



visitBelfast **TOURISM** **STRATEGY**

**New Horizons for
Belfast City Region
2024-2027**



Belfast

Contents

1. Executive Summary..... 2

2. Introduction 4

3. The Market, Demand and Supply Contexts to this Strategy..... 12

4. Policy Context 16

5. Tourism Outlook and Growth Trajectory 18

6. Visit Belfast Three–Year Growth Targets..... 19

7. Three–Year Strategy 20

8. Outcomes 25

9. Departmental Operational Plan 2024–2025..... 26

10. Strategic Focus 2024-27: Neighbourhood Tourism..... 63

1. Executive Summary

This three-year strategy and business plan builds on the significant progress to date and the ongoing transformation of Visit Belfast and Belfast city as a thriving destination. Following the past three years of successful delivery of Visit Belfast's Rebuilding City Tourism 2021-24 strategy, the city's visitor economy has re-emerged stronger and more dynamic, innovative and competitive in a market context that has been characterised by strong headwinds and challenging trading conditions. This is highly positive news for the Belfast city region, with tourism proving to be a major contributor to Northern Ireland's economic growth and prosperity.

The steps that Visit Belfast has taken to transition from being a 'DMO' (Destination Marketing Organisation) to a 'DMMO' (Destination Marketing and Management Organisation) have also been critical in enabling the organisation to service its diverse groups of stakeholders more effectively; partners, members, other local businesses, visitors and ultimately the people of Belfast themselves. By embracing the public-private model (through which approximately 40% of our funding is derived from partnership and commercial revenue), Visit Belfast has been able to develop its range of commercial services to partners, generate increased revenue from retail sales and better support the city's visitor economy in improving its sustainable impact.

Visit Belfast continues to count on widespread and consistent support amongst its core funders and industry partners and regional tourism local authorities who have praised the team for its leadership, innovation and agility particularly over the last three years and confirmed that its core functions are relevant and appropriate. Nevertheless, given that the challenges of the coming years will require even deeper collaboration, we recognise through this strategy the need to provide strategic and corporate partners with greater strategic input into Visit Belfast.

Furthermore, the extensive consultations and research on international best practices carried out in the development of this strategy have also confirmed that Visit Belfast continues to play a critical role as the official and trusted source of curated visitor destination information for the visitor, that it has the capacity to influence visitor dispersal throughout the city while mobilising the city region's visitor economy businesses around key opportunities that emerge, such as business events, major festivals and new tours and experiences in its neighbourhoods and throughout the city region.

Being agile, proactive and mindful of tourism's impact on the environment and local communities will be critical in the coming decade, as, in alignment with key national and regional strategies such as DfE's Economic Vision, *10-Year Tourism Strategy*, *Belfast Agenda*, *Belfast's Make Yourself at Home Tourism Strategy*, the *NI Business Events Strategy* and the *Belfast Resilience Strategy*, we seek to shape tourism activity in the city region in a way that enriches the visitor experience, encourages longer stays and achieves meaningful economic and social impact for local people. This strategy has been prepared in full alignment with these strategies, using the outcomes-based accountability methodology and is designed to achieve tourism impacts that go way beyond historical metrics of visitor volume and spend.

This is just one reason why strengthening the appeal of Belfast's neighbourhoods for visitors is a major aim of this strategy. Promoting neighbourhood exploration is the ideal way to help our visitors to immerse themselves in the local everyday culture of our city, encourage longer stays and add to our overall city-wide destination proposition. As well as spreading the positive economic impact of tourism across the city, neighbourhood tourism can also bring important social impact benefits by celebrating the unique identity of local places to instil civic pride, ownership and belonging amongst Belfast's residents. Together

with Belfast City Council and key local partners including Fáilte Feirste Thiar, EastSide Partnership and others, we want to help develop neighbourhood tourism in a responsible, sustainable way that enhances the visitor experience while working well for the people of Belfast. See Section 10 - Neighbourhood Tourism, for a detailed collation of Visit Belfast's neighbourhood tourism activity and associated KPIs.

Adopting this approach to ensuring that the value of tourism is well distributed across the city region will be essential as Visit Belfast makes its contribution to meeting Belfast City Council's refreshed objective for the next 4 years (2024/5 to 2028/9) to double the value of tourism from £400m to £800m per year by 2030.

With this in mind, Visit Belfast is targeting an annual growth of 6.25%, from £125 million in economic impact (target) in the year 2023/24 to £150 million in 2026/27. Over the course of the three-year strategy Visit Belfast will deliver 20% growth and a cumulative economic impact of £424m to the Belfast city region. This represents a return on investment of £30:1.

2. Introduction

Background

The story of Belfast's visitor economy over the past three years has been one of continuous growth and improvement: growth in visitor numbers and economic impact, but also growth in confidence in the city's ability to attract a burgeoning market of leisure visitors and business events that create a strong legacy for the city's economy and its local communities. We've also seen a story of continuous improvement in terms of increased focus on a quality experience for visitors and in terms of the city's approach to making tourism more sustainable. Throughout this period, guided by its *Rebuilding City Tourism 2021-24 strategy*, Visit Belfast has played a core role in driving this growth and improvement in tourism's impact.

The severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the visitor economy of Belfast and Northern Ireland at large has been well documented. Yet while national and international travel has resumed (and in some cases already exceeded 2019-levels of demand), consumer preferences for travel have continued to evolve, heavily influenced by a significant increase in the cost of living. This, as well as a multitude of other factors including increased energy and staffing costs, has made for a challenging trading environment for businesses in the visitor economy.

Despite these challenging conditions, Belfast has continued to deliver outstanding levels of visitor satisfaction, establish its reputation as an attractive city break destination, attract a record number of cruise calls and passengers and attract business events that have delivered demonstrable social and economic benefits for the people of Northern Ireland.

With this in mind, the three-year strategy *New Horizons for Belfast City Region 2024-2027* and one-year business plan (2024-2025) presented in this document are focused on enhancing Visit Belfast's efforts to:

- **Grow** the visitor economy in the Belfast city region in an inclusive and sustainable way
- **Position** the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out
- Enhance the **experience** for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer
- **Sustain** its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast's sustainability story.

The extensive consultations and background research carried out in the development of this strategy have reconfirmed stakeholders' desire to see Visit Belfast play a key role in shaping the reputation of Belfast as a diverse and welcoming city, while strengthening areas such as research and insights, curating the city's neighbourhood offer, further supporting local businesses in boosting their sustainability performance, and enhancing the value of strategic and commercial partnerships. This underlines the ongoing importance of fulfilling the role of Destination Management and Marketing Organisation (DMMO) for the city, the transition to which started with the introduction of the previous three-year strategy.

Furthermore, Visit Belfast is well positioned to help the city and its visitor economy to address the strategic priorities set out in Belfast City Council's Belfast Agenda, The Department for the Economy's Economic Vision and 10 Year Plan for Tourism. It has also been structured in full alignment with the city's *Make Yourself at Home* tourism strategy.

The methodology for developing this strategy and business plan

This three-year strategy for Visit Belfast has been informed by extensive desk research, benchmarking and tourism sector insights from across the UK and Europe, as well as market shifts and emerging trends in consumer demand from Belfast's key source markets.

Understanding our broader role, beyond simply destination marketing, this research has also extended to best practice in sustainability, innovation and holistic city placemaking to ensure Visit Belfast continues to position itself as an effective Destination Marketing and Management Organisation (DMMO) in 2024 and beyond, maximising our value and positive impact for the city.

The initial research phase enabled us to develop a solid understanding of the strategic environment for Visit Belfast which included a comprehensive review of the national, regional and local policy context including relevant investment, economic development, community plans, sustainability strategies and long-term tourism plans for Belfast and Northern Ireland.

Empowered with this knowledge and insights, we conducted extensive consultations with key industry and community stakeholders from a national, regional and city-wide perspective. These interviews and focus groups (conducted between November 2023 and January 2024) highlighted practical challenges and opportunities for the city over the next three years and beyond. An analysis of key consultation findings was presented to the Visit Belfast Board in January 2024.

These primary and secondary insights informed our strategy prioritisation and have shaped the following three-year plan as presented. This three-year strategy and one year business plan was then be submitted in draft format to the Visit Belfast Board for ratification in February 2024.

The research, stakeholder consultations and strategy development were guided by TOPOSOPHY Ltd, a place making and marketing agency with extensive international experience in the field of urban tourism development.

Belfast's visitor economy performance 2021–2024 – a summary

Reflecting the theme of the previous strategy, *Rebuilding City Tourism 2021-2024*, a wide range of performance indicators tell the story of recovery of Belfast's visitor economy over the previous three years and highlight the key role that the city plays as a gateway for visitors to discover Northern Ireland. The explanations below, covering a range of datapoints from third parties help to illustrate the shape and pace of tourism recovery in the city to date.

Firstly, the accommodation sector has seen strong performance, with hotel room occupancy between January and December 2023 at 78.2%. This represents 5% growth compared to 2022 and 4.7% growth compared to 2019. Furthermore, weekday occupancy during this period was 75.9% (seeing an increase of 6.6% on 2022 and +6.8% on 2019) while weekend occupancy was 84.1% (+2.1% on 2022 and +3% in 2019), pointing to the recovery of the leisure market in the city.¹

With two airports, Belfast Harbour as well as road and rail links, the city is also driving overall tourism growth to Northern Ireland. This, combined with its extensive leisure and business offer, is attracting visitors. 48% of visitors have² and in recent years, 52% of all visitors to Northern Ireland came to Belfast. Overall, the city accounts for 32% of all overnight stays in NI³ and the city generates 40% of the region's tourism spend. Since the height of the COVID–19 pandemic, tourist consumer spend within Belfast has increased by £82 million (88%⁴)

During and since the pandemic, tourism on the island of Ireland has performed particularly strongly, helping to mitigate the shortfall of international visitors. This has been particularly noticeable among visitors from ROI to NI. In fact, residents from the Republic of Ireland took over 1.1 million overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2022 (51% increase from 2019 levels), staying for 2.6 nights (42% increase) and spending £233 million (65% increase).⁵ This is significant for Belfast because 3 in 4 visitors from the Republic of Ireland state that a 'City Break' is their preference when travelling to Northern Ireland.⁶

Another key measure of confidence in Belfast as a place to visit; both for locals and visitors is footfall in the city centre. During 2023 (Jan-Dec) Belfast City Centre footfall figures saw an increase of 12.4% up on the same period in 2022 and 94% of 2019 levels.⁷

¹ Source: STR/Visit Belfast Tourism Barometer.

² Tourism NI's Visitor Attitudes Survey.

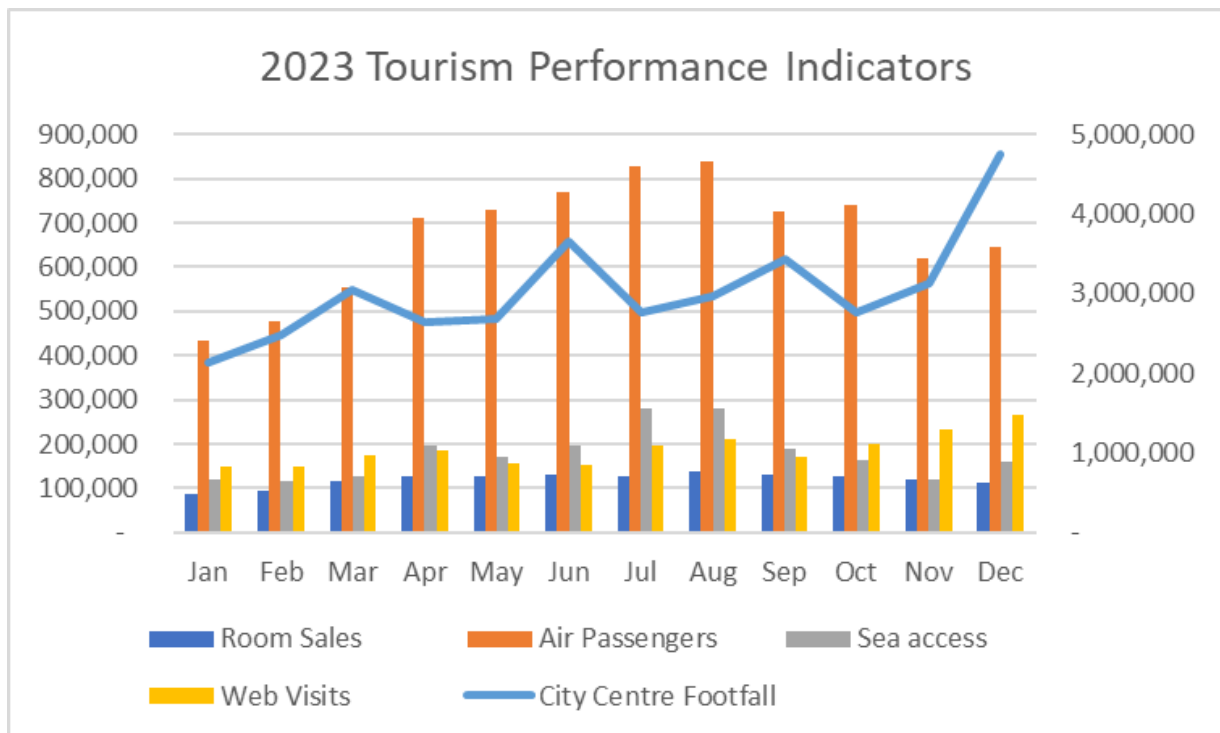
³ BCC Tourism Plan. Make Yourself at Home.

⁴ Belfast City Council Economic Strategy

⁵ CSO –Household Travel Survey.

⁶ Tourism NI Consumer Sentiment Research (Oct 2023).

⁷ Springboard / Belfast One BID.



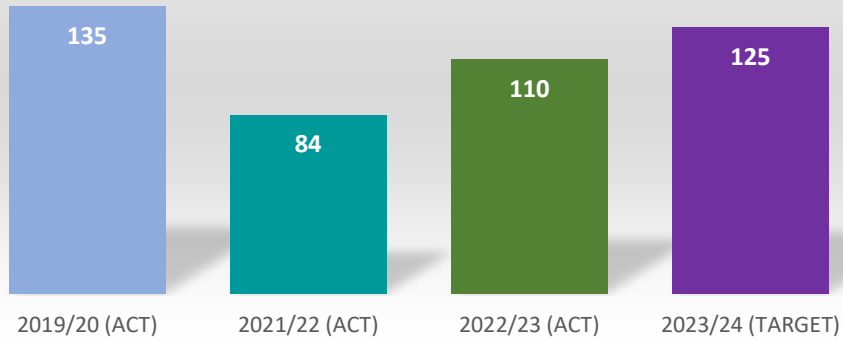
Visit Belfast 3-year performance review and key achievements

Visit Belfast’s activities cover a wider range of areas; however, the following key indicators point to the recovery in the city’s visitor economy and demonstrate the pace and extent to which Visit Belfast has helped to drive this recovery. The following graphs show the performance of Visit Belfast during the 3-year period 2021/22 to 2023/24, alongside pre-pandemic performance during 2019/20 for comparison.

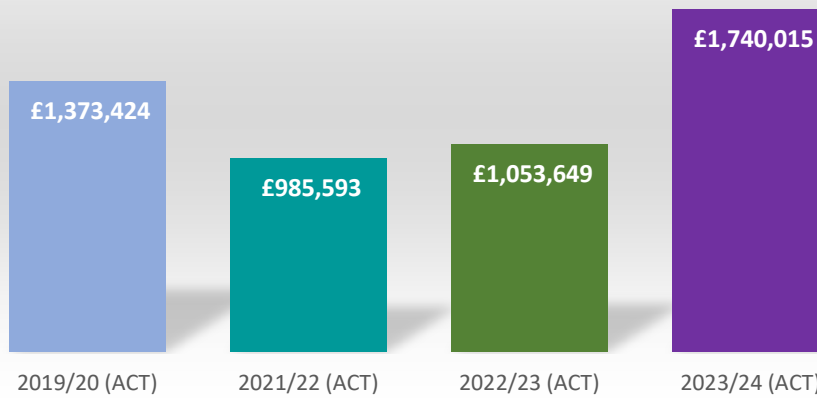
In some cases, such as Visit Belfast’s commercial income, cruise calls and social media impressions, estimated performance in 2023/24 already exceeds that of 2019/20, pointing to strong retail performance, the successful collaboration between Visit Belfast and Belfast Harbour in attracting a large number of cruise ships, and continued investment in our digital platforms.

Other indicators, such as our economic impact and leisure/business bednights are closely linked and showing signs of significant recovery.

