



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Proposal for Development Tourism Events Action Plan</b>
<b>Date:</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> March 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manger Culture, tourism and events
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Kerry McMullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager

**Restricted Reports**

**Is this report restricted?**

Yes

No

**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

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

**If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?**

**After Committee Decision**

**After Council Decision**

**Sometime in the future**

**Never**

  
  
  

**Call-in**

<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No
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<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the proposed approach to development of a Tourism Events Action Plan - .
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the contents of this paper and subsequent next steps for the development of a Tourism Events Action Plan.</li> <li>• Recommendations relate to the information contained in section 8.0 of the report, Members are asked to agree to the development of an action plan, and associated ToR with budget of up to £40,000</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
	<p><b>Strategic Context of City Events:</b></p> <p><b>Belfast Agenda:</b></p> <p>The Council has set out a strategic mandate to develop a city for everyone in its Community Plan the Belfast Agenda, where the vision is that:  <i>Belfast will be a city re-imagined and resurgent. A great place to live and work for everyone. Beautiful, well connected and culturally vibrant, it will be a sustainable city shared and loved by all its citizens, free from the legacy of conflict. A compassionate city offering opportunities for everyone. A confident and successful city energising a dynamic and prosperous city region. A magnet for talent and business and admired around the world. A city people dream to visit.</i></p> <p><b>City Imagining:</b></p> <p>To achieve this vision, the Council launched a ten-year Cultural Strategy in 2019 - <i>A City Imagining</i> which sets out a long-term commitment to facilitating a new integrated phase of culture-led progress and development for Belfast. The strategy brings together the culture, events and tourism functions within Council, as well as identifying areas of cross departmental working to support the Belfast Agenda.</p>

Belfast's Cultural strategy, *A City Imagining*, recognises the importance of events and programming to the wider cultural and tourism profile of Belfast. Events can tell stories, connect people and present new perspectives on our place.

As cities move on from the impacts of COVID-19, consumer sentiment research has indicated that events will take on a new significance as motivators for travel and an opportunity for destinations to differentiate their offer. Events can also create immersive spaces for the visitor to become part of an ever-evolving story.

The benefits of events and cultural programmes to cities are considerable. Many cities have used events to engage with local people, build civic pride and transform their reputation internationally. Events are one of the best ways to measure the economic, social and environmental impact of tourism as they bring together a cross-section of city stakeholders. Importantly they also have the ability to create legacy.

#### **Make Yourself at Home:**

To realise the ambitions of the Cultural Strategy, Council developed the Tourism Plan *Make Yourself at Home*, which is a ten-year blueprint to develop and grow tourism in the city with its four directional themes – Grow, Sustain, Experience and Position.

The plan recognises the need to expand the city's experience mix that will encourage visitors to stay longer and increase dwell time to increase economic development and support the environment.

Events also have a key role to play as a motivator to travel as well as delivering direct economic impact

*Make Yourself at Home* also states that a sustained programme of activity including an annual calendar of signature events, will help attract visitors back to our city following Covid, providing a much-needed boost for citizens as well as the cultural and hospitality sectors and the wider tourism industry.

