

MID TERM REVIEW OF THE STRABANE BID COMPANY ON BEHALF OF DERRY CITY & STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL



Derry City & Strabane
District Council

Comhairle
**Chathair Dhoire &
Cheantar an tSratha Báin**

Derry Cittie & Stràbane
Destrìck Cooncil

Submitted on 2nd August 2019

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Full Circle Management Solutions Ltd, was commissioned by Derry City & Strabane District Council [DCSDC] to conduct a Mid-term Review of the Strabane BID Company in July 2019.

The following report represents a review of the BID Company's delivery, communications and management, presented in the form of a series of findings and recommendations. These are designed to inform the BID Company with respect to successful delivery of the remainder of the BID term.

The review involved the following elements:

- Structured engagement with the business community/ stakeholders, a total of 71 participants on 2nd July 2019.
- Desk Research including a review of BID legislation, best practice, survey responses and individual discussions.
- A facilitated session with the BID Board on 25th July 2019 with 4 participants in attendance.

The review included a comprehensive analysis of the activities undertaken by Strabane BID Company since it was established in 2016. The findings provide an assessment of the performance of the Strabane BID and the Strabane BID Company and an assessment of its efficiency and effectiveness as an organisation, and of its delivery of the Business Plan.

Findings are presented in 3 categories:

1. Delivery of the Business Plan.
2. Communications and Engagement.
3. Planning, Management and Evaluation.

The findings indicate that although a number of activities have been successfully implemented, there are some significant deficiencies in delivery against the 2016 Business Plan. There have also been important shortcomings in communication with and engagement of key stakeholders, as well as areas for considerable improvement in adopting best practice in the terms of planning, management and evaluation.

Across the 3 findings categories, eleven recommendations are presented. These are summarised below and further developed in Chapter 4.

- Re-profiling of budget allocation by theme
- Establishment of relevant KPI's
- Increasing levy payer engagement in Business Plan delivery
- Establishment of a BID/Town Centre Management Office
- Recruitment of a Town Centre BID Manager
- Formal Member Engagement activity
- Online Marketing and Social Media Engagement Plan
- Recruitment of Additional Directors to the BID Company
- Creation of Board Sub-Groups
- Changes to Financial Management
- Improvement in evaluation and feedback

These recommendations are broad ranging and are highly inter-connected. The swift and effective implementation of these recommendations, most within 3 month of the date of this report, is essential to ensuring successful outcomes for the Business Plan, the Bid Company and all stakeholders.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

On 1st July 2014 the Department for Social Development brought into effect the Business Improvement Districts (BID) Regulations (Northern Ireland). In 2016 the decision was taken to propose a BID for Strabane. In a subsequent vote there was an overwhelming number of ballots placed in favour of a BID in the area. As a result the Strabane BID Company was established and a BID levy of 1.5% was imposed on each business within the BID catchment area.

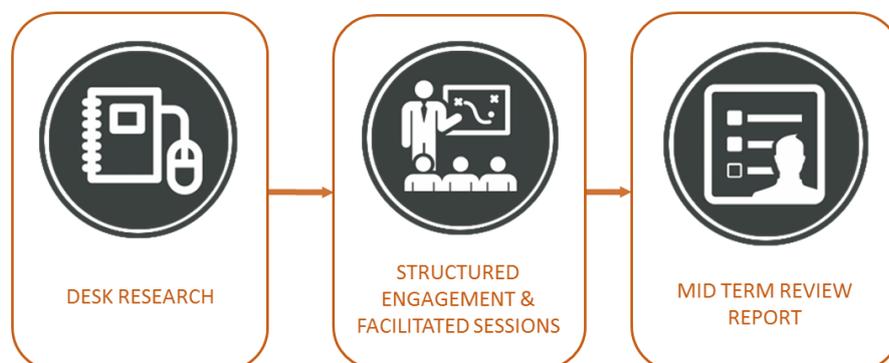
Full Circle Management Solutions Ltd, was commissioned by Derry City & Strabane District Council [DCSDC] to conduct a Mid-term Review of the Strabane BID Company in July 2019. The Strabane BID is approximately half way through the delivery of its 5 year mandate.

2.1 Mid-Term Review

The aim of the Mid-Term Review was to provide an overview of the performance of the Strabane BID and the Strabane BID Company, through assessing its efficiency and effectiveness by:

- Carrying out a thorough analysis of the Business plan delivery, resources available, governance and effectiveness of the Strabane BID Company
- Carrying out a review that will take into account the engagement of the Strabane BID Company with the wider business community both within the BID area and outside
- Determining the ability of the organization to influence and shape economic, social and environmental development of Strabane Town and its engagement with DCSDC on emerging plans within the Derry/Londonderry and Strabane Region City Deal.
- Assessing the effectiveness if the Strabane BID Company to effectively deliver on Strabane BID Business Plan
- Making outline recommendations for the future business plan and resources of the Strabane BID Company

2.2 Methodology



The review stages are summarised in the diagram above and involved the following key stages:

- Extensive desk research included a comprehensive review of the activities relating to the Strabane BID Company since it was established in 2016 including review of meeting minutes, best practice documentation, plans, evaluations, reports and the June 2019 survey of 116 BID businesses.
- Structured engagement and consultation with the business community & relevant stakeholders – a total of 70 people participated in the public event on 2nd July 2019.
- Facilitated Session with the BID Board – a total of four Board Members attended this event on 25th July 2019.

This review provided the information and analysis necessary to complete the findings and recommendations contained in this report as part of the Mid-Term Review of the Strabane BID Company.

3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

This section provides an analysis of the performance of the Strabane BID and the Strabane BID Company through an assessment of its efficiency and effectiveness as an organisation.

On 1st July 2014 the Department for Communities [Formerly, Department for Social Development] brought into effect the Business Improvement Districts (BID) Regulations (Northern Ireland). In April 2015 there were 11 new Councils in Northern Ireland, the vision was to have a 'thriving, dynamic local government that creates vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable communities that have the needs of the citizens at their core.'

