



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Department for Social Development reStore Initiative
Date:	13 October 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development ext. 3470
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Relevant Background Information

In December 2008 Margaret Ritchie, Minister for Social Development, launched a pilot initiative to attract more shoppers and visitors to the Greater Castle Street area of Belfast. The reStore Castle Street action plan was based on the 'restore DC programme' which currently operates to support small businesses and commercial districts in Washington DC, USA.

Government funding is directly targeted to distinct commercial districts and small retailers and traders. The initiative seeks to provide technical and funding assistance to design and improve streetscapes and building frontages. It further seeks to build the capacity of neighbourhood non-profit organisations to assist businesses and co-ordinate sustainable community driven revitalisation efforts.

Minister Ritchie has further committed the Department for Social Development (DSD) funding to support the traders in the Smithfield/Library Quarter of the city centre as part of the reStore Initiative.

Key Issues

Castle Street/King Street

The Traders Association held a very successful business promotion day in the run up to Christmas 2008. The Traders Association carried out a number of improvements to shop fronts and signage and has completed the installation of several public art pieces which sought to enhance the appearance of the area.

DSD initially provided £150,000 funding to support the implementation of the action plan.

A further £15,000 was provided to complete a number of additional projects which emerged during the latter stages of the initiative – business owners who had initially been reluctant to participate in the pilot became interested when the widespread improvements began to take effect.

The local business community has provided “in kind” contributions to the overall pilot, such as price reductions for goods during the business promotion/fun day in the run-up to Christmas 2008 and offering their professional time to the development and implementation of the initiative.

The time and commitment devoted to the reStore programme by members of the Traders’ Association has resulted in a successful pilot and improvements to the targeted area. In addition, the initiative has encouraged some of the business owners to carry out additional enhancements to their properties.

The group developed a brand and a heritage guide for the area, which aims to attract more visitors/shoppers to the area following the recent improvements. This is in addition to the streetscape improvements completed in the area by DSD as part of the Belfast Streets Ahead public realm programme. Minister Ritchie launched the guide in January 2010.

Smithfield and Union

The aims of the reStore Initiative in Smithfield/ Library Quarter are:

- Self help initiative for businesses
- Financial support to develop a unique brand for the Smithfield Market/Library Quarter area
- To promote the area in more generic terms as a place for shoppers and visitors to visit
- To improve the overall attractiveness of the area

The problems facing the area had been addressed by the North-West City Centre Regeneration Committee (NWCCRC) – a local committee made up of traders, residents and other individuals associated with the area as a whole. It was this committee that considered where the funding was to be spent and their long term vision for the area was the basis on which work proceeded – this is an example of how the reStore Initiative seeks to involve the local personalities and individuals rather than a more generic regeneration plan.

Although the NWCCRC were enthusiastic, DSD found that the project was not moving forward as quickly as desired. It was at this stage that Peter Moore, Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM), was brought in to manage the works.

The project’s main emphasis was on two areas’ capital works which constituted physical improvements to the area, this included shop fronts, signage and aesthetic presentation.

The second element was the re-branding of the area as Smithfield and Union, largely undertaken by the University of Ulster’s Liam McComish. This concentrated on how the area was to present itself within the changing context of marketing and image, trying to attract a higher footfall and tourism.

£98,000 was allocated to the two areas of work and the breakdown of the areas on what the money was spent on was decided after meetings between DSD, BCCM and the NWCCRC.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to agree to the request from DSD to make a presentation to a Special meeting of the Development Committee on the reStore Initiatives in Castle Street area and on the work ongoing in the Smithfield and Union area.

Decision Tracking

Further to agreement, a date to be set for a Special Meeting to receive a presentation from the DSD.

Timeline: November 2010

Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay

Key Abbreviations

DSD- Department for Social Development
BCCM- Belfast City Centre Management
NWCCRC- North-West City Centre Regeneration Committee