



Belfast City Council

Report to: Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Subject: **Communications Update**

Date: 11th December, 2009

Reporting Officer: Eamon Deeny, Head of Corporate Communications, ext 6285

Contact Officer: As above

Relevant Background Information

Significant progress has been made in developing an efficient and effective communications service for Belfast City Council with a view to improving the image and reputation of the organisation. New communications channels, such as the website, Facebook and Twitter are successfully being used to reach ratepayers alongside the continued development and improvement of existing and traditional channels such as the media, City Matters and publications. All of this has been achieved while at the same realising significant savings for the council. This report sets out to outline details of progress to members.

Key Issues

Awards and recognition

July 2009: UK Good Communications Awards (the main communications awards for the public sector in the UK) – Belfast City Council Corporate Communications was one of just four local authorities across the UK to be shortlisted for PR Team of the year and was a commended runner up.

December 2009: CIPR Awards (the PR industry's main awards of the year for both in-house and consultancy PR) – Belfast City Council was described as the most prolific winner on the night, picking up awards in a range of categories. The awards were the result of excellent team work across departments.:

Gold Award – Best Newsletter – the A-Z of Council Services

Gold Award – Best Leaflets – Information on Flooding

Gold Award – Best Website – The Zoo

Gold Award – Best Integrated Communication – Waste Management

Silver Award – Best Newspaper/magazine – City Matters

Silver Award – Best Event – the MAD Awards.

October 2009 – Belfast City Council was held up at a Social Networking Conference in the Odyssey in Belfast, attended by 400 people, as the best example of how organisations should use Facebook and Twitter to engage with customers.

Efficiencies

The Council has developed a corporate approach to effective communications, by the internal transfer of resources, delivering the 2005 recommendations while also achieving significant savings. With the support and co-operation of departments, total efficiencies in the area of communications will have amounted to over £1.265 million in the three year period ending 2009/10. See table below:

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	Total
Publications		£ 60,000	£ 50,000	£650,000
Graphic design	£180,000	£180,000	£180,000	
City Matters A-Z	£ 80,000	£160,000 £ 35,000	£100,000	£375,000
Advertising			£140,000	£240,000
Recruitment – reduced spend			£100,000	
Total	£260,000	£435,000	£570,000	£1,265,000

Website

The number of unique visits to the council website has increased almost threefold in the past three years, from around 675,000 in 2006 to almost 2 million in 2009. The progress has continued this year with 135,130 visitors in April compared to almost 160,000 in September.

Hits on the website peaked in August with 216,000 unique visitors as a result of the Tall Ships visit ensuring that Belfast City Council website was one of the top four sites for traffic among all public sector sites in the UK.

City Matters

City Matters continues to be our most successful communications tool. We continue to get up to 1,000 responses from the publication's readers including comments, feedback and requests for information, with the vast majority of these being extremely positive about the publication and about Belfast City Council.

The cost per edition is £38.5k. It is partly paid through advertising income which averages £20k per edition. City Matters is delivered six times a year but one edition will be removed from next year's budget for efficiency reasons.

A-Z of council services

Our A-Z directory highlighting all the services the council provides began distribution on 7 December and will be delivered to all ratepayers.

The income generated through advertising for this publication was £27k out of the total cost of £40.5k.

Graphic design

Out of the 207 design jobs carried out over the past six months, over half of these were completed by our in-house designer. These include:

- City Matters
- Intercom
- The City Hall reopening campaign
- Garden Gourmet campaign
- Tall Ships publications.

A second designer on a fixed contract is starting in December 2009. This means that we will significantly reduce our spend on graphic design – over £120k was spent on using external companies in 2008-09 – as we will be able to do even more design work in-house.

New media

Corporate Communications will bring forward a digital strategy for the council early in the New Year and will also develop policies and procedures around the use of new communications technologies, such as email marketing and social networking, to ensure a corporate value for money approach is adopted across the council.

- **Email marketing**

A procurement document has been sent out for an email marketing solution to ensure a corporate approach. This will provide efficiency savings by cutting down on things such as print and postage. It will also be a more targeted and measurable way of communicating.

- **Social networking**

The use of this new channel of communication is proving to be extremely successful. For example over 8,000 people said they would be visiting the continental market at Christmas through our Facebook site .We have successfully promoted events, such as Stitch and Style for Waste Week, as well as our Lord Mayor's blog on both Twitter and Facebook. Belfast City Council now has 972 followers on Twitter and 415 followers on Facebook.