In 2016 the decision was taken to propose a BID for Strabane. In a subsequent ballot there was an overwhelming number of ballots placed in favour of a BID in the area. As a result the Strabane BID Company was established and a BID levy was imposed on each business within the BID catchment area.

3.2 Delivery of Business Plan

A crucial measure of the success of the Strabane BID was its ability to deliver the Business Plan, established in 2016 for the five years of the Strabane BID. The Business Plan outlines four key themes under which a series of goals were developed. The sections below present a summary of the achievement towards each of these goals to date, followed by a more detailed analysis of each.

3.2.1 Theme 1: Promotion: Marketing and Events. Increase local loyalty and footfall

Summary Table:

Theme 1: Promotion: Marketing and Events. Increase local loyalty and footfall		
Goal	Status	Deliverables
Budget (5 Years): £202,500 Annual Budget: £40,500	Projected Spend: £81,000 Actual Spend: £81,919	
Creating an entertainment programme of regular events for both the daytime and night time economy	Range of activities supported over last 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Christmas Fayre: 2016, 2017 and 2018- Strajamba: 2017, 2018 and 2019- St Patricks Day: 2017, 2018 and 2019
Incentivising and rewarding local shopping to help people of Strabane to 'fall back in love' with their town	Introduced the Strabane Gift Card	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- £11,000 Gift Card sales to date- 41 Business have Gift Cards redeemed- One Retailer has £1,100 in sales from the Gift Card
Proactively marketing Strabane to Visitors & potential investors	Proactively marketed to visitors and video developed for potential investors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- In Strabane website (to be launched in August 2019)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visitor Map developed for In Strabane Website - Social Media activity re. Gift Card and Events - Christmas marketing campaign including billboards, press advertising and radio - Collaboration with Strabane Town Forum and Strabane Chamber re. production of Investment video for new website
Work with key organisations such as Tourism NI, The Arts Council & DfC	No evidence of progress on this goal	

Over the first two years of the Strabane BID, the Strabane BID Company has met its expenditure obligations under this theme, reflecting the level of activity in this area. This has resulted in spend of £81,919 against a budget of £81,000.

Creating an entertainment programme of regular events for both the daytime and night time economy

Whilst there is no evidence of a specific entertainment programme for both the day time and night time economy, the focus of theme 1 by the Strabane BID Company has been on providing the following events:

- Christmas Fayre: 2016, 2017 and 2018.
- Strajamba: 2017, 2018 and 2019.
- St Patricks Day: 2017, 2018 and 2019.

The general consensus in surveys and workshops was that these events were well received by visitors and retailers, although there is still scope for improvement in this area with the backing and support of local businesses.

With the exception of the Christmas Fayre in 2016, there have been no evaluations of the impact of the above events. This has presented challenges around understanding the impact of these events as part of this review. Furthermore, without fully monitoring and evaluating the impact/return on investment, there will be no basis on which to inform future decision making.

Incentivising and rewarding local shopping to help people of Strabane to ‘fall back in love’ with their town

Another key success under theme 1 has been the introduction of the Strabane Gift Card. The Gift Card was launched in 2018 and has been supported by a dedicated website the <https://instrabanegiftcard.com/>, this website has been active in promoting the BID. The website includes details of where a gift card can be purchased; businesses listings of who accepts the gift card and blogs promoting a wide range of businesses. This website is

provided as part of the contract with Miconex who manage the Gift Card on behalf of the BID. Miconex deliver the Gift Card initiatives on behalf of other NI BIDS and the majority of UK BIDS. Highlights include;

- In excess of £11,000 Gift Card sales to date.
- Following the public workshop on 2nd July 2019, 16 new Businesses have signed up to the Gift Card.
- 41 Business across the BID area have redeemed the Gift Card.
- A major announcement will be made in August regarding a major employer buying into the Gift Card which will increase distribution and reach.
- One Retailer has redeemed £1,100 in sales from the Gift Card.

Proactively Marketing Strabane to Visitors & potential investors:

The Strabane BID Company has been actively promoting the town to visitors as further developed below.

One method of marketing the town has been through the website. More recently Strabane BID Company has been faced with a number of issues around the Strabane BID website, as a result the Bid In Strabane website is currently undergoing a revamp.

Further evidence regarding the promotion of Strabane has been in relation to the level of social media activity – primarily on Facebook and Instagram:

- <https://en-gb.facebook.com/BIDInStrabane/> - local businesses are encouraged to submit details of any events, promotions, special offers they wish to be displayed on the BID website, recent contributors include McNamees, C&Co, Papa G's
- <https://en-gb.facebook.com/Strajamba/> - promotional social media including event details, videos and photographs
- <https://www.instagram.com/strajamba/> - promotional social media including event details, videos and photographs
- <https://www.facebook.com/StrabaneChristmasFayre/> - promotional social media including event details, videos and photographs

There has been a lot of activity in this area, a review of the analytics is summarised here:

- The overall number of followers has grown to reach 2,098
- Growth in followers has been relatively steady. It would appear that activity around the Christmas Campaign contributed to the peaks in November 17 and November 18.
- Spikes in engagement were through organic rather than paid engagement.
- Boosting of posts seems to have been over a short period of time, however, it did result in a dramatically increased reach during those periods.
- 73% of the current followers on the page are females.
- The largest age demographic represented for females is 35-44 year olds and for males is 25- 34 year olds.
- 1,623 of the followers are based in Strabane with the next biggest locations being Castlederg, Omagh, Lifford and Derry accounting for another 492 followers.

