

# ST. PATRICK'S DAY



## Business Survey And Feedback Report 2012

# **St. Patrick's Day Business Feedback 2012**

*BCCM SR No. 61*

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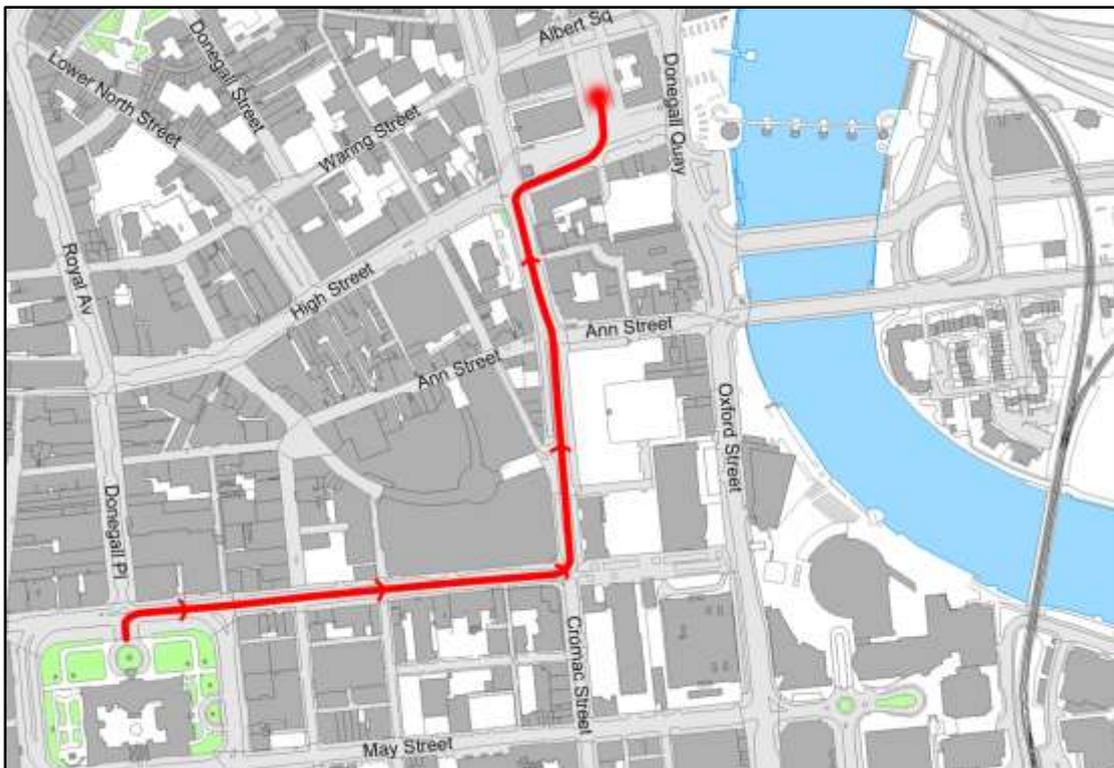
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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2012, Belfast City Centre Management undertook a comparative survey of retailers based within the city centre to gauge their opinions on the St. Patrick's Day civic celebration. This was to ascertain whether the event had an impact on a variety of issues ranging from footfall, sales, anti-social behaviour and inclusiveness.
- 1.2 This survey was designed to be as concise as possible; the participating businesses are listed in Appendix 1, and a copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2.
- 1.3 The St. Patrick's Day celebrations took place on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012, with the floats and parade leaving Belfast City Hall at 12 noon, led by the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Niall Ó Donnaghaile and also featured community groups from across the city, and proceeded east down Chichester Street then turning north onto Victoria Street with the parade completion taking place in Custom House Square (Figure One) and culminating in a concert featuring the Red Hot Chilli Pipers and X Factor finalist Sophie Habibis. The theme for this year's celebrations was '2012', with the parade designed to celebrate this year's unique events from the centenary of Titanic to the 2012 London Olympics.



