



Subject:	Freedom of the City – Frontline Workers and Covid-19 Response
Date:	23rd April, 2021
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Sandra Robinson, Protocol and Public Affairs Manager Eimear Henry, Senior Manager (Culture and Tourism)

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
1.1	The purpose of this report is to set out: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- options available to deliver a public facing programme to recognise the work of the city's frontline during the Covid-19 pandemic.- options are set out to safely deliver a programme in the context of ongoing Covid-19 and inclusive of budget implications.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the proposal within this report and agree the recommended option for a programme of events from May – October 2021.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 22nd May 2020, it was agreed to award the Freedom of the City to healthcare workers and all those working tirelessly on the frontline to care for vulnerable citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic, with Members agreeing that a report outlining proposed arrangements for this to be submitted in due course. Therefore, this report sets out a proposed programme to include both a reflective event of commemoration as well as a citywide recognition event with community participation.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Frontline Workers Freedom of the City</u></p> <p>The Council has agreed to stage an event to recognise the contribution of all frontline workers during the Covid-19 crisis. Following consideration of the likely timeline for the return of live events in line with the roll out of the vaccination programme, this report sets out a recommended way forward.</p>
3.3	<p>PROGRAMME OF EVENTS aligned to City Recovery and UNESCO City of Music bid</p> <p>The concept would be to deliver a programme that would run from May 2021 through to autumn 2021. The beginning and end of the programme would be symbolically marked with an event. The final event would include the Freedom of the City ceremony.</p>
3.4	<p>Strand one: Reflection through the Symbolism of Planting Trees</p> <p>May 2021: Announcement/ launch of the programme with an appropriately reflective event to recognise the challenges the city has faced, including the loss of lives. It is proposed that this should be a tree planting event.</p>
3.5	<p>This element of the concept would entail symbolically marking the Freedom of the City with tree planting which would run alongside the wider programme of events, allowing for a physical memorial to the shared experience of the pandemic. Our public spaces have seen considerably higher usage and have been critical in supporting physical and mental wellbeing. This concept also ties in with ongoing Council strategies such as One Million Trees.</p>
3.6	<p>This strand of the programme would support the planting of a memorial tree in the grounds of Belfast City Hall, subject to appropriate planning considerations. It is proposed that a distinct evergreen variety be selected to provide a year round memorial. The planting of the tree in May this year would launch the Freedom of the City programme.</p>

Strand two: Honouring the Contribution of City’s Frontline Workers and Communities

- 3.7 The second strand of the programme will be developed around the theme of music. Music has played an important part in people overcoming the challenges of Covid-19 and creatively is the ideal art form to signal the beginnings of recovery. In addition, 2021 marks the submission of the city’s bid to be recognised as a UNESCO City of Music. We already have Committee approval to award 5 City of Music bursaries that will create 5 ‘musicians in residence’ for the city. It is envisaged that this cohort of artists would be joined by a further 5 musicians to deliver a Freedom of the City music programme. This residency programme would be launched in May and would be delivered across the city working with up to 10 different groups, all of them having had a particular experience of Covid. This could be a community group, a group of frontline workers, a school, a women’s group etc. Each ‘residency’ will produce their own version of ‘Mix the City’ - a unique music composition that tells their Covid story. All groups will then come together to create an overall composition that symbolises the city of Belfast – A Mix of the City.
- 3.8 By Autumn 2021 a Belfast Album would be created to be released. An official Freedom of the City event could then take place at the City Hall or alternative appropriate venue.
- 3.9 This main stage event would include profiled acts, breakthrough artists and a live performance of the new Belfast track with all the community participants. In addition, there would be a screening of a specially commissioned film that captures the city’s response to Covid and personal stories.
- 3.10 A series of satellite events could take place (with digital link-ups) to maximise community participation through a ‘music version’ of the clap for carers moment with a performance of Mix the City led by musicians on the main stage with audience participation across the city.
- 3.11 The overall programme would include:
- Direct Community Participants: 150 via 10 groups
 - Core musician team of 10
 - Headline music acts at final event
 - Current Lord Mayor would launch initiative in May with incoming Lord Mayor participating in closing event in Autumn
 - Film produced capturing the individual ‘Belfast Stories’ of Covid. This could also contribute to Belfast Stories/Belfast Destination Hub Story Collection strand of work, as would the music commissioned
 - Potential to work with media partner

<p>3.12</p> <p>3.13</p> <p>3.14</p> <p>3.15</p>	<p>Covid-19</p> <p>Officers are aware of the implications on mass gatherings in the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic. The cultural, arts and events sector has been one of the many societal areas impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Restrictions are likely to remain in place impacting the number of people permitted to gather indoor and outdoor. A timeline for the return of local, national and international events has not yet been set out however discussions are emerging around the likely return of events previously cancelled or postponed. This has obvious implications for the delivery of any chosen option. It is for this reason that any option with an ‘event’ element has been proposed for no earlier than September 2021. The date of this final event can continue to be flexible to ensure that Covid guidance and public safety remain at the forefront of all plans.</p> <p>The proposed programme seeks to reflect the remarkable efforts of the city throughout the pandemic and has at its core an ethos of being both a caring and a creative city.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The programme costs would be met from within existing budgets due to plans for a city event to mark the bid for UNESCO designation.</p> <p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>The proposed programme of events is open to all and as such have the potential to promote good relations and equality by bringing together people from a wide range of backgrounds. City of Music Events are part of the cultural strategy for Belfast that has been subject to EQIA.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>