

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>153<sup>rd</sup> Open Championship Final Update</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	Leisure & Development Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	16 December 2025
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	For Information
<b>To be discussed In Committee</b>	<b>NO</b>

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)</b>	
Strategic Theme	Promote our tourist offer locally and internationally
Outcome	Improve prosperity
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation

<b>Estimated Timescale for Completion</b>	
Date to be Completed	December 2025

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	<b>YES</b>
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

<b>Legal Considerations</b>	
Input of Legal Services Required	<b>NO</b>
Legal Opinion Obtained	<b>NO</b>

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes	Date: 03 Dec 2025
	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes	Date: 03 Dec 2025
	RNA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes	Date: 03 Dec 2025
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

## **1.0 Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to update Elected Members following the Borough's hosting of the 153<sup>rd</sup> Open Championship in Portrush in July 2025.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 In July 2025, the highly successful 153<sup>rd</sup> Open Championship was held at Royal Portrush Golf Club. This comes six years after the Open returned to Northern Ireland for the 148<sup>th</sup> Open Championship at the same venue.
- 2.2 Council played a central role in the planning, delivery and hosting of this prestigious global event. Members received monthly updates at Committee in advance of the Championship, and this report now details some of the main post-event impacts and evaluations.

## **3.0 Council's Role**

- 3.1 Council Chaired three of the Bronze Open Championship planning groups. These were Traffic & Transport, Tourism & Promotion and Community and Business Engagement. Council also established its own Town Presentation and Continuity Group. Successes and Learnings from these groups will be set out later in this report.
- 3.2 Council was also a key member of the other Bronze Open Championship planning groups including Safety & Security, Marketing & Communications, Technical & Regulatory, Medical, Marshalling and Legacy & Sustainability. Successes and Learnings from these groups will be set out later in this report.
- 3.3 Senior Council officers were key members of the Silver and Gold Open Championship Planning Groups.
- 3.4 Council committed a budget of £365,000 for the planning and delivery of this event.

## **4.0 Economic Benefit and Impact**

- 4.1 Total economic benefit for Northern Ireland is estimated at £280 million. This is broken down as follows:
- £89.2 million – Total Economic impact on Northern Ireland (actual tangible income).
- £43.7 million – The portion of the total Economic impact that relates directly to Causeway Coast and Glens.
- £191 million – Estimated value of the Destination Marketing benefit.
- 4.2 These figures represent a significant increase on the total economic impact generated when The Open was last held at Royal Portrush in 2019 – almost double for Northern Ireland (2019: £45 million) and growth of 67% for Causeway Coast and Glens (2019: £26.2 million).

## **5.0 Attendees (context - resident population of Portrush is 6,500)**

- 5.1 278,000 attendees across the Championship week. This was the largest Open Championship outside of St. Andrews and is an increase of 40,000 from 2019. New attendance records were set each day, with even the practice days selling out.
- 5.2 9,000 children attended for free as part of the long-running 'Kids go Free' initiative.
- 5.3 Overseas attendees:
- 60% of attendees came from outside of Northern Ireland (166,800).
  - 17.3% of attendees travelled from England (48,094).
  - 16.7% of attendees came from Republic of Ireland (46,426).
  - 12.3% of attendees came from USA (34,194).

- 5.4 Of the 166,800 visitors from outside of Northern Ireland, 61% extended their stay locally for at least 3 additional days. Furthermore, 35% of overseas visitors played golf in Northern Ireland as part of their trip, which is approximately 58,380 extra rounds of golf at Northern Irish golf clubs.
- 5.5 95% of spectators also agreed that the event would increase the reputation of Northern Ireland as a holiday destination.
- 5.6 The Open Championship camping village was based at the University of Ulster in Coleraine. This campsite hosted visitors from all around the world and provided 11,500 bed nights (3,500 of which were free).

## **6.0 All eyes on Portrush**

- 6.1 In the UK, Sky Sports recorded its most-watched Open ever with 21.2 million viewer hours, representing a significant 36% year-on-year increase. The final round marked Sky's second-largest Sunday audience.
- 6.2 In the USA, NBC/Peacock final round coverage averaged 4.1 million viewers, a 21% increase from 2024, and Sunday audience peaked at more than 6.1 million viewers.
- 6.3 Both Sky Sports and NBC/Peacock supplemented their golf coverage with rolling footage of the local area which was both stunning and memorable.