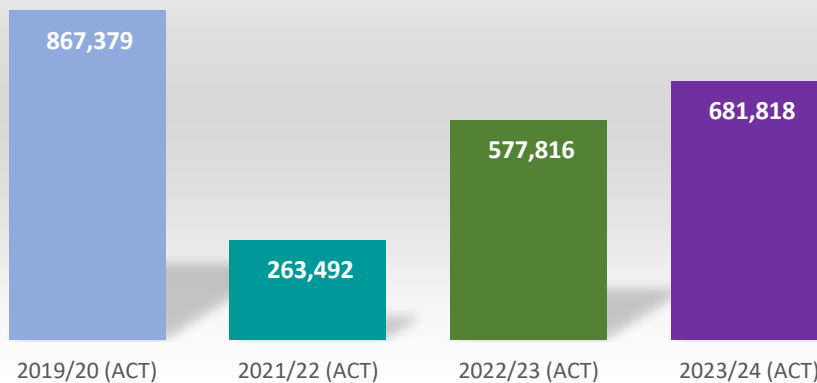
Visit Belfast: Economic Impact (£m)
49% growth (2021/22-2023/24)



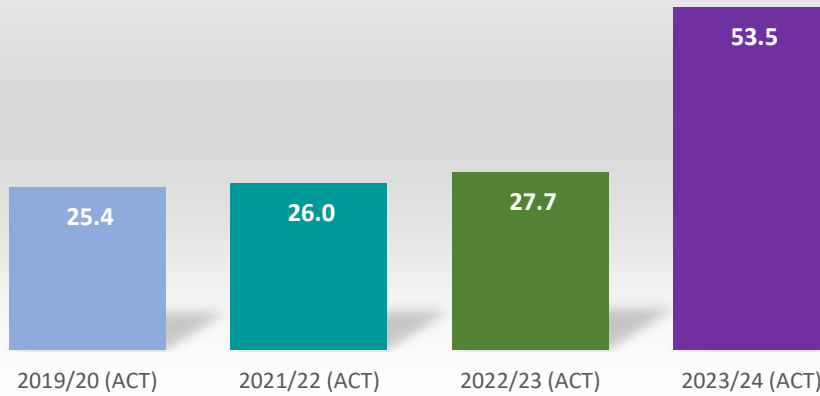
Visit Belfast: Commercial Income (£)
77% growth (2021/22-2023/24)



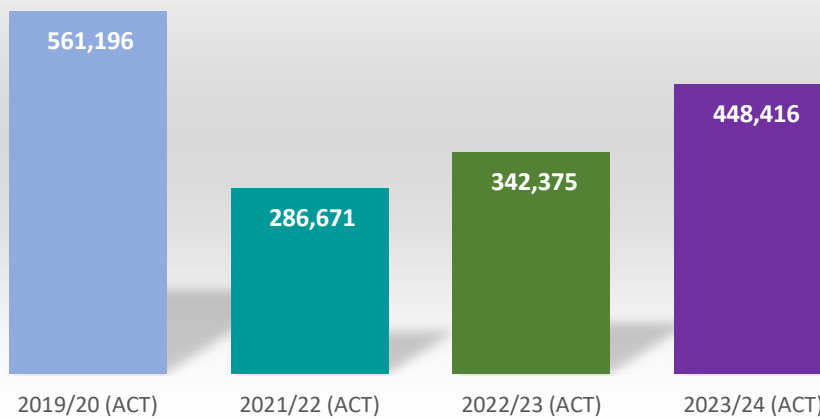
Visit Belfast: Number of Visitor Enquiries
159% growth (2021/22-2023/24)



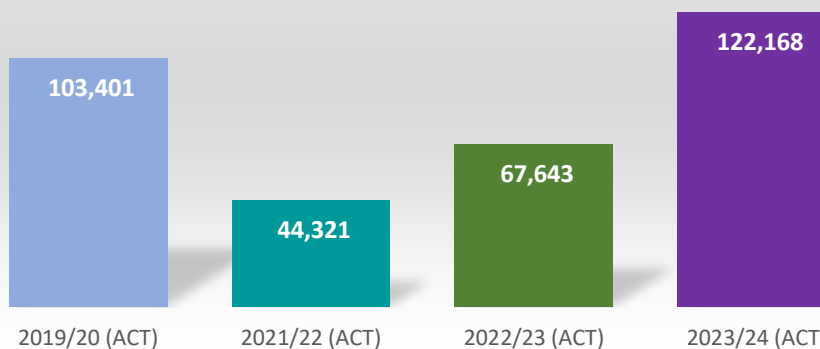
Number of Social Media Impressions (million)
106% growth (2021/22-2023/24)



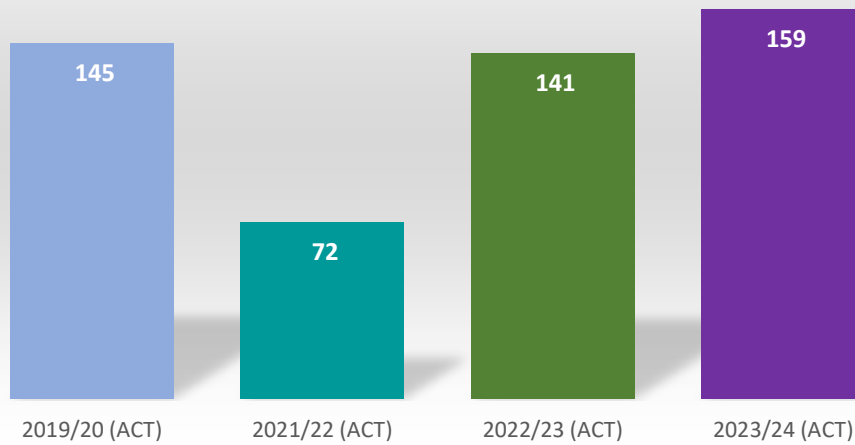
Number of Leisure Bednights Generated
56% growth (2021/22-2023/24)



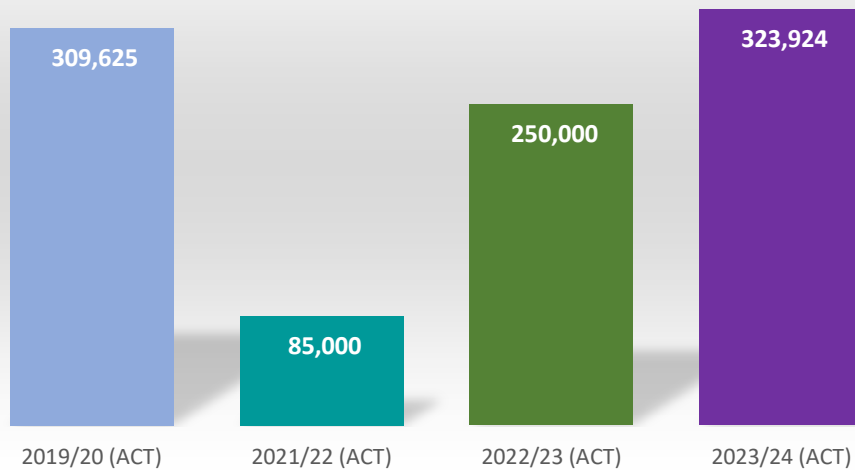
Business Events Sales Performance
(Bednights)
176% growth (2021/22-2023/24)



Number of Cruise Ships
121% growth (2021/22-2023/24)



Number of Cruise Passengers & Crew
281% growth (2021/22-2023/24)

















Awards and accolades

Testament to the successful implementation of Visit Belfast's *Rebuilding Tourism Strategy* is the number of awards that Visit Belfast and the destination has received during the past three years. A total of 10 national and international business tourism awards since 2021 have helped to position Belfast more effectively as a front-of-mind destination for business events, while accolades such as the strong positioning in the GDS Index are proof that Belfast is performing well in the field of sustainability; an area which is seeing increasingly intense competition between cities.

Belfast's appearance among the 30 most exciting places to visit by National Geographic, and 5 Best Places to Visit in the UK by TimeOut is helping to put the city on the map among leisure travellers who may not have considered taking a break in Belfast before.

A summary of key achievements is set out below:

	Joint 2nd highest performing DMMO in the world GDS Index 2023		11th most sustainable destination in the world GDS Index 2023		Global Innovation Award winner GDS Index 2022
	Top 10 sustainable travel destination in the world 2024 Travellers' Choice Awards		76% of Belfast hotel bedrooms sustainably certified Baseline 24% 2021		Best Visitor Information Centre 19 times NI Travel and Tourism Awards
	Top 30 most exciting destinations to visit in 2024 The Cool List 2024		Top 5 destination to visit in the UK 2024 Time Out		Best UK and Ireland Port of Call 2023 Cruise Critic Awards
	Best conference destination in the world C&IT Awards 2021, 2022, 2023		UK destination team of the year MIA Awards 2022, 2023		Best convention bureau micebook Awards 2023
	Best sustainability initiative ABPCO 2021		Best impact and legacy award ABPCO 2023		

3. The Market, Demand and Supply Contexts to this Strategy

Market and Industry Context

Extensive research has informed this three-year strategy highlighting key market and industry trends relevant to Visit Belfast and the city's evolution as a visitor destination. These included the return of city breaks, the rise of conscious travel, visitors' desire to discover the authentic and unique aspects of cities and the continued dominance of social media in destination marketing especially amongst Millennials and Gen Z travellers.

However, the visitor economy operates within a broader geopolitical context and like every other part of the national, regional and local economy, the sector has been affected by the following macro factors in recent years:⁸

Post-pandemic recovery

The socio-economic impacts of the global pandemic continue to resonate in Belfast, Northern Ireland and beyond. The city has charted a strong recovery, yet challenges such as staffing, higher costs of doing business within the tourism and hospitality sector and the knock-on impact on hospitality opening hours in the city remain.

Inflation and cost of living

The economic challenges posed by inflationary growth, coupled with the soaring cost of living rises have been felt by both industry and consumers. Increased pressures on household incomes have put pressure on discretionary spending among consumers on hospitality and leisure, particularly in the domestic market, highlighting the importance of tourism growth to sustain these businesses.

Political Instability

Political uncertainty has resulted in challenges for those working in the tourism and hospitality industry in Northern Ireland and it is envisaged that continued unrest in Europe and the Middle East will affect consumer confidence from long-haul markets such as the USA and China.⁹

Climate Change

There is growing pressure on governments and businesses, including the travel trade and major event organisers, to prioritise environmental sustainability and achieving net-zero targets. The rise of conscious travel is also influencing destination preferences amongst independent travellers. With international visits (outside the island of Ireland) necessitating access by air or sea and the growing concerns around sustainability this remains an important macro level market reality for Belfast as a city destination.¹⁰

⁸ Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland – 10 year plan

⁹ European Travel Commission, January 2024 [source](#)

¹⁰ DfE, (2023) Research paper on the future of tourism in Northern Ireland

Consumer demand context

As noted at the outset, consumer demand continues to be shaped by a wide range of macroeconomic and social factors. Lifestyle changes imposed by pandemic restrictions (such as reduced international travel, or the increase in hybrid working) also appear to have had a lasting effect on the way that consumers spend their leisure time. A series of consumer demand trends that are particularly relevant to consumers in Belfast's key target markets (namely, NI, ROI, GB, direct access markets in Europe and the USA) are summarised below.

Balancing a longer holiday with short, shoulder season breaks: As reported by Tourism Ireland, cost of living pressures are leading consumers to concentrate leisure breaks into one extended holiday in the summer and complemented by 1-2 short breaks in the shoulder season.¹¹

City breaks are back: While many consumers sought to avoid cities during the pandemic, city breaks are now back as a favourite choice, particularly among visitors from NI, GB and ROI.¹²

Tech savvy and value driven: The COVID-19 pandemic saw consumers of all ages become (even more) familiar with using mobile devices to control various aspects of their lives. To try to cut through content overload, and seek real value, consumers are becoming highly adept at finding low prices, special offers and package deals in order to help them get the most out of their travel budget.¹³

Seeking digital simplicity: Personalised content from trusted sources is more in demand than ever, as consumers turn to search engines, aggregators and AI tools to help them curate bespoke itineraries and plan trips¹⁴

Seeking frequent escapes from stress and monotony: For many, the news cycle, turbulent politics and digital overload mean that leisure time is dedicated more than ever to digital detox, rekindling social connections and engaging in activities which are fun and immersive.¹⁵

Focussed on physical and mental wellbeing: The pandemic heightened consumers' awareness of maintaining both physical and mental health. These issues have become especially important for young consumers, who are shunning alcohol consumption and hedonism in greater numbers, in favour of good diet and exercise.¹⁶

Keen to meet the locals: Meeting local people in the places where they spend time is a key priority among travellers who see this as the best way to uncover what is most unique and authentic about the places they're visiting. As a result, cities across Europe are connecting visitors with their neighbourhoods as part of broadening their appeal and encouraging longer stays.¹⁷

Conscious spenders who expect action on sustainability: As evidence of climate change and biodiversity loss mounts year on year, consumers expect businesses and governments to take meaningful action on

¹¹ Tourism Ireland, Marketing Plan 2024, launch presentation

¹² ABTA (2023) [Holiday Habits 2023-24 Report](#).

¹³ Euromonitor, Top Global Consumer Trends, 2024 (Nov 2023)

¹⁴ See: Euromonitor, cited above

¹⁵ See: Euromonitor, cited above

¹⁶ See: Euromonitor, cited above

¹⁷ American Express Travel (2023) [2023 Global Travel Trends Report](#)

these issues and help them in making changes to their own individual behaviour by making sustainable options cheaper and more readily available.¹⁸

Sector context: Shifts & Trends in Destination Marketing & Management

The role of destination marketing and management organisations in cities across the UK and Europe has been evolving at pace over the last decade with the pandemic further accelerating innovation and change within the sector (as highlighted above). As an active member of the [City Destinations Alliance](#) (formerly European Cities Marketing), Visit Belfast has been at the forefront of much of this innovation in relation to sustainability and recognising the importance of broadening the organisation's perspective and adopting increased destination management responsibilities alongside its strategic destination marketing role for Belfast.

In-depth research, conducted as part of this strategy development process, indicates that in 2024 and beyond, DMOs will need to continue to find new ways of measuring success and articulating their purpose and impact more clearly to multiple audiences. City DMMOs are also adopting more holistic place marketing approaches by showcasing authentic destination propositions and nurturing the value of the local market by celebrating liveability and recognising residents as priority audiences and stakeholders.¹⁹ The evolving roles of visitor information centres hubs for engaging with local residents and celebrating local culture, events and activities is particularly relevant.²⁰

Finally, in the future DMMOs will need to continue to curate multiple attractions and experiences to increasingly diverse audiences, marketing the city but also the surrounding region as a holistic package that is easy for visitors to explore and navigate. This is already an important strategic role for Visit Belfast and will continue to be so in the future.

Market, demand and supply trends: implications for Visit Belfast

- Belfast visitor economy businesses will have to be even more agile in responding to consumer demand and help consumers find the best value from their leisure time in the city region.
- Consumers are relying on official sources of information to help them curate itineraries and cut through content overload, as well as find information that suits their personal tastes. Visit Belfast can respond to this by expanding its work on experience curation and work to build up an even stronger picture of how visitors are behaving in the city and what they're looking for.
- Strategic issues such as climate change adaptation and mitigation as well as shaping a workforce that's flexible and able to quickly adopt new technology are only going to increase in importance, pointing to the need for DMMOs to respond to these challenges through the way they support the local tourism sector and address other destination management challenges.
- Many cities want to attract visitors for weekend breaks however the most successful marketing campaigns have demonstrated that establishing emotional connections, building a sense of place, showcasing authentically local experiences and the allure of somewhere new can be compelling pulls

¹⁸ See: Euromonitor, cited above

¹⁹ CityDNA (2022), Exploring the Role of the Place Making and Marketing Organisation

²⁰ CityDNA (2023) VIC Working Group

(also confirmed by the consultations for this project).

- Consumers are looking for help with meeting their goals related to their own personal wellness and with achieving a more sustainable impact on the environment and local community. Visit Belfast can also help play the role of a trusted advisor in this respect.
- The marketing of cities is becoming more holistic in nature, centred around building emotional appeal and challenging perceptions. Visit Belfast can build on its work of recent years and support other public and private bodies in the city with improving all-round perceptions of Belfast.

4. Policy Context

How Visit Belfast will address key national, regional and local priorities

As Visit Belfast is a not-for-profit public, private and community partnership, we place significant importance on the policy context within which we operate. We have provided a detailed contextual analysis of national, regional and local policies in the baseline report accompanying this three-year strategy and have summarised our priorities for strategic alignment below.

