



**“Welcoming New Business
to
Preston City Centre”**



Report by the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

April 2018 – November 2018

Contents	Page
Chair's Foreword and Acknowledgements	2
Recommendations	3 - 4
Background / Aims of the study	5
Evidence	5 - 10
Findings and Conclusions	10 - 11
Corporate Management Team Commentary and Legal, Financial and Equalities Implications	11 - 12

Appendices / Links to Background Documents

Appendix A – Scoping Document 13 - 14

[Appendix B - Background Information regarding NNDR \(Business Rates\)](#)

[Appendix C - Business Rates Relief Application Form](#)

Minutes of Meetings:

[12 April 2018](#)

[4 July 2018](#)

[20 November 2018](#)

Chair's Foreword and Acknowledgements

This Task and Finish Group was set up to examine the ways in which new business was being welcomed to the City Centre by Preston City Council. We took evidence from officers of the Council and representatives of the business community. We met with the Chamber of Commerce and BID and new city centre businesses.

In general the Council was seen as supportive and helpful but a number of suggestions were made which it was felt would enhance the welcome to new city centre businesses. These are included in our recommendations.

I would like to thank all council officers and members who assisted in the preparation of this report and those businesses and business organisations who submitted evidence - particularly those who agreed to meet the committee.

Councillor David Borrow

The members who contributed to this study were:

Councillor Borrow (Chair)

Councillor Atkins (Vice Chair)

Councillor Bax

Councillor Crompton

Councillor Greenhalgh

Councillor Potter

Councillor Seddon

Councillor Wallace

Councillor Woollam

Recommendations to Cabinet

	Recommendation	Date To Be Implemented	Officer & Organisation responsible
1.	That the Council produce a Welcome Pack with improved useful information for new and potential businesses (e.g. trade waste collection services; policing and security in the city centre; enforcement regarding street furniture/A Boards; and contact for Preston BID). This to be made available electronically on the PCC website and a 'business card' produced with the website link, which can also be distributed with the notice regarding Business Rates	May 2019	Shirah Bamber Head of Communications
2.	To appoint a 'Member Champion' for new businesses in the City Centre, to act as a point of contact/enquiry, attend networking/business events and other associated activities which would facilitate the promotion of new businesses in the city centre.	To be appointed at Council – date to be agreed	Shirah Bamber Head of Communications (to liaise with CMT / Leader)
3.	That Cabinet liaise with Preston BID with regard to scope for a designated contact point for new businesses	CMT to suggest timeframe	Cabinet/ CMT
4.	That officers be requested to look at rescheduling waste collection times to an earlier time slot in the City Centre so as to be more business friendly	May 2019	Mr Duncan Coward, Head of Waste Management.
5.	To consider how Friargate can be better included within the promotion of the city centre.	Ongoing	Shirah Bamber Head of Communications

6.	The Task and Finish Group recognises UCLAN's growing role in the City Centre particularly in relation to Friargate. It recommends that Cabinet liaise with stakeholders such as UCLAN and Preston BID to invest in the Friargate/ Corporation Street corridor, with a view to progressing a Masterplan for the area incorporating a street character for shop frontages	Ongoing	Cabinet / CMT
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1. Background / Aims of this study

As a Council, we recognised that our business community is central to what makes a strong local economy, with a thriving City Centre and high streets. The economic situation facing Preston is not uncommon with many small city centre high streets throughout the country facing decline, with retailers having to compete with the growth of internet shopping.

We are committed to supporting business growth and making our city a great place to do business and to this end we endeavour to explore how we may provide a better service to new city centre ratepayers and what information / advice they would need to know when setting up a business in Preston City Centre.

To achieve this a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group was formed to hear views from newly established businesses and other key witnesses in order to improve the Council's information e.g. a mechanism for identifying premises available, signposting, FAQ's.

1.2 Scope of the Study

This study was approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Plan 2017/18.

A draft scoping document was approved at the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group on 12 April 2018 (see Appendix A).

It was proposed that focus for the study was to look at what the Council can do to remove any barriers to setting up a new business in the City.

The Task and Finish Group formulated a list of key people / witnesses to hear from, including PCC officers, Preston BID, UCLAN and a variety of new businesses within the City Centre area. It decided to focus specifically on businesses within the city centre to give the study a sharp focus and realistic time frame.

