



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Support for traders as result of recent disruptions
Date:	5 March 2013
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	<p><u>Backin' Belfast campaign</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that the Council and DETI have co-invested in a promotional marketing campaign called "Backin' Belfast". BCC have contributed £400k towards a £1m campaign with the balance of funding from DETI delivered via BVCB and NITB. The campaign is open to engagement from businesses all across Belfast. The campaign has been funded through to end of March 2013 and is coordinated by Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) with the animation programme being led and delivered by Council.</p>
1.2	<p>To date, some traders beyond the city centre have taken part in the campaign by forwarding offers and engaging in the social media activities linked to the Backin' Belfast initiative. However there are still opportunities for further engagement within the programme timeframe. Belfast City Council has been directly encouraging businesses and local trader groups to engage in the campaign.</p>
1.3	<p>BCC also agreed last month to allocate the sum of £25k for East Belfast to participate in a complementary campaign to Backin' Belfast. Work has been completed with the local trader groups in East Belfast on developing a 'Spend Local' promotion which will take place on 23 March. This will comprise a leaflet drop to local homes in East Belfast promoting the 23 March as a key date for special offers and on-street entertainment.</p>
1.4	<p>Members also asked that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee outlining the options available to the Council to address requests which might be submitted from traders affected by disruption in other parts of the city, outside of east Belfast.</p>
1.5	<p>Officers were asked to engage with businesses to understand the challenges that they were facing. Given the timescales, it has not been possible to have a comprehensive engagement programme with all business group representatives. However officers did manage to meet with a range of groups and/or their representatives, including:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - West Belfast Traders' Forum - Lisburn Road Business Association - Sandy Row Business Forum - Traders from Ardoyne area
1.6	In addition, officers were in attendance at a breakfast hosted by the Lord Mayor at which representatives of 9 traders' groups were in attendance. Discussions focused on the impact of the downturn on business as well as possible solutions.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p><u>Quantifying the impact of disturbances</u></p> <p>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 additional support have been received by the Council. 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.</p>
2.2	<p>Key issues raised during those meetings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced footfall especially in late afternoons resulting in shops closing early - Businesses unable to provide deliveries and answer call-outs - Cancelled bookings (restaurants, professional service providers) - Staffing issues – employees not being able to get to work or having to send staff home, with the associated loss of wages for those staff - Travel difficulties due to lack of public transport - Reduction in shoppers from outside Belfast - Request to consider financial support (hardship fund)
2.3	Retailers have also acknowledged that the disruptions are not the only contributing factor to the difficult economic trading conditions and that their business is under pressure because of the wider downturn.
2.4	Traders have raised these concerns through a range of groupings and organised events and have met directly with support agencies and politicians. The Lord Mayor of Belfast recently hosted a meeting for local trader groups at which he took the opportunity to discuss the current support provided by the Council and to ascertain what particular issues the traders were facing and how they could be supported in addressing these. Representatives from nine traders' groups attended the meeting and they covered a range of potential support issues. They also suggested that they would welcome the opportunity to have a regular engagement with politicians and senior officers from Council on support for independent retail development in Belfast.
2.5	Members will be aware that, outside of existing funding allocations (outlined below) there has not been any specific provision set aside to provide financial support to the business groups. All trader groups and businesses met in recent weeks have asked for financial support also including some direct support for individual businesses as well as other support for any initiatives which would help drive footfall back to their areas. However, one trader group has submitted a specific request. The West Belfast traders are seeking £6,000 to contribute