National Context

The Department for the Economy's new Economic Vision sets out the transformation required to support the growth of the Northern Ireland economy over the next decade. This NI-wide strategic vision is underpinned by four key objectives; to increase the proportion of working-age people in good jobs; to create a more regionally balanced economy; to raise productivity and to reduce carbon emissions and build a greener economy. Through this strategy Visit Belfast will reaffirm its commitment to the triple bottom line outcomes (economic, social and environmental), contributing towards a more resilient economy, delivering inclusive growth and supporting a greener, more sustainable economy for NI in the future.

One of the key enablers of DfE's Economic Vision is the Draft **Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland, 10-year plan** which seeks to "Establish Northern Ireland as a year-round world class destination which is renowned for its authentic experiences, landscape, heritage and culture and which benefits communities, the economy and the environment, with sustainability at its core." Reflecting this, the core principles of innovation, inclusivity, sustainability, collaboration and showcasing the attractiveness of Northern Ireland as a vibrant and welcoming destination are threaded through Visit Belfast's strategy in order to complement this long-term plan for tourism in Northern Ireland.

City Context

The city's community plan, the **Belfast Agenda (2023-2027)** sets out a joint vision and long-term ambitions for Belfast's future, as well as outlining priorities for action over the next four years. This plan sets the vision for Belfast to be a culturally vibrant city where people love to live and dream to visit. The vision, outcomes and ambitions of The Belfast Agenda are intended to improve the lives of everyone in Belfast in the long-term through five strategic themes: *Our People, Our Economy, Our Place, Our Planet, and Compassionate City*.

Through this strategy Visit Belfast will continue to support Belfast City Council to develop the city's 'welcoming, vibrant neighbourhoods' by promoting our diverse city areas and maximising the benefits of tourism to communities across the city (Our People) and creating a more liveable, connected, and vibrant city (Our Place). Showcasing Belfast as a vibrant and welcoming city offering local and authentic experiences accessible to all (Compassionate City). We will also continue to support the tourism sector in building an innovative, sustainable, and inclusive tourism industry by promoting and facilitating access to training schemes and certification (Our Economy) and we will continue to lead innovative initiatives to support all stakeholders' efforts in creating a more sustainable, nature-positive city (Our Planet).

Visit Belfast will also continue to be a key delivery partner for Belfast City Council's '**Make Yourself at Home**' 10 Year Plan for Tourism in Belfast. We endorse and support these strategic principles of being people-centred, responsible and sustainable: increasing the benefits of tourism for visitors and the local people, businesses and neighbourhoods, to affect positive change in support of a visitor economy that will

effectively serve the city and the region, and aligned to economic, social and environmental sustainable development goals.

This long-term plan is about realising Belfast's potential to become a leading cultural visitor destination and maximising the city's role as a gateway for Northern Ireland and beyond. The plan also places community at its heart. To demonstrate our unwavering commitment to this strategic approach to tourism in Belfast, we have aligned this three-year strategy around the strategic pillars identified in Make Yourself at Home: **Grow, Position, Experience** and **Sustain**.

Belfast City Council declared a **Climate Emergency** in October 2019, and committed Belfast to becoming carbon neutral by 2050. The Belfast Agenda commits the city to "tackling climate change" and creating a city "where people and nature thrive together." Therefore, Visit Belfast will continue to support Belfast City Council's Resilience and Sustainability Board to ensure we contribute towards Belfast transitioning to "an inclusive, zero-emissions, climate-resilient economy within a generation." We will continue to ensure that tourism in Belfast provides a positive net benefit for the city and continue our efforts to improve the sector's sustainability practices.

We will also support the Council in communicating the city's sustainability efforts and achievements and showcasing Belfast as a sustainable city by actively promoting sustainability initiatives across Belfast (both in the city centre and in the neighbourhoods) to visitors and residents.

5. Tourism Outlook and Growth Trajectory

Growth context

The outlook for tourism in Northern Ireland, and in Belfast in particular over the coming decade is very positive. Both the Department for the Economy, Tourism Ireland and Belfast City Council have set out strategic objectives of increasing the value of tourism in Belfast, and in Northern Ireland through the following goals:

- The Department for the Economy's recent **Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland - 10 Year Plan** sets out the strategic aim of increasing the value of tourism to the Northern Ireland economy by 50%-75% compared to 2019, or growth of 4%-6% per annum.
- **The Belfast Agenda** sets out the aim of increasing the value of tourism in Belfast from £417m in 2019 to £800m in 2030.
- The **Tourism Ireland Marketing Plan** (issued 2024) sets targets of driving tourism revenue growth in Northern Ireland by +6.5% year-on-year to 2030. This is compared to targeted Island of Ireland growth of 5.6% average year on year growth to 2030.
- **VisitBritain's tourism forecast for 2024** (published January 2024) forecasts growth of 5% in visits and 7% in nominal spend (4% in real spend) compared to 2023.

The growth trajectory of Visit Belfast's economic impact

In addition to the forecasts set out above, there are a number of factors specific to the visitor economy in the city of Belfast that give grounds for optimism:

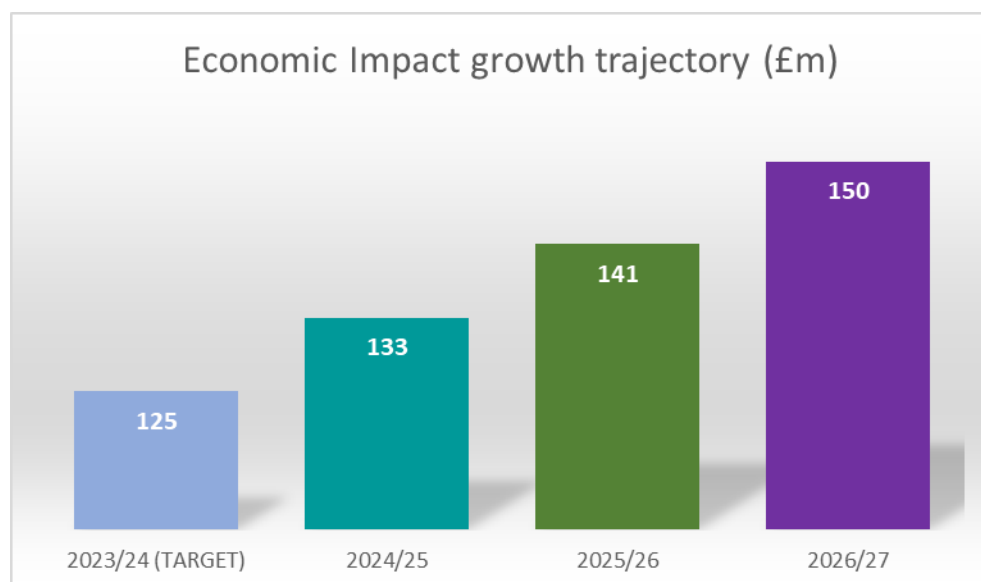
- Belfast accounts for approximately 32% of Northern Ireland's tourism nights²¹ and 40% of tourism spending in Northern Ireland²².
- Northern Ireland is to host a series of major events and festivals, which are expected to drive a large increase in visits to the city, these include Belfast 2024, Oireachtas na Samhna 2025, The 153rd Open Championship 2025, Fleadh Cheoil 2025/2026 and UEFA Euro 2028 (UK & Ireland).
- An increase in hotel room supply: This will return to pre pandemic levels with a further 500 new hotel rooms by 2025. An additional 600 hotel rooms are required by 2030.
- Landmark tourism investment planned through the Belfast Region City Deals are set to further enhance the visitor offer including Belfast Stories, Bangor Waterfront and Destination Royal Hillsborough amongst others.
- Major city development projects such as Belfast Grand Central Station Intergrated Transport Hub, City Quays Gardens and the Waterside improving the city's attractiveness and connectivity.
- The Northern Ireland Business Events Strategy aims for 170% growth in business events by 2033 and has highlighted that Belfast will be required to deliver the majority of this growth. A strategic working group has recently been established by Tourism NI with key stakeholders including Visit Belfast to develop an action plan for delivery and investment.

²¹ BCC - Make Yourself at Home strategy, p.12

²² BCC – Economic Strategy for Belfast 2022-2030 [source](#)

6. Visit Belfast Three-Year Growth Targets

Visit Belfast is targeting an annual growth of **6.25%**, from £125 million in economic impact in the year 2023/24 to £150 million in 2026/27, as shown in the graph below. Over the course of the three-year strategy Visit Belfast will deliver 20% growth and a cumulative economic impact of £424m.



Growth trajectory - important considerations

While the growth projection set out above gives substantial grounds for optimism, it is important to consider that it relies on a critical series of factors which include:

- **Sustained investment:** Areas such as attracting business events, driving off-peak demand, meeting visitor servicing needs and implementing sustainable tourism initiatives (such as developing neighbourhood tourism) require sustained, targeted investment.
- **Sustained collaboration:** Working with the cruise industry, mobilising Belfast's visitor economy businesses around shared goals and delivering an outstanding visitor experience requires sustained collaboration and the continual nurturing of partnerships in the visitor economy.
- **Delivering an excellent visitor experience:** By delivering an excellent experience for visitors to the city, including through servicing visitors through Visit Belfast's various touchpoints, we can encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more in the city, be better placed to drive repeat visits and secure recommendations by our visitors.

Finally, it is important to underline that the successful implementation of this strategy will require any increases in the value of tourism to benefit communities across the whole Belfast city region. It is also incumbent on Visit Belfast as well as the other public and private sector stakeholders involved to ensure that growth is managed responsibly, with minimal environmental impact.

7. Three-Year Strategy

The following section sets out Visit Belfast's key strategic priorities for the financial year 2024/2025 through to 2026/2027. The priorities and actions have been structured to reflect the four key strategic pillars of Belfast City Council's Make Yourself at Home 10-year tourism strategy, while addressing the key challenges and opportunities identified in the desk research and stakeholder consultations described in the methodology section. The tables below outline each strategic pillar, its rationale, the areas of activity for each pillar, and key actions that will be carried out.

Summary of strategic pillars:

Strategic Pillar 1

Visit Belfast will **grow** the value of tourism to the Belfast city region and its communities.

Strategic Pillar 2

Visit Belfast will **position** the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out.

Strategic Pillar 3

Visit Belfast will **enhance** the **experience** for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer.

Strategic Pillar 4

Visit Belfast will **sustain** its approach to championing **sustainability**, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast's sustainability story.

Strategic Pillar 1 - Grow

Visit Belfast will grow the value of tourism to the Belfast city region and its communities.

How will we do this?

We will capitalise on the strong post-pandemic recovery of city breaks and increase the value of overnight stays and day trips from NI, ROI and GB markets, prioritising midweek, shoulder season and winter months. In addition, Visit Belfast will focus on direct access cities within Europe and capitalising on increased US market via Dublin.

Area of Activity	Key Actions
Data-driven decision making and collaboration	Further develop Visit Belfast Tourism Barometer, enhancing it with cruise market feedback, visitor satisfaction surveys, VIC profile data, event organiser feedback, sustainability insights, feedback from tour operators/cruise lines and any other relevant insights and secondary research. We will also seek new ways to share these insights with our various stakeholder groups.
	Utilise knowledge of visitor segments with the strongest affinity to Belfast's leisure and cultural offer (TI/TNI segmentation) to tailor destination marketing and support neighbourhood development across the city.
Grow the value of business events to Belfast and NI	Continue to support the Northern Ireland Business Events Strategy and to attract business events that are aligned with Invest NI key economic sectors. Work with the strategic working group to advocate for investment and develop an action plan for delivery.
	Expand the legacy of business events for the city's economy and communities.
Raise profile and amplify the value contribution of tourism to the city	Continue to strengthen digital marketing activity across web, digital and social media channels keeping up to date with AI innovations and maximising opportunities to harness local pride and passion through online channels.
	Enhance visitor servicing activity (before, during and after visit) to increase length of stays, visitor spend and visitor spread across the city and region.

Strategic Pillar 2 - Position

Visit Belfast will position the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out.

How will we do this?

We will be ambassadors for the Belfast brand, proudly celebrating the city's energy, authenticity and vibrancy whilst strengthening Belfast's unique position as the gateway to discovering Northern Ireland.

Area of Activity	Key Actions
Refresh and enhance perceptions of Belfast among prospective visitors	Showcase the city's people, culture and stories and celebrate Belfast's modern-day personality by expanding on the vibrancy and energy of the themes in the Belfast Playbook.
	Highlight Belfast as an inclusive, diverse, warm-hearted and welcoming destination for all.
	Use events with national and international appeal (such as Belfast 2024) as a platform to showcase the diversity of the city's cultural offer and appeal.
	Spotlight Belfast's distinctive neighbourhoods and authentic experiences, in order to highlight diversity of the city's offer.
Maximise in-destination reach, profile and influence	Secure presence in Belfast's new transport hub and maximise existing visitor servicing and marketing points of contact (e.g. cruise, VICs, event organisers and digital platforms) to upsell and cross-sell opportunities for in-destination visitors to further explore the city, neighbourhoods and wider region.
Develop and Nurture City-Wide Partnerships and collaboration opportunities	Reinforce Visit Belfast's positioning: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As a trusted local marketing partner in enhancing the city's reputation• As a partner (with valuable local-level insights on the visitor economy)• As a welcome partner (the go-to place for welcoming leisure, cruise and business visitors to the city)
	Strengthen coordination, integration and collaboration of city and event marketing to achieve greatest impact.

Strategic Pillar 3 - Experience

Visit Belfast will enhance the experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer.

How will we do this?

We will work strategically with partners across the city region to develop and curate experiences in Belfast's neighbourhoods and nearby coastal and rural areas, in order to connect visitors with the authentic and unique experiences that the city region offers.

Area of Activity	Key Actions
Support development of Neighbourhood Tourism across the city	Support Belfast City Council and neighbourhood-based organisations across Belfast to continue to develop and grow the city's neighbourhood tourism offer.
	Raise the profile of Belfast's varied and distinctive neighbourhoods to enhance the city's overall destination proposition.
	Champion the development and promotion of neighbourhood tourism as an opportunity to instil ownership and civic pride amongst Belfast residents and maximise the social impact of tourism.
Maximise opportunities to enhance Belfast's experiential offering through Visitor Servicing and Marketing and Industry Support	Continue to develop and enhance visitor servicing through the Belfast Welcome Centre (attracting locals also), Belfast Cruise Hub, transport hubs and airports, neighbourhood-based attractions and by also exploring opportunities for mobile and flexible visitor servicing at cultural events and festivals and major business events.
	Continue to develop and promote Belfast city region's 'Bleisure' and 'Extender' destination offer e.g. by developing sustainable daytrips, walking, cycling and public transport to neighbourhood and wider city region.
	Continue to work with Belfast City Council and partners to showcase the city's varied product and experience offering e.g. through industry engagement and product knowledge programme.
	Ensure visitors with additional accessibility needs are easily able to find and enjoy Belfast's leisure and cultural offer.
Embrace emerging technologies and innovations in AI to enhance destination offer	Maximise potential of emerging technologies and innovations in AI to better service visitors and empower partners to develop and promote enhanced tourism products and services.

Strategic Pillar 4 - Sustain

Visit Belfast will sustain its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast's sustainability story.

How will we do this?

We will intensify efforts to improve Belfast's competitive position as a renowned sustainable destination and find creative ways to tell the city's sustainability story, engaging visitors and local businesses to engage in sustainable tourism practices.

Area of Activity	Examples of how we will implement
Be industry champions sustainability initiatives across Belfast	Deliver Carbon Baseline Study with partners incl. Belfast City Council.
	Continue to support sustainability practices to improve accreditation and credentials of our industry and city.
	Continue to pioneer and promote industry-wide social impact initiatives such as Changing the Menu for Good.
	Further develop and promote Legacy and Impact initiatives for Business Events.
Ensure Visit Belfast leads by example	Adopt new ways of measuring impact (economic, social & environmental) across the organisation.
	Better communicate our impact with all our stakeholders (including Visit Belfast Board).
	Embed sustainability knowledge throughout Visit Belfast, to ensure consistency of approach and messaging.
	Continue to improve financial sustainability to enable innovation and development in the future.
Tell Belfast's sustainability story and champion responsible tourism	Informing and inspiring visitors across leisure, cruise and business tourism by developing and promoting Belfast's sustainability story by weaving it into leisure content, digital comms and key visitor servicing touchpoints.
	Promoting responsible visitor behaviour through curated itineraries, local sustainability heroes, and guiding on easy ways to reduce environmental impact, supporting neighbourhood tourism (e.g. sustainable travel options, events and maximise social benefit).

8. Outcomes – Year 1

What we plan to achieve and how we'll measure our progress

The actions listed in the strategy above are expected to achieve impacts across a wide range of areas. In accordance with the principles of sustainable tourism, it is important that we are able to monitor our progress and record our achievements in environmental, social and economic terms. Progress in delivering this strategy will be measured against a number of headline key performance indicators (KPIs), aimed at recording our overall impact on the city's visitor economy, its environments and communities. This are supplemented with detailed departmental KPIs, and operational plans set out in section 9.

