

High Streets Task Force Case Study: Birmingham City Centre and the Colmore Business District

August 2023

Case Study Information

Date	07/08/23
Author	John-Jo Von Johnson
Organisation	Colmore Business District
Place	Birmingham
Version	

Basic Facts about the high street and local area

Description of the place

Colmore Business District is the Business Improvement District (BID) which covers the commercial heart of Birmingham City Centre. It is home to over 500 companies employing over 35,000 people and occupying approximately 5.6m square feet of office space. It is the largest professional service hub in England outside of London.

As well as being a hub for business and professional service firms, the District also boasts a thriving leisure and hospitality offering, with a host of award winning independent and chain bars, restaurants, cafes, hotels and pubs.

The District also hosts a number of transport hubs including bus stops, trams, and a train station, leading to heavy footfall during commuting rush hours.

Colmore BID has an ever-growing night-time economy with the number of bars, clubs and restaurants growing considerably in the last few years, even with the impact of the COVID19 Pandemic.

Some of our footfall drivers are Snow Hill Train Station, St Philips Cathedral and our hospitality venues as well as being the central businesses district for the City Centre.

Our District forms only part of Birmingham City Centre. There are four other BIDs operating in the city centre, who are primarily focused on retail and hospitality. Colmore BID shares some of its streets and public spaces with two of these BIDs.

Key opportunities/challenges

Being involved in work to tackle issues of safety presents several opportunities for the BID. As an organisation, two of our strategic aims are to build engagement with our businesses and create an operating context that attracts inward investment. Activity that reduces anti-social behaviour helps

us to achieve both aims. Our businesses appreciate having a visible service, and we know that businesses feel more confident in positioning themselves here as a result.

We are also able to build a good level of engagement with our public sector partners. Being involved as part of the solution means we can directly influence the approach taken around issues that affect our levy payers. It means that we can engage with some of the most vulnerable in our city. All of this work goes towards improving safety, both in real terms and in terms of perception.

This is, however, a challenging space to operate in. We are limited in terms of what we can deliver on our own and rely heavily on our public and voluntary sector partners. Both of those sectors have been significantly reduced in terms of capacity. There is also a regular turnover of staff, which means it is difficult to build and maintain partnerships and strategic focus. Much of the work also requires significant funding which can be tricky to unlock.

In terms of anti-social behaviour specifically, the perpetrators are also a key issue. As a regional hub for services, Birmingham City Centre has a large, transient street population. They can often be challenging in terms of behaviour, lead chaotic lives and have personal challenges of their own. Unfortunately, for each person we can help transition away from street living, more arrive, which means it can be hard to demonstrate the value of the work we do. But for the people we help, we know it is invaluable and life saving.

As our District has become more successful, it has started to transform into a hub for good quality food and drink. This has led to a significant growth in our Night Time Economy. This is a relatively new area of work for us. We are currently solidifying our approach to servicing this element of the District, mindful that we are growing in a city centre that already has two significant NTE hubs which draw significant resource from the police, NHS and associated services.

Goals/objectives

The key objective of this work stream is to create and maintain a District that is safe, and perceived as safe by those who work here and who visit us. This feeds into our key strategic goals to make Colmore Business District the key location for Professional Services in Birmingham, and to offer a location that attracts businesses globally.

This is an ongoing objective with shifting goals. As such, there is not one key metric or milestone for the future. The objective is to create and maintain the levels of safety by efficiently responding to the challenges that arise. We have demonstrated this in the past, creating a Security service to respond to the increase in ASB in the District. That project is now in its “maintain” phase. Our next challenge is around Night Time Economy. We are confident there will be another challenge to follow!

Description of the project/initiative

Description of the project/initiative

Safe & Sound

Safe and Sound is one of eight workstreams which guide our project work to benefit the local area and businesses. Each business contributes 1.5% of their Rateable Value each year which brings in £1.3m in levy. The Safe and Sound Workstream has a budget of £208,500.

The Workstream is delivered through a Working Group, which generates ideas for projects and oversees their delivery by the team. The group is Chaired by a Board Director and includes partners from the public sector, key staff from Colmore BID and 10 representatives from local businesses.

Street Operations Team

In 2016, in response to consultation feedback from businesses, Colmore BID decided to employ its first security patrol officer to assist with rising cases of anti-social behaviour in the District and a perception of a lack of police patrols. Previously Colmore BID had a team of ambassadors who only reported ASB instead of engaging and resolving issues. Since 2016 the security team has been expanded to a team of four, due to the level of demand and feedback from businesses.