Branding

Corporate Communications is working closely with BCVB on the development and roll out of the 'B' brand and developing council guidelines around its use.

Media Relations

Media enquiries – Increasing media demands, with 24 hour news bulletins and more weekly newspapers, meant that there has been a 10 per cent increase in media queries during the past six months, 1626 enquiries were dealt with – an average of just under 300 per month.

Response times - An improvement in response times indicates 71% are dealt with in less than one hour, and 11% in 1 to 4 hours.

Analysis of enquiries - During the period, analysis of figures for regional broadcast media show that BBC NI made most demands on staff time with 61% of enquiries and UTV 12% of enquiries

Media coverage - over 80% of newspaper stories are now positive

Positive media coverage that has been achieved for BCC has included the Tall Ships, the Belfast 2009 campaign highlighting the reopening of landmark buildings, such as the City Hall and Ulster Hall, alongside new developments, Safer Belfast, anti-litter and waste management campaigns, the continental market, health and leisure initiatives, economic development and older people.

Journalists recently surveyed as an part of an evaluation of the implementation of the 2005 review of communications said that the Belfast City Council media operation is among the best, if not the best, in Northern Ireland. The services we provide the media include:

- Online news facility which publishes all press releases issued by the council with accompanying photographs for press use
- Links to social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter
- RSS feeds which deliver news updates to journalists each time the website is updated

Advertising

Following implementation of many of the recommendations from the Verve 2007 report on advertising the following advertising savings have been made this year to date:

- Recruitment advertising - £100,200
- Placement of advertising - £6,500 (by booking adverts display not classified)
- City Hall opening campaign - £17k of media delivered for £10k, 41% discount
- Boost January (planned) activity – £40k of media delivered for £19,182, 52% discount
- Added value delivered such as FOC print for bus stop 6 sheet activity and FOC outdoor sites

Significant volume advertising discounts have also been negotiated with main media suppliers ensuring that the council gets value for money when placing its advertising. We have also generated advertising revenue to help cover the cost of City Matters and the A-Z directory as outlined above.

An audit report on the council's approach to advertising is currently being completed. Once it is finalised, Corporate Communication will begin to develop an advertising strategy, including defined policies and procedures. Its aim will be to further improve effectiveness and achieve further significant savings and will be brought to the committee for approval early in the New Year.

Internal Communications

The past six months, a number of major initiatives have been developed to improve communications with staff across the council, both in terms of existing and new channels

Interlink – employee intranet - News stories of interest to staff including council decisions and policies are uploaded with many new sections added regularly with information on staff offers, the staff restaurant, ISB customer zone, Waste treatment facilities and performance. The success of the site is underlined by the fact that more than 1,600 distinct staff visit the site on a monthly basis with over 7,000 hits per day, making it an effective communications tool.

Getting People Connected - A pilot, called Getting People Connected, is to run at six sites (depots, leisure and community centres) during December 2009 to get information to staff who don't have PCs. TV screens will be installed in staff canteens to display stories from interlink's homepage.

Intercom – During the past six months three editions have been produced. Among the stories features has been the 2009 MAD Awards and a pull out on the reopening of City Hall, the Tall Ships event and stories on performance and business issues such as absence and local government review updates. A reader satisfaction survey in July showed over 96 per cent of respondents rated the publication as good or very good.

Team brief - The team brief has been reviewed with the brief now issued to all departments every second month. Over 150 team briefers have been on refresher training and the new evaluation system has been running for six months.

Face to face - one council briefings – Regular staff briefings take place at City Hall informing staff of important issues, such as RPA and the many challenges facing our organisation.

Future plans – Initiatives under consideration include the use of video to get across messages to staff, further development of Interlink as a two-way communications device with staff.

A high priority will be given to exploring with Members how they want to receive information and be kept informed about operational work and activity and initiatives aligned to our corporate themes.

Resource Implications

None

Recommendations

Members are asked to note:

- The recent awards successes achieved by Belfast City Council for its communications activity, which enhances the image and reputation of the council and the city as a whole;
- The efficiencies and improvements achieved as a result of professionalising the communications service
- The efforts to embrace new communications channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, as a way of improving services and engagement with ratepayers.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Twitter details and examples
Appendix 2 – Facebook details and examples
Appendix 3 – You Tube
Appendix 4 - Flickr

Twitter

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets.

Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers who are known as followers.

Followers

We currently have **925 followers** (16 November 2009). Our followers include ratepayers, businesses, councillors, other councils and government agencies, as well as members of the press.

What do we use Twitter for?

We use Twitter to post information about council projects, events, news, jobs and tenders. We also use it during emergencies such as flooding. It is a quick and easy way to communicate key messages.

Within our messages, we always include a web link back to the council website so users can get further information.

Our followers can also communicate with us via our Twitter page, sending us queries or questions about council events and services.

Other features

- **Search facility** - this allows us to monitor what people are saying on Twitter about the council and council projects or events.
- **Re-tweet facility** - Twitter enables people to 're-tweet' our tweet to their followers so our message is spread virally to people.
- **'Follow' facility** – we can follow other users and organisations, particularly partners, to promote a joined approach



belfastcc

That's you!

Lists

Our Christmas Continental Market starts tomorrow (Tues) at 10am at Belfast City Hall. It sells food, drinks and crafts. <http://ow.ly/CGre>

less than 20 seconds ago from HootSuite

Tenders: E903 - Expression of interest for the recovery and refurbishment of goods and items deposited at the Council... <http://ow.ly/161sp3>

6:40 PM Nov 13th from HootSuite

Tenders: ST902 - Pre-qualification questionnaire for the supply and delivery of two and four wheeled waste and recy... <http://ow.ly/161sp2>

6:40 PM Nov 13th from HootSuite

Name Belfast City Council

Location Belfast

Web <http://www.belfas...>

Bio The latest news, jobs, events and tenders from Belfast City Council

31 following **923** followers **28** listed

Tweets **690**

Favorites

Following



[RSS feed of belfastcc's tweets](#)

Example - Lord Mayor's blog

We are currently trialling the Lord Mayor's blog at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/lordmayorsblog

It was set up at the end of August 2009 and currently has eight postings.

On average, the blog receives around 500 visits per month but this will increase over time as we develop the section.

When a blog post is added on our website, we put a comment on Twitter directing our followers back to our website. Some of these postings are below:



These Twitter postings have generated over 300 visits to the Lord Mayor's blog on our website. This builds awareness of the Lord Mayor's role and activities as well as showcasing what the council website has to offer.

Facebook

What is Facebook?

Facebook is a global social networking website. It allows people to connect and share information with friends. Businesses and organisations can also use it to communicate key messages to their 'fans' – people who have decided to receive information and updates from a business or organisation.

Fans

We currently have **363 fans** (16 November 2009). Our fans include rate payers, businesses, councillors, government agencies and members of the press.

What do we use Facebook for?

We use Facebook to post information about council projects, events, news, jobs and tenders. We also use it during emergencies, such as flooding. Within our postings, we include web links back to the council website so users can get further information. It is a quick and easy way to communicate key messages.

Our fans can also communicate with us via our Facebook page, sending us queries or questions about council events and services. They can also comment on our postings and say whether they like it by 'giving it the thumbs up'.



Other features

- Photo and video galleries
- Events calendar
- Discussion boards.



Belfast City Council

- Wall
- Info
- Photos
- Discussions
- Events
- Boxes
- >>
- +

What's on your mind?

Attach:

Share

Options



Belfast City Council We have teamed up with the Irish Football Association to create a special five-a-side tournament for women. Futsal is a relatively new sport in Northern Ireland, offering a high-paced and exciting game for both players and spectators. Come along to Shankill Leisure Centre, Sunday 15 November at 12.30pm and show your support!

Ladies' Futsal Tournament

Source: www.belfastcity.gov.uk

Fri at 17:17 · Comment · Like · Share



Belfast City Council



Christine Bleakley and The One Show at Christmas Continental Market

Source: www.belfastcity.gov.uk

BBC's The One Show will be broadcasting a Children In Need special stunt, live from the Santa's Grotto at the Christmas Continental Market on Thursday 19 November, between 7pm and 7.30pm, when presenter Christine Bleakley will be trying to avoid being 'gunged' by Pudsey and some young local helpers!

Fri at 14:35 · Comment · Like · Share

2 people like this.