Impact	Headline KPIs	Measurement
Economic	758,000 visits	Cruise 274,000 / Daytrips 200,000 / Overnight leisure trips 250,000 / Delegates 34,000
	445,200 bed nights	350,000 leisure, 95,200 business
	£133m contribution to the city's economy	Leisure £60m / Business events £35m / Visitor servicing £18m / Cruise £20m
	Visitor enquiries - 766,000	
Environmental	Identify Visit Belfast Carbon Baseline - year 1	Based on VB's Carbon Baseline study / seek to reduce in Year 2 & Year 3
	Identify Belfast Tourism Industry Carbon baseline - year 1	Based on VB's Carbon Baseline study / seek to reduce in Year 2 & Year 3
	No. of VB members adapting and adopting sustainable practices and certified tourism businesses	Annual Survey of VB Members
	No. of clients supported on sustainability	VB to record and measure the support it provides in this area (Travel trade, event organisers, cruise lines)
Social	Baseline resident sentiment towards tourism and its value for the city (TBC)	Investigate partnership with BCC to facilitate this
	No. of residents taking part in tourist-type activities in Belfast (TBC)	Investigate partnership with BCC to facilitate this
	10% increase in number of neighbourhood tourism partnerships	Internal
	No of neighbourhood tourism referrals	Year 1 baseline - across organisation
	Funds (£) raised by VB and partners for social / charitable causes	Funds raised Input from Staff Survey

9. Departmental Operational Plan 2024–2025

Visitor Servicing and Destination Management

Introduction and context

Visitor Servicing is central to successful destination management and the delivery of Belfast City Council's 10-year Tourism Strategy *Make Yourself at Home*. Visit Belfast's visitor servicing and Destination Management activity has been based around a hub-and-spoke model with the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre (VBWC) representing the information and resource hub. The supporting spokes include key visitor touch points e.g. airports (GBBCA self-serve only) and the Cruise Welcome Hub. Our main aim is to enhance the visitor experience by inspiring visitors to see more, do more and spend more while in the city, its neighbourhoods and the wider NI Region.

Through this new strategy, following the principles of the City Destination Alliance (CityDNA) Constellation Model, we will work towards pivoting our services to ensure that the themes of Sustainability, Accessibility and Neighbourhood Tourism, and promoting "Local" experiences for both locals and visitors are paramount. This will be evident across VB visitor servicing touch points via our front-line Travel Advisors, Cruise Teams and Volunteers.

It is critically important to fully embrace these new themes. This will involve firstly educating our own staff; travel advisers, cruise teams and volunteers on the new messaging and build their product knowledge so they are fully *au fait* with the neighbourhood product, new City experiences and how we/they can encourage visitors to experience the destination in a sustainable way.

Furthermore, our Industry Engagement Programme will be further developed to include a greater focus on neighbourhood tourism. It is important that front of house staff, who regularly engage with visitors, have strong destination product knowledge and are comfortable encouraging visitors to see more, do more, spend more.

Underpinning this activity will be the need to maintain and grow our commercial focus to support operational costs. Over the next three years we plan to expand our services into Belfast Grand Central Station, with a VIC point within a shared desk on Transport Information. We also aspire to operate a more flexible and mobile off-site Visitor Servicing (e.g. Travel Advisers on bikes across the city) allowing greater engagement with visitors at key festivals e.g. Belfast 2024 and business events.

Key achievements:

- Handled 1.53 million enquiries and generated £31m into the local economy (2021-2024)
- Restructured airport VIC services; secured commercial support from BIA and relocated BIA VIC services resulting in an improved facility with greater space and visibility. BIA enquiry levels are currently 51% ahead of 2023/4 targets with ticket sales up 37% on last year. Successfully introduced innovative Visitor Information solutions including a Welcome Wall with self-serve functionality at GBBCA.
- 80% growth in retail sales on 2022/3 levels, due to a new strong commercial focus in VBWC and cruise performance.

- Most successful Industry Engagement Programme to date with 94 tourism industry representatives attending 3 neighbourhood-focused Fams (to date) and average attendance of 42 at quarterly briefings.

Key Areas of Activity – overview:

- Visitor Servicing through the three VICs (with a potential additional facility at Belfast Grand Central Transport Hub).
- Commercial Income.
- Industry Engagement Programme & Volunteers.
- Neighbourhood Tourism.
- Destination Management, including:
 - Cruise
 - Accessibility and Inclusivity
 - Data and Insights
 - Digital City Pass
 - City connectivity and sustainable transport.
- City Destination Initiatives – Code of Conduct for City Sightseeing, Overnight Coach Park and Digital City Pass funding permitted.

Visitor Servicing Objectives in 2024-25:

- Provide welcome to 766,000 visitor enquiries* delivering an economic benefit of £18 million
- Handle 247,000 gateway enquiries, ensuring the benefits of tourism are extended into the City Plus area and the rest of Northern Ireland, delivering £6.5m economic benefit.
- Building on our strong commercial focus, generate net commercial revenue in visitor servicing of £804,481 equating to 62% of all visitor servicing costs.
- Maintain visitor satisfaction levels of our services to 85% very satisfied, 15% satisfied.
- Provide a warm and reassuring welcome to cruise passengers on up to 136 cruise ships delivering £20m into the local economy.
- Continue to work with Belfast City Council and partners on delivering on the *Make yourself at Home* Tourism Strategy - particularly with regards to city connectivity and accessibility projects.
- Maintain and grow quality visitor servicing at key visitor touch points, encouraging visitors, to see more, do more, spend more, encourage repeat visits, and for those who can lengthen their stay.
- Capture data across key visitor touch points and through Visitor Satisfaction and VIC Monitoring Sheets to help establish and inform important trend data and insights.
- Focus on growing visitor numbers to the city's neighbourhoods and enriching the visitor experience through connecting visitors with our people, cultures, and stories.
- Champion "Sustainable" messaging e.g. Explore the City by foot, bike, boat, Public Transport and promoting local products and Neighbourhood experiences.
- Extend and enhance Visit Belfast's Industry Engagement programme, updating and briefing front line tourism and hospitality staff on City and wider region, so they gain the knowledge to "upsell" the destination to their customers.
- Continue collaboration with Belfast City Council to deliver on destination initiatives:
 - Code of Conduct for the city's Hop On Hop Off Bus Tours and Sightseeing Services.
 - Provision of a secure overnight Coach Park for visiting tour operators.
 - Digital version of a Belfast Visitor Pass.

Key Areas of Visitor Servicing Activity

Key areas of visitor servicing activity are set out in the following tables, together with their respective KPIs:

Activity: Growing and harnessing the power of visitor servicing, to increase length of stay, visitor spread, Across all Visit Belfast's VIC's and visitor touch points, and potentially Translink's new Belfast Grand Central station

Aim: Grow Visitor enquiry levels to deliver more visitor spread and spend across the city, its neighbourhoods and wider region.

Context: Growth in demand over the next three years is expected to come from:

- Strong demand from in the region of 1 million cruise visitors over the next three years
- Leisure visitors coming for short breaks, day trips for events, festivals, and cultural activities
- Conferences and business events
- Demand/Growth will be supported by increased air and sea access, and improved transport links particularly from ROI with the planned increase in train and bus services.
- Increased marketing by TI, TNI and VB in key markets

Key productivity measures 2024/5 (not including Belfast Grand Central Transport Hub):

- 766, 000 enquiries (+12.5% on 2023/24 target)
- 495, 000 visitors through VBWC and BIA Airport Desk (+8% on 2023/24)
- 173, 000 enquiries at Cruise Hub and off site at Business/Leisure events (+5.5% on 2023/24)
- Total enquiries generate an economic impact of £18m (+12% on 2023-24).

Activity: Positioning Belfast as the Gateway to Northern Ireland and promoting regional spread

Aim: To service visitors and provide Belfast and NI wide visitor information.

Context: Just under one third (32%) of all enquiries handled by Visit Belfast relate to the rest of Northern Ireland, demonstrating the importance of visitor servicing in spreading the benefits of tourism across the region.

Key productivity measures 2024/5:

- Target 247,000 gateway enquiries across all visitor servicing touch points.
- Generate an additional £6.5 million into the local economy.
- ROI for TNI £1: £64 into the local economy.

Activity: Grow Visit Belfast's commercial income

Aim: To support Visit Belfast's operational costs by adopting a strong commercial approach to our operations, with a particular focus on retail sales across VBWC/ Cruise and BIA.

Context: Resources and commercially focused staff are in place to drive this growth. Income targets for Retail and Ticketing are based on a volume-based model on either visitor footfall (BWC), cruise visitors (Cruise Hub), Airport Passengers (BIA VIC), set against a conversion factor for financial transactions, and average transaction value based on the previous year's outputs.

Commercial Income – Projected performance figures and context:

- Commercial income from visitor servicing targeted at £804,481 which equates to 62% of 2024/25 visitor servicing costs.

Key Retail productivity measures 2024/25:

- Recruit seasonal retail focused sales team.
- Careful selection of product lines for each Retail Outlet, VBWC and Cruise Hub.
- Managing Stock, effective merchandising and presentation.
- Achieve good discounts from supplier's and target GPM of 50%.
- Increase locally sourced products from 26 to 35.
- Extend the retail shop in Cruise Hub with a better position for the sales desk.

Activity: Develop Visit Belfast's box office services

Aim: To support operational costs by further developing Visit Belfast's box office services.

Context: VB box office plays a critical role in supporting and promoting the city's rich, cultural, heritage festival & event programme, including our burgeoning food / drink and music scenes. VICs have a key role in promoting the array of activity across the city to visitors and residents during their stay. Similarly, they enable a variety of user-friendly booking methods and payments for customers. As Belfast City Council embarks on its yearlong celebration of Culture in 2024 it is especially important to provide this service.

Key productivity measures 2024/5:

- Ticketing income is to increase by 8% in 2024/25 to £89,132 net sales.
- Grow the provision of Box office services from 46 to 53 clients.
- Key Box office role for Belfast International Arts Festival, and Northern Ireland Science Festival
- As part of our B2B development and supporting role we will aim to further extend our services to smaller community-based initiatives.
- Meet to offer our ticketing services and support 10 new Neighbourhood Products providers
- A percentage of Visit Belfast's commission on NI Science festival sales will go towards a selected local charity.

Activity: Enhance the visitor experience by introducing a new digital visitor pass

Aim: Utilise innovative and visitor focused technology to encourage visitors to see, do and spend more. Embrace AI and Innovative Technology to support Visitor Servicing and Destination Management.

Context: Today's visitors are motivated by authentic, meaningful, local experiences unique to the city and region. Visit Belfast visitor servicing activity connects local and international visitors to our local tourism, cultural and neighbourhood partners. A key focus of 2024- 2027 will be to work with Belfast City Council and other stakeholders to enhance the connectivity between our 'hero' anchor attractions and smaller, lesser-known tourism experiences. This will extend the visitor experience beyond the city centre and into the local neighbourhoods, wider city region and the rest of Northern Ireland thereby extending the visitor spend across the city.

Digital City Pass – overview:

- Deliver and develop a new digital city pass that will encourage visitors to explore more of the city using sustainable transport, (subject to funding.)
 - The pass will incorporate a back-office system/ dashboard which will monitor and track visitor journeys, uptake on Transport, attractions, tours, and events throughout the city.
 - Driving additional spend into the city's businesses and communities.
 - Has potential to be expanded to City Plus Model
 - Integrated with Public Transport/City Bike Scheme
-

Key Destination Management Initiatives

Activity: Grow neighbourhood tourism

Aim: To deliver more visitors and visitor spend to the city's neighbourhoods.

Context: Current European trends illustrate that today's visitors are motivated by authentic, meaningful, local experiences unique to the city and region. Belfast as a city is well placed to deliver on this and help spread the benefit of tourism into our neighbouring communities. A key focus of 2024-25 will be to work with Belfast City Council and other stakeholders to enhance the connectivity between our 'hero' anchor attractions and smaller, lesser-known tourism experiences that will extend the visitor experience beyond the city centre and into the local neighbourhoods.

We will work to ensure there is full integration of neighbourhood messaging across all our activity, building product knowledge and using curated itineraries to better inform visitors choices. We will establish current baseline targets on levels of interest, and uptake on the ground, so we can track progress over the lifespan of this plan on uptake on neighbourhood visits.

Key outputs:

Team Engagement

- Allocate two Travel advisers to be Champions for North & West and South and East, sharing product knowledge with their front-line colleagues.
- VIC Champions meet key contacts in Tourism bodies twice a year.
- All VS Staff receive training in Neighbourhood product knowledge including participating in Fam Trips.
- Belfast Neighbourhoods is included in induction and training for all new staff.
- Robust two-way engagement with Neighbourhood Tourism groups across all levels within the Department.
- Quarterly Review and update meetings with Neighbourhood Tourism organisation's.

Visit Belfast Welcome Centre

- Replace the large graphic panel in the entrance foyer with new updated neighbourhood content highlighting key attractions and Hidden Gems (may include digital screens.)
- Create a branded section in the Literature racking area for neighbourhood literature.
- Allocate desk space within the centre for neighbourhood promotions.

Belfast International Airport

- Neighbourhood images and video content to be included on the 65-inch screen.
- Branded area within Literature racks for neighbourhood literature.

Cruise

- Allocate desk spaces within the cruise hub to neighbourhood promotion.
 - A Belfast neighbourhood map graphic on display.
 - Inclusion of neighbourhood products in a section on Cruise "What's on today."
 - Cruise animation –elements to be delivered by neighbourhood areas.
 - Work with neighbourhood partners to provide opportunities for local communities to be involved in cruise ship welcomes (animation) or learning days so they experience the buzz of a cruise ship day.
-

Activity: Industry Engagement Programme “Get the Knowledge”

Aim: To build destination product knowledge amongst front of house tourism & hospitality staff who are in daily contact with visitors.

Context: This programme will have an added focus on neighbourhood tourism, which is a key element of Visit Belfast’s Business Plan and Belfast City Council’s 10-year Tourism Strategy Make Yourself at Home. This capacity building programme aspires to ensure the economic and social benefits of tourism are spread across the city into our neighbourhoods and wider Belfast City Region, through knowledgeable, confident and informed front of house staff.

Key outputs:

- Quarterly 2-way engagement with neighbourhood tourism organisations.
- 4x seasonal Industry Briefing updates for information sharing. Invited industry representatives speak directly to front of house staff about their product. Regular contributions from strategic, neighbourhood and Belfast Plus partners (Translink, LCCC and A&ND Council).
- 4x neighbourhood familiarisation visits aimed at front of house staff and VIC Network to increase product knowledge and confidence in promoting the destination. Messaging to include FOH staff role in shaping the visitor experience.
- 4x guided walking tours in neighbourhood areas with focus on community products and stories.
- Weekly What’s On ezine to industry front of house database.

Activity: Volunteer Programme

Aim: To enhance the welcome for visitors and provide support to our Front of House staff via a signposting service.

Context: Volunteers can provide a very useful extension of our visitor information servicing activity, helping Visit Belfast enhance and extend our services and providing the welcome at all our visitor touchpoints.

Key outputs:

- Work with Volunteer Now to recruit, maintain and grow the volunteer pool over the next three years.
- Aim to always have a minimum of 15 active volunteers in peak season.
- Primary role - welcome, signpost and orientate visitors across locations e.g. the cruise hub, Belfast Welcome Centre and conference venues., and “off-site” events
- Volunteers to have a role in promoting Neighbourhood tourism by sharing knowledge and passion for their part of the city.
- Increased capacity to enable facilitation of a wider range of visitor servicing support e.g. volunteer street walking programme (peak season) and wrap around services at key city events.
- Contribute to our CSR (volunteering provides residents, from all backgrounds, with the opportunity to give something back to their city. This brings with it a sense of purpose, increased civic pride, brings communities together, which in turn brings about improved mental and physical health).

Activity: Sustainable Destination Messaging

Aim: Engage with visitors to promote the city's sustainable credentials, and recommend sustainable transport options, local products, neighbourhoods etc.

Context: Visitors are more likely to make sustainable choices in destination if it is easy for them to do so and it is important that conscious travellers are aware of and able to access sustainable options.

Key outputs:

- Staff and volunteers to receive training and briefings on how to communicate to visitors about the efforts being made towards Belfast's Sustainable City Journey and the practical steps they can take to make more sustainable choices.

Activity: Visitor Insights and data

Aim: To strengthen research, intelligence, and insights to aid Visit Belfast with decision making and to share information with stakeholders and partners.