The team draws on its strategic partnerships with other organisations to ensure individuals and businesses experiencing anti-social behaviour are provided with immediate assistance and access to relevant support networks. They have an important role of engaging with our frequent homeless and begging communities. Team members are trained in signposting vulnerable individuals to the most appropriate support services to ensure those in need can access the right treatment and support to lead healthier lifestyles.

Our business liaison executive is attentive to the issues in the District. As well as providing a vital business liaison service, they also help to monitor the state of our street scene, reporting issues such as pot-holes, cracked pavements and broken lamps and bins. We also employ a cleaner to provide a service, in addition to the one provided by the local authority.

Personal Safety Training

Colmore BID started delivering Personal Safety Training sessions in 2012 after feedback from businesses around perceptions of safety. The sessions have evolved over the years and Colmore BID currently works with an internationally renowned female martial arts expert, instructor and author to deliver a pragmatic personal safety awareness course that provides simple and effective personal safety skills and techniques to increase self-confidence, awareness and assertiveness.

We advertise the sessions via our website and weekly mailer. Each month we arrange for a session to be hosted by a business in the District and populate the session with staff from that business and others. The sessions have been very popular and, since starting, we have delivered around 85 sessions to just over 900 staff from the District.

Partnership Working

Our Street Operations Manager has been the Vice Chair of the Local Community Safety Partnership for the last 3 years. The group meets regularly to bring partners together to problem-solve issues relating to crime, anti-social behaviour and public place vulnerability. One of the successful initiatives from the group was a public space protection order to tackle low-level ASB in the city centre. Colmore BID played a key role in assisting the local authority to draft and consult on the order.

Effective partnership working is key to building good relationships with the support services who deal with the street community the security team encounter. The team have built strong relationships with

the various services, getting to know the teams and procedures which helps them to offer the correct support to vulnerable people.

The team also work closely with West Midlands Police. We have arranged weekly partnership patrols to tackle anti-social behaviour hot spots. The partnership patrols also consist of business engagement where our Street Operations Manager and an officer from the police delivers group talks to businesses explaining the work that happens in the District.

Building and Facilities Managers Forum

The Colmore Building & Facilities Managers Forum was established in 2021 and is co-ordinated by Colmore BID's Special Projects Officer. The key aims are to facilitate better communication, connectivity and collaboration among the Business District's Building & Facilities Managers and partners, and to improve our overall levels of emergency preparedness and business resilience to spontaneous criminal or civil emergency situations. Any Building or Facilities Manager within Colmore Business District is welcome to join and participate in the Forum's activities.

The Forum contributes towards some of the objectives set for Birmingham's counter terrorism strategy, ensuring a collective understanding of the Crowded Places agenda in Birmingham, disseminating key threat and risk information from Counter Terrorism Officers to promote a more prepared District. The forum meets every quarter. Agencies such as Birmingham's Resilience team provide presentations, updates, and training to the forum members. Members also share their own best practice with each other. We also hold regular table-top exercises, designed by the Resilience team to help members assess their own decision making and operational processes when responding to major incidents.

Trauma Equipment Awareness

Since 2019, our Street Operations Manager has been working closely with West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council and the Daniel Baird Foundation to distribute Bleed Control kits and deliver Awareness Sessions to show people how to use the kits in the event of a catastrophic bleed.

This project was reviewed and further developed after the pandemic, expanding the training to include basic CPR and Defibrillator training. Colmore BID has been instrumental in arranging sessions and the distribution of kits, not just in the District, but across the city. To date, the group have delivered more than 20 sessions with over 300 people attending them.

Colmore BID have installed a publicly accessible Bleed Control kit in our District and we have also distributed 15 bleed control kits to local businesses. These can be accessed by members of the public in an emergency.

Homelessness and Support

Homelessness is a complex matter for many cities, and this is no different in Birmingham. Our Security Team uses a multi-agency approach to tackle the root causes of social issues and ensure vulnerable individuals can access support.

The team builds relationships to gain the trust of individuals, and in many occasions takes people directly to services. This approach helps to drive real change for rough sleepers rather than simply moving them on to other areas. The team regularly patrols with support services building relationships with the outreach teams and sharing information around rough sleeping locations. The team also volunteers their time once a month to help out at the main drop-in centre. Colmore BID also contributes to local support services through fundraising efforts and facilitates local businesses in providing assistance and support to our partners.

