



<b>Subject:</b>	Future City Centre Programme
<b>Date:</b>	8 November 2023
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b>	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Information relating to any individual</li><li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li><li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li><li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li><li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li><li>6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction</li><li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li></ol>	
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After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update Members on a refreshed Future City Centre (FCC) Programme based on previous recommendations from a refreshed Pragma Retail and Leisure Performance Strategy, ongoing stakeholder engagement and reflecting programmes, projects and activities underway across a number of inter-related areas.</li> <li>• Seek approval to the proposed objectives and measurement indicators within the revised FCC Programme.</li> </ul>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the contents of the report, including the important role the city centre plays for the wider city and region; the key findings of the refreshed Pragma Retail and Leisure Performance Strategy and updates on programmes of work and activity aligned to these recommendations.</li> <li>• Note the progress in relation to shaping the Future City Centre Programme (FCC) and the updated City Centre governance structures.</li> <li>• Approve the monitoring framework within the revised FCC Programme as attached at Appendix 3 consisting of programme objectives and strategic indicators, noting that regular reports will be brought back to Committee on these measurement indicators.</li> <li>• Note that Belfast does not receive the same level of specific regeneration funding programmes that other UK cities receive for city/town centres and high streets, as referenced below, and that a detailed report on this is to be brought to the SP&amp;R Committee in the near future.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Background &amp; Context</b>
3.1	<p>Belfast and the city centre remains the economic driver for the region. The Regional Development Strategy 2035 recognises the need to enhance the distinctive role of the City Centre as the regional capital and the focus of administration, commerce, specialised services and cultural amenities. It highlights the need to support and strengthen the distinctive role of Belfast City Centre as the primary retail location in Northern Ireland.</p>
3.2	<p>The Belfast Local Development Plan highlights that Belfast city centre plays a significant role in the regional economy serving a wide catchment area beyond its plan area boundary. The city centre is also a regional centre for commerce, culture, tourism, recreation, entertainment, learning and employment, contributing £47million in non-domestic district rates (which represents 27% of all Belfast City Council's rates income). City centre jobs represent c33% of all Belfast jobs and 9.6% of all jobs in Northern Ireland. The success of the city as a whole is critically important, although like other UK cities, the city centre is viewed as the showcase for the wider city and the gateway for the</p>

region, supported by the major transport hubs serving the region. The diversification and inclusive economic growth of the city centre is crucial to Belfast's physical and economic development.

3.3 BCCRIS (Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy), the adopted regeneration policy for the city centre, recognises that the city centre is one of the most important places in the Region. The city centre is a place where investment impact can be maximised, where the majority of our rates are generated (per area) and therefore where momentum can be built to support inclusive growth in Belfast's surrounding neighbourhoods. All communities in Belfast therefore have a direct interest in an inclusive economically thriving city centre. BCCRIS and A Bolder Vision both recognise the importance of connections to communities; this is a key theme throughout and includes both physical connectivity and ensuring that local people feel connected to the centre in a way that allows their full participation in its economic and social life.

3.4 Members will also recall that a report was brought to this Committee in March on the Regeneration Tracker which provided an overview of regeneration and development activity which took place across the city during 2022, as aligned to the Belfast Agenda and the policy areas within BCCRIS, This indicated positive progress across a range of asset classes and noted that in 2021/2022 there was a 2% growth in the rates base arising from additional development, which resulted in additional rates growth of £3.3m every year. However there remain a number of challenges impacting on the city centre including stalled regeneration schemes, poor public realm, limited city centre living, decline of certain high street retailers, lack of targeted regeneration funding programmes, severance with surrounding communities and a range of social issues.

3.5 The City Growth and Regeneration Committee in February 2020, noted the key findings and recommendations of a Retail Analysis, as developed by Pragma Consulting Limited; and the progress in relation to shaping a Future City Centre Programme that cut across various programmes of work and projects associated with regeneration, development, business, investment, cultural and vibrancy activities and operational issues. This included programme strands aligned to the Pragma Retail Analysis and Members had agreed that officers develop the Future City Centre Programme through engagement with city stakeholders. In April 2021, Members of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee received an update report on the Future City Centre Programme in the context of the ongoing challenges caused by the Covid – 19 Pandemic. The Committee noted the ongoing challenges of the city centre and its criticality to the recovery of the wider city and region as well as the need to adopt a multi-faceted approach to the re-imagination and recovery of the city centre.