Context: Visit Belfast can provide via its VIC base and outreach activities a rich source of visitor data and insights through both the quarterly Visitor Satisfaction surveys and the completion of Customer profile information through staff Tick Sheets. Key findings can be included in the Tourism Barometer and shared with stakeholders and partners.

Key outputs:

- Target 2,000 surveys across Key Visitor touch points
- Maintain VIC Tick Sheets to gain greater insights of visitor profile / nationalities / interests.
- Start baselines for Neighbourhood tourism / interest in visiting / satisfaction levels
- In addition, capture all sales and bookings information.

Activity: Accessibility and inclusion

Aim: Improve visitor information provision and servicing for all.

Context: Visit Belfast will support the delivery of Belfast City Council's three-year Belfast Access and Inclusion Implementation Plan to ensure our city welcomes all visitors on an equal platform. Visit Belfast will communicate training opportunities to its partners and encourage engagement in the programme.

Key outputs:

- Digital Accessible Guide for Belfast to be housed on VisitBelfast.com.
- Increase the number of Belfast partners on AccessAble.com
- Ensure all FOH teams undertake Inclusivity training including the Jam Card and Deaf awareness course.
- With BCC/ TNI ensure all new training materials videos are shared with our own team and partners.
- Collaborate with BCC/ TNI and partners to strive for best practice across the city in terms of access and inclusivity.

KPIs	
Total visitor enquiries handled	766,000
Visitor footfall at VBWC and BIA VIC	495,000
Maintain visitors' satisfaction levels	85% very satisfied and 15% satisfied
Gateway enquiries as a proportion of all enquiries	247,000
Income generated through commercial activity	£804,481
Visitor servicing economic benefit	£18m
Productivity Measures	
Increase ticketing clients	from 46 to 53
Increase locally sourced merchandise	from 26-35
Maintain volunteer numbers	at 15
Increase participation in the VB's Industry engagement programme	Increase participation to: 190 attendees at Quarterly Briefings 64 attendees on Neighbourhood walks 136 attendees across 4 x Neighbourhood Fam trips
Explore further use of new technology, such as AI to enhance visitor servicing	Additional engagement with visitors, particularly younger markets
Promoting Belfast's sustainable story via our VIC teams	Knowledgeable staff providing information on sustainable providers and sustainable travel
Enhancing provision of information on accessibility	Further training for VS teams Belfast accessible digital guide
Number of neighbourhood tourism referrals	Year 1 baseline across organisations

Cruise

Introduction and context

Cruise tourism continues to be one of Belfast and Northern Ireland's success stories. Cruise Belfast, the sales, marketing and visitor servicing partnership between Visit Belfast and Belfast Harbour, has established strong and profitable working relationships with cruise lines and operators since 1999.

An award-winning cruise destination, Belfast is regarded as one of the UK and Ireland's most welcoming and vibrant destinations. Since the first cruise ship arrival in 1996, Belfast has welcomed more than 1,000 calls to the city and over 2 million cruise visitors. Belfast now holds the title of number one Cruise Transit Port in The British Isles. Cruise visitors are a valued and crucial part of the growing tourism economy in Belfast and Northern Ireland. Cruise tourism continues to be a catalyst for regeneration and economic growth in Belfast, supporting jobs and creating opportunities for our businesses and communities across the region.

The Cruise Welcome offered by Visit Belfast is a key part of destination management and plays a significant role in the success of maintaining and sustaining inbound cruise tourism. The importance of resourcing this area of operations cannot be underestimated. It is essential to employ the right people for the right teams. Visit Belfast works closely with Belfast Harbour and local shipping agents in a Cruise Destination Management role, to ensure the smooth running of operations at the Port and wider destination. Key benefits of cruise tourism include:

- Economic Benefit: Passenger and crew spend, port and operational charges, storing, refit and repair. Embarkment value can also be higher depending on accommodation requirement.
- Well planned and managed tourism.
- First-time out of state visitors, with a strong potential to become return visitors.
- Word of mouth and social media recommendations-
- Strong delivery of NI wide visitors - 42% of cruise excursions are outside of Belfast.

Key achievements:

- Welcomed and serviced 372 Cruise Ships and 659,286 cruise guests over the last three years
- 2023 has been the most successful season to date with 159 cruise calls, 10% increase on pre-pandemic record set in 2019. Final passenger / crew numbers were 323,924 equating to an economic benefit of £20million to the local economy (on passenger and crew spend only, not including cruise ship organised shore excursions).
- Winner of the Cruise Critic Best UK and Ireland Port of Call 2023.
- Passenger capacity increased to an average of 90% per ship.
- High cruise visitor levels: 100% of cruise visitors were satisfied with their visit to Belfast/Northern Ireland (96% very satisfied, 4% satisfied).
- Strong propensity to return, 94% of cruise visitors surveyed would be keen to return to Belfast Northern Ireland.

Cruise – key areas of activity:

- Developing and nurturing relationships with cruise lines to encourage new and repeat calls.
- Visitor servicing, shore side “Welcome” (and commercial sales)
- Cruise arrival and wider destination management
- Strategic planning for future cruise tourism growth on a UK & Ireland basis
- Cruise Sustainability Plan.

2024 Cruise Season at a glance:

- 141 ships between April–October
- 33 Cruise lines berthing in Belfast
- 7 Overnight stays at Pollock Dock
- 1 Large Turnaround
- 7 Partial Turnarounds
- 26 double days
- 8 Inaugural Calls
- 274,000 passengers and crew generating £20 million into the local economy.
- 65% of ships staying after 6pm
- 28% of ships staying after 8pm.

Visit Belfast Cruise Priorities in 2024-2025:

- Maintain Belfast’s position as a key cruise destination in the British Isles, delivering between 145 and 160 ships per annum to 2027. Following a planned move after 2027 to the new cruise terminal, to sustainably grow the volume and value of Cruise to Belfast and Northern Ireland.
- Continue to support the local cruise supply chain of guides, transport, attractions, tours, retail and hospitality sector, by extending the season, and spreading visitors across the city and region.
- Provide excellent visitor servicing and destination management.

Actions by area of activity:

Business Development

Aim: Developing and nurturing relationships with cruise lines to increase the number of Cruise calls.

Context: Work with Belfast Harbour to deliver a targeted sales plan with existing lines to increase future calls to Belfast, Northern Ireland. This will include tradeshow and calls to the major cruise lines in the USA, Europe and the UK.

Key outputs:

- Enhance relationships existing and prospective cruise lines
- Target new lines to position the destination as a new port of call through virtual sales calls/presentations, FAMs and attendance at Sea Trade and other industry platforms.
- Grow the number of full and partial turnarounds.
- Work collaboratively with Port of Liverpool to target additional calls through collectively working to provide more flexibility for accommodating Cruise lines itineraries.
- Create and develop product updates, destination marketing support and suggested itineraries for shore-ex and itinerary planners. Incorporate more local and neighbourhood products and immersive experiences.
- Refresh of the Cruise Belfast website in 2024.

Visitor Servicing & Destination Management

Aim: Provide a warm welcome and world-class visitor information service to the 296,458 cruise visitors arriving in Belfast in 2024, working with Belfast Harbour and Cruise partners to deliver an excellent visitor experience on arrival, departure and in the destination.

Context: Continue to engage with the main cruise excursion companies and shipping agents, Belfast Harbour Police and Harbour Security, experience, tours and transport providers, all of whom have a key role to play in delivering a high-quality tourism experience on the ground both in the Port, the city and the wider destination.

Key outputs:

- Maximise footfall and spend to tourism partners across Belfast and Northern Ireland; and by doing so, optimise the economic benefit from the 141 cruise calls generating £20m spend into the local economy.
- Work with the local cruise supply chain to facilitate the delivery of a best-in-class cruise experience.
- Ensure that Visit Belfast maximises commercial income streams to support Visitor Servicing operating costs.
- A visitor focused approach will ensure high visitor satisfaction levels which will impact on customer feedback measured by the cruise lines.
- Visit Belfast to oversee landside operations including the management of the Cruise Shuttle service and managing a team of Cruise Welcome Ambassadors.
- Provide a shore side welcome for first time visits providing entertainment that highlights local culture and music.

KPIs 2024-2025

Support Belfast Harbour in retaining and growing cruise calls to Belfast and NI. The KPIs for 2024 are:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 141 ships • 274,000 Cruise Guests • £20M economic impact
Generate Commercial revenue from cruise retail and commercial platforms in 2024	£429k
Maintain cruise visitors satisfaction levels.	86% very satisfied and 14% satisfied
City, neighbourhood and regional spread of visitors	Work with cruise lines to develop sample itineraries that include gateway and neighbourhood products and services.
Build a collaborative approach with the local cruise supply chain	Meet with the Partners of the Cruise supply chain. pre and post season briefings.
Cruise sustainability plan	Develop year 2 action plan
Accessibility and Inclusion	Ensure Shuttle Buses are accessible. requirement at the cruise terminal, for taxis at taxi ranks to accommodate passengers with accessible needs. Accessibility and inclusion training for all VB staff servicing cruise ships.

Marketing and Communications

Introduction and context

Visit Belfast's marketing and communications plans embody a comprehensive and strategic approach to promoting Belfast and its surrounding City Region. By putting people, place, and uniquely Belfast communities at the heart of its stories, Visit Belfast aims to communicate authentic experiences to its key markets locally and internationally. Our marketing commitment for 2024-25, fully recognizes the creative potential of our city and the vital importance of supporting both our neighbourhood areas and Belfast 2024. We understand that these elements are key enablers for the success and growth of our city's visitor economy.

Our approach is centred around supporting a sustainable city tourism industry while also contributing to the city's broader agenda of creating a healthy, sustainable, inclusive, and growing economy. With this in mind, our plans are designed to be responsive and agile, allowing us to quickly adapt to opportunities, market gaps, and changing demand.

We are committed to working smarter and better, fostering collaboration and integration with key stakeholders such as the Belfast City Council, Tourism Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland, and our industry partners and neighbourhood organisations. By combining and integrating our marketing efforts, we aim to strengthen our outputs and outcomes without any duplication or inefficiencies. Ultimately, we are dedicated to increasing visitor engagement and participation by promoting and showcasing the city's tourism and cultural experiences, as well as highlighting the unique propositions offered by our diverse neighbourhoods, all in new, exciting, and authentic ways.

Key achievements:

- Delivery of leisure campaigns have delivered over £149m to the local economy over 3 years.
- Web visitors are annually more than 2 million maintained during pandemic years (7 million over in the last 3 years).
- Social media engagements have increased by 75% over past 3 years.
- 2023-24 expected output of 31.4m social media impressions.

Key areas of activity

Visit Belfast's Marketing and Communications activity is principally focused around the following five areas:

- **Marketing Campaigns**
 - Supporting Belfast's tourism and culture strategies, utilise priority themes and neighbourhood USP to market, brand and position Belfast.
 - Attracting city breaks and day trips from local, national and international markets.
 - Growing tourism markets and segments in a sustainable and inclusive way.
- **Web and Digital**
 - Providing trusted/official visitor information and promotion to existing and new visitors.
 - Developing and optimising new visitor and associated websites and supporting Visitor digital screens.
 - Enhancing email marketing and social media promotion.

- **Content and Publications**

- Planning and creating content, using key themes and neighbourhood connections for use across all digital and print channels.
- Supporting B2B sales, leisure marketing and visitor servicing with local stories and emotional touchpoints to promote Belfast City, its neighbourhoods and region.

- **PR and Communications**

- Corporate/consumer PR and brand positioning to strengthen visitor interest in uniquely Belfast neighbourhood areas with curated stories and itineraries.
- Provide full press office service, support media fam-trips, influencer engagement and itineraries curated across the city area.

- **Partnership and Commercial**

- Review and development of membership tiers and strategic and corporate partners.
- Nurture industry relationships and engagement and ensure that partners achieve maximum benefit.
- Increase neighbourhood engagement and partnership working.
- Develop new cluster approach to strengthen neighbourhood proposition and cultural positioning as an integral part of city tourism.
- Renew, service and expand partnership and commercial opportunities in sustainable ways.

Key objectives 2024/25:

- Deliver post-pandemic full recovery of city breaks and overnight stays and day trips from priority NI, ROI and GB markets.
- Promote authentic urban and gateway experiences to encourage visitors to stay longer, grow shoulder season and fill periods of low occupancy.
- Encourage visitors and locals to explore neighbourhoods and discover authentic and uniquely Belfast experiences with compelling reasons to visit.
- Develop responsible marketing and communications plans built on core principles of sustainable, inclusive and accessible tourism.
- Collaborate with our members, partners and communities to strengthen combined outputs and maximise our tourism assets, promotion and engagement.
- Maximise use of good data and our use of innovative digital technology and data analysis to inform our marketing and communications.
- Showcase Belfast 2024 and showcasing the city's cultural and tourism events in a consistent and exciting way; increasing appreciation and engagement.
- Support the marketing of Belfast as a leading destination for hosting business events and support return to pre-pandemic levels.

Summary of key themes to be used in 2024/25

The key themes for Visit Belfast's marketing and communications activity can be summarised as follows:

- **Belfast 2024:** Cultural Celebration embracing creativity and UNESCO City of Music: Highlighting Belfast's vibrant cultural scene, artistic events, and its designation as a UNESCO City of Music. Emphasising the city's music festivals, theatres, art exhibitions, and cultural celebrations.
- **Neighbourhoods:** Homespun Pioneers: Curated stories, history, and heritage: Focusing on the unique character and stories of Belfast's neighbourhoods. Highlighting the rich culture and history, heritage

attractions, local traditions, and the contributions of famous people and the people who call these neighbourhoods their home.

- **Maritime Powerhouse:** Highlighting Belfast's maritime history, particularly its association with RMS Titanic, built in Belfast. Showcasing the iconic waterfront, the Maritime Mile, and world class Titanic Belfast and other maritime attractions related to the city's maritime stories and heritage.
- **Food and Drink:** Uniquely Local: Showcasing Belfast's rich culinary offerings, including local restaurants, food markets, distilleries, and tasting experiences. Promoting the city's diverse food scene, unique flavours, and traditional cuisines.
- **Events and Festivals:** Promoting the city and region's annual events calendar, including both seasonal and local activities. Highlighting major festivals, sporting events, cultural gatherings, and community celebrations that take place throughout the year.
- **Natural Gateway to City Region:** Promoting Belfast as a gateway to the natural beauty of the surrounding seascapes, hills, and landscapes. Highlighting outdoor activities, hiking trails, scenic drives, and opportunities for nature exploration in the city region.
- **City Plus:** Outdoor and Nature, City Plus Experiences and Family Adventures: Showcasing Belfast as a city that offers a combination of urban amenities and outdoor experiences. Highlighting family-friendly attractions, outdoor experiences and adventures, and activities that cater to city explorers.
- **Accessible and Inclusive:** Reflecting the diversity of a welcoming, safe, fair, and inclusive city for all visitors. Emphasising Belfast's accessibility features, inclusive attractions, and efforts to create an inclusive and welcoming environment (LGBTQ+, Disabled persons, minority groups.)
- **Sustainable Belfast:** Embodying our dedication to climate change and sustainable practices, a city that nurtures its community and environment. Through education and incentives, inspiring residents, businesses and visitors to become environmentally conscious. Sharing compelling stories that showcase the city and region's progress and utilising the sustainability agenda to guide our communication and marketing efforts.

Key interventions for 2024/25

Activity: Marketing Campaigns

Approach: An integrated marketing approach will be adopted to rejuvenate our city and tourism sector, aligned with BCC's strategic areas: Grow, Position, Experience, and Sustain, as outlined in the draft Tourism Strategy. The campaign plans will bolster Belfast 2024, tourism and cultural strategies through thematic marketing and city branding. Our plans will be flexible, allowing for swift, smart, and tactical activity. We'll work closely with our industry partners, BCC, TNI and TI to enhance engagement by promoting the city's authentic tourism, cultural and neighbourhood experiences in innovative ways.

Summary – areas of focus:

Destination marketing campaigns: Digital first, simple, targeted campaigns that capture emotion and inspire visits to Belfast through using place, local voices, local people and experiences

Attract city breaks, day trips and short stays from local, national and international markets

Co-op campaigns through air & sea carriers including shoulder season, city touch points & themes, authentic experiences.

