



Subject:	International Engagement – emerging approach
Date:	12 March 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director, Place and Economy
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. 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 matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on work to date on developing a new approach to international engagement activity by the council and to set out emerging thinking ahead of a final draft being presented to a future meeting of this committee, as well as to request approval for council engagement in the June 2025 New York-New Belfast event.
2.0	Recommendation
	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the range of engagement to date and feedback from internal and external partners • Note and consider the emerging thinking on the content and approach for the new international engagement activity • Share any additional feedback on the emerging propositions in order to inform the final report that will be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee • Agree to support and engage in the annual New York-New Belfast event in June 2025 at a cost of £5,000 towards sponsorship and up to a maximum of £7,500 towards travel and accommodation costs for the Lord Mayor and relevant senior officers.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At the October 2024 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members noted and agreed a series of high-level considerations to shape the work around a new approach to international engagement and agreed that a more detailed report setting out the proposed approach would be brought back to a future meeting.
3.2	Since that time, officers have been engaging with teams across a number of relevant council departments as well as key external partners and have also looked at how other cities carry out this work. We have distilled the findings from that engagement and research work into a series of emerging proposals that we consider will shape the final draft report.
3.3	The global operating environment is obviously facing significant headwinds and is highly volatile at the present time. Macro-level factors such as these mean that it is difficult to plan activities with any degree of certainty given that changes such as the introduction of tariffs can impact direct on commitments and ambitions around trade and FDI activity. At a regional level, Invest NI has released a new business strategy, including an enhanced focus on both FDI and international trade activity.

3.4	<p>More locally, the recent Belfast Agenda refresh and collective commitment to a series of agreed priority actions means that any future approach needs to align with and support these actions. Within the council, the changing operational structures – with new teams established over recent years focusing on activities such as Innovation, Climate and City Regeneration – mean that many officers are engaging in international networks and partnerships as part of their “business as usual”. This would not have been the case when the original international relations framework was established in 2017. In addition, the increased focus on international events such as One Young World and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, as well as the planned investment in Belfast Stories demonstrate an enhanced focus on attracting international visitors to Belfast. This presents additional opportunities not only for developing and implementing a strong city narrative for key audiences, but also to consider opportunities for “layering up” business and cultural investment opportunities.</p>
3.5	<p>Officers have now met with numerous teams across the council involved in international activity in order to understand planned activity as well as the level of financial and staff resources allocated to that activity. We have also met some of our key external partners involved in international activity (including universities; colleges; British Council; Invest NI; Visit Belfast). We noted an extensive programme of engagement in formal and informal networks, partnerships and programmes across a range of disciplines – much of which is carried out as discreet, stand-alone activity relating to those specific business areas. Teams identified some areas where they could benefit from (and contribute to) added value products and services such as improving information sharing; insights and data collation – particularly focusing on key messages and unique selling points. It was recognised that emerging investments such as the City Deal projects present an opportunity for enhancing that messaging.</p>
3.6	<p>The role of the Lord Mayor remains a key resource in “fronting up” engagements with potential investors or supporting on city promotion activities. Access to the City Hall is widely valued by partner organisations and can be a very useful tool in our wider menu of investment and city promotion support.</p>
3.7	<p>Taking account of the issues raised during the engagement work, officers are of the view that there are a number of opportunities for establishing more effective ways of working across internal teams and with external partners, as well as considering new products that can be used by all partners to generate a coherent, positive messaging around the city as a vibrant business and investment location. We also consider that there is value in focusing on a small number of areas in which we can add value – while recognising that partner organisations and internal teams will be moving ahead on a wider range of activities that are fairly self-contained or which they are able to deliver independently.</p>

3.8	<p>By way of areas of focus, these may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital investment – focus on engagement at key events and targeting specific investment opportunities/funds to deliver corporate and city ambitions • Digital innovation – focus on engagement in key events and networks – and considering how to integrate project-based opportunities (including emerging City Deal investments) into wider city promotion messaging • Trade and investment – helping more local businesses to engage in export and supporting Invest NI in FDI promotion activity • Education – we expect that this work will be led by universities but that there may be opportunities to add value e.g. through civic engagement.
3.9	<p>To move this forward, it is proposed that the collective range of international engagement activity will be “packaged” together and presented to the committee as a cohesive programme of work on an annual basis, but as part of a wider strategic approach. Delivery responsibility will sit across a number of council teams and partner organisations but the collaborative programme of work will give members a picture of the scale of engagement – as well as demonstrating the added value that is being generated from relevant individual connections.</p>
3.10	<p><u>New York New Belfast – request for financial support and agreement to attend</u></p> <p>As noted above, the plan for the coming years is to present an overarching programme of work sets out the collective commitments for that coming year. Each team will be responsible for securing individual approvals – including budgetary approvals – to progress their planned activities. Ahead of this more strategic approach being implemented, it is likely that there will be a number of activities that need to come to the committee for approval, given timelines for decision. One of those activities is New York New Belfast (NYNB). Member will be aware that this is an annual event which takes place in New York and which promotes business and investment opportunities in Belfast to a selected audience of government, private business and civic leaders. The 2025 event will take place on 12 June 2025. Over 150 delegates are expected to attend the event which incorporates discussions on the themes of tourism, innovation, infrastructure and excellence in technology.</p>
3.11	<p>While the focus to date has been on selling Belfast as an investment location, the 2025 programme will include an enhanced focus on Belfast’s indigenous entrepreneurial strengths. Under the banner of “Meet the Belfast Maker” a number of city CEOs will highlight their contribution to the capital’s economy and outline opportunities for collaboration and investment from external partners. This June’s event will also include a delegation of businesses from the Belfast Chamber of Commerce. Members are asked to agree to sponsor the event at a</p>

	cost of £5,000 and to agree to attendance at the event by the Lord Mayor and appropriate senior officers, at a cost not to exceed £7,500.
3.12	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>New approach to international relations: no specific resource implications at this point. The action plan that will be presented to a future meeting of this committee will include a detailed breakdown of expenditure on relevant activities.</p>
3.13	<p>New York New Belfast event: Members are asked to contribute £5,000 towards sponsorship for the 2025 event and to agree to attendance at the event by the Lord Mayor and relevant senior officers, up to a maximum estimated cost of £7,500. The above costs are set aside within the existing International Relations budget 2025/26.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no direct Equality or Good Relations implications associated with this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	None