The marketing activity has also been enhanced with an annual advertising campaign of the ‘In Strabane Brand’ which included a combination of:

- Billboards across Tyrone, Derry and Donegal,
- Bus advertising (20 buses Derry, Strabane, Castlederg, Omagh, Newtownstewart)
- Advertisements in regional press (Donegal, Derry & Tyrone)
- Advertisements in magazines (Local Woman, My Local)
- Social Media Campaign (Facebook, Instagram, Text, Email)
- Radio advertising. It was estimated that over 135,000 listeners heard the 4 week campaign and over 60,000 saw the advertisements in the local press.

A review of the Strabane BID marketing activity, in a Media Book review in 2018 highlighted the effectiveness of the advertising activity – with an Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) of €22.3k for ‘Strabane BID’ (Aug-18 – Jul-19). The AVE figure for ‘Strajamba’ alone, equated to €21.8k.

A further success of the Strabane BID, was successful lobbying of Strabane Town Forum and Strabane Chamber of Commerce with regard to the development of a visitor and investor video for Strabane. This video will go live with the launch of the new website.

Finally, in order to improve accessibility for visitors, the Strabane BID Company was responsible for the design and development of a visitor map. This map will also go live on the new website.

Work with key organisations such as Tourism NI, The Arts Council & DfC to strengthen the tourism, heritage and sporting offer in the town:

Whilst there was some engagement with the DfC regarding CCTV, there is still room for improvement in this area. To date there is little evidence to suggest that the Strabane BID Company is actively engaging with these stakeholders.

Conclusions:

- Events were well received however there is scope for significant improvement and there is a clear need for evaluation.
- Advertising has been effective with Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) of €22.3K for ‘Strabane BID’ (August 18- present); AVE figure for ‘Strajamba’ alone €21.8K.

3.2.2 Theme 2: Welcome: Access and Experience. Improve accessibility to the town by:

Summary Table:

Theme 2: Welcome: Access and Experience. Improve accessibility to the town		
Goal	Status	Deliverables
Budget (5 Years): £180,000 Annual Budget: £36,000	Projected Spend: £72,000 Actual Spend: £17,608	
Developing the parking offer and	No evidence of	4 th July

incentives for shoppers to visit the town	progress	
Developing initiatives to encourage passing visitors / tourists to stop off in Strabane to eat, shop or enjoy our cultural offering	Limited Evidence	Visitor Map created
Improving access and links from the Bus Depot, Retail Park and town centre area	No evidence of progress	
Improving the visitor experience and increasing footfall	Investment in town centre aesthetics	Street dressing including; bunting and 70 no. planters/ floral displays (£9,308). Annual Street deep clean
Reducing the number of empty shops	Increased Occupancy Levels	Evidence is anecdotal
Improve town centre safety from daytime through to night time economy	Investment to deter Anti-Social Behaviour	Security Gates installed 5no. CCTV Cameras installed

Whilst some progress has been made in spend under this theme, it has been a small proportion of the projected budget, with less than a quarter of the budget spent in the first two years.

This is reflected in the level of activity under this theme. It is unclear at this stage what progress has been made by the Strabane BID Company by way of achievement in the following areas:

- Developing the parking offer and incentives for shoppers to visit the town; and
- Improve access and links from Bus Depot, Retail Park and town Centre area.

Reducing the number of empty shops

Whilst it is widely felt that occupancy has been increasing, there is a lack of evidence available that this has been as a direct result of the Strabane BID Company reducing the number of empty shops in the town. Furthermore, there is a lack of information surrounding baseline data such as occupancy levels at the start of the Strabane BID compared to now.

Developing initiatives to encourage passing visitors / tourists to stop off in Strabane to eat, shop or enjoy our cultural offering:

A visitor map has been drafted and developed. The intention is to launch the visitor map on the newly updated website. The Strabane BID Company was at the forefront of having this developed.

A further initiative lobbied for by the Strabane BID Company was an annual deep clean in the town Centre. The first of the deep cleans took place in 2019 and this is due to be repeated annually.

Improving the visitor experience and increasing footfall

In order to fully assess this goal, statistics surrounding footfall activity in the town would be beneficial. Footfall activity has not been actively monitored by the Strabane BID Company to date and needs to be an area of future focus.

Strabane BID has been responsible for spending £9,308 over the last two years on bunting to enhance the town during civic/public events as well as purchasing and planting 70 containers to add to the town's floral displays. This has enhanced the overall appearance of the town and enhanced the visitor experience.

Improve town centre safety from daytime through to night time economy

The Strabane BID Company was responsible for an investment of £8,000 to install alley gates between Castle Street and John Wesley Street and secured funding towards town centre CCTV.

Anecdotally this has reduced anti-social behaviour in this area. Whilst baseline data is available, it is too early to monitor activity. There is a lack of information to assess impact on anti-social behaviour / crime levels in these areas at the outset, and subsequent to any intervention by the Strabane BID Company.

Conclusions:

- Whilst it is understood that occupancy has been increasing there is a lack of information surrounding baseline data.
- Progress has been made around improving the visitor experience and increasing footfall however baseline data is unavailable to fully understand impact from the outset.
- The Strabane BID Company was responsible for investment in security gates and CCTV. Anecdotally this has reduced anti-social behaviour in this area. While baseline data is available it is too early to accurately assess impact of this intervention.

3.2.3 Theme 3: Reducing Costs & Support

Summary Table:

Theme 3: Reducing Costs & Support		
Goal	Status	Deliverables
Budget (5 Years): £45,000 Annual Budget: £9,000	Projected: £18,000 Actual: £1,495.28	
Investigate opportunities to save you money	Negotiations with service providers	Appointment of Bank of Ireland as preferred Merchant Service provider Currently being scoped: waste management and broadband provision
Provide Advice & Networking	Training & Networking Opportunities	Collaboration with Councils Business Development team to deliver workshops on:

		<p>GDPR, Social Media and Delivering the Perfect Pitch</p> <p>6 training events on Age/Dementia Awareness across 2018.</p> <p>Business breakfast and information events delivered</p> <p>Collaboration with Strabane Town Forum to deliver “Online Programme” (Sept.19)</p>
Lobby with a collective voice	No evidence of progress	
Attract additional funding into Strabane	No evidence of progress	

Less than 10% of the projected budget for this theme has been spent to date. Once again this is reflected in the level of activity under this theme. We are not aware of any evidence of the Strabane BID Company having made progress on the following goals:

- Lobby with a collective voice.
- Attract additional funding into Strabane – with the exception of an additional CCTV camera.