2. Meeting – 12 April 2018

Shirah Bamber, Communications and Marketing Manager introduced the work plan study topic. In order to obtain views of newly established businesses, the Group decided to set up sub groups to interview the following:

- 1) Small retailers
- 2) Cafes/Restaurants
- 3) Offices

A number of potential city centre businesses were added to the scoping document.

It was agreed that informal sub group interviews be arranged in the new municipal year (from May 2018).

3. Sub Group Interviews – May – June 2018

3.1 Town House Coffee and Brew Bar, 62 Friargate - 29.5.18

Councillors Borrow, Atkins, Greenhalgh, Potter, Seddon and Woollam interviewed Bernice Newton and Loui Snape.

The Town House opened in June 2016 as a café focussing on health foods.

It was reported that they found the PCC website and information provided by Preston BID very useful.

The main areas of concern included the congregation of drug users close to the premises and the nearby telephone box and the amount of litter dropped on the area.

It was recognised that the Council responded well to fly tipping.

They also felt that the area would benefit from some publicity similar to the promotion of the city centre e.g. a Farmers Market. It may be the right time to use the Local Plan process and the expansion of UCLAN to focus on this part of the city.

3.2 Roast, Orchard Street – 21.6.18

Councillors Borrow, Seddon and Wallace interviewed Dean Yates.

Mr Yates explained that the company behind Roast has a successful butchery and cooked meat business in Bootle and opened the Preston business on 9 February 2018, employing 14 staff.

It was reported that PCC Environmental Health was very helpful and there was understanding over parking issues while the store was being fitted out. Councillors were told “Preston offers a lot to new business”.

Issues raised were:

- The preferred frontage sign could not be used due to being in a Conservation Area, prompting security concerns
- The shop generated large amounts of clean cardboard waste which the Council did not provide a suitable recycling scheme

Overall Mr Yates felt that Preston was a good place to trade and the business was meeting its anticipated targets.

4. Meeting – 4 July 2018

The Task and Finish Group met formally on 4 July 2018 to interview PCC Officers listed in the scoping document.

4.1 Interview with Julie Smethurst, Revenues Manager (Shared Service)

Ms Smethurst circulated background information with regard to business rates or National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) (see Appendix B). She informed the Group that a revaluation in April 2017 had reduced the rateable value of Preston by £16.5 million (9.69%). The briefing note outlined the various categories of business rate relief.

4.1.1 Ms Smethurst was asked about examples of best practice and Burnley BC was cited as a local authority which had previously put together a scheme to attract new businesses.

4.1.2 The Chair indicated that business rates were often seen as a business cost and that a lot of high street businesses were tied into an ‘increase only’ rent review as part of their lease contract. He queried whether reducing business rates would really benefit businesses as it may encourage landlords to simply increase the rent. Ms Smethurst added that the discretionary rate relief and exemptions available were now extremely complex. For example, many small businesses in Preston are able to claim 100% rate relief (approximately 2,000 of 5,000), however it is only applicable to a business occupying one premises. Business rates are regulated nationally and all councils have discretionary powers; each application is judged on its merits.

4.1.3 Issues raised:-

Unoccupied premises – the Council is not allowed to increase the levy above 100%

Business rates web pages – information is available online but it could also be provided in a ‘welcome package’ for new businesses. (Ms Smethurst agreed to provide a copy of the application form for Small Business Rate Relief sent to potential new qualifiers with their initial bill).

Marketing of the City – i.e. retail / leisure. Members agreed that Preston needed to promote a diverse offer and not concentrate on one sector.

4.1.4 The Chair stressed that anything the Council does to encourage new businesses to set up in the city centre must be cost neutral.

