

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 6th December, 2017

MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor O'Donnell (Chairperson);
The High Sheriff (Alderman Haire);
Aldermen Kingston, McGimpsey and L. Patterson; and
Councillors Beattie, Boyle, Dorrian,
Dudgeon, Graham, Johnston, Kyle, Magee,
McAteer, McDonough-Brown, Mullan, O'Hara and Walsh.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;
Mr. D. Durkan, Director of Development;
Ms. N. Gallagher, Director of City Centre Development; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillor Hargey and Howard.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 8th and 21st November were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th December.

Declarations of Interest

The Chairperson (Councillor O'Donnell) declared an interest in Item 7a, Draft East Bank Development Strategy Update, in that she was a member of the Short Strand Partnership, which had responded to the consultation.

Matters Referred back from Council

Notice of Motion: Belfast's Historic Environment

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 4th December, had considered the following notice of motion which had been proposed by Councillor McAteer and seconded by Councillor Campbell:

"Belfast boasts a rich historic environment that is both distinctive and irreplaceable. The continued care and conservation of these unique assets and their re-use as part of the heritage-led regeneration of Belfast will not only recognise the intrinsic value of the City's historic built environment but also ensure that these invaluable assets will significantly contribute to prosperity, culture, pride of place, tourist income generation and a general sense of health and wellbeing.

This Council will encourage imaginative and creative approaches to Belfast's conservation and heritage assets to ensure that they are protected, re-purposed and developed as an important driver for sustainable economic development and job creation, the provision of much needed housing, community and cultural animation and the creation of environments and public spaces that citizens and visitors alike can enjoy.

This Council will work to inform, shape and embed imaginative and creative approaches to Belfast's conservation and heritage assets in the outworking of the Belfast Agenda, the Local Development Plan, the European Capital of Culture, Belfast City Deal and the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018."

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion had been referred to the Committee for consideration.

A Member suggested that officers could provide a report with examples of best practice in other cities in relation to preserving and re-purposing the City's built heritage.

A further Member agreed and highlighted the importance of retaining the unique characteristics which made Belfast different to other cities.

After discussion, the Committee:

1. noted the contents of the motion; and
2. agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting to include information on the protection and promotion of the City's historic built environment; examples of best practice in other cities for the protection and repurposing of historic buildings; and ways in which the Heritage Lottery Fund could be utilised.

Presentation

Invest NI

The Committee was advised that, in accordance with the Committee's decision of 9th August, representatives from Invest NI were in attendance to provide the Committee with the 2017 Regional Briefing for the Belfast City Council area.

The Chairperson introduced Ms M. Loughran, Regional Business Manager, and Ms. F. Johnston, Statistician, to the Committee and they were admitted to the meeting.

The Regional Business Manager outlined Invest NI's Business Strategy 2017-2021 which followed an outcomes based approach. She described how it supported and encouraged 30,000–40,000 additional jobs and increased business expenditure on research and development by £160-£200million.

She outlined that Invest NI's key focus was on sectors in which N.I. was currently world class, such as advanced engineering and manufacturing, agri-food, construction, financial services, or, where N.I. had the potential to be world class, such as the Cyber Security sector.

The Statistician provided the Committee with an overview of the Entrepreneurship ecosystem and advised it that worked closely with the Council to provide help to businesses at the right time in order to help them navigate the market.

She advised the Members that 70% of people in the Belfast area were economically active, compared to the N.I. average of 73%.

A Member pointed out that only 6% of those who were in employment in Belfast were self-employed, compared to 12% across Northern Ireland. The statistician advised the Committee that encouraging entrepreneurship from an early age was important in increasing those numbers and that a co-ordinated approach was required.

A further Member pointed out that there were thousands of farmers who lived outside of the Belfast City Council area, all of whom were self-employed, and that the figures were surely skewed in that regard.

The Director of Development added that, historically, there were more job opportunities in Belfast and graduates in particular had developed a low risk attitude towards seeking employment, whereas in other Council areas such as Mid Ulster, for example, less employment opportunities existed which had led to a higher level of entrepreneurship and local business start-ups.

A further Member stated that there was a perception that overseas companies which wished to set up an office in Belfast were treated more favourably than local businesses. The Director of Development challenged that and added that the services and programmes which were offered by the Economic Development Unit, in conjunction with Invest NI, had created 800 jobs since April 2017.