It further recognises that events will be an exemplar for the four strategic themes of the plan: Grow, Position, Experience and Sustain. These events will:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly contribute to the growth of the tourism industry in Belfast through an increase in out-of-state visitors, dwell time and spend</li> <li>• Challenge perceptions of Belfast and raise awareness of the diversity and richness of the city’s culture, arts and heritage</li> <li>• Create authentic and contemporary Belfast Experiences of quality</li> <li>• Establish a model for carbon neutral activity.</li> </ul> <p>Finally, <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> notes that events of ambition within the city have the potential to be truly transformative. They will tell contemporary Belfast stories with an unprecedented international reach by fusing digital and real-life experiences. They will leave a lasting legacy of skills and capacity, that will support future generations of tourism ambassadors, creative talent and storytellers.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Impact of Covid 19:</b>
	<p>The Covid-19 pandemic had a considerable impact on events across the globe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mass gatherings were unsafe for an extensive period</li> <li>• Public confidence in events was affected</li> <li>• Considerable negative impact on suppliers to the event industry - staff shortages, redundancies, business closure</li> <li>• Spiralling costs.</li> </ul> <p>Within Council, all events were cancelled during 2020, and in 2021, those which returned were delivered differently, recognising the on-going need for social distancing.</p> <p>Council events have now in - large returned to pre - pandemic delivery levels, however that is not withstanding the fact that events staff, suppliers and providers are now more difficult to source, with many moving to work in other sectors during the pandemic, infrastructure and ancillary costs have as a result increased substantially and the Council events budget does not currently fully reflect this ‘new world’ of event delivery post - Covid.</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Status Quo - Current Delivery:</b>
	<p>Traditionally the Events team within the Tourism and Events Unit are responsible for a range of event activity which can be largely categorised below:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of civic events in the City - the St Patrick’s celebrations, Lord Mayors Day, and Christmas Lights Switch on. This would also include ad hoc events of this scale, recent examples being Operation Shamrock and the King’s Coronation</li> <li>• The development and delivery of the Belfast Maritime Festival – a signature event for Belfast – now on a biennial basis as a result of a major strategic review</li> <li>• Thirdly, the team have a multitude of roles in respect of major or mega events. Often, these are events involving NI wide stakeholders with a number currently in the pipeline, namely; , The Oireachtas in 2025 and Ongoing Bidding for the All Ireland Fleadh Cheoil in 2026/27 Past examples included the Giro D’italia, World Police and Fire Games, MTV Music awards, Tall Ships, One Young World</li> </ul> <p>Delivery of these events, no matter the scale, involves a vast spectrum of tasks which range from stakeholder liaison, consultation, managing contractors, health and safety, legal and insurance, traffic management, community co-design, and significant procurement. Whilst ensuring strategic alignment and maximising the opportunities presented for the city.</p> <p>Whilst the cultural strategy recognises the opportunity that hosting of major events has for city positioning it recommends delivery of 1 major event every 5 years, and should we be successful in our current bidding we could be in the position of one major every year for the next 3 years.</p> <p>The remit of the Events team also includes management of funding streams (Support for Sport) and oversight and contract management of the City’s Festive Lighting Scheme.</p>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Other events associated with Council:</b>
	<p>Managed by the Culture Unit in Council, the CMAG budget is £2.43m annually. This is broken down as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £473,425 to 16 Festivals and Events organisations for two years (minimum audiences of 10,000)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 600,240 to four Festivals and Events organisations for four years (minimum audiences of 65,000)</li> <li>• £791,783 to nine Arts and Heritage organisations for four years (audiences over (50,000).</li> <li>• £564,562 to 27 Arts and Heritage organisations for two years</li> </ul> <p>Finally, City and Neighbourhood Services also deliver a series of community and parks events throughout the year, with key projects being the Spring and Autumn Fairs.</p> <p>These events make up the calendar of city events and present an opportunity for cultural vibrancy and visitor experience but also opportunities for closer alignment of delivery, coordinated marketing and initiatives on sustainability and inclusivity.</p>
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Previous development work</b>
	<p>In July 2017, Council commissioned Festivals and Events International (FEI) to undertake a review of our investment in and support for Events and Festivals, with a view to developing a new Events strategy for the Council and its strategic partners.</p> <p>In March 2018, a Committee paper to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee presented the key FEI recommendations and proposed a way forward, in conjunction with key partners.</p> <p>The consultancy team’s key recommendations focused on a number of areas including Funding Streams, Capacity Building Support, Evaluation and Measurement and Governance and Delivery.</p> <p>CG&amp;R adopted the recommendations within the report on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018, these were subsequently integrated into the long term cultural strategy ‘A City Imagining’. While these reports refer to the ‘integration’ of the recommendations within the FEI report, there was a definitive shift in strategic direction which resulted in no stand-alone ‘Festival and Events strategy’ or Action plan being developed at that time.</p> <p>That decision was also taken within the context of a number of important developments and milestones, such as the cessation of the European Capital of</p>