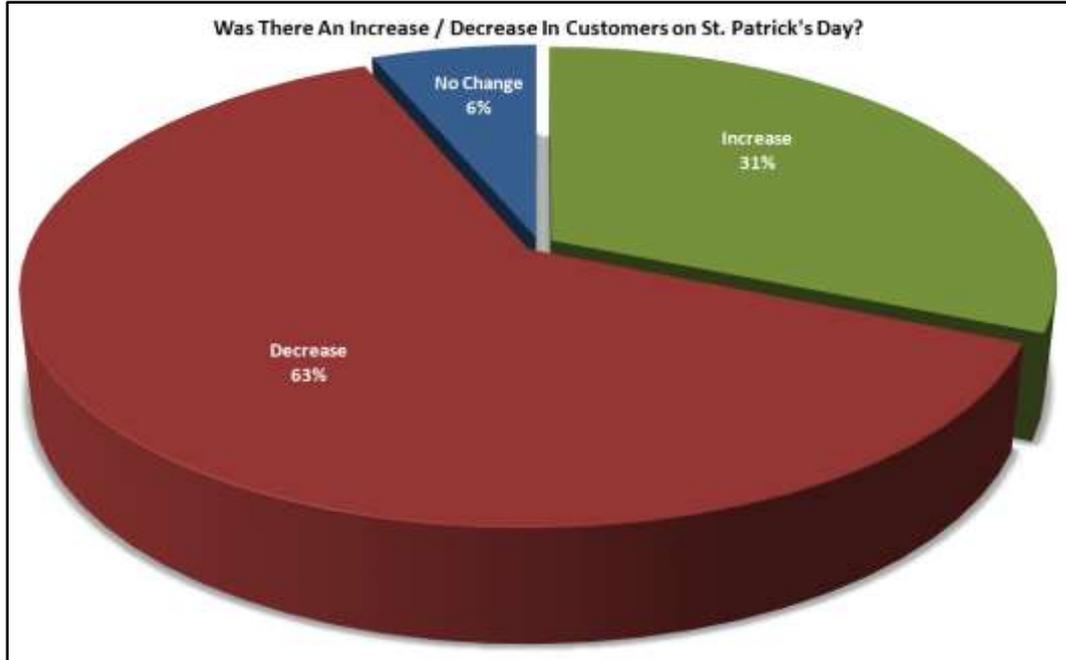
**Figure One:** Map of St. Patrick's Day parade route

- 1.4 The results for sales and footfall mirrored each other exactly with retailers reporting a 63% decrease in both. However, several retailers reported sales as up substantially – these businesses were in the hospitality industry and this result is, therefore, not surprising. The overall synopsis for this report is that the pattern that has been noted to date for most events within the city centre (that is, the public may enter the city to view the event, but do not associate this with an opportunity to shop) has continued.



