

# **All-Party Working Group on the City Centre**

Friday, 7th March, 2025

## **MEETING OF THE ALL-PARTY WORKING GROUP ON THE CITY CENTRE**

Members present: Councillor Long (Chairperson);  
Alderman McCullough; and  
Councillors de Faoite and Maskey.

In attendance: Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and  
Development;  
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services;  
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business Research and Development  
Manager;  
Ms. Y. Hill, Project Manager (Complex Lives);  
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 6th December, 2024 were agreed.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

### **Presentations**

#### **ROAM NI**

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. A. Bartlett from ROAM NI to the meeting.

Mr. Bartlett provided the Working Group with a presentation on the ROAM NI app, which he stated provided a personalised marketing experience that placed businesses at the heart of the local community.

He outlined the benefits to local businesses and explained how the app offered customer engagement tools and contact-free stopping solutions to brick and mortar businesses to increase loyalty and repeat revenue.

He explained how the app could be used to guide visitors through the city and outlined the customer experience to the Working Group, highlighting how businesses could target visitors as well as locals, through push notifications with images, deals and discounts

He concluded by sharing a promotional video with the Working Group.

In response to a question from a Member, who asked how visitors to the city would know about the app, Mr. Bartlett explained that ROAM NI were working in conjunction with Translink to promote the app to visitors and added that there had already been 180k downloads of the app in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson thanked ROAM NI for the presentation and the Working Group agreed that a report on the scheme, that would envisage what a partnership between ROAM NI and the Council would look like, would be presented to a future meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

### **Future City Centre Performance Update - Verbal Report**

The Business Research and Development Manager presented the Working Group with the recently updated Future City Centre Programme Performance Dashboard. He provided an update on the following strategic indicators which reflected the city's overall performance, for which all stakeholders were accountable:

- Footfall levels;
- Dwell time;
- Unique visitors;
- Catchment area;
- Rates income;
- Cleanliness and safety,
- Air quality;
- Employee jobs;
- Development;
- Vacancy rates;
- Independent retailers;
- Consumer spend; and
- Tourism spend.

The Business Research and Development Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of different footfall and visitor behaviour indicators, that included street level and density heatmaps, international visitors and catchment areas, which highlighted recent performance, compared with similar periods the previous year.

He concluded by outlining consumer spend data, provided by Visa cardholder spend data, which indicated an increase of 3.3% in consumer spend in BT1 and BT2 from 2023 to 2024.

At the request of a Member, the Business Research and Development Manager agreed to provide the Working Group with 2019 performance figures to allow a pre-pandemic comparison.

The Working Group noted the update.

### **Communications and News Update - Verbal Report**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development updated the Working Group on city centre new and communications from the previous three months and provided an overview of recent coverage, highlighting the following positive communications:

- Twilight at St George's Market;
- Launch of Queen's Quay Kiosk;
- Belfast Stories design concepts – extensive broadcast and print/digital coverage;
- Looking back to look forward (Joe Berridge) stock-take report;
- Appointment of GRAHAM as private sector delivery partner for city centre housing-led regeneration – excellent pick up across sector and wider media;
- Development of student accommodation (£80 million project) and 40-bedroom Cathedral Quarter Hotel;
- Christmas celebrations and Christmas market – ongoing in-depth coverage across December;
- Rory Gallagher statue;
- Vacant to Vibrant – numerous and extensive coverage;
- Opening of new coffee shops Black Sheep and Nine Squared;
- Planning permission granted for Cathedral Gardens;
- Launch of St Patrick's Day celebrations 2025;
- DBEC conference; and
- Primark home store opening and increased footfall figures.

She outlined upcoming proactive activity that included the Fleadh announcement, St Patrick's Day celebrations, inner northwest housing developments, further Vacant to Vibrant grants and Easter activity in the city centre.

She stated that, moving forward, consistent positive city centre messaging would be undertaken and reported that the vast majority of Council posts on social media had been positively received with above average levels of engagement.

The Working Group noted the update.

### **Complex Lives Update - Verbal Report**

The Project Manager (Complex Lives) provided the Working Group with an overview of the Complex Lives Initiative that worked in partnership with the PSNI, Probation NI, Belfast Trust, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and voluntary organisations, to meet the acute needs of those caught in the cycle of chronic homelessness.

She stated that the partnership focused on Belfast city centre and was not a service provider but a collaboration model to ensure support was better coordinated across agencies to help stabilise situations and improve outcomes for individuals.

She informed the Working Group that the model aimed to pool expertise and resources and provide evidence and case studies to inform change across support services.

She reported that, to date, the initiative had supported 165 people to move to a place of stability, recovery and long-term accommodation.

The Project Manager (Complex Lives) outlined the future plans of the initiative, that included a shared case management system and enhancement of referral pathways.

In response to a question from a Member with regard to PSNI statistics for the city centre to gain a full picture of the level of incidents that had been occurring, the Project Manager (Complex Lives) stated that the initiative had been working with a PSNI vulnerability team and would engage with partners to ascertain what information or statistics could be shared with the Working Group.

At the suggestion of a Member, the Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, that an All-Party delegation undertake a site visit to Merchant's Quay Ireland, in Dublin, a registered charity that supported people affected by homelessness and addiction.

The Working Group noted the update.

### **Agenda Items for Future Meetings - Verbal Report**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development explained the proposed approach to the programming of the Working Group for the following twelve months and suggested that the following five pillar themes be rotated, per meeting, to enable an enhanced view of the ongoing work of the various departments in the city centre:

- Regeneration and connectivity,
- Business and investment proposition;
- Animation and distinctive offering;
- Clean, green, inclusive and safe; and
- Vulnerability.

The Working Group agreed to the proposed approach and noted that it may be subject to change due to the ongoing governance review.

Chairperson