## **7.0 Footfall in Portrush (Main Street)**

- 7.1 The week of the Open Championship saw a rise in pedestrian footfall within Portrush Town Centre to 98,726. This is a 40,000 increase from the week prior to Championship week and a 33,000 increase as compared to the week after the Championship.
- 7.2 For further comparison, the same week in 2023 and 2024 were 59,312 and 69,810 respectively.

## **8.0 Council's Schools Golf Programme**

- 8.1 Seeking to leave a legacy and building on the interest and opportunities created by hosting the Open Championship in our town, Council's Sports Development Team led a Programme of access to sports via Golf for school aged children across the Borough.
- 8.2 The outputs of this successful programme were as follows:
- 278 children were engaged in playing golf.
  - 22 participants at Easter Golf Camps.
  - 33 participants at July (pre-Open) Golf Camps.
  - 168 participants in schools coaching programme.
  - Delivered 3 "mini Open Championships".
- 8.3 The programme culminated by a hosted day at Royal Portrush Golf Club in June 2025 where the children got a look behind the scenes as well as an opportunity to test their skills on the putting greens at the Championship venue.
- 8.4 This programme is due to be repeated in 2026.

## **9.0 Community and Business Engagement**

- 9.1 Council, and partners, delivered 2 Community and Business Engagement events in Portrush with 250 attendees.
- 9.2 Council also provided 46 Drop in Days in Portrush Town Hall with over 400 attendees in total at these sessions.

9.3 Council also ensured engagement through local Town Forums and Business Organisations.

9.4 This was all backed up with an extensive digital and social media awareness campaign for residents and businesses.

## **10.0 Local Traffic Management**

10.1 To facilitate key logistical and infrastructure requirements for the delivery of the Open Championship, Council agreed to the transfer of some car parks and public spaces in Portrush. The impact of this was the loss of over 1,100 car parking spaces. Furthermore, the No Waiting At Any Time (NWAAT) order also had implications for hundreds of households which could no longer park on the road outside their property.

### **10.2 How did Council respond?**

- Letter drops conducted by Council staff to all homes and businesses that were affected by parking restrictions.
- Extensive digital and social media awareness campaign for local residents and businesses.
- 3 Council owned public spaces in Portrush were transformed into displaced parking car parks. These were Parker Avenue Playing Fields, Landsdowne Green and Metropole Green. These displaced parking areas were protected and managed from 6am to 9pm on a daily basis.
- Over 700 parking passes issued by Council to residents and businesses affected by parking restrictions.
- These car parks never reached capacity. This enabled Council to dynamically open them up in the afternoons and evenings for visitors and domestic tourists, which in turn eased pressure on the road networks and provided parking for those attending Council's Event space at Kerr Street Green.

## **11.0 Our Town Is Open Stage**

11.1 Council created a family and visitor friendly Event Space on Kerr Street Green and the Amphitheatre, Portrush, from 16-20th July 2025. This was aimed at providing entertainment for locals and visitors alike during the Championship week.

11.2 Over the space of the five days there were musical and cultural performances from over 30 different acts, as well as facilitating the BBC NI roadshow.

11.3 A Pyrotechnic Aeronautical display was provided on the Friday evening and there were also golf related family friendly challenges and games.

11.4 The total visitor attendance figures for Council's Events Space was 18,160. Set in the context of a few days of adverse weather then this is a very positive return.

## **12.0 Open Championship Legacy Fund 2025**

12.1 Organisations and Community Groups in Portrush were invited to make applications to the R&A's £100K Open Championship Legacy Fund.

12.2 The successful recipients are:

- Sea2it C.I.C - Enhancing volunteer capacity and capability to deliver coastal clean-ups by Sea2it Volunteers.
- St Patrick's Hall Committee, Portrush - St Patrick's Hall 153rd Open Legacy Sport & Wellbeing Project.
- St Patrick's Primary School, Portrush – Building upgrades / New Assembly Hall floor.

- Portrush Heritage Group - Discover Portrush Walking Tours.
- Portrush FC Youths - Enhancing Social Value Through Sport.
- Paul's Legacy - Action Defibrillator Causeway Coast.
- Portrush Bowling Club - 'Bowling green improvement/ maintenance project to further support community engagement'.

