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| Subject: | Visit Belfast Business Plan 2024-25 |
| Date: | 13 March 2024 |
| Reporting Officer: | John Greer, Director of Economic Development |
| Contact Officer: | Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture and Tourism Kerry McMullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager |

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| Restricted Reports | |
| Is this report restricted? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? | |
| After Committee Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| After Council Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some time in the future | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| Call-in | |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-in? | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues |
| 1.1 | <p>The purpose of the report is to present the request for funding from Visit Belfast for the 2024-2025 financial year and to set out the organisation's strategic development and operational delivery, focused on supporting tourism growth.</p> <p>Members should note that Visit Belfast will be in attendance at the Committee to present the detail of its 2024-25 plan.</p> |

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| 2.0 | Recommendations |
| 2.1 | <p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the draft Visit Belfast business plan 2024-25. The overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast in the coming financial year has been taken account of in the revenue estimates that have already been approved by Council. - Approve and agree a funding allocation of £2,076,424 for 2024-25, subject to the development of a funding agreement, priority areas of activity and agreed targets. |
| 3.0 | Main report |
| 3.1 | <p>Members will be aware that Visit Belfast was established by Council as the principal destination marketing and visitor servicing organisation for the city of Belfast. Visit Belfast leads on the tourism marketing activities and targets both the leisure and business tourism markets. It is a membership organisation with more than 460 partner businesses across the wider hospitality industry. Visit Belfast works on behalf of its funders and partners and with a range of public and private partners including Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and Belfast Chamber to promote Belfast as a tourism destination.</p> |
| 3.2 | <p>Visit Belfast is a public / private partnership. It's current Chairperson is Marie-Thérèse McGivern and Belfast City Council has four Councillor representatives on the Board: Councillor Sammy Douglas, Councillor Eric Hanvey, Councillor Clíodhna Nic Bhranair and Councillor Séanna Walsh. Also represented on the board are members from the private, public and community sectors.</p> |
| 3.3 | <p>The tourism and hospitality industry in Belfast had been going from strength to strength as Belfast continued to drive the regional tourism economy. In 2019, in the last - published Local Government District tourism statistics by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Belfast hosted 1.9m trips accounting for one third of all tourism trips to Northern Ireland and tourism spend amounted to £417m, 40% of Northern Ireland tourism spend. Council has worked with Visit Belfast over the past three years to rebuild city tourism which has resulted in Belfast's visitor economy re-emerging stronger and more competitive in a market context that has been challenging.</p> |
| 3.4 | <p>The inclusion of tourism as a key growth sector in the City Region Deal, acknowledged the fact that the sector is already a significant economic generator but recognises the need for significant additional investment in order to sustain growth. The Council's 10-year plan for tourism in the city: "<i>Make Yourself at Home</i>" sets out a vision for the future of tourism in the city that is centred on a people-based and sustainable model of development with a focus</p> |

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| | <p>on: increasing the coherency of the Belfast experience; supporting quality authentic products; developing skills; and strengthening the city's position through marketing and communications.</p> |
| 3.5 | <p>Belfast's <i>Make Yourself at Home</i>, Tourism Plan recognises both the challenges to increase tourism and to maximise the positive impact that it can have on the city; whilst the updated Belfast Agenda has set a target to double the value of tourism from £400m to £800m per year by 2030. As the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) for Belfast, Visit Belfast has an important role to play in realising the vision for tourism. It is in this context that Visit Belfast has developed its new three-year strategy (2024-2027) and 2024-25 business plan to support and promote tourism activity in the city region in a way that enriches the visitor experience, encourages longer stays and achieves meaningful economic and social impact for local people. Plans to promote and encourage the exploration of Belfast's neighbourhoods by visitors, thereby adding to our city-wide destination proposition, is a primary aim of Visit Belfast's new strategy. Further details of activities that will be undertaken as part of this plan with associated targets will be set out in the presentation to the Committee and are included at Appendix A.</p> |
| 3.6 | <p>Visit Belfast's new three-year strategy (2024-2027) and one-year business plan (2024-2025) are aligned to the four themes of Belfast's Tourism Plan: <i>Make Yourself at Home</i>, focused on delivering for the city:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grow the visitor economy in the Belfast city region in an inclusive and sustainable way ● Position the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out; ● Enhance the Experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer, and; ● Sustain its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast's sustainability story. |
| 3.7 | <p>Tourism Outlook – despite the outlook being far from certain, tourism can contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of the city with high potential to create jobs quickly and provide the economic impetus for the wider economy. The reporting of tourism statistics and meaningful visitor analysis at a local level continues to be impacted by the delayed resumption of surveys and statistics by NISRA. While tourism related surveys including passenger and household travel surveys have resumed, it remains unclear when we will see</p> |