Where activity has taken place, it is primarily in the following areas:

Investigate opportunities to save you money

The Strabane BID Company has been involved in negotiations with merchant service providers to secure cost savings for the Levy members – Bank of Ireland was appointed as the BIDs preferred provider of Merchant Services.

Other areas currently being considered by the Strabane BID Company include potential savings around waste Management and Broadband provision.

Provide Advice & Networking

The Strabane BID Company in collaboration with Council’s Business Development team has previously delivered workshops on GDPR, Social Media, Delivering the Perfect Pitch and 6 training events on Age/Dementia Awareness across 2018. These were well attended by retailers, hospitality and office sectors and this will continue throughout 2019 with other workshops planned.

There has also been a series of business breakfast events and information events that BID levy numbers have been invited to. It was highlighted during the public workshop that these events could be communicated better to the members as many were unaware of their existence.

In addition, the Strabane BID Company has successfully collaborated with Strabane Town Forum and will be delivering the 'Get Your Business Online' programme. This is aimed at providing support for entrepreneurs, micro businesses and social enterprises to develop a professional online presence in order to enable effective marketing of products and services, reinforcing their brand and encouraging both return and new custom.

The aim of this project is to assist small businesses to develop the skills, tools and techniques required to successfully market their products/ services to a wider audience thereby allowing them to become more competitive and to grow. The programme will help participants to identify the best online methods to use for their businesses and how to maximise on these through market intelligence gathering, content creation and management, creative design, user functionality etc. Programme content will include:

1. Skills Development Workshops – to help those recruited to identify online marketing activities and how to maximize on their impact and benefits.
2. Website development – Assist a selection of businesses in the design and development of a website for their business. Participants for this element of the programme will be chosen through a competitive application process.
3. Social Media Strategies – Assist businesses to develop, monitor and review their social media presence across a variety of platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.

Anticipated Outcomes from these workshops:

- 4 no. workshops with at least 15 no. participants.
- 4 no. basic business websites developed for businesses.
- 10 no. companies assisted to develop their social media presence across a variety of platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc

Strabane BID contribution: £5,000

Conclusions:

- Whilst there has been a range of formal and informal engagement, attendance levels were generally low.
- It was highlighted during the public workshop that advice and networking events could be communicated better to the members as many were unaware of their existence.

3.2.4 Theme 4: Innovation – Creative Spirit

Summary Table:

Theme 4: Innovation – Creative Spirit	
Goal	Status
- Budget: £22,500 - Annual Budget: £4,500	No evidence of progress
- Capitalise on any opportunities that arise over the next 5 years	No evidence of progress

At present there is no evidence of any budget being spent or activity around this theme.

3.2.5 Conclusion:

As highlighted in the tables above there has been some progress towards achieving the goals of the Strabane BID, however with an inherent lack of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) it is difficult to provide a comprehensive analysis of achievement against target.

The existing Business Plan and subsequent annual action plans lack baseline information with which to assess progress. Furthermore, timeframes for delivery and responsibility of actions were lacking across these documents. With the exception of the five year budget under each theme there are no other SMART objectives with which to assess performance.

3.3 Communications and Engagement

Communications and engagement underpins all the activities of the Strabane BID Company. Throughout the period of the BID's existence there have been concerns raised by many stakeholders as to the success of the communication and engagement of the Strabane BID Company with the wider business community both within the BID area and outside.

Since the outset, the Strabane BID Company has communicated through a variety of media including newsletters, committee papers, e-zine, information events, business breakfasts and online through the websites and social media. Whilst there is evidence of activity in this area, the compelling feedback from the BID Levy members is that for whatever reasons this communication is not reaching them.

A key challenge for the Strabane BID Company has been the level of engagement from the BID Levy members. This is reflected in low attendance levels at seminars, information events etc. For Strabane BID to be a success, there needs to be greater 'buy-in' from the Strabane BID Company, BID Levy payers, wider business community and other relevant stakeholders.

A summary of some of the methods of communication over the last number of years includes:

- Newsletter: Published in June 2017.
- Information Event – October 18.
- Annual Report and Review Published in 2019.
- Strabane Business Improvement District (BID) and Strabane Chamber of Commerce delivering a series of business networking breakfast meetings (first meeting October 2017; additional meetings held in November 2017; January 2018; February 2018; April 2018, May 2018, June 2018, February 19, April 2019, May 2019).
- Letters and emails in advance of the Christmas Fayre, Strajamba, and Gift Card Launch.
- Emails to the business database (approx. 120 emails) re. events, promotions, Council initiatives.
- Hair & Beauty Sector Workshop (September 2017).

In the June 2019 survey conducted with 116 businesses in Strabane, the feedback identified a number of concerns around communication:

- Lack of visibility of the Strabane BID Company with the wider membership.
- The location of the BID officer was seen as a physical barrier to the BID Levy members being able to contribute and engage with the Strabane BID Company.
- A lack of day-to-day engagement with the BID officer.
- A lack of regular membership Fora.
- No Annual General Meeting.
- Lack of clarity in relation to the accountability of the BID Officer to the BID Board and DCSDC.

Conclusions:

- Throughout the period of the BID, stakeholders have raised concerns raised by as to the success of communication and engagement approaches.
- Since the outset, the Strabane BID Company has communicated through a variety of media, however the compelling feedback is that this has not been effective in reaching its target audience.
- There is an onus on the BID Levy members to engage more with the Strabane BID Company. This has been generally low over the BID term to date, with below average attendance levels at seminars and information events etc.
- The overwhelming feedback from the business community is that the BID would benefit from an office location based in the town centre.

