



<b>Subject:</b>	Proposal for Belfast to join UK Network of Learning Cities
<b>Date:</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> January 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	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"> <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>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To seek approval for Belfast Learning City to join the UK Network of Learning Cities, following an invitation from Swansea Learning City, and to endorse attendance at the network's inaugural meeting and launch in late January 2025, coinciding with International Day of Education.

2.0	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Consider and agree that Belfast joins the emerging UK Learning Cities Network.</li> <li>ii) Consider and agree that officer representation (maximum of 2) from the Belfast Learning City's Network attend the inaugural meeting and launch of the UK Learning Cities Network to be held in Swansea in late January 2025. Members to note the meeting takes place in advance of February Council ratification.</li> </ol>
3.0	<b>Key Issues</b>
3.1	<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>Belfast joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities in 2018 in recognition of the City's commitment to promoting lifelong learning for all. This aligns with the vision of the Belfast Agenda, to promote Belfast as a great place to live and work for all.</p>
3.2	<p>Since joining the UNESCO network, Belfast has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthened partnerships with local education, community and business stakeholders:</b> Under the auspices of community planning, a cross-sectoral 'Learning Cities Leadership Group' currently exists and comprises representatives from QUB, UU, BMET, BHSC, 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.</li> <li>• <b>Strengthened partnerships with Learning Cities across the island (Dublin, Derry and Strabane, Limerick, Cork and Waterford):</b> These relationships have been formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), enabling collaboration, exchange of best practices and access to joint funding opportunities to deliver shared projects that have directly benefited Belfast's learning programmes particularly in areas such as community engagement and skills development.</li> <li>• <b>Delivered annual Belfast Learning Festivals:</b> These festivals have provided a platform to celebrate and showcase formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities across the city, with participation from schools, businesses and community groups helping reinforce the city's commitment to narrowing educational inequalities and fostering a culture of lifelong learning. The city has also administered grant funding to enable not-for-profit organisations to host a learning event as part of this celebration.</li> <li>• <b>Supported initiatives that enhance skills development and community wellbeing:</b> For example, Belfast Learning City recently funded the Aisling Educational Bursary Awards which supported individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds to access further or higher education.</li> <li>• <b>Strengthened partnerships with Learning Cities across the globe:</b> This has included informal learning exchanges with cities across Europe, South Africa and Australia.</li> </ul>

<p>3.3</p> <p>3.4</p> <p>3.5</p> <p>3.6</p> <p>3.7</p>	<p><b>The Irish Network of Learning Cities</b></p> <p>In 2019, Belfast joined the Irish Network of Learning Cities (INLC), with the Lord Mayor signing a Memorandum of Understanding between participating cities including Derry and Strabane, Cork, Dublin, Limerick and Belfast. The MOU was renewed and re-signed in May 2022.</p> <p>The INLC meets several times a year to share knowledge, experience and support each other on their learning city journey. The network recently secured and implemented a Shared Island funded initiative which enabled and encouraged learning exchanges and joint initiatives across the INLC.</p> <p><b>UK Network of Learning Cities</b></p> <p>There are 7 designated learning cities across the UK ( including Bristol, Derby, Glasgow, Kirklees, Manchester, Swansea and Wolverhampton). Reflecting on the approach adopted by the all-island Irish Network of Learning Cities (UNESCO promotes the collaborative approach as an exemplar), Swansea are leading an initiative to create a UK network of Learning Cities. Swansea has invited both Belfast and Derry and Strabane Learning Cities to join the Network.</p> <p>Joining the UK Network will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster further collaboration with many UK Core Cities, enabling and encouraging the sharing of good practice and amplifying impact of lifelong learning on a national scale.</li> <li>• Showcase Belfast’s achievements and ongoing work, enhancing our city’s profile both nationally and globally.</li> <li>• Position Belfast as a leader in lifelong learning, increasing opportunities for external funding and partnerships.</li> <li>• Provide a collective platform to influence regional and national policies in support of learning initiatives.</li> </ul> <p><b>Next Steps</b></p> <p>Subject to the consideration and approval of the Council’s Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the proposed next steps are set out below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Belfast Learning City Steering Group will confirm its intention to join the UK Network of Learning Cities.</li> <li>2. Representatives of the Belfast Learning Cities Steering Group will attend the inaugural meeting and launch event of the UK Network of Learning Cities in Swansea in late January 2025.</li> <li>3. Opportunities for collaboration within the network will be identified and reported to future meetings of the Committee.</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</b></p>
<p>3.8</p>	<p>There are no membership fees for joining the UK Network of Learning Cities and participation in network activities will align with ongoing Learning City Work.</p>

3.9	Attendance at the inaugural meeting and launch of the network in Swansea, if agreed, will incur travel and subsistence costs which can be funded through existing budget assigned for Belfast Learning Cities.
	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</b>
3.10	There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications contained in this report.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	None