	<p>Culture bidding process, initial recommendations arising from the draft Festival and Events Strategy and the conclusion in March 2020, of the current Cultural Framework and Tourism Strategy.</p> <p>It is important to also remind Members that the subsequent period of strategy development took place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and there has been significant change in market demand as well as delivery models, supplier infrastructure and costs.</p> <p>Tourism currently has a stand - alone plan to underpin 'A City Imagining' in the form of 'Make Yourself at Home' while City Events does not.</p>
<b>8.0</b>	<p><b>Need for an Updated Events Action Plan</b></p> <p>After significant scoping work , Officers are now of the view that while the FEI report still contains important and relevant information which needs reflected in an updated Events Action Plan to underpin both ' A City Imagining' and 'Make Yourself at Home' through the remainder of their life span (2029 / 2030), a new Events action Plan should be considered</p> <p>Additionally, Officers have experienced key 'Lessons Learned' in the period since both <i>City Imagining</i> and <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> began operational roll - out in relation to Council Managed Events - these should be reflected in an updated resourced Events Action Plan with review milestones, KPI's and associated ownership.</p> <p>This Events Action Plan will require in its formation a period of sectoral, strategic and Elected Member engagement to ensure future 'best fit' of Council - managed events and will address the following points,</p> <p><b>Strategic Context:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategic alignment to <i>Belfast Agenda</i>, <i>City Imagining</i> and <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> as well as other regional strategies (eg <i>DfE Tourism strategy</i>, <i>ACNI strategy</i>) is needed,</li></ul>

- Ensure that Council city events delivered align to the strategic ambitions and priorities of Council
- Consideration of the Council city events portfolio within the context of the events life cycle and rejuvenation points needed at specific future gateways
- Clear articulation and rationalisation needed on what events Council should deliver - 'who, what where, when and why' approach
- Horizon scanning is needed for Officers to identify emerging trends and opportunities for new events
- An aligned approach to ensure that Council events align to the new Tourism NI Events Strategic Vision.
- Consideration of bidding process and decision making frameworks for major/bid for events

***Filtering Mechanism:***

- Review and rationalisation of both the quality and quantity of Council events currently being delivered and to be delivered in the future
- Consideration is also required as to the appropriateness of Council as the delivery agent for each event in the portfolio or whether other city stakeholders are best placed to deliver certain events or city animation e.g. ongoing work to consider councils role in delivery of culture night.

***Development Plans:***

- Developmental pathway for each Council event with a Tourism lens and associated budget profiling is needed to ensure tourism and positioning potential is fully exploited.

***Budget / Procurement:***

- The Council Events Team has a developmental remit, which is not being fully exploited due to constraints on current resources – multi-annual budget consideration is required to allow for developmental pathways- annual budgets present developmental challenges meaning that focus is often on in year delivery.
- The Council events budget has been 'stand still' without 'year on year' developmental or inflationary increases –



- Cultural co-design capability requires enhancement
- Lead-in time for the sector needs to be longer and 2 - 3 year procurement deals are required to allow events to develop / grow

***Segmentation:***

- Clear visitor segmentation for events is required for each event and Council delivery approach tailored accordingly - much of the portfolio is currently a 'Family Fun' segment, with a limited offering for other identified market segments – there are opportunities to reach some of the more targeted segments.

***Programming:***

- Balance is needed between cultural co-design / commissioning and 'buying in' programming content as needed for event standout (capacity and capability to deliver must be reviewed). Local input on programming v international input needs considered.
- Internally, a balance is also needed on robust event governance, event development and operational delivery for Officers - all of which are functions associated with the internal Tourism and Events Unit.

***Events Team Resourcing:***

- The role of the Events Team is currently varied - Event Delivery Agents v Event Development v Major Event / Bidding, a clear resource plan is needed and staffing structure allocated accordingly
- Contingency / flexibility is needed in future event resource planning, especially in relation to major event planning and delivery, as period of high / peak season.
- Flexibility to deal with and respond to ad hoc opportunities

***Major Events:***

- A new approach needs developed for Major Event Bidding in the City - this is currently reactive for Officers
- A direction is needed on the number of major events to be delivered over the coming years with associated resourcing

***Alignment between Culture and Events:***

- Further integration on how CMAG events and Council-managed events can best deliver for the culture and tourism offering within the city
- Benchmarking of synergies between tourism and cultural events with other Local Authorities is required reflecting 'best practice' – beyond NI
- The role of city events within the existing Festivals Forum
- The legacy impact of Belfast 2024 on cultural / tourism event delivery. Belfast 2024 puts Belfast on an international stage as a culturally vibrant destination and this will present ongoing opportunities to deliver a compelling proposition for the city as a home of events.