In response to a Member's question regarding the different aims and outcomes, the Committee was advised that, since Local Government Reform in 2015, programmes to target social enterprise, social value frameworks and cooperatives had transferred to the eleven Councils.

In relation to female entrepreneurship, the Statistician added that this had also passed to the Councils under Local Government Reform, and that the latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) data had shown an increase in female entrepreneurs.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting to provide an update on what the Council was doing to increase entrepreneurship levels in the City, to include information on female entrepreneurship, self-employment in disadvantaged areas and engagement with young people outside of schools.

Restricted Item

The Information contained in the following report is 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 Committee meeting during discussion of this item as, due to the nature of the item, 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.

World Irish Dancing Championships 2022

The Director of Development reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 12th April 2017 it had agreed, in principle, to support hosting the World Irish Dancing Championships in 2022.

He explained that Belfast had been invited to bid for the World Championships and had subsequently been offered the 2022 Championships, taking place between 9th and 18th April 2022.

He stated that Belfast had previously hosted both the All Ireland and World Dancing Championships. He pointed out that those events had seen a large visitor footfall in the city, with an estimated economic return of 5:1 for the All Ireland Championships.

The Director advised the Committee that he was now seeking formal approval to host the event, inclusive of financial resources.

After discussion, the Committee:

1. agreed to the hosting of the 2022 World Irish Dancing Championships in Belfast, cognisant of the £400,000 cash required from Belfast to stage the event;
2. noted that the finance would come from the Council making provision each year from within the Department's existing budgets; and
3. noted that officers would seek additional support from Tourism NI closer to the event year.

Requests to Present to Committee

Translink – Weavers Cross/Transport Hub

The Committee was advised that a request had been received from Translink to present to the Committee on the subject of the new Transport Hub, known as 'Weavers Cross'.

The Director of City Centre Development advised the Committee that it was considered an appropriate time for Translink to present their updated proposals and the overall programme for Weavers Cross to the Committee. She outlined that Translink would advise the Members on certain issues which had been of interest to Members previously, including:

- how Translink would engage and consult with local communities on the Outline Planning application;
- potential social and economic benefits of the scheme;
- how it would intend to construct the Transport Hub whilst ensuring 'business as usual' and minimum disruption for the city and its residents; and
- how Translink was working with the Council and other partners to bring forward the development of the wider Weavers Cross scheme.

The Chief Executive advised the Members that a request to present to the Committee had recently been received from the Transport Hub Alternatives Group.

A Member suggested that the Committee invited both Project Hope and the Transport Hub Alternatives Group in to present their views on the Transport Hub.

A number of Members felt that the presentation from Translink should be heard initially, given that Translink would inform the Committee of its proposals for engagement.

After discussion, the Committee acceded to the request from Translink to present to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in January on the Transport Hub/Weavers Cross and, after having received that presentation, agreed that it would then consider whether it wished to hear from other interested parties at a future date.

South Belfast Partnership Board

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of a request from the South Belfast Partnership Board to present to a future meeting, to allow further information to be sought as to the reasons why it wished to present to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, and that officers would submit a report on the development, the area and any potential relationship to the One Bankmore Square development.

Growing Businesses and the Economy

Special meeting Update – Potential Impact on the Economy of the U.K. Leaving the E.U.

The Director of Development provided an overview of the Special Meeting on Brexit, which had taken place on Tuesday, 21st November 2017.

He outlined that the meeting had provided an opportunity for the Committee to focus on Brexit, to explore some of the issues and opportunities for Belfast with input from a range of expert perspectives, including the movement of people, the role of the local economy and the business perspective as well as broad economic forecasts for the City and the City-region dependant on the nature of the deal.

He stated that the Council's role in continuing to show leadership to drive inclusive economic growth was vital, particularly given the uncertainty in the political, economic and global environment.

In response to a Member's request, it was agreed that copies of the four presentations would be circulated to all Members of the Committee for their reference.

The Committee noted the issues raised and agreed that officers would continue to monitor developments and bring further updates to future Committee meetings to ensure delivery of its inclusive growth strategy, the Belfast Agenda.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Draft East Bank Development Strategy Update

(Mrs. A. McGlone, Regeneration Project Officer, attended in connection with this Item)

The Chairperson declared an interest in Item 7a, Draft East Bank Development Strategy Update, in that she was a member of the Short Strand Partnership which had responded to the consultation but, as the item was for notation, she did not leave the room.

