



Subject:	Belfast Learning Cities – 2024-2025 emerging programme
Date:	23 August 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty
Contact Officers:	Patricia Magee, Policy and Performance Analyst, Naomi Doak, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 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 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 80%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 20%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Some time in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		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
<p>Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To update Members on the work underway in support of Belfast’s membership of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and the repositioning of this work in the context of community planning.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) note the ongoing work being taken forward in support of the city’s designation as a UNESCO Learning City including the cross sectoral partnership in place. ii) note the £25k funding secured through the Public Health Agency in support of the Belfast Learning Cities initiative. iii) note the proposed theme of ‘Connect’ for the 2024-2025 Belfast Festival of Learning. iv) consider and agree, subject to SP&R approval, the proposed £40k funding to be allocated from existing budgets within City and Organisational Strategy to support the Belfast Learning Cities programme. v) consider and agree, subject to SP&R approval, the proposed £20k allocation to set aside to support opportunities for celebrating success or enabling access to learning opportunities across the city with up to £4,000 available N/S/E/W/Shankill. vi) consider and agree the proposed open call for small grant funding (up to a maximum of £500) to support community groups to design and delivery events as part of the Belfast Learning Cities Festival.
3.0	Key Issues
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>Members will be aware that Belfast joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities in 2018 in recognition of the City’s commitment to promoting and encouraging lifelong learning for people of all ages. Within The Belfast Agenda, we have a vision that our city should be a great place for everyone to live and providing lifelong learning opportunities is a core part of this. Learning has the potential to transform lives for the better- it can build better relationships and help enhance quality of life for everyone in the city.</p>
3.2	<p>Whilst Belfast continues to play its role as a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities as well as a member of an All-Island Network of Learning Cities, it is felt there is a real opportunity to build on Belfast’s Learning City status and to bring city stakeholders together to reenergise our focus and maximise the opportunities presented. Under the auspices of community planning, a cross-sectoral ‘Learning Cities Leadership Group’ currently exists and comprises representatives from QUB, UU, BMET, BHSCT, PHA, Education Authority, Libraries NI, community partners and Council. Other key partners, including the Open University and Belfast Healthy Cities, are engaged and plan to join the Leadership Group.</p>
3.3	<p>Emerging programme of work 2024-2025</p> <p><i>i. Belfast Learning Festival 2025</i></p>

A key focus of the annual programme of work has been a '**Festival of Learning**' which is a week-long programme of free interactive and engaging events for local residents and partners. A thematic approach was adopted for the recent festival (held on 22-27 April 2024) which brought focus to the climate challenges facing the city and our communities through the delivery of 120+ events across the city and attracting significant participation.

- 3.4 Council officers are actively scoping opportunities for the 2025 Festival of Learning Week. The theme of 'Creating Connections' is proposed alongside a strapline of 'Take Time to Connect'. This theme aims to promote the fact that learning is a lifelong journey and encourage individuals of all ages to connect with new knowledge, technologies, skills and each other. Similar to previous years, it is proposed that the programme of events is created through a combination of the following:
- Open call for small grants (up to a maximum of £500) to help local voluntary and community sector organisations to develop and/or showcase an event.
 - Open call for in kind events, working in collaboration with key departments internally as well as external partners and anchor institutions.

- 3.5 *ii. **Learning Neighbourhoods***
- Another key area we would wish to scope and bring forward a potential initial demonstrator initiative is in relation to 'Learning Neighbourhoods'. The potential of this for Belfast emerged through shared learning and good practice from Cork Learning City and the work of the All-Island Network of Learning Cities.

- 3.6 A learning neighbourhood is an area that has a commitment to learning, providing inclusive and diverse opportunities for whole communities through partnership and collaboration and help build a culture of lifelong learning. It is proposed that the first demonstrator is realised in West Belfast, this is something that part of the city is already working towards and provides an opportunity to learn, and replicate based on evidence (aligned to values of our status).

- 3.7 *iii. **Celebrating excellence***
- A core way to help foster a lifelong culture across Belfast is to celebrate excellence. Rather than duplicating efforts or developing a bespoke approach to celebrating excellence this year, Belfast as a Learning City aims to capitalise on existing schemes/initiatives which align with our ethos or address gaps where appropriate.

- 3.8 In this context, a recent request has been received for the Council, under the auspices of learning cities, to support the Aisling Education Bursaries up to a value of £4,000. The Aisling Bursaries provide financial support to students from disadvantaged or challenging backgrounds in West Belfast

	<p>and Shankill to help make their ambitions of taking up further and higher education or training a reality, leading to securing a fulfilling career. Those who are supported through the initiative include young people who were perhaps the first person in their extended family to go to university; women and men returning to education and training having missed out education the first time around; ex-prisoners and victims of the conflict, lone parents, those from low-income households and those disadvantaged through disabilities. Since the Bursaries began in 2000, 1248 students of all ages from west Belfast and Shankill have been awarded £905,500 in Bursaries.</p>
3.9	<p>It is understood that the bursaries have received an unprecedented level of eligible applicants (i.e. 224) and the request of support from Council would help enable all applicants to be awarded a Bursary. Officers are actively exploring other opportunities to partner with other initiatives which celebrate success and/or enable access to learning opportunities across the city</p>
	<p>Funding</p>
3.10	<p>It should be noted that £25,000 has been secured through the Public Health Agency in support of the festival and other related areas of work including the recognising and celebrating excellence as well as exploring the potential to bring forward a demonstrator initiative in relation to ‘Learning Neighbourhood’. Similar to last year, it is proposed that the Council consider allocating funding to the learning city initiative up to a value of £40,000 from within existing in-year departmental budget. This would be spent on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Belfast Learning Festival: £15,000 to enhance the small grant funding, the delivery of a launch event and to contribute to marketing & communications related costs. ii. Learning Neighbourhood: £5,000 to progress the demonstrator and a report on key learning/impact etc. iii. Celebrating Excellence: £20,000 to enable support to be provided to initiatives and schemes which celebrate success or provide opportunities to access learning opportunities. It is suggested that up to a maximum of £4,000 be made available to support initiatives across the city (N/S/E/W/Shankill). It should be noted that any future year support would be subject to Members consideration.
	<p>Financial & Resource Implications</p>
3.11	<p>£25K funding has been secured through the Public Health Agency in support of the delivery of the Festival of Learning. An additional £40k funding from Council is proposed and will be funded through available in-year budgets within City and Organisational Strategy.</p>
	<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</p>
3.12	<p>There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications contained in this report.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>