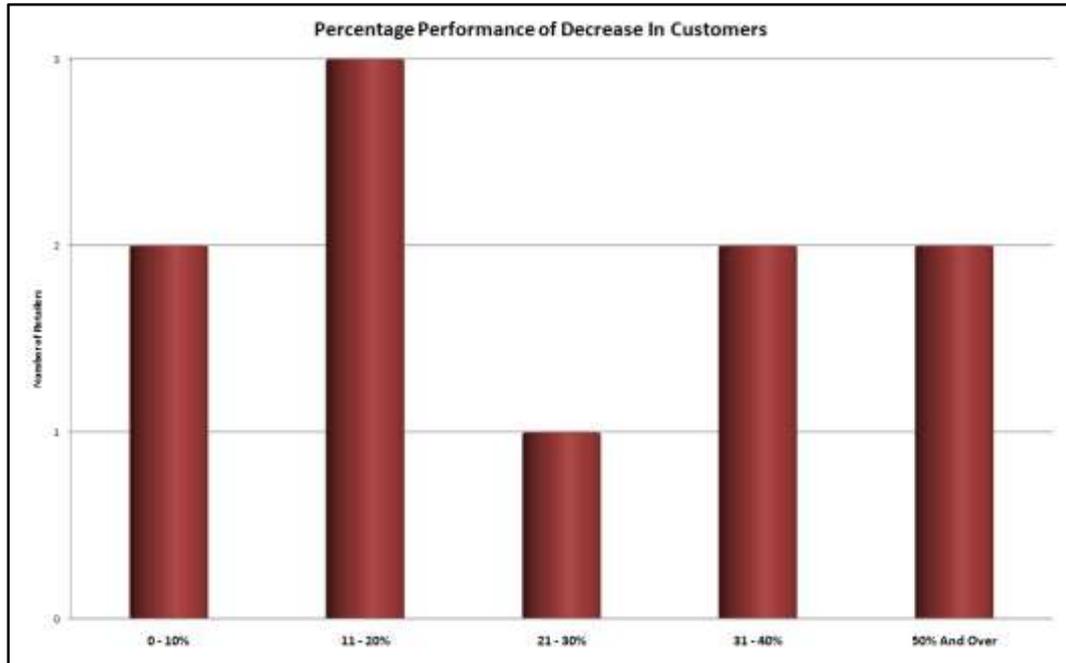
## 2. Results

5.1 A total of sixteen businesses were surveyed from within the city's retail core to establish the effect the parade and celebratory event had had on their performance. All of the retailers surveyed were open for the duration of the event. The businesses were next asked whether there was an increase or decrease in the number of customers (footfall) entering their store during the parade and celebrations (Figure Two). 63% stated they noticed a decrease in footfall, 31% saw an increase and 6% that there was no noticeable change.



**Figure Two:** Was there an increase/decrease in customers on St. Patrick's Day?

The businesses were asked to quantify the reduction levels. However, not all stores are able to gauge footfall in this way, and therefore the ten responses were all from those that noticed a reduction (Figure Three).

