

## SERVICE UPDATE

<b><u>Name of Cluster:</u></b>	City Development and Regeneration
<b><u>Date:</u></b>	5 September 2024
<b><u>Title of Update:</u></b>	Union Street Empty Shops Action Plan – update on 24/25 priorities
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### **UPDATE:**

In response to the decision sheet of the Special Council meeting on Monday 2 September, item 4 (ii, 2), please find below an update on the priorities identified for 2024/25 in the Union Street Empty Shops Action Plan Progress Report. This [report](#) was presented at the Finance and Resources Committee on 13 March 2024 (COM/24/066, paragraph 3.27), with an annual update due in Spring 2025.

Data at the time of writing the Union Street Empty Shops Action Plan (from September 2022) revealed 47 vacant ground floor units on Union Street, a vacancy rate of almost 25%. From March 2023 onwards, monthly walkabout surveys have been undertaken to monitor the number of units becoming occupied and vacant. The lowest number of vacant units on Union Street during this period was recorded in October 2023, when there were 36 vacant units. As at 31 August 2024 there were 39 vacant units, but we are aware that a further 11 of these units are either undergoing renovations to support reoccupancy, in the Planning system, or applying for the Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme.

In relation to the priority actions identified for the 12 months following the March 2024 update, progress is as follows:

- Recruitment of an additional Project Officer – complete. UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding was obtained to support creation and fulfilment of this post until 31 March 2025.
- Identification of funding to support provision of a pop-up pilot retail scheme - ongoing. Following engagement with letting agents, a suitable unit on Union Street could not be identified for this type of activity. Therefore, focusing on the same outcome of supporting SMEs to develop business skills and resilience, a successful application to UKSPF has been made focused on creating a ‘business toolkit’ as part of a wider Vibrant and Sustainable Cities Pilot. The Toolkit will develop resources and training for local businesses with the intention of creating a more resilient High Street, and enabling businesses to maximise the impact of local events programmes and an evolving city centre. The Toolkit will launch at the end of October.
- Identification of additional funding for the Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme beyond the allocated £500,000 – complete. A decision was taken at Council Budget in March 2024 to increase the capital

funding to £1,000,000 and extend the duration of the Scheme into the 2025/26 financial year.

- Securing a new tenant for 81 Union Street – ongoing. The Letting Agent has advised that a new tenant has been secured on a sub-lease basis awaiting final approval and checks.
- Collaboration with Marks & Spencer on options for the St Nicholas store – ongoing. See [report](#) CR&E/24/157 presented at Finance and Resources on 8 May 2024.
- Supporting Aberdeen Inspired with a feasibility study on Union Street upper floors – ongoing. As part of the study a panel session with officers from Strategic Place Planning officers is being scheduled for September, with final report expected by mid November.
- Collaboration with city centre stakeholders and continued monitoring of benchmarks – ongoing.
- Development of the Council's Union Street Cross-Service Working Group – ongoing. This includes a shared Microsoft Teams channel for cross-service updates, and increased representation from relevant services on the Union Street Empty Shops Grant Scheme Review Panel. To support partner's Our Union Street with their marketing campaign of vacant units, representatives of the Cross-Service Working Group will attend promotional activity of vacant units to offer dedicated pre-application support in-person.