

Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration

Evidence from Business in the Community

Business in the

Community

1.0 About Business in the Community

Business in the Community is a business-led charity with 850 members from large multi-national household names to small local businesses and public sector organisations. 17.8 million staff are employed worldwide by BITC member companies. With 350 staff across Wales, England and Northern Ireland, BITC have strong local representation and our staff work with a variety of local partners to deliver positive business and community outcomes. BITC was established in 1982 and has HRH Prince of Wales as its President.

Business in the Community mobilises business for good. Our members commit to continually improve how they manage resources wisely – be that their people or planet. Our power is in demonstrating the positive impact business can have on society and through this, building trust in the value of business and understanding among stakeholders.

2.0 BITC's work on Future High Streets

In May this year Business in the Community launched its "Future High Streets" study. Led by Alex Gourlay, CEO of Alliance Boots Health & Beauty Division, the working group for this study also consisted of McDonalds, Starbucks, The Cooperative Group and Asda. The study focussed on the positive impact which store and branch managers can have if they engage in the local high street. It featured case studies of some national chains which are already doing good work in this area. The study's call to action was for senior business leaders to own local engagement as part of their corporate plan.

The findings of the study were based on two Retailer Roundtables where a range of views were captured. Survey work was also undertaken with Town Centre Managers through the Association of Town Centre Management and Store/Branch Manager surveys were completed by Business in the Community members. 149 completed surveys were received in total from the two groups of respondents.

The results provided a real insight into the barriers and benefits to better local business engagement. A few key findings included:

- Town Centre Managers often struggle to engage Store Managers – 55.6% of Town Centre Managers said store/branch managers were difficult or even impossible to engage.
- It's often not about money, Town Centre Managers rank "Getting involved in civic life" as more important
- 62% of Store Managers live over 10 miles from where they work.
- 60% of Store Managers donate gifts in kind to local community groups.

- Of those not involved 55% of Store Managers said they were not involved because “the business has other priorities”.

The resulting challenges to business were:

Review how you're doing

1. Have you done an audit of what your store and branches are already doing at local level?
2. Are your Local Managers empowered by HQ to make local decisions about which organisations to engage with? Have they researched what local partnerships exist and made a reasoned judgement as to their value?
3. Is reference made to local engagement in the Local Manager's performance review?
4. Are your Local Managers able to articulate how their store/branch contributes to their local community?

Put in place the training

5. Do you have local community engagement guidance/a diagnostic for your Managers to use?
6. Do you train Local Managers in how to engage locally? What is your internal resource to deliver this kind of training?
7. What internal support structures are in place to assist Local Managers to engage in the local community? Do you have the internal expertise?

Make continual improvements

8. Is there a feedback mechanism for Local Managers to let you know what's happening on the frontline?
9. Encourage Local Managers to seek out local brokers or connectors to develop their local knowledge and contacts.
10. Given that the research indicates that a lot of Local Managers live far away from their store, consider having a named person working in the Store, who might live locally and who is responsible for community liaison.

3.0 Messages for Government

Business action at local level only addresses half of the issue. The local public sector also needs to be willing and able to work in quality partnerships with business. This means stronger, business-led local management partnerships which are delivery-focussed. With this in mind, key messages for national and local government coming out of the report were:

- Local and national Government to **share best practice** between local partnerships. Local Enterprise Partnerships need to work with the range of local partnerships in their area to raise standards through up-skilling local partnership managers with a responsibility for engaging business.
- **Trust businesses to lead local partnerships.** They are the best business brains you have in the high street. The best partnerships we spoke to during this research were all business-led, not local authority led.
- **Could local town centre partnerships deliver more?** Businesses are keen to work with residents (i.e. customers) as well as other businesses. Town Centre Partnerships have the potential to broker business community relationships around social as well as economic issues and should be encouraged to do so.

4.0 Conclusion

Business in the Community is happy to provide more detail about their work in this area. The report can be read at http://www.bitc.org.uk/resources/publications/future_high_streets.html
The health of the high street is of concern to both business and government but without effective local partnerships to deliver locally driven improvements town centres can stutter and fade into a spiral of decline.