

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 12th June, 2024

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nelson (Chairperson);
Councillors Black, De Faoite, D. Douglas, Duffy,
Kelly, Maskey, F. McAteer, McCabe, McDowell,
McCormick, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, McKay,
Smyth and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Ms. L. O'Donnell; Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. C. Persic, Development Manager;
Mr. A. Cairns, Zoo Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.

Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Alderman Lawlor and Councillors Hanvey and McDonough-Brown.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 8th and 29th May were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd June.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McCabe declared an interest in that the organisation she worked for was associated with the funding under item 5.b) St. Patrick's Day Review and Recommendations and left the room while the item was being discussed.

Presentation

Belfast City and Region Place Partnership

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. J. O'Neill and Ms. M. Doyle, representing the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership, to the Committee.

Mr. O'Neill described the membership and explained the objectives of the Partnership, namely to:

- Continue to build collaboration and partnership in the city and wider region;
- Continue to promote and market the Belfast region outside Northern Ireland;
- Increase engagement and advocacy with all key stakeholders, in particular, investors and government;
- Support delivery of the Belfast Region City Deal programme of investment by attracting collaborative partners; and
- Support delivery of our shared ambition and drive inclusive, sustainable growth.

He provided an overview of its partnership with anchor institutions, key developers and professional agencies, together with its pillared programming of: Research; Programme; Engagement and Advocacy; and Media and Communication.

The representatives highlighted the significance of partnership working for continued investment, together with research which had been undertaken by Ernst and Young on the viability of Belfast as an investment proposition. Mr. O'Neil described the development of bespoke digital Belfast Region investment guide and a targeted digital marketing campaign, together with showcase events and conferences attended.

They advised the Committee of their next steps, which included taking forward their objectives, working collaboratively to support place-based growth proposition for Belfast and wider region; Positively showcasing and positioning the city region as a place for investment; and Positively positioning the city to attract inclusive investment to deliver regeneration and development across the city.

During discussion, the representatives described the benefits of investing in Belfast and answered a range of questions in relation to the benefits of attending conferences, social engagement, the potential for an anchor community organisation to be included in the partnership, a sub-group for community engagement, and procurement plans.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their presentation and they retired from the meeting.

Belfast City and Region Place Partnership Update

Following the presentation, the Director of City Regeneration and Development introduced the following report for Members consideration:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- **Update members on the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) 2023 / 2024 Programme.**

- Seek approval to extend Council's involvement in the BCRPP to 2024 / 2025 .

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note a presentation will be made at Committee from representatives from the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP).
- Approve that Officers continue to support the delivery of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme including governance processes, administering programme funded expenditure and entering into associated contracts on behalf of and with oversight from the BCRPP and in line with Council's procurement processes.
- Approve the Council investment (from existing and approved City Regeneration and Development Budget) as part of the wider public private sector partnership contribution towards the delivery of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme.
- Approve attendance by senior officers at MIPIIM 2025 as part of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme, noting that the BCRPP presence at MIPIIM will be funded from the wider public-private sector BCRPP programme budget.

3.0 Background

3.1 Members will recall that this Committee agreed in May 2024 to receive a presentation from representatives of the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) in June 2024. The purpose of this presentation is to update Members on the 2023 / 2024 programme of work and proposed 2024 / 2025 activities, including priority issues and objectives for the Partnership moving forward.

3.2 The BCRPP, formerly Renewed Ambition Partnership (RAP), is a joint public-private initiative that is delivering a programme of work aimed at ensuring Belfast is positively positioned to continue to attract inclusive investment to unlock and development, regeneration and infrastructure required to deliver on our inclusive growth ambitions.

3.3 BCRPP is supported by public, private and key anchor institution partners. Partners comprise of Belfast City Council, Belfast City Region Deal Partner Councils, Invest NI, Belfast Harbour, Translink, Housing Association representation, Queens University Belfast, and representatives from the local development community bringing forward regeneration and development projects.

- 3.4 For the past nine years Council has played a lead civic role in supporting this joint public private sector approach aimed at ensuring Belfast is positively positioned to attract external capital investment required to deliver on our sustainable and inclusive growth ambitions as outlined in the Belfast Agenda. This sets bold ambitions and economic development priorities for the city aimed at delivering inclusive growth. It aims to create a liveable and connected, vibrant and competitive city through prioritising housing-led regeneration; connectivity, active and sustainable travel; and future city centre and wider city regeneration and investment. It is recognised that a collaborative partnership working approach between the public and private sector is key to successfully delivering on these ambitions, with the BCRPP being an important delivery mechanism. The BCRPP is also an important tool within our wider 'Position the City to Compete' proposition which seeks to build on the city's reputation as a unique destination for investment, tourism, development and supporting inclusive economic growth. Members will be aware that 'Positioning the City to Compete' is a key programme of work within this Committee's work plan as agreed at a special meeting of CGR Committee in May.
- 3.5 It has been estimated that c £7.5bn investment is required to deliver the Belfast Agenda growth ambitions, therefore working collaboratively with the private sector to attract external investment is critical. It is also worth noting that approximately 80% of the Council's income comes from the district rate. Increasing the rates base therefore through further development and regeneration activity will support delivery of Council's corporate priorities.
- 3.6 This Committee received a presentation on the 2023 Regeneration Tracker in April 2024. This provided an overview of regeneration and development activity which took place in 2023. It noted the overall positive trajectory of development and regeneration activity since 2015 and how this positively contributes to the wider region including economic growth, job creation, access to services and cultural and recreational amenities. However it had also highlighted some of the challenges and opportunities to future regeneration and development activities, with a particular focus on increasing city centre living, city wide housing-led regeneration and unlocking major regeneration schemes.

3.7 Party Group Leaders (or nominees) and senior officers participated on a study visit to Manchester and Leeds in April 2024. Discussions with elected representatives and senior officers from both cities highlighted the importance of having a long-term vision and supporting strategies, and strong public and private sector partnership working to secure external funding to bring forward development and deliver on growth ambitions. Both councils noted that the key to successful regeneration and development was not always direct delivery, but councils using their strong convening role in attracting external investment and supporting private sector delivery. They also emphasised the importance of city national and international marketing activities in developing long term relationships with international brands and investors, and how this assisted in securing both long term patient capital and partners who have bought into the city's values and vision. They highlighted the economic benefits of this partnership approach to bringing forward development and regeneration. This included supporting graduate retention, attracting FDI and providing employment opportunities.

4.0 Main Report

4.1 The 2023 / 2024 programme commenced on the 1 September 2023 and is delivering a structured programme of work focussed on the key pillars of Research; Events; Advocacy and Engagement; and Communications aligned to securing investment and regeneration for Belfast and the wider city region. The presentation to Committee by the BRCPP Taskforce will provide an overview of the programme and highlights including:

- Development of Marketing collateral to reinforce positive messaging around Belfast and the city region. This includes updating the Belfast Region Investment Guide and creating a digital interactive version which is a key marketing asset at showcase events and wider marketing tool, producing monthly newsletters and securing media coverage highlighting positive news stories.**
- Organising a Dublin Investment Showcase event which was delivered in conjunction with Urban Land Institute (ULI) to showcase the Belfast City Region investment opportunity to a ROI investment and development market with positive engagement and a strong interest in the Belfast market, notably the Residential sector.**
- Belfast City Region presence at MIPIM 2024 which comprised of attendees from 15 organisations including Belfast Harbour, Invest NI, Titanic Quarter and private sector developers attending as part of the Belfast City Region delegation.**

- **Belfast City Region presence at UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiiF) 2024 which comprised of attendees from 13 organisations, including partner BRCD Councils, key developers and professional services firms.**
- **Advocacy and engagement activities to unlock development and barriers to delivery including to support delivery of the place-based growth proposition for Belfast; housing-led regeneration; and engagement with Planning in relation to the Local Development Plan – Plan Strategy and the emerging Local Policies Plan.**

4.2 It is recognised that the BCRPP public private partnership approach is an important lever as part of our wider 'Positioning the City to Compete' proposition. It complements other city region partnerships including Belfast Region City Deal and Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor; and is aligned to council-led activities to accelerate city centre living, city innovation, connectivity, resilience / net zero and EDU activities.