3.4 Planning, Management & Evaluation

To date there has been limited evidence of the ability of the Strabane BID Company to influence and shape the economic, social and environmental development of Strabane Town and its engagement with DCSDC on emerging plans within the Derry/Londonderry and Strabane Region City Deal.

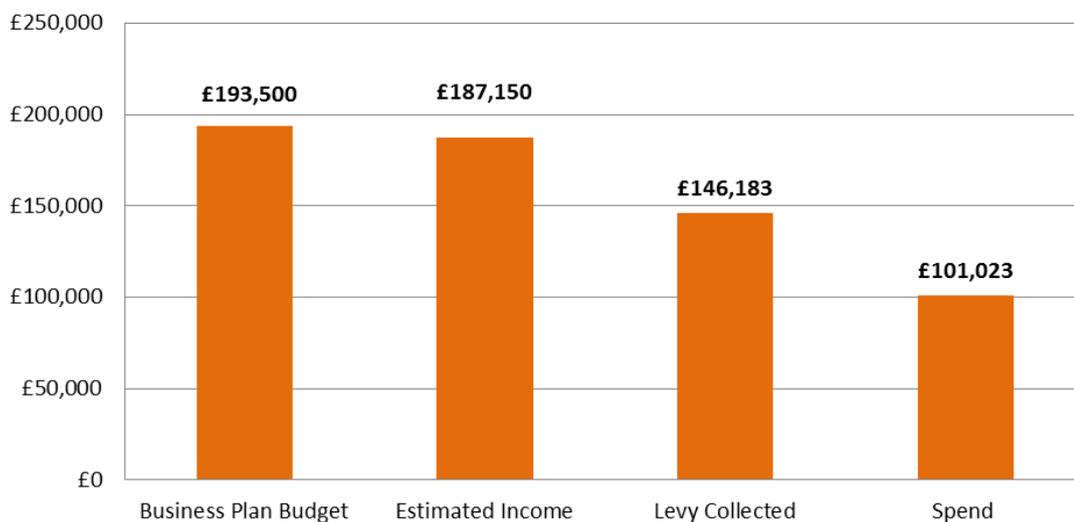
From a review of Board minutes it is clear that there has been a strong core of members that have consistently attended Board meetings over the years. There are currently 3 registered Directors on the Board.

There is evidence to suggest that the Board members are aware of gaps in skill, sector and geographical representation. Ultimately the Board is open to securing representation to fill these gaps thereby ensuring the Board is effective and representative. The low attendance of some members at Board meetings raises questions regarding the governance and accountability of the board. There have been 7 occasions in the last 2 years that Board meetings have had insufficient attendees to create a quorum.

Over recent months there has been a noticeable emphasis on BID Levy collection due to a drop in paid levies, therefore directly impacting on the Strabane BID Company's ability to deliver against the 4 key themes. Whilst a crucial element of the BID, it has become the priority area in recent meetings, which have resulted in reduced focus on delivery across the four themes of the Business Plan.

The following chart presents the allocated annual budget, BID Levy income, and overall spend.

Combined Revenue/Spend over the First Two Years



The chart highlights that at the outset of the BID £193,500 was estimated to be available to the Strabane BID Company for the delivery of the business plan. Revisions to estimates, followed by a subsequent drop in levy collected, have resulted in less funds now being available to deliver against the original goals. It is also significant that there has been an underspend of the funds available.

It is important to note that there has been a downward trend between years 1 and 2, dropping from 84% of levy collected to 72% in year 2.

A lack of both quantitative and qualitative feedback on the progress of the Strabane BID Company has led to an overall reduction in confidence regarding the delivery of the Business Plan. The lack of detailed feedback and SMART KPI's in the original business plan, has been an impediment to successful delivery of the Business Plan.

The BID business community are asking for greater transparency and accountability. They are also keen to see improved monitoring and evaluation in order to better understand the impact of the BID and the use of the levies paid.

Conclusions:

- From a review of Board minutes it is clear that there has been a strong core of members that have consistently attended Board meetings over the years.
- Board members are aware of skills gaps, sector and geographical representation across the Board members and are open to ensuring that these gaps are filled
- There have been 7 occasions in the last 2 years that Board meetings have had insufficient attendees to create a quorum.
- The strategic direction of the board has been impacted by the need to ensure a sustainable revenue stream

- A lack of both quantitative and qualitative feedback on the progress of the Strabane BID Company has led to an overall reduction in confidence regarding the delivery of the Business Plan.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Introduction

The Strabane BID Business Plan was developed, agreed and voted on by the business community within the BID area and established in October 2016. Since then, the Strabane BID has delivered significant elements of the themes laid out in the Business Plan. As part of our analysis at the mid-point of the implementation of the Business Plan, our findings have identified a number of areas of concern. These findings, as they pertain to the Business Plan, provide the basis for the recommendations noted below.

The recommendations have also been informed by:

- UK Department for Communities and Local Government document, “Business Improvement Districts: Guidance and Best Practice.” March 2015.
- Statutory Rules of Northern Ireland, “The Business Improvement Districts (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014.”
- Business Improvement Districts Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.

The completion of this Mid Term Review comes against the backdrop of a number of developments since Council Officers met with a range of businesses following the Board’s decision to issue levy collection notices in April 2019. Following on from feedback arising from 7th May 2019 Board Meeting, the BID Board recognised the need to engage more, better and review the focus of the Business Plan at the half way stage. As a result these recommendations both identify new areas for consideration as well as encouraging implementation of activities that are already being planned. The recommendations are presented in three categories, aligned to those used in the findings:

- Delivery of the Business Plan.
- Communications and Engagement.
- Planning, Management and Evaluation.

It is hoped that this Mid Term Review will assist the BID Company to deliver against the revised priorities from August 2019 until November 2021.

