



<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Support for local traders affected by recent disruption
<b>Date:</b>	29 January 2013
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John McGrillen, Director of Development ext 3470
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives ext 3459

<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	Members will be aware of the concerns of many traders – both city centre-based and across the city’s neighbourhoods – at the impact of the recent protests and associated disruptions on their businesses. A number of requests for support have been received and officers and Members have met with a range of groups to gain an understanding of the key challenges and to consider what types of support may be required to help the businesses at this difficult time.
1.2	Members will be aware that the retail action plan for the current year was approved by the Development Committee on 17 April 2012. This included a range of business support, marketing and promotion and networking initiatives to support primarily local independent traders. A funding allocation of £210,000 was set aside for this work.
1.3	There has been a significant interest in the establishment of new traders’ groups in the course of the last year. At present, we are supporting 9 groups to undertake a range of activity. The groups are at varying stages of development but all have a collective interest in promoting and marketing their areas with a view to increasing footfall and spend.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	Traders across the city have raised their concerns regarding the challenging economic climate which has been exacerbated by recent demonstrations and disruptions. East Belfast particularly Newtownards Road, Albertbridge Road, Castlereagh Road, and Castlereagh Street have been affected directly by disruptions. Correspondence has been received from traders in the north of the city (Ardoyne Road and Cambrai Street) as well as the south (Lisburn Road).

2.2	At present, Belfast City Council is supporting three traders' groups in East Belfast: Belmont/Strandtown, Ballyhackamore and Castlereagh Street/Road. Two new traders' groups have just been established or are in the process of being established in the Newtownards Road and Holywood Arches areas and both are keen to work with the Council to become constituted bodies and be able to lever in resources to support their future activities.
2.3	East Belfast Partnership (EBP) hosted a meeting of traders in the area on 24 January 2013 and the trader representatives in attendance identified the key challenges facing them. At that meeting, representatives from Belfast City Council and the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) made them aware of the Backin' Belfast campaign and the opportunities to piggyback on this initiative. While there was a genuine interest in considering how this could work for their businesses and the wider localities, the traders also felt that targeted initiatives for that part of the city would be required.
2.4	They considered that a variation on the Backin' Belfast campaign would work for them: <b>Backin' East Belfast</b> . This would send out the message that this part of the city was still open for business. Rather than the focus on the evening economy and hospitality sector that was driving the Backin' Belfast campaign, they were keen to promote the message that the retail and services offering was still available and were keen to encourage local residents – not just tourists – to support their local businesses. In tandem with this, they agreed that they would be interested in exploring how they could become involved in the wider Backin' Belfast campaign by promoting offers etc. and were keen that soundbites/video coverage from the east of the city would be used in this campaign.
2.5	The east Belfast trader representatives presented a range of ideas for a targeted campaign for their area, in parallel with the Backin' Belfast which would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Promotional materials (branded t-shirts/"A" boards/building wraps on large and/or derelict properties)</li> <li>– Some street animation – although the representatives felt that this would not be appropriate for all areas.</li> </ul>
2.6	The representatives also asked that Members be requested to look at a range of wider initiatives, including a hardship scheme (using the precedent of the flooding scheme) and consideration of how licensing conditions may be temporarily relaxed to allow additional events to take place in a range of alternative venues.
2.7	Members acknowledged the need for immediate support but were also concerned that those areas, in which activities such as street animation may not be appropriate at present, would not lose out on support at a future date.
2.8	The chairs of the respective trader groups in the area committed to meeting together regularly to coordinate their marketing and promotional campaigns in the future.
2.9	The groups were also anxious to ensure ongoing commitment from Belfast City Council. The retail support plan for the coming year is currently being developed – including an evaluation of the current activity – and this will be presented at a future meeting of the Development Committee.

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	A targeted campaign for local traders in the east of the city in the short-term would cost up to £25,000. Additional monies may be required if support for other areas or activities is agreed.

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
4.1	No specific equality or good relations implications, although the current proposal does focus on one area of the city.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Note the requests from traders across the city – particularly east Belfast – for additional support due to the general downturn and the impact of the current disruptions</li> <li>– Note and approve the funding request for £25,000 towards a targeted campaign for the east of the city, to be undertaken in parallel to the Backin’ Belfast campaign</li> <li>– Note the development of the future retail support plan, to be presented to an upcoming meeting of the Development Committee.</li> </ul>

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
Should the funding request be approved, a report will be presented to the April 2013 meeting of the Development Committee.	
Timeframe: April 2013	
Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay	

<b>7</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
BVCB – Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau	