



Subject:	TEO High Street Task Force – Call for Evidence
Date:	10 <sup>th</sup> November 2021
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director, City Regeneration & Development
Contact Officer:	Deirdre Kelly, Programme Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
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"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to inform Members of a TEO High Street Task Force ‘Call for Evidence’ exercise that has recently been launched to gather evidence, data and views on a wide range of high level issues relating to High Streets, to form the basis of policy options for the Executive.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note that the Executive Office has launched the High Street Task Force Call for Evidence in order to gather evidence, data and views on a wide range of issues relating to the High Street, with a closing date of 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021 for responses.</li> <li>Agree that officers prepare a draft response which will be brought via Party Leaders Forum on 25 November with the final response brought back retrospectively to CGR Committee in December. To help inform the final draft the view of Members is also sought in advance of 25 November, either by way of comments at this Committee or by subsequently forwarding to officers.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
<p>3.1</p> <p>3.2</p> <p>3.3</p>	<p><u>High Street Task Force 'Call for Evidence'</u></p> <p>The Executive Office formed the High Street Task Force (HSTF) , which has members drawn from retail; hospitality; local government; academia; the voluntary and community sector; the culture and arts sector; tourism; and trade unions. Through its members the HSTF is working to identify the challenges and issues that our high streets face, and is seeking views on solutions to support high streets and to contribute to the development of thriving and sustainable city, town and village centres.</p> <p>The Executive Office launched the High Street Task Force 'Call for Evidence' on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021 which will run until 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021. The Call for Evidence (CfE) is the first stage of an ongoing public engagement process. The CfE document sets out the current understanding of the evidence available relating to high street issues with comments and views invited on this. Responses to the Call for Evidence will inform a draft report and it is proposed that a final report of this ongoing process will be presented to the Executive by Spring 2022.</p> <p>Members will be aware of the challenges facing our city centre, the arterial routes and neighbourhood centres. Even prior to the onset of Covid-19 pandemic our high streets, and the retail sector in particular in Belfast, like many other cities, suffered challenges from changes in consumer behaviours including trends towards more online shopping and the desire for enhanced experiences on the high street. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated these changes, with a number of retail closures, many of which were the result of closures of chains of national stores across the UK. The way people shop and the way that communities use their high streets is changing. This changes the nature of what makes a high street successful and it recognised that high streets are having to evolve and adapt. The Call for Evidence, as attached in Appendix 1 of this report,</p>

provides an opportunity for Council to input to potential future policy options for the Executive, to drive forward the diversification and reimagination of the high street. The Call for Evidence has identified 14 themes which provide an overview of the issues that our high streets currently face:

- Partnerships
- Follow Best Practice
- Investment
- Planning
- Public Realm
- Fiscal – including Rates
- Capacity
- Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability
- Housing and other Infrastructure
- Getting to and from the High Street
- Tourism
- Digital High Streets
- Rural Settlements
- People, Localism and Well-being

3.4

It is proposed that officers develop draft responses to the questions posed in the document and given that the closing date is 6th December, and that the draft response is brought via Party Leaders Forum on 25th November. However the view of Members is sought in advance of 25 November, either by way of any comments they would wish to make at Committee or to forward to officers which will help inform the final draft response. A final copy of the response will be brought back retrospectively to December CG&R Committee. Members can of course separately make their own submissions.

3.5

**Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no finance or resource implications associated with this report.

3.6

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications associated with this report.

<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
4.1	<b>Appendix One:</b> High Street Task Force – ‘Call for Evidence’ consultation document