STOCKPORT PORTAS PILOT UPDATE

Report of the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration

1 MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

1.1 To provide an update on the Stockport Portas Pilot initiative.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 In March 2012 Stockport Council submitted a bid on behalf of the Stockport Town Centre Business & Retail Forum for the town centre to become a Portas Pilot and in May 2012 Stockport was one of 12 towns in the UK selected to participate.

2.2 In June/July 2012 following a vote and selection process a Stockport Town Team was established to lead on the initiative. The Town Team consisted of town centre business representatives covering a wide range of sectors and geographic areas of the centre. During its first year the Town Team established a governance structure and approved a number of projects including funding towards a digital projector for the Plaza. It was also agreed that the new Town Team would replace the existing Town Centre Business & Retail Forum.

2.3 On 1st October 2012 the Council’s Executive approved the transfer of responsibility for £300,000 (£100,000 Portas Pilot funding, £100,000 Council capital match funding and £100,000 High Street Innovation Funding) to the Town Team. This approval was subject to meeting the Council’s responsibilities as ‘Accountable Body’ and adhering to the Council’s policies and procedures for procurement and monitoring of spend and performance.

2.4 In April 2013, following a further vote, the Town Team stepped down and a new group, known as the Portas Pilot Project Delivery Group, was established primarily focusing on the Market Place & Underbanks area, with a Wider Town Team Forum to be reconstituted as a consultative body. The Town Centre Business & Retail Forum was re-established to serve the whole town centre.

2.5 The Portas Pilot Project Delivery Group became responsible for:

- assessing project applications and deciding which should receive funding support;
- monitoring projects, ensuring that each project was delivered in accordance with the Portas Pilot bid, and met agreed objectives and targets.

The Group also became accountable for:

- Having a formal structure in place which was open and transparent regarding its membership, its activities and the decisions taken.
- Robust monitoring systems that recorded members’ attendance and Group decisions; including regular formal meetings accurately recorded.
- Keeping records that are available and accessible to public viewing.
• Systems in place that ensure value for money

2.6 Under the terms of the 2013 agreement the Council agreed to take a ‘light touch’ supporting role with the Group. This meant that Council officers did not attend the Group meetings except on an infrequent ad-hoc basis and only by request.

3 PORTAS PILOT PROJECTS & EXPENDITURE

3.1 A total number of 40 separate projects were funded through the Stockport Portas Pilot initiative between 2012 and 2017, (one remaining project – an ‘Old Town Website’- aims to be completed by the end of summer 2017). Some of these projects were agreed by the initial Portas Pilot Town Team, others by the Portas Pilot Project Delivery Group. Once the final remaining project has been delivered this year the total expenditure across all projects and all years will be £300k.

A list of the Portas Pilot projects together with expenditure can be found in Appendix A

4 IMPACT & OUTCOMES

4.1 Whilst the Stockport Portas Pilot initiative made some impact within the Market Place & Underbanks areas this must be considered within the broader context of a wider and more extensive range of the other interventions, measures and initiatives led and delivered by others, particularly those of the Council, including:

• The £7m Market Place & Underbanks Regeneration & Investment Programme
• MMU Marketplace Studios business incubation (at 18-19 Market Place) for art and design graduates incorporating a workshop & gallery space.
• Ongoing Market and Town Centre Management & business support
• Managed Workspace Units at Merchant House in the Market Place

The impact of the Stockport Portas Pilot initiative was also magnified by the additional financial contributions made by the Council in the form of capital, (£100,000), and the High Street Innovation Funding, (£100,000) which increased the overall fund from £100,000 to £300,000.

4.2 The main impact of the Portas Pilot initiative, in line with main areas of spend, has been through the staging of events and activities and through promotional activity, which would not otherwise have taken place.

4.3 Events & Activities

The Portas Pilot group funded the delivery of a range of events, including a number of Folk and Fringe Festivals and a range of smaller themed activities such as the 2014 & 2015 Viking Festivals and ‘Animal August’ in 2015. Many of these were organised and managed through ‘Seven Miles Out’, a ‘community arts centre’ project which was also funded through the initiative. Seven Miles Out has also delivered a programme of evening events including comedy and music, which boosted the limited evening offer in the town centre at the time. The new digital projector enabled the Plaza to significantly expand their programming.

Foodie Friday, originally a Council initiative which was able to continue through Portas Pilot funding, has been significant in bringing a new demographic into Stockport and illustrating the potential of such events and offers to transform the
perception and experience of the town centre. The success of this monthly event has encouraged the development of wider proposals to promote the food and evening offer in the Market Place.

4.4 **Marketing and promotion**

Another significant focus for the group was the marketing & promotion of the ‘Old Town’ area. In addition to an Old Town branding, map and website and more recently the re-development of the Old Town website, the group also used its resources to pay for promotions linked to specific events. This included billboard marketing, magazine adverts and flyers, as well as social media activity.

4.5 **Specialist retail and empty premises**

In addition to the main areas of focus, the funding also was used to support several other initiatives including the establishment of 20th Century Stores, building on the success of the monthly Vintage Village market; the continuation of an existing Council business improvement grant scheme; funding of premises/space for new businesses and vinyl art work to improve the appearance of a number of vacant units.

5 **LESSONS LEARNT**

5.1 A number of lessons were learnt by both the town centre business community and Council through the Portas Pilot initiative, some of which have helped guide and inform subsequent initiatives and projects.

5.2 **Market Place & Underbanks**

The original Portas Pilot bid contained a bold vision and a range of ambitious objectives; together with the high profile nature of the scheme and its namesake, this led to expectations among local stakeholders disproportionate to the fairly limited scale of the resources. However the bid formed part of a recognition of the importance of the Market Place and Underbanks as a unique part of the town centre and commitment by the Council through the creation of the £7m investment fund for the regeneration of the area.

5.3 **Governance**

One of the aims of the Portas initiative was to test new ways of governance. In the case of the Stockport Portas Pilot initiative this initially began with the establishment of a Town Team with representatives based on sector and geographical spread with the aim of achieving stakeholder engagement & participation and accountable operating protocols and governance. However this structure was subsequently challenged and, following a vote, replaced with a new group based on the signatories of the original bid.

Following the Portas initiative all subsequent town centre partnership initiatives, such as Vision Stockport and more recently the Stockport Business Improvement District (BID), have all been developed on the basis of robust governance with clear, open & transparent formal protocols.

5.4 **Sustainability**

Another objective of the Portas initiative was to explore initiatives and projects that would offer sustainable solutions and not simply provide short term measures. Whist most of the projects commissioned through the Portas initiative have been
short term and not proven financially sustainable, they have demonstrated and confirmed the importance of events, activities and promotion to animate the area and attract new visitors.

6 RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Members are recommended to note this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

STOCKPORT PORTAS PILOT Report of the Corporate Director Place Management & Regeneration to the ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Meeting: 10 April 2014

Details about the Stockport Portas Pilot Project Delivery Group can be found at: http://www.stockport.gov.uk/services/business/stockporttowncentre/stockportowncentremanagement1/tcpartnerships/portaspilot/

Details about the Stockport Town Centre Business & Retail Forum can be found at: http://www.stockport.gov.uk/services/business/stockporttowncentre/stockportowncentremanagement1/tcpartnerships/TCBRF

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Graeme Vout on telephone number 0161 474 4562 or alternatively email graeme.vout@stockport.gov.uk.