12.3 Press releases and a photocall relating to this are due to be released in the coming weeks.

### **13.0 Post Event Surveys**

13.1 Following the hosting of the 153<sup>rd</sup> Open Championship in Portrush, Council has surveyed local businesses and residents. The outcomes of these surveys are below.

13.2 19 local businesses responded and their key returns are as follows:

- 52% believed that the Open Championship was important for their business.
- 37% reported increased sales, 37% reported decreased sales and 26% were as yet unsure.
- 74% believed that hosting the Open Championship was either somewhat important, or very important for businesses in the Causeway Coast and Glens area.

13.3 163 local residents responded, and their key returns are as follows:

- 72% had attended at least one day of the Open Championship.
- 40% had attended the Council's Event Space at Kerr Street Green.
- 74% felt that hosting the Open Championship was either important or very important to them as a resident.
- 90% felt that hosting the Open Championship was either somewhat important or extremely important for the Causeway Coast and Glens area.
- 80% felt that hosting the Open Championship put the Borough on the map in a positive way.
- 3.6% felt that hosting the Open Championship had a negative impact on the area.

### **14.0 Budget**

14.1 In 2019, in support of the 148th Open Championship Council's final spend was £434,573.99. This included a contribution of £81,300 from Tourism NI.

14.2 In advance of the 153rd Open Championship in 2025, Council agreed a budget of £365,000. Council has also received a contribution of £30,000 from Tourism NI for the delivery of Events and Branding.

14.3 As of the end period 7, the budgetary spend position is £177,229.00. Council has worked very hard to be as efficient as possible.

14.4 Some work remains to be done in terms of reconciliation of staffing hours across Council for work conducted at the Open Championship, but Officers remains confident recording a final spend which is significantly under budget.

## 15.0 **Success and Lessons Learned from main Planning Groups**

### 15.1

#### **Traffic and Transport (Council Chair)**

##### **What worked well:**

- Co-operative working – partner engagement over the 18 months of planning was strong and beneficial.
- Public transport – Local 140 Bus Services, working on a significantly enhanced timetable, kept people moving. The 402 service from Ballycastle was popular but under resourced.
- Park & Ride Service – The efficient operation to park over 44,000 vehicles during Championship week should not be underestimated. This was an increase in numbers parked from 35,000 back in 2019.
- Local road network – with the volume of traffic, it worked well. The council had some control on how traffic got in and out of town by controlling additional car parking. These were opened up in the afternoons and evenings when they weren't taken up by residents/businesses. This provided additional parking provisions to keep the traffic moving.
- The group's reps were very hands on and pragmatic, especially the staff at Translink. This was particularly noticeable on Saturday evening when additional busses were brought in to deal with crowds. It was also noted that the Translink staff in the MACC were fantastic.
- Early engagement took place with the local community, especially in relation to parking passes. Having a community support staff member from the R&A worked well. The number of negative comments from the community was much lower than in 2019.

##### **Key learnings:**

- Strategic road network – earlier engagement required with DFI and R&A to establish what is required from each partner.
- Risk and contingency – there was good detail in the risk register including mitigations, however, a way of sharing and discussing these between Safety & Security and Traffic & Transport should be found moving forward. This was noticeable at peak busy moments and caused a little confusion. The R&A will consider this for future events to ensure continuity between both groups.

### 15.2

#### **Community & Business Engagement (Council Chair)**

##### **What worked well:**

- There was a good level of engagement from the group.
- The ticket ballot allowed for visitors to spend time in the area and provided opportunities to build offers/experiences. Local industry anecdotally have said they saw a benefit from this.
- Businesses who followed the advice in the toolkit benefited.
- The rambler bus along the coast worked well and helped businesses benefit.
- Animations were positive with a good response from traders.
- Recruitment/supply chain worked well.
- The role implemented by The R&A, Community Engagement Officer, was well received by the community. It was commended that this resource proactively visited local businesses in Portrush to ensure that they felt supported.

- Level of attendance at some community events was low, particularly those later in the schedule. However, it is felt that this may be because the community had already been provided with the information they required so did not need to attend later sessions.
- Overall, the towns were extremely happy with the exposure given as a result of The Open.

#### **Key Learnings:**

- Translink do not offer the ability to plan trips far in advance. Feedback shows that visitors would appreciate this information at an earlier stage.
- Animation/event information should be available at an earlier stage to allow for planning and promotion.
- Council will look into offering more official opportunities for car parking spaces opening in late afternoon/evening for future events.
- Understanding and agreeing roles and responsibilities from an earlier stage regarding who is responsible for what e.g. R&A for event permits/CC&G for businesses.