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on responses received during the public consultation exercise on the draft East Bank Development Strategy and to advise of the intention to undertake a Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) on the draft Strategy.**
- 1.2 A summary of the consultation and engagement process undertaken is set out on modern.gov. Organisations and individuals who responded are identified on modern.gov. Appendix 3 summarises responses from those who completed the consultation questionnaire on-line and are available to view on modern.gov. Appendix 4 on modern.gov summarised the comments of those who responded by e-mail or letter and includes detailed comments from respondents to the on-line questionnaire.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note comments received through the consultation exercise to date and note that a further report will be brought to committee addressing any comments to responses together with the SEA;
- Note the intention to take forward a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment for the area;
- Note the intention to report back to Committee on a finalised version of the Strategy for approval in late spring/early summer 2018.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1 In June 2016 Committee approved the draft East Bank Development Strategy for consultation. The 12-week consultation period commenced on 7th July and ended on 29th September.
- 3.2 The process is summarised on modern.gov. A total of 190 responses were received. Organisations and individuals who responded are identified on modern.gov. There were 22 responses via citizenspace of which the majority are positive or very positive.

Statutory Agencies

- 3.3 In terms of statutory agencies, almost all were supportive. DfI Transport Strategy Division's response was non-committal (Appendix 4, pages 5-8 – available on modern.gov) subject to further traffic modelling being undertaken while DfI Rivers notes that the document needs to say more about how to address present-day flood risk to the proposed development as well as the impact of future climate change and in particular, potential sea level rise due to climate change (see Appendix 4, pages 4-5 on modern.gov).
- 3.4 In light of the comments relating to flood risk and others received relating to protected habitats and environmental considerations, the Council conducted an SEA Determination (a 'screening' process) in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and has concluded that an SEA (Environmental Report) and HRA is required.

3.5 The responses from statutory agencies are summarised below:

1. Department for Communities (DfC) is supportive and will use the document to inform its development brief for Queen's Quay (see Appendix 4, pages 3-4 on modern.gov);
2. DfI Rivers is critical of the document in terms of its lack of reference to assessment of flood risk (see Appendix 4, pages 3-4 on modern.gov);
3. DfI Transport Strategy Division has provided qualified support, in that it emphasises the need for more traffic modelling in advance of major infrastructure changes (see Appendix 4, pages 5-7 on modern.gov);
4. NIHE is also broadly supportive and would support a 20% affordable housing requirement across the Strategy area (see Appendix 4, pages 12-13 on modern.gov);
5. Translink is also generally supportive but notes that further traffic modelling is required before agreeing to proposals to re-locate the TQ rail halt. (see Appendix 4, pages 35-38 on modern.gov).

Community Groups and Members of the Public

3.6 Eastside Partnership responded positively, welcoming the inclusion of Sirocco, the 'shatter zone' and Odyssey Quays within one plan and supporting the four place-making themes identified as enabling the East Bank to become fully integrated with the city centre, bringing the centre 'across the river', and connecting Titanic Quarter to the city centre. The Partnership is keen, however, to retain the existing TQ rail halt and also offered suggestions for inclusion in the finalised document (see Appendix 4, pages 8-10 on modern.gov).

3.7 84 drawings and illustrations were received from an event described as the Youth Urban Almanac organised by the Eden Project and facilitated by Seed Head Arts which was attended by 60 young people aged 8 to mid 20s. Most of the ideas relate to public realm and use of the river and were innovative and original including permanent and temporary suggestions, for example bandstands for buskers, giant chess sets, concrete table tennis tables, open air swimming pools and boardwalks. (see Appendix 4, page 10 on modern.gov).

