

Programme Background Information

Timeline of events

Phase	Timeframe	Event / Activity
Emergency Response	28 August 2018	Fire breaks out at Bank Buildings. Building Control, Emergency Planning and others begin emergency response
	31 August 2018	Council take control of cordon from Emergency Services
	7 September 2019	Council response expands from emergency response to city recovery
City Recovery	September onwards	Mobilisation of multiple council units to develop and deliver the City Recovery Programme focusing on various work strands including wayfinding, physical and environmental improvements, animation, trader support, marketing and communication
	26 October 2018	Planning permission granted for Primark's conservation led approach to building
	17 November 2018	Christmas lights switch on, beginning of enhanced animation programme including the extension of the Christmas Market onto Donegal Place for displaced traders, large scale attractions including the snow slide on Donegal Place, Castle Place and in Buoy's Park, Cathedral Quarter Trust commissioned to lead co-ordinated animation programme pre and post-Christmas
	3 December 2018	Cordon walkway between Donegal Place and Royal Avenue opens allowing 8 of the closed traders to reopen
	31 December 2018	Cordon handed over to Primark
City Revitalisation	1 February 2019	Handover of programme from Commissioner of Resilience to Director of Place and Economy
	27 February 2019	Footpath access from Castle Street to Fountain Street reopens
	26 March 2019	Footpath access from Fountain Street to Donegal Place reopens, four more close premises gain access
	20 May 2019	Castle Place Junction reopens to single lane traffic, last closed premise gains access

City Recovery Programme (September 2018 to Jan 2019)

Objective:

- Increase footfall and in turn increase sales

The City Recovery programme focused on:

- provision of targeted support for businesses severely affected
- improving connection and movement into and across the city centre including enhanced wayfinding and signage environmental enhancements to make key streets and thoroughfares more attractive
- delivery of a significant programme of animation, events and attractions to help attract footfall into city centre
- delivery of an incentive scheme involving 200 local businesses which sought to drive additional footfall into city centre businesses by providing a range of incentives and rewards for shoppers and visitors
- Enhanced and focused marketing campaign

The City Recovery Programme encompassed a range of activity including:

- Targeted support for displaced traders including direct assistance to find alternative premises, Council premises were made available for interim use and advice was provided on issues associated with rates, utilities, insurance, employee support and environmental health. Agents appointed to support businesses keen to relocate.
- Immediately following the fire, to support connectivity, a free cross city shuttle bus was put in operation between St George's Market, City Hall and Royal Avenue with a new stop at North St along with the relocation of bus stops in the affected areas.
- Regular and sustained engagement with affected traders and umbrella organisation, initially through the Business Recovery Group meetings evolving into the City Lead Recovery Group which continues to meet regularly.
- Physical and environmental improvements included street furniture, planters, enhanced lighting schemes and Astroturf areas, as well as a revised wayfinding and signage installation to improve connectivity and movement around the city centre taking account of the new cordon walkway, which was dressed in historical city centre images.
- Enhanced city street cleansing throughout the pre and post-Christmas period.
- Enhanced City Beat provision.
- A significant programme of animation and major attractions put in place to attract people into the city centre eg: Large attractors such as a snow slide; an enhanced Christmas Market, with additional stalls along Donegall Place to displaced traders.
- The Council worked in partnership with the Cathedral Quarter Trust (CQT) to put together a comprehensive programme of animation and events (eg Mini Mela, Q-Con and music events etc), involving approximately 75 local cultural organisations and attracting hundreds of visitors and participants to each event
- A city centre trader incentive scheme, the Your Belfast Rewards app aimed at generating additional sales particularly to those stores most affected by the fire. It involved over 200 local businesses and provided a range of incentives and rewards for city centre shoppers and visitors and prizes included vouchers for city centre shops, restaurants and event experiences.
- A significant campaign of city marketing and communications activity was led by BCC, Visit Belfast and several other city partners. Overall, the campaign was successful in delivering increased year on year results over the 8 week period of the Christmas Campaign (ie +16% trips, +122% bed nights and +4% spend).

- In the run up to Christmas, Translink launched an extensive range of discount travel tickets and special services aimed at attracting more people to shop and socialise in Belfast during the festive season. Translink reported strong passenger figures over the period and indicated increases of 15% and over compared to previous years.
- Primark provided £500k of funding to businesses directly impacted by the fire. This fund was administered by Council.

Key success measures

Following the implementation of the City Recovery Programme to encourage visitors and shoppers back into the city centre in the run up to Christmas 2018, feedback and evaluations of these activities identified a number of key success measures:

Footfall figures

The overview of footfall in the Bid One area showed a positive increase in footfall over the period from the week following the fire up until Christmas. The key issue following the fire was the localised reduction in footfall, especially Royal Avenue and Donegall Place. In the week immediately following the fire footfall in the Royal Ave area for example had decreased by 49% compared to the same period the previous year.

However, overall footfall in the city centre has generally increased each month compared to the same month in the previous year. December '18 saw an increase in footfall of 17% on December '17, with January '18 up 13% on the previous year. Royal Avenue was up over 20% in the week prior Christmas compared to the previous year, and Fountain Street and Ann Street were both up over 60% in the same week. Bid One has also agreed to install a footfall counter in the Castle Street area which will provide more targeted information on the affected area going forward.