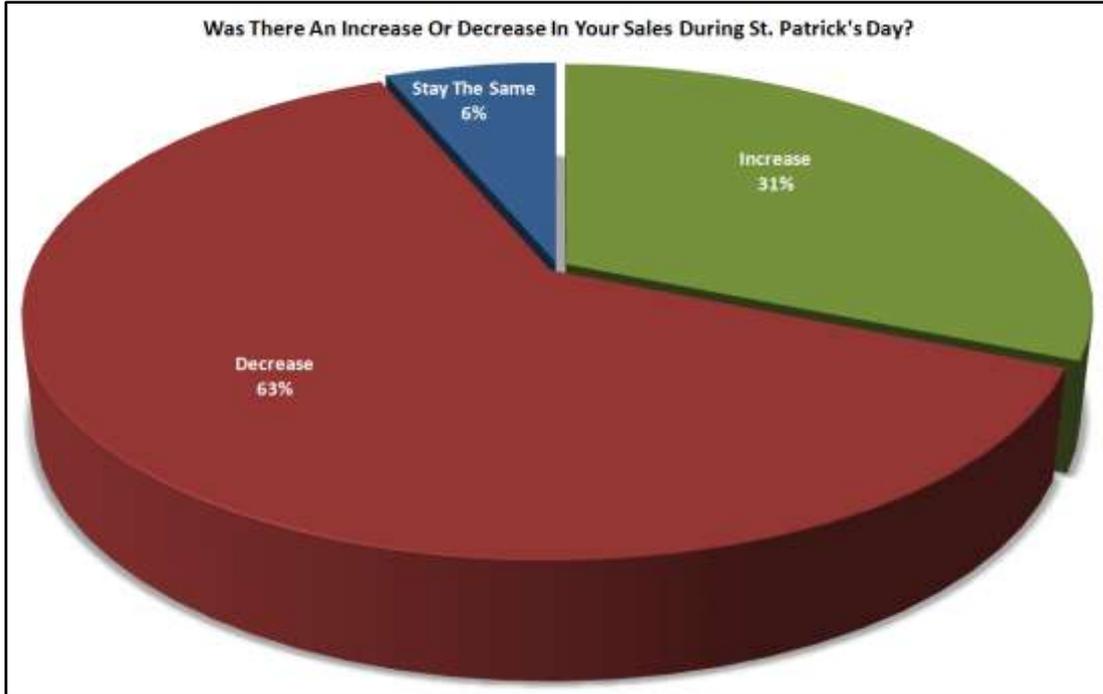


**Figure Three:** Percentage decreases in footfall



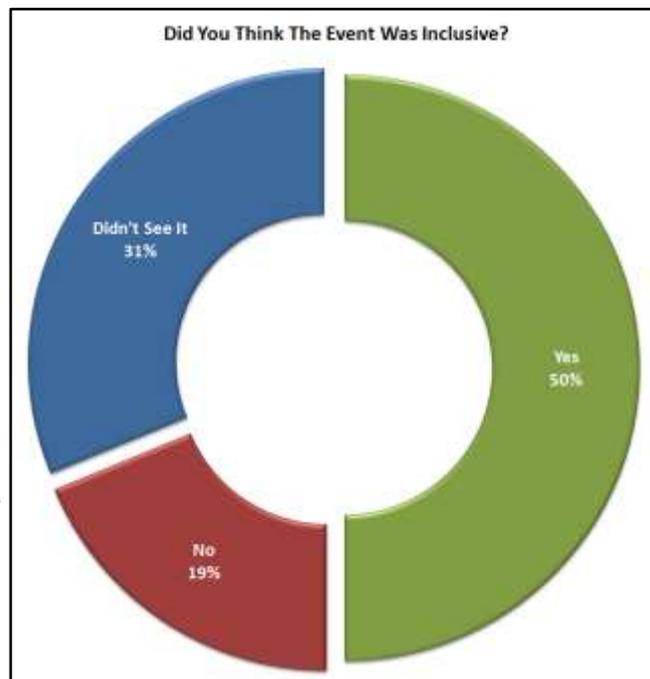
Two businesses stated that their footfall had decreased up to 10%, three businesses that it had decreased between 11% and 20%, a single retailer that it had decreased between 21% - 30%, two retailers noticed a 31% - 40% reduction and another two retailers experienced a decrease in customers 50% or over on their usual statistics.

5.2 Businesses were asked whether they experienced an increase or decrease in sales during the event. The results matched exactly those given for footfall (Figure Four). 63% stated they recorded a decrease in sales, 31% noticed an increase in sales and 6% that there was no discernable difference.



**Figure Four:** Did businesses notice an increase or decrease in sales during St. Patrick's Day?

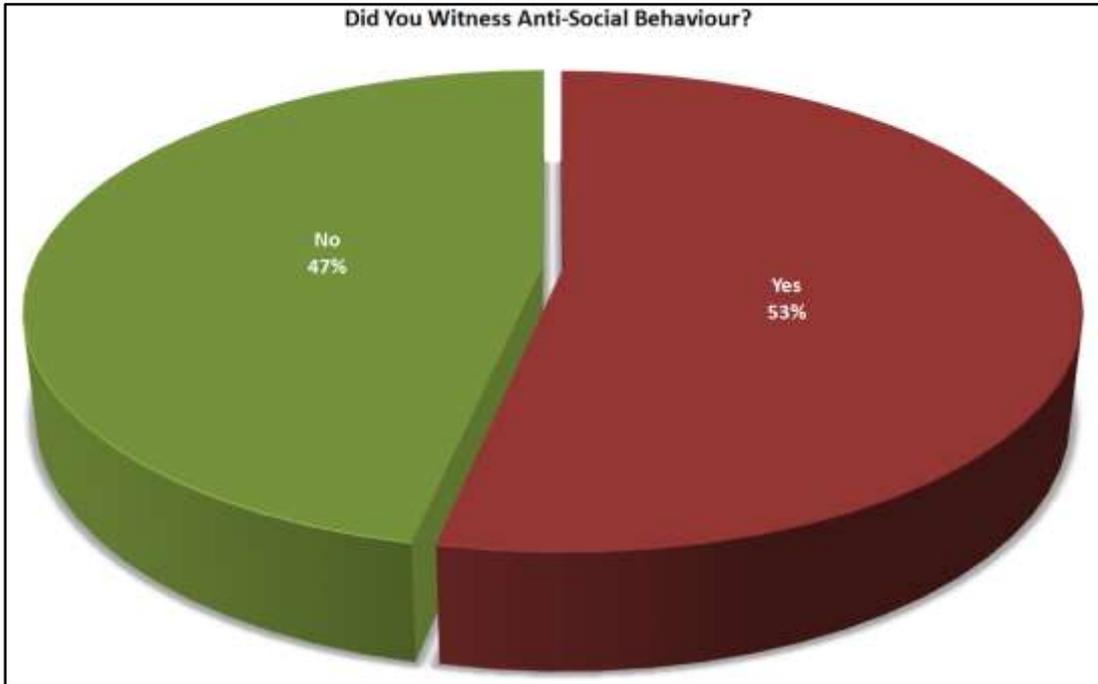
2.3 The event organisers (Belfast City Council) have strived to make the St. Patrick's Day celebrations in Belfast inclusive and "comfortable" for everyone. This is perhaps best highlighted by the multi-cultural participation in the parade and concert. In 2011, 47% of retailers asked stated they did not feel the event was inclusive. However, the results for this survey (Figure Five) show that 19% feel the event is not inclusive – a reduction of 28%. 50% of the businesses asked felt that the event felt inclusive and 31% that they did not see it.



