



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Towns and Cities First Campaign
Date:	20 June 2013
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director Development, Ext 3470
Contact Officer:	John Walsh, Legal Services Manager, Ext 6042

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The recession, coupled with changes in consumer spending patterns and behaviours, has had a considerable impact on the economic performance of towns and city centres across the UK.
1.2	In May 2011, Mary Portas was asked by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister to conduct an independent review into the state of Britain's high streets and town centres. "The Portas Review: An Independent Review into the Future of our High Streets" (herein after referred to as 'The Portas Review') was published in December 2011. The Portas Review made a series of recommendations designed to help create the sustainable high streets of the future.
1.3	The Portas Review did not extend to Northern Ireland. However, on 7 th February 2012, the Minister for Social Development, Nelson McCausland announced that he was setting up a taskforce of senior departmental officials to review the support which the DSD provided to regenerate city and town centres and to consider whether this might be further strengthened.
1.4	Members will be aware that, at the 20 th 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.
1.5	Members will also be aware that, at the 17 th April 2012 meeting of the Development Committee, a Retail Action Plan was agreed with the aim of supporting the development of the retail sector. The action plan contained a range of support programmes which were aligned to the Portas Review.

1.6	On Thursday, 14 February 2013, Minister McCausland published a report on the role of the DSD in supporting Northern Ireland's town and city centres.
1.7	The report found that the experiences of our town and city centres and arterial routes over recent years has been similar; shopper numbers are down and shop unit vacancy rates in Northern Ireland have risen to the highest in the UK. A report produced by Lisney in September 2012 reports that the percentage of empty shop units has reached 19%, meaning that almost one in five shops is empty. This compares with an average vacancy rate of 11% for the rest of the UK.
1.8	The Minister accepted all the recommendations in the report and stated that he was committed to developing the local vision, improving coordination of city and town centre management and driving forward regeneration initiatives.

2	Key Issues
2.1	One of the issues highlighted in both reviews was the need to promote town and city centres. Members will also recall the recent success of the "Backin' Belfast" campaign.
2.2	After initial discussion with some city centre retailers and other retail organisations, it has been suggested that a media campaign be undertaken to highlight the important role of town and city centres.
2.3	It is anticipated that the total cost of such a campaign will be approximately £25,000. It is recommended to Members that they agree to the Council contributing up to £10,000 to the campaign.
2.4	A firm commitment to contribute to the campaign has already been provided by interested parties such as House of Fraser, Castle Court and the Belfast Chamber of Commerce. Approaches have been made to the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association and other interested parties and it is envisaged that there will be additional contributors to the campaign.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<u>Financial</u> If members approve the recommendation, the financial cost to the Council will be a maximum of £10,000.
3.2	<u>Human Resources</u> Do you want to put something into this about work for us?
3.3	<u>Asset and Other Implications</u> None.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
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4.1	None.
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5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>The Committee is asked to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of the report; and • Agree to contribute up to £10,000 towards a media campaign promoting town and city centres.

6	Decision Tracking
<p>The person responsible for any actions arising from your meeting is John Walsh, Legal Services Manager.</p>	