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<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Update on Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme</b>
<b>Date:</b>	10 April 2024
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b>	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information relating to any individual</li> <li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li> <li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li> <li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li> <li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li> <li>6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction</li> <li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li> </ol>	
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b> <b>After Council Decision</b> <b>Sometime in the future</b> <b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>
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Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes  No

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to further update Members on the research and engagement work undertaken to date which will inform the development of a new Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme in due course.</p> <p>The report also provides an outline proposal for future funding of the existing City Connections programme.</p>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Note the contents of this paper and subsequent next steps for final scoping and designing of an appropriate Neighbourhood Tourism funding model, which suits the needs of applicants and their stage of development whilst also meeting council ambitions.</li><li>ii) Consider the recommendation to allow funding to be released under strand one of the programme to EastSide Partnership and Fáilte Feirste Thiar, in recognition of their current capacity to deliver on objectives relating to neighbourhood tourism.</li></ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
	<p><b>Programme Aims:</b></p> <p>In June 2023, Members granted permission to proceed with the development of a new Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme. This pilot programme will provide mentoring and financial support over a two - year period, to promote the development and implementation of market-led tourism products and experiences in locales across the city, increasing footfall, dwell time and spend and sharing the benefits of tourism beyond the city centre. The programme also aims to prioritise collaborative working models and uplift sectoral capacity, skill and growth.</p>

### **Research and Engagement 1: Open Workshops (x9):**

Extensive research has already been undertaken with a range of internal and external sectoral stakeholders. This work has helped to identify needs, gaps and opportunities and will help inform programme criteria and ensure proposals are aligned with the ambitions of 'Belfast Stories'.

Neighbourhood Tourism workshops were a key part of the recent engagement work at which both groups and individuals could find out more about Neighbourhood Tourism and express their own views and prioritisations around thematic questions.

Nine workshops were held across inner and outer North, South, East and West Belfast and the city centre which attracted 98 participants from 58 organisations. These were held in the following venues: *Belfast Castle, Ulster Museum, City Hall, EastSide Visitors' Centre; St Comgall's, Malone House, Shorts Recreational Club, Roddy McCorley Centre and Crumlin Road Gaol.*

In order to accommodate input from people who were not able to attend the workshops, two further avenues of engagement were made available via:

- an offer to meet one - to - one with an independent facilitator and;
- (ii) an online survey.

The Neighbourhood Tourism workshops followed a set format, with participants addressing six specific questions:

- 1) How would you describe your neighbourhood to a tourist?
- 2) Market segments : does this reflect the interests of visitors who visit your area?
- 3) Stories : what stories do local people want to share with tourists?
- 4) Neighbourhood products and experiences : what already exists? what could be done that is new?
- 5) Itineraries : how ready is your neighbourhood to welcome visitors?
- 6) What could an investment fund look like?

An analysis is currently underway of the information gathered and a final report along with options and recommendations will be brought to Committee for consideration by May 2024 .

In the interim, the following is a summary of how the workshops were received and the main points which came through at a neighbourhood level which will inform the final programme design and support.

- There was a high level of interest from a range of community organisations. Participants were positive, engaged and clearly wanted to learn more about the concept of 'Neighbourhood Tourism' and the benefits it could bring to localities across the city.
- Most participants benefitted from the overview of market segments, narratives and trends provided as part of the workshops. For voluntary and community organisations in particular, this was an exercise in finding out what they did not know and recognising they had a long road ahead in developing viable products and experiences.
- There was an acknowledgement that people's current level of understanding tourism and visitor needs would benefit from an increased knowledge of the subject, this could include tourism products, delivery methods, infrastructure and the development of tourism clusters.
- There was also learning about the wealth of stories and assets that already exist within both the city and neighbourhoods. This helped further understanding as to how lived experience matched with professional expertise can bring authenticity.
- Stakeholders talked over breaks, left together, exchanged contact details and talked of future collaborations. They also asked for more opportunities for learning, information sharing and networking.

The following points were raised by workshop participants for Council to consider in any future approach to Neighbourhood Tourism:

- A relatively small funding pot to cover projects from across the city.
- Funding welcomed as it will minimise financial risks associated with new product development and market testing.
- Tourism offerings should come from locally based residents and organisations, ie. fear of being marginalised by bigger, outside organisations with no real connection to local areas.

- Open to a collaborative approach but provision should also be included to allow smaller, individual applications.
- Match funding should not be a requirement as it could exclude potential applicants.
- A hybrid model of financial support combined with business mentoring would be beneficial.
- Support for marketing and sales came through strongly.
- Clustering opportunities could maximise impact, increase benefits and avoid duplication.
- Council to be cognisant of how parts of the city are currently not as developed as others in terms of tourism offerings and the ability to bring forward new concepts and products.
- Funding model to be user friendly and proportionate to level of funding requested.