4.3 Participation in the BCRPP programme has delivered a number of benefits in terms of working to achieve our corporate and city level strategic priorities. Members will be aware of the on-going focus on accelerating city centre living and the advanced stages of Council's competitive dialogue process which is seeking a long-term Private Sector Partner to deliver residential led, mixed use developments to support growth ambitions as set out in the Belfast Agenda. Showcasing this opportunity through BCRPP activities has undoubtedly played a key role in terms of positively positioning this proposition within the investment and development market. It has been clear that participation generally as part of the BCRPP programme has generated interest in wider regeneration, development and investment opportunities across the city.

4.4 There has been strong interest in Belfast from the investment and development market with positive engagement at showcase events and subsequent requests for follow up presentations and inward visits to Belfast. There has been a number of follow up meetings in Belfast over the past months, with more planned in the coming months from investors, developers and occupiers including:

- Major housing / residential developers who have not to date delivered projects in Belfast / NI
- Real estate investment trust (REIT) with a strong interest in residential developments
- End-use occupiers including FDI companies, commercial / leisure operators, innovation hub operators and Food & Beverage operators

4.5 Proposed approach to 2024 / 2025

The Partnership is governed via a Taskforce comprised of representatives of the public and private sector. The Taskforce has endorsed continuing the Partnership into 2024 / 2025. The presentation from the BCRPP Taskforce will set out the core objectives and proposed workstreams for the 2024 / 2025 programme.

4.6 For the Council the key aims and objectives of being part of the BCRPP Partnership and contributing to the programme include:

- Securing investment required to assist with delivery of our growth ambitions as outlined in the Belfast Agenda and aligned to corporate priorities, noting the wider economic benefits these investment delivers and that from a council perspective increased investment and development activity also results in increased rates generation and delivering on corporate priorities.
- Strengthening additional support and advocacy for the Place Based Growth Proposition for Belfast.
- Maximising the benefits of the Belfast Region City Deal investments
- Securing investment in the built environment on a city-wide basis to maximise opportunities to create jobs, support inclusive economic growth alongside enhancing physical and social infrastructure across the city.
- Securing investment in key city infrastructure schemes including waterfront regeneration, connectivity, net- zero and innovation related projects.

4.7 Council plays a key role in both the strategic and operational management of BCRPP including the development, management and delivery of the Programme of Activity. Members are asked to approve Council continuing to take on this role, with officers supporting the 2024 / 2025 programme including governance processes, administering programme funded expenditure and entering into associated contracts on behalf of and with oversight from the BCRPP Partnership, and in line with Council's procurement processes.

- 4.8 The BCRPP is supported and funded by public, private and key anchor institution partners, with external funding forming the majority of the overall programme delivery budget. Members are asked to note the proposed approach to the 2024 / 2025 Programme and approve the Council investment (from existing and approved City Regeneration & Development Budget) as part of the wider public private partnership contribution towards the delivery of the 2024 / 2025 Programme.
- 4.9 Council has participated in the 'Team Belfast' attendance at MIPIM since 2016. MIPIM is the world's leading built environment conference and exhibition attended by approx. 20,000 public and private sector representatives from across the globe, major European and UK cities including London, Manchester, Newcastle, Cardiff, Liverpool. It provides an opportunity for Belfast and the wider city region to position itself to a global audience and attract the interest of institutional investors, developers, occupiers and funders in the context of bringing forward sustainable development to create a well-connected and culturally vibrant, sustainable city and region. Following positive feedback from MIPIM 2024 the BCRPP has endorsed a Belfast City Region presence at MIPIM 2025 in line with the approach taken by other UK Cities, and its inclusion within the wider BCRPP Programme of activity for 2024 / 2025. The BCRPP Partnership feel that in order to successfully showcase Belfast and the wider City Region it requires the civic leadership and attendance by Belfast City Council. Members are asked to approve attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2025, noting that the BCRPP presence at MIPIM will be funded from the wider public private BCRPP budget.
- 5.0 Financial and Resource Implications
- 5.1 The BCRPP is delivered as a public private sector sponsorship fund and is supported by a range of public, private and key anchor institutions who contribute financially towards the 2023 / 2024 programme, with external and private sector funding forming the majority of the overall programme budget. It is anticipated that the majority of the 2024 / 2025 programme budget will again be funded through external funding.

5.2 Council has previously agreed to contribute of £80,000 towards the 2023 / 2024 Programme, and subject to Members agreement it is proposed that Council contribute £80,000 (from existing and approved City Regeneration and Development Budget) as part of the wider public private partnership investment towards the delivery of the 2024 / 2025 programme.

5.3 Approval is sought for attendance of senior officers at MIPIM 2024. Travel costs for Council attendance at MIPIM 2024 to be met from within existing and approved departmental budgets. All other costs related to these events would be met from the 2024 / 2025 BCRPP programme budget.

6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment

None associated with this report.”

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Kelly,
Seconded by Councillor McCormick

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendations

Amendment

Moved by Councillor McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to write to the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership to request that they consider establishing a sub-group of the partnership for community engagement with a focus on social value and defer consideration of attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2025 as part of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme until a report was submitted to the Committee in August to outline the tangible benefits of the conference.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- Noted the presentation from representatives from the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP);
- Approved that officers continued to support the delivery of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme including governance processes, administering programme funded expenditure and entering into associated contracts on behalf of and with oversight from the BCRPP and in line with Council's procurement processes;

- Approved the Council investment (from existing and approved City Regeneration and Development Budget) as part of the wider public private sector partnership contribution towards the delivery of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme;
- Agreed to write to the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership to request that they consider establishing a sub-group of the partnership for community engagement with a focus on social value; and
- Deferred consideration of attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2025 as part of the BCRPP 2024 / 2025 programme until a report was submitted to the Committee in August to outline the tangible benefits of the conference.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following six items was 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 following items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Members were also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Vacant to Vibrant Scheme

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on the Vacant to Vibrant Programme which sought approval for the recommendations from the Vacant to Vibrant assessment panel following the recent receipt and assessment of applications.

She also outlined the recommendations for the next steps for the Vacant to Vibrant programme following engagement with Members and explained further the proposed research and development work.

The Committee:

- I. Noted the update in relation to the city centre Vacant to Vibrant Programme;

- II. Agreed to the recommended grant awards as outlined within Section 3.15 of the report;
- III. Noted the update on the next steps of the Vacant to Vibrant Programme; and
- IV. Agreed to the recommendations for the Vacant to Vibrant next steps as outlined with Section 3.28 of the report.

Update on Placemaking and Active Travel Projects

The Committee was provided with an update on the delivery of placemaking and active travel projects including Grey to Green, Active Travel Enablers and Developer Contribution led schemes.

During discussion, one Member questioned the rationale for determining the boundary maps of the existing schemes, such as the North West Masterplan. The Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that this could be examined across the projects.