**Figure Five:** Did retailers think that the event was inclusive?

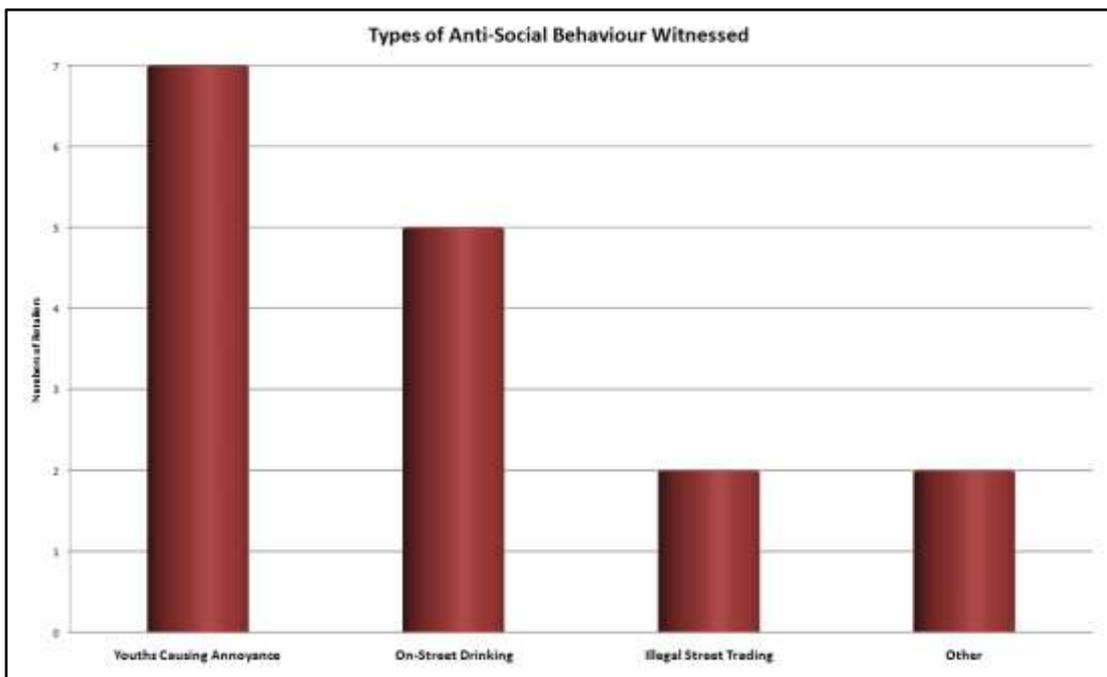


2.4 Retailers were asked whether they noticed anti-social behaviour during the course of the celebrations. In 2011, a disappointing 65% stated they had. This has reduced to 53% in 2012 (Figure Six).



**Figure Six:** Did businesses witness anti-social behaviour?

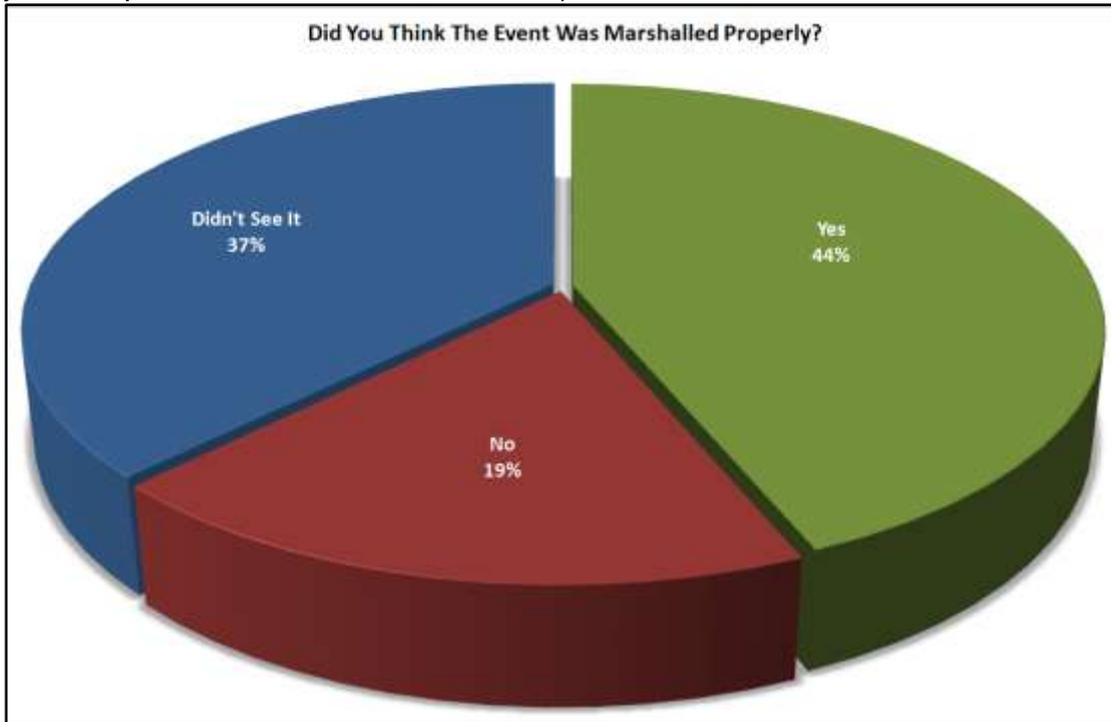
The retailers were asked to outline the types of anti-social behaviour they had witnessed (Figure Seven). The most common report was of youth[s] causing annoyance of which seven of the surveyed businesses witnessed (one individual stated they were also verbally abused), five witnessed on-street drinking, two illegal street trading and two "other" – of which one stated they had witnessed shop-lifting. This was the same (and only) instance where the PSNI were needed and therefore called. The other offence related to sectarian slogans being shouted.