- 3.8 Lagan Currachs support better access points to the Lagan and makes a number of suggestions for activities on the water as well as by the river, including houseboat infrastructure. They disagree with proposals to relocate the railway station on grounds of cost. (see Appendix 4, pages 10-11 on modern.gov).
- 3.9 Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) response, which is generally supportive, focuses on accessible transport, safe streets and accessible information. In particular, it emphasises the importance of barrier free access to the pedestrian environment and barrier free access to different modes of transport to support inclusive and independent living for people with sight loss. Of concern, are any proposals for 'shared surfaces' in public realm schemes. RNIB does not support the use of flush surfaces and recommends that the memorandum guidance on kerb heights in public realm schemes produced by the Department for Regional Development (issued in May 2015) is adhered to. Within this guidance it states that: 'For public realm schemes, and in line with best practice, it is recommended that a 'standard' kerb height of 125mm should be generally used.' This response reflects comments which RNIB submitted to the public consultation exercise which the Council undertook on the Linen Quarter Public Realm Vision and Guidance in 2015. (see Appendix 4, pages 17-23 on modern.gov).
- 3.10 Titanic Foundation generally agrees with the vision and reiterates the importance of the East Bank being fully woven into the fabric of the city centre to include Titanic Quarter. The Foundation believes it is important to look at the whole of the Lagan with a view to achieving an animated waterfront on the East Bank that continues to include TQ and beyond - as far as HMS Caroline and the Thompson Dock. The concept of a Maritime Mile between Donegal Quay and HMS Caroline has been developed as part of the TQ Destination Plan and Titanic Foundation will be progressing this as a theme which ultimately will link key tourism, heritage and employment hubs. The Foundation generally agrees with proposed interventions other than that to re-locate the rail halt. Further transport modelling is required before agreeing / disagreeing with this move. (see Appendix 4, pages 33-35 on modern.gov).
- 3.11 However, 74 letters of objection were received from Short Strand residents on grounds that a land allocation for affordable/social housing has not been identified within the Sirocco site. Two similar letters from St Matthew's Housing Association and the Short Strand Partnership on the same grounds but also referring to the failure to identify the

Translink bus garage on Mountpottinger Street as a development opportunity for housing and leisure uses. The bus garage is outside the Strategy area and the city centre strategy boundary. Both St Matthew's and the Short Strand Partnership also referred to a deficit of leisure facilities for Short Strand residents and the need to address this in the East Bank Strategy. (see Appendix 4, pages 25-29 on modern.gov).

Major Landowners

- 3.12 Responses were received from Turley Associates on behalf of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and Titanic Quarter and Swinford (Sirocco). There were no major points of contention in the first two responses (see Appendix 4, pages 1-2 and 14-16 on modern.gov). However, Sirocco (Swinford) while supportive of the majority of the draft Strategy and the Sirocco design principles set out in Appendix 3 of the draft Strategy, view the 'prescriptive way in which the Strategy moves beyond the high level conceptual diagrams on pages 18 and 19 and imposes the basis of a masterplan to interpret these principles' as 'not acceptable, nor is the approach to phasing' (see Appendix 4, pages 29-33 on modern.gov).

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

- 3.12 The final strategy will be used as a framework for development across the East Bank and accordingly, there may be environmental issues given the previous use of the land. In light of some of the comments received during the public consultation exercise, it was decided to undertake an SEA Determination (a 'screening' process) in consultation with DAERA to determine if an SEA (the Environmental Report) and HRA is required and the conclusion is that they are. Work has begun and it is anticipated that the Environmental Report will be available for public consultation by February 2018. The statutory consultation period is 12 weeks enabling a report to be brought back to Committee by June 2018 at the earliest. Any significant issues arising in the course of the SEA will be reported back to Committee and reviewed in the finalised Strategy. A verbal update on the process for dealing with comments to the consultation will be provided at committee.

3.14 Equality and Good Relations Implications

As part of the public consultation undertaken to date, engagement took place with those Section 75 groups listed on the Equalities Unit's contacts database and the draft

Strategy was circulated at the Equality Consultative Forum on 26th September. Further equality and good relations screening will be conducted in parallel with the proposed consultation processes described in paragraph 3.13.

3.15 Financial & Resource Implications

The cost of the SEA and HRA is met from existing and projected budgets for 2017/18.”

The Regeneration Project Officer provided the Committee with a detailed overview of the responses which had been received to the public consultation.

In response to a Member’s request that, given the scheme’s significance in the east of the city, the Committee would be provided with an interim draft of the Strategy addressing comments raised, the Chief Executive agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting, with a final report brought in the Spring/early Summer 2018.

The Committee:

1. noted the comments which had been received through the consultation exercise to date and noted that a further report would be submitted to the Committee addressing any comments to responses together with the SEA;
2. noted the intention to take forward a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment for the area; and
3. noted that an interim report addressing comments raised would be submitted to the Committee, with a finalised version of the Strategy presented for its approval in late spring/early summer 2018.