4.2 Delivery of the Business Plan

Effective and efficient delivery of the Business Plan is central to the role of the BID Company. Highlighted below are recommendations relating to the delivery of the Business Plan.

4.2.1 Recommendation 1 – Re-profiling of budget allocation by theme

The 2016 Business Plan identified planned expenditure by theme as follows:

- Marketing and Events - £202,500 (45%)
- Access and Experience - £180,000 (40%)
- Reducing Costs - £45,000 (10%)
- Creative Spirit - £22,500 (5%)

At this stage in the 5 year Business Plan, it is widely felt that there has been an over-emphasis on Events in comparison to other themes. In order to provide for a greater breadth of provision for all levy payers and to increase the impact of the BID Company, it is our recommendation that BID expenditure is adjusted per theme as follows:

- Access and Improvements - 20%
- Business Support - 20%
- Arts, Culture and Events - 20% (No more than £5k expenditure on one single event) - Additional fund raising would be required to invest more.
- Marketing and Promotion - 40%

This will assist in prioritisation of activities and deliver a more balanced programme of interventions. The BID Company will need to consider if these changes need to be managed in line with alterations requirements in the BIDs Regulations. The surveys completed during June and July 2019 and the feedback from the workshop held on 2nd July provides a range of activity ideas under the various themes, these should be used as part of detailed plans for each theme.

This re-profiling should be used as a basis for an Revised Action Plan, to be complete by end of September 2019.

The actual spend by theme should be reported to the members on a quarterly basis both in the quarter, year to date and in relation to the overall business plan, as part of improving communication and transparency, and in clearly demonstrating how the levy is being spent.

4.2.2 Recommendation 2 – Establishment of relevant KPI's

The 2016 Business Plan contained a number of important and relevant objectives across all themes, however, no quantitative targets other than the levy revenue and the split by theme were presented. The Guidance and Best Practice advice highlights the need for “short/medium/long term objectives” as well as a delivery plan with Key Performance Indicators.

The BID Business Plan must have a short number of quantifiable outcomes that can be measured. A series of KPI's will need to be agreed for this purpose and must be reported on quarterly. Based on the revised spending profile as indicated in Recommendation 1, it is important that a set of objectives are created for each theme to include quantifiable measures, appropriate timescales and clear responsibility assigned.

For example, in the 2016 Business Plan, the Experience theme stated as an objective, “Reducing the number of empty shops.” Going forward this objective needs to translate into a KPI such that it determines the current level of empty shops, sets a target for the end of the current 5 year plan and breaks this down by year.

Communication of these KPI's and ongoing performance against each is a fundamental element of the communication requirement and is central assessing the performance of the Bid Company and the Town Centre BID Manager. KPI's should be agreed and published by end September 2019.

4.2.3 Recommendation 3 – Increasing levy payer engagement in Business Plan delivery

The member surveys held in late June and the public workshop held on 2nd July identified a range of excellent ideas from participants. It is apparent that levy payers can provide a much greater input into identifying activities that will meet the requirements of the Business Plan. With increased involvement in activity identification, will come a greater buy-in to the success of the BID. This input can be effectively harnessed through the Member Engagement Forum identified in Recommendation 6 below.

In addition, members have a much greater role to play in delivering individual activities, thereby allowing a greater proportion of the BID Board's time to be focussed on delivering the overall business plan. This is further developed in Recommendation 9.

4.3 Communications and Engagement

Communication and member engagement is at the heart of this review and the recommendations seek to provide an integrated membership involvement structure involving every corner of the Strabane BID geographic area, drawing in talent from across all business sectors, supported through a strengthened Board and additional management support.

Surveys conducted with 116 businesses and the member workshop held on 2nd July, have yielded significant feedback and generated much useful information, underscoring the value of regular and ongoing communication with all levy paying businesses.

The need for transparency and accountability is included in the Guidance and Best Practice advice which highlights the "use of social media, an up to date website, news releases, newsletters to levy payers, regular meetings and producing annual accounts" as being important.

4.3.1 Recommendation 4 – Establishment of a BID/Town Centre Management Office

It is clear from member feedback and observation that the establishment of a BID/Town Centre Management Office is essential. This is also highlighted in the Guidance and Best Practice advice which highlights a need to have a "suitable office space found." In order to provide the best mix of access, visibility, proximity to services and cost, it is recommended that this office be established in a town centre location and be fully operational by November 2019.

As part of this recommendation, the BID Company should, with immediate effect, put in place a weekly clinic where businesses can call in to discuss issues/voice their support for the BID. This should also take place in an appropriate space in the town centre prior to availability of a more permanent presence. The duration and frequency of the clinic should be scaled appropriate to demand until a permanent presence is in place.

4.3.2 Recommendation 5 – Recruitment of a Town Centre BID Manager

Feedback relating to recommendation 4 also indicated that there was an urgent need for a Town Centre BID Manager to be recruited and subsequently located in the BID office.

It is recommended that there is a public recruitment of a Town Centre BID Manager at Middle Management level, with responsibility to deliver the BID, based at a town centre location. The public recruitment campaign should commence in October following DCSDC

approval. Selection and interviews should take place in November to allow the new post-holder to commence in January 2020. This should be offered as a two year contract initially, to coincide with the end of the current business plan, with an option to extend dependent on the outcome of any subsequent ballot.

The post should be co-funded by Derry City and Strabane District and the Strabane BID., with the post-holder being accountable to the Strabane BID Company and its membership. The post-holder will be employed by Derry City and Strabane District Council. It is important that a comprehensive set of roles, responsibilities and competencies are drawn up prior to the commencement of the public recruitment campaign.