Retail Trading/ Sales

On an annual basis, Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) undertake research into the annual sales and the in-store footfall experienced by city centre retailers in the run up to Christmas (Nov and Dec). This research was undertaken by 'Card' on behalf of BCCM and the following is a summary of this research:

- 131 business participated in total; 100 retailers and 30 hospitality and food service businesses
- 60% National Multiple, 40% Independents
- Retail sales in Dec 18 vs Dec 17 indicate a small net growth overall; 61% experienced sales that were the same or higher than Dec 17; the growth was largely driven by multiples whilst independent retailers experienced similar sales to last year
- Hospitality sector performed better than retail; 79% experienced sales that were the same or higher than Dec 17
- Footfall figures look to indicate fairly similar footfall in retail premises in Dec 18 vs Dec 17; 57% experienced footfall that was the same or higher than Dec 17
- This research reflects a snapshot only of businesses in the area and there are also variations on impact across businesses and location.

Outputs from the animation programme

Council commissioned Cathedral Quarter Trust to programme animation activity at key locations (particularly those worst affected) throughout the City Recovery Programme:

- Approximately 75 local creative, arts and community cultural organisations involved in the events programme
- Mini Mela: 1200 visitors
- Festival of Fools: 1000 attendees

- Halloween Walking tours: 600 participants
- Serenity Sunday: 250-300 visitors, generated positive social media response
- Musical stage at Royal Ave: Over 60 different bands, performers and community groups attracting 200-300 visitors per hr (on each event day)
- Drop in Craft workshops: 60 visitors per hr
- Fire and Ice Event: 500-1000 visitors, attracting a number of local press articles
- Caribbean Christmas: 300-400 visitors per hr
- Q-Con weekend: 2000 attendees, attracting a number of local press articles and radio coverage
- A Gift for all light projections: 400-500 visitors per hr
- Elfish on the Shelf tours: 925 participants
- Belfast Community Gospel Choir: 400-500 visitors per hr

Independent Market Survey

An independent market research survey undertaken on behalf of the Council in relation to the programme of animation and attractions provided the following key conclusions:

- 84% of respondents were aware of the additional Christmas attractions and events
- 83% of respondents felt the attractions & events would encourage others to visit the city centre
- 93% of respondents said the attractions and events added to their enjoyment of visiting city centre
- 93% of respondents were likely to recommend visiting the city centre to family and friends
- 63% of respondents said they would revisit attractions during Christmas period
- 70% of respondents spent up to £60 eating out during their visit
- 48% of respondents spent over £80 on shopping during visit

Marketing and Communication Campaign

A significant campaign of city marketing and communications activity was led by BCC, Visit Belfast and several other city partners. Overall, the campaign was successful in delivering increased year on year results over the 8 week period of the Christmas Campaign (ie +16% trips, +122% bed nights and +4% spend).

#Your Belfast Reward App

- Launch Date: 3rd December
- Total Installs: 5902
- Total QR Scans: 6324
- Involving over 200 local businesses
- Over 75 different incentives made available
- Prizes included: vouchers for Abacus Beads, Voodoo, Easons, Madden's Bar, Dawsons Music and Castlecourt.

City Revitalisation Programme (February 2019 to present)

The broad objectives underpinning the City Revitalisation Programme are:

- Creating an enhanced city centre offering to drive footfall across all sectors
- Improve attractiveness and vibrancy
- Enhance connectivity and permeability
- Maximise tourism and cultural opportunities and attract visitors
- Encourage more families and young people to use the city centre
- Support existing businesses and augment and promote ongoing programmes of activity

The key strands of work and potential project scope for the City Revitalisation Programme as previously agreed by Members are set out below:

Strand	Potential Scope
1. Physical & Environmental Enhancements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep clean & graffiti removal • Thematic city dressing • Creation of family destinations inc pop-up park (with aligned animation) and urban play • Creating usable spaces eg. Bank Square • Enhanced city centre lighting inc lighting features • Greening the city centre /Enhanced Belfast in Bloom • Upgrade of entries -enhancing connection, permeability and tourism offering
2. Animation Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uplift/amplify existing programmes / thematic areas including music events and forthcoming events including Restaurant Week, Science Festival, Festival of Fools and Cathedral Quarter Art etc / Test emerging priorities in new cultural strategy • Generating 'unique experiences' involving retail, leisure, tourism /culture and environmental assets
3. Incentivisation & Trader Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance 'Belfast Rewards App' • Potential trader relocation support (linked to previous committee agreement) • Creation of a City Currency
4. Marketing & Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced city marketing and communications campaign • Focused activity in promoting Belfast as a destination and USP e.g. food and hospitality, cultural experiences etc • Focused activity on key challenges e.g. transport and car parking
5. Creative Input and Programme Delivery Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative direction and support to ensure coherence across the physical, animation and programming and other interventions • Programme delivery and engagement support
6. Research/Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail gap analysis and diversification opportunities