

CITY CENTRE RECOVERY: POLICY REVIEW

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide background information to Members to aid their policy review scrutiny of progress in implementing the '*City Centre Recovery Action Plan*', attached at **Appendix 1**.

Scope of Scrutiny

2. During this scrutiny, Members can explore progress with implementing the *City Centre Recovery Action Plan*, any changes made to the Plan since it was agreed, and whether further changes are required. Members will have an opportunity to hear from FOR Cardiff, the representative body for city centre businesses, which works in partnership with the Council.
3. Members will also be able to explore the financial implications for the Council, whether there are any risks to the Council, and what the next steps are for City Centre Recovery.

Background

4. In December 2021, Cabinet agreed the '*Greener, Fairer, Stronger City Recovery and Renewal Strategy*'¹, which seeks to respond to the post pandemic needs of the city and includes *Key Mission 1: Reimagine the City Centre*. Cardiff City Centre accounts for circa 70,000 jobs, employing residents and commuters from across the region. The Strategy argues the city centre affords opportunities to support a more productive and sustainable economic recovery, and outlines the following key priorities for the mission:

¹ Available [here](#)

- *'Make sure our city centre is safe, clean, welcoming, and attractive for people of all ages and backgrounds.*
- *Accelerate the completion of the central business district to support continued jobs growth.*
- *Support existing businesses to grow and become more productive.*
- *Improve existing - and establish new – public squares, streets, green spaces, and open up our waterfront.*
- *Take a more direct role in managing the future of the city centre to reflect the needs of residents, workers, businesses, and visitors.*
- *Put culture and arts at the centre of the recovery, embracing the role the sector plays in shaping our city centre.*
- *Create a city centre that is fully accessible to all ages and people of disabilities, underpinned by a fully integrated transport system.'*

5. The previous Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee undertook policy development scrutiny of the draft '*Greener, Fairer, Stronger City Recovery and Renewal Strategy*', in May 2021, and received an update on the findings of the associated Engagement Exercise, in November 2021. The Committee were pleased to see a range of engagement events were held, with child-friendly events, stakeholder events including business, art and culture sectors, and an open survey for all, with the results informing the focus of the Strategy, and were supportive of the overall approach to recovery and renewal set out in the Strategy².

6. In January 2022, the Cabinet agreed a *City Centre Recovery Action Plan*, attached at **Appendix 1**, which brought together and promoted key initiatives and projects for the city centre that the Council and partners will work towards over the next five years.

7. This highlighted the key role of Cardiff City Centre to residents, visitors, businesses, and Wales as a whole, namely:
 - i. Crucial to our identity – it matters to residents, and it provides meeting and socialisation space for residents, visitors, and businesses.
 - ii. Essential to Climate Emergency response - as the most accessible location in the city, the focus of public transport and active travel networks, it supports the most efficient low carbon focus of the city.

² [\(Public Pack\)Correspondence Following Committee Meeting Agenda Supplement for Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee, 16/11/2021 16:30 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

- iii. Essential to business – as a location, a place for meetings and interaction, and as a key source of brand recognition.
 - iv. Provides Wales's best opportunity to address productivity gap. Increased hybrid working is both an opportunity and threat with research highlighting that smaller cities such as Cardiff could benefit from a move away from the world's megacities.
8. The action plan is based around nine key themes, which respond to the priorities set for *Key Mission 1* in the Recovery & Renewal Strategy. The nine key themes are:
- i) A Fully Curated City Centre – clean, safe, attractive, well managed for all
 - ii) A Dynamic Business and Employment Hub
 - iii) A World Class Transport Network
 - iv) A City Centre of World Class Urban Design and Public Realm
 - v) A Green and Biodiverse City Centre
 - vi) A Blue City Centre of Rivers and Canals
 - vii) A Great Inclusive Place to Live and Play
 - viii) A City Centre of Culture and Animation
 - ix) A Great Quality Experience for Visitors.
9. Overall, the Action Plan contains over 60 actions, most of which rely on partnership working to implement and some of which relate to schemes that will take time to deliver e.g., transport schemes. Previous scrutiny, in January 2022, sought assurance these actions were deliverable and noted officers' responses that:
- i) a substantial percentage of these actions were already being delivered or have business cases being prepared and costed
 - ii) proposals will only be implemented if there is a robust business case, with agreed costings
 - iii) work with partners will be essential to deliver these schemes e.g., the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal has assisted discussions with the Department of Transport and Network Rail regarding Cardiff Central Train Station
 - iv) the Police have given commitments to be involved in the delivery of the Action Plan.

10. Previous scrutiny in January 2022 also sought to understand how the Council would know if the aims of the Action Plan had been achieved, for example that the city centre becomes more child-friendly, and asked for clarification on possible data sources to assist measurements to be provided in response to their letter; this information was provided in the Leader's response, which is available at **Appendix 2** alongside the letter from the Committee.

11. In 2022-23, this Committee undertook an Inquiry '*Shaping Cardiff's Post Pandemic Economic Recovery*' (January 2023), resulting in 19 recommendations to Cabinet, of which 16 were accepted in full and 3 were partially accepted. Members considered the Cabinet Response at their meeting on 19 September 2023; a link to papers is [here](#) , which includes a link to the Inquiry report.