#### **Research and Engagement 2 : Sectoral Stakeholders:**

The Neighbourhood Tourism based workshops were supplemented with interviews and engagement with representatives from key sectoral bodies, area partnerships and local and central government, including:

- Party Group Leaders and Elected Members who attended the workshops.
- Key BCC teams and departments, including:
  - Property and Projects
  - Neighbourhood Regeneration
  - Neighbourhood Integration
  - Community and Neighbourhood Assets
  - Central Grants
  - City Innovation
  - Economic Development
  - Culture
  - Tourism
  - Belfast 2024
  - Belfast Stories

As well as external stakeholders including:

- Department for Communities
- Department for the Economy
- Tourism NI
- Visit Belfast
- Tourism Ireland
- The Greater Shankill Convention
- Maritime Belfast
- EastSide Partnership
- Fáilte Feirste Thiar

A brief synopsis of feedback from sectoral representatives currently includes:

- Concerns in terms of restricted capacity levels with a particular focus on quality, marketing and viability.
- It was also felt that more investment was needed in Neighbourhood Tourism. Successful destination development in areas such as West Belfast, East Belfast and Maritime Belfast indicated the scale of investment required.
- A number of other strategies are currently under review or in development and it appears that stories will be a common driver for all key partners and sectoral bodies going forward.
- It was suggested that people, stories or themes should be the focus of the programme rather than neighbourhoods or that there could be distinct strands for neighbourhoods and for storytelling. There was some concern that a focus on geographic communities excludes community of identity, for example, the LGBTQ plus community.
- Other stakeholders suggested that investment should support existing or emerging anchor attractions and assets such as the city's cemeteries, Belfast Castle and Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund projects.
- There was discussion as to whether the investment programme is a fund, a strategy or a building block contributing to neighbourhood tourism development alongside, for example, a skills and training agenda.
- Consultees felt that a key benefit of the investment programme should be allowing providers to "de-risk" the development of new and enhanced products

and experiences. This should be matched by a risk appetite prepared to accept greater risk in pursuit of the greater potential benefits of innovation.

- Several consultees also reinforced that this is a pilot and in such a context , success and failure are different sides of the same point, provide that lessons are drawn and learning shared.

#### **Opportunities available within Go Succeed Programme:**

As part of the consultation and engagement process, Council's Tourism staff have met on a regular basis with colleagues in Economic Development to explore how a new Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme could benefit from the opportunities available within the existing Go Succeed programme. The aim is to provide wrap - around support in the form of concept development, tailored business assistance, guidance and mentoring. This integrated approach would provide the business acumen and support needs raised by attendees at the neighbourhood tourism workshops.

#### **Funding Models:**

Research and engagement work to date has provided learnings which will be taken into consideration when developing an appropriate funding model over the coming months.

It is clear that different destinations and neighbourhoods across the city are at varying 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.

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. Some have a model that they have not been able to grow or monetise, while Tourism NI has indicated a gap in support for established providers to internationalise their offer.

Consideration will also be given by the Tourism Development Team to the respective implications of employing either a commissioning model or a grant funding model

within the CGU framework. Work will also continue to delineate operational roles and responsibilities and appropriate methods for monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

A detailed report on all engagement feedback and next steps, alignment to Go Succeed and funding model recommendations for member consideration will be presented at May 2024 Committee.

**4.0 Eastside/Failte Feirste Thair**

In East Belfast, EastSide Tourism is a long-established community organisation that has many years' experience in servicing visitors' needs. In the west of the city, Fáilte Feirste Thiar is also firmly established and has a strong track record in supporting and delivering neighbourhood tourism services.

During the research and engagement work, several stakeholders, not just those with a destination management remit, emphasised the importance of destination management at a quarter or neighbourhood level.

Consultees pointed to gains made in the East, West and Waterfront areas in relation to strategy, co-ordination, networking, marketing, promotional material, digitisation, packaging, clustering, volunteer development, visitor servicing, accreditation and more.

In recent years, Council has provided funding to EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar to enable the City Connections programme, a partnership between the two organisations which works to maximise the impact of tourism at a local level.

Given these organisations are long established with a strong remit of neighbourhood tourism and the current limited capacity for others to deliver offerings of a similar calibre, it is recommended to split the investment programme into two strands:

The total budget for the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme is £500,000 over a two-year period from 2024 - 2026.



	<p>i) <b>Strand One</b> will continue to support the work of EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar for two years, this will be by way of an annual funding agreement which will be subject to the achievement of KPIs and agreed deliverables. The organisations would each receive £62,500 per annum. This funding will support an outcomes-based model that will integrate support and capacity building to other Neighbourhood Tourism projects through an agreed delivery programme. Officers will work with both organisations to outline associated KPIs and deliverables for this funding and will be monitored via funding agreements.</p> <p>ii) <b>Strand Two</b> will provide £250,000 across the programme 2 year lifespan to support other applicants beyond to develop, test and bring to market new or enhanced tourism products and experiences. (If funding for EastSide Tourism and Fáilte Feirste Thiar is approved under strand one, these organisations would be excluded from applying for funding under strand two). The funding model options will be brought back to committee in May 2024.</p>
<p><b>5.0</b></p>	<p><b>Financial and Resource Implications:</b></p> <p>Funding for year 1 (2024 / 25) and year 2 (2025 / 26) will be provided from Belfast Region City Deal Reserve. This is a total of £500k over the 2 financial years - £250k per annum.</p>
<p><b>6.0</b></p>	<p><b>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment:</b></p> <p>The Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme has been screened for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Equality of opportunity and good relations and</li> <li>ii) Disabilities duties</li> </ul> <p>On the basis of the answers to the screening questions, it was recommended that the policy is ‘screened out - mitigating actions’ (minor impacts).</p> <p>Therefore, the consultation and engagement on Neighbourhood Tourism and draft Equality Screening took simultaneously between January and March 2024.</p> <p>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, built in.</p>

	Only minor positive impacts have been identified at this stage. The council will continue to monitor for further differential impacts.
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Appendices:</b>  <b>N/A</b>