VuCity Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To provide an update on VUCITY: the 3D model of Belfast

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the roll out plans for VUCITY, the 3D model of Belfast**
- **Agree that a licence agreement is entered into with VUCITY**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Following approval in January 2017, Members will be aware that the Council has been working on developing a 3D model of Belfast, in partnership with VUCITY. The model will be operational from February 2018 and will cover 52 square kilometres of Belfast, (see Appendix 1 on modern.gov).

3.2 VUCITY will provide an interactive 3D view of the city and will assist with displaying and exploring:

- emerging developments
- planning applications / approvals
- development potential of Council sites and other key city sites
- promotion of Belfast as a place to invest and as tourism destination
- citizen engagement and consultation and potential community impact and opportunities

3.3 It was initially envisaged that the model would cover the City Core, City Airport, Titanic Quarter, North Foreshore. This has been extended to cover an area of 52sq / km, most of Belfast City Council's boundary. The model is rendered as a minimum in block detail, up to level of detail (LOD) 3. Users can view, zoom and rotate, from a whole area right down to the detail of one building.

3.4 The VuCity model of Belfast includes:

- A fully interactive 3D model of Belfast city, extending over 52sq/km
- An accurate city model including terrain to 15cm.
- Street level walk mode
- Ability to explore Belfast viewpoints in virtual reality
- Ability to integrate protected views
- Sunlight / shadowing simulation
- The potential to overlay real time transport information
- Ability to integrate other relevant council data e.g. flood risk, noise, demographics, traffic and pedestrian modelling
- Integration of proposed projects which could inform decision making processes for planning or investment
- Increased understanding of the development potential of sites

3.5 It is anticipated that the users of VUCITY will include: elected Members, planners, the development community, potential investors, architects, agents, community hubs, transport engineers and decision makers.

- 3.6 There are wide ranging uses of VUCITY within council including: data visualisation; promotional tool to market the city; and assisting with the planning decision making process. Members should note that while there is no statutory requirement for developers to use VUCITY as part of their planning application process, they will be encouraged to use it as part of the pre-application discussions.
- 3.7 VUCITY has presented to the Development Community in March 2017 and at the Developers' Forum in June 2017, and previously at the Agents' Forum and Belfast Strategic Issues Group. It has been very positively received. Given the wide-ranging uses of VUCITY, City stakeholders and partners are also being encouraged to use it.
- 3.8 In January 2017, Committee granted approval for officers to explore establishing an appropriate partnership with VUCITY for the development and roll out of a 3D Model of Belfast.
- 3.9 VUCITY has proposed a licence agreement with Belfast City Council. This would initially be for one year, with the option to extend. This is the approach other councils have taken and proved very successful.
- 3.10 This licence agreement is to be agreed with and by the City Solicitor. It will be a licence for 1 year, with an option to extend on an annual basis to a maximum of 3 years.
- 3.11 VUCITY is currently available as a software package for laptop and desktops, however a web-based platform and i-pad friendly version are currently in development and will be available in 2018. VUCITY also integrates onto interactive touch tables.
- 3.12 Equality and Good Relations implications
None.
- 3.13 Finance and Resource Implications
The £25,000 cost includes the licence fee, hardware requirements, staff training and data integration."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Positioning Belfast to Compete

Visit Belfast

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on city tourism performance and to provide details of Visit Belfast’s marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity to date.

1.2 The report also seeks authority for Visit Belfast to attend the March 2018 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee to present their business plan and request for financial support for the financial year 2018/19.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report and the progress to date.
- Agree to receive a presentation on Visit Belfast’s 2018-19 Business Plan in March 2018 for the consideration of the Agency’s request for ongoing financial support into 2018/19.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

As Members will be aware, Visit Belfast is the city’s Destination Marketing Management Organisation (DMMO) dedicated to marketing Belfast as a city break, conference, day-trip and cruise ship destination. It also, in its visitor servicing role, manages the operation of three gateway Visitor Information Centres (VICs) including Visit Belfast Welcome Centre, Arrivals George Best Belfast City Airport and Arrivals Belfast International Airport and a range of visitor servicing initiatives on behalf of Belfast City Council.

