
To: **Economy and Regeneration Policy Board**

On: **23 May 2023**

Report by: **Chief Executive**

Heading: **Town Centre Vacancy Taskforce - update**

1. Summary

- 1.1 The report outlines current officer thinking on this initiative and recommends next steps for Board approval

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Board:

- i. Approve the Taskforce scope and remit as outlined in the report and agree the next steps as set out in section 8;
 - ii. Notes that the recommendations of the Taskforce will report back to a future Council Board;
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3. Background

- 3.1 In January 2023 the Economy and Regeneration Board was presented with an amendment seeking that:

“a **Town Centre Vacancy Taskforce**, consisting of relevant officers, be formed with a specific remit to examine the barriers to occupancy and letting, bringing forward potential policy changes that assist in removing identified barriers, promoting vacancies which were market ready and identifying actions for those which were not.”

- 3.2 This amendment was agreed by the Board and the Head of Economy & Development was asked to consider the amendment and report back to the Board in due course.

3.3 When it comes to defining “town centres”, Renfrewshire’s adopted Local Development Plan (2021) has the following planning policy allocations:

- *Strategic Centres* – Paisley and Braehead;
- *Core Town Centres* – Linwood; Renfrew; Johnstone; Erskine

4. Objectives of Town Centre Vacancy Taskforce

4.1 The following objectives have been drawn up by officers in response to the Board’s decision to create a Taskforce:

- Agree the principal challenges facing Renfrewshire town centres (listed above) in 2023, noting that this will almost certainly differ between centres;
- Identify the barriers to occupancy / letting of currently vacant ground floor commercial units;
- Produce a strategy for the promotion of occupiable vacant units for each centre, noting that interventions may vary between the six centres;
- Produce an action plan for those vacancies which are not market ready [action plans may need to vary by centre]
- Establish “task and finish” bespoke groups for each of six centres, reporting to a core Steering Group of senior officers;

5. Taskforce Steering Group and Stakeholder participation

5.1 The intention would be to keep the Steering Group of the relevant officers for the Taskforce to a small number to ensure it can maximise ability to liaise and co-ordinate outputs.

5.2 The proposed Steering Group membership is outlined below, and all these officers have been made aware of this request and indicated their support for the initiative. Other officers can be asked to contribute as and when required as the initiative develops.

- *Head of Economy and Development (lead officer)*
- *Head of Finance;*
- *Streetscene Manager*
- *Regeneration and Place Manager;*
- *Principal Estates Surveyor;*
- *Housing Regeneration and Development Manager;*

5.3 The list of stakeholders which the Steering Group will engage with to meet the objectives set out above include:

- Paisley First
- Johnstone Business Consortium
- a selection of agents currently marketing vacant premises in each centre (for Braehead and Erskine, which are principally in single ownership, this would be one agent);
- a selection of potential occupiers (including some engaged in Start-Up Street initiatives in Renfrewshire);
- a sample of owners of property not yet in occupiable condition in terms of barriers to their investment;

6. Potential incentivisation

- 6.1 Members may recall that Board agreed a report in March 2023 seeking to set aside £250,000 from the Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery Fund to invest in vacant town centre property across Renfrewshire.
- 6.2 Our intention would be for the Taskforce to come forward with recommendations as to how this funding should be directed to assist in meeting the objectives outlined. This would be the subject of a future report to Board for their approval.

7. Scale of vacant properties by Renfrewshire centre

- 7.1 At March 2023 it is estimated that there are approximately 40 ground floor commercial units across Renfrewshire's town centres which are vacant and immediately available to occupy. A summary of these by centre is set out in Table 1 (below). Members will appreciate these numbers are reflective of the date of last survey, as units may have been occupied or become vacant since this data was gathered.
- 7.2 It is estimated that there will be a similar number (or more) which are vacant but not in a condition to be occupied. This latter statistic will need to be confirmed during the work of the Taskforce.
- 7.3 This assessment only includes those premises in public street facing premises within designated town centres. It does not include those within purpose-built shopping centres such as Piazza Centre, Paisley Centre or Braehead. The Taskforce in due course will have to reach a view on whether to recommend that any incentivisation proposals apply to such centres. It also does not include any properties owned by the Council as the Council is already aware of all the issues regarding those. Most Council owned ground floor commercial properties are located in Johnstone town centre.

Centre	Number of vacant and immediately available to occupy ground floor premises
JOHNSTONE	11 properties
PAISLEY	23 properties
RENFREW	6 properties
ERSKINE	No applicable properties in town centre as all occupiable properties currently operating as such
LINWOOD	No applicable properties in town centre as all occupiable properties currently operating as such

8. Next steps

- 8.1 An initial meeting of the Taskforce Steering Group has taken place and stakeholder consultation is expected to commence shortly.
- 8.2 A report will be brought back to the August 2023 meeting of the Board to confirm the proposed strategy and recommendations for how the incentivisation process could operate. At the same time, we will be able to update on the outcome of the stakeholder consultation and the latest position regarding the vacancies for each centre.
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – Any financial implications would be within existing approved budgets.
 2. **HR and Organisational Development** – None.
 3. **Community Planning**
 - Our Renfrewshire is thriving – delivering more vibrant town centres will increase economic activity reduce vacancy. This will improve perceptions and increase footfall in centres.
 - Reshaping our place, our economy, and our future – by facilitating investment in our town centres we will help create new businesses with employment opportunities for our residents and potential supply chain connections for our existing businesses;
 4. **Legal** – None.
 5. **Property/Assets** – Any Council owned vacant commercial properties that are immediately available for occupation are marketed by the Council on an ongoing basis. It is not expected that these will be included in any incentivization initiative.
 6. **Information Technology** - None.
 7. **Equality & Human Rights**

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
 8. **Health & Safety** – None.
 9. **Procurement** – None.
 10. **Risk** – None.
 11. **Privacy Impact** – None.
 12. **COSLA Policy Position** – None.
 13. **Climate Risk** – None.
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List of Background Papers

- (a) Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery Funding; Economy & Regeneration Board; 14 March 2023
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