***Delivery Structures / Governance:***

- Streamlining of governance arrangements across events in the City events calendar across delivery partners
- The potential establishment of new Events Forum for the city needs explored

***Belfast Event Positioning:***

- The status of Belfast as gateway events destination for the region needs further exploration - to include benchmarking within the NI context and beyond
- Event themes aligned to our tourism positioning require further analysis - UNESCO City of Music, Maritime etc, ensuring Belfast can position itself as a 'Home of Events' and international events destination
- An updated events SWOT for the city and event gap analysis against thematic areas is required. This will inform event development as well as funding and bidding strategies
- New and emerging event 'hooks' through the ongoing 'Belfast Stories' project needs to be considered, including developing accessible and sustainable events
- The consideration of how new tourism product is developed around the city managed events portfolio requires further exploration, as well as how visitor experience can be maximised.

***Categorisation / Events Criteria:***

- A clearly defined event criteria and purpose is required - tourism, civic, community, cultural, business, corporate (or a combination of these) and the associated hierarchy of city events and subsequent growth potential
- This new pyramid structure should include definitions and criteria for segmentation, programming, categorisation of events which best lend themselves to co-design / commissioning as well as measuring impact / success
- Consideration of event city centre and geographic dispersal across the city centre and neighbourhoods is needed, in line with Neighbourhood Tourism
- A resourced evaluation / monitoring mechanism is required for each category and tier of event and metrics need considered in light of existing models, such as eventIMPACTS and emerging industry updates, while considering Council's own bespoke evaluation, monitoring and reporting needs that take into account social and cultural impact in addition to economic.

***Marketing:***

- An analysis is needed of the Communications, PR and MARCOMM's approach to each Council-managed event and 'best fit' future direction on the consumer / corporate approach with associated budget requirements.
- Consideration to opportunities to leverage international marcomms opportunities

***Funding Synergies / Sponsorship:***

- Consideration is needed as to how Council aligns with other event funders in terms of maximising budgets in the current economic climate – the use of co-investment models
- Sponsorship options for Council events also need consideration within the context of financial sustainability.

***Policy Context:***

- An analysis is needed in terms of gaps on current event policy such as Charity and Community / Business Engagement - considering benchmarking data and recommendations for future approach.

***Training / Education:***

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review of current and future training, networking and advocacy needs of the city events sector is needed to consolidate Council’s role as ‘leaders’ in ‘best practice’ tourism / cultural event delivery.</li> </ul> <p>To this end, Council Officers are proposing the development of an Events Action Plan for City Events which would underpin both <i>City Imagining</i> and <i>Make Yourself at Home</i>, which would consolidate the previous findings of the FEI report from 2018, while incorporating new recommendations from the ‘Lessons Learned’ of Officers, and delivery partners, over the last two plus years.</p> <p>This would include an assessment on issues highlighted as above, while detailing a future approach to events, including internal resourcing requirements and associated staff skills, governance arrangements and budget requirements to ensure city events are maximised to their full potential in the years ahead.</p> <p>This Action Plan would allow Officers to agree formalised developmental pathways for the Council-managed portfolio. Findings will be brought back to Committee for consideration in due course. This will inform the Events Unit business planning over the period of the new Action Plan.</p> <p>Officers are therefore requesting permission to develop a Terms of Reference for issue to market in the coming weeks, for providers to assist with the development of this Events Action Plan, with an associated budget requirement of up to £40,000 to be financed within core budgets.</p> <p>The commissioned work will incorporate a process of sectoral consultation with relevant stakeholders and Elected Member engagement to inform the Action Plan.</p>
<b>9.0</b>	<b>Financial and Resource Implications:</b>
	The development of an Events Action Plan has a budget of up to £40,000 to be allocated for existing budgets.
<b>10.0</b>	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment:</b>
	Any future Events Action Plan will be screened as required.

