



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	The Gathering
Date:	20 November 2012
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Gathering is an initiative designed to boost visitor numbers and contribute to restoring the Republic of Ireland economy, rebuild national pride and renew global reputation. The aims are to celebrate Ireland and reach out to global connections.
1.2	30 million Americans said that they had Irish ancestry in the 2000 US census and 5 million said that they had Scots Irish (or Ulster Scots) heritage. Just fewer than 4 million Canadians and 2 million Australians also have Ireland connections. While figures in Britain are less clear, 6 million Britons have a close Irish relative.
1.3	The Gathering includes a calendar of events, both professional and at community level, and an open invitation to individuals, communities, parishes, schools and companies to join in the celebration. Appendix 1 highlights the frequently asked questions and answers from The Gathering website

2	Key Issues
2.1	Fáilte Ireland (FI) have received an additional €5m into their regular events fund, normally consisting of over 380 regular events/festivals, to encourage event/festival organisers to stage additional Gathering elements to their normal events.
2.2	In addition to this, local residents have been asked to run 'Gathering' events and as part of this a 'write and invite' message is being communicated by the tourism bodies. No budget support is being offered for this element, however FI have dedicated a number of staff to the project. They have been engaging community and local groups to put on Gathering events. In the region of 200 locally organised gathering events have been planned.

2.3	All events, whether normal events/festivals, or specially organised local gathering events, are registered on the Gathering website www.thegatheringireland.com .
2.4	Of the local community events that have been organised, a majority of these are private, friends and family, events and not open to the public or visitors to attend. Of the total local community events that have been organised 95% of these are small events.
2.5	Northern Ireland has a significant year planned in 2013, both in terms of hosting the World Police and Fire Games, one of the largest sporting events in the year which will see in the region of 25,000 people visiting Belfast and NI in August 2013, as well as the exciting programme of events planned for Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture which will see a number of events come to NI for the first time, including the prestigious Turner Prize and the All Ireland Fleadh.
2.6	<p>The official response on the current position of Northern Ireland Tourist Board/Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on The Gateway is as follows:</p> <p><i>The Minister welcomes any scheme that has the potential to bring more tourists to Northern Ireland, building on the success of ni2012 and boosting potential visitors to NI in 2013. In 2013 Northern Ireland will have plenty to offer the visitor with Londonderry as the first UK City of Culture and Belfast hosting the World Police and Fire Games.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, there are many organisations that are active both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Where they are involved with the Gathering Initiative and wish to organise events in Northern Ireland, such events will be welcome.</i></p>
2.7	Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) Tourism Events Fund has just closed with 80 applications received. There is no additional funding for events linked to The Gathering.
2.8	Any events taking place in Ireland (north and south) can register as part of the The Gathering and there are no costs. The site will be promoted by Tourism Ireland throughout 2013 in their key target markets. To date there are approximately 10 'Gathering Events' registered in Northern Ireland. Events such as St Patrick's Day could maximise exposure by registering as a 'Gathering' event.
2.9	Officers are aware that some tourism organisations such as Fáilte Feirste Thair have been in discussions with Tourism Ireland and are keen to be part of The Gathering initiative. Officers are also aware that initiatives such as The Gathering and potential events planned for Belfast 400, may stimulate visitor demand for genealogy and ancestry products and services. Due to a number of providers across the city offering different elements of this service, Council could support more integrated signposting of visitors to what is available through web information and print material.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	No additional resources are required to register events on the Gathering and to communicate the opportunity to wider event and festival organisers across the city.
3.2	Some budget could be ring fenced within the 2013/14 Tourism, Culture and Arts budget to promote the city's genealogy and ancestry products and services which may appeal to increased visitors coming to Ireland during 2013 and encourage them to Belfast.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations Considerations attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Officers would therefore recommend: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Registering Council led events on The Gathering website and communicate the opportunity to wider events and festivals across the city via a workshop with the Festivals Forum. 2. Work with key partners such as PRONI and the Ulster Historical Foundation to strengthen Belfast's genealogy offer for 2013.

6	Decision Tracking
There is no Decision Tracking attached to this report.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
FI - Fáilte Ireland NITB – Northern Ireland Tourist Board PRONI – Public Records Office Northern Ireland	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 - The Gathering FAQs	