

**Developing the Town Centre Partnership; A revised Portas Pilot application and; Proposals for a Town Centres Manager**

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**Portfolio:** Regeneration, Planning & Town Centres

**Ward(s) affected:** Primarily Newcastle and Kidsgrove Town Centres

**Purpose of the Report**

To update Members on progress with the setting up of a town centre partnership for Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre. To outline proposals for continuing support from the Council, specifically a proposal for the Partnership to have a Town Centres Manager. The report also provides an update to members on progress made with developing plans for supporting the development of the town centre which formed the basis of the revised submitted Portas Pilot bid.

**Recommendations**

a) That Members agree to support the emergent Town Centre Partnership with the allocation of £30,000 in the current financial year for the recruitment of a Town Centres Manager and £5,000 to support the establishment of a website, both from the re-allocation of existing budgets.

b) That Members agree to the short term secondment of the current Business Development Officer on a 0.5 FTE basis to support the business community with town centres development activities / initiatives.

c) That officers be authorised to proceed with the formal establishment of the town centre partnership based around a Community Interest Company model (or similar entity), including the appointment of Directors, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning and Town Centres.

d) That Members agree to the continued provision of in-kind support to the town centre partnership to assist with the following activities:

- I. Recruitment of a town centres manager;
- II. Formalisation of the town centre partnership;
- III. Preparation of an action plan for at least the next 12 months and;
- IV. Exploration of options for establishing a sustainable funding model for the TCP.

e) That members note the plans included in the revised submitted Portas pilot application.

**Reasons**

In March 2012 Cabinet agreed to the Council becoming a director of the Newcastle Town Centre Partnership and agreed to officers working under the auspices of the partnership to submit a 'Portas Pilot' bid. This report outlines progress made with these issues and in particular outlines a recommended approach of supporting the Town Centre Partnership to appoint a Town Centres Manager including interim support.

1. **Background**

- 1.1. The formalisation of a Newcastle Town Centre Partnership (TCP) is a clear objective of the Council's Corporate Plan and Transformation Programme. In March 2012, Cabinet agreed to the council becoming a director of the emerging Newcastle town centre partnership company and authorised officers to take the necessary steps to facilitate it.
- 1.2. On 21<sup>st</sup> June 2012 the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a discussion paper drafted by the President of the Chamber, which outlines the possible ways forward to achieve the ambitions of the emerging Town Centre Partnership. Officers continue to work with local business representatives to take forward the plans to establish the formal structure as agreed by Cabinet.
- 1.3. In Dec 2011, Mary Portas issued her independent review into the future of our high streets. Following the review, the Government announced a number of national initiatives, including an invitation to set up a 'town team' and apply to become a Portas pilot town. Up to £1.2m was available to support 12 pilot schemes to test the ideas in the Portas Review with the main objective being to strengthen the high street (town centre). Based on the overwhelming enthusiasm and the quality of the applications, the government has agreed to fund another 12 pilots.
- 1.4. Along with 370 other towns, Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre submitted an application which included a YouTube video sequence made by a local college student and letters of support from a wide variety of businesses and organisations by the March deadline. Newcastle was not successful in the first round but was automatically included in the second round and was able to submit a revised bid. The TCP and the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that it would be worth re-submitting the Newcastle application based on lessons learned from the successful bids and producing a new YouTube video sequence to better represent the issues in the town centre and how we plan to resolve them.
- 1.5. The Council's new administration has made it very clear that it wishes to prioritise the development / improvement of town centres (both Newcastle and Kidsgrove); this is exemplified in the re-naming of the key portfolio as "Regeneration, Planning and Town Centres". It is anticipated that this will involve some re-alignment of resources in order to demonstrate the Council's commitment to improving the economic fortunes of the centres, working in harness with private sector investors.

## 2. **Issues**

- 2.1. The TCP is keen to engage more local businesses and are conscious that there is an agreed need to move from discussion to delivery in order that local businesses support the plans. The opportunity to resubmit the Portas Pilot bid has brought together more partners in the town centre and importantly focussed the partnership approach on initiatives / schemes they wish to deliver. The Portas Pilot focussed on two key strands; 'Start Up and Start Again' under the overarching Partnership approach. These were chosen to portray the ambitions to help more business "Start Up" and, equally importantly, aid current businesses to be more profitable under the heading of "Start Again".
- 2.2. There are plans to develop a Newcastle town centres website (based on the approach taken by a nearby town centre partnership) and to utilise this platform as the basis for a range of marketing and promotional work. It is also clear that to attract younger, and more affluent, shoppers to the town centres there needs to be an investment in more modern ways of marketing focussing on web-based technology (accessible from 'smart phones').
- 2.3. In terms of support for the development of new businesses there are ambitions to develop a range of partnerships with local landlords, business support and Keele University. These will seek to develop models which link available retail units with mentoring and practical business

support. These formed a key aspect of the Portas Pilot bid and it is hoped that Portas funding will be awarded in order to bring these ideas to fruition.

- 2.4 In order to achieve the ambitions of the town centre partnership there is a wide range of tasks to be undertaken, not least the formalisation of the town centre partnership, preparation of an action plan for the forthcoming year and importantly exploring options for longer term sustainable funding models. It would be appropriate for the Council to consider supporting the emerging partnership to deliver these tasks.

### 3. **Options Considered**

- 3.1 The Council could decide that the current support offered to the Town Centre is appropriate or Members could consider that as the economic development of the town centres are key priorities that it is appropriate to offer additional support.

