



Subject:	Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations: update
Date:	9 February 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Cathy Keenan, Enterprise and Business Growth Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
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"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the work to support local commercial districts through the Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations programme. This programme aims to work with business/traders associations to develop and deliver interventions that can drive footfall and create vibrancy in those areas.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Note the update on the work to support the delivery of area-based Vibrant Business Destinations</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note that the pilot initiative is currently open to Expressions of Interest from local business/traders groups located outside the city centre and Business Improvement Districts</li> <li>• Note that this work is intended to complement a wider programme of support and activity that is taking place within the city centre, including the targeted interventions to address vacancies and previous business support interventions through the Revitalisation Programme.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b><u>Background</u></b></p> <p>At its meeting on 13 October 2021, members were provided with an overview of the proposed approach to supporting local business associations to develop and deliver interventions that will drive footfall and create vibrancy in those areas.</p>
3.2	<p>Members are reminded that the overarching purpose of the pilot initiative is to strengthen the competitiveness of our local business destinations, focusing on actions which aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the development of shared and safely accessible commercial areas</li> <li>• Support the diversification of business destinations outside of the city centre</li> <li>• Bring together key stakeholders to benefit business destinations outside of the city centre</li> <li>• Improve the quality of urban design, distinctiveness, and townscape quality.</li> </ul>
3.3	<p>Members were advised that, following discussion with the Department for Communities (DfC), an opportunity was identified to secure resources through the DfC Revitalisation programme. This pilot programme is in keeping with work undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) to develop a “Living High Street Toolkit”. The basis of the toolkit is about building capacity, taking ownership and driving forward change within high street business communities. DfC considered that this pilot initiative could inform future approaches and funding investments. This model has emerged as a short-term priority for the work of the High Street Task Force so the Belfast interventions will be useful pilots to shape future activity.</p>
3.4	<p>Given the feedback from the businesses and the need to support these organisations with advice and funding, the Enterprise and Business Growth Team secured funding of £475,000 from the Department for Communities (DfC). This funding will be supplemented by a £30,000 contribution from council resources for the delivery of advice and support to assist</p>

	<p>with the scheme. The pilot initiative aims to support up to 10 business associations to a maximum of £40,000 each for expenditure on a range of eligible activities. The objectives are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase engagement and partnership working between statutory partners and local business associations</li> <li>• Support the development of area-based actions plans which address specific local concerns and deliver specific, measurable benefits over the short/medium and long term</li> <li>• Increase footfall and sales as a direct result of marketing and promotional activity; generating new customers or sustaining customer loyalty through increasing sales revenue, increasing the number of new customers or developing repeat business</li> <li>• Enhance the profile of the area with a view to stimulating economic activity</li> <li>• Support the growth and development of businesses engaged in associated activity</li> <li>• Support the sustainability of businesses and local business associations.</li> </ul>
3.5	<p>The initiative will operate over a 21 month time period and will have a two-stage application process. Stage one involves the completion of an Expression of Interest (EoI) by 31 May 2023. The basic eligibility criteria include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groups or established associations must be led by the business community (including social enterprises and cooperatives) to address locally-based issues and be committed to becoming a constituted association.</li> <li>• Groups or established associations must be made up of retail/hospitality/consumer facing businesses located on road frontage/local high streets</li> <li>• The priority focus is on arterial routes and routes with a minimum number of 15 confirmed businesses located on road frontage</li> <li>• Group membership should be representative of the businesses in the eligible area – both by volume and by business type</li> <li>• Business membership must represent predominantly owner-occupiers and independent traders, however can involve representation from community organisations.</li> </ul>
3.6	<p>At stage 1, groups will be supported to become formally constituted, where they aren't already, and to develop area-based action plans. The action plans will provide an analysis of the locality, the physical environment, existing provision and key challenges and opportunities. It will identify priority issues to be addressed to improve the business</p>

	environment through engagement with with existing businesses and stakeholders in the area. The action plans will form the basis for moving to a stage 2 application.
3.7	A successful Stage 2 application will enable the group to draw down funding to support their action plan delivery. An overview of support is included in Appendix 1.
3.8	The Enterprise and Business Growth Team is coordinating this programme of work in partnership with the City Regeneration and Development Team, with input from officers across the council along with DfC and Department for Infrastructure (DfI).
3.9	Communications and marketing activity has commenced to raise awareness of the pilot project. Officers are currently receiving Expressions of Interest and engaging with applicants offering advice and guidance as required.
3.10	<p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The programme is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. It will go through a process of equality screening which will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts. It will be available to business groups all across the city, in line with the agreed criteria.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The activities outlined within this report are resourced through income from DfC, as previously noted. The £30,000 from Council resources was included in the estimates that have previously been approved by this Committee.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
4.1	Appendix 1 – Area based support programme overview