4.2 Interview with Mark Taylor, Head of Parks, Street Scene and Transport Manager

- 4.2.1 Mr Taylor was questioned on several aspects of his service which may assist new city centre businesses.
- 4.2.2 Members stressed the importance of having an attractive street scene particularly on busy high streets such as Fishergate and Friargate. Examples of issues raised included obstructions such as Friargate bollards and street cleanliness. Mr Taylor explained that Friargate had been refurbished years ago as part of an LCC scheme and that currently the Winckley Square Community Interest Company (CIC) were working with LCC to see what can be done in the Winckley Square area. He indicated that the Council's partners and stakeholders do all meet to discuss City Centre schemes strategically. The proposed UCLAN development is now key as this will affect both Friargate and Corporation Street 'twin arms'. Shirah Bamber, Communications Manager indicated that were plans for a consultation on forthcoming schemes in the city centre. Reference was made to a strategic '20 year plan' discussed at the Central Lancashire Strategic Planning Joint Advisory Committee but which was still in the draft stage.
- 4.2.3 Mr Taylor referred to a special 'Pavement Cleaning Process' to tackle problems such as chewing gum, vomit, grease etc. The scheme is funded by Preston BID who identify areas that require cleaning. Due to the material used e.g. light granite, stains were very visible. The pavement outside KFC was raised by members as a problem area. Mr Taylor said that maintenance would be a condition of the Pavement Café Licence and he would raise the issue with Russell Rees (Engineering) and arrange for an update to be provided to the Group.
- 4.2.4 A question was asked about having a specified number of litter bins in close proximity to takeaways. Mr Taylor was unsure about whether this could be implemented as they were complex issues such as potentially attracting vermin and being an obstruction for disabled people. Additionally as part of the Fishergate Scheme LCC reduced the number of litter bins to improve streetscape layout. Currently they do not wish us to place any more street furniture on Fishergate and Church Street.
- 4.2.5 A key issue identified was that new businesses only come to the attention of waste services if they contact us. The Task and Finish Group suggested that it would be useful to have a single point of contact at the Council for new businesses, so they can access all the information and services they require. One idea was that useful additional information can be included with the letter regarding business rates and perhaps improving access to information

already on the Council's website by having a specific "Help for New Businesses" link. Helpful information may include:

- Business rates
- Trade waste collection services
- Policing / security in the city centre

4.2.6. Finally, an enquiry was made about requests for 'pop up' cafés or food selling on parks, arising from the recent café opening at Moor Park. Mr Taylor indicated that not many requests were made and they tended to be small scale e.g. ice cream vans and were only considered for suitable sites.

4.2.7 Arising from discussions regarding street scene and obstructions, it was suggested that the relevant LCC contact concerning 'A' Board enforcement be included in the information supplied for new businesses.

5. **Sub Group Interview with Preston BID – 21.8.18**

Councillors Borrow, Atkins, Crompton, Greenhalgh and Seddon met with Babs Murphy and Mark Whittle from Preston BID.

5.1 Following extensive discussion, a number of suggestions to improve the experience for new businesses emerged. These included:

- 1) A new business welcome pack
- 2) A possible Member Champion for new businesses in the City Centre
- 3) Identifying a named officer as a contact point for new businesses. Perhaps if a few officers took on this role and shared the new businesses between them, resources may be available.
- 4) Bins in the main retail area of the city centre – could these be emptied early in the morning
- 5) Explore working with UCLAN and Lancashire County Council to encourage start-up in the City Centre.

6. **Written evidence from UCLAN – October 2018**

Professor Sue Smith, Professor in Innovation and Enterprise, UCLAN provided the following written evidence:

The University makes a positive contribution to the overall economic and social wellbeing in Preston and offers business a range of specific benefits such as:-

- Access to talent – we can help find the best graduates, Degree Apprenticeships and placement students. Our placement schemes require local partners to work with and projects for students to work on. The business will have the benefit of exciting new talent at very low cost, and graduates will have the businesses in mind when they start looking for their first job.
- Professional development and staff training to help give their existing team enhanced skills.
- Access to business support projects and networks (e.g. SME Centre)
- Access to researchers and facilities - Working with university researchers means they will have the latest studies and innovations at their fingertips, ahead of the competition.
- Access to Knowledge Transfer Partnerships This government-funded scheme places a trained academic inside the business to help with a specific project lasting between 6 and 36 months
- Access to equipment (e.g. the £32m Engineering Innovation Centre opening in early 2019).
- Access to the student and staff market (i.e. spend)

Some cases studies of where PCC and UCLan are working together to support new businesses are the Preston Model and on the development of new supply chain development projects such as the Preston Flying High City Challenge.

<https://www.uclan.ac.uk/news/preston-flying-high.php>

Professor Smith also referred to the UCLAN website (e.g. business pages).

https://www.uclan.ac.uk/business_at_uclan/index.php

8. Findings and Conclusions

8.1 Meeting - 20 November 2018

The Task and Finish Group met to consider its findings throughout the course of the study. The key findings and suggestions that may form recommendations can be summarised as follows:

1. The common theme from the interviews we held with small businesses and Preston BID was that Preston City Council did a good job, but access to information for new businesses could be improved. A “Welcome Pack” or information sent out via the Business Rates bill mailing were ideas put forward.