The Committee:

- I. Noted the update in relation to externally funded Tactical Regeneration activity;
- II. Noted the relocation of the Queen's Quay kiosk, originally proposed for Castle Place, to DfC owned lands at Queen's Quay and the proposed transfer of ownership of the Queen's Quay kiosk to Maritime Business Trust;
- III. Noted the update of the Public Realm Improvement Works delivered via Developer Contributions; and
- IV. Agreed that a future report would be brought to the Committee to outline the rationale around red line boundaries including the city centre boundary and various programmes and projects and how this might be looked at going forward.

Bad Debt Write Off

The Committee authorised that the outstanding account of £10,668.52 be written off, in accordance with Section M12 of the Council's Financial Regulations, as outlined in the report.

Belfast Zoo - Quarter 4 Performance Update

The Committee considered the quarterly update on the performance at the Zoo, across the following areas:

- Visitor Services;
- Animal Collection;
- Marketing and Events;
- Education Services; and
- Financial performance.

The Committee noted the Zoo performance update report for the period January to March 2024.

Belfast Bikes - Quarter 4 Performance Update

The Director of Economic Development updated Members on the performance of the Belfast Bikes scheme in Quarter 4 (January 2024 to March 2024) of year 9 of operation.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development explained further the limitations of user data and engagement but this could be discussed with the new operator. He also advised that data on vandalism of the Bikes could be explored.

He pointed out that finding suitable locations for the installation of new bike stands could be difficult but engagement was undertaken beforehand.

The Committee:

- noted the update of the Belfast Bikes performance for Year 9 Quarter 4 (January to March) financial year;
- noted the progress regarding phase one and phase two expansion;
- noted the update that tender will be prepared for procurement of a new Public Bike Hire Scheme;
- noted the current status of appointing a new sponsor for the Public Bike Hire Scheme; and
- approved the usage of free memberships, free ride vouchers and ride credits for marketing activity.

Markets - Quarter 4 Update

The Director of Economic Development provided a quarterly performance and financial update for the period to end March 2024. He advised the Committee of the future plans for the coming quarter and noted that additional updates would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

The Committee:

- Noted the update on city markets – with a focus on St George’s Market; and;
- Noted the priority actions for the coming quarter and note that further updates on progress will be brought back to future meetings of this Committee.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Horizon Europe Urban Planning 2030 (UP2030) Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development and the Development Manager provided an update to Members on the ongoing activities as part of the UP2030 Net Zero Neighbourhoods Project including stakeholder engagement, workshops, partnership working and highlight upcoming milestones.

The Committee was reminded that, in March 2022, the Council was invited to participate in a three-year Horizon Europe consortium funding application from the Urban Planning 2030 (UP2030) fund to guide cities through the transitions required to meet their climate neutrality ambitions. As reported in November 2022 and March 2023, the City Regeneration and Development and Climate teams were successful in joint bid of €204,250/£176,024 to further an integrated approach between urban planning, achieving net zero and aspects of resilience. It was noted that Belfast was a pilot city within the Horizon UP2030 project which would focus on the development of a net zero neighbourhood framework and toolkit and the use of climate tools to support analysis, mapping and engagement in city neighbourhoods.

It was reported that, as agreed at the Committee in March 2023, the geographic area of the UP2030 pilot covered an area bounded by May Street and Shaftesbury Square, and the Gasworks and Great Victoria Street, and adjacent city centre communities in the Market, Donegall Pass and Sandy Row, and to include the area bounded by the M1, the Inner Ring and Divis Street, which aligns with A Bolder Vision, Net Zero Roadmap, and provided a holistic mix of local communities, city centre living, commercial and tourism and hospitality. However, it was impressed that, whilst this work was undertaken within a defined boundary, the purpose was to produce a framework that could be adapted and used within all communities and districts to set forward net zero tailored approaches, attract funding and deliver climate adaption plans tailored for the uses of that specific district.

The Development Manager advised that the primary focus of UP2030 was on the development of a Net Zero (NZ) Neighbourhood Framework that was shaped around three thematic areas: active travel, greening and retrofit. These themes linked across to the UP2030 pillars of a fair and just transition, carbon neutrality and resilience.

She highlighted that Cities accounted for 70% of the global CO2 emissions and consumed 78% of the world's energy. The UP2030 project was about recognising the role cities play in achieving net zero by 2050, and the sequence of actions and transitions that would be required by 2030 to ensure this target ambition is met. The '5UP' approach guides the work of the project and the considerations required for the development of a framework for creating a net zero neighbourhood:

- UP-Dating: Identifying the needs and barriers, and reviewing the processes, planning codes and policies that should be urgently updated to create future proofed NZ neighbourhoods;

- UP-Skilling: Building capacities to upskill the entire stakeholder ecosystem, from city departments to urban practitioners to the construction industry, through to citizens;
- UP-Grading: Considering the transformation at the suitable physical scale;
- UP-Scaling: Scaling solutions and integrating them across sectors by shaping governance arrangements and matching financial resources; and
- UP-Taking: Sharing knowledge and learning through the project to create long-lasting communities of practice.

The Development Manager informed the Committee that the project commenced in February 2023 and would run until December 2025. She pointed out that it was driven by robust project milestones and constant engagement across the consortium that was made up of 46 partners, with Belfast one of 11 pilot cities and only UK city.

She described the progress to date, together with the key milestones achieved, stakeholder engagement and workshop delivery.

She highlighted that data collection and analysis had provided another layer of understanding of the UP2030 area and helped identify further needs, challenges and opportunities for net zero led regeneration to future proof the area and communities.

The Committee:

- Noted that Belfast, represented by Belfast City Council, was a pilot city within the Horizon Europe UP2030 project which was focused on the development of a net zero neighbourhood framework using technical tools and support that were provided through the UP2030 consortium including analysis, mapping and engagement;
- Noted the update on the ongoing UP2030 Net Zero neighbourhoods project, with further updates to be brought back to Committee as this progressed; and
- Noted that an update report on UP2030 was also being brought to the Climate and City Resilience Committee (13th June).

Positioning Belfast to Compete

St Patrick's Day Review and Recommendations

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on:**

- St Patrick's Day Celebrations 2024
- forward planning for 2025

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report
- Note the Year 2 award for Féile an Phobail
- Note the approach to Lot 2 for retendering
- Agree to a funding allocation of £30,000 to Conradh na Gaeilge as per 2024 which will be drawn from existing budgets.
- Agree the way forward in respect of the Parade, with officers recommending option 2.
- Agree to officers arranging a member workshop to review lessons learnt.
- Agree the proposed allocation of £300,000 from pre-agreed departmental budgets for the St. Patricks Day Festival to be allocated as below,
 - Parade/Pageant - £95,000
 - City Centre Weekend Music Programme - £90,000
 - Cross City Music Showcase (£50k) – Awarded for year 2 to Féile an Phobal
 - Conradh na Gaeilge - £30k for delivery of Seachtain na Gaeilge
 - Marketing/Engagement/Logistics - £35,000

3.0 Main report

3.1 St Patrick's Day 2024 Process

Belfast City Council's previous model for the delivery of St. Patrick's Day celebrations in Belfast, consisted of a Carnival Parade along a city centre route, followed by a free music concert for all ages in the city centre from 1.30pm - 4pm. In 2021, a new approach was adopted for St Patrick's Day Belfast 2022 and 2023. Following an Expression of Interest process, Council agreed to directly invest in the local sector through four Creative Development Awards. These projects then progressed from feasibility to pilot stage for the Festival in 2022. Following the delivery of the pilot projects in March 2022 an evaluation process was completed, with all four projects again supported in 2023.

2024 Approach

It was further agreed at CG&R in September 2022, that a new Design Contest would be run in a timely manner for any required service contracts to support the delivery of St Patrick's Day in 2024 and beyond. This was conducted with the support of CPS to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Publics Contracts Regulations.