We have been working closely with the Food Justice Network, who connect those affected by homelessness with food kitchens and community cafes. As well as practical support, we have helped them develop strategies and policies to help those who want to do good in our city make the biggest impact possible. We have also worked with our local Combined Authority to deliver their alternative

giving scheme, 'Change into Action'. [As well as promoting the scheme, we have](#) installed two contactless giving points in the [District](#), providing members of the public with a way to donate to charities working to end homelessness. Our Street Operations Manager also sits on the panel to help dispense the funds raised to individuals in need.

The team involved in the project/initiative

Project/initiative team

Michele Wilby Colmore BID Chief Executive
Jonathan Bryce Colmore BID Operations Manager
Paul Street Colmore BID Strategic Projects Officer
John-Jo Von Johnson Colmore BID Street Operations Manager
Kelsey Dwyer Colmore BID Events Executives
Nicole Panayiotou Colmore BID Business Liaison Executive
Zack Palmer Colmore BID Security
James Crooks Colmore BID Security
Dimitrios Mitropoulos Colmore BID Security
Peter Charalambous Colmore BID Cleaner
Neelam Sunder WMCA
Chief Inspector Mark Lacey WMP
Councillor Sharron Thompson BCC
Trident
Sifa Fireside
St Basils
Health Exchange
Central BID
Southside BID
WestSide BID
West Midlands Police
Birmingham City Council

Impact or outcomes

Short-term outcomes/achievements

The Security Team records their work using our Customer Relationship Management software which helps us understand the impact of their work on the District.

In 2022, for example, we dealt with 102 incidents of ASB related to drugs and alcohol. This is down from 502 incidents when the team started in 2019. Whilst begging remains unsurprisingly high, with 775 incidents recorded in 2022, this is down significantly from 1,852 in 2019. We are also pleased to note that the number of contacts with rough sleepers has also reduced significantly from 747 in 2019 to 234 in 2022. Aggressive ASB is the only issue that has remained static at around 70 incidents each year (except during 2020 when various lockdowns were in effect).

The Team's wealth of knowledge around local support services and relationships built with our street community also allows the team to connect rough sleepers with the right services needed to support the individual requesting help. This has resolved challenges the team have faced when engaging with rough sleepers on private and public property.

Long-term outcomes/achievements

The work the team has done has had a measurable impact both day-to-day for businesses and over time. We know from surveying our businesses that they value our work in this area and we hope that this will translate into support for the BID at ballot.

A long-term achievement for the service is the way it has been able to position Colmore Business District as a key actor in the city centre on issues around safety and security. All of the BIDs in the city work well with our public sector partners, but Colmore Business District is the most active in terms of strategy and policy, helping to deliver positive outcomes both for the District and the wider city centre.

Our ability to respond swiftly to challenges also helps to shape the District itself; through cosmetic impacts such as our Bleed Kit and contactless donation point, legacy impacts through the way we design our public realm, and policy impacts through our Counter Terrorism Work. We hope that these kinds of projects will set the direction for the District on a long term basis.

Visual



Advice for High Streets Task Force users

Advice/key learning

Effective partnership working is the most important component of all these projects, whether it be with businesses, the local authority, or other public sector partners. Consistency with individuals is also important, for example roles and positions can change quite frequently which can have a knock-on effect on how a project develops. Being consistent with an organisation and getting buy-in at the right level can help to ensure projects and partnerships continue when staff change.

Building good relationships with key people in organisations and services is also critical for delivering projects. A high level of personal resilience is also needed to continue to drive initiatives forward and unpick complex local politics.

Projects can be expensive to deliver. It is important to look out for funding opportunities and to work closely with partners to explore and unlock those opportunities. However, not everything needs money. Often it is possible to deliver good projects through discussion and good partnership working.

Finally, whilst it can be challenging to do, look for opportunities to help create solutions to local issues. Being a good partner can allow you to have more influence over the solutions developed and access more support when your area is struggling.

Contact for Task Force Queries

Name	John-Jo Von Johnson
Position	Street Operations Manager
Organisation	Colmore BID
Contact Email	john-jo.vonjohnson@colmorebid.co.uk

Further details

Further details

www.colmorebid.co.uk (Safer Colmore page)