

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Executive - 14 November 2012

Taunton Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) Programme : The Way Forward

Report of the Economic Development Manager

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Norman Cavill)

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the proposal for a second BID term in Taunton town centre was rejected by Non Domestic Rate payers earlier this year. The BID programme, which was managed by the Taunton Town Centre Company (TTCC) therefore terminated at the end of September.
- 1.2 This Briefing is intended to inform Members of the successes of the BID programme. It describes the TTCC's strategy for progressing a future BID, and outlines the implications on the town centre of those activities and services which terminated when the programme finished.
- 1.3 The report also considers the Council's financial contributions to the TTCC and the main terms of the Service Level Agreement.

2. Background

- 2.1 Members will be aware that Taunton town centre has, for the past 5 years, benefitted from a Business Improvement District (BID) programme, which was run by the Taunton Town Centre Company. In March, a ballot was held by the Borough Council amongst the affected ratepayers. The proposals made by the Town Centre Company were rejected by the ballot, meaning that the BID ceased at the end of the five year term on 30th September 2012. The loss of income has already had a negative impact on the town centre, including removing the funding available to the Town Centre Company to deliver the traditional Christmas lights and switch-on event.
- 2.2 The BID Ballot Result

The renewal Ballot for Taunton BID held on 31 March 2012 resulted in 208 votes cast in favour of the renewal proposals, representing a majority (52%) of the voters. The BID failed, however, because it secured only 45% of the vote expressed as Rateable Value of those who voted. In order to carry the vote must achieve a majority vote in terms of the number of votes cast and majority by rateable value.

The Taunton Town Centre Company has discovered that 62% of firms with a Rateable Value of £100,000 or more did not vote and that this includes many of the town's National Retailers where decisions tend to be made at head office rather than through the local store manager. Whilst the 62% was probably the main reason for the result TTCC also recognizes that there is a small but vocal minority locally who believe TTCC is no longer fit for purpose.

3 The Future of the Taunton BID

3.1 Having reviewed the reasons for the failed BID proposal the Taunton Town Centre Company Board decided in June to undertake preparatory work in advance of any future decision to run a new BID campaign leading to a new ballot in 2013. In the meanwhile the company will:

1. Develop an interim business plan budget and staffing structure for TTCC to ensure the company remains financially viable notwithstanding the change in circumstances on 30 September 2012, when the current BID ceases.
2. Work with national retailers at head office level, and public sector bodies to establish key contacts, greater awareness and support for Taunton .. TTCC has commenced a comprehensive programme of establishing links with voter contacts within head office functions of the town's national retailers. TTCC will work closely with TDBC prior to and during a future BID campaign and ballot to ensure that the relevant contacts are given more opportunity to feedback on BID proposals. Greater attention will also be placed upon providing ample notice of the ballot, and upon ensuring that voting papers are securely delivered to national firms in good time in order to maximise the opportunity for them to influence decisions affecting their operations in Taunton.
3. Revisit the building blocks for a future BID proposal, which is more in tune with national policy guidelines and local business needs and aspirations. The TTCC recognises that it needs to rewin the confidence of traders through greater transparency and visibility; and that a future BID offer must be seen as proposing what traders want and must be presented compellingly.
4. Ask Sainsbury's to carry out an independent, external audit of the Taunton BID programme. This is a free support service offered to towns across the UK where there is an active BID programme.

3.2 The TTCC recognises that it needs to address the reputational issues, and to restore business confidence. Measures it is considering to that end include;

- Refreshing the management board
- Revitalising communications with traders e.g. by circulating full accounts
- Moving to more visible and accessible office accommodation
- Commissioning an external review of the company to ensure it is fit for purpose.

3.3 The company's strategy is to get at least some of these measures in place before launching a future BID campaign which the Town Centre Company accepts would need to be projected as new, different and compelling.

4 Review of BID Services

4.1 The BID generated £1.14m in levy contributions, which in turn levered a further £600,000 from a number of sources;

Avon & Somerset Police	£320,000
Taunton Deane Borough Council	£170,000
Sponsorship towards events and individual projects	£100,000
SWERDA	£30,000
Total	£620,000

4.2 Without BID funding the company's capacity to deliver town centre management activities is severely curtailed, and the town centre will inevitably suffer as a result.