A tender for a similar approach to the Expression of Interest was developed and as before, fully aligned to the Cultural Strategy.

This resulted in four Lots being offered for:

- A Parade / Pageant (£95k)
- City Centre Weekend Music Programme (£70K)
- Cross City Music Showcase (£50k)
- An 'Open Call' (£50k)

The remaining budget was retained for parade logistics (circa £35k) and some other programming and marketing activity.

The outcome of this process was that one submission was received for Lot 3 only, which was subsequently awarded to Féile an Phobail. Lots 1, 2 and 4 received a Nil return.

Further to discussions with CPS, Beat Carnival and Tradfest were approached at the end of October 2023 to deliver the Parade element and City Centre Weekend Music Programme respectively. Tradfest subsequently agreed to deliver Lot 2 and this was agreed at SP&R in November 2023.

It was further agreed that Lots 2 and 3 were to be delivered by Feile and Tradfest respectively. Beat declined the opportunity to deliver Lot 1 in mid-November. Officers then took forward the option to deliver Lot 1 (the Parade) in-house, due to timescales and the limited availability of organisations to provide assets. Subsequently, there was engagement with a number of organisations on the provision of professional performance, community engagement, and parade assets.

Lot 4 sought to consider open call proposals. There was no response to this tender and subsequently Council received a request to support Seachtain na Gaeilge, a 17 - day festival organised by Conradh na Gaeilge. The festival proposal provided an opportunity to for attendees to enjoy Irish, whether a fluent speaker, learner or someone with a Cúpla

Focal, with a calendar of entertaining and fun events for every type of interest and every age group. Voluntary and community groups, local councils, schools, libraries, and music, sports, arts and culture organisations organised events for Seachtain na Gaeilge le Energia in their local area. In 2023, Belfast City held over 100 events during Seachtain na Gaeilge and held the flagship event, Spraoi Cois Lao, with over 5000 attendees from all cultures and backgrounds on the day. Members agreed to a funding agreement to the value of £50k for delivery in 2024, budgets were sought from within current departmental allocation in repurposing the Lot 4 monies.

3.1.1 2024 Programming

In the lead-up to St. Patrick's Day and the day itself, a series of additional activities were orchestrated across the city, significantly enhancing the festive atmosphere. These were a combination of curated partners and Council:

Delivered by Féile an Phobail, TradTrail celebrated Belfast's status as a UNESCO City of Music with performances from the best local and national trad musicians from Sunday 10th to Sunday 17th March, offering free music performances in bars, restaurants, hotels and visitor attractions across the city. Performers from Clare & Cork participated in the sessions across the City.

Seachtain na Gaeilge, presented by Conradh na Gaeilge began on Friday 1st March and continued until St Patrick's Day itself. This included an Irish language family fun day - Spraoi Cois Lao – which took place at Custom House Square on Saturday 9th March, the biggest fun day of its kind. This event included musicians, dancers, activities, games, food and entertainment, all celebrating the Irish language, and was free to access. Almost 5,000 attended this, even with inclement weather. Across the period of the festival, over 10,000 attended over 80 diverse events and activities.

New for 2024, Belfast Trad Fest, presented the St Patrick's Day Music Weekend - three days of concerts, céilís, displays, taster sessions and workshops in venues throughout the Cathedral Quarter. Combining traditional music with bagpipes, Highland dancers, Irish dancing and bodhrán circles, a festival village located at Cathedral Gardens included a host of free performances, alongside food stalls, céili workshops and more. In addition, there were a number of ticketed performances too, including a Kiddy Céili at Belfast Cathedral on Saturday 16th March as part of Belfast Children's Festival, a gala concert with Frankie Gavin and Dé Dannan at Ulster Hall on the same evening and a finale event with Stockton's Wing and John Spillane at the MAC Belfast on Sunday 17th March. Anúna played to an audience of 550 at St Anne's Cathedral. The music weekend was hugely successful in creating new partnerships across the

City, with an audience of over 16,000 attending the events at 13 indoor and outdoor venues.

Council provided further family friend programming in 2 Royal Ave, via the Council -appointed operator Maywe which was well attended by families for a day of free events, including art workshops, dance performances, music, games area. Over 2,100 attended the venue which also accommodated a sensory area.

Council, in partnership with Ards Comhaltas, programmed live music in St George's market on both Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th March, which further brought the venue to life, showcased the asset and profiled the ongoing bid for Fleadh Cheoil.

The St. Patrick's Day Parade was held on Sunday 17th March, was a significant event aimed at providing a family-friendly experience in celebration of the cultural heritage. The St Patrick's Day Parade was curated and delivered by the Council Events team incorporating engagement, animation and participation from a number of professional, voluntary and community organisations with 500 plus participants; dance troupes, schools, community groups and musicians who joined the floats for a free multi-cultural, cross-community celebration, focusing on 'People, Place and Planet' – the key themes in the council's Belfast 2024 programme, which is celebrating the city's creativity throughout the year. Commencing from Belfast City Hall, the parade followed a circular route and concluded back at the City Hall, ensuring a vibrant celebration which was accessible to the large audience.

There was an estimated visitor attendance of 30,000 in the City Centre on the 17th for the Parade and Village.

The St Patrick's Celebrations were delivered within the budget allocation of £300,000. Members should note that Good Relations funding of £20k was also secured to enhance the community offering within the parade. It is worth noting that our partners did comment on the need for further financial resources to continue to develop this overall event, not only in the City centre but across the City. The levels of support for the original tendered 'Lots' was also a factor in the lack of submissions.

3.1.2 Outcomes

In summary, while the procurement process for the provision of programming for the 2024 celebrations undoubtedly faced a series of challenges, ultimately the programme was delivered on budget, was very well attended, and positively received. All partners have been very positive in their feedback with further details on public reception available in 3.1.3.

A previous challenge associated with the festivities was the lack of dwell time around the parade in previous years. This year, there was considerable evidence of elongated dwell time in the City with the hubs and parade wrap around, particularly in the Cathedral Gardens, and 2 Royal Ave. This enhanced experience will be further developed via bringing other Council owned assets into play - positioning and the stories piece - all linking through to the opening of Belfast Stories in the coming years.

Operationally the parade route needs consideration of elongation next year due to the high density of the spectators attending; this will be considered in consultation with the H&S Advisory and other stakeholders.

Members will be aware that at a meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 28 August 2019 a new ten-year cultural strategy for Belfast, *A City Imagining*, was agreed. As part of this strategy a new investment approach was approved and this model committed to a partnership approach to supporting the cultural sector, with the aim of sustaining and developing accessible cultural activity and infrastructure across Belfast and creating the conditions for long-term transformation. It was agreed that this partnership model should be applied to the direct delivery of City events by Council as well as funded programmes of activity.

Supporting Belfast to become a recognised cultural destination through a coherent approach to events and festivals. This would include a range of approaches from bidding for major events to supporting local festivals and importantly creating a portfolio of Signature homegrown Belfast Events.

Members should note that officers are reviewing this as an ongoing piece of work and will forward a report to committee in August that looks at the implications of revisiting city events and associated resource implications. As part of this process officers wish to host a member workshop which will

invite certain suppliers to provide direct feedback on councils' approach to commissioning events. This information will then educate the August report.

3.1.3 Alignment to the Cultural Strategy

The 'City Imagining Strategy' approved by Council has a focus on supporting developing local arts and cultural organisations, through funding, commissioning and capacity building. In this regard, Streetwise Circus were engaged to execute a stilt walking programme, teaching the youth the art of stiltwalking and showcasing in the parade. Circusful ran a circus skills programme with the youth circus to perform in the parade along with their professional performers. There was engagement with local arts, voluntary and community organisations to create props or coordinate performances of varying nature to enhance the overall production of the parade and highlight the local arts and culture within Belfast. Additionally, partners worked with the sector in the delivery of the wider programme.