Key roles and responsibilities of the Town Centre BID Manager should include but not be limited to:

- Lead on the Development and Implementation of the Strabane BID Business Plan.
- Lead on the Development and Implementation of a comprehensive BID Membership/Levy Payer Communications and Engagement Strategy.
- Liaise on a day-to-day basis with Strabane BID Board Members, Levy Payers and Wider Strabane Town Businesses and stakeholders.
- Lead the effective development and delivery of a portfolio of economic activity for the Strabane BID area and wider Strabane Town including the sourcing and management of European Union, Central Government and private funding programmes as appropriate.
- Develop and maintain collaborative partnerships and networks between the Strabane BID Company, Council, Government Departments, Statutory Agencies and external stakeholders who can contribute to the development and growth of the Strabane BID area and Strabane Town.
- Manage and initiate projects to enhance the development of the Strabane BID area and Strabane Town, ensuring comprehensive evaluations are completed and reported on to measure outcomes.
- Manage and initiate ongoing and regular proactive communication and liaison with all town centre stakeholders on a variety of issues, such as public realm works and other activities, to minimise disruption to commerce and maximise opportunities, and where issues arise seek to resolve through timely corrective action.
- Develop and manage a comprehensive database of town centre businesses, within the Strabane BID area.
- Carry out regular town centre health checks to include vacancy rates, property uses/changes, footfall etc and collate data to monitor key performance indicators and bench mark against other towns.
- Develop and manage an integrated database of all town centre activity, including all Council and external partner activity.
- Research, plan and deliver key town centre programmes and projects, in conjunction with local, regional and national stakeholders, to achieve Council's goals within the Corporate and Community Plans.
- Responsible for the resolution of problems that arise in relation to town centre activity in a timely manner and to refer to the Head of Service or Director as appropriate.
- Develop the Strabane BID Company and Council's role as a lead facilitator in coordinating local responses to town centre issues and policy at local and regional level.

- Review and act upon new legislation and policy documents affecting town centre development, liaising with legal advisors and advising the Directors of the Strabane BID Company and Council on such matters as required.
- Ensure efficient and effective financial management by contributing to the development of and working within the agreed Strabane BID Company budgets and finances to deliver the Strabane BID priorities and by ensuring that these budgets are effectively managed, implemented and adhered to.
- Ensure the financial viability of the Strabane BID Company by ensuring that the Company operates as efficiently and effectively as possible, utilising benchmarking and other value for money techniques and complying with all financial targets, the Strabane BID Company's standing financial instructions, standing orders, codes of conduct and accountability.
- Approve purchase payments and authorise lodgements.
- Provide input to audit reports and ensure implementation of recommendations of these reports, ombudsman cases on a timely basis.
- Seek innovative and creative solutions to help bring about change and service improvements.
- Pursue as appropriate, additional sources of funding or other resources, which could be used to enhance those available to the Strabane BID Company.

Key competencies should reflect the capabilities needed to successfully deliver a role at this level. These should include but not be limited to:

- Managing Performance - Sets clear, aligned, high standard performance goals & objectives for self, others and the organisation.
- Communicating with Impact - Presents a positive image by communicating effectively, being resilient and treating people fairly.
- Collaborating in a Political Environment - Develops and manages effective networks by establishing common ground.
- Meeting Customer Needs - Establishes the needs of customers and strives to ensure that these are met.
- Problem Solving and Decision Making - Gathers information from a range of sources. Analyses information to identify problems and issues. Makes effective decisions and recommendations based on resolution agreement within an environment of trust, mutual respect and cooperation.
- Achieving Results - Takes personal responsibility for making things happen. Shows motivation and perseverance in overcoming obstacles and achieving results.

4.3.3 Recommendation 6 - Formal Member Engagement activity

Overall engagement and communication among levy payers has been identified as a major issue. To this end, it is a recommendation that a number of activities take place with the goal of improving communication, engagement and transparency.

- A quarterly Member Engagement Forum, to be held in the BID area. This will be open to all members and those from outside the BID area to engage and feedback to the Town Centre BID Manager.

- A bi-monthly E-zine distributed to all members by post, email, and on the BID website.
- An AGM to be held each December, following the conclusion of the BID year. The first AGM is to be held in December 2019.
- Provision of a text alert service to send real time updates and reminders to all members. To be introduced by October 2019.

The objectives of these communications must be to; keep awareness and commitment high; deliver accurate, clear and consistent messages; manage expectations. As part of this process four core elements will require close attention; message clarity, audience targeting, feedback on effectiveness and an effective delivery mechanism. Responsibility for effective communication is part of the role of the Town Centre BID Manager.

4.3.4 Recommendation 7 – Online Marketing and Social Media Engagement Plan

The original “BID In Strabane” website was constructed primarily for the purposes of the ballot and for general information. It is recommended that the work on the new website is expedited in order to be completed no later than August 2019. This website must have the capability to include a members only log-in area, shopping and tourist information, maps, sign-up capabilities, business promotions, capacity for gift card purchasing, etc. The existing “In Strabane Gift Card” website remains active and should be linked to the “BID In Strabane” website and vice versa.

Whilst Social Media, primarily Instagram and Facebook have been extensively used, it is essential that a social media plan is created and executed as part of this recommendation. Moving forward the design of a digital media plan to determine the impact of activity around – frequency, reach, followers etc will help inform future decisions around budget towards this activity.

Also as part of this recommendation, it is essential that the effectiveness of both the website and social media are monitored and suitable KPIs are established as appropriate in terms of clicks, likes, shares, etc. This plan should be ready for implementation by September 2019.

4.4 Planning, management and evaluation

Effective management of the Business Plan requires focus in 3 key areas:

- Governance, accountability and target-setting.
- Operational planning, implementation and evaluation.
- Financial Management.

The recommendations highlighted below seek to address each of these areas.

4.4.1 Recommendation 8 – Recruitment of Additional Directors to the BID Company

The existing board have had a strong core of members who have contributed significantly to the work that has taken place thus far. Of those who contributed significantly, the background and expertise has skewed towards hospitality. In addition the number and expertise of the Board needs to be extended in order to plan, manage and deliver the BID Business Plan.

A number of changes are included below as part of this recommendation.