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| | <p>a full return of annual government tourism statistics particularly at a local level. However, a range of data analytics from a number of sources have provided valuable metrics illustrating recovery has been stronger than expected including for example:</p> |
| 3.8 | <p>The accommodation sector has seen strong performance, with hotel room occupancy between January and October 2023 at 79.2%. This represents 5.5% growth compared to 2022 and 5.1% growth compared to 2019. Furthermore, weekday occupancy during this period was 77% (seeing an increase of 7.1% on 2022 and +5.7% on 2019), while weekend occupancy was 84.9% (+2.1% on 2022 and +3.8% in 2019), pointing to the recovery of the leisure market in the city.</p> |
| 3.9 | <p>With two airports, Belfast Harbour as well as road and rail links, the city is driving overall tourism growth in Northern Ireland. This, combined with its extensive leisure and business offer, is attracting visitors. 52% of all visitors to Northern Ireland came to Belfast. Overall, the city accounts for 32% of all overnight stays in NI and the city generates 40% of the region's tourism spend. Since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist consumer spend within Belfast has increased by £82 million (88%).</p> |
| 3.10 | <p>During and since the pandemic, tourism on the island of Ireland has performed particularly strongly, helping to mitigate the shortfall of international visitors. This has been particularly noticeable among visitors from ROI to NI. In fact, residents from the Republic of Ireland took over 1.1 million overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2022 (51% increase from 2019 levels), staying for 2.6 nights (42% increase) and spending £233 million (65% increase). This is significant for Belfast because 3 in 4 visitors from the Republic of Ireland state that a 'City Break' is their preference when travelling to Northern Ireland.</p> |
| 3.11 | <p>The city has charted a strong recovery, yet challenges such as staffing, higher costs of doing business within the tourism and hospitality sector and the knock-on impact on hospitality opening hours in the city remain.</p> |
| 3.12 | <p>Priorities outlined in Visit Belfast's business plan 2024-25 include:</p> <p>Directly deliver on the ambitions and priorities set out in <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> tourism plan for Belfast through key strategic focus areas of Neighbourhood tourism; new ways of measuring impact; Belfast 2024; Accelerating digital innovation; Data driven decision making; Enhancing perceptions of Belfast amongst visitors; Increased collaboration; Telling Belfast's sustainability story; and Enhancing the visitor experience and touchpoints.</p> |

3.13 **Operational Targets for 2024-25:** based on projected levels of growth in 2024-25, Visit Belfast is proposing the following targets for 2024-25 as agreed by their board:

| Total Output | Target |
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| Leisure Tourism Bed nights | 350,000 bed nights |
| Leisure Tourism Day trips | 200,000 day trips |
| Business Tourism Bed nights | 95,200 bed nights |
| Business Delegates | 34,000 delegates |
| Cruise Visitors | 296,000 pax & crew |
| Visitor Enquiries | 766,000 enquiries |

| Economic Impact | 2024-25 Target |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Leisure Tourism | £60m |
| Business Tourism | £35m |
| Cruise Tourism | £20m |
| Visitor Servicing | £18m |

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| Visit Belfast Economic Impact | £133m |
| Budget | £4.5m |
| ROI | £1 : £64 |

3.14 A detailed business plan has been submitted and reviewed by officers. The targets outlined will form the basis of key performance indicators for Council's 2024-25 funding agreement with Visit Belfast. Regular monitoring against targets will be included and these key performance indicators will relate to the trajectory for growth and align with the implementation phases for Council's tourism plan. This provides a basis for more effective monitoring of performance.

Financial & Resource Implications

3.15 In the current financial year, Belfast City Council's funding arrangement with Visit Belfast is £2,035,710. The City Growth and Regeneration Committee, at its meeting on 9 March 2022, approved a multi-annual funding agreement for the 3 years from 2022-25 and an inflationary increase of 2% in Year 3 of the Business Plan which results in a funding allocation of £2,076,424 to Visit Belfast in 2024 / 2025

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| 3.16 | <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> No specific equality or good relations implications. Visit Belfast also works with councils outside of Belfast, as part of the Regional Tourism Partnership. |
| 4.0 | Appendices |
| 4.1 | Appendix A: Visit Belfast Presentation of Business Plan 2024-25 |