3.1.4 Key Findings: Belfast St Patrick's Day 2024 socio-economic survey

Visitor profile:

- 58% of visitors from Belfast City Council area
- 29% from elsewhere in Northern Ireland
- 1% Republic of Ireland; 9% Great Britain 9%, 6% other regions
- 44% of those outside Northern Ireland, the event was the main reason for their trip
- 3% staying in accommodation away from home
- 43% attended the event with children
- 50% had attended a St Patrick's Day event in Belfast before, 50% had not
- 40% heard about the events by family /friends

Visitor Spend:

- 95% ate out during the event, average spend per group £50.63
- Total average spend per group *excluding* accommodation £77.65
- 12% staying in accommodation in Belfast region

Overall estimated direct spend for the St Patrick's Celebrations £1.274m.

Overall Rating:

- 86% gave the Parade a rating of 8-10, including 30% who rated it as 'Extremely good'.
- 96% of visitors agreed that the event improves NI's reputation as a host for events like these.
- 95% of visitors agreed that the event improves the reputation of NI as a place to visit.
- 96% agree /strongly agree events like this have can help shape a more accepting citizenship in our city.
- 100% of respondents believe that events like this encourage people to come to Belfast.
- 92% said that such events improve their sense of wellbeing and community.
- 98% felt the St Patrick's Celebrations were inclusive for all people from all cultural heritages.
- 95% agreed that there should be more events like this in Belfast.
- 98% would recommend the event to other people.
- 81% likely/very likely to visit St Patrick's Day celebrations in future years.

Events & activities

- 79% also attending 2 Royal Avenue activities
- 26% also attending music weekend
- 16% also attending St George's market activities

Respondents were also asked about whether the event should be held on a weekend or the 17th. 50% preferred the weekend, while 44% indicated a preference for the 17th March

3.1.5 Marketing and Communications

Council operated a digital campaign and online advertising to promote the events taking place under the St Patricks Celebrations banner, including all partner activity and the events at St George's and 2 Royal Ave. Council directed people to www.belfastcity.gov.uk URL, where the event information was displayed prominently on the page. Additionally, further details could be found on programming at partner websites.

Promotion took place across digital platforms and via key partners including Visit Belfast. A press release was also issued in early March to promote the finer and confirmed details of the event schedule.

Stats from Belfast City Council as below:

Social media review- St Pat's 2024

Facebook

9 posts

Total post reach: 170,000

#BelfastStPats hashtag was used in 52 posts (including posts from partners and stakeholders) with overall reach of 2.3million.

Our post following the event with the pics was the best performing post reaching nearly 40,000 accounts organically.

Instagram

4 posts

Total post reach: 15,000

#BelfastStPats was mentioned in 197 posts (including posts from partners and stakeholders)

Our best performing post was the video following the event with the aerial footage, parade features and performers – it was played 6,700 times

Twitter

31 posts

Total impressions: 82,500

Standout tweet:



This tweet had nearly 10k impressions

#BelfastStPats hashtag was used in 312 Twitter posts with an overall reach of 3.8 million (including posts from partners, RTs, etc)

Stats from Visit Belfast as below:

Social Media Advert Campaign:

- Advert placed across Facebook and Instagram
- Advert targeted NI and ROI
- Call to action visit <https://visitbelfast.com/ideas/st-patricks-day-in-belfast/>
- Campaign live 20th Feb – 17th March

Results

- Impressions – 1,862,387
- Engagements – 312,121
- Video Views – 1,296,625

Organic Results

- Organic Impressions – 504,708
- Organic Video Views – 11,938
- Organic Video Views – 151,850



Overall Results

Result

Website Visits	33,708
Total Social Media Impressions	2,345,685
Total Social Media Engagements	333,069
Total Social Media Video Views	1,425,223
Total E-zine Impressions	19,063

3.2 Way Forward 2025

The tender developed for 2024 resulted in four Lots being offered for:

- A Parade / Pageant
- City Centre Weekend Music Programme
- Cross City Music Showcase
- An 'Open Call'

While the outcome of this process was that one submission was received for Lot 3 only (Féile an Phobail), subsequently there was a direct award for Lot 3 (Tradfest) and Lot 4 was repurposed to support Seachtain na Gaeilge.

Lessons Learnt

Taking into consideration the procurement position from 2024 the following elements have been reviewed in order to achieve better engagement for 2025 delivery.

- Timings, procurement will hit market earlier to allow for better responses. Due to challenges with late market entry previously many suppliers had pre committed to other events already.
- Pre market engagement – a process of pre market engagement is underway to understand available resources, appetite and ability to deliver – this will inform any final tender specification requirements
- Simplified tender documentation
- Subject to committee approval increased value for the city centre music weekend
- Parade/pageant to remain at £95k in recognition of 2024 delivery and engagement outcomes

3.2.1 As per the tender process, both Féile an Phobail, on the back of a successful 2024, will progress into Year 2 of their award.

It is recommended that the element City Centre Music programme delivered by Tradfest in 2024 is procured for year 2 of the delivery in 2025 given the success of this activity in 2024. This would be required to be retendered given that SPR provided approval for one year only. Given the success of this element of the event officers propose increasing the contribution this year by £20,000 for a total of £90,000.

Conradh na Gaeilge, has been assessed and successful under CMAG to the value of £20,000. However, organisers have indicated that this will not be sustainable in 2025 as they are preparing for a significant increase in pricing and as such are seeking additional funding that would equate to the total provision of £50,000 made in 2024. As a result, officers are seeking approval to allocate £30,000 to Conradh na Gaeilge for the delivery of an event in 2025. This will be drawn from existing departmental budgets.

In summary the proposed allocation of the pre-agreed £300,000 is as below,

- Parade/Pageant - £95,000
- City Centre Weekend Music Programme - £90,000
- Cross City Music Showcase (£50k) – Awarded for year 2 to Féile an Phobal
- Conradh na Gaeilge - £30k for delivery of Seachtain na Gaeilge
- Marketing/Engagement/Logistics - £35,000

3.2.2 Officers have engaged with CPS to establish options for the Parade delivery in 2025.

Option 1: re-tender the Parade Lot for one organisation to provide the entire parade lot. Council would continue as per previous years to provide all logistical support. Members should note that no submissions were received in 2024 for this Lot and there will be no change in value or specification for 2025.

Option 2: continue with in – house delivery. Council officers would continue to work with CPS to test the market initially and establish the best means to explore procurement of the services required to successfully deliver a fresh parade, particularly with respect to floats, professional performance and community engagement. It is very evident that professional parade provision is very competitive on the island of Ireland due to the high demand for the St Patrick’s Day celebrations. Early approval and engagement would give Belfast the opportunity to progress options for the 2025 Parade.

4 Financial and Resource Implications

The events budgets were presented to City Growth & Regeneration Committee on 8th May 2024 as part of the committee plan and associated workplans, this includes St Patrick’s Day Celebrations to the value of £300k. Its is proposed this is allocated as below,

5 Equality and Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

Events form part of the overarching City Imagining Cultural Strategy for Belfast that has been subject to EQIA. An equality screening has been completed and mitigating actions will be considered as part of any initiatives.”

During discussion, Members questioned the inclusivity of the St. Patrick's Day events and the need for further community outreach. The Director of Economic Development explained the principles and theme of the events, together with the community engagement that had taken place across the city. He advised that a report would be submitted to the Committee in August in relation to the review of the events process and community engagement.