15.3

### **Tourism & Promotion (Council Chair)**

#### **Overwhelmingly positive**

- Joint TNI/CC&G branding looked well and CC&G would be keen to work this way for any future events. The branding produced was deliberately generic so it can be re-used which helps with sustainability ambitions.
- Council designed and erected more than 100 lamppost banners. Furthermore, this was supplemented by #THEOPEN and Welcome signage all across the Borough.
- The mobile #THEOPEN was successful and gained good attention online.
- The town was cleaned overnight and more bins in certain areas will be noted for any future events. The R&A paid particular praise to CC&G for the clean up after Saturday evening events.
- Animation events were well planned and well attended.

#### **Key Learnings:**

- Impact on lands – consideration to be given to the use of green spaces and how they are returned to Council, as this can have an impact on how quickly land can be put back to use for tourism and events related activity.
- Animation programme and messaging to be signed off and implemented earlier.
- Never too early to start work on design for banners and town dressing materials.
- Local event organisers are keen to learn from how The R&A run events. The R&A agreed to give a presentation to interested parties if required in the future. Tourism NI had hosted a learning journey on course during The Open for homegrown events which was well received.
- Consideration should be given to the extension of this to CC&G local event organisers for any future events.

15.4

<b>Safety &amp; Security (PSNI Chair)</b>
<p><b>What worked well:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The biggest risk from 2019 was the egress and ingress. This was taken on board from an early stage and the additional entrance/exit had a positive effect on the egress and ingress, taking the pressure off.</li> <li>• Searching off site at the Park &amp; Ride was a positive inclusion in the process. It did cause some early issues on day one and two but this was sorted and the setup worked well the rest of the week.</li> <li>• Information sharing agreements worked well with Security in Sport.</li> <li>• The CCTV on the coastline was an improvement from 2019.</li> <li>• The walk arounds organised were really well received and ensured all partners were up to date.</li> <li>• Early planning ensured all partners had the appropriate time to deliver.</li> <li>• The multi-agency control room provided opportunities to work through issues presented during the week of the Championship.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key Learnings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mail screening protocol – this will need to be considered further for any future events. Clarity is required on who can deliver, who is checking and areas being used. The R&amp;A will work on ensuring there is clarity in this area.</li> <li>• Course build timelines caused PSNI issues in relation to the search element. If this can be carried out earlier it is easier in relation to resources, however PSNI are aware this would incur additional costs to seal the area following searches.</li> <li>• There were some issues with comms with radio links which was picked up during The Open.</li> <li>• Partners should have confidence in the plans put in place. There were some worries in the MACC coming up to the 72nd hole.</li> </ul>

15.5

<b>Technical &amp; Regulatory Group (Fairhurst Consultancy Chair)</b>
<p><b>What worked well:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The frequency of meetings worked well, however, they did not always align to demands; and there was good representation at meetings from the right people.</li> <li>• Great professionalism and partnership working.</li> <li>• The Group took lessons from 2019 which were embraced in the planning for 2025.</li> <li>• The Table Top Planning exercise as well as the digital file sharing on Huddle worked really well for the group.</li> <li>• Problems were brought proactively to the table.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key Learnings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kitchen equipment build programming – it is a requirement for environmental health/regulation bodies to carry out water supply checks and final checks are required once the equipment is installed. The timelines for equipment being installed was very late. Timelines for installation should be considered in future years.</li> <li>• The timing of testing coincided with public holidays which added complications.</li> </ul>



- Infrastructure quality – back-of-house infrastructure did not match the high standards of front of-house. This was largely due to the challenges of transporting equipment across the Irish Sea and a busy summer events that placed extra demand on available resources.

15.6

#### **MarComms (TNI Chair)**

##### **What worked well:**

- The 153rd Open Championship set a new benchmark for attendance, broadcast viewership and digital engagement.
- Partners agreed that organisational and joint objectives were met.
- The additional drone coverage showed the destination and course off to the world.
- The Comms protocol worked well. Some small tweaks were made at the beginning of planning that worked well.
- Partners website stats show the high levels of traction to The Open information.
- From a destination perspective, coverage was much higher than in 2019. This is step forward for the destination.
- Using Translink's fleet for marketing/advertising purposes was a great partnership opportunity.
- Industry reports are positive with, for example, Titanic Belfast reporting an uplift of 20k visitors in July.

