

All-Party Working Group on the City Centre

Friday, 3rd May, 2024

MEETING OF THE ALL-PARTY WORKING GROUP ON THE CITY CENTRE

Members present: Councillor de Faoite (Chairperson);
Aldermen Rodgers and McCullough; and
Councillors Long and Maskey.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. E. McConville, Director of External Affairs,
Communication and Marketing;
Ms. D. Kelly, Programme Manager;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business Research and Development
Manager;
Ms. L.A. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were recorded.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th April, 2024 were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Importance of ENTE for Future City Centre Programme (FCC)

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy delivered a presentation to the Working Group and highlighted the Council's contribution to Belfast's ENTE within the context of the Future City Centre Programme's five pillars:

- Regeneration and Connectivity;
- Business and Investment;
- Animation and Distinctive Offering;
- Clean, Green, Inclusive and Safe; and
- Vulnerability.

He explained that there was a lack of data pertaining to the City's nighttime economy and that the three BIDs had previously committed to commissioning research to learn more about the sector and its economic impact. He reported that the Council's Business Research and Development unit and UUEPC were assisting with the development of a research specification. He stated that the limited data that was available was assisting with an understanding of the city centre during evening and nighttime hours and he reported that research undertaken by GLA Economics, as part of the Great London Authority Evidence Base for the London Nighttime Economy, provided data for the rest of the UK.

The Business Research and Development Manager informed the Working Group that, between November, 2023 and January, 2024, the Council had undertaken an online survey on its engagement platform, Your Say Belfast, which aimed to provide an updated baseline position on a previous Clean, Green, Inclusive and Safe survey undertaken in 2021 and that, as part of the questionnaire, a short module on Belfast city centre's nighttime economy had been included to capture additional data, he reported that the key findings were:

- More than half of the respondents (53%) agreed that Belfast city centre had a vibrant nightlife;
- A third of respondents (33%) agreed that the city centre had a wide range of choices or things to do; and
- There were strong sentiments expressed with regard to transport, with 75% of respondents disagreeing that the availability of taxis was satisfactory.

He explained that the Purple Flag Steering Group had collated a wide range of evidence to support their application, including PSNI crime data, hospital admissions where alcohol and drugs were cited in the notes, and the number of establishments, including public buildings, alcohol-based venues, food-based venues and culture and entertainment venues, and the proportion that we're open at night.

Noted.

Purple Flag Accreditation Status Update

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. C. McCracken, Purple Flag Steering Group, to the meeting.

Mr. McCracken delivered a presentation to the Working Group and explained that a Purple Flag was an internationally recognised accreditation for excellence in the nighttime economy and helped to create safe and thriving locations at night for all users.

He stated that the accreditation looked at the area in terms of the following five themes:

- Wellbeing;
- Place;
- Appeal;
- Movement; and
- Policy.

He explained that full renewal was required every two years, with an interim renewal in the year in between and he outlined the requirements for the full renewal application that included footfall data, PSNI crime statistics, alcohol and drug related accident and emergency admissions, a public perception survey and an overnight self-assessment.

Noted.

Members' Reflection on Assessor Feedback

In response to a Member's question with regard to Elected Member representation on the Purple Flag Steering Group, Mr. McCracken stated that one representative from each stakeholder was how the Steering Group had been comprised and that representation was a matter for each organisation. The Director of City Regeneration and Development stated that she would add Purple Flag Accreditation as a standing agenda item for the Working Group and direct Members feedback to the Purple Flag Steering Group.

Noted

Purple Flag - Next Steps, Appointment of Night Czar and development of ENTE Strategy

Mr. McCracken outlined the following next steps in maintaining Belfast's Purple Flag accreditation:

- **Well-Being**
 - Support city centre volunteer charities and investigate funding opportunities; and
 - Continue roll out of Ask for Angela and similar safety initiatives.
- **Movement**
 - Lobby for Nightmovers – BIDs have offered £30k marketing contribution;
 - Reform of taxi licensing – e.g. accreditation bottleneck; and
 - Continue to lobby for pedestrianisation of areas such as Hill Street in CQ.
- **Appeal**
 - Night-Time events – e.g. open Victoria dome at night, Experience led Restaurant Week (October), Alive After Five; and
 - Expansion of the non-alcoholic offer, including late night coffee shops.
- **Place**
 - Placemaking Projects – e.g. lighting exterior of heritage buildings like Ulster Hall;
 - Review wayfinding and signage – navigation around city fragmented; and
 - Lobby for roll out of Streets Ahead in CQ and LQ BIDs.
- **Policy**
 - Appoint Belfast City Centre Night Czar – post currently advertised;

- Night-Time Economy Research (to define and value the NTE);
- 3 BIDs and the Council to collectively develop Night-Time Economy strategy for Belfast; and
- Annual Stakeholder Forum led by Purple Flag Steering Group.

Members' Feedback

A Member indicated that feedback from other cities which had appointed a Night Czar indicated that particular qualities would be required for the role, including impartiality and the ability to connect stakeholders. He also expressed concern with regard to resourcing the role.

Concerns were raised by Members that representation from the arts and cultural sectors was required and agreed that an update report regarding a previous Notice of Motion in relation to the funding and resourcing of a Belfast City Night Czar be accelerated to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

A Member stated that nighttime transport was a priority along with lighting and animating the city centre and stated that there was a lack of coordination with regard to signage in the city centre and that it should be standardised across the city. Mr. McCracken responded by stating that Translink had been undertaking work, in consultation with its staff, with regard to implementing a night bus service.

Concern was raised about the absence of a sexual crime increase statistic and, in response, Mr. McCracken stated that the feedback from the assessors was that it was an area of concern that required more urgent attention and may have a negative impact if interpreted incorrectly.

Mr. McCracken also explained that Hospitality Ulster had been working with representatives from London with regard to achieving the Nighttime Safety Chartermark and had been providing feedback to the Purple Flag Steering Group.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. McCracken for his presentation and concluded the meeting.

Chairperson