A public recruitment for BID Board of Directors takes place offering up to 5 additional directors with the following experience. This public recruitment process should commence in August and appointments made by September 2019.

- 1 Director with Senior Leadership of a large business.
- 1 Director with Arts and Culture expertise.
- 1 Director with a Legal expertise.
- 1 Director with a Marketing expertise.
- 1 Director with a Finance expertise.

It should not be a requirement to be based within the BID area to join the board. Board recruitment will be based on merit, experience and a willingness to deliver on behalf of the BID.

Board responsibilities:

- Board membership includes a requirement to become a registered director.
- Board members will be required to commit to at least 2 working days per month equivalent, dedicated to delivering on the BID.
- Board members will be required to chair and deliver on a range of Delivery Sub-Groups, see recommendation 9 below. (1 day per month equivalent).
- Board members will agree priorities, objectives and KPI's for the remainder of the Business Plan term.
- The position of Chair of the Board should be rotated at a frequency to be agreed by the board members.
- The need for good governance arrangements is also highlighted in the Guidance and Best Practice advice.

4.4.2 Recommendation 9 – Creation of Board Sub-Groups

In order to more effectively deliver against the Business Plan's objectives, it is recommended that the BID Company establishes the following sub-groups. It is critical that membership is not limited to Board's members and the wider BID Business Membership, but also interested parties outside the BID area. Each group needs to be appropriately set up with terms of reference, appointed chair and secretary, meet regularly and provide minutes and actions to the BID Board. In addition each sub-group will be responsible for delivering against their theme within the Business Plan and in meeting KPI's assigned to the sub-group. Each group should be chaired by a Board member.

Membership Engagement Group - This group will encompass representation from four geographic zones within the BID area. A representative will be nominated from each area as

a contact point, advocate and representative of the BID. The MEG will provide a vital feedback loop in relation to BID plans and member issues.

Arts, Culture and Events Group - This group will recruit participants to develop and deliver a range of arts, culture and events throughout the year.

Marketing and Promotion Group - This group will recruit participants to assist in the development of ongoing marketing and promotion of the BID area.

Finance and Fundraising Group - This group will have an oversight responsibility in relation to the financial management of the BID. It will also be tasked with maximising revenue from outside the BID area and the traditional levy payer income, including sponsorship.

This process should commence in September 2019 and be completed by December 2019.

4.4.3 Recommendation 10 – Changes to Financial Management

The BID collection rate in year 1 and 2 was 84% and 72% respectively. This remains above the NI average. The success of the BID and the delivery against each of the themes is determined on its ability to generate revenues.

In relation to financial management, the following activities are part of this recommendation:

- A minimum target for levy collection to be determined for years 3, 4 and 5. This needs to be accompanied by a plan to ensure this target is met. This should be agreed and communicated by September 2019.
- New members from outside the BID area can become members if they are willing to pay the levy. Businesses from a range of sectors including manufacturing, IT Solutions, Retail and Tourism would be very suitable.
- A campaign to clearly articulate the financial benefits of membership is required, using examples from those businesses who have recouped their levy. This should also project potential future financial benefits based on new activities.
- Council has a legal obligation under the BIDS Regulations (NI) 2014 Act to collect the Levy. The new Board needs to decide if they want Council to appoint another body to administer, collect and recover the BID Levy.
- Communication of financial information needs to be included as part of the ongoing changes in overall communication as part of Recommendation 6.

4.4.4 Recommendation 11 – Improvement in evaluation and feedback

Evaluation and feedback relate to several of the earlier recommendations included in this report. Focus areas in this regard should be;

- Satisfaction/Customer Feedback tool to be available on the BID website as a real-time scorecard.
- KPI monitoring and reporting in order to assess Board and Town Centre BID Manager performance.
- Evaluation of all events in order to understand customer satisfaction, performance against objectives, impact, benefits, lessons learned and areas for improvement.

- Creation of Infographics that are easy to understand and give high quality updates on performance, status and plans for the benefit of all stakeholders.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This report has sought to provide a comprehensive set of findings and recommendations based on research, analysis, consultations and workshops with a range of provision, individuals and groups. Although efficiency and effectiveness of the BID Company's delivery of the original BID Business Plan is central to this report, ultimately the delivery of benefits to the Strabane BID and BID members is the measure of success.

As part of this review it is clear that there have been many successes in the delivery of the BID to date. Focussing particularly on benefits arising for members of the BID, these include but are not limited to.

- Free Participation and resultant commercial benefits of the In-Strabane Gift Card and the In-Strabane Gift Card Promotion Campaign
- Commercial and image benefits of successful annual events such including Strajamba, St Patrick's Day and Christmas Fayre
- Marketing benefits arising from extensive Christmas marketing campaigns, investor video, social media activity and a visitor map
- Benefits arising from deep clean of the public realm, introduction of CCTV, security gates and improved street dressing

Furthermore, if the recommendations of this report are implemented, further benefits are achievable including.

- Access to improved rates in merchant services, waste management and broadband provision as service provider agreements are implemented
- Increased marketing opportunities as a result of a more comprehensive online marketing effort through bespoke Social Media Campaigns
- Increased volume and range of free Business Mentoring in Finance, Marketing, Legal and Sales
- Increased access to improved Town Centre Management services
- Increased Networking and Business to Business Opportunities
- Greater input via participation in Membership of the BID Member Engagement Forums and Sub-Groups

In closing, it is also vitally important that BID members pay their Levy. The BID Company relies on the collection of this revenue to be able to deliver for Strabane Town. Without achieving the anticipated levels of levy collections, these recommendations cannot be fully implemented and the full range of benefits cannot accrue to members.

The Strabane BID has had a challenging 2.5 years since its inception in 2016. Despite experiencing a number of issues, the BID remains a significant opportunity to improve the town and trading environment and thereby shape the future of Strabane. With appropriate reflection on the findings and adoption of the recommendations contained in this report, the realisation of the significant benefits for all stakeholders remains an achievable goal.