



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	DSD High Street Meetings – Update Report
Date:	Tuesday 26 June 2012
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that, at the 20 March 2012 meeting of the Development Committee, it was agreed that Belfast City Council would work with the Department for Social Development (DSD) to deliver meaningful regeneration across the city. Members will also be aware that, at the 17 April 2012 meeting of the Development Committee, a Retail Action Plan was agreed with the aim of supporting the development of the independent retail sector in particular. The action plan contained a range of support programmes which were aligned to the recently-published report by Mary Portas on reinvigorating the High Street.
1.2	DSD's regeneration support has included a significant focus on town centre regeneration, particularly the issue of vacant properties. In order to inform their work on the process, the Department has recently been engaging in a series of meetings with traders and traders' groups across Belfast and Northern Ireland as a whole. On 7 February 2012 the DSD Minister announced that, in response to Mary Portas' report on how to halt the decline of the high street, he was setting up a taskforce of senior officials to respond to the difficult trading challenges facing Northern Ireland's towns, villages and cities. The taskforce will review the support which the Department already provides to regenerate town centres to see whether this might be further strengthened in light of the recommended actions identified by Mary Portas.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<u>DSD High Street Consultations</u> In order to inform the process, the Department embarked on a series of High Street meetings across Northern Ireland. The purpose of these meetings was to enable local traders and business people to put their views on the future of our local high streets, town and city centres to senior officials working on the taskforce.

2.2	The Minister has met with stakeholder business representative groups to hear their views and the task force is engaging with the Association of Town Centre Managers (ATCM) and Northern Ireland Independent Retail Association (NIIRTA). For the Belfast-based meetings, the Department worked closely with Belfast City Council and there was Council representation at all the Belfast meetings.
2.3	<p>Meetings have taken place at the following venues in Belfast:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City Centre, 17/05/12, The Ulster Reform Club - South Belfast, 24/05/12, Riddell Hall - East Belfast, 30/05/12, Belmont Tower - West Belfast, 31/05/12, Argyle Business Centre - North Belfast, 01/06/12, Belfast Castle
2.4	The final DSD High Street meeting is scheduled to take place in Ballymoney on 13 th June 2012.
2.5	<p>The discussions at the meetings have been led by the retailers present with the following prevailing issues coming forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Car Parking – Belfast City Council has undertaken some further consultation regarding this issue and the feedback is detailed below. - Rates burden and implications for business, including clarification around the timetable for the proposed rates review (2015). - Poor state of streetscape in some areas e.g. pavements, derelict properties. - Poor condition of vacant retail units and implications for adjacent businesses. - Need for initiatives to improve footfall in key areas. - Need for marketing of retail areas including linkages to tourist attractions e.g. City Hall, Queen’s University; Titanic Belfast. - Need for re-imaging areas of the city to attract new retailers and improve footfall. - Lack of positive messages in local media about local and independent businesses. - Concerns at conduct of utility services e.g. poor timing of roadworks/utility services, excessive bollards and obstructions.
2.6	<p>The traders have been proactive in proposing a range of potential initiatives to address these challenges. Ideas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proposal for a targeted strategy and action plan to encourage more independents to start up in business and support to assist their development. - Supported enterprise zones for independents and start-ups like Covent Garden. - Planning quotas to encourage/discourage certain types of shops where appropriate. - Greater integration between government departments, Council and retailers to co-ordinate initiatives and maximise impact of spending. - Clear guidance on pop-ups and promotion of these opportunities. - Review of car parking across the city, to encourage and support access to retail outlets. - Measures to increase footfall – retailers in the City Centre especially highlighted the reduction in footfall at weekends and as a result of the re-

	<p>location of bus stops.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legislative changes required to enhance offering of retail and entertainment on Sunday mornings especially for tourists visiting City Centre. - Widening of an “Independent Retail Week” concept. - Marketing of individual areas including Shopping maps and other promotional literature. - Event-led promotional activity especially linked to major events and festivals etc. - Getting local business involved in continental market or a Belfast-only independent market at City Hall. - Initiatives to ensure landlords take greater responsibility for the condition of their properties. - Public-private partnerships to allow start-ups to trade in empty retail units and offices.
2.7	<p>Belfast City Council is already working with a number of the traders’ groups and individual traders on a range of marketing and promotional activities, with 8 traders’ groups now operational across the city (outside the city centre). The Council is also undertaking environmental improvement works at a range of locations across the city and is working directly with other partners including PLACE, Arts and Business and Belfast City Centre Management to coordinate a strategy to address the issue of vacant properties.</p>
2.8	<p><u>Parking Issues:</u> One of the major issues of concern for traders across the city is car parking. At the April 2012 meeting of the Development Committee, Members asked that specific attention be given to this issue, in conjunction with other statutory partners.</p>
2.9	<p>In discussion with local traders’ groups, the following specific issues have been raised:</p>
2.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Belmont Road Traders</u> have noted a range of issues relating to parking including commuters leaving their cars in the area and getting the bus into town, shop workers parking on the road all day. They have consulted with elected Members and applied to DRD have the city-bound traffic on the road classed as restricted waiting, a process that started in 2009. The proposed restricted waiting went out to consultation in November 2010. DRD Roads Service advised that this proposal has come up against legal difficulties and is with DRD solicitors.
2.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Ballyhackamore traders</u> have noted that they too would welcome a two-hour limit system in Ballyhackamore village to allow for greater circulation of customer parking. They have also identified a current parking bay which is could be redesigned to accommodate greater parking and also serve as a public space.
2.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Stranmillis Traders</u> have noted that their businesses are severely impacted by the lack of on-street parking on the road and side streets which are largely used by the student population. Traders reported that there is no circulation of parking at the public park all day on the Urban Clearway. They also noted that trade increases during the summer when the universities are closed. Several meetings have taken place with DRD to resolve the issue but no appropriate resolution has been agreed to date.

2.13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Lisburn Road Business Association</u> have raised concerns over the “enthusiastically enforced clearway” noting that 28% of all tickets issued in Northern Ireland for clearway infringements are given out on the Lisburn Road. The group has been campaigning for a tidal clearway that allows parking in the morning on the outbound side and parking in the afternoon on the inbound side. Opposition to this proposal came from Translink and the emergency services. The group have highlighted a need for adequate and alternative parking on the Lisburn Road.
2.14	<p>Other areas of the city have raised similar issues including the need for increased parking bays in certain areas of Cliftonville Road, Carlisle Circus and Antrim Road with the introduction of limited waiting times and systems for better circulation of traffic.</p>

3	Resource Implications
----------	------------------------------

3.1	<p><u>Financial</u> There are no financial implications at this time.</p>
-----	---

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
----------	---

4.1	No specific equality or good relations considerations.
-----	--

5	Key to Abbreviations
----------	-----------------------------

ATCM	– Association of Town Centre Management
BCCM	– Belfast City Centre Management
DSD	– Department for Social Development
DRD	– Department for Regional Development
NIIRTA	– Northern Ireland Independent Retail Traders Association

6	Documents Attached
----------	---------------------------

None.

7	Recommendations
----------	------------------------

<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - note the update on DSD’s work on improving the High Street, taking account of the collaboration with Belfast City Council on this activity; - note the update on parking issues from a range of traders’ groups and consider how these may be addressed with the relevant statutory bodies.