**Figure Seven:** Types of anti-social behaviour witnessed



2.5 The businesses were asked whether they believed the event was organised and marshalled properly (Figure Eight). 44% stated they felt it was organised and marshalled properly, 19% did not and 37% did not see the event (a further year on year comparison can be seen in Section 3.).



**Figure Eight:** Did retailers believe the event was organised and marshalled properly?

2.6 Retailers were asked a series of open-ended questions regarding the route of the parade and any other comments or suggestions. Five of the retailers wished to see the route pass through the main thoroughfares (Donegall Place and Castle Place). However, given the new road layout of the streets, the floats are, currently, unable to make the turn east from Donegall Place onto Castle Place. Furthermore, from past events, many retailers had voiced objections to parade routes passing through the retail core. This was, however, juxtaposed with an equal number of retailers voicing their desire to see the event remain in Custom House Square and out of the central core.



### 3. Year on Year Comparison

3.1 The St. Patrick's Day celebrations in 2012 represented the 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year that Belfast City Council has organised the event. Table 1 shows comparisons of previous surveys carried out from 2007–2012 for the St. Patrick's Day event:

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Retailers that saw an increase in customers visiting their shop on the day	14%	48%	16.6%	28%	17.6%	31%
Retailers that saw a decrease in customers visiting their shop on the day	60%	31%	66.6%	48%	41.1%	63%
Retailers that saw an increase in sales on the day	26%	34%	16.6%	16%	11.7%	31%
Retailers that saw a decrease in sales on the day	46%	24%	60%	44%	41.1%	63%
Retailers that thought the event was inclusive	58%	69%	90%	76%	47%	50%
Retailers that witnessed anti-social behaviour on the day	66%	61%	36.6%	44%	64.7%	53%
Retailers requiring PSNI assistance	8%	0%	20%	4%	6%	6%
Retailers that believed the event was organised and marshalled properly	74%	90%	96.60%	44%	100%	44%

**Table One:** Comparative results from 2007 – 2012 (inclusive)

The percentage of retailers who have recorded a decrease on both customers and footfall has increased in 2012 by 21.9% for each. However, the number of retailers experiencing an increase also rose; although with a relatively small sample, the results can be somewhat skewed. As with previous years, the sales and footfall figures mirrored each other closely (Figure Nine: A3 pullout).

3.2 The number of retailers that felt the event was inclusive rose by 3% and the number of retailers witnessing anti-social behaviour fell by 11.7%. The percentage of businesses that felt the event was organised and marshalled properly fell by 56%.