##### **Key Learnings:**

- There are always opportunities to streamline the approvals process in terms of branding, design, copy, media releases etc.
- The Toolkit was well received; however, an in-person launch would have worked better than the digital launch. The industry reported that they would like face to face training. This may also mitigate some local protest issues in relation to supply chain etc. A printed summary card of the toolkit may also work well in future years.
- NIFRS are keen ensure a multi-agency comms approach to incidents is worked through to be clear on who is doing what and when.
- The integrated planner worked well. However, partners need to feed into this sooner to allow for cross promotional opportunities to be maximised.
- Co-operation with the local media was good, however, it is important to ensure they are onboard from an early stage to help address negative comms. Understanding occasions when opportunities can be maximised is important. Proactive positive messaging release from an early stage will also mitigate some negative comms.
- Partner interaction with the media at an early stage would help to shepherd overwhelming requests coming to the club.

15.7

#### **Medical (R&A Medical Team Chair)**

##### **What worked well:**

- Medical base was in a better location than in 2019.

- The new entrance, walking route, and better use of bridges helped spectator flow.
- A huge thank you was extended to NIAS for their partnership approach.
- Para bikes used as first responders was a great success.
- There was a good blend of local and regular doctors and nurses servicing the medical HQ.
- An extra ambulance was brought in at the last minute to ensure provision could be met if required, which was the right thing to do given the long waiting times at the hospital.
- Health messaging on course was positive including the Hummingbird project for mental health services and on site experts (local project).
- The revivor app provided instant access to CPR.

**Key Learnings:**

- Access to the course due to difficulties in manoeuvring buggy routes – this will be considered in the venue development.
- 'Mipro', the medical data system – the team need advanced training on this for future events.
- Large numbers of medical personnel in the MACC at times – this can be trimmed down going forward.
- The mound at the practice area is a hazard for potential falls/fractures and should be considered as part of the future venue development.

## **16.0 Town Presentation and Continuity Group**

- 16.1 Council's Town Presentation and Continuity group met regularly in advance of the Championship. Membership was taken from across Council services including experienced senior colleagues from Estates, Operations and Environmental Services.
- 16.2 The group delivered an important service for the town as well as ensuring that visitors were left with a very positive impression of the local area. The focus was on the delivery of the following activities:
- Altered bin collections to avoid peak traffic times.
  - Increased street sweeping and washing in advance of (and during) Championship week.
  - Increased size and frequency of litter picking teams.
  - Enhanced opening hours and focus on presentation of Public Toilets.
  - Environmental Health and Enforcement Issues including Street Trading and inspections of catering provisions.
  - Entertainment Licenses/ Liqueur Licensing / Child Certification.
  - New floral displays and enhanced level of grass cutting, hedge trimming and pruning.
  - Carried out minor repairs when required and protected lands for parking.
  - On call during the Championship week for issues that arose.
- 16.3 A big thank you is extended to all who carried out this important work; which is often completed late at night, in the early hours, and in all weather. Local knowledge, local relationships and retained experience from 2019 were all key to the success of this group.

## **17.0 Thank You**

- 17.1 A big thank you must go out to our key partners in the delivery of this hugely successful and prestigious global event. Principle amongst these are the Royal & Ancient, Tourism NI, PSNI, Translink, Royal Portrush Golf Club, all the emergency services, Department for Infrastructure, Volunteer Now and many more.
- 17.2 It is also very important that we appreciate the part played by the locals, the residents of Portrush, and indeed the Businesses in Portrush. Their town was the centre for the sporting world for a week in July, but the impact on their daily lives extended beyond that. Without the grace, patience and cooperation of the people of Portrush, the hosting of such an event would not have been possible.
- 17.3 Finally, a huge and lasting thank you must be extended to the talented, dedicated and committed officers at Causeway Coast and Glens Council. The example has been set by our officers in terms of how to contribute to the hosting and delivery of world class events. Colleagues from Estates, Operations, Environmental Health, Events, Tourism, Destination Marketing, PR, Coast & Countryside, Town & Village Management, Business Development, Sports Development and many more, all delivered beyond expectations and helped to well and truly enhance the image and reputation of our Borough across the world. Thank you.

## **18.0 Recommendation**

Elected Members are asked to note the content of this update report.