



Subject:	City Centre Engagement Plan
Date:	7 March 2018
Reporting Officer:	Nuala Gallagher – Director of City Centre Development
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Restricted Reports	
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"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the ongoing work to deliver a City Centre Engagement Plan and the intention to procure technical advice to assist residents understanding of and engagement with development taking place in the city.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• agree to the procurement of independent technical advice to help residents understanding of and engagement with development taking place in the city.

3.0	Main report
3.1	<p data-bbox="272 264 432 293"><u>Background</u></p> <p data-bbox="272 309 1431 394">In May 2017, members approved a proposal to develop and implement an engagement plan linked to regeneration in the city.</p>
3.2	<p data-bbox="272 450 1174 479">The Engagement Plan is required to focus on the following elements:</p> <ul data-bbox="272 533 1431 1070" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="272 533 1431 719">• Physical inclusion – this focuses on the capacity building of residents and businesses to enable them to understand the impacts of physical developments, and providing technical advice as required so that they can meaningfully engage with the planning process and consultation activity. <li data-bbox="272 734 1431 920">• Social inclusion – this element focuses on improving connectivity to and from the city centre, and also includes potentially engaging with residential and business communities to develop Meanwhile uses on vacant sites/buildings in the city centre; and <li data-bbox="272 936 1431 1070">• Economic inclusion – aims to help residents and businesses secure the maximum benefit from city centre development in terms of employment, training and supply chain opportunities.
3.3	<p data-bbox="272 1144 703 1173"><u>Update on the Engagement Plan</u></p> <p data-bbox="272 1189 1431 1323">The City Centre Development Team is working with the Development Department on a co-ordinated engagement strategy and will provide a further update as this strand of work progresses.</p>
3.4	<p data-bbox="272 1397 922 1426"><u>Physical inclusion- Independent Technical Advice</u></p> <p data-bbox="272 1442 743 1471">Community Engagement Context</p> <p data-bbox="272 1487 1431 1675">In June 2016, the council published its Statement of Community Involvement as required by The Planning (NI) Act 2011. The Statement of Community Involvement sets out the council's policy for engaging with the community when carrying out its development plan, development management and enforcement functions.</p>
3.5	<p data-bbox="272 1742 1431 2031">In relation to development management, the Planning Act also places a duty on applicants to engage with the community on their development proposals. Prior to the submission of a major planning application, applicants are required to submit a pre-application notice (PAN) outlining their approach to consulting with the community. The PAN must be submitted 12 weeks prior to the submission of the planning application and the level of engagement must meet the minimum statutory requirements stipulated in The Planning</p>

	<p>(Development Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. In addition, the applicant is also required to prepare a pre-application community consultation report.</p>
3.6	<p><i>Existing support for residents to engage with planning</i></p> <p>The Planning Act enables the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to provide grants to organisations whose primary objectives are to enhance an understanding of planning policy proposals or development proposals. In this regard, DfI provides funding to Community Places, a not-for-profit organisation to provide independent and impartial planning advice, support and capacity building to people and communities across Northern Ireland.</p>
3.7	<p>As the funding is required to provide support to the entire region, the ability to provide assistance to a particular community is dependent upon the number and scale of planning issues across the province at any given time. In recent years, resources have focused on providing assistance to communities on large scale renewable energy projects outside the Council area.</p>
3.8	<p>DfI (and the former DOE) has provided funding for a number of years however funding is not guaranteed but applied for on a year by year basis and it is understood that DfI plan to review its planning support in the coming months.</p>
3.9	<p>In other jurisdictions, Planning Aid provides planning advice and support to help individuals and communities engage with the planning system. In England for example, advice and support is provided by Planning Aid who rely heavily on chartered planners to volunteer. Arrangements are also in place to avoid conflicts of interest.</p>
3.10	<p><i>Pilot Independent Technical Advice Service</i></p> <p>It is recognised that despite opportunities for communities to engage in the planning process, it can be challenging to participate meaningfully without prior knowledge or experience of how the system operates. As planning applications come through the PAN and PAD process, neighbourhoods potentially affected may need advice in relation to the proposal.</p>
3.11	<p>A budget of up to £30,000 has been identified within the existing budget of the City Centre to procure independent technical advice for a 12-month pilot to support communities in Belfast city centre affected by proposed development and planning applications coming</p>

	<p>forward. This will involve providing independent professional advice to help groups respond to and engage with the proposals and plans for physical change that are coming forward in the city centre. The pilot will help develop knowledge and skills of residents to facilitate a better understanding of the planning and development process and build capacity to enable them to effectively engage and respond.</p>
3.12	<p>A key component will be ensuring that the consultant and their advice is impartial and independent.</p>
	<p><i>How will the technical advice service work?</i></p>
3.13	<p>The appointed consultant will be required to develop and deliver a range of services to eligible communities affected or concerned by development coming forward within the city. It is anticipated that the consultant will provide advice in relation to a range of planning and regeneration issues including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • legislation, policy and guidance; • development management; and • effective community engagement.
3.14	<p>The council will develop a communication strategy for promoting the service to potential applicants including Online, City Matters and social media. The appointed consultant will be responsible for managing subsequent requests for advice and support. The council will also develop eligibility criteria to ensure that those residents or groups with limited capacity and most directly impacted by development benefit from the programme.</p>
3.15	<p>VuCity, VuBelfast, the 3D visualisation tool for proposed development is going live in March 2018, it is envisaged that this tool be used to benefit residents understanding of the nature, scale and impact development may have. The Planning Department are engaging with developers to request that they use VuBelfast for their proposed development, however this currently will be at the developers' agreement.</p>
3.16	<p>It is anticipated that a brief will be issued by April 2018 and a consultant appointed by June 2018. The pilot will be reviewed at 6 months and a report brought back to committee 6 months after the start of the service.</p>
3.17	<p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u> The pilot programme will be equality screened.</p>

3.18	<u>Finance and Resource Implications</u> Resource requirements will be met from existing departmental budget allocation.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None