## **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 Given the current challenging economic trading conditions, it is, perhaps, not surprising that retail businesses within Belfast have reported decreased footfall and trading during the St. Patrick's Day parade and celebrations. However, this pattern is one that has been noted before in relation to most events (e.g., Orangefest, Pride, Belfast Carnival) within the retail core, and although footfall into the public realm may increase, customers crossing shop thresholds does not. The issue still remains that within the wider public consciousness, they may wish to come into the city to spectate but this is not usually translated into a shopping experience. Although the figures do suggest that some retailers experienced a boost in sales, these businesses were predominantly bars and newsagents and therefore this is not surprising.
- 4.2 Anti-social behaviour remains an area that needs addressed, with over half of the retailers surveyed witnessing anti-social behaviour and one retailer stating he was also verbally abused. Additional comments on the survey suggested that even if not engaged in overt anti-social behaviour, the sheer numbers gave an intimidating atmosphere which in itself is not conducive to a relaxed shopper-friendly environment. It seems once the event has finished there is no "exit strategy" and therefore youths tend to loiter. There has also been a decline in the number of businesses that believed the event was marshalled properly; although there were no suggestions as to what strategies should be put in place to solve this issue.

## **5. Recommendations**

- 5.1 Based on the findings from the survey, the following recommendations are suggested:
- Promotion of retail and Belfast's retail experience as an integral part of the St. Patrick's Day celebrations.
  - Engagement with businesses on the preferred parade route (although the finishing point of Custom House Square is widely accepted as the best location).
  - Anti-social behaviour needs addressed – although retailers did state there was a visible police presence which helped calm any potential trouble.
  - A "celebration completion" plan might need to be implemented to reduce the number of youths loitering within the city centre.



## Appendix One

<b>Business Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Alex Mekki	CHICHESTER STREET
Beaverbrooks	DONEGALL PLACE
Belfast City Sightseeing	HIGH STREET
Crawford's	HIGH STREET
Forbidden Planet	ANN STREET
Formula Health	HIGH STREET
Francis Brown Gallery	LOMBARD STREET
Jessops	HIGH STREET
Ladbrokes	CHICHESTER STREET
Marks & Spencer	DONEGALL SQUARE NORTH
McHugh's	QUEEN'S SQUARE
New York City Nails	CHICHESTER STREET
Oscar's Champagne Café	CHICHESTER STREET
Tiso	CORNMARKET
Vodafone	DONEGALL PLACE
Wicker Man	HIGH STREET



## Appendix Two



### St Patrick's Day, Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012 - Business Feedback Form

Following the St. Patrick's Day event in Belfast city centre, we would appreciate your feedback on a number of issues relating to the day.

Belfast City Centre Management will treat all comments in the strictest confidence.

<b>NAME OF BUSINESS:</b>	
<b>ADDRESS:</b>	
<b>SURVEY COMPLETED BY</b> (Please print name)	
<b>POSITION IN COMPANY:</b>	

<b>1. Did your business trade on St. Patrick's Day, 2012?</b>				<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
If 'no' please go to question 8.					
<b>2. Was there a significant increase/decrease in <i>customers</i> visiting your business on the day compared to St. Patrick's Day 2011?</b>		Increase	Decrease	No change	
<i>COMMENT:</i>		Please advise of %			
<b>3. Was there a significant increase/decrease in <i>sales</i> in your business on the day compared to St. Patrick's Day 2011?</b>		Increase	Decrease	No change	
<i>COMMENT:</i>		Please advise of %			
<b>4. The Council attempts to ensure the event is as inclusive as possible and one at which everyone would feel comfortable. Do you think this was achieved?</b>		<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>DIDN'T SEE IT</b>	
<i>COMMENT:</i>					
<b>5. Did you witness anti-social behaviour on the day?</b>				<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
If 'yes' because of:		Youths Causing Annoyance	On-Street Drinking	Illegal Street Trading	Other (Please state)
<i>COMMENT:</i>					
<b>6. Was there a need for your business to request the assistance of the PSNI?</b>				<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<i>COMMENT:</i>					
<b>7. Did you think the event was organised and marshalled appropriately?</b>		<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>DIDN'T SEE IT</b>	
<i>COMMENT:</i>					
<b>8. What are your views on:</b>					
<b>(a) The parade route being from City Hall to Chichester Street and Victoria Street?</b>					
<i>COMMENT:</i>					
<b>(b) The event being managed by Belfast City Council and held in Custom House Square?</b>					
<i>COMMENT:</i>					
<b>9. Do you have any suggestions or comments on future St. Patrick's Day events in Belfast city centre?</b>					
<i>COMMENT:</i>					

Please return your completed survey by Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March:

Email: [d.dornan@belfastcentre.com](mailto:d.dornan@belfastcentre.com)

Fax: 028 90230809

Alternatively, telephone BCCM on 028 90242111 to have your form collected. Thank you.