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| Subject:           | Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations: update     |
| Date:              | 9 November 2022                                      |
| Reporting Officer: | John Greer, Director of Economic Development         |
| Contact Officer:   | Cathy Keenan, Enterprise and Business Growth Manager |

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

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

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| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>  |
| 1.1        | The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the work to support local commercial districts through the Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations programme. This programme aims to work with business/traders associations to develop and deliver interventions that can drive footfall and create vibrancy in those areas. |
| <b>2.0</b> | <b>Recommendations</b>  |
| 2.1        | The Committee is asked to:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Note the Council's update and work undertaken to support the delivery of area-based Vibrant Business Destinations.</li></ul>  |

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|            | <p>- Note that the pilot initiative is currently open to Expressions of Interest from local business/traders groups located outside the city centre and Business Improvement Districts.</p>   |
| <b>3.0</b> | <b>Main report</b>  |
| 3.1        | <p>At its meeting on 9 February 2022, Members were provided with an overview and update of the approach to supporting local business associations to develop and deliver interventions to drive footfall and create vibrancy in those areas.</p>  |
| 3.2        | <p>The overarching purpose of the pilot initiative is to strengthen the competitiveness of our local business destinations, focusing on actions which aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the development of shared and safely accessible commercial areas.</li> <li>• Support the diversification of business destinations outside of the city centre.</li> <li>• Bring together key stakeholders to benefit business destinations outside of the city centre.</li> <li>• Improve the quality of urban design, distinctiveness, and townscape quality.</li> </ul>   |
| 3.3        | <p>Following feedback from a range of businesses and traders associations across the city and through engagement with the Department for Communities (DfC), an opportunity was identified to secure resources through the DfC Revitalisation programme. Vibrant Business Destinations was identified as a pilot programme is in keeping with work undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) to develop a “Living High Street Toolkit”. Belfast City Council successfully secured funding of £475,000 from the Department for Communities (DfC), which will be supplemented by a contribution from Belfast City Council resources to enable the delivery of advice and support to assist businesses to access the scheme. The scheme is intended to complement a wider programme of support and activity that is taking place within the city centre, including the targeted interventions to address vacancies and previous business support interventions through the Covid Revitalisation Programme.</p> |
| 3.4        | <p>The pilot initiative aims to support up to 10 business associations to a maximum of £40,000 each for expenditure on a range of eligible activities. The objectives are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase engagement and partnership working between statutory partners and local business associations.</li> <li>• Support the development of area-based actions plans which address specific local concerns and deliver specific, measurable benefits over the short/medium and long term.</li> </ul>   |

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|     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase footfall and sales as a direct result of marketing and promotional activity; generating new customers or sustaining customer loyalty through increasing sales revenue, increasing the number of new customers or developing repeat business.</li> <li>• Enhance the profile of the area with a view to stimulating economic activity.</li> <li>• Support the growth and development of businesses engaged in associated activity.</li> <li>• Support the sustainability of businesses and local business associations.</li> </ul>  |
| 3.5 | <p>The initiative has a two-stage application process. Stage one involves the completion of an Expression of Interest (Eoi) by 31 May 2023. The basic eligibility criteria include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groups or established associations must be led by the business community (including social enterprises and cooperatives) to address locally based issues and be committed to becoming a constituted association.</li> <li>• Groups or established associations must be made up of retail/hospitality/consumer facing businesses located on road frontage/local high streets.</li> <li>• The priority focus is on arterial routes and routes with a minimum number of 15 confirmed businesses located on road frontage.</li> <li>• Group membership should be representative of the businesses in the eligible area – both by volume and by business type.</li> <li>• Business membership must represent predominantly owner-occupiers and independent traders, however, can involve representation from community organisations.</li> </ul> |
| 3.6 | <p>Following successful completion of an EOI at stage 1, groups are supported to become formally constituted, where they aren't already, and to develop area-based action plans. The action plans will provide an analysis of the locality, the physical environment, existing provision and key challenges and opportunities. It will identify priority issues to be addressed to improve the business environment through engagement with existing businesses and stakeholders in the area. The action plans will form the basis for moving to a stage 2 application.</p>  |
| 3.7 | <p>To date there have been 47 requests for an Expression of Interest. These requests cover the following areas: <u>East Belfast</u>: Eastside Partnership, Ballyhackamore, Cregagh and Woodstock Roads, Newtownards Road, Tullycarnett, The Mount, Albert Bridge, Castlereagh Place, Belmont Road, Kings Square and Gilnahirk, Castlereagh Road, Hollywood Arches. <u>South Belfast</u>: Forward South Partnership Board, Ormeau Road,</p>   |

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|      | <p>Crescent Arts, Malone Road. <u>West Belfast</u>: West Belfast Partnership Board, Falls, Springbank Industrial Estate, Blackstaff Mill, Andersonstown Road. <u>North Belfast</u>: Cliftonville Circus, Lower Antrim Road, Cavehill Road, Argyle Business Park. <u>Other</u>: City Centre Management, Dundonald.</p>   |
| 3.8  | <p>To date there have been 4 formal expressions of interests submitted from Ballyhackamore, Kings Road, Cregagh and Cliftonville Circus, work is currently underway to support these groups to become constituted and to develop area-based action plans. Following completion and approval of action plans they can progress to stage 2 of the process. A successful Stage 2 application will enable the group to draw down funding to support their action plan delivery, an overview of support is included in Appendix 1.</p>   |
| 3.9  | <p>A number of requests for expressions of interests did not meet the initial criteria of the programme and therefore did not progress, work is underway to support those groups who would be deemed eligible, however, there have been a number of issues that have resulted in delays and non-progression to date including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closure of businesses and concern for the future of some businesses given the current energy prices.</li> <li>• Timeframes and effort for businesses to develop constituted associations with the adequate number of members.</li> <li>• Internal issues within business associations and disbandment.</li> </ul> |
| 3.10 | <p>The team have been working closely with businesses to try and overcome these issues and support the process where possible. We have also been working to ensure there is an adequate spread of applications across all parts of the city.</p>  |
| 3.11 | <p>The Enterprise and Business Growth Team is coordinating this programme of work in partnership with the City Regeneration and Development Team, with input from officers across the council along with DfC and Department for Infrastructure (DfI). A Design Team has been appointed to assist trade groups in the delivery of any capital-based activities and officers continue to search for and engage with lead stakeholders on several arterial routes.</p>   |
| 3.12 | <p>Communications and marketing activity continues to raise awareness of the pilot project. This has included activity through council social media platforms and e-shots, City Matters, direct intervention via officers and email circulation to council members. Officers are</p>  |

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|            | <p>currently receiving Expressions of Interest and continue to engage with applicants offering advice, guidance and support to progress through the process as required.</p>  |
| 3.13       | <p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The activities outlined within this report will be resourced through the existing Enterprise and Business Growth budget for 2022/23 and funding secured through DfC.</p>   |
| 3.14       | <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The unit is currently undertaking a process of equality screening on the overall work programme, this will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of this project.</p> |
| <b>4.0</b> | <b>Appendices</b>   |
|            | Appendix 1 – Vibrant Business Destinations support  |

