



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Support for Independent Traders – Proposed Approach
Date:	23 August 2011
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that, at the 15 June meeting of the Development Committee, a range of economic and business growth measures was endorsed. This covered – among other themes – support for sectoral initiatives, including activities to support the independent retail sector in the city.
1.2	Since that endorsement, some preliminary discussions and preparatory work have been undertaken with a range of trader groups to clarify their needs and to develop a proposal to support the groups, according to their stage of development, their specific requirements and their capacity to deliver and collaborate with other partners.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The retail sector, and in particular the independent retailers, are under considerable pressure in the current economic climate. Retailers have been trying to develop a range of initiatives to increase footfall and spend in their areas and have, increasingly, been working collaboratively under the guise of traders' forums to carry out this work.
2.2	At the 15 June 2011 Development Committee, a budget of up to £200,000 was committed to promote the development of the sector through a range of activities including trader group development, local area campaigns, Retail Therapy business development programme, market start up programme and Independent Retail week (proposed to take place in March 2012).
2.3	Under previous retail initiatives, support has been provided to help traders' groups become constituted; to assist them in prioritising areas requiring collaborative support and to deliver some initial activity aligned to this support.
2.4	Support has also been provided to a number of existing trader groups including Lisburn Road Business Association; East Belfast Traders (incorporating Ballyhackamore, Belmont Road and Bloomfield Avenue), West Belfast Traders' Association and the Shankill Road Business Association. This support was provided on the basis that groups were incorporated, had a management structure in place and were committed to a programme of activities to market and promote the areas.

2.5	The Retail Therapy programme has now helped 90 independent traders across the city and is currently open to recruitment for up to 30 participants – the deadline for this programme is 16 September. Retail Therapy focuses on helping individual traders grow their business. It does this through a mystery shop process, after which a tailored development plan is put in place and a small grant element is provided to allow the trader to implement to issues identified as part of the improvement process.
2.6	With regard to retail support activities in the 11/12 financial year, it is proposed that support be provided as follows:
2.7	<u>Trader group development support</u> Some initial discussions have taken place with a range of new and fledgling traders groups, all of which are at varying stages of development. These include the Antrim Road Business Group, Lower Lisburn Road Traders, Ormeau Road Traders and Bloomfield Road traders.
2.8	It is proposed that work should continue in helping these and other groups link into existing support; identify their priorities for action to address the challenges and help deliver on these. It will be important for the groups to consider becoming constituted if they are to draw down resources or to consider a management structure which might allow them to access and manage funding.
2.9	It is proposed that some seed funding should be made available to work on issues such as collaborative promotion and marketing campaigns, events to increase footfall and customer loyalty initiatives. Experience suggests that the traders may also be concerned with a wider range of issues such as business rates; street cleansing; car parking and environmental improvements. Whilst we can advise on these issues and advocate on their behalf to relevant agencies, through local elected representatives, it is suggested that the focus of this particular support should remain on those marketing-related issues identified above.
2.10	Given that these groups are either newly-formed or in the process of being established, it is proposed that funding of up to £3,000 per group maximum be made available for eligible expenditure. The support will be provided against a range of pre-arranged eligible activities and should be incurred in the current financial year.
2.11	While a number of groups have made contact directly with officers, members are asked to consider additional groups and areas that may benefit from this type of support. We will engage with a range of new trader groups using a budget of up to £25,000.
2.12	<u>Area campaigns</u> Under the previous retail support plan, provision had been made for local campaigns to enhance the profile of designated shopping areas through a range of targeted support initiatives. This enabled groups to undertake activities such as producing local trader maps and business directories, creating a website for promotion and online trading and organising local events to increase footfall and trading in specific areas.
2.13	A number of established groups have expressed an interest in committing to an agreed programme of support to build on the previous work. In order to allow the groups to implement the ideas, it is proposed that an amount of up to £20,000 is allocated to the designated groups for expenditure against a range of agreed

	<p>promotional activities, similar to those identified above, within the current financial year.</p>
2.14	<p>It is accepted that a number of the traders groups are more advanced than others and that some may be able to bring resources to supplement the council contribution. In recognition of this, it is proposed that, beyond the £20,000 support provided, Belfast City Council can match the trader contribution £ for £, up to a total maximum contribution from council of £40,000. Consideration should be given to the sustainability of the proposed intervention, given that funding levels cannot be guaranteed in future years.</p>
2.15	<p>Where this funding is provided, Belfast City Council should ensure that the proposed activity does not duplicate or conflict with the work undertaken by other partners (particularly Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau and Belfast City Centre Management) and that additional funding is levered in to support the council and partner contribution, where possible. Trader groups will also be encouraged to collaborate on issues in which they have a common interest.</p>
2.16	<p>In considering the trader group development support and the area campaigns, a number of wider issues should also be taken into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work should support other council activity, where possible (e.g. Renewing the Routes) • The work should support additional business and should not lead to displacement i.e. moving business from one area to another or supporting one business or area to the detriment of another • The trader representatives should be encouraged to take responsibility for the work and should be committed to making the initiative sustainable, when the funding comes to an end • The trader groups should be acting collectively for the benefit of an area rather than on a business-by-business basis • We will engage with at least two traders' groups on area campaigns, using a budget of up to £85,000.
2.17	<p><u>Market start up programme</u> This programme will support potential entrepreneurs and new start businesses to explore market trading as a possible business model, in advance of progression to a retail outlet. Participants will complete the National Market Traders' Federation's NMTF First programme. They will be supported by specialist mentors and will have an opportunity to test trade at St. George's Market. This programme will get under way in September 2011 and a budget for the programme has already been approved by this committee. We will involve at least 10 new traders in the programme, at a budget of up to £13,500.</p>
2.18	<p><u>Retail Therapy programme and master classes</u> This tailored support programme will help independent traders to assess their business and will provide mentoring and financial assistance to move their business forward. The programme is currently open to recruitment for 30 independent traders. The Retail masterclasses will focus on a number of topics of particular interest to independent traders including visual merchandising and customer service. The budgets for these activities have already been approved by this committee. Thirty independent retailers will take part in the programme at a budget of up to £42,000. Up to 30 traders will attend each master class.</p>

2.19	<p><u>Independent Retail Week</u></p> <p>It is proposed that a range of events and activities will take place in early March 2012 to draw attention to the range of independent traders and the services they offer. Traders will be encouraged to organise local events and to present offers and packages to increase footfall within their area. The budget for this initiative has already been approved by this committee, and will be a maximum £35,000.</p>
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3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>The independent retail support budget was approved by the Development Committee in June 2011.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	No specific equality or good relations considerations.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the proposals to provide business development and promotion support to local independent retailers, alongside wider council initiatives • Endorse the proposed payment thresholds and approach for supporting the trader group development and area campaigns work. • Note the proposed funding allocation for each of the elements of the programme.

6	Decision Tracking
A report on progress will be brought back to Development Committee in April 2012.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
NMTF – National Market Traders’ Federation	