Support Belfast's cultural and tourism strategies including Belfast 2024. Visit Belfast will support the marketing and promotion through:

- Implementing a marketing take-over across all our owned channels,
- Delivering the marketing of Belfast 2024 in NI/ROI and GB markets
- Working collaboratively with BCC, TNI and TI
- Utilising selected media partners with all island and UK coverage

Neighbourhoods: Support the dispersion of visitors into local neighbourhood areas through digital first campaigns using local voices, local experiences and local stories, in particular:

- **Identify and showcase unique neighbourhood experiences:** Document the distinctive characteristics, cultural heritage, and attractions of each neighbourhood in Belfast. Highlight the diverse range of experiences that visitors can experience in each area, such as historical landmarks, local food, street art, hidden gems, traditional pubs, and attractions and tours. Create compelling content, including articles, blog posts, videos, and social media posts, to showcase these unique experiences.
- **Collaborate with local businesses and community organisations:** Establish partnerships/memberships with local businesses, tourism organizations, and tourism stakeholders in each neighbourhood. Work together to develop joint marketing campaigns, events, and promotions that highlight the neighbourhood's authentic experiences. This can include neighbourhood festivals, guided tours, or special events that showcase the local culture, traditions, and talents.
- **Engage local residents as ambassadors:** Encourage locals to become ambassadors for their neighbourhoods by sharing their personal stories, recommendations, and insights. This can be done through social media campaigns, guest blogging opportunities, or by featuring locals in promotional and publication materials. Their authentic perspectives and passion for their neighbourhoods will resonate with visitors and add credibility to the promotion efforts.

-
- **Create neighbourhood-specific itineraries:** Develop curated itineraries for each neighbourhood (and include in city itineraries), highlighting the must-see attractions, local businesses, and unique experiences. These itineraries will be featured on the Visit Belfast website, in visitor guides, and made available to hotels concierge and other front of house staff. We will ensure that the itineraries cater to different interests and preferences, such as history, food, art, or outdoor activities, to appeal to a wide range of visitor demographics.
 - **Utilise social media:** Using our owned social media platforms, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Twitter, to showcase vibrant imagery of the neighbourhoods, share stories and testimonials from local people and visitors, and engage the online community in new and exciting ways. Utilise search engine optimisation techniques to increase visibility and reach.
 - **Collaborate with travel influencers and bloggers:** Partner with travel influencers and bloggers who specialize in authentic travel experiences. Invite them to explore the different neighbourhoods in Belfast and share their experiences through blog posts, social media content, and videos. Their influence and reach can help to amplify the promotion of Belfast's neighbourhood areas to wider audiences.
 - **Measure and evaluate the impact:** Regularly monitor and analyse the effectiveness of the marketing efforts in promoting Belfast's neighbourhood areas. Track website traffic, social media engagement, and visitor feedback to assess the impact of the designed promotional activities. Collect data on visitor numbers, spending patterns, and satisfaction levels to gauge the success of the campaign and identify areas for improvement.
-

Activity: Web and Digital

Approach: Visit Belfast adopts a digital first approach to our marketing content and advertising, to effectively communicate with our key audiences. Visit Belfast will continue to accelerate its digital marketing capabilities to keep at the forefront of digital communications with continued investment in:

- New design and development of visitbelfast.com
- Development of visitor experience blogs
- Social media video content production
- Development of paid social media advertising
- Social media influencer strategy
- Development of email marketing

Summary – areas of focus: The Digital Team will;

- Update and create content to promote events & festivals, as well as our key themes as per our 2024-2025 content plans, with a particular focus on Neighbourhoods and Belfast 2024.
- Update and create new content for the website based on our website analytics, google search research & insights and industry insights, enabling our website to continue to return high via google search rankings.
- Increase the number of high performing keywords via Google Search.
- Oversee the new Consumer website design and development project for go live September 2024, ensuring we maintain our high performing SEO.
- Develop and increase our referral traffic from associated appropriate industry websites and other Visit Belfast owned websites.
- Develop and further grow our social media platforms that direct and encourage visits to the website.

Activity: Content and Publications

Approach: Visit Belfast's portfolio of literature serves as both sales and marketing tools for the city as well as supporting our visitor servicing requirements.

Summary – areas of focus:

The Belfast City and Region Guide is produced three times a year and includes inspirational editorial features and a directory of partner listings for key activities, attractions, tours and food and drink experiences. It is distributed widely throughout the city via guest accommodation, key transport hubs in Northern Ireland and Dublin, Stena Line onboard guest services and the VIC network across Northern Ireland.

The Belfast Student Guide is produced and distributed annually during September's Freshers' Week via welcome events, faculty departments and student accommodation.

Other miscellaneous and campaign specific brochures will be produced as and when appropriate, as well as an updated **Visitor Map, a digital Visitor Guide, Experience Belfast Plus, Restaurant Voucher scheme collateral, Visit Belfast Marketing Opportunities, Belfast Accessible Guide and industry support materials**. All literature will be made available in digital formats and introducing sustainable options for print (FSC approved paper and carbon balanced.)

-
- Within the Belfast City and Region Guides which are produced three times a year, Visit Belfast will be dedicating a double page spread within each of these guides to promote the **Neighbourhood** areas of the city.
-

Activity: PR and Communications

Approach: Visit Belfast is committed to enhancing its reputation and increasing awareness of its sales and marketing plans, visitor servicing, and commercial activities among key consumer and corporate audiences. Our Public Relations (PR) and Strategic Corporate Communications team will drive positive reinforcement through local, national, and international media relations.

Through effective stakeholder management strategies and well-executed media relations, Visit Belfast will utilise the power of PR and Communications to protect our reputation and strengthen our position and influence.

With over 460 partners, Visit Belfast will actively seek collaborative and mutually beneficial PR opportunities that support our goals and those of the wider tourism sector.

Summary – areas of focus:

Position: Position Belfast in the minds of our visitors as a place of interest. A place where there's a story to be explored through its history, experiences and people. Belfast is a must-see city ideal for a break.

Utilise: Utilise our key themes through a calendar of integrated PR activity for the whole of the organisation. Utilise our USPs – our people, neighbourhoods, communities and our advancement in sustainable tourism.

Generate: In this digital age, generate coverage through a multichannel approach. Through media, influencers and online channels, generate stories, emotion and tell compelling stories through narratives, storytelling, imagery and video.

Collaborate: Maximise potential exposure for the city through collaboration with our partners and stakeholders (Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland, strategic and corporate partners).

Marcomms KPIs for 2024-25

Area	KPIs
Overnight visits	250,000
Day trips	200,000
Bednights	350,000
Visitor spend	£60m
Web visits	2.2m
Social media impressions	41m
Engagements	3.2m
Video views	15m
WOTS	180m
AVE	£600k
PR articles	325
Corporate X/Twitter followers	3,960 (+10%)
Corporate LinkedIn followers	11,150 (+10%)

Strategic focus – Neighbourhood Tourism KPIs

PR and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press visit – include at least one neighbourhood element to each visit (subject to theme.) • Influencers – 2 targeted influencer visits to neighbourhood areas • PR Profiles – 4 dedicated neighbourhood press releases (use our community to tell their stories) plus inclusion in 2 generic press releases. • Partners' Ezines – 4 pieces in the monthly ezine based on neighbourhood areas. • What's On Industry Ezines – 12 neighbourhood inclusions.
Consumer website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New consumer website development will hero the neighbourhoods landing page on the homepage (Sept 2024). • Development of a dedicated Neighbourhood landing page, highlighting each of the Neighbourhood areas and including new visitor itineraries content. • Neighbourhood partner products will be included throughout other appropriate blogs for further promotion. • 10 dedicated neighbourhood blogs created and co-developed with a relevant Neighbourhood representative from each area.
Consumer social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media posts to be scheduled across relevant social media channels to further promote the new neighbourhood website content created. • New social media video content to be created for each neighbourhood area and shared across relevant social media channels. • 'Neighbourhoods' social media series created by collaborating with selected local influencers who visit a dedicated area, for a walk through to tell us what their favourite thing is about the neighbourhood and share unique stories.
Consumer ezine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a dedicated consumer e-zine's that focuses on neighbourhoods and partner products and offering within each area, to further promote and create awareness. E-zine to be distributed to Visit Belfast's NI (35K) & ROI (15K) subscribers database.
Campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonal campaign activity to include neighbourhood buy-in. • Development of 2 dedicated neighbourhood digital campaigns. • All campaign landing pages to link to neighbourhood content and itineraries.
Publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Guides - 2 pages in each seasonal issue to promote neighbourhood assets, events and itineraries. • 'My Belfast' DPS feature – narrated through a local person, utilised across digital channels and PR activity.

Partnership and Commercial

Introduction and context

Visit Belfast is a public-private sector organisation that thrives on strong partnerships to achieve its goals as a Destination Marketing and Management Organization (DMMO). These partnerships are vital for the success of our tourism, marketing, and sales plans for the city region. We currently have a strong base of 460 partner businesses across various sectors, and our aim is to further expand this membership to 520 businesses representing the tourism industry in the city region. Our approach to developing partnerships and growing commercial revenue in 2024/25 is summarised in the table below.

Objective	Key activities / actions
Ensure that membership remains affordable	In recognition of the current cost of living crisis affecting our members, we have decided to freeze membership costs for the upcoming year, despite increased activity and benefits.
Partner Engagement	<p>In 2024-25, our focus will be on enhancing partner engagement which will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking and educational events: Our event calendar will include a range of activities such as speaker lunches, recruitment sessions, AGM, anniversary celebrations, neighbourhood marketing clinics and sustainability briefings. • Regular one-to-one partner engagement calls and updates to keep our partners informed and maximise their membership benefits.
Share our commitment to sustainability	We will support Visit Belfast's Sustainability and Impact Manager in promoting the importance of the Green Tourism accreditation scheme.
Expand our strategic and corporate partnerships	We aim to further develop existing relationships and expand with new partnerships to support the tourism development and growth of the city region.
Develop partnerships to support neighbourhood tourism	<p>We will collaborate and work closely with key tourism organisations and businesses within neighbourhoods, including Fáilte Feirste Thiar and EastSide Partnership and tourism organisations in North and South Belfast, to increase participation and enhance the promotion of our neighbourhood areas. We will also introduce a new initiative to develop successful Neighbourhood Clusters that support smaller businesses and tourism providers.</p> <p>Quarterly review meetings with neighbourhood tourism organisations to support planning and reporting.</p>
Nurture regional tourism partnerships	Visit Belfast has established successful partnerships with Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC). In the coming year we will continue to collaborate with existing regional tourism partners, increasing our collaboration and buy-in, participation within the city region including Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Newry and Mourne to efficiently promote each council area and provide value for money to visitors.

Deepen ties with cultural tourism partners	In alignment with Belfast City Council's Belfast 2024 initiative, Visit Belfast aims to expand its membership base to include more local artists and performers. This partnership initiative will contribute to our neighbourhood and community engagement plans, connecting visitors with the city's vibrant cultural scene.
Expand commercial partnership opportunities and deliver even better value to partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on ensuring repeat buy-in, enhancing current offerings, and identifying and creating new revenue opportunities and streams. • Capitalise on getting exposure on popular platforms and extend our offering to partners increasing our digital sales plans and reviewing the value of platforms and services provided. • Maximise the potential across our new and developing digital platforms, such as visitbelfast.com and businesseventsbelfastandni.com. • Expand advertising opportunities at the Cruise hub to reach a wider pool of member businesses. • To support our marketing and sales plans we will develop an updated Marketing and Sales Opportunities guide for 2024-25. This guide will showcase a wide range of commercial platforms available to our partners, providing targeted benefits to their businesses. It will be printed on sustainable paper and made available on our website, visitbelfastpartners.com

Partnership KPIs	
Members	520 (+15%)
Retention of partners	90%
Corporate partners	2 new
Member fees	£220,000
Guides income	£82,000
Screens income etc	£185,000
RTP agreements	£60k
Neighbourhood tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase membership by 10% from neighbourhood businesses. • Host a series Marketing Engagement Workshops in neighbourhoods. • Generate 30 new leads / sales calls to businesses in neighbourhood areas. • Develop neighbourhood tourism clusters across city.

Travel Trade

Introduction and context

Global demand for group travel remains strong. Operators and destinations are adapting to changing traveller behaviours and preferences including shorter lead times for booking, higher prices due to global inflationary pressures and the emergence of undiscovered, immersive and 'off the beaten track' experiences to itineraries.

Belfast is well positioned as a destination on both Ireland and UK focused itineraries and in 2023 the city hosted two major industry conferences - UK Inbound and the Coach Tour Association which helped to reinforce Belfast's commitment to supporting the travel trade.

The feedback on Belfast from tour operators at World Travel Market is still very positive with some new and emerging markets now also showing interest. There has also been a recurring theme of operators wanting information on new and undiscovered experiences including neighbourhood tourism. Another opportunity for Belfast is around the Irish Open (2024) and the 153rd Open in 2025 with operators intending to use the city as a base for both events.

In terms of challenges, one of the main issues and questions from with operators is the ETA (Electronic Travel Authorisation). The introduction of ETA (phase 2) for the main non-visa national countries is likely to be introduced from 2025. This will be an issue for tour operators providing all-island tours and some have already adapted and developed a UK/NI tour.

The other emerging issue that operators have raised is the cost and availability of accommodation in the city centre, with several operators now looking at outside of the city centre. A challenge is also the availability of secure coach parking in the city centre since the withdrawal of the temporary site at Crumlin Road Gaol. Potential options for alternative solutions are being explored by Visit Belfast and key stakeholders.

Travel trade remains an important market segment for Visit Belfast and its industry partners. The Leisure Trade Sales Manager is responsible for promoting the Belfast city region as a must visit destination for the group market and generating and referring opportunities to Visit Belfast partners.

Visit Belfast has an important role in promoting the depth and breadth of group product on offer across the city region; in particular, the small-medium sized experiences, attractions and suppliers. Working at a destination level is a much more effective way for smaller partners to gain visibility and traction with tour operators. For the large attractions and hotels with established relationships and contracted rates in place, Visit Belfast has as secondary role providing destination support where required.

Visit Belfast also has an important destination management role for current and prospective inbound operators seeking advice acting as a single point of contact for destination queries and updates, introductions to partners, itinerary planning, promotion and delivery.

The primary source markets for group business into Belfast are set out below:

Priority Source Markets 2024-25	Rationale
GB & Ireland	High volume, high propensity, established operators with room for growth.
North America	High value, high propensity, increased Dublin access, increased demand and growth. High spend.
Europe (Tier 1) Germany, Netherlands	Good volume, lower spend, opportunity for Belfast to be included as part of a UK/Ireland itinerary. Markets have a strong propensity to book via tour operators & travel agents.
Europe (Tier 2) Rest of Europe - France, Spain, Italy and Nordics	Lower travel trade volume, market has as strong propensity to travel independently with proactive operators who require support and deliver reasonable volumes.

In addition to in-market activity, ezines and enquiry management, Visit Belfast has an account management structure in place to manage its key operators, divided into gold, silver and bronze.

Gold: 63 operators falling into two categories – the top inbound travel trade with the greatest volume and value as well as those operators with significant growth potential. The leisure trade sales manager has a target of at least quarterly direct contact with gold operators.

Silver: 123 operators – medium volume and value travel trade, such as those bringing in occasional and ad-hoc business or low volume series business. Proactive contact is at least twice annually.

Bronze: 563 operators – Low volume and value trade. Includes agents and operators who don't specialise in the UK and Ireland but have potential to influence FIT and small, ad-hoc group bookings.

Visit Belfast also has an engaged travel trade database of 3,763 contacts from 771 operators which receive its quarterly e-zine.

Key areas of activity

- Representing Belfast city region and Visit Belfast partners at in-market tradeshow, exhibitions and buyer events for travel trade – e.g. Britain and Ireland Marketplace, World Travel Market, Meet the Trade Dublin, TI Germany, BeNe / Nordics workshops, TI/TNI Meet the Buyer and ITOA events.
- Destination marketing and promotion for groups – itineraries, presentations, product updates, quarterly travel trade ezine
- Lead generation and partner referrals
- Account management of key operators - destination management support and enquiry handling

Key aims for 24-25:

- **Neighbourhood tourism** - the group tour market represents a strong potential opportunity for neighbourhood tourism due to the emerging demand for authentic, undiscovered and immersive experiences amongst operators. While individual experiences are included in Visit Belfast's group presentations, neighbourhood tourism as a theme will be a strategic priority for the leisure trade sales manager and operationalised as follows:
 - Curation and launch of neighbourhood tourism themed itineraries for the travel trade market in collaboration with key partner organisations and neighbourhood businesses and tour operator clients.
 - Organise a Neighbourhood tourism webinar to launch new itineraries and highlight partner products. This will also be recorded and shared with Visit Belfast's travel trade database for product training.
 - Neighbourhood tourism themed travel trade ezine to Visit Belfast's database of 3,763 contacts.
 - Commitment that every travel trade presentation will include neighbourhood tourism as a key theme for Belfast.
 - Development of a social video to showcase the neighbourhood experiences on offer for the group market.
 - Hosting a neighbourhood tourism FAM with key operators.
- **New formats for promotion** – development of quarterly briefing webinars as a new format to engage with operators by providing quarterly webinars and product updates and offering partner showcase opportunities.
- **Travel trade section of the visitbelfast.com website to be redeveloped.** The leisure trade manager will also work with the digital team to explore opportunities to showcase itineraries and experiences on offer for the group market.

