Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Northern Ireland Science Festival
Date:	15 April 2014
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officers:	Lisa Toland, Economic Development Manager, ext 3459

1	**Relevant Background Information**
1.1	The inaugural Northern Ireland Science Festival is scheduled to take place from mid-February to early March 2015. The festival is seeking to build on a format that has been very successful for a number of cities in recent years, notably Dublin (City of Science in 2012) and Brighton which holds an annual event that runs for a month in February each year.
1.2	The Northern Ireland festival will be based principally in Belfast with some events also taking place across the region.

2	**Key Issues**
2.1	A science festival is an event that showcases science and technology in the same way that events take place to promote arts or music. Numerous cities now include science festivals as part of their programme of city events, using these as a way of generating footfall in the city but also assisting in profiling the city as a centre for technology and economic growth. In Derry/Londonderry, the city has recently invested in the high profile CultureTech event and this was a flagship event in the City of Culture programme in 2013, albeit that the focus was more on culture and technology. A follow-up event is planned for this year.
2.2	The vision for the Northern Ireland Science Festival is to showcase science, technology, engineering and maths as a central part of our culture and society. Statistics suggest that there is a considerable mismatch between the number of young people studying these subjects at school and the demand from employers for staff with this educational background.
2.3	It is intended that the event will act as a focal point for partners to demonstrate the best of what they do, while at the same time raising awareness among young people of the opportunities available to them in these fields.
2.4	In addition, it is intended that the event can act as an anchor in the branding of

	Belfast as a "smart city" and one in which technology supports and drives its daily operation and its future growth.
2.5	The event is being organised by a company with charitable status called Science Festival NI. Its board consists of representatives from twelve organisations including the two local universities, Northern Ireland Science Park, Institute of Physics, Institute of Engineering and Technology and Open University.
2.6	At present, the organisation is in the process of developing its business plan including identifying potential funding sources for sponsorship and event support. It has a target of around £120,000 to be secured from sponsorship to make the event happen.
2.7	Event planning is currently under way and a number of venues have been provisionally booked for key events across the city of Belfast. One of the major areas of focus for the festival will be to undertake events in local communities, in conjunction with schools. In addition, they are seeking to partner with some key media organisations in order to raise the profile of the event locally and nationally and to link into national campaigns to make science interesting to young people in particular.
2.8	The event organisers have indicated that they would be keen to secure Council support for the event and that once a business plan is further developed they may approach the Council for financial support.

3	**Resource Implications**
3.1	Resource implications not yet finalised; the organising committee has indicated that they will seek funding from the Council to deliver the event – report to be presented to a future meeting of the Development Committee.

4	**Equality and Good Relations Considerations**
4.1	There are no specific equality or good relations considerations attached to this report.

5	**Recommendations**
5.1	Members are asked to: - Note plans to organise the first Northern Ireland Science Festival in February 2015 - Note the organisers' aspirations to secure Council support for the event with a request for financial support to be presented to a future meeting of the Development Committee.

6	**Decision Tracking**
If Members agree to support the event, a request for financial assistance will be brought back to a future meeting. Timeline: June 2014 Reporting Officer: Lisa Toland	