3.6 The refresh of the Belfast Agenda was launched in April 2021 and continued most recently with the public consultation which closed on 2 October 2023. The city centre and its role in supporting the

3.7	<p>growth ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda, as well as its importance as a place to visit, live, work and invest in was highlighted by a large no of respondents. On the basis of this feedback from stakeholders and the public as a whole, the Future City Centre has emerged as a priority area within the “Our Place” theme of the Belfast Agenda.</p> <p>In response to the emerging city centre issues, during 2022 a review was undertaken of existing mechanisms for engagement and improved governance to bring together the various city centre related facets and ensure synergy whilst avoiding duplication and silo approaches. Members will note this included the establishment of an All-Party Working Group on the City Centre which was approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 19 August 2022. The revised FCC Programme is aligned to the agreed city centre governance structures (included in appendix 1) which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Future City Centre Leadership Group</b> – a sub-group of the Belfast Agenda City Development Board which focuses on ensuring that issues are raised, and solutions achieved relating to the priorities for the Future City Centre Programme. Membership consists of representatives from a number of partners including BCC, city centre stakeholders including private sector, central government agencies, anchor institutions, Visit Belfast and BIDs and representation from the VCSE panel.</li> <li>ii. <b>Strategic Leadership Group (Complex Lives)</b> - A strategic and proactive partnership and multi-agency approach which brings together the NIHE, PHA, the Health and Social Care Board, Probation Board for NI, PSNI and Council, along with voluntary agencies. This is supported by a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) which meet on a weekly basis to understand the specific needs and to develop an individual support plan for the vulnerable person.</li> <li>iii. <b>Multi Agency Operational (tasking) Group</b> – this group seeks to address Clean, Green, Inclusive and Safe (CGIS) issues and overseeing the implementation of a CGIS action plan. Membership includes representatives from relevant government departments, PSNI Belfast Chamber, the city’s three Business Improvement Districts and the NIHE.</li> </ul>
4.0	<b>Main Report</b>
4.1	<p><b>Refreshed Retail and Leisure Performance Strategy</b></p> <p>As referenced above, in 2018/19, Pragma Consulting Ltd were commissioned to undertake a Retail Analysis of Belfast City Centre to identify the challenges facing the city’s retail sector and inform recommendations on how retail, leisure and supporting uses could drive the development of Belfast City Centre. This was previously considered by Committee and formed the basis of the Future City Centre Programme referenced above and agreed by Members as a basis for cross cutting themes of work for the city centre. Since then, a number of significant events such as the fire at Bank</p>

4.2	<p>Buildings, Covid – 19 pandemic and global economic crisis have seen an acceleration of a number of trends identified within the report.</p> <p>With Covid-19 having the potential for both short and long term change, the Council had recommissioned Pragma to revisit the findings to understand what has changed, and how the Council as an active stakeholder in the city centre, alongside other partners, can affect maximum positive change given the opportunities and resources available. It was recognised that there was a need to consider the purpose and functionality of the city centre and how it can adapt to becoming a multi-purpose location, combining retail and hospitality with business, residential, cultural, community and other facilities alongside new ways of working (hybrid/homeworking) and embracing innovation and digital technology. The key findings and recommendations from this recently refreshed work have informed various interventions, programmes and approaches that have being brought to this Committee for approval and noted to the City Centre All Party Working Group. A summary of key recommendations and an update on actions is attached in Appendix 1.</p>
4.3	<p><b>Future City Centre Programme</b></p> <p>The Future City Centre Programme, as previously agreed by Members, adopted a pillared approach across various thematic areas of regeneration and connectivity; business and investment; vibrancy and animation; clean green, inclusive and safe. The overall Programme has recently been recast to take into account the significant challenges brought about by the Bank Buildings fire, the Covid-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis and stakeholder feedback, as well as best practice advice and recommendations from external sources inc the refreshed Pragma Report 2022, Institute of Place Management, High Street Task Force etc.</p>
4.4	<p>The ethos of the FCC programme remains. However, this is now strengthened by the collectively (BCC, DfI, DfC and significant stakeholder and public input) developed blueprint for the city centre through A Bolder Vision, with key principles around removing severance and barriers to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities to improve access for all; facilitating city centre living; importance of a strong civic spine and enhancing the waterfront. A Bolder Vision embedded within the FCC programme presents a significant opportunity to ensure the restoration of a sense of collective pride in the centre of the city by the communities within and around it.</p>
4.5	<p>The revised and recast FCC framework has been brought about by a comprehensive programme of research and engagement. It reflects feedback from Elected Members of the City-Centre All Party Working Group during meetings held in late 2022 and early 2023. It is also a result of significant inter-departmental working to ensure joint working with all the relevant divisions in the Council, such as Economic Development, Culture, Tourism, Planning, Building Control, Climate, Smart Cities, Property &amp; Projects, City Regeneration and Development, CNS and Strategic Hub.</p>

4.6 The revised FCC Framework (attached in Appendix 2) was adopted by the City Centre All Party Working Group on 08 September 2023. It is aligned to the longer term ambitions of the refreshed Belfast Agenda and Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS). The revised FCC Framework Vision to create:

*“A vibrant, unique and thriving place where people spend time, live, work, visit and invest”.*

4.7 As set out in the Framework (Appendix 2), this is supported by eight programme objectives, measured by 14 strategic indicators and underpinned by work within five thematic pillars, as below. The programmes of work and activities included in each pillar are not exhaustive and many involve other partners but they are intended to reflect the broad range of activities that are ongoing and are managed and reported via programme and project management arrangements for the various strands:

Regeneration & Connectivity	Business & Investment	Animation & Distinctive Offering	Clean, Green, Inclusive & Safe	Vulnerability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Major regeneration schemes</li> <li>BRCD projects including Belfast Stories</li> <li>City Centre Living / Houseing-led regeneration</li> <li>Connectivity and Active Travel</li> <li>Connected spaces &amp; places</li> <li>Vacant-to-Vibrant capital grant programme</li> <li>Matchmaking service to address vacancy</li> <li>A Bolder Vision</li> <li>Preservation of built heritage</li> <li>Environmental improvements</li> <li>Cathedral Gardens redevelopment</li> <li>Waterfront promenade framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business support programmes</li> <li>Attracting new-to-market brands</li> <li>City Investment Service</li> <li>Business tourism - conference subvention</li> <li>Night-time economy</li> <li>Business premises for cultural organisations/creative industries</li> <li>Test trading at markets</li> <li>Positioning the city to compete</li> <li>Maximising international opportunities in FDI, trade and education</li> <li>Smart Belfast programme</li> <li>Belfast Smart District</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2024 Year of Culture Projects</li> <li>Cultural animation activities and events, pop-up activities</li> <li>2 Royal Avenue programming</li> <li>UNESCO City of Music/ music strategy implementation</li> <li>Meanwhile uses</li> <li>Lighting Interventions</li> <li>Night-time economy</li> <li>Food and drink tourism</li> <li>City Hall exhibition including Augment the City experience</li> <li>Street dressing/ street art</li> <li>Annual events programme</li> <li>City markets</li> <li>Belfast HUB-IN at Maritime Mile</li> <li>Belfast Stories visitor attraction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhanced city centre cleansing regimes and tackling graffiti</li> <li>City centre cleanliness charter</li> <li>Safer Neighbourhood Officer city centre patrols</li> <li>ASB Officer advice/guidance</li> <li>Imagining use of open and civic spaces (support retail/hospitality sectors).</li> <li>Support the provision of parklets and greening the city initiatives.</li> <li>EVC strategy</li> <li>Tourism Accessibility Programme</li> <li>Green Tourism Accrediation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue multi-stakeholder approach to support alcohol and drug addiction; and rough sleeping.</li> <li>Delivery of Complex Lives (whole systems and people-centred approach)</li> </ul>
<p>Cross-cutting enablers: Local Development Plan; Digital innovation; Inclusive Growth; Sustainability &amp; Resilience; Development of a robust evidence base providing objective data on the above indicators and measures – to be used to inform the development of future actions; Taking an 'evidence led approach' by utilising best practice and corporate membership of IPM; and Legislation - Reform of licensing</p>				

4.8 **Strategic Indicators**  
 As part of recent engagement, officers have identified a range of strategic indicators (across areas such as footfall, investment, tourism spend etc) as set out in the enclosed Framework which will be used to track the progress of the FCC programme objectives over the longer term. Work is ongoing to collate this data and develop appropriate monitoring mechanisms for all metrics. A technical report has been included at Appendix 4, which provides further information on each of the indicators including its definition, source and performance data. Officers will report progress on these indicators on a regular basis.

4.9 The revised framework also includes performance measures, drawing on Outcomes Based Accountability thinking, whereby the vision, objectives and indicators refer to the population

	<p>accountability for the entire city; and then the “pillars” relate to performance accountability which link to individual workstreams that the council delivers or has a key role in.</p>
4.10	<p><b><u>Funding &amp; Investment in Belfast</u></b></p> <p>While Belfast has experienced strong growth across some sectors there is significant public and private sector investment required to deliver on the outcomes of the Belfast Agenda. Belfast has experienced several years of in-year capital budgets from central government, limiting and removing the ability to deliver the required capital infrastructure investment to support the sustainable, diversification of the city centre. This lack of major Executive capital investment is further compounded when considered in conjunction with the fact that other UK cities are eligible for significant funding directly aligned to city /town centre regeneration that NI cities /towns are not eligible for. These include specific regeneration funding streams available in other UK cities inc the High St Fund, the Better Towns Fund, Brownfield Fund etc and the absence of these dedicated funding streams provides a significant disadvantage to Belfast in terms of competing with other UK &amp; Ireland city/ town centres and High Streets, but also in terms of dealing with, and recovering from economic shocks such as the Pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. A further report on this will be brought to a future meeting of this Committee and the SP&amp;R Committee.</p>
5.0	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>The revised Future City Centre Programme only identifies existing programmes and workstreams that are already covered from existing budgets. As highlighted above, non-domestic district rates from the city centre contributes £47 million or 27% of the council’s total rates income.</p>
6.0	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>Each workstream and/or programme and project will be separately equality screened as per our statutory requirements.</p>
7.0	<p><b><u>Appendices - Documents Attached</u></b></p> <p>Appendix 1 – Pragma Key recommendations and update on actions  Appendix 2 - Revised Future City Centre Programme Framework  Appendix 3 - Future City Centre Indicator Technical Report</p>