Edit Page

Promote with an advert

Activate mobile status updates

Promote with a fan box

Send an update to Fans

Add to my page's favourites

Remove from my page's favourites

Belfast City Council is the largest council in Northern Ireland, serving more than 260,000 people. Become a fan to read more about our latest events or









Example – Christmas Continental Market

We added the Christmas Continental Market to the council’s Facebook events calendar and it has received a huge response from people on Facebook.

Like Twitter, users can ‘share’ our information/events/postings with their friends and our message can spread virally. People can also invite their friends to go to our events and this is what has happened with the Continental Market. We currently have 7,850 confirmed guests (16 November 2009) for the market - the event was communicated to these people virally.

Confirmed guests

This event has [7,776 confirmed guests](#) [See all](#)

							
Rhonda Greenaway	Seliabel Unabee	Hollie Watson	Sarah Buchan	Karen Cullen	Nicola McElroy	Gary Craig	Geraldine Gray


Our fans can also post comments on our Facebook page and events. We currently have 241 posts about the Christmas Continental Market.



Luke McGibbon wrote
at 00:00

This is such a big part of my Belfast christmas. I love it I love it I love it. I'm so excited :D

[Report - Delete](#)



Natasha Lee Gracey (Northern Ireland) wrote
at 23:25 yesterday

THIS is what gets me excited about Christmas : D

[Report - Delete](#)



Trina McKenna wrote
at 22:05 yesterday

Best market + best season = best city! shall be there ;)

[Report - Delete](#)

31 Christmas Continental Market

Christmas food, drink and entertainment!

Host: [Belfast City Council](#)
Type: [Other - Carnival/Fun Fair](#)
Network: [Global](#)

Start Time: [Tuesday, 17 November 2009 at 10:00](#)
End Time: [Saturday, 19 December 2009 at 20:00](#)
Location: [Belfast City Hall](#)
Town/City: [Belfast, United Kingdom](#)

Phone: [02890320202](#)
Email: markets@belfastcity.gov.uk

Description

Once again the City Hall grounds will come alive with dozens of market stalls offering a stunning range of crafts, food and decorations from across Europe, and beyond, to delight the Christmas shopper seeking original gifts.

Opening hours are:

- * Monday to Wednesday 9am to 8pm
- * Thursday to Saturday 9am to 10pm
- * Sunday 1pm to 6pm.

Please note, the market will start at 10am on Tuesday 17 November and close at 8pm on Saturday 19 December.

Food and drink includes:

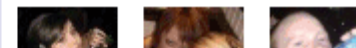
- * Bratwurst sausages and German beers
- * warming gluhwein
- * gourmet burgers
- * Spanish paella
- * toasted baguettes

[Invite people to come](#)[Promote event with an advertisement](#)[Edit Guest List](#)[Cancel this Event](#)[Edit event](#)[Update Fans of Belfast City Council](#)[Export](#)**Other information**

Guests are allowed to bring friends to this event.

Other invitations

Might attend (530)

[See all](#)

Christmas Continental Market

Christmas food, drink and entertainment!

Host: [Belfast City Council](#)
 Type: [Other - Carnival/Fun Fair](#)
 Network: Global

Start Time: Tuesday, 17 November 2009 at 10:00
 End Time: Saturday, 19 December 2009 at 20:00
 Location: Belfast City Hall
 Town/City: Belfast, United Kingdom

Phone: 02890320202
 Email: markets@belfastcity.gov.uk

Description

Once again the City Hall grounds will come alive with dozens of market stalls offering a stunning range of crafts, food and decorations from across Europe, and beyond, to delight the Christmas shopper seeking original gifts.

Opening hours are:

- * Monday to Wednesday 9am to 8pm
- * Thursday to Saturday 9am to 10pm
- * Sunday 1pm to 6pm.

Please note, the market will start at 10am on Tuesday 17 November and close at 8pm on Saturday 19 December.

Food and drink includes:

- * Bratwurst sausages and German beers
- * warming gluhwein
- * gourmet burgers
- * Spanish paella
- * toasted baguettes



[Invite people to come](#)

[Promote event with an advertisement](#)

[Edit Guest List](#)

[Cancel this Event](#)

[Edit event](#)

[Update Fans of Belfast City Council](#)

[Export](#) 

Other information

Guests are allowed to bring friends to this event.