In response to a Member's question in relation to the funding allocation for Conradh na Gaeilge, the Director explained further the rationale and associated Cultural Multi-annual grants funding.

Proposal

Proposed by Councillor F. McAteer,
Seconded by Councillor Nelson,

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the recommendation to allocate £95K to the Parade/Pageant for March 2025 until the aforementioned Workshop has taken place to consider feedback from the previous applicants.

On a vote, 3 Members voted for the proposal and 8 against and it was declared lost.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations as set out in the report.

Update on Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress of work on the new Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme, outline the proposed commissioning model and advise on next steps.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Committee is asked to:

- **Consider the updated findings of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme approach as contained within this report**
- **Approve the commissioning model detail proposed, and associated next steps.**
- **Approve the remaining financial allocation from the £500,000 allocation from the City Deal Reserve for a two year pilot programme with allocations of, £250,000 to Strand 2 & across the two year period.**

- Note that funding was approved for EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar (previously ‘City Connections Programme’) by Committee on 10th April 2024. This initial investment programme phase will continue to support the work of both organisations for two years, with support of £62,500 to be released to each per annum via a funding agreement.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Strategic Context:

Council’s ten-year tourism strategy, *Make Yourself at Home*, commits to developing a Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Fund, recognising that regenerative tourism is driven by the relationship between people and place and that there are strong opportunities to share tourism’s economic benefits beyond the city centre and for local tourism to contribute to the city’s growth.

Members will be aware that investment was approved in June 2023 for a two-year programme to ‘develop and enhance tourism products and experiences across the city, sharing and distributing the benefits of a vibrant tourism sector throughout local neighbourhoods. In April 2024, approval was also granted to fund EastSide Partnership and Fáilte Feirste Thiar under the City Connections programme.

Earlier this year, the Tourism unit oversaw an extensive programme of independent research and engagement with a series of public workshops across the city. Flowing from this work are recommendations and timelines to inform a two-year investment programme, including considerations to support capacity, skills and visitor servicing interventions.

3.2 Engagement process and issues identified:

At April 2024 Committee, Members were presented with an extensive overview of the engagement work undertaken:

Stakeholder motivation for attending the workshops tended to be for one of three reasons:

- a) A small number had ready formed ideas or projects in different stages of development. This included plans to expand or diversify an existing product or experience. Others needed market testing, piloting, prototyping, feasibility and other research.

- b) Many were at the start of their journey, recognising neighbourhood tourism as an opportunity for their organisation or area or wanting to find out more about potential benefits and opportunities.
- c) Others were motivated simply by their pride and passion for their area and a desire to advocate for council or others to do more, rather than by an interest in developing neighbourhood tourism themselves.

3.3 Overview of Key Engagement Findings:

Many participants were new to the concept of market segmentation. It was noted that further education and exploration may help focus neighbourhood tourism providers on key markets rather than on local supply or local interest.

Consultees generally agreed that the key market segments for their areas were from:

- NI: Aspiring families, Social Instagrammers, Natural Quality Seekers
- ROI: Active Maximisers and Open-Minded Explorers
- GB: Cultural Curious and Social Engineers

Key visitor groups identified to the city were Education (including academics and school trips), Spanish and American visitors, LGBTQ+ visitors and those with niche heritage interests. It was also noted that visiting families are increasingly multigenerational.

Consultees also noted a rise in the number of people coming to Belfast for a special event, such as a concert or a sports match, when they cannot get tickets local to them in ROI or GB. Once here, they often tap into other cultural, music or sporting activities, but the initial draw has been attendance at a special event.

Feedback also suggested that there should be a focus on local people and supporting them to be tourists in their own city. For example, one person described their work as 'selling Belfast Hills to Belfast' - in West Belfast, the Glider was seen as a factor in increasing numbers of visitors from East Belfast and the suburbs.

During the workshops, people were introduced to stories already identified through key Belfast strategies and relevant tourism research:

Authentic:

- Home
- Emotional, human connections
- Our people and personalities
- Road less travelled, beyond the guide book
- Hands - on experiences

Natural Assets:

- Hills
- Parks
- Rivers
- Sustainable tourism

Culture and Arts:

- Music
- Festivals and event
- History and heritage
- Language
- Writers, poetry, dramatists
- Screen tourism

People and Skills:

- Innovation and invention
- Maritime
- Industry

Food and Drink:

- Local
- Sustainable
- Tasting and making

Peace and Beyond:

- Politics
- Troubles
- Regeneration

Built Heritage and Attractions:

- Architecture
- Cemeteries
- Historic sites

There was general agreement the above thematics are the stories people in neighbourhoods want to tell. Consultees also suggested the following stories should be included: Local humour, Personalities, History and Sport.

Universal support was expressed for employing stories and storytelling as a means of engaging visitors and sharing the authentic flavours and histories of our neighbourhoods. For some, this meant sharing 'realness and grittiness', not a sanitised or 'vanilla' version of neighbourhood stories. For others, it meant sharing first-person experiences so that, for example, stories of the Troubles could be shared by those who experienced them, although some stressed this should not be at the expense of veracity. It is important that experiences will draw connections to the Belfast Stories Story themes and provide a mechanism for visitors to have deeper, authentic engagement opportunities while in destination.

Products and Experiences:

Some participants struggled with the dual lens of segment and story. Others were able to identify gaps and opportunities at both a story and market level.

Many consultees took the opportunity to highlight wider infrastructural, operational or servicing issues and needs such as joined-up marketing and promotion, signage, transport and capacity building.

Consultees generally struggled with new ideas and in all cases found it easier to produce existing products or enhancements rather than new offerings. For some, particularly those from the cultural sector, this was explicitly attributed to capacity and the need for significant further investment.

People were keen to work across the city, providing visitors with authentic story -based experiences not constrained by geography.

Although interest in neighbourhood tourism was clearly evident, many organisations acknowledged a low capacity in this area. This currently includes volunteer-led groups, community organisations whose staff have a primary remit

other than tourism, sole entrepreneurs and micro-businesses.

Stakeholders noted that centralised support for organisations in training, capacity building, marketing and promotion would be welcome.

Few consultees expected financial support alone. Rather, there was demand for wrap - around support at all stages from pre-application to post-evaluation. It was also noted that businesses may also need support to utilise local supply chains and become 'real' living wage employers.

Many participants noted that they would welcome more opportunity to collaborate further. It was suggested Council could facilitate this through networking, group training and capacity building. It could also be incentivised by making larger grants available to consortia.

This could include enhanced funding for clusters or itineraries that would encourage visitors to remain in neighbourhoods for longer than one product or experience with a half - day being considered a reasonable duration.

It should also be noted that a minority of consultees, particularly in South and inner North workshops, were not in favour of 'compulsory collaboration', citing experience where it had the opposite impact and 'squashed' co-operation' and that it is not sustained beyond the money.

For the investment programme to be effective and support high quality tourism offerings, an integrated programme is required - one which comprises financial support, wraparound capacity building and business support, effective contract management and partnership working.

3.4 Programme Overview:

Following a period of facilitated research and engagement, recommendations have been developed to support an integrated, 3-strand programme; previous Member briefings have noted that the programme would be comprised of 2 strands, however subsequent scoping work undertaken by Officers has indicated the potential benefits of a 3-strand programme, as cited. The proposed programme and investment model which would blend financial investment with holistic business support to meet the strategic objectives of the fund and optimise collaborative working to develop cohesive visitor experiences across the city. The programme will embed reflective learning and evaluation

throughout the pilot phase to inform and shape future investment.