12. This Inquiry considered evidence about the changing retail and work patterns, post-covid, and made several recommendations pertinent to the city centre, including Recommendations 10, 13, 14, 15 and 19, which are:

- i) *To undertake an annual review of the City Centre Recovery Action Plan to ensure actions are altered as required to respond to the fast-changing economic landscape*
- ii) *To explore the benefits of utilising more modern ways of using data to understand usage and behaviour patterns in the city centre*
- iii) *To consider enabling more benches, tables and chair on pavements to provide space for socialising and create a community feel; provide planters, rubbish bins and lamp post banners; introduce a busking strategy and byelaws to promote good busking and tackle poor busking; introduce a city centre visitor attraction; address begging and shoplifting; and assist FOR Cardiff to market and promote their 'Give DIFFerently' homelessness project*
- iv) *To prepare an Affordable Workspace Policy, including consideration of space and risk registers as well as vacant unit incentives and disincentives.*

13. The Cabinet Response accepted Recommendations 10, 13, 14 and 15 and partially accepted Recommendation 19.³ They clarified that:

R10. - *Officers will review the Recovery and Renewal Plan and City Centre Recovery Action Plan, but this should be seen in the context of embedding appropriate actions and commitments within existing strategic documents rather than updating individual plans annually.*

R14. - *... A busking approach based around voluntary guidelines has also been adopted by the Council which is under review to consider its efficacy and effectiveness from the perspective of visitors, businesses and residents. Officers are also working with partners, including the Police, within the city centre to consider anti-social behaviour*

R19. - *... Whilst officers will explore the potential for intervening directly in the commercial property market by providing vacant unit incentives and disincentives for landlords this needs to be considered against value for money considerations, the risks involved in seeking to actively manage the commercial property market and any unintended consequences that may arise from market interventions and distortion.*

14. The latest data from the Welsh Retail Consortium for footfall in October 2023 shows a 5.6% decrease in footfall across Wales, compared with October 2022⁴. This compares to a total UK footfall decrease of 5.7% in October 2023, compared to the previous year. Information from the British Retail Consortium⁵ shows:

Covering the four weeks 01 October – 28 October 2023

According to BRC-Sensormatic IQ data:

- **Total UK footfall** *decreased* by 5.7% in October (YoY), down from -2.9% in September.
 - **High Street** footfall *decreased* by 4.6% in October (YoY), down from -1.7% in September.
 - **Retail Parks** footfall *decreased* by 4.3% in October (YoY), down from -2.4% in September.
 - **Shopping Centre** footfall *decreased* by 7.3% in October (YoY), down from -4.0% in September.
- Of the UK nations, **England** saw the least significant YoY drop in footfall, showing a decrease of 5.3%. **Scotland** saw a YoY drop in footfall of 5.5%. This was followed by **Wales** at 5.6% and **Northern Ireland** at 6.8%.

³ [Appendix B.pdf \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

⁴ [New data shows poor start to crucial festive trading for retailers in Wales - Business Live \(business-live.co.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Brollies up, Footfall down \(brc.org.uk\)](#) YOY stands for Year on Year

15. The data from the Welsh Retail Consortium also shows Cardiff's city centre footfall decreasing by 6.5%⁶ in September 2023; the article cites poor weather conditions as the likely cause for this.

TOTAL FOOTFALL BY CITY

GROWTH RANK	CITY	Sep-23	Aug-23
1	Edinburgh	0.5%	7.5%
2	London	-2.9%	-0.9%
4	Belfast	-3.2%	-3.9%
4	Bristol	-3.2%	-2.6%
5	Liverpool	-3.5%	3.4%
6	Manchester	-5.2%	-1.4%
7	Nottingham	-6.3%	-4.6%
8	Cardiff	-6.5%	-2.0%
9	Birmingham	-7.9%	-4.3%
10	Glasgow	-8.9%	-2.9%
11	Leeds	-9.7%	-5.4%

Progress Update

16. Attached at **Appendix 3** is a presentation that provides an update on delivery of the City Centre Recovery Action Plan.

Way Forward

17. Councillor Huw Thomas (Leader) will be invited to make a statement. Andrew Gregory (Director of Planning, Transport and Environment), Jon Day (Operational

⁶ [New data shows poor start to crucial festive trading for retailers in Wales - Business Live \(business-live.co.uk\)](https://www.business-live.co.uk)

Manager – Tourism & Investment), and Richard Hyett (City Centre Manager) will attend to give a presentation. Carolyn Brownell, For Cardiff (Executive Director - Interim) will also attend and the whole panel will be available to answer Members' questions.

Legal Implications

18. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

19. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to:

- i) Consider the information in this report, its appendices and the information presented at the meeting
- ii) Determine whether they would like to make any comments, observations, or recommendations to the Cabinet on this matter, and
- iii) Decide the way forward for any future scrutiny of the issues discussed.

LEANNE WESTON

Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer

15 November 2023