4.3 The BID funding enabled the significant enhancement of services provided by the Borough Council and the Police Authority across three areas in particular; Marketing and Events, Cleaning and Maintenance, and, Policing and Security. Some of the successes delivered as a result of the BID in those three areas is summarized in the following paragraphs.

4.4 Marketing and Events

Notable successes include:

- an annual programme of large scale community events, including the Family Fun Day and the Christmas lights Switch-on, regularly attracting thousands of visitors to town.
- High quality visual arts performances to boost the seasonal Christmas lights event attracting thousands of visitors annually including Fireworks displays, Helioshere performance and aerial acrobatic display
- Support to local events highlighting Taunton regionally/nationally including Taunton Literary Festival, Tour of Britain and Olympic Torch Relay
- An extended scheme of Christmas lights covering gateways into town and converting from traditional tungsten lamps to more efficient LED lights, reducing Taunton's carbon footprint
- Support to TDBC and Project Taunton to deliver a new wayfinding scheme & highlight specialist shopping areas. Smart new fingerposts and monolith signs have been erected round town
- Support to traders in Bath Place, Wyvern Shopping Centre and East Reach to introduce new marketing projects and signage to these areas
- The Taunton website attracting an average of 10,000 views/month and consistently high ranking for key word search on google

- Creation of the Taunton Mobile App – providing visitor and shopper information to mobile phone users of android and apple mobile phones
- 40,000 Seasonal event publications distributed across Somerset annually
- 5,000 Annual shoppers guides distributed to visitors to Taunton

4.5 Cleansing and Maintenance

- Cleaner streets through the introduction of the BID cleaning machine and caretaker; removing staining and gum from pavements
- A team of volunteers clearing litter, graffiti and fly-posting on a weekly basis
- Grant assistance to nearly 50 small businesses to refurbish their shopfronts, creating a smarter street scene

4.6 Policing and Security

The BID co-funded an award winning, high visibility community beat police team supporting the daytime and evening economy. It provided an additional policing resource for the BID area and supported the deployment of one Police Constable and two Police Community Support Officers dedicated to policing the BID area. Avon & Somerset Police are unable to continue to fund those staff members beyond September with a resulting reduction in the policing presence. The officers from the BID Team have been redeployed to other locations.

4.7 Other Activities

In many areas the BID went beyond the minimum service pledge laid out within the five year business plan to deliver additional projects;

- Shop Taunton campaign to encourage local trade creating favourable local PR estimated as thousands of pounds in equivalent advertising spend
- Annual customer service competition, Who Cares Wins engaging local businesses and rewarding loyal shoppers
- Subsidised summer hanging baskets
- Subsidised shop-front Christmas Trees
- Dressing the town with 200 Union jack flags and hundreds of meters of bunting for the queens diamond jubilee
- Swift removal of large graffiti tags blighting the town centre
- Supply of six winter gritting kits to assist businesses in keeping footways clear during severe weather
- Supply of new street furniture including six new benches and new poster points to public spaces

5. Council financial contributions to the Town Centre Company

5.1 The Council has funded the Company to deliver town centre management services on its behalf for many years. Recently that funding has comprised the following amounts:

5.2 Annual contribution towards core operation costs in the sum of £42,700 in 2012/13.

This contribution is made independent of the BID programme, with additional funding attracted from businesses towards individual projects and events. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Council and the Town Centre Company is currently being drafted in relation to the annual contribution. The main services included in the draft SLA are:

- a) Design and delivery of an exciting and innovative programme of events in Taunton town centre. The programme will comprise a pre-Christmas and a Summer event as well as occasional, smaller events held throughout the year. The provision of all events will be subject to the securing of additional funding from third party organisations.
- b) The design and consultation amongst businesses on a new Business Improvement District programme in the town centre, to be progressed and submitted for ballot during 2013.
- c) The design and delivery of programmes to promote Taunton as a shopper, event and visitor destination
- d) Maintain an awareness of trends and issues in the town centre and provide written reports to the Council twice per year on a range of indicators
- e) Introduce a busker development programme to encourage high quality busking throughout the town centre.
- f) Provide support to the Bath Place Traders Association, East Reach Traders Association and seek involvement with emerging traders groups i.e. Magdalene Lane & Wyvern Shopping Centre.
- g) Maintain the rotunda poster points and other information boards in the town centre with up to date and relevant information on events and activities.