Other invitations

Might attend (530)

[See all](#)



Appendix 3

YouTube

What is YouTube?

YouTube is a video sharing website on which users can upload and share videos.

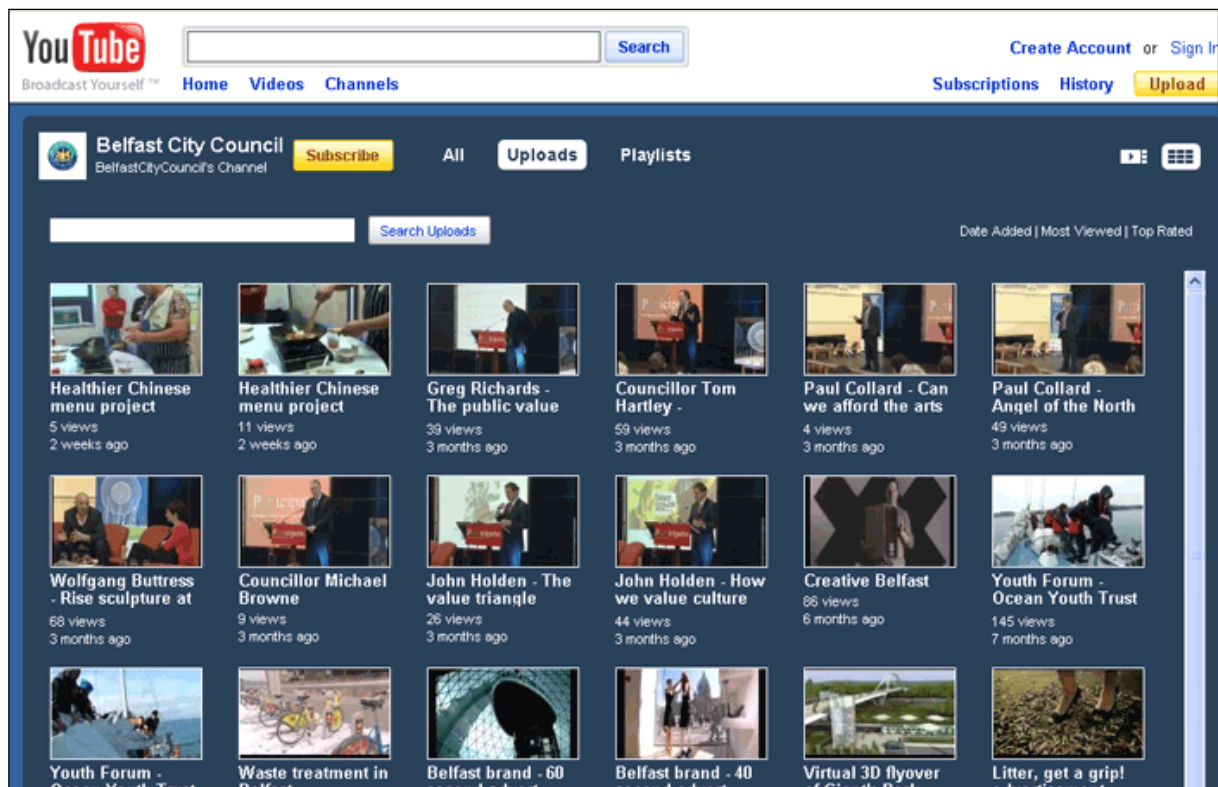
What do we use YouTube for?

We have uploaded nearly 20 videos to our council You Tube account including:

- Belfast brand TV adverts
- Anti-litter TV adverts
- Youth Forum videos.

You Tube compresses and resizes videos which we can then place on our website. Videos can also be shared between users to highlight projects and events.

