



Subject:	City Centre Accessibility
Date:	3 April 2019
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Cathy Keenan, Assistant Economic Development Manager (Local Economic Development)

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of the report is to update Members on progress to undertake research to establish city centre accessibility needs. The report also seeks approval to provide financial support to Shopmobility Belfast to ensure service continuity, pending the outcome of the research.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note and agree the aims and objectives of the proposed research work to be undertaken to assess city centre accessibility needs which will inform future city centre investment decisions; • Approve a financial contribution of £15,000 for Shopmobility to support the continuation of service delivery in the Belfast City Council area in this financial year.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Members will be aware of the scale of investment that is taking place in the city centre and the commitments contained within the Belfast Agenda to continue to invest here. In order to ensure that these developments can be experienced by everyone, officers are currently working on research to identify barriers to accessing the city centre and its range of facilities including shops, entertainment venues, bars, restaurants, accommodation and services. This research will consider access issues that could potentially reduce participation and will include customer and visitor satisfaction surveys to measure current levels of private and public provision. It will also identify potential improvements that could be implemented to ensure that the city centre is more user-friendly and welcoming to all. The initial work will focus on physical disabilities but the research will also consider the wider range of disabilities and actions required to ensure that those with any type of disability can access and enjoy the facilities of the city centre.</p>
3.2	<p>The key aims of the research are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the level to which accessibility is an issue for Belfast city centre • Identify areas of intervention and make recommendations on the appropriate type of interventions required to achieve a meaningful impact • Assess the level of commitment from private and public sector partners to invest collectively towards more joined-up, accessible and inclusive services.
3.3	<p>The research piece will include the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A series of engagement with users of the city centre including surveys with shoppers and event attendees • One to one meetings and focus groups with key internal and external stakeholders including Disability Advisory Panel, Shopmobility and Disability Go, BIDs and city economic and community stakeholders

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of best practice across other areas including innovative solutions to promote inclusive city centres • An analysis of demographics to quantify the demand for accessibility services across Belfast, forecast, and changes in this demography over the next 3-4 years • An assessment of the quality and extent of accessibility support services across the city by private, public or community organisations • Consideration of how interventions to support city accessibility needs could be supported through broader factors such as developer contributions and private sector interventions • Recommendations for future interventions to maximise the economic benefits for Belfast whilst promoting an accessible and inclusive city agenda
3.4	<p>This research will commence in April 2019 with an expected completion date of September 2019.</p>
3.5	<p>Members will be aware that the council has a number of statutory requirements in the provision of its services to ensure that it addresses issues of disability. The council's Draft Disability Strategy and Action Plan 2018/19 outlines our commitment to fulfilling our statutory obligations in compliance with Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006) which places new duties on public authorities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people • Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.
3.6	<p>The draft Disability Action Plan for 2019 – 2022 is currently being finalised with formal consultation commencing on 15th April for 12 weeks.</p>
3.7	<p>Currently, the main mechanism to support accessibility across the city is through the AccessAble initiative, which is delivered through the council's Equality and Good Relations Unit. The AccessAble initiative provides access guides online and via a mobile app for 1000 venues across the city enabling people to make informed choices about the services they want to access. Raising awareness of access issues helps break down physical and attitudinal barriers as well as the significant psychological barrier of tackling the unknown for persons with a disability.</p>
3.8	<p>From the Council's perspective and that of businesses, providing information on accessibility not only helps meet legal obligations but also actively promotes services to residents and</p>

	<p>visitors to boost inclusion and revenue. 5400 people used these guides in the past year. Whilst this app has made a positive contribution to supporting accessibility within the city, it is recognised that there is a requirement for further support.</p>
3.9	<p>Shopmobility Belfast is a charity which provides access to a mobility scooter or a wheelchair for those who need it. There are currently over 8,500 members and eight locations throughout Belfast. The reduction in the Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS) from the Department for Infrastructure has resulted in reduced funding to cover Shopmobility's operational costs. This has put the organisation in a position where their service may become unsustainable and may have to close. As a result, the charity has approached Belfast City Council to seek support which will enable it to continue to deliver its services to meet user needs.</p>
3.10	<p>Given the levels of usage, it is recommended that Belfast City Council provides one-off financial support to Shopmobility of £15,000 to enable the continuation of service delivery in the Belfast City Council area in this financial year. As a condition of this funding, it is proposed that the council also works with Shopmobility to review its business model and explore opportunities to reduce overheads and drive efficiencies in order to maintain service delivery.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The activities set out in this report will be resourced from the budget for Economic Development as previously approved by this committee.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The City Centre Accessibility research will have a positive impact on equality by encouraging access to the city centre for those with a disability. A rural needs assessment will be undertaken as part of the research.</p>
4.0	Appendices
	None