5.3 Annual BID Levy payment of £4,500

Payable by the Council due to its ownership of various hereditaments in the town centre.

5.4 BID Ballot Costs

During 2011/12 the Council incurred a one-off payment of £2,500 to ERS for the cost of holding the BID ballot.

5.5 Contribution of £20,000 towards the administration of the BID programme.

For the year ending September 2012 The Executive considered this item at its meeting in November 2011.

6. Corporate Scrutiny Recommendation

6.1 The Corporate Scrutiny Committee considered this item at its meeting on 25 October 2012, at which the Chairman of the TTCC and the Town Centre Manager were in attendance. The Members received representation from local businesses and recognised the reputational difficulties faced by the TTCC. In conclusion the Committee resolved to recommend to the Executive that:

1. **It no longer has confidence in the Taunton Town Centre Company to progress a further BID proposal, and,**
2. **It urges the Executive to reconsider all the options available to promote and enhance the Taunton town centre on a voluntary basis and draw from the business community alternative ways forward.**

6.2 The reasons for the BID's failure are reviewed in paragraph 2.2. These do not reflect a position where the majority of businesses have lost confidence with the TTCC. This does not mean that there are not obstacles to overcome. Indeed the TTCC clearly recognizes this – see paragraph 3.1. They also recognize the reputational issues they currently have and intend to take action to overcome these– see paragraph 3.2. Paragraph 4 describes the key successes of the TTCC. Taking all this information into account, and considering what the loss to Taunton would be without a Town Centre Company, the recommendation is that the Council should continue to support TTCC through this period of change towards a successful BID vote, so that Taunton can continue to benefit from the activities of a Town Centre Company.

7. Finance Comments

7.1 The Council's contribution of core funding to the Taunton Town Centre Company, the Council's BID Levy contribution, and the one-off contribution in 2012 of BID ballot costs (paras 4.2 to 4.4) are funded from the General budget. The contribution of £20,000 (para 4.5) towards the administration of the BID programme was recognised as a one-off contribution and was taken from reserves that are no longer available.

8 Legal Comments

8.1 No direct legal implications at this stage.

9 Links to Corporate Aims

9.1 This proposal links to the Regeneration Aim of the Corporate Strategy.

10. Environmental and Community Safety Implications

10.1 The services provided through the BID Programme impacted directly upon the quality of the environment and the safety of the town centre, as outlined in Section 5 of this report.

11. Equalities Impact

11.1 No direct equalities implications at this stage.

12. Risk Management

12.1

Risk	Low/Medium/High	Mitigating Action
Marketing & Events: Decline in number of visitors to the town centre leading to loss of business income	High	Officers will liaise with TTCC staff to ensure provision of an annual events programme, albeit funded differently and at a lower scale.
Cleansing & Maintenance: More litter and debris, and unclean streets.	Low	The Deane DLO will continue to provide cleansing services throughout the town centre, albeit at a lower scale.
Policing & Security Less policing numbers and visible presence to deter crime.	Medium	Police services will be maintained, albeit at a lower level. Recorded crime levels are actually relatively low in comparison to other towns.
Public Feedback: Negative public and business perceptions over the state (both physical and economic) of the town centre	High	The TTCC will communicate more effectively with town centre businesses to persuade them of the benefits of a further BID programme.

13. Partnership Implications

13.1 The Council works in close partnership with the Taunton Town Centre Company, being represented by Council Members on the Company Management Board. Officer representation was also maintained on the BID Steering Group and other operational groups.

14 Recommendations

14.1 That the Executive recognises the importance of securing a further BID programme in Taunton, and:-

1. Lends its full support to the Taunton Town Centre Company in progressing a further BID proposal for Taunton town centre.
2. Delegates authority to the Executive Portfolio Holder to approve the annual Service Level Agreement with the Taunton Town Centre Company.

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