

All-Party Working Group on the City Centre

Wednesday, 17th January, 2024

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

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

In attendance: Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. D. Kelly, Programme Manager;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business Research and Development
Manager;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 1st December, 2023 were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Presentation - Purple Flag Steering Group

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. Eimear McCracken, Operations Manager Belfast One BID, and Mr. Chris McCracken, Managing Director LQ BID, to the meeting.

Ms. McCracken commenced by providing an overview of the Purple Flag Initiative. She advised that Purple Flag was an international accreditation programme which aimed to recognise those cities that achieved excellence in their night-time economies. It strived to help create safe and thriving locations at night for all users, by looking at an area in terms of the following themes - wellbeing, place, appeal, movement and policy.

The Association of Town City Centre Management (ATCM) aimed to support those who manage high streets, town centres and city centres across the UK and Ireland. The representative detailed that towns participating in Purple Flag, included Derry/Londonderry, Omagh, Enniskillen, Newry, Sligo, Carrick on Shannon, Dublin, Drogheda, Waterford, Cork and Kerry. More information was available via the ATCM website [here](#)

Ms. McCracken explained that the Belfast Purple Flag Steering Group comprised of the following stakeholders:

- Belfast One BID;
- Linen Quarter BID;
- Destination CQ Bid;
- Belfast City Council;
- Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce;
- PSNI;
- SOS Bus;
- Value Cabs;
- Hospitality Ulster; and
- Translink.

She drew the Members' attention to a map of the Belfast Purple Flag Area, which comprised of Belfast One, The Linen Quarter and Destination Cathedral Quarter.

She explained that the recent application had focused on addressing the 5 key themes of wellbeing, place, appeal, movement and policy and was informed by a range of issues identified as part of an assessment of the Night Time Economy in September 2023. An accompanying KPI document had looked at key statistics, including night-time footfall, crime statistics, alcohol and drug related hospital admissions and data from a public perception survey. She explained that Belfast's Status was jointly funded by the 3 BIDs and that renewal to the scheme was required every 2 years.

In terms of the current Purple Flag Status, the Members were reminded that a successful initial application had been made in 2019 when Purple Flag status had been granted in 2020, unfortunately, as a result of the COVID pandemic and the challenges that it had presented, the Steering Group had been unable to fully utilise the opportunity that the accreditation presented, however, it had continued to meet regularly. In 2023 an application was made to renew Belfast's Purple Flag status with an external showcase night having been held in November 2023, she then provided an overview of the work that the Steering Group had undertaken with its various stakeholders to promote the night-time economy of Belfast.

The Working Group was advised that the outcome of the application and the assessor feedback was due on 30th January. Once this had been received it would be circulated to the Purple Flag Steering Group and any feedback and recommendations would then be discussed by the Group which would formulate its 'action plan' going forward. She advised that the Steering Group continued to meet quarterly to review and progress any actions and highlighted that the 3 BIDs were planning to fund a piece of research into the value of the night-time economy in Belfast.

The Chairperson stated that he would like to see further engagement with the various stakeholders regarding the proposed research into the value of the night-time economy in Belfast but it was suggested that this would be better undertaken following the receipt of the feedback and recommendations from the application process. Ms. McCracken concurred and advised that the Purple Flag Steering Group already had a rolling action plan, and any key points raised would be fed into this prior to any roundtable discussions.

The Chairperson referred to a previous notice of motion made on appointing a night Czar for Belfast to champion Belfast's night-time economy and expressed concern at the time taken to consider this notice of motion.

The Members then discussed the importance of regular night-time public transport to support the night-time economy. It was noted that 6 bus routes had been identified by the BIDS as potential pilot scheme but that there was a funding gap of £150,000.00 per annum in making this deliverable. The representative advised that funding options were being explored, both from the private and public sector, to try and get agreement to progress a 2-year pilot.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their informative presentation and stated that he looked forward to seeing the results from the application process.

The Working Group agreed that officers would investigate an alternative style Night Time Economy roundtable event with the various stakeholders once the feedback from the application process had been fed into the current Purple Flag Steering Group Action Plan.

Noted.

Future City Centre Programme Dashboard

The Business Research and Development Manager drew the Members' attention to a draft of the Future City Centre Programme Performance Dashboard which provided a comprehensive analysis of 13 key indicators, including footfall, dwell time, catchment area, vacancy levels and tourism spend. It also provided information on performance measures and secondary indicators for the previously agreed Future City Centre 5 pillars, which reflected the impact of Council and wider public and private sector activity and interventions which ultimately contributed overall to the strategic indicators.

The Members noted the volume of positive information contained within the dashboard, particularly in respect of city centre activity overall, as well as improvements to cleanliness and safety, given that recently there had also been certain negative news. It was agreed that it was important that this information was shared via the Council's social media platforms and also with the Members.

The Members also discussed the City Centre Footfall over the Christmas period which had exceeded that seen in 2022 throughout most of the pre-Christmas period and discussed the fact that the Christmas Market was a powerful magnet which drew many people from outside of Belfast to the City over the Christmas period.

The Working Group noted the dashboard.

Site Visit

The Working Group agreed to convene a site visit to Riddel's Warehouse on Ann Street.

Chairperson