



Subject:	Belfast Christmas Market update
Date:	9 November 2016
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
Contact Officer:	Clodagh Cassin, Markets Development Manager

Is this report restricted?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on plans for the Christmas Market which will operate in the City Hall grounds and the immediate outer perimeter area on Donegall Square North from 19 November to 22 December 2016.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to; <ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the update on the Christmas Market at City Hall.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u> Members will be aware that Belfast City Council has hosted Christmas Markets in the grounds of the City Hall since 2004. The Market is now synonymous with the start of Christmas and, in recent years, its opening has been timed to coincide with the Christmas lights switch-on.
3.2	At the start of this year, the delivery of the Christmas Market was put out to tender. As a result of this process, Marketplace Europe (MPE) were appointed as the operator. MPE have been operating the market since 2004 as a result of previous procurement exercise.
3.3	The Christmas Market is extremely popular with visitors to the city and is one of the main attractions for tourists over the Christmas season. The last evaluation of the Christmas Market – carried out by Millward Brown Ulster in 2014 – noted that the Market generated around £58million into the local economy, with 60% of Market attendees also visiting local

	shops and 39% visiting local restaurants and cafés.
3.4	A recent survey of traders within the Belfast One BID area noted that 97% of those surveyed were aware of the Christmas Market. 91% felt that the Market was of significant direct value to the City while 35% of respondents felt that it was of direct benefit to their business. Traders at St George's also feel that the Christmas Market is complementary to their offer and has a positive impact on their trading performance.
3.5	Given the recent commitments by the Council to invest in the City Centre and to ensure that visitors to the City can benefit from a unique experience, officers took the opportunity of the procurement process for the Market to consider how it could add value to the City and could support some of the emerging Place Positioning narrative of a city open for business, with a unique character. A soft marketing testing process was undertaken to get feedback from potential bidders as to preferred locations, opening period, range of products etc and this information was used to inform the brief.
3.6	One of the most significant opportunities this year in particular was to consider the potential presented by the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink 2016. Members will be aware of a significant programme of promotion and awareness-raising activities supported by Tourism NI and led by Food NI. In keeping with this theme, the Market in 2016 will feature a number of unique local food traders who will showcase "The Best of Northern Ireland" in terms of food products. These companies are being selected by Food NI – an umbrella body for a range of food producers and restaurants – and will come from all over Northern Ireland.
3.7	The local traders will be located in new chalets which are to be placed along the outer perimeter railings on Donegall Square North. There will be 20 chalets at this location and 15 of those will be occupied by local food producers as well as a number of craft businesses. The stall holders will operate on a rota basis and will change twice a week. This will ensure that the local suppliers are able to produce sufficient stock to service the significant crowds that come to the Market. These chalets will be branded as "Year of Food and Drink NI". There will be around 90 chalets within the City Hall grounds. This is slightly fewer than in recent years and the market organisers have worked to improve the layout in order to reduce congestion at peak times.
3.8	MPE have also run a competition called "Pitch Perfect". This was open to new businesses and offered the opportunity to sell their products at the Market. This year, there were more than 50 entries to the competition and MPE selected two winners, one of which is a Belfast-based company – the Belfast Beard Company. This company supplies locally-produced beard oils and grooming products.
3.9	MPE have also invested in a significant outreach programme, as they have done in previous years. The school tours programme is already fully booked while their "buddy scheme" programme, which provides supported tours for those with disabilities, will provide opportunities to visit the markets at quieter times (10-12 on Mondays and Wednesdays).
3.10	The Christmas Grotto at the Market will be revamped this year by MPE and the chosen charity is the Children's Cancer Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital. In addition to the grotto, MPE have invested in a number of family-friendly activities and these will soon be announced

	as part of their promotional campaign for the market.
3.11	As in previous years, MPE are in the process of appointing a contractor to carry out an independent assessment of the economic impact of the Market. This information will be made available to the Council in early 2017 and can be used as a basis for future development in the course of the contract.
3.12	In order to facilitate the extended build programme, the September meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed that MPE could have access to the site from 7 November to start the pre-build work, focusing on the construction of the chalets on the East Lawn. Work will continue until 11 November and, at this point, the East Lawn will be screened off with panels. No work will be carried out during the observance of Armistice Day on 11 November or during the cross laying ceremony on 7 November morning. There will be a security presence on-site at all times during the pre-build.
3.13	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The contract for running the market was awarded to MPE following a public procurement exercise. There is no cost to the Council for running the event.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Equality & Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>No specific equality or good relations implications.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
4.1	None