2. Other ideas raised focused on having a designated officer for new businesses to contact and a Member Champion.
3. Waste collection was another area of concern – business waste and bin collection times in the City Centre. Perhaps a more ‘business friendly’ time could be agreed.
4. Including Friargate in promotion of the City Centre events was seen as a positive for new businesses
5. The Task and Finish Group recognised UCLAN’s growing role in the City Centre particularly in relation to Friargate. The Group felt that the Cabinet should liaise with stakeholders such as UCLAN and Preston BID to invest in the Friargate/ Corporation Street corridor, with a view to progressing a Masterplan for the area incorporating a street character for shop frontages.

8.2 The Task and Finish Group were keen for any recommendations arising from the study to be cost neutral and therefore it was agreed that information should be available electronically via the PCC website.

9. Corporate Management Team Commentary

CMT welcome the Work Plan Study and have the following comments to make.

Recommendation 1 – The welcome pack should be a digital online resource as an effective means of ensuring online access to this material.

Recommendation 2 & 3 – CMT would like to point out that the Leader of the Council currently has a key role in championing business is the Council’s representative on the Preston BID Board. The Deputy Leader also has a key role as the Council’s lead in the emerging Preston Partnership and for clarity and consistency it is recommended that both the Leader and Deputy Leader include new business liaison within their existing roles.

Recommendation 6 – The Council is already undertaking extensive partnership work with UCLAN, the County Council and others, in respect of the Friargate and Corporate Street gateway routes between the city centre and the UCLAN campus, and in effect master planning work is under way. A city centre shop frontage design guide is already in place.

9.1 Legal, Financial and Equalities Implications

Legal Implications

It is noted that one of the recommendations to Cabinet is the enforcement regarding street furniture/ A Boards.

This is a matter for Lancashire County Council as it is the highway authority. Under Section 149 of the Highways Act 1980, a highway authority has the power to immediately remove from the highway pavement anything which it reasonably considers constitutes a danger to highway users and ought to be removed without delay. It can also recover the costs of doing so. Under Section 137 of the same Act, a highway authority can prosecute any person who obstructs the free passage of the highway pavement.

Section 28 of the Town and Police Clauses Act 1847 provides that it is an offence to place goods for sale on a footway.

Financial Implications

At this point there are no financial implications. However there may be implications from the outcome of the recommendations, which would require further investigations.

Equalities Implications

With regard to Recommendation 1 concerning a Welcome Pack, an “Easy Read” version should be produced to ensure accessibility. Easy to read information for individuals and communities including those whose first language is not English.

SCRUTINY WORK PLAN STUDY TOPIC SCOPING DOCUMENT

“Welcoming New Business to Preston City Centre”

Key background information

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We are committed to supporting business growth and making our city a great place to do business and to this end we endeavour to explore how we may provide a better service to new city centre ratepayers and what information / advice they would need to know when setting up a business in Preston City Centre.

To achieve this we want to hear views from newly established businesses to improve the Council’s information e.g. mechanism for identifying premises available, signposting, FAQ’s.

Key people to hear from

Shirah Bamber – Communications & Marketing Manager

Julie Smethurst – Revenues Manager

Mark Taylor – Deputy Head of Parks, Streetscene & Transport Manager

BID Board Members – Council Leader and Manager of St George’s Shopping Centre / Mark Whittle – Preston BID

UCLAN

External Visit

New businesses in the City Centre area

Proposed 3 sub groups with examples of venues –

1) Small retailers

- Victoria’s Vault (Independent boutique, Guildhall St)
- Roast (less than 3 months, food to go)

2) Cafes / Restaurants

- Health Shack (about a year old, Lancaster Road)

- Town house coffee and brew bar (open less than 2 years, on Friargate)

3) Offices

- Harrison Drury Solicitors (HQ on Winckley Square, 5 years or less)
- Wash Design (relocated to Winckley Square in 2017 from shared offices near the prison)

Lead Officer

Shirah Bamber – Communications & Marketing Manager

Panel size

9 (5,3,1)

Time estimate

3 months

Resources

Officer time

Target Audience

Members and Officers

Management Team comment

Corporate Management Team support this work