3.2 Visit Belfast represents over 500 tourism businesses and services across the tourism industry and its core purpose is to create and service visitors for Belfast and Northern Ireland in order to generate an economic benefit for the city region, creating jobs and wealth.

- 3.3 The role of Visit Belfast is to drive visitor numbers and increase visitor spend, by providing a mechanism for co-ordinating investment and market engagement. The organisation has a portfolio of marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity across both leisure and business tourism.
- 3.4 2017-18 is the second year of a four-year strategy (2016-20) that aims to deliver a cumulative 1.4m bed nights, 680,000 cruise visitors, 3 million enquiries and £392m into the local economy by 2020. Visit Belfast is on target to achieve the milestones set for 2017-18.
- 3.5 Visit Belfast's strategy is an essential tool in growing the visitor economy in Belfast and Northern Ireland and, in particular, in achieving the Belfast Agenda commitment to increase the value of out-of-state tourism to £500million by 2021.
- 3.6 Urban tourism continues to drive tourism on a global basis and Belfast continues to increasingly lift Northern Ireland tourism, contributing up to half of the NI visitor economy. Last month, the renowned travel guide Lonely Planet named Belfast (alongside the Causeway Coast) as their No. 1 region to visit in 2018; while earlier in the Autumn, Belfast was shortlisted as 'a leading European City Break destination' by the World Travel Awards. The city has also been successful in winning the Rising Star category at the National Geographic Traveller Awards in London, another major coup for the city.
- 3.7 Tourism, and in particular out-of-state tourism, has become a key economic driver for the city region, generating revenue and contributing to job growth. Belfast is central to the region's tourism ambitions and it is not simply about increasing hotel capacity, though private sector investment in hotel development will see over a thousand hotel rooms come on line by the end of 2018. Titanic Belfast's enduring popularity, the opening of HMS Caroline, the expansion of the Belfast Waterfront and the development of community-based tourism initiatives such as Failte Feirste Thiar and Eastside Partnership, in tandem with concerted Visit Belfast marketing, contributes to the Belfast Agenda and its stated outputs.
- 3.8 Belfast has experienced unprecedented tourism numbers to date in this calendar year, and projections from NISRA indicate that the economic impact for the city will exceed that of 2016, which was £334 million.

3.9 Outlined below is a summary of the performance so far this year in relation to hotel performance, sales and marketing, business tourism and cruise tourism. The figures below relate to the period January – September 2017 and performance is compared to the figures for the same period the previous year.

3.10 Belfast Hotel Performance (January-September 2017)

Between January-September, room occupancy stood at 82.3%, which is an increase of 3.5%. Room sales have increased by 3.9% and hotel revenue has increased by 18.6%. It is worth noting that occupancy figures spiked throughout the summer months, with June occupancy being 92% and 93% throughout August. On average, room occupancy during the summer months (April – September) was 87.9%.

3.11 Destination Interest and Visitor Servicing (January-September 2017)

Interest in Belfast as a destination of choice has increased. This is demonstrated by figures from Visit Belfast which show that the Visitor Centre handled 679,337 enquiries and welcomed 264,064 visitors through the doors. Both figures are reported to have increased by 18.4% and 21.3% respectively on the same period last year. The profile of these visitors is broken down as 22% from GB & NI, 14% Spain & Portugal, 9% Germany & France, 5% Asia, 3% ROI and 2% other world. Visitor service support is also provided at core events in the city. This is done through the provision of an information stand/point for delegates. Examples of such provision have been in relation to the Routes Europe Conference, the Women's Rugby World Cup, and the UEFA Under 19 Women's Football Championship.

3.12 Cruise Belfast

The City welcomed unprecedented numbers of cruise ships this year. 94 ships arrived into Belfast Harbour, carrying an estimated number of 158,000 cruise visitors to the city, again an increase of 10.8% from last year. The economic benefit achieved this year from cruise tourism is estimated to be £6.6million. Planning is already underway for 2018, and it is expected that up to 200,000 cruise visitors will come to Belfast. This will generate an economic return in the region of £8.5million.