These include:



Advantages

- makes use of video being produced already
- attracts a new and hard to reach audience
- reduces load on services
- allows content to be spread virally

Flickr

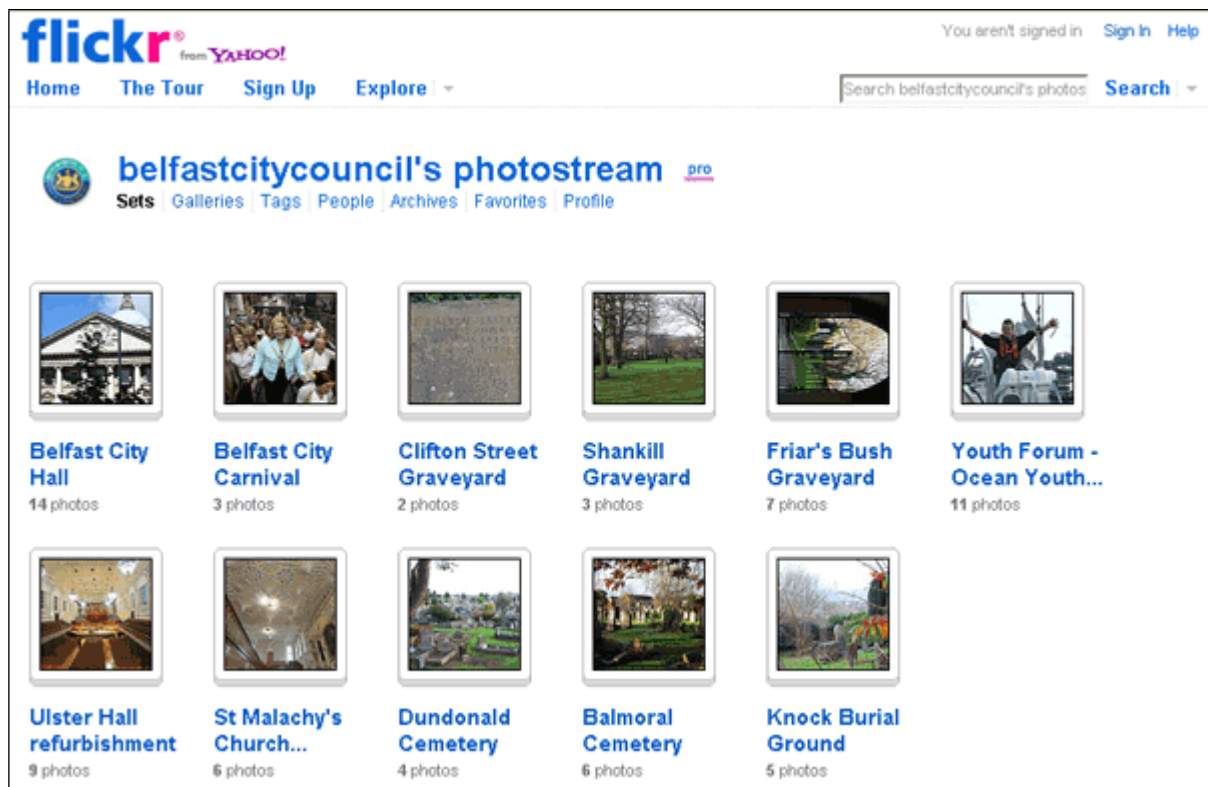
What is Flickr?

Flickr is an online photo management and sharing application.

What do we use Flickr for?

We have uploaded a number of photos to our Flickr page. Once there, we can pull the images back onto the council website as an easy to use photo gallery. This saves time and resources as Flickr will crop and resize images automatically.

Flickr is also a good way to publicise an event or council project as users can 'share' photos with each other.



Advantages

- makes use of photography being produced already
- attracts a new and hard to reach audience
- reduces load on services
- allows content to be spread virally

The market in a million

Record numbers expected to go the whole hog at continental fair

MUGLEY

[belfasttelegraph.co.uk](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk)

A piece of the Continent is back in Belfast yesterday – and a million people are expected to see it. The Continental Market was opened yesterday and people were already expected to be the first to sample from croque monsieur.

Mr. Crooks, who was there with David Crooks, said: "In counting down the market opened, I really look at it every year. We just had our lunch break but it will be a frequent visitor next month."

More than 82 stalls, almost every corner of the market has established as one of Belfast's success stories.

Under through the City is a variety of smells drift through the air, coming from the various stalls or gift stalls selling incense. With each step different accents and languages greet you, giving a truly continental feel to the market.

Stalls from all over Europe further afield have added 15 new stalls have



THE MARKET IN NUMBERS

750,000

People visited the market last year

82

Different stalls

8,250

Fans on the market Facebook page

33

The number of days that market is open

5

Years the market has been in Belfast

The Continental Market returned to the grounds of Belfast City Hall yesterday

PAUL FAITH AND DAVID FITZGERALD