



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Retail Sector Support Plan
Date:	10 September 2008
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459 Lisa Martin, Economic Development Manager, ext 3427

Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that, at previous meetings of the Development Committee, support for a range of initiatives to assist in the development and promotion of the retail sector (with a focus on Independents) across the city has been approved.

While there are a number of interventions underway at present, recent research along with specific recent demands from trader groupings, have identified additional potential interventions which could support the further development of the sector. A Retail Sector Support Plan for the current year has been proposed on the basis that further analysis will permit Council to consider a new 2 year plan in the near future.

Key Issues

Recent research carried out by the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) on behalf of Belfast City Council provides important information on the scale and nature of the sector. The data was gathered from the period 1993-2005. Key statistics include:

- Between 1993 and 2005, total retail employment in Belfast increased from 10,311 to 13,560 – an increase of 31.5%
- The number of individual businesses increased by around 10% from 1145 to 1256
- In single-plant retail businesses (i.e. those with only one store and employing less than 20 people – mainly independents) employment increased from 2,803 to 3,039 jobs
- The number of independent retail outlets increased by 9.6% from 617 to 676
- The independent retail sector represented around 22.4% of total employment and 53% of total outlets in the retail sector in the period 1993-2008
- Independent retailers created 2,151 jobs in this given period: the majority of these were in new openings (1,745) rather than expansions (406)
- Over 2/3 of the existing jobs in 1993 had been destroyed by 2005. The majority of

- these losses were due to the closure of outlets
- In 2005, around a third of jobs and around a quarter of outlets in the independent retail sector were located in the city centre area. Overall, the independent retail sector in the city centre had an increase in net employment of almost four times that of the rest of the city (17% compared to 4.4%)
 - 71% of independent retail jobs in Belfast city centre in 1993 were lost by 2005 (compared to 2/3 of those outside the city centre)
 - Since 1999, employment in the independent retail sector has decreased by 1.1% (it grew by over 12% in the previous 6 years).

It should be noted that there has been considerable further increase in retail employment and shop openings in the period from 2005. However, official statistical information is not yet available for this period.

Further to this analysis, additional qualitative research was undertaken to gauge the key issues affecting local independent retailers and to identify a range of potential interventions which Council might undertake to support the sector. This work revealed that the estimated market value for the independent retail sector is £345million.

Having considered the foregoing analysis along with direct demand from the predominantly independent retail sector, a draft action plan has been prepared for Members' consideration and is included in annex to this report (Appendix 1). This report also indicates the significant support mechanisms already in place for the sector within the Development Department and across the wider council services. Proposed actions have been identified within the following themes:

1. Marketing, promotion and branding
2. Capacity building and skills development
3. New product development support

Issues around planning/legislation and place making/environmental improvements are also important and will be developed further for successive retail sector support plans.

Activities proposed under each of these themes include:

Theme	Activity	Budget
Marketing, promotion and branding	- Shopping festival	£28,000
	- Belfast Loves Shopping Guide	£20,000
	- Independent Retail Awards	£9,000
	- What's on Calendar	£4,000
Capacity building and skills development	- Retail Therapy programme	£15,000
	- Trader groups development plans	£10,000
	- Retail master classes	£2,000
New product development support	- Change of focus for Thimble group towards product development	Resources included in Creative Industries budget
	- Craft traders initiative	£12,000

As reported to committee previously, Council corporately and Members individually have been approached by independent retailers and traders groupings seeking Council support and assistance. Currently there are approximately 12 retail groupings in Belfast both within the City Centre and in areas outside the City Centre. Each group is organised differently, has a different set of issues and is seeking various degrees of support from Council and public

agencies and each group chooses to use Council support at different times.

Over the past 3 years, Members and staff have been directly engaged with the following groups: Lisburn Road, Castle Street, Ann Street, North Street, North West Quarter, Fountain Street, Wellington Street, West Belfast, Belmont Road. Some of the groups have produced action plans which contain both short and long term proposals connected to environmental improvements, marketing and business development. Staff have been active in attending to a large number of issues identified by groups which have no Council costs attached except staff time and have been particularly effective in securing cooperation of Government Departments on environmental improvements.

Council has also recently received a proposed Action Plan from Belfast Chamber of Commerce as appended, which is designed to generate additional footfall in the city centre. Belfast Chamber is intending to implement this plan in time for the Christmas trading season commencing in the autumn. Council financial support is being sought towards a number of initiatives and following further analysis this will be presented to Committee in due course.

Resource Implications

£100,000 already contained in budget.

Recommendations

To approve the proposed Retail Sector Support Plan.

Key to Abbreviations

ERINI – Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Supporting the Independent Retail Sector in Belfast: An Action Plan for Belfast City Council

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