cultural strategy, *A City Imagining* has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and a Rural Needs Assessment (RNA). Any further investment or significant programmes will include equality screening as appropriate.”

During discussion, Members raised concerns in relation to capacity building required for the sector and questioned the parameters of the development grants. One Member suggested that the proposals for the four development grants, at a maximum of £20,000 per grant, be submitted to the Committee for approval.

In response to Members questions, the Director of Economic Development explained further the engagement with the Department for Communities and the Arts Council and advised that the timeframe for the Barnett consequential support package, outlined in the report, had not been confirmed.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report and the contribution that the work programme for 2020/21 would make to support the recovery of the cultural sector;
- Noted the further detail supplied on specific projects within the overall programme and the breakdown and allocation of existing budget to specific projects as outlined at paragraph 3.27 and Appendix A to the report;
- Grant delegated authority to the Strategic Director of Place and the Economy to award the 10 creative bursaries at a maximum of £10,000 per bursary, following open and competitive processes in relation to specific projects within budgetary controls as outlined at paragraph 3.27 and in Appendix A to the report;
- Agreed that the awarding of the 4 development grants at a maximum of £20,000 per grant, following open and competitive processes in relation to specific projects within budgetary controls as outlined at paragraph 3.27 and in Appendix A to the report, be submitted to the Committee for approval; and
- Agreed to make a submission to the Department for Communities on the impact of Covid-19 on the cultural sector including Council's position on emerging priorities and response as set out in the report.

Strategic/Operational Issues

Organisation Recovery - Update on City Centre Public Toilet Opening

The Committee was provided with an overview of the status of the public conveniences in the City Centre that were provided by the Council in the midst of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee was informed that the Council provided a network of standard and automatic public conveniences (APCs) across the city and in line with many other Council services these facilities had closed in late March, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This action was taken to minimise the potential for transmission of the virus and in response to the Public health challenges.

It was reported that, as part of the Council's recovery plan for services, there had been a phased re-opening of these facilities in order to ensure a safe environment for staff and users. Five APCs opened on 1st July located at: Lombard Street, Custom House Square, Dublin Road, Gasworks and Waterworks.

On 17th August, two standard public toilets in the city centre re-opened at Church Lane and Winetavern Street. On 1st September, the last of the city centre public toilets opened at Arthur Lane. The final phase of service recovery involved those facilities at: Ormeau Embankment, Drumglass Park and Connswater. These were scheduled to re-open on 14th September.

It was reported that City and Neighbourhood Services were currently looking at options to extend the opening hours of the APCs to 11 pm each night from 7th September and this would be kept under review should these facilities suffer from major abuse during the 'out of hours' periods.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided in the report.

Additional Item

Promotion and Uptake of the Flu Jab

In agreement with the Chairperson, Councillor Heading raised concerns in relation to the uptake of the Flu Jab and the impact of further sickness absence might have on the economy and City Centre recovery. He suggested that the Council could help promote further uptake of the Flu Jab this winter through its communication tools.

The Committee noted that the Director would share this suggestion with the City and Neighbourhood Services Department.

Chairperson