3.13 Conferences in Belfast 2017

The city will welcome this year a total of 71 conferences, which will generate an estimated 79,315 bed nights, again an increase of 7%. The economic benefit is estimated to be in the region of £34.1million. Given the long lead-in times, Visit Belfast is also working on attracting future events. Visit Belfast has achieved conference wins for the city worth £33million, this is estimated to generate 60,000 bed nights over the next 4 years. In addition to this, an In-Market Sales Manager has been appointed, based in London, whose focus of work is on the UK Association and Corporate conference market. From taking up post on the 1st October, the manager has established seven conference leads for Belfast, worth an estimated £5m.

3.14 Leisure Tourism & Marketing

Seven marketing campaigns have been delivered, worth around £303,000. These have targeted Berlin, Republic of Ireland, London, Amsterdam, Manchester and Scotland. The aim of these campaigns is to generate 235,000 leisure bednights. Importantly, these campaigns allow Visit Belfast to lever significant partner income: £2 for every £1 of its investment in out-of-state marketing. Additionally, web and digital marketing has generated 916,000 visits to visitbelfast.com and 631,000 social media engagement so far this year.

3.15 Equality and Good Relations Implications

There are no specific equality or good relations implications.

3.16 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial implications attached to this report. The Council support for Visit Belfast in 2017/18 is £1.8million.”

In response to a Member’s question as to how many more hotels Belfast needed, the Chief Executive pointed out that hotel occupancy figures had spiked in Belfast during the summer months, with occupancy at 92% in June and 93% in August. She added that 5% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was raised by tourism, in comparison to 10% on average across the U.K. and that there was still significant potential for Belfast to add and increase visitor stays.

It was pointed out by another Member that more hotels would create a more competitive market for visitors to the city.

In response to a Member's question regarding the Council's Employment Academies for the hospitality industry, the Director of Development clarified to the Members that the academies were not only providing training and recruitment for the newly built hotels in the city, but were also working with established hotels in Belfast.

The Director added that he and officers from the Employability and Skills team would be meeting with the Chief Executives of the Hotel Federation and People 1st to discuss and agree how the Council could further support job creation across the hotel sector.

A further Member suggested that Visit Belfast should examine how many visitors were using Airbnb in the city, given its recent popularity.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Nashville

The Director of Development reminded the Committee that, through the International Relations Framework 2017-2021, the Council's focus of international activity was on the City's Sister Cities of Boston, Nashville and Shenyang. He advised that the US Stakeholder Group focussed on opportunities to secure partner buy-in to locally based events aimed at furthering the relevant city-to-city links.

The Committee was advised that one of the opportunities which had been identified was the potential to organise a 'Nashville in Belfast' event to promote the long-standing relationship with Nashville. The Director stated that it was anticipated that the events would serve to bring new partners to the Sister City collaborations, expand current collaborations and promote our local product, talent and investment opportunities to the incoming delegation. He added that the programme would also drive footfall and business into the city through the range of events on offer.

He outlined to the Members a number of initiatives which were under development, including:

- a programme launch as part of Lord Mayor's Day on 28th April, 2018;
- a joint city concert on 29th April in the Ulster Hall;
- a Nashville themed Twilight Market at St. George's on 1st-2nd May;
- a Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival music event on 5th May; and
- lunchtime family heritage workshops through the Ulster Historical Foundation between 1st-4th May.

The Director stated that the BBC had expressed an interest in a number of interviews to promote the programme and that discussions were ongoing with the Nashville Sister City Committee, who had agreed to investigate the possibility of bringing a Nashville musician to Belfast for a select number of performances. He added that this might also open the opportunity of the events being broadcast to Nashville.

The Committee was also advised that work was ongoing to explore whether a State Department Trade Mission could link in with the 'Nashville in Belfast' dates to facilitate Nashville businesses coming to Belfast in conjunction with Invest NI, in order to promote Belfast as an investment location and to deliver business workshops for local companies interested in doing business in the United States.

A number of Members expressed their support for the programme.

A Member requested that officers look at ways in which music could be incorporated along the Belfast City marathon route and, given the dates of the Nashville Inward Mission, that those visiting from Nashville could be made aware of the date of the Marathon.

After discussion, the Committee agreed:

1. the development and promotion of the "Nashville in Belfast" events at a maximum cost of £20,000 from within the International Relations existing budget, noting that the cost would include the hosting of an inward Nashville delegation to coincide with the programme dates; and
2. that officers would look at ways in which music could be incorporated along the Belfast City marathon route, given the overlap in dates, and if those visiting from Nashville could be made aware of the date of the Marathon, 7th May 2018, given the proximity of the Nashville Inward Mission.