Travel Trade KPIs 2024/25	
Travel trade leads generated	£2m economic impact
Travel trade buyer engagements	200
Travel trade partner referrals	175
Neighbourhood tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and launch new Neighbourhood themed itineraries specifically for the travel trade market• Deliver a Neighbourhood tourism themed travel trade webinar and ezine to VB's database of over 3.7k contacts• Development of a neighbourhood tourism social video focused on groups to showcase the experiences on offer• Hosting a neighbourhood tourism FAM with key operators• Commitment to including neighbourhood tourism as a key theme in all travel trade marketing and promotion

Business Events

Introduction and context

2023 was a record year for business events in Belfast, with 92 conferences held in the city worth over 32,000 delegates, 97,000 bed nights and £42.5m in economic impact. When compared with pre-pandemic performance, business bed nights were +34% ahead of 2019 levels and economic impact performance was 22% higher than 2019, demonstrating a strong recovery for Belfast in a challenging operating environment.

Three-year sales performance by the Visit Belfast team (2021-2024) has delivered a 94% increase in business event bed nights, working in partnership with industry. During the same period, the team received more than 10 national and international awards in recognition of its pioneering work on sustainability and impact, exceptional client service levels, comprehensive destination management support and by strategically aligning business events to economic development.

This important development work by Visit Belfast over the past three years has enhanced Belfast's proposition and its reputation as a responsible and forward-thinking destination, equipped to meet the new demands of the business events market.

Key achievements

- 94% growth in business event sales (bed nights) between 2021 and 2024
- £511m leads generated 2021-2024
- Secured over 10 national and international awards during 2021-2024
- Destination team of the year – UK 2022 & 2023 (Meetings Industry Association)
- Best Conference Destination – International, 2022 & 2023 (C&IT Awards)
- Best Convention Bureau – International, 2023 (MICEBOOK)
- 100% of all event organisers surveyed by Visit Belfast said that they are likely or highly likely to recommend Belfast as a conference destination (2023)
- 100% of event organisers rated the service received by Visit Belfast as 'excellent-good' (2023)
- Belfast is ranked 11th in the world for sustainability (Global Destinations Sustainability Index - 2023)
- A record year for business events in 2023 in terms of economic impact with Belfast hosting 92 conferences 32,000 delegates, 97,000 bed nights and £42.5m

Key areas of activity

Visit Belfast is the city and region sales team responsible for attracting and hosting business events into Belfast and Northern Ireland. In broad terms, activities cover:

- Destination promotion for business events
- Lead generation/business development
- Sales/conversion activities
- Destination management (after-sales)

Area of Activity	Actions include:
Destination promotion for business events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination Marketing – development of the Belfast business events brand position and playbook, destination presentations and ezines, management of the business events website and social media channels. • In-market promotion – promoting Belfast as a business event destination at tradeshow, exhibitions and industry events, organising client events and sales missions - GB, ROI, Europe and North America. (2,000 buyer engagements target 24/25). • Ambassador circle network management – recruiting new and developing relationships with existing ambassadors (business, academic and medical leaders) to attract strategic events to Northern Ireland – (1,4000 ambassadors, 5 sector advisory panels).
Lead generation and business development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead generation and sales research (Generate and manage £130m worth of leads 24/25). • Bids/Proposals/Enquiry management – development of city bids, proposals, RFPs and presentations as well as management of inbound business event enquiries/referrals (Bid for events worth £105m 24/25).
Sales and conversion activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure business events for the city worth 34,000 delegates, 95,200 bed nights and £35m in economic impact* in partnership with industry (24/25). • Sales/pipeline management – prospecting and sales calls, developing relationships with key event organisers customer relationship management and pipeline management. (Current pipeline value – 464 leads worth £529m). • Site inspections and FAMs – hosting and organizing site visits and FAMs for prospective clients. • Promotion and management of the Belfast and NI Conference Support Scheme – scheme promotion, preparing applications for panel decision, liaising with client, issuing of letters of offer, management of claims and post event evaluation. (Finance dept support with the governance and financial management of the scheme.)
Destination management (after sales)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a destination and account management service for all forward booked events into Belfast (approx 150-200 events) acting as a single point of contact for all destination enquiries from incoming event organisers. <p>Support includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegate marketing and information – Visit Belfast blogs/guides/content on tours/attractions things to do, extend your stay, welcome video to promote the conference, FAQs, tours/attractions, getting here and getting around. For larger events; pop-up visitor servicing desk to support the event when it arrives in Belfast. • Working with industry partners on delegate offers and promotions to encourage delegates to explore Belfast and NI when here for the conference, plus extender / repeat visit hotel offers and delegate literature. • Sourcing local suppliers and partners to service business events (as well as dinners, entertainment). • Coordinating requests for local speakers, potential sponsors, delegates and

	<p>exhibitors working with the ambassador circle and local stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability and impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1:1 guidance with clients providing advice and ideas to make their conference in Belfast more sustainable - Development of the Visit Belfast sustainable events framework and legacy/impact guide - Sustainability resources and toolkits, carbon measurement and offsetting options. • Post event evaluation surveys and feedback. • Conference support scheme application post event claims management ensuring Ts and Cs of the Letters of Offer are met. Finance dept lead on financial management of the scheme.
--	---

Key areas of strength to build upon:

- **Leveraging the region's sector strengths** to attract the 'right' events to Belfast and Northern Ireland – focusing on those sectors where NI is leading, the most likely to convert; with the greatest potential to deliver economic, research and legacy benefits for the region.
- **Maximising our strong GB market awareness and performance** – particularly in the association sector. (60% of all business events in Belfast were from GB - 2023).
- **Harnessing Belfast's largest sales channel for business events** – The Ambassador Circle network of 1,400 leaders and five sector advisory panels. (79% of all NI business events are confirmed with support from an ambassador).
- **Promoting Belfast's sustainability credentials and support** – which is a critical element of Belfast's business events proposition and a USP over other destinations in its competitor set.
- **'Above and beyond' approach to destination management support** – which is frequently cited as a USP by event organisers given that Belfast is an unfamiliar destination to them, and they lack the local knowledge and established supplier relationships. As their destination partner, Visit Belfast also uses the destination management role to upsell and cross-sell, promoting local suppliers and experiences.
- **Data driven sales management and business development** – as a target-driven team with a comprehensive CRM system and sales management processes in place, Visit Belfast can leverage its sales pipeline, 7,500 strong database of PCO's, agencies, associations, DMCs, ambassador network and its social media following to drive destination awareness and consideration levels and support sales activity.
- **Continuing to develop strong partnerships and collaboration with industry partners involved in business events.**

Key aims and development areas for 24-25

In 2024-25, Visit Belfast will deliver a comprehensive calendar of sales and marketing activities to secure and service business events for the region in partnership with industry partners, Tourism Ireland and Tourism NI.

In addition, there are a number of areas for development that will be a strategic focus for Visit Belfast during 24-25:

1. Supporting Tourism NI in the development of an **action plan for delivery and investment of the NI business events integrated strategy**.
2. **Growing demand from the corporate and agency market** – Increase RFPs and buyer engagements.
3. **Increased in-market activity in Europe and North America** – growing buyer engagements in these markets working in partnership with Tourism Ireland/Tourism NI.
4. **Harnessing the power of the ambassador network to increase leads, engagement and strategically develop the network** – targeting underrepresented areas (NI wide ambassadors, future/emerging leaders, technology, food/drink and business and professional services sectors).
5. **Investment in digital and content marketing to increase awareness and engagement around Belfast as a business events destination** – Increase social media followers, ezine subscribers and digital engagement on business event channels.
6. **Strategic development of key partnerships** with key business event stakeholders including ICC Belfast, Queen's University, Ulster University, Invest NI, Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland, Titanic Belfast and wider industry.
7. Utilising current and potential **sources of data and insights from event organisers and delegates** to support industry, funders and stakeholders as well as supporting marketing content (case studies, testimonials, statistics etc).

KPIs and measuring success in 2024/25

The team will focus on increasing YoY sales performance by 13% on economic impact. In addition, a number of additional KPIs are proposed to drive delivery of the strategic aims set out above.

Headline KPIs – Business event sales	
Delegates	34,000
Bed nights	95,200
Economic impact (new SRI multiplier)	£35m*

**23/24 economic impact outturn using new multiplier £31m*

Productivity KPIs	
Leads generated	£130m**
Bids/proposals submitted	£105m**
Buyer engagements	2,000

Strategic aim KPIs	
Corporate and agency RFPs	40% increase in corporate/agency RFPs (100)
International buyer engagements	60% increase in international buyer engagements (400)
Social media followers	Increase by 2,800 (12,406)
Increase social media engagement	From 12.5% to 20%
Ambassador recruitment	150 new ambassadors in underrepresented areas - NI wide, key

	sectors, future leaders.
Neighbourhood tourism	Develop range of neighbourhood focussed offers and experiences for business delegates for inclusion in VB delegate offers and delegate marketing content.
Neighbourhood tourism	Identify neighbourhood tourism projects to be profiled in VB's business events legacy and impact guide.

*** Note 1 – economic impact KPIs have been developed using the SRI new multipliers and rebased as explained below.*

***Updated economic impact multipliers for 24-25**

The business events team reports on a multitude of KPIs to measure performance from confirmed business value (measured in delegates, bednights and economic impact from conference wins) through to sales productivity KPIs such as the value of leads generated, bids submitted and number of buyer engagements as well as activity conducted, outcomes from activities and analysis of wins/losses.

The economic impact of business events in NI is currently measured using historic Visit Britain delegate expenditure research which gives an average spend per delegate day. This has been applied by VB/TNI/BCC and ICC Belfast as an indicator of economic impact in the absence of primary research specific to Northern Ireland.

To develop a robust measure of economic impact for business events for Northern Ireland requires significant investment in research. This is currently being investigated by TNI as a research project in partnership with Visit Britain.

As an interim measure, an updated economic impact multiplier will be introduced from 24-25 onwards based on more recent GB Visit Britain delegate expenditure research which was modelled for NI by Strategic Research Insights (SRI), the strategy consultants commissioned by TNI.

The implications will be that the economic impact for business events in NI will reduce from an average of £1,279 per delegate over the past 3 years to £1,021 per delegate using the new SRI multiplier. This is due to a change in methodology of the research and the fact that the new SRI multiplier doesn't take account of length of stay.

Whilst this will reduce the reported economic impact of business events, it is hoped that longer term investment in research will enable a more accurate and holistic value of business events to be developed. In the meantime, delegate and bed night figures will allow for year-on-year comparisons to be made.

Sustainability and Impact

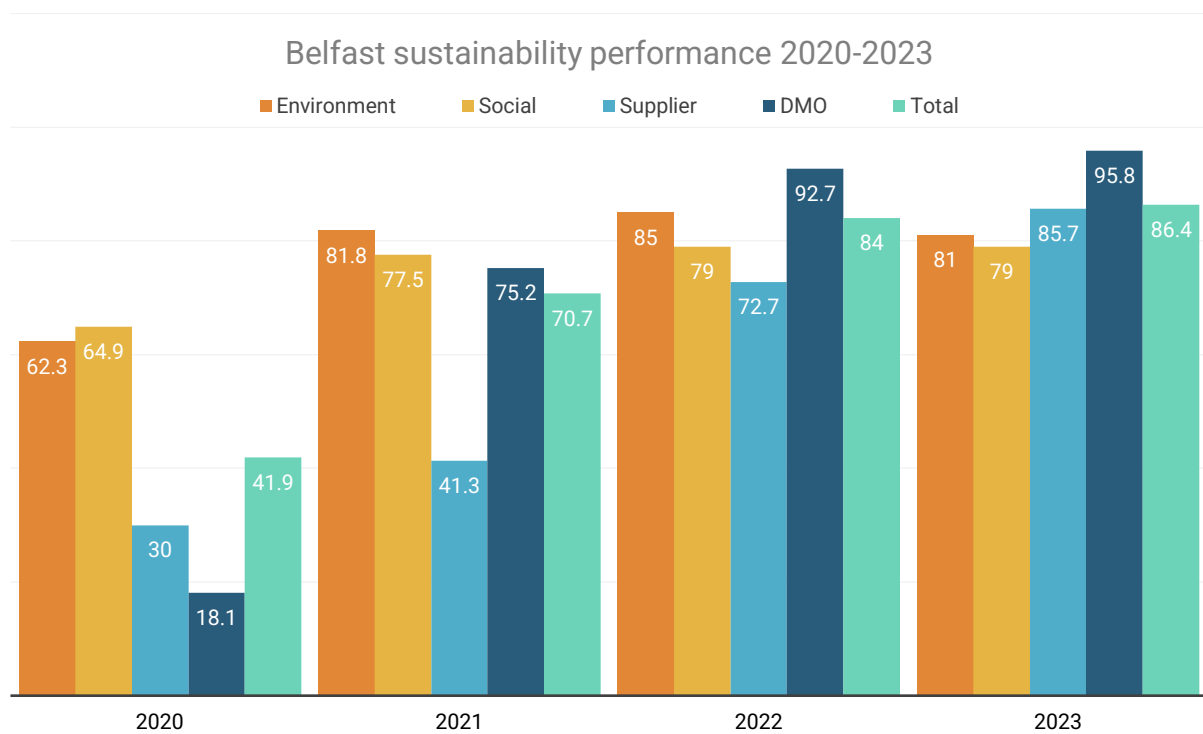
Introduction and context

As mentioned in the Visit Belfast's Rebuilding City Tourism 2021-20, in a relatively short period of time, Belfast has made excellent progress in developing a series of measures on climate adaptation, climate mitigation and levers to support a green economy. In strategic terms, [The Belfast Agenda](#) commits the city "to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss head on" while the 'top [five things people want](#) for Belfast 2035 includes desire for Belfast to be a "vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable city", with carbon emissions reduced by 66% by 2025 and 80% by 2035.

Meanwhile, the [Resilience Strategy](#) aims to "transition Belfast to an inclusive, zero-emissions, climate-resilient economy within a generation". It sets out 30 transformational programmes, and several are linked to tourism and to Place - they have direct or indirect impact on enhancing the city's appeal to residents, prospective residents, investors, and visitors. With this in mind, it is imperative that Visit Belfast continues to ensure that tourism in Belfast provides a positive net benefit for the city and continue its efforts to improve the sector's sustainability practices.

To date, the commitment and leadership shown by Visit Belfast, its board, Belfast City Council and industry partners has been transformational in Belfast's journey towards a more sustainable tourism model. From a starting position of second last globally (2020), Belfast is now ranked 11th out of 100 sustainable destinations in the world as assessed by the Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index 2023. Visit Belfast has also been widely praised by funders and industry for galvanising action on sustainable tourism; working with Belfast City Council and industry to develop and deliver interventions that are making a real impact.

As a result, Belfast has made seismic improvements to its sustainability performance and credentials in recent years as shown below in the city's annual performance on the GDS Index (2020-2023). There is now widespread buy-in from the industry on sustainability issues with a critical mass of businesses taking and accelerating action in this area.



Belfast sustainability performance 2020-2023 overall and by category – GDS Index

Visit Belfast has focussed its efforts on interventions within the organisations control or sphere of influence, largely in the destination and supplier categories within the GDS Index. The challenge for Belfast in the next period will be to maintain this performance in a rapidly changing environment. This is due to a number of factors:

- The GDS assessment is a performance improvement tool – which is designed to be more challenging each year as the criteria changes. In 2024, 45% of the criteria will change, with a greater focus on regenerative destination management, climate engagement, DEI, capacity management, measurement and reporting.
- More destinations are investing in sustainability and accelerating action making it more and more competitive each year.
- The opportunities to increase Belfast's performance now largely depend on infrastructure investment and policy development areas which are outside of Visit Belfast's control and influence.

This requires Visit Belfast to work hard to continue to make progress in the areas it can impact whilst working with Belfast City Council and other stakeholders to highlight longer term actions for planning and improvement.

Key achievements

- Visit Belfast is now the joint 2nd highest performing DMMO in the world (Global Destination Sustainability Index 2023)
- 11th most sustainable destination the world ((Global Destination Sustainability Index 2023)
- 76% of Belfast hotel bedrooms sustainably certified (baseline 24% 2021)
- Top 10 sustainable travel destination in the world – (TripAdvisor 2024 Travelers Choice Awards)
- Global Innovation Award winner – Changing the Menu. For Good – (Global Destination Sustainability Index 2022)
- Overall sustainability performance for Belfast has increased from 41.9% in 2020 86.4% in 2023 (Global Destination Sustainability index)
- 100 businesses signed up to green tourism programme and 59 accredited to date
- Over £28,000 raised through Visit Belfast's Changing the Menu, For Good initiative which equates to over 22,778 meals provided to those living in food poverty in Belfast.
- Impact and legacy guide developed.
- Cruise Belfast sustainability plan developed.