### 4. **Proposal and Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 4.1 The new administration has identified the development / improvement of the two main town centres (both Newcastle and Kidsgrove) as a clear priority. In particular they wish to demonstrate that the Council is able to support and develop the town centres as vibrant places where people want to visit, work, invest and shop. Consequently it is appropriate that the Council seeks to work in partnership with the local businesses to work together to develop an action plan for improving the economic prospects of the town centres.
- 4.2 At this stage the Council's preference is for the establishment of the TCP in a Community Interest Company under the chairmanship of Jonathan Mitchell – a local businessman – that will enable broad engagement of the business community, including key strategic partners; at the time of writing the precise model was being developed.
- 4.3 The Newcastle Town Centre Partnership is currently developing its objectives and these are likely to include focusing on the economic development of the areas, supporting businesses, increasing footfall and promoting the area as a place to invest. It is appropriate that the role of a Town Centres Manager would mirror these objectives and therefore it is appropriate that the post is accountable to the Partnership.
- 4.4 Whilst the Council could consider employing someone directly it is felt to be more appropriate for the newly forming Town Centre Partnership or the North Staffordshire Chamber Commerce and Industry (NSCCI) to act as employer. As the Town Centre Partnership is still in its infancy it is appropriate that officers support the recruitment and selection process of the Town Centres Manager (e.g. providing advice on the job description and assisting with any interview process).
- 4.5 The post will coordinate the development and delivery of the agreed initiatives and plans on behalf of the Town Centre Partnership and to engage the wider business community and the council together to develop the plans in the future. The Town Centre Partnership will monitor performance of the post holder; most importantly they will want to see delivery of agreed priority actions.
- 4.6 It is also intended that, where appropriate and possible, some of the initiatives would be replicated in Kidsgrove town centre. It may be appropriate in Kidsgrove to work alongside the Town Council and the LAP in order to secure complimentary support (this should include a financial contribution towards the post in due course).
- 4.7 Given the importance of achieving tangible progress with the activities of the emergent TCP and the likelihood that it will take a few months to recruit a town centres manager, officers would recommend the formalisation of interim arrangements. The present Business Development

Officer has been providing increasing levels of support to town centre-related activities over the past twelve months, consistent with the Council's objectives. Consequently it is proposed that the Council formalises this arrangement by offering 50% of her time to be dedicated to an interim management role for, say, the next three months (subject to review).

- 4.8 Alongside the interim arrangements and support for recruitment of a Town Centres Manager it is appropriate that the Council continues to provide in-kind support to the town centre partnership to assist with all of the matters listed in this report.
- 4.9 Looking forward it is important that the partnership seeks to find a sustainable funding model. As part of the M&S plans to develop at Wolstanton there has been a commitment to give the Town Centre Partnership £100,000 to deliver the partnership's objectives, along with a £10k p.a. revenue contribution. The S106 agreement to secure this funding is still being finalised but the Town Centre Partnership could decide to utilise a proportion of this funding to support a Town Centres Manager.
- 4.10 Finally it remains the intention that the TCP explores the potential opportunity for the establishment of a Business Improvement District to provide long term funding for the costs of the Town Centres Manager and a range of initiatives / activities.

## **5. Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 5.1. Outcomes from these actions will significantly affect the 'Borough of Opportunity' corporate priority, and will have implications for the quality of life, regeneration, and sustainability of the town centres, the borough as a whole and ultimately North Staffordshire.

## **6. Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1. There is no statutory requirement to carry out these recommendations. The establishment of the TCP as a formal legal entity will be undertaken with due regard to the associated legal implications.

## **7. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 7.1. An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out but the actions identified will help to make the town centres more able to meet the needs of both residents and the business community, in particular those interested in the possibility of starting their own business.

## **8. Financial and Resource Implications**

- 8.1 In the context of the Council's powers and duties relating to economic development it would be appropriate for the Council to grant the Town Centre Partnership £30,000 to deliver the partnership objectives including the recruitment of a Town Centres Manager. This funding can be allocated from vacant posts within the Council's establishment budget.
- 8.2 Bearing in mind that this is a new partnership and the delivery model needs to be supported to establish itself it is appropriate to allocate funding for at least two years with a review by the end of 18 months. In terms of long term sustainability it is intended that officers work with the partnership with a view to optimising external funding options (including the M&S funding, the potential for a Business Improvement District and support from Kidsgrove Town Council).
- 8.3 The proposal to provide interim management support to the TCP (0.5 FTE Business Development Officer) can be achieved by re-prioritisation / re-profiling of the economic development team's activities to avoid the need for incurring extra costs.

8.4 The Council utilises some of the printing, publicity and marketing budget to support the town centres. This has supported the town centres events calendar by adding value through funding entertainment. It is proposed to continue this type of support working alongside the town centre partnership. As a one-off cost it has been possible to identify the necessary £5,000 budget for the TCP to purchase a website which can be developed specifically for the promotion of the town centres. The Council is also able to provide in kind support for the production of newsletters and communication with town centre users from existing resources.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1. There is a risk that the Town Centre Partnership will fail leading to reputational damage however the potential benefits of the partnership succeeding in contributing to the economic development of the area outweigh the risks.

10. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

10.1. Mar 2012 - Cabinet agreed to Newcastle under Lyme B.C. becoming a director of the Newcastle town centre partnership company and authorises officers to take the necessary steps to facilitate the same.

10.2. Mar 2012 - Cabinet agreed to officers working under the auspices of the Newcastle town centre partnership to prepare and submit a bid to become a "Portas pilot", in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning and for the Council to act as the accountable body for administering any grant.

11. **Appendices**

11.1 None.

12. **Background Papers**

12.1 Copies of the revised Town Centre Partnership Portas Pilot bid and the latest discussion paper on the development of the Partnership are available on request.