The recommended programme will comprise a range of interventions:

- **Strand 1: Wraparound skill and capacity building, mentoring and business support for tourism product development, together with tailored, specialist support to develop more mature visitor offers ('Neighbourhood Tourism Academy').**
- **Strand 2: Financial support for new or enhanced tourism products and experiences commissioned via a quotation process. Council proposes to commission 8 to 10 awards of between £25k and £30k throughout the programme across a two year pilot period from a total budget allocation of £250,000.**
- **Strand 3: Financial support for the work of EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar to deliver interventions which integrate support and capacity building to other Neighbourhood Tourism projects through an agreed programme.**

3.5 Strand 1: Tourism Academy and Targeted Sectoral Support

An opportunity has been identified to optimise the impact and resources of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme by working collaboratively with the *Go Succeed* programme, within the Economic Development Unit. This programme provides a range of business advice and training opportunities, including mentorship for pre-enterprise and start-ups.

3.5.1 Neighbourhood Tourism Academy:

To build skill, capacity and maximise the quality and viability of a pipeline of developing tourism products, a wraparound business support programme, 'the Neighbourhood Tourism Academy', will be co-designed between the council's Tourism and Economic Development Units and will be delivered via the *Go Succeed* Programme. It is envisaged that this will provide a range of interventions, including networking and partnership introduction and facilitated workshops, business planning, training workshops and masterclasses, knowledge exchange, networking and partnership introduction and one-to-one mentoring.

An 'open call' will be made for applicants to apply directly to the Tourism Academy via existing *Go Succeed* programme architecture, with oversight and guidance from the Tourism Development Unit. Wraparound support interventions will be delivered by the *Go Succeed* team, together with mentors and sectoral specialists with tourism industry experience and expertise.

Data regarding applicant baseline capacity, programme outcomes and project progression will be captured and evaluated by the ESS team, with Tourism Officers to provide signposting to further sources of support where appropriate. As a result of Academy support, a pipeline of tourism products will be developed and organisations will enhance their ability to develop and deliver impactful visitor experiences across the city.

3.5.2 Targeted Developmental Support:

Tourism businesses with products which have progressed in development but require specific interventions to reach maturity may also apply to the Academy for tailored support and interventions, specific to their business needs. Working in close collaboration, Tourism and ESS officers will deliver targeted initiatives in response to applicant need, skills gaps and market opportunities, identifying sectoral specialists with appropriate skill and experience to support the applicant.

Data regarding applicant baseline capacity, intervention outcomes and project progression will be captured and evaluated by the Tourism and ESS teams. It is anticipated that Tourism Officers may then identify applicants/projects which may be suitable for investment in future programme phases. Projects which are not suitable for future investment will be signposting to further sources of support where appropriate.

3.6 Strand 2: Financial Support

3.6.1 Proposed Investment Model:

Under this support strand, it is proposed that Council makes 8 to 10 awards of between £25,000 and £30,000 throughout the programme. Grounded in best practice, consultation findings and learnings gleaned from the Belfast 2024 Programme, it is recommended that Council commissions new or enhanced neighbourhood tourism products and experiences via a quotation process, adapted to suit the specific ambitions of this programme. Given the higher value of the awards made by Belfast 2024, the full design

commission process is not appropriate to the scale of this pilot investment programme.

Research and consultation with key internal partners and sectoral specialists has indicated that this approach would support more effective delivery of programme ambitions than a grant funding model. The commissioning model would offer increased flexibility to Tourism officers to support, shape and steer project development, resulting in visitor offers which are financially viable, market led, with potential to spread the economic and social benefits of tourism within city neighbourhoods. Lessons learned from the Belfast 2024 team demonstrate that the commissioning model offers Officers agility through the lifespan of the project to adjust and test projects to ensure they meet expectations regarding quality, viability, budget and timescale.

It is envisaged that all commissioning activity will be managed by the Tourism Development Unit in collaboration with the Central Procurement Unit, with a dedicated Tourism officer appointed as contract manager to oversee performance of each commission throughout the project lifespan.

3.6.2 Strand 2: Application Process:

It is envisaged that a two-stage application process will be employed, with bidders submitting an initial Expression of Interest, followed by targeted invitations to submit project proposals up to the value of £25,000 - £30,000. This will enable council to identify projects which are most likely to meet the aspirations of the investment fund and to maximise resources. The Central Procurement Unit have advised that this process is the most appropriate and efficient process to deliver the ambitions of the investment programme at this stage.

- **Stage 1: Expressions of Interest**
To enable council to invest in viable, high-quality products which address market need, potential bidders for financial support will be required to submit an Expression of Interest form, including eligibility criteria, outline project proposal and details of project partners/consortia members.
- **Stage 2: Invitation to Quote**
It is recommended that Council commissions neighbourhood tourism products and experiences via a quotation process, with contracts awarded up to the value of £25,000 - £30,000, supporting between 8 and 10 projects.

3.6.3 Strand 2: Eligibility and Programme Criteria:

Full investment criteria and applicant guidance are currently under development.

To be eligible to apply for financial support, bidders will be required to collaborate with other organisations and partners to develop joint proposals for experiences, clusters, packages or itineraries that will encourage visitors to dwell in a neighbourhood or neighbourhoods for at least half a day.

Consortia must comprise at least one for-profit business and one voluntary or community organisation. Social enterprises can be considered as both a for-profit and, depending on their community interest, a community organisation. One partner organisation must be identified as the lead partner throughout the project lifespan.

Bidders will be required to demonstrate how the product or experience:

- Is market - led, likely to appeal to key market segments.
- Is authentic - that is tells a story or stories that say something about the local area and are likely to captivate
- Will be high quality
- Is bookable and repeatable
- Will be marketed and promoted
- Responds to gaps in the visitor offer such as night-time economy, Sunday mornings and shoulder season
- Will enhance, support or connect to other tourism assets or stories
- Has the potential to be regenerative and positively impact on the local area.

3.6.4 Strand 2: Assessment of proposals

Proposals for investment will be assessed by a panel comprising Tourism officers and a number of key partners (potentially Belfast Stories, Economic Development, Neighbourhood Integration managers and Visit Belfast), ensuring there is a blend of business, tourism and local expertise.

- Successful commissions: each commission will be assigned a dedicated contract manager, who will demonstrate agility through the lifespan of the project, adjusting and retesting projects to ensure they meet

expectations regarding quality, viability, budget and timescale. However, the contract manager's role remains facilitative and that accountability and all liabilities will sit with the consortia.

- **Unsuccessful submissions:** Unsuccessful applicants will be briefed by Tourism officers on the rationale for non-award of financial support, viability of tourism product and, if appropriate, will be signposted towards sources of developmental support, capacity and skill-building, both within Council and external partners.

3.7 Strand 3: Support for EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar (previously City Connections Programme)

Members will be aware that funding was approved for EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar (previously 'City Connections Programme') by Committee on 10th April 2024. This initial investment programme phase will continue to support the work of both organisations for two years, with support of £62,500 to be released to each per annum via a funding agreement.

This uplifted funding will support an outcomes-based model which will integrate development support and capacity building to other Neighbourhood Tourism projects through an agreed delivery programme. In the year ahead, both organisations will utilise their sectoral expertise and learnings to support less mature offers across the city, delivering appropriate interventions, including learning journeys, workshops and targeted support. Given that tourism offers are at different stages of development across many of the city's neighbourhoods, it is envisaged that Officers will employ a flexible approach to programme delivery, ensuring that the organisations can provide agile, responsive support to address evolving needs.

In coming weeks, Officers will continue to meet with EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar to discuss and inform how strategic alignment can best be facilitated the recommendations of the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme report and between the agreed programme for delivery in the year ahead, to include at least one collaborative project between both organisations.