Key aims and interventions for 2024-25

From a standing start, Visit Belfast has successfully accelerated its work on sustainability with a targeted and focussed plan for delivery. Core activities in this area include:

- Championing and supporting sustainable tourism practices across our industry partners and city.
- Leading the annual Belfast GDS Index assessment process with input from BCC and industry partners.
- Promoting and supporting the green tourism programme funded by BCC.
- Providing 121 sustainability support, guidance and resources to influence Visit Belfast's event. organisers, tour operators, cruise lines and industry partners.
- Developing and promoting Visit Belfast's *Changing the Menu for Good* initiative.
- Development of the Visit Belfast's impact and legacy guide for business events.
- Creation of sustainability content and resources for destination marketing and supporting digital.

- Improving Visit Belfast's corporate sustainability performance as assessed by Green Tourism and bi-annual reassessment.
- Development and delivery of the Cruise Belfast sustainability plan (year 2) in partnership with Belfast Harbour.

The next phase of Visit Belfast's sustainability journey will be to fully embed sustainability knowledge and practices right across the organisation. This will be achieved by:

- Adopting new ways of measuring impact (economic, social & environmental) across the breadth of the organisation.
- Build sustainability capacity and embed sustainability knowledge throughout VB and ensure consistency of approach and messaging.
- Developing and promoting Belfast's sustainability story (across leisure, cruise and business tourism) woven into leisure content, digital comms, the new visitbelfast.com website and key visitor servicing touchpoints.
- Delivering the carbon baseline study in partnership with BCC and industry to inform decarbonisation interventions and plans.
- Baseline VB's carbon impact and put in place improvement plans.
- Promotion of responsible visitor behaviour through curated itineraries, local sustainability heroes, easy ways to reduce environmental impact e.g. sustainable travel options, events and maximising social benefit.
- Prioritising neighbourhood tourism across the organisation and delivery of a company-wide action plan.
- Better measurement and communication of our impact with key stakeholders in line with Visit Belfast's sustainability policy.
- Delivery of Visit Belfast's DEI policy and championing DEI best practice across our industry.
- Baselining the environmental, social and economic actions being undertaken by our industry and promoting and celebrating best practice.

Sustainability KPIs are now included in Visit Belfast's headline KPI's and also referenced across the organisational business areas, however key delivery areas are summarised below:

Sustainability and Impact KPIs	
GDS Index	Lead submission for 2024
Green tourism	Secure Silver/Gold award 2024 – Visit Belfast Promote and support green tourism programme to industry partners
Carbon	Baseline VB carbon footprint Baseline Belfast tourism industry carbon footprint
Funds raised	Funds raised for social causes (VB and industry) - survey
Sustainability support - clients	No of travel trade, event organisers and cruise lines provided with sustainability support.
Sustainability support - industry	No of VB partners accredited and adopting sustainability practices (survey).
Business events – sustainability	No of business events with a sustainability and impact goal
Business events – legacy	No of business events with a legacy / impact goal
Cruise	Delivery of year 2 cruise plan with Belfast Harbour
DEI	Delivery of VB's DEI policy and action plan
Impact reporting and measurement	Produce annual impact report

10. Strategic Focus 2024-27: Neighbourhood Tourism

Introduction

Neighbourhood Tourism

Neighbourhood Tourism refers to the development of experiences that appeal to visitors as well as local residents within city neighbourhoods, recognising that these are the places where you are more likely to 'get under the skin' of cities and immerse yourself in the local everyday culture of the place. Not necessarily geographically bound to the periphery of cities, these diverse city areas promote diversity and celebrate distinctiveness of neighbourhoods, encouraging longer stays and adding to the overall city-wide destination proposition. It can also encourage residents to be tourists in their own city. As well as spreading the positive economic impact of tourism across the city, Neighbourhood tourism can also bring social impact benefits by celebrating the unique identity of local places to instil civic pride, ownership and belonging amongst residents. **Community Tourism / Community-led Tourism / Community-based Tourism.**

Community Tourism refers to the practice of the community being directly involved (often in partnership with local authorities and DMOs etc.) in curating, developing and managing the tourism particular area. This community-centred approach can often foster community-led tourism opportunities where typically people from within the community have set up social enterprise initiatives to deliver a visitor facing service or experience which derives significant benefits back into the community.

The Belfast context

Meeting local people in the places where they spend time is a key priority among travellers who see this as the best way to uncover what is most unique and authentic about the places they're visiting. As a result, cities across Europe are connecting visitors with their neighbourhoods as part of broadening their appeal and encouraging longer stays.

This is just one reason why strengthening the appeal of Belfast's neighbourhoods for visitors is a major aim of this Visit Belfast strategy. Promoting neighbourhood exploration is the ideal way to help our visitors to immerse themselves in the local everyday culture of our city, encourage longer stays and add to our overall city-wide destination proposition. As well as spreading the positive economic impact of tourism across the city, neighbourhood tourism can also bring important social impact benefits by celebrating the unique identity of local places to instil civic pride, ownership and belonging amongst Belfast's residents. Together with Belfast City Council and key local partners including Fáilte Feirste Thiar, Eastside partnership and others, we want to help develop neighbourhood tourism in a responsible, sustainable way that enhances the visitor experience while working well for the people of Belfast.

Adopting this approach to ensuring that the value of tourism is well distributed across the city region will be essential as Visit Belfast makes its contribution to meeting Belfast City Council's refreshed objective for the next 4 years (2024/5 to 2028/9) to double the value of tourism from £400m to £800m per year by 2030.

How we will enhance neighbourhood tourism in Belfast

– a summary of key actions

Our plans will encourage visitors and locals to explore neighbourhoods and discover authentic and uniquely Belfast experiences with compelling reasons to visit. By incorporating this key theme into our activities, Visit Belfast can effectively promote the city's unique neighbourhood offerings, attract a diverse range of visitors, provide reasons to stay longer and enhance the overall visitor experience.

Neighbourhood tourism focus will include:

Homespun pioneers: curated stories, history, and heritage: Focusing on the unique character and stories of Belfast's neighbourhoods. Highlighting the rich culture and history, heritage attractions, local traditions, and the contributions of famous people and the people who call these neighbourhoods their home.

Visit Belfast will:

- **Identify and showcase unique neighbourhood experiences:**

Document the distinctive characteristics, cultural heritage, and attractions of each neighbourhood in Belfast. Highlight the diverse range of experiences that visitors can experience in each area, such as historical landmarks, local food, street art, hidden gems, traditional pubs, and attractions and tours. Create compelling content, including articles, blog posts, videos, and social media posts, to showcase these unique experiences.

- **Collaborate with local businesses and community organisations:**

Establish partnerships/memberships with local businesses, tourism organisations, and tourism stakeholders in each neighbourhood. Work together to develop joint marketing campaigns, events, and promotions that highlight the neighbourhood's authentic experiences. This can include neighbourhood festivals, guided tours, or special events that showcase local culture, traditions, and talents.

- **Engage local residents as ambassadors:**

Encourage local residents to become ambassadors for their neighbourhoods by sharing their personal stories, recommendations, and insights. This can be done through social media campaigns, guest blogging opportunities, or by featuring local residents in promotional and publication materials. Their authentic perspectives and passion for their neighbourhoods will resonate with visitors and add credibility to the promotion efforts.

- **Create neighbourhood-specific itineraries:**

Develop curated itineraries for each neighbourhood (and include in city itineraries), highlighting the must-see attractions, local businesses, and unique experiences. These itineraries will be featured on the Visit Belfast website, in visitor guides, and made available to hotels concierge and other front of house staff. We will ensure that the itineraries cater to different interests and preferences, such as history, food, art, or outdoor activities, to appeal to a wide range of visitor demographics.

- **Utilise social media:**

Using our owned social media platforms, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Twitter, to showcase vibrant imagery of the neighbourhoods, share stories and testimonials from local people and visitors, and engage the online community in new and exciting ways. Utilise search engine optimisation techniques to increase visibility and reach.

- **Collaborate with travel influencers and bloggers:**

Partner with travel influencers and bloggers who specialise in authentic travel experiences. Invite them to explore the different neighbourhoods in Belfast and share their experiences through blog posts, social media content, and videos. Their influence and reach can help to amplify the promotion of Belfast's neighbourhood areas to wider audiences.

- **Measure and evaluate our impact:**

Regularly monitor and analyse the effectiveness of the marketing efforts in promoting Belfast's neighbourhood areas. Track website traffic, social media engagement, and visitor feedback to assess the impact of the designed promotional activities. Collect data on visitor numbers, spending patterns, and satisfaction levels to gauge the success of the campaign and identify areas for improvement.

Key actions by business area

PR & Comms

- Press visit – include at least one neighbourhood element to each visit (subject to theme.)
- Influencers – 2 targeted influencer visits to neighbourhood areas
- PR Profiles – 4 dedicated neighbourhood press releases (use our community to tell their stories) plus inclusion in 2 generic press releases
- Partners' Ezines – 4 pieces in the monthly ezine based on neighbourhood areas
- What's On Industry Ezines – 12 neighbourhood inclusions

Consumer Website

- New consumer website development will hero the neighbourhoods landing page on the homepage (Sept 2024).
- Development of a dedicated Neighbourhood landing page, highlighting each of the Neighbourhood areas and including new visitor itineraries content.
- Neighbourhood partner products will be included throughout other appropriate blogs for further promotion.
- 10 dedicated neighbourhood blogs created and co-developed with a relevant Neighbourhood representative from each area.

Consumer social media

- Social media posts to be scheduled across relevant social media channels to further promote the new neighbourhood website content created.
- New social media video content to be created for each neighbourhood area and shared across relevant social media channels.
- 'Neighbourhoods' social media series created by collaborating with selected local influencers who visit a dedicated area, for a walk through to tell us what their favourite thing is about the neighbourhood and share unique stories.

Consumer E-zine

- Creation of a dedicated consumer e-zine's that focuses on neighbourhoods and partner products and offering within each area, to further promote and create awareness. E-zine to be distributed to Visit Belfast's NI (35K) & ROI (15K) subscribers database.

Campaigns

- Seasonal campaign activity to include neighbourhood buy-in
- Development of 2 dedicated neighbourhood digital campaigns
- All campaign landing pages to link to neighbourhood content and itineraries.

Publications

- City Guides - 2 pages in each seasonal issue (4 in total) to promote neighbourhood assets, events and itineraries.
- 'My Belfast' DPS feature – narrated through a local person, utilised across digital channels and PR activity.

Membership

- Increase membership by 10% from neighbourhood businesses
- Host a series Marketing Engagement Workshops in neighbourhoods
- Generate 30 new leads / sales calls to businesses in neighbourhood areas
- Develop neighbourhood tourism clusters across city

Visitor Servicing - Team Engagement

- Allocate two VBWC Travel advisers to be Champions for North & West, South and East- sharing product knowledge with their front-line colleagues and collating that information.
- VIC "Champions" meet key contacts in Tourism bodies twice a year-, or as required.
- All VS Staff receive regular training and updates on Neighbourhood product knowledge including participating in Fam Trips/ Site visits.
- Full briefings on Belfast Neighbourhoods will be included in induction and training for all new staff.

Visit Belfast Welcome Centre

- Replace the large graphic panel in the entrance foyer (LHS) with new updated neighbourhood content highlighting key attractions and Hidden Gems. (May include digital screens.)
- Create a branded section in the Literature racking area for Neighbourhood Literature, and provide a literature monitoring service, alerting providers when stocks run low.
- Allocate (an agreed number) of space within the centre for Neighbourhood promotions, particularly during festivals, and key events.

Belfast International Airport Desk

- Neighbourhood images and video content to be included on the 65-inch screen.
- Branded area within Literature racks for neighbourhood literature.

Cruise

- Allocate desk space within the cruise hub to neighbourhood promotion.
- A new Belfast Neighbourhood Map graphic on display.
- Inclusion of neighbourhood products in a section on Cruise "What's on today".
- Cruise animation – elements to be delivered by neighbourhood areas.
- Work with neighbourhood partners to provide opportunities for local communities to be involved in cruise ship welcomes (animation) or learning days so they experience the buzz of a cruise ship day.

Off Site Touch Screen Kiosks

Visit Belfast currently has 17 off-site kiosks located around the city, at bus and train stations, airports, Apple green, Titanic Belfast, on board P&O ferries and at Stena line terminals in Liverpool and Cairnryan. The design is very inspiring and eye catching, with QR links in place so visitors can scan and book directly.

These interactive digital kiosks have Belfast and Northern Ireland content – The Belfast content is split into neighbourhood. We will undertake to work with the neighbours to strengthen the information in each area, adding in any new tourism products which emerge.

- Audit and update Neighbour content.
- Monitor Impressions on neighbourhood products for each area.

Visit Belfast's Box Office Role

VB box office plays a critical role in supporting and promoting the city's rich, cultural, heritage festival & event programme, including our burgeoning food / drink and music scenes. VICs have a key role in promoting the array of activity across the city to visitors and residents during their stay. Similarly, they enable a variety of user-friendly booking methods and payments for customers. As Belfast City Council embarks on its yearlong celebration of Culture in 2024 it is especially important to provide this service.

- As part of our B2B development and supporting role we will extend our services, to smaller community-based initiatives.
- Offer our ticketing services and support to 10 new Neighbourhood Products providers.

Industry Engagement Programme - "Get the Knowledge "

To build destination product knowledge among front of house Tourism & Hospitality staff who come into daily contact with visitors. This programme will have an added focus on neighbourhood tourism, its designed to help spread the economic and social benefits of tourism across the city into our neighbourhoods and wider Belfast City Region, through knowledgeable, confident and informed front of house staff, from across the tourism sector, hotels, attractions, tour providers and hospitality. Those attending the session receive the presentation afterwards and they are encouraged to share these with work colleagues.

- 4 x seasonal Industry Briefing updates for information sharing. Invited industry representatives speak directly to front of house staff about their product. Regular contributions from strategic, neighbourhood and Belfast Plus partners.
- 4 x neighbourhood familiarisation visits aimed at front of house staff and VIC Network to increase product knowledge and confidence in promoting the destination. Messaging to include FOH staff role in shaping the visitor experience.
- 4 x guided walking tours in neighbourhood areas with focus on community products and stories.
- Weekly What's On e-zine to industry front of house database.

B2B - Travel Trade – Cruise and Business Events

- Develop a range of neighbourhood focussed offers and experiences for business delegates for inclusion in VB delegate offers and marketing content.
- Identify neighbourhood tourism projects to be profiled in VB's business events legacy and impact guide.

B2B - Travel Trade – Coach and Cruise Operators

The group tour market represents a strong potential opportunity for neighbourhood tourism due to the emerging demand for authentic, undiscovered, and immersive experiences amongst operators. While individual experiences are included in Visit Belfast's group presentations, neighbourhood tourism as a theme will be a strategic priority for the leisure trade sales manager and operationalised as follows:

- Curation and launch of neighbourhood tourism themed itineraries for the travel trade market in collaboration with key partner organisations and neighbourhood businesses and tour operator clients.
- Organise a neighbourhood tourism webinar to launch new itineraries and showcase partner products. This will also be recorded and shared with Visit Belfast's travel trade database for product training.
- Neighbourhood tourism themed travel trade ezine to Visit Belfast's database of 3,763 contacts.
- Commitment that every travel trade presentation will include neighbourhood tourism as a key theme for Belfast.
- Development of a social video to showcase the neighbourhood experiences on offer for the group market.
- Hosting a neighbourhood tourism FAM with key operators.
- New formats for promotion – development of quarterly briefing webinars as a new format to engage with operators by providing quarterly webinars and product updates and offering partner showcase opportunities.
- Travel trade section of the visitbelfast.com website to be redeveloped. The leisure trade manager will also work with the digital team to explore opportunities to showcase itineraries and experiences on offer for the group market.

Neighbourhood tourism engagement

Neighbourhood tourism is a strategic priority for Visit Belfast in 2024-2027 and therefore the Director of Visitor Servicing and Destination Initiatives, will have responsibility for coordinating Visit Belfast engagement with neighbourhood tourism partners. This will include regular quarterly meetings with Visit Belfast, Belfast City Council and key neighbourhood tourism partners including Fáilte Feirste Thiar, EastSide Partnership and others, to review progress, preview future activity ensuring regular and up to date content and communication.

visitBelfast