



Subject:	Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations
Date:	13 October 2021
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic 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"/>
Some time 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 provide the Committee with an outline of the proposed approach to supporting local business associations to develop and deliver interventions that will drive footfall and create vibrancy in those areas.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note and agree the approach to accessing funding to support the delivery of area-based support for local business associations to increase vibrancy and drive footfall in anticipation of a go-live date in early November 2021.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Members will be aware of the ongoing challenges faced by local businesses as a result of COVID-19. The specific impact on the city centre has already been the subject of significant discussion and while there is some research to suggest that businesses outside of the city centre may not have been affected to the same extent, it is clear that retail and hospitality businesses in particular across the board have suffered as a result of the successive lockdowns.
3.2	The council has supported local business associations over many years, but the drive from these groups does tend to vary at different times. Over recent months, we have seen a significant increase in interest from a number of existing business associations across the city, as well as the establishment of new business associations. While the needs vary from area to area, they generally involve environmental improvements (additional planting, improvements to open space), creation of seating areas/new focal points, animation, cultural programming, events and local promotion activities.
3.3	Within the existing departmental budget, there is some limited financial provision to support business associations, but it is clear that many of the activities identified above could not be accommodated within this spend.
3.4	Given the feedback from the businesses, we have been engaging with relevant teams across the council to consider how we can establish a streamlined process of support for the organisations. We have also had some preliminary engagement with the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to explore whether they may be able to provide financial resources to extend the budget provision. The engagement of the departments is also critical, given the need to engage with them in order to progress many of the interventions in the public realm.
3.5	DfC has identified a potential opportunity to secure resources through their Revitalisation programme (subject to application and internal businesses case). This support is in keeping with the work recently undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG), which DfC have sponsored, in developing a "Living High Street Toolkit". This toolkit is premised on building capacity within the high street business and community sectors of towns and neighbourhood

centres (such as the arterial routes) and viewed through the lens of a combined economic, physical regeneration and environmental perspective. It is, however, very much based on building the capacity within the business communities to identify and take ownership of driving forward change in their areas. DfC considers that this initiative could act as a pilot to inform future approaches and funding investments.

3.6 Following discussions with DfC/DfI and other sections across the council, the Enterprise and Business Growth Unit and the City Regeneration and Development Division have developed an outline approach to move these proposals forward. Subject to approval at this committee and DfC's internal processes, officers intend to launch this initiative in November 2021.

3.7 The overarching purpose of the initiative is to strengthen the competitiveness of our local business destinations, focusing on actions which aim to:

- Support the development of shared and safely accessible commercial areas
- Support the diversification of business destinations outside of the city centre
- Undertake initiatives that will bring together key stakeholders to benefit business destinations outside of the city centre
- Undertake initiatives that improve the quality of urban design, distinctiveness and townscape quality.

3.8 The objectives include:

- Increasing engagement and partnership working between statutory partners and local business associations
- Supporting the development of area-based actions plans which address specific local concerns and deliver specific, measurable benefits over the short/medium and long term
- Increasing 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
- Enhancing the profile of the area with a view to stimulating economic activity
- Supporting the growth and development of businesses engaged in associated activity.
- Supporting the sustainability of businesses and local business associations.

3.9	<p>The proposed initiative will put in place a 2-year pilot programme of support for business associations that are based outside of the city centre boundary/ BID areas. This programme will involve a two-stage process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 1 of the support will engage new and existing traders and business associations. It will help those groups that are not formally constituted to do so (being constituted will be a pre-requisite for accessing the funding). It will also provide support to groups to develop an area-based action plan. This action plan will form the basis for moving to a stage 2 application. It will demonstrate how the group will meet the programme objectives around driving footfall and creating vibrancy in the area and will identify the priority areas for action, based on research and consultation with local businesses • Stage 2 will enable the group to draw down resources to support delivery. Key areas of expenditure will include marketing, activities aimed at driving footfall to an area, developing business skills, enhancing the look and feel through small-scale environmental improvements, animating the area through events and activities and providing opportunities for groups to engage with representatives in statutory organisations and other partners across the city (overview of support included in Appendix 1). Associations will be provided with technical assistance throughout the process – both in terms of business support and engagement and in terms of the specialist technical skills associated with small-scale infrastructure investments.
3.10	<p>It is envisaged that the pilot will support up to 10 business associations to access funding. Depending on the level of demand for support, a proposal may be submitted to extend the scheme (subject to appropriate approvals and access to resources). The total budget available to each association through stage 2 is a maximum of £40,000. The total budget request to DfC to support this scheme is £475,000, in addition to a £30,000 contribution from Belfast City Council to support the delivery of consultancy support for stage 1 which sits within the existing council budgets.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The indicative budget allocations are conditional on securing resources from DfC, as set out above. The activities outlined within this report are expected to be resourced through an application and business case to the DfC Revitalisation fund, with the exception of £30,000 which will be from the 2021/22 Enterprise and Business Growth budget.</p>

3.12	<p>While the Enterprise and Business Growth team will coordinate this programme of work and remain the accountable team, the nature of the activities to be delivered will require input across the department.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The proposed project referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. The proposed project will go through a process of equality screening which will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix 1 – Area based support programme overview