3.8 Programme Monitoring and Evaluation:

Council will undertake ongoing evaluation and monitoring activity throughout the programme to facilitate continuous improvement to delivery. This will be a continual reflective process of learning with commissioned projects and key partners, including Economic Development and Belfast Stories teams, and will ensure that lessons learned are fed back in real time to inform future investment.

The evaluation will be 'live' and continuous over the 2-year pilot programme to enable Council to pivot and adjust parameters if necessary. The evaluation will generate key data and analytics to inform the uplift of the programme and future direction beyond the pilot. The evaluation will in real time identify gaps, issues, lessons learned, areas for consolidation particularly within the context of Belfast Stories.

The approach to evaluation will be three pronged and the appointed provider will ensure that there is a coherent approach and a synergy in the reporting across the three strands identified:

- Strand 1: Analysis of data from *Go Succeed* programme around numbers referred from Neighbourhood Tourism expressions of interest, types of intervention, hours spent, *Go Succeed* outcomes and generation of a heat map of future need.
- Strand 2: Analysis of data from the up to ten commissioned projects
- Strand 3: Analysis of data via support to EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar
- Data from will reflect the performance indicators below and KPI's will be set around these to ensure synergy. The evaluation will consider qualitative and quantitative measures of success in relation to performance indicators, including:
 - Impact on visitor numbers
 - Impact on visitor dwell time
 - Quality of experience for visitors including authenticity, emotional connection, memorability, captivation or wonder
 - Impact on organisational capacity and capability particularly in relation to product development, business development and neighbourhood tourism

- Extent, nature and impact of collaboration between organisations and areas
- Impact on local people and communities such as job creation, skills development, pride, vibrancy, empowerment and exchange
- Contribution to local services and infrastructure
- Contribution to the city's stories and storytelling infrastructure
- Local support for and attitudes to neighbourhood tourism
- Differential impact on section 75 dimensions

In addition, a post-delivery evaluation of this pilot phase will be conducted to reflect impact and learnings and inform investment in future programme phases. with a report and recommendations to be brought back for Committee consideration in due course. A final monitoring and evaluation report will be published March 2026 and brought back for Committee consideration.

3.9 Risks and Mitigations:

A comprehensive assessment of potential risks and mitigations has been undertaken, a summary of which is outlined below.

- **Variances in maturity of tourism offers in neighbourhoods:** The Neighbourhood Tourism report recognises that different destinations and neighbourhoods across the city are at different stages of development. So too are potential providers, which include businesses, social enterprises, charities, voluntary groups and sole entrepreneurs across the private, community, culture and heritage sectors.
- **Resource constraints:** Many providers are small and lack staff, time and financial resources to innovate or take a risk on something new or unproven. For others, tourism is not a core organisational function or focus.
- **Scope of investment programme:** No scheme in isolation can address all challenges or issues. Any gaps identified, for example, in terms of geographic spread, stories, market segments, types or scale of product or experience, will be targeted in subsequent calls of the programme.
- **Lack of sectoral knowledge and skills gap:** The current primary risk is a lack of tourism knowledge and corresponding skills gap among organisations who are otherwise keen to promote their neighbourhoods and provide offerings which meet visitor needs.

Effective support blends financial investment with holistic business support and therefore, as a mitigation, we will work collaboratively with colleagues in the Economic Development Unit who have resources within the *Go Succeed* programme to deliver bespoke business interventions.

Additionally, the two-stage application process with a 'low bar to entry' expression of interest will enable staff to identify the support required and signpost to appropriate mentors and training providers.

A further mitigation could involve clustering initiatives whereby different organisations work collectively to design and deliver offerings aligned to their particular areas of experience and skill sets.

- **Project progression not as anticipated:** Successful commissions will be assigned a dedicated contract manager who will act as a single point of contact between the organisation and council. Payment schedules will be tied to key stages or milestones to ensure the commissions are progressing effectively and viably. For example, if market testing finds there is no demand for a product or experience, the council may exercise its right not to proceed with the contract.

Contract managers will provide a facilitative role and will exercise discretion should projects not progress as planned. For example, they will explore if the product or experience be adjusted and retested so that a viable product could still be developed within budget, timescales and to the required quality standard.

During a period of sectoral consultation and research, a further range of potential risks to programme were identified. These moderate and high risk, together with mitigating actions, are set out at Appendix 1.

3.10 Overview of next steps:

Work is ongoing to develop and implement the programme, including the following actions:

- Continued review the range of wraparound support measures and tailored interventions available under *Go Succeed* For integration to Neighbourhood Tourism support package
- Work has been developed in collaboration with Procurement colleagues on a Quotation document to

include background information, detailed requirements, how to apply and the assessment procedure. A comprehensive list of FAQs is currently being developed.

- Information sessions will be held across the city to provide people with information first hand, this will include criteria, the process, timelines and capacity building support available.
- As outlined above, it is envisaged that Expressions of Interest (EOI) will be sought in the first instance. Interested parties will provide some key information on their organisation and potential partners and outline the product or experience concept.
- This initial EOI will help Tourism Officers to assess level of interest, emerging themes and identify potential gaps. When completing an EOI, applicants will be asked to identify their level of readiness to proceed with the venture and to advise of any support required to enable them to develop and bring to market a high-quality offer.
- It is anticipated that not all interested parties will be in a position to submit a proposal for a robust and viable tourism product or experience. The EOI exercise will help identify areas of need and the interventions required to address.

3.11 Timeframe:

The anticipated timeframe for development and delivery of the programme is as follows:

- **June 2024 - September 2024:** Neighbourhood Tourism Academy, co-designed between Tourism Development and Econ Development Units.
- **August to mid - September 2024:** Promotion of Opportunity via information sessions/online/in person - include information on criteria, application process, procurement model.
- **September to December 2024:** Open call for Expressions of Interest for financial support launched; also commence Neighbourhood Tourism Academy and roll out support services to build sectoral capacity and address skills gaps, with associated Communications support to raise public awareness.
- **December 2024 to January 2025:** following Expression of Interest phase, Invitations to Quote Issued.

- Early November 2025 to end November 2025 (December Committee TBC): Assessment and awarding of commissions. Feedback issued to unsuccessful & further signposting as appropriate.
- January 2025: Letters of Offer issued.
- January 2025 - March 26: Management of contract performance.
- March / April 2026: Impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation - include learnings from tourism academy participants and commissions and make recommendations for future investment phases.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications:

Support for Eastside and Fáilte Fearste was approved at April CGR committee to the value of £62,500 per annum a total of £250,000 across the two year pilot period for Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme.

Funding for the financial support strand for year 1 (2024 / 25) and year 2 (2025 / 2026) will be provided from Belfast Region City Deal Reserve. This is a total over the two financial years - £250k. It is anticipated that a total of 8-10 commissioned neighbourhood tourism products and experiences will be supported during this period, with contracts awarded up to the value of £25,000 - £30,000.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment:

The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme has been screened for:

- i) Equality of opportunity and good relations and
- ii) Disabilities duties

On the basis of the answers to the screening questions, it was recommended that the policy is 'screened out - mitigating actions' (minor impacts).

Therefore, the consultation and engagement on Neighbourhood Tourism and draft Equality Screening took simultaneously between January and March 2024.

This means that policy development was shaped by the findings of the consultation and screening, allowing any potential negative impacts to be designed out and opportunities to promote equality or good relations to be built in.

Only minor positive impacts have been identified at this stage. Council will continue to monitor for further differential impacts.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Housing Led Regeneration Round Table

The Committee noted that the Housing Led Regeneration All Party Round Table planned for the end of June would be rescheduled to a later date.

Chairperson