

# All-Party Working Group on the City Centre

Friday, 27th September, 2024

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

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

In attendance: 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. W. Kane, Tourism Development Officer; and  
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

No apologies were reported.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 7th June, 2024 were agreed.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

### **Presentation**

#### **Food and Drink Tourism Network**

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. P. Kane, Belfast Whiskey Week and Co-Chair, Mr. A. Duggan, Hospitality Belfast and Co-Chair, Ms. K. Dittmar, Oui Poutine, Mr. N. McKenna, Waterman House/James Street South, Ms. C. Thompson, Thompson's Tea and Ms. L. Goodall, Goodall Consulting, to the meeting.

Mr. P. Kane and Mr. A. Duggan delivered a presentation to the Working Group and explained the following key areas:

- Background to the Food and Drink Action Plan;
- Developing a Network for Belfast;
- Current Macro Challenges;
- City Challenges; and
- Key Opportunities;

Mr. Duggan stated that, to ensure the continued growth and impact of the Food and Drink Tourism Network, it would require the following support:

- Increased budget and annual growth with a commitment to Years 2 and 3 of the Action Plan;
- Assistance to develop internal cross-departmental support on issues relating to economic development, employability and skills, environmental health, Planning, Licensing, sustainability and climate, accessibility, waste management, Belfast Stories, Tourism and Events; and
- Nomination of Elected Members from each party with interest in support on specific issues.

Ms. Goodall concluded the presentation by explaining that, through engagement with the Network, members would gain robust knowledge and understanding of the sector and access to key stakeholders and their support would help to protect and sustain more than 12,000 jobs in the city and assist in positioning Belfast as a world class food and drink tourism destination.

During discussion, a number of Members expressed their willingness to provide support to the Network and to gain an understanding of what contributions the Council could make to the success of the Food and Drink Tourism Network.

The Chairperson (Councillor Long) and Councillors de Faoite, Groogan and Maskey agreed that they would act as ambassadors, on behalf of their respective political parties, for the Food and Drink Tourism Network.

The Chairperson thanked the deputation for their presentation, and they retired from the meeting.

The Working Group noted the presentation.

### **Future City Centre Programme Council led Activity Update**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Working Group with an overview of a range of recent activity across the pillars of the Future City Centre Programme, with updates from June to September, 2024 in the following key pillar areas:

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

She provided a comprehensive overview of the work that was being led across the Council, and that it provided a useful tool of reference for the Members. She also highlighted that the development of a robust evidence base, that was demonstrated in the Future City Centre Framework Performance Dashboard, provided objective data on the indicators and

measures that measured the impact of activity in the city centre, and that further developmental work was required on the operational indicators linked to the Council led activity.

The Working Group noted the update.

### **Future City Centre Programme Performance Dashboard**

The Business Research and Development Manager presented the Working Group with the recently updated Future City Centre Programme Performance Dashboard. He provided an update on the following strategic indicators which reflected the city's overall performance, for which all stakeholders were accountable:

- Footfall levels;
- Dwell time;
- Unique visitors;
- Catchment area;
- Rates income;
- Cleanliness and safety,
- Air quality;
- Employee jobs;
- Development;
- Vacancy rates;
- Independent retailers;
- Consumer spend; and
- Tourism spend.

The Business Research and Development Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of different footfall and visitor behaviour indicators, that included street level and density heatmaps, international visitors and catchment areas, which highlighted recent performance, compared with similar periods the previous year.

He concluded by providing an update on the city centre residential population, stating that NISRA had recently released its 2022 Mid-Year Population estimates which indicated that there was an estimated 14,793 people living in the city centre in 2022, up 8.5% from the 2021 Census.

The Working Group noted the update.

### **City Centre News and Communications Digest**

The Director of External Affairs, Communications and Marketing updated the Working Group on recent city centre news and communications. He provided an overview of recent coverage that included the opening of Grand Central Station, Belfast PRIDE, Mela, Villa Vie cruise ship passenger reception and the opening of The Ivy.

He outlined future releases, that included the Augmented Reality City Hall exhibition experience, in partnership with BT, further Vacant to Vibrant success stories, the autumn consultation on Belfast Stories concept designs and Cathedral Gardens future development plans.

He explained that briefing sessions would be held for relevant key journalists to explain context, promote understanding of the Council's role and responsibilities and highlight positive developments and future priorities.

He concluded by outlining a proactive strategy to consistently amplify positive city centre messages.

### **Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy** **10 Year Stocktake**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Working Group with an update on a recent stocktake on a ten-year review of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS).

She explained that the strategy was built on the following core principles/policy areas:

- Increase the Employment Population;
- Increase the Residential Population;
- Manage the Retail Offer;
- Maximise the Tourism Opportunity;
- Create Regional Learning and Innovation Centres;
- Create a Green, Walkable, Cyclable Centre;
- Connect to the City Around; and
- Shared Space and Social Impact.

She stated that the stocktake involved looking back at what had been envisaged and taking stock in order to assist in a focus to looking forward and was not intended to be an in-depth analysis of all elements of the strategy. She highlighted that the delivery of policies, projects and plans in BCCRIS sat across the public private and third sectors.

She outlined the key points and areas of focus, and she explained that the emerging findings would be presented to the next meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, followed by a BCCRIS Summit event in November, 2024.

The Working Group noted the update.

Following a suggestion from a Member, the Working Group agreed to extend an invite to Mr. M. Stewart, who had recently been appointed as the Belfast Night Czar, to attend a future meeting of the Working Group.

Chairperson