Strategic and Operational Issues

European Capital of Culture Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To update Committee on the recent developments in regards to the European Capital of Culture 2023 competition.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and that an options report on potential next steps will be brought forward when further information becomes available from Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sports (DCMS) and European Commission.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

Members will be aware that the ECOC2023 bid is a two staged process with the initial key milestone recently reached with the stage 1 Bid Book submitted to DCMS on 27 Oct 2017.

- 3.2 A formal presentation (pitch) of stage 1 bid submission, followed by a detailed Q&A session with a panel of 12 National and European experts had been scheduled for Tuesday 28 November 2017. This process would have determined which of the five competing cities would be shortlisted to stage 2 of the process.
- 3.3 As Members will be aware, the European Commission recently announced that the UK will not be eligible to host the European Capital of Culture in 2023 along with a city from Hungary. On this basis, DCMS has written to all five competing cities confirming that the pre-selection presentation has been postponed. DCMS has also confirmed that senior political and official dialogue and negotiations are ongoing with the European Commission to try to put the ECO competition back on track. The Council is actively involved in supporting these ongoing discussions. Once these negotiations have concluded we will proceed with the publication of the details of the bid.
- 3.4 On the 28 November, the five competing UK cities met with representatives from DCMS including John Glen MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, to discuss the current position and possible next steps. A joint press statement from the 5 cities was released thereafter. In summary, the statement:
- acknowledged the huge and passionate support received locally, nationally and internationally in response to the surprising announcement by the European Commission;
 - recognised the commitment given by DCMS to try and resolve this issue and agree a clear way forward for the cities involved;
 - urged DCMS to continue negotiations with the European Commission on the legitimacy of its decision, particularly in the context that the UK has not yet left the EU and the terms of that departure are not yet agreed;
 - five cities have collectively requested that DCMS takes further legal advice on the status of the announcement as a matter of urgency;
 - recognised the urgent need to reach a conclusion in a timescale that allows the momentum created within the cities to be maintained.

- 3.5 During Prime Minister's Question Time on 29 November, the First Secretary of State, Damian Green confirmed that Ministers are in urgent talks with the European Commission over the decision to exclude UK cities from entering the European Capital of Culture. He further stated that *'we are making sure that all those cities who applied can continue with their cultural development because cultural development has been shown to be an extremely good basis for the regeneration of cities and towns across the United Kingdom.'*
- 3.6 Clearly, the position taken by the European Commission comes as a great disappointment to the city of Belfast, our citizens and wider cultural and business community who have invested significant time, energy and resources in the preparation of our bid. As part of the process the Council engaged directly with over 16,000 people, 120 stakeholder meetings and workshops as well as 5,000 surveys completed.
- 3.7 The Lord Mayor has recently written to the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker as well as the three Northern Ireland MEPs seeking urgent meetings to explore what options exist to help reinstate the process. This would allow our citizens, our cultural sector and wide range of partners to realise the ambition, energy and opportunities contained within the bid.
- 3.8 The Committee will be kept fully informed as further information on a possible way forward becomes available.
- 4.0 **Financial & Resource Implications**
- All financial and human resource implications attached to emerging options in terms of way forward will be brought to Committee attention.
- 5.0 **Equality or Good Relations Implications**
- None."

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

Dates for Special Meetings

The Committee agreed the following dates for Special meetings during 2018, which would receive presentations only and would only be held if required:

- Wednesday, 24th January;
- Wednesday, 21st February;

- Wednesday, 28th March;
- Wednesday, 25th April;
- Wednesday, 23rd May;
- Wednesday, 27th June;
- *No meeting in July;*
- Wednesday, 22nd August;
- Wednesday, 26th September;
- Wednesday, 24th October;
- Wednesday, 28th November; and
- Tuesday, 18th December.

The Committee agreed that those meetings would also commence at 5.15pm.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Quarter 2 Finance Report

The Chief Executive advised Members that the Quarter 2 position for the Committee showed an overspend of £44,000, while the year-end position was forecasting an underspend of £179,000.

She pointed out to the Committee that the overspend related to less income received than budgeted, and an increased spend on supplies and services which was offset by vacant posts across a number of services.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the associated financial reporting pack.

Chairperson