



Glasgow City Council

**Neighbourhoods, Housing and Public Realm
City Policy Committee**

Item 1
1st June 2021

**Report by Executive Director of Neighbourhoods, Regeneration and
Sustainability**

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CITY CENTRE TASK FORCE: UPDATE REPORT

Purpose of Report:

To update Members on the current and planned activity of the City Centre Task Force.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Committee:

- (1) Considers the contents of this report;
- (2) Considers the progress and planned activity by the City Centre Task Force.
- (3) Notes that an update report will be prepared in six months to advise Members of the next stage of the Glasgow City Centre Strategy.

Ward No(s): 10

Citywide:

Local member(s) advised: Yes X No consulted: Yes No

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Members will be aware that a City Centre Task Force was established in late 2020 to direct and oversee activity in the city centre during the pandemic and post-pandemic period. The City Centre Task Force is a multi-partner forum which comprises a wide range of public sector agencies and private businesses and business networks. A full list of current members is provided in [Appendix A](#).
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to outline progress to date, the overarching plan for 2021, and the proposed next steps for the new Glasgow City Centre Strategy.

2. Background

- 2.1 The City Centre Task Force (CCTF) was established following a recommendation from the Glasgow Economic Recovery Group, which recognised the particular issues being faced by the city centre business community as a result of the pandemic. Accordingly, the CCTF was convened with representation from all key city centre business sectors, and it is co-chaired by Councillor Angus Millar and Stuart Patrick, CEO of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce.
- 2.2 The CCTF's overarching objectives are to:
- (i) provide city leadership and senior-level advocacy to both the immediate response in the city centre to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the longer-term incorporation of that response into the new City Centre Strategy's content and governance structure;
 - (ii) secure and oversee a public-private partnership response to priority issues identified and agreed by the Glasgow Economic Recovery Group (GERG).
 - (iii) secure national government support and resources to deliver these objectives .
- 2.3 The CCTF was initially convened in November 2020 with the expectation it would form a short-life working group during the pandemic. Its initial focus was to:
- (i) maximise business support opportunities for city centre businesses.
 - (ii) utilise the GCC City Services structure to assist businesses with all matters relating to the Covid-19 restrictions, including safely operating in the city centre when able to do so.
 - (iii) deliver the Sustrans-funded Spaces for People temporary public space interventions across the city centre, which aimed to increase space for pedestrians to support social distancing measures.
 - (iv) develop the marketing campaign for the recovery period.
- 2.4 Early deliverables of the CCTF in late 2020 included:
- delivery by Glasgow Life and partners of the 2020 *Love Glasgow This Christmas campaign*.
 - responding to concerns around antisocial behaviour.

- ensuring business grants were disbursed as quickly and widely as possible.
- realigning the Spaces for People programme in light of CCTF feedback.
- securing Scottish and UK Government representation on the task force.

2.5 After Christmas 2020 it became clear that pandemic restrictions would continue for some time into 2021, and the CCTF remit was consequently reviewed in the New Year. This resulted in a slight refocus in order to refine objectives to cover the medium-term, and it established a clear schedule of activity for the CCTF until August 2021. This was intended to provide some reassurance that some of the issues being regularly raised at the CCTF would be covered in detail during the year. It also incorporated more actions for the private sector members, to ensure that recovery planning and the longer-term revision of the City Centre Strategy would be underpinned by sector priorities.

3. CCTF 2021 Plan

3.1 A new plan and monthly agenda was established and approved by the CCTF in January 2021. This brings together 10 key workstreams to be progressed by August.

3.2 GCC successfully applied for the maximum grant available of £650,000, which allowed for the allocation of additional funding towards some of the identified CCTF priorities, including marketing, events, outdoor cafes and property repurposing.

3.3 The following section provides a short summary of the workstream activity and planned outputs. All work streams will last for the duration of the CCTF and timelines reviewed at the defined review date in August:

- **3.3.1 Sector Blueprints:** All sectors represented on the task force have prepared recovery blueprints which outline the key issues, asks of local and national government, and highlight opportunities during recovery. This intelligence is now being reviewed to identify how policy, regulation, legislation and investment can respond over the short, medium and long term.
- **3.3.2 Vacant Units and Outdoor Areas:** This workstream has undertaken mapping of all city centre vacancies, and will develop a plan that looks both at temporary uses and cosmetic improvements. In addition, the allocation of Scottish Government grant has allowed the Council to waive business permit fees for outdoor café operators in the city centre until March 2022.
- **3.3.3 Advocacy:** it is important that the City's position is both strongly advocated and communicated consistently and clearly to Scottish and UK Governments. This workstream has sought to build relationships, ensure Glasgow's case and local priorities are well presented, funding options are maximised, and that the government representatives are able to contribute effectively to and benefit from membership of the CCTF. In addition, this workstream has assisted in obtaining a place for GCC on the Scottish Government's City Centre Task Force, which is enabling various benefits

including contributing directly to the national city centre agenda as new policy measures are developed.

