



Subject:	Visit Belfast – Half Year Performance Report
Date:	6 December 2017
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
Contact Officer:	Clare Mullen, Tourism, Culture, Heritage & Arts Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on city tourism performance and to provide details of Visit Belfast’s marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity to date.
1.2	The report also seeks authority for Visit Belfast to attend the March 2018 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee to present their business plan and request for financial support for the financial year 2018/19.
2.0	Recommendations

2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of the report and the progress to date. • Agree to receive a presentation on Visit Belfast’s 2018-19 Business Plan in March 2018 for the consideration of the Agency’s request for ongoing financial support into 2018/19.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>As Members will be aware, Visit Belfast is the city’s Destination Marketing Management Organisation (DMMO) dedicated to marketing Belfast as a city break, conference, day-trip and cruise ship destination. It also, in its visitor servicing role, manages the operation of three gateway Visitor Information Centres (VICs) including Visit Belfast Welcome Centre, Arrivals George Best Belfast City Airport and Arrivals Belfast International Airport and a range of visitor servicing initiatives on behalf of Belfast City Council.</p> <p>3.2 Visit Belfast represents over 500 tourism businesses and services across the tourism industry and its core purpose is to create and service visitors for Belfast and Northern Ireland in order to generate an economic benefit for the city region, creating jobs and wealth.</p> <p>3.3 The role of Visit Belfast is to drive visitor numbers and increase visitor spend, by providing a mechanism for co-ordinating investment and market engagement. The organisation has a portfolio of marketing, sales and visitor servicing activity across both leisure and business tourism.</p> <p>3.4 2017-18 is the second year of a four-year strategy (2016-20) that aims to deliver a cumulative 1.4m bed nights, 680,000 cruise visitors, 3 million enquiries and £392m into the local economy by 2020. Visit Belfast is on target to achieve the milestones set for 2017-18.</p> <p>3.5 Visit Belfast’s strategy is an essential tool in growing the visitor economy in Belfast and Northern Ireland and, in particular, in achieving the Belfast Agenda commitment to increase the value of out-of-state tourism to £500million by 2021.</p> <p>3.6 Urban tourism continues to drive tourism on a global basis and Belfast continues to increasingly lift Northern Ireland tourism, contributing up to half of the NI visitor economy. Last month, the renowned travel guide Lonely Planet named Belfast (alongside the Causeway Coast) as their No. 1 region to visit in 2018; while earlier in the Autumn, Belfast</p>

was shortlisted as 'a leading European City Break destination' by the World Travel Awards. The city has also been successful in winning the Rising Star category at the National Geographic Traveller Awards in London, another major coup for the city.

3.7 Tourism, and in particular out-of-state tourism, has become a key economic driver for the city region, generating revenue and contributing to job growth. Belfast is central to the region's tourism ambitions and it is not simply about increasing hotel capacity, though private sector investment in hotel development will see over a thousand hotel rooms come on line by the end of 2018. Titanic Belfast's enduring popularity, the opening of HMS Caroline, the expansion of the Belfast Waterfront and the development of community-based tourism initiatives such as Failte Feirste Thiar and Eastside Partnership, in tandem with concerted Visit Belfast marketing, contributes to the Belfast Agenda and its stated outputs.

3.8 Belfast has experienced unprecedented tourism numbers to date in this calendar year, and projections from NISRA indicate that the economic impact for the city will exceed that of 2016, which was £334 million.

3.9 Outlined below is a summary of the performance so far this year in relation to hotel performance, sales and marketing, business tourism and cruise tourism. The figures below relate to the period January – September 2017 and performance is compared to the figures for the same period the previous year.

3.10 Belfast Hotel Performance (January-September 2017)

Between January-September, room occupancy stood at 82.3%, which is an increase of 3.5%. Room sales have increased by 3.9% and hotel revenue has increased by 18.6%. It is worth noting that occupancy figures spiked throughout the summer months, with June occupancy being 92% and 93% throughout August. On average, room occupancy during the summer months (April – September) was 87.9%.

Destination Interest and Visitor Servicing (January-September 2017)

3.11 Interest in Belfast as a destination of choice has increased. This is demonstrated by figures from Visit Belfast which show that the Visitor Centre handled 679,337 enquiries and welcomed 264,064 visitors through the doors. Both figures are reported to have increased by 18.4% and 21.3% respectively on the same period last year. The profile of these visitors is broken down as 22% from GB & NI, 14% Spain & Portugal, 9% Germany & France, 5% Asia, 3% ROI and 2% other world. Visitor service support is also provided at core events in the city. This is done through the provision of an information stand/point for delegates. Examples of such provision have been in relation to the Routes Europe Conference, the

	<p>Women's Rugby World Cup, and the UEFA Under 19 Women's Football Championship.</p> <p><u>Cruise Belfast</u></p> <p>3.12 The City welcomed unprecedented numbers of cruise ships this year. 94 ships arrived into Belfast Harbour, carrying an estimated number of 158,000 cruise visitors to the city, again an increase of 10.8% from last year. The economic benefit achieved this year from cruise tourism is estimated to be £6.6million. Planning is already underway for 2018, and it is expected that up to 200,000 cruise visitors will come to Belfast. This will generate an economic return in the region of £8.5million.</p> <p><u>Conferences in Belfast 2017</u></p> <p>3.13 The city will welcome this year a total of 71 conferences, which will generate an estimated 79,315 bed nights, again an increase of 7%. The economic benefit is estimated to be in the region of £34.1million. Given the long lead-in times, Visit Belfast is also working on attracting future events. Visit Belfast has achieved conference wins for the city worth £33million, this is estimated to generate 60,000 bed nights over the next 4 years. In addition to this, an In-Market Sales Manager has been appointed, based in London, whose focus of work is on the UK Association and Corporate conference market. From taking up post on the 1st October, the manager has established seven conference leads for Belfast, worth an estimated £5m.</p> <p><u>Leisure Tourism & Marketing</u></p> <p>3.14 Seven marketing campaigns have been delivered, worth around £303,000. These have targeted Berlin, Republic of Ireland, London, Amsterdam, Manchester and Scotland. The aim of these campaigns is to generate 235,000 leisure bednights. Importantly, these campaigns allow Visit Belfast to lever significant partner income: £2 for every £1 of its investment in out-of-state marketing. Additionally, web and digital marketing has generated 916,000 visits to visitbelfast.com and 631,000 social media engagement so far this year.</p> <p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>3.15 There are no specific equality or good relations implications.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.16 There are no financial implications attached to this report. The Council support for Visit Belfast in 2017/18 is £1.8million.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None.

