



Subject:	Sunday opening hours for essential retailers
Date:	13 January 2021
Reporting Officer:	Alistair Reid, Strategic Director, Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	John Greer, Director of 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 type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of the report is to update members on the uptake of extended Sunday trading in the run-up to Christmas and to advise the committee of requests to extend Sunday opening hours for large retailers in order to support the management of shopper numbers as part of ongoing social distancing measures.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the uptake of extended Sunday opening hours in the run-up to Christmas• Consider the request from large retailers to support extended Sunday opening hours (in line with Northern Ireland Executive guidance) on a temporary basis, to be reviewed by 5 April 2021, as part of the efforts to manage shopper volume and support social distancing.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (a) (2) (c), that the aforementioned decisions would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that an unreasonable delay could be prejudicial to the Council's or the public's interest.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Members will be aware that, during the initial period of lockdown from late March 2020, Belfast City Council agreed not to take enforcement action against those essential retailers that opened earlier than the current permitted opening time of 1pm on a Sunday (for large stores as smaller stores are already permitted to open). This measure was put in place to support healthcare staff and vulnerable individuals in particular, and there was no end date to retain flexibility throughout the uncertain period.
3.2	From end June 2020, the retail sector was permitted to re-open in line with the various measures set out in the Northern Ireland Executive's Pathway to Recovery. However, since then, the Executive has also announced a number of shorter and more focused closures for certain sectors including close contact services and hospitality.
3.3	The current Northern Ireland Executive guidance – which became operational on 26 December 2020 – confirms that only those retailers deemed as “essential” retail are permitted to remain open at this time. This decision is to be reviewed after four weeks but the Executive has suggested that it expects that these restrictions will remain in place for six weeks (i.e. until 6 February 2021 at least).
3.4	Taking account of the specific challenges faced by the retail sector, and as a means of managing numbers wishing to access retail premises in the run-up to Christmas, the council advised businesses that it would not carry out enforcement action for all types of large retail shops (essential and non-essential) should they open or deliver from 10am onwards on a Sunday (up to 6pm). This was a temporary arrangement, running from 22 November 2020 to 10 January 2021.
3.5	In the context of the current NI Executive guidance, business organisations and individual retailers have been engaging with the council to feed back on the impact of the temporary non-enforcement approach in the run-up to Christmas and to request that the council considers extending this approach to support retail stores in managing shopper volume at peak times to ensure social distancing.
3.6	Feedback from retailers on the extended opening hours in the run-up to Christmas was universally supportive of the provisions made by the council. Broadly, those retailers

	<p>reported an increase in sales from previous levels, and all considered that trade was spread better across the day. This meant that they were able to manage social distancing measures more effectively and provide a positive experience for those visiting the stores. The supermarkets, in particular, noted that it had allowed them to better manage their numbers over the longer hours, instead of the shorter five hour window during which they noted that there was a much more “intense” volume of shoppers. The supermarkets also noted that the extended hours enabled them to expand their delivery service and that these slots were very popular with customers. Some smaller retailers and those operating on an appointment-only basis felt that the extended hours gave them an opportunity to drive new customers with the additional flexibility.</p>
3.7	<p>Given the positive experience in the run-up to Christmas, and taking account of the ongoing need to support social distancing measures until the vaccine roll-out makes significant progress, a number of the large retailers and business support organisations have asked that the council continues with the current approach to enforcement after the proposed end date on 10 January 2021. Officers have been engaging with colleagues in other council areas and we know that an extension of this approach to being considered across other council areas – and has already been agreed for the Lisburn and Castlereagh City, Derry City and Strabane District Council and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council areas.</p>
3.8	<p>Given the degree of uncertainty in the short-term, with even the most optimistic of scenarios indicating that a significant vaccine roll-out will take until Spring at the earliest, it is proposed that the current approach to enforcement remains in place until 5 April 2021, subject to review and in keeping with Northern Ireland Executive decisions relating to retail opening.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> No specific financial or resource implications for council.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> No specific equality implications.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None