- **3.3.4 City Services:** this workstream covers a broad variety of activity under the banner of operational, management and regulatory matters. It comprises a range of Council services which have sought to respond agilely and proactively to the Covid-19 restrictions and support businesses accordingly. In addition it has streamlined licensing application and approval processes, supported operational requirements around cleansing and associated issues, provided sector-specific support to comply with government guidance, and acts as a single point of contact for business stakeholders. More information can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/cityservices>
- **3.3.5 Business support – grants and gap funding:** There has been a strong focus on maximising grant funding, and the CCTF has influenced a recent Discretionary Grant programme which saw over £8m invested in businesses located in the city centre. This is in addition to the wider grant support that has been provided through the Strategic Framework Business Fund as well as various top-up schemes administered by the Council on behalf of Scottish Government. To date, over £280m of grants have been paid to businesses in the city across 18 different schemes. The priority now will be to understand how best to support business reopening and growing in the city, utilising any future funding that may become available to aid economic recovery.
- **3.3.6 Marketing:** The impact of the pandemic on city centres has been disproportionately high, with *Stay Local* messaging prevailing over much of the past year, in addition to the relatively high fixed costs of city centre operators. As such, the restart marketing plan for the city centre as it moves down the restriction levels is of critical importance, to ensure visitors are reassured of public safety and attracted back into the city centre. On 26 April, Glasgow Life launched the **#LoveGlasgow** campaign to encourage locals back to enjoy the city centre experiences that they have missed over the past year. Glasgow Life is working closely with the Scottish Tourism Alliance and the other Scottish cities on targeted support for the city centre-based tourism sector from VisitScotland, Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise. Tourism recovery funding of £28m has been assigned to ten priority areas listed by the Tourism Task Force. Glasgow Life is keen to ensure that cities are included in this support. In addition, there is significant work ongoing to re-establish Glasgow's competitive position as a prime investment location through Invest Glasgow.
- **3.3.7 Return to Work Travel Plan:** As the pandemic restrictions lift there is a need for a clear travel plan for office workers and others returning to the city centre. Public transport guidance is under constant review and a regional transport transition plan is in development. In due course this will inform the strategy to encourage the use of certain modes of transport, while restrictions continue.
- **3.3.8 City Centre Transport Plan:** This was in development pre-pandemic and is of key importance to longer-term regeneration plans, with the overarching objective of rebalancing the transport hierarchy in favour of pedestrians, active travel and public transport fully aligned with the policy shifts emerging as a result of the pandemic. Significant work is ongoing with

the Transport Plan, along with the Avenues and other major public realm activity in the city centre, to develop a clear programme of works to deliver on key strategic objectives around Net Zero, inclusion, placemaking and economic development.

- **3.3.9 Planning and development priorities:** This workstream will pick up two key issues:
 - (i) The need for a flexible and creative Planning approach in terms of how the city deals with the immediate issue of sharply-falling demand for large retail floorplates. It is critical that new, high quality uses that support the overall city centre experience are supported, and current policy for the core city centre is not conducive to the changing circumstances that the pandemic has accelerated.
 - (ii) An assessment of the significant vacant sites in the city centre to understand issues inhibiting development, in order to look at mitigation measures and create a priority list of development opportunities.
- **3.3.10 Long Term Strategy to 2025:** the intention is, subject to the pandemic recovery, to wind down the CCTF in late 2021 and prepare the new City Centre Strategy for Committee consideration and public consultation in early 2022. This new City Centre Strategy is likely to run till 2025 to allow for ongoing recovery from the pandemic.

4. Forward Look 2021/22

- 4.1 **Scottish Government funding:** the allocation of £650,000 has allowed dedicated budget to be allocated to some key workstreams outlined above, which will ensure there is appropriate resource in place for the recovery/winter period. A report on the output of this investment will be prepared later this year for Ministers' consideration and it is expected that further support may be allocated to city centres in due course, given the disproportionate impact of the pandemic.
- 4.2 **Property Repurposing Strategy:** as indicated above there are some fundamental structural issues affecting property supply and demand in the city centre, which the pandemic has actively accelerated. Demand for large retail floorplates has fallen sharply and there have been some high-profile retailer administrations, with Debenhams, the Arcadia Group and many others unlikely to reopen.

More broadly, pre-pandemic there were clear shifts in general demand for commercial property, with increasing moves away from large office floorplates in favour of more flexible, communal space. Similarly, there was an emerging growth in demand for city centre living. The pandemic has resulted in even greater pressure to find sustainable solutions to these issues, which the City Centre Strategy already acknowledged through its focus since 2014 on developing a far more mixed-use centre with "experience" at the heart of the offer.

