



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast Poet Laureate initiative
Date:	15 April 2014
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officers:	Brian Johnston, Tourism Culture & Arts Manager, ext 3586

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Dr Sinead Morrissey was appointed Belfast's inaugural Poet Laureate last July by the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Mairtin Ó Muilleoir.
1.2	Dr Morrissey is a resident of the city and reader in creative writing at QUB's Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry and earlier this year she won the internationally recognised T.S. Eliot Prize for Poetry.
1.3	As Poet Laureate for the city in 2013/14, the award-winning Dr Morrissey has engaged the public in poetry and has been a positive and active ambassador for the city. She has taken part in a series of public events locally and internationally and has performed outreach work with community groups, prisons, language organisations and minority groups. She has been commissioned to produce a series of poems about Belfast.
1.4	The Belfast Poet Laureate initiative has helped to support the Literary Belfast tourism product to enhance the profile of the city and helped develop new local audiences for the arts.
1.5	The initiative was developed in consultation with Arts Council NI, with the support of commercial sponsors Movie House Cinemas who were match funded by Arts and Business. The three partners each contributed £2,500 to cover the poet's expenses and Arts Council NI has administered the investment. No financial investment has been made by Belfast City Council to date.
1.6	Given the success of this initiative, Members are requested to consider recommending the initiative as an annual commitment? The statutory organisations have indicated that they would be willing to maintain their current level of financial support.
1.7	Sinead Morrissey and UK Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy, together with John Sampson (musician, poet and actor), will perform at a celebratory event on 14 May 2014 at Movie House Cinema.

1.8	This event is a highlight of the One City One Book project which takes place annually during May. The One City One Book project is an Arts Council of Northern Ireland's reading initiative which promotes local contemporary writing by encouraging everyone across the city to read and discuss the same book during the month of May. Belfast City Council helps to promote this initiative through its City Dressing marketing campaign.
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2	Key Issues
2.1	Dr Sinead Morrissey, together with the UK Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy and musician/performer John Sampson will perform at an event during May in Belfast to celebrate the close of the first year of this initiative.
2.2	The event will take place on 14 May at a Movie House Cinema in the city and will be open to the public free of charge.
2.3	Should there be Council agreement to extend the initiative for future years, a policy and guidelines for selection of future Poet Laureates would be developed in partnership with Arts Council NI and would be developed as part of the Literary Belfast tourism product.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<u>Financial</u> None.

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

5	Recommendations
5.1	It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report and agree representation of Belfast City Council at the Poet Laureate celebratory event on 14 May 2014.
5.2	It is recommended that Members consider further embracing the Poet Laureate initiative for Belfast as part of the city's Literary Belfast on an ongoing basis.

6	Decision Tracking
Tourism, Culture, Heritage and Arts Manager to implement Committee decision.	