	<p>towards a localised Backin' West Belfast campaign to coincide with an upcoming festival event in early March. The funding would contribute to building wraps on vacant properties, t-shirts for traders, street bunting, taxi wraps and street animation.</p>																					
2.6	<p>Similarly, the Lisburn Road Business Association has requested additional financial support for promotional events that are being planned for the end of March. They have also asked that consideration be given to supporting a member of staff for the organisation in the future (no specific financial allocation requested).</p>																					
2.7	<p>Members will be aware that there have been no further funds allocated for these purposes at this stage beyond the Council's commitment to the Backin' Belfast campaign of £400k and a specific allocation of £25k for East Belfast to deliver a complementary campaign in association with Backin' Belfast. Members are asked to consider how they want to respond to such requests from trader groups and local businesses which have made contact with Council as outlined above.</p>																					
2.8	<p><u>Retail Action Plan – current support available</u> 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 local independent traders. A funding allocation of £210,000 was set aside for this work. The majority of this was set aside for development support to help traders' groups to become operational and to engage in targeted promotional activity. It was intended that the Council's resources would help lever other funding and that it would be used to create sustainable business associations that would not be wholly reliant on public support.</p>																					
2.9	<p>Belfast City Council is currently supporting six existing constituted traders groups (against a baseline of three in the previous year) through Area Campaigns Support as detailed below:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><u>Trader Group</u></th> <th><u>Awarded</u></th> <th><u>Amount paid to date</u></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Lisburn Road Business Association</td> <td>£40,000</td> <td>£25,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ballyhackamore Business Association</td> <td>£28,705.00</td> <td>£24,399.25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strandtown Traders Group</td> <td>£29,565.00</td> <td>£14,782.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ormeau Road Business Association</td> <td>£14,742.00</td> <td>£8,845.20</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Antrim Road Business Association</td> <td>£4,500 plus advisory support</td> <td>£3,825.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>West Belfast Traders</td> <td>£25,170.00 plus advisory support</td> <td>£10,068.00</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<u>Trader Group</u>	<u>Awarded</u>	<u>Amount paid to date</u>	Lisburn Road Business Association	£40,000	£25,000	Ballyhackamore Business Association	£28,705.00	£24,399.25	Strandtown Traders Group	£29,565.00	£14,782.50	Ormeau Road Business Association	£14,742.00	£8,845.20	Antrim Road Business Association	£4,500 plus advisory support	£3,825.00	West Belfast Traders	£25,170.00 plus advisory support	£10,068.00
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2.10	<p>All activity and expenditure on the letters of offer to the groups above expire on 31 March 2013. Groups have been encouraged to undertake all elements of their approved projects promptly to ensure full delivery of outputs and maximisation of the full budget.</p>																					
2.11	<p>Belfast City Council has also supported the establishment of six new groups (against a target of three) as below:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><u>Trader Group</u></th> <th></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Cliftonville</td> <td>Circus</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>These new groups have all recently become</p>	<u>Trader Group</u>		Cliftonville	Circus																	
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	<p>Traders constituted.</p> <p>Stranmillis Business Association</p> <p>Castlereagh Business Association</p> <p>Newtownards Road Traders</p> <p>Hollywood Arches</p> <p>Finaghy Traders Group</p>	<p>They are all currently working with an advisor (provided by Council) to develop action plans and series of marketing initiatives.</p>
2.12	<p>In addition to the trader group activity, Belfast City Council also supports a range of business development activities – both bespoke activities focused on the independent retail sector and wider support initiatives that independent retailers can avail of. These include flexible mentoring support (2 days’ targeted support to address a specific development need). To date, 20 traders have availed of this support.</p>	
2.13	<p>Members are advised that work is now due to commence on developing a new retail plan for 2013/14. A full review of the results of the current year’s plan along with a stakeholder engagement and consultation process is required to re-shape the plan in line with current needs. Many of the issues raised by trader groups to date and outlined above will need to be taken into account and it may be that an enhanced budget is required for this work in 2013/14. Members are asked to note that a further report on the new retail plan and process for its completion will be submitted to Committee next month.</p>	

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>The Retail Action Plan was approved by the Development Committee 17 April 2012. A funding allocation of £210,000 was set aside at this time.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	No specific equality or good relations considerations attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage ongoing engagement by businesses and business groups in the Backin’ Belfast campaign - Consider whether Council wishes to provide any additional financial support to affected groups across the City in advance of the new support plan - Consider how to respond to the two specific requests (from West Belfast Traders’ Forum and Lisburn Road Business Association) - Note that a further report on a new retail support plan for the coming year will be presented to Committee in April.