The Scottish Government funding has therefore also been allocated to the development of a new Property Repurposing Strategy, which will respond

directly to these issues through the development of a clear evidence base to support any policy change recommendations. It will look at supply and demand forecasts and trends, undertake economic analysis, engage with think tanks and international good practice, and explore other city models. It is expected that the findings of this work will be ready for Council consideration in late 2021.

- 4.3 Other funding opportunities for the city centre including the UK Government's Levelling Up fund and the Bus Improvement Partnership fund may offer further investment support for the city centre. The Council is currently assessing a range of potential bids to the Levelling Up fund through the submission of Expressions of Interest which will include opportunity for the city centre. Member engagement will be part of the process.
- 4.4 The flagship City Centre Strategy projects – District Regeneration Frameworks and Avenues – are progressing well and progress will be reported to Committee later this year, along with the final four DRFs which are currently being finalised for Members' consideration and public consultation. The next three Avenues will be moving to construction early 2022.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 This report has outlined the key activities currently being undertaken by the CCTF. Monthly briefings have been arranged with the Ward members and these started in April 2021. The purpose of these briefings are to keep members updated on progress and the developing plan over the course of 2021. The intention is to review the CCTF in August with a view to moving towards the new City Centre Strategy in 2022. An update report will be prepared for Members' consideration in late 2021, outlining the proposed way forward.

6. Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

Financial: Delivery of the CCTF activity as outlined in this report will be met from existing capital and revenue budgets.

Legal: There are no immediate legal issues.

Personnel: There are no direct personnel issues.

Procurement: CPU will be engaged with as required.

Council Strategic Plan:

The report supports the following strategic plan themes and priorities -

- A Thriving Economy, with specific outcomes:

- A Resilient, growing and diverse city economy where businesses thrive;
- The city and its citizens benefit from inclusive economic growth and are involved in economic decision making through participatory budgeting.

Priorities: 2,3,6,8

- A Vibrant City, with specific outcomes:
 - Glasgow is a world class destination for tourism, culture, sport, events and heritage;
 - Glaswegians are active and healthier.

Priorities: 13

- A Healthier City with specific outcomes:
 - Glasgow is healthier
- A Sustainable and Low Carbon City with specific outcomes:
 - The city is clean and public spaces are well maintained;
 - We have a low carbon footprint as a council and as a city;
 - Citizens use active travel, including walking and cycling.

Priorities: 54,55,64,65,66

- Resilient and Empowered Neighbourhoods, with specific outcomes:
 - Citizens can access good facilities, jobs and services locally;
 - Citizens' satisfaction with services is maintained or improved.

Priorities: 83, 87

Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2017-21

The project will help deliver Outcome 9 by improving opportunities for physical activity through the increase in active travel opportunities.

What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?

Positive impact: the project will improve accessibility through improved physical measures.

Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio economic disadvantage.

The proposal will promote accessibility, inclusivity and connectivity, providing positive benefits for all socio-economic groups.

Sustainability Impacts:

Environmental:

A Sustainable and Low Carbon City with specific outcomes:

- The city is clean and public spaces are well maintained;
- We have a low carbon footprint as a council and as a city;
- Citizens use active travel, including walking and cycling.

Priorities: 54,55,64,65,66

This includes direct intervention in the following priorities:

54: Invest in roads and pavement maintenance, improving conditions, residents' satisfaction and contributing to active travel networks. Ensure community involvement in local decision making about this investment;

55: Prioritise sustainable transport across the city.

64: Improve the city's cleanliness and recycling rates and residents' satisfaction with these issues.

65: Build high quality, inclusive active travel infrastructure, investing a minimum of 10% of our transport infrastructure budgets in cycling and walking to make Glasgow an excellent cycling and walking city.

66: Improve the efficiency of our services through the development of smart technology, including refuse collection and street lighting.

Social, including opportunities under Article 20 of the European Public Procurement Directive:

This project will improve Glasgow's urban environment and connectivity, thus leading to an improvement in a range of outcomes for the city's population and economy.

Economic:

The project helps support efforts to make Glasgow an attractive place to live, work and play.

Privacy and Data Protection impacts:

A DPIA is required by law where the processing of personal data is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals. This project will not collect personal data.

7. Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- (1) Considers the contents of this report;
- (2) Considers the progress and planned activity by the City Centre Task Force.
- (3) Notes that an update report will be prepared in six months to advise Members of the next stage of the Glasgow City Centre Strategy.

Enclosures

Appendix A – Members of the City Centre Task Force

Organisation

Chardon Hotels
City Property LLP
DF Concerts
First Group
GCC Chief Executive's
GCC Legal Services
GCC NRS
GCC Regional Economic Growth
Glasgow Chamber of Commerce
Glasgow Conventions Bureau
HFD Property Group Ltd
Holdfast Entertainment Group
Monkey Sleeps
Scotland Office
Scottish Government
St Enoch Centre