



Subject:	Sunday opening hours for large retailers
Date:	03 March 2021
Reporting Officer:	Alistair Reid, Strategic Director, Place and Economy
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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"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of the report is to advise the committee of requests to extend the current approach on Sunday opening hours for large retailers for a period of three months from the current proposed end date (5 April 2021) in order to support the management of shopper numbers as part of ongoing social distancing measures as the city prepares for re-opening.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Consider the request from Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) to support extended Sunday opening hours (in line with Northern Ireland Executive guidance)

	<p>on a temporary basis, to be reviewed on 5 July 2021, as part of the efforts to manage shopper volume and support social distancing.</p>
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Members will be aware that, during the initial period of lockdown from late March 2020, Belfast City Council agreed not to take enforcement action against those essential retailers that opened earlier than the current permitted opening time of 1pm on a Sunday (for large stores as smaller stores are already permitted to open). This measure was put in place to support healthcare staff and vulnerable individuals in particular, and there was no end date to retain flexibility throughout the uncertain period.</p>
3.2	<p>From end June 2020, the retail sector was permitted to re-open in line with the various measures set out in the Northern Ireland Executive's Pathway to Recovery. However, since then, the Executive has also announced a number of shorter and more focused closures for certain sectors including close contact services and hospitality.</p>
3.3	<p>The current Northern Ireland Executive guidance – which became operational on 26 December 2020 – confirms that only those retailers deemed as “essential” retail are permitted to remain open at this time, until at least 1 April 2021. In January 2021, Belfast City Council considered and acceded to a request from large retailers to support extended Sunday opening hours (in line with Northern Ireland Executive guidance) on a temporary basis, to be reviewed by 5 April 2021, as part of the efforts to manage shopper volume and support social distancing.</p>
3.4	<p>On 2 March 2021, the Northern Ireland Executive produced “Moving Forward: the Executive's Pathway out of Restrictions”. This document outlines the first step in the Executive's Roadmap to Recovery and sets out how it will approach the relaxation of restrictions. It includes nine pathways. These pathways cover areas such as Home and Community; Culture, Heritage and Entertainment; Travel and Tourism; Retail and Services and Hospitality. Each pathway has a series of five phases and movement from one phase to another will be informed by the Executive taking a risk-based approach, weighing up data across a range of factors including economy, health and community. The first formal review by the Executive will take place on 16 March and there will be subsequent reviews every four weeks thereafter. The Executive has also confirmed that, while it will formally review and make decisions on restrictions every four weeks, the monitoring cycle provides them with the</p>

	<p>ability to move more rapidly on emerging priorities should the need arise before the next review point.</p>
3.5	<p>As part of the announcement on 2 March 2021, the Executive confirmed that, from 8 March 2021, it would permit a limited contactless click and collect service at baby equipment shops, clothing shops, footwear shops and electrical goods shops. The extension of click and collect more widely to other retail sectors will be considered as part of the next review of restrictions in mid-March. These developments mark phase 2 on the Retail and Services pathway. Phase 3 will permit all non-essential retail to re-open and close contact services to resume, with mitigations. Phase 4 on this pathway will permit all close contact services to open without appointments and will end remaining mitigations. It will also support increased in-store capacity in all retail at this stage in the re-opening process. Finally, phase 5 will permit all retail and close contact services to open with reduced mitigations.</p>
3.6	<p>This means that it is likely that the restrictions on capacity within retail and services will remain in place for some time in order to maintain some level of social distancing in indoor premises. Although current footfall levels in the city centre are down around 80% on the same time last year, once the restrictions start to lift, people will be encouraged to come back into the city centre to avail of the unique retail, cultural and hospitality offer. Businesses are keen welcome back visitors and shoppers – but they want to be able to do so in a way that is socially responsible. One of the issues that has been raised by the businesses and the representative organisations is that it would be helpful to have some flexibility on the current Sunday trading hours, in order to support recovery efforts and enable retailers to manage their footfall better over a slightly extended trading period on a Sunday.</p>
3.7	<p>Officers have had some contact with colleagues in other councils areas on this issue. While most have had extensions in place for a temporary period, these are due to run out soon – or have already expired – in most areas. It is important to note that Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council has extended the current approach to enforcement until the end of June 2021.</p>
3.8	<p>Given the degree of uncertainty in the short-term, the challenging business environment that the retailers face and the measures that have been put in place – both in the public realm and within individual properties – to give confidence to visitors and shoppers, it is proposed that the current approach to enforcement remains in place until 5 July 2021, subject to review</p>

	and in keeping with Northern Ireland Executive decisions relating to retail and service re-opening.
3.9	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> No specific financial or resource implications for council.
3.10	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> No specific equality implications.
4.0	Appendices
	None