

Report of the Chief Executive

REOPENING HIGH STREETS SAFELY FUND AND SURVEY UPDATE

1. Purpose of report

To update members of the Committee on the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund, the outputs so far, and how this links into the ongoing business survey work.

2. Background

The government announced on the 29 May 2020 Broxtowe Borough Council would be allocated £101,458 for the reopening of high streets safely fund. Access to this funding was available from 1 June 2020 of this year.

As a direct result of this process, two Covid-19 Information Officers were appointed, to communicate and assist businesses with their operations within the Town Centre during this time. A summary of their work to date, again is included within the appendix.

On 18 June Jobs and Economy Committee members agreed to several actions, as part of a holistic survey of businesses across the Borough. As part of the survey work businesses were contacted and questioned on how they are coping in these challenging times. A brief summary of progress to date is included within the appendix.

4. Financial implications

All financial outlays will be reimbursed directly from the government.

<u>Recommendation</u>

The Committee is asked to NOTE the use of the fund.
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Background papers

Nil

APPENDIXCovid-19 officers' summary of work:

Two officers were appointed to advise high street businesses within Broxtowe on reopening safely and successfully. The two officers have engaged with businesses face to face, and over the phone in all four town centres communicating with all sectors on the high street, not just retail.

The vast majority of the businesses have responded positively to this process. The officers will maintain this engagement going forward whilst helping businesses react to the ever changing advice and new initiatives that occur. A great example of their work can be reflected in the number of businesses that have signed up to the Eat Out to Help Out scheme. Both officers have produced an update on their activity, which is summarised below.

Zahid:

'As a Covid-19 information officer in Beeston it is my job to engage in dynamic dialogue around the full range of Covid-19 related issues. I provide direct advice/guidance and problem solving where appropriate to support effective prevention of further outbreaks. This will involve working with issues around service delivery as a whole, but also in relation to ensuring personalised responses for individual customers and to build and maintain effective relationships within these settings with key stakeholders. The primary function of the service is to work collaboratively with customers, partners and other stakeholders to help boost business within the area, and try and get them back to pre Covid-19 business levels.

During my work I have seen a 'step change' in the business community. At the start, I had businesses talking about shutting down, but now several are at a stage where they are happier, and nearly at the stage they were at pre Covid-19. To enable this 'step change' we must educate the businesses on how they can improve customer confidence in their area as a whole, but also ensure they are implementing all the relevant government guidelines and methods. Our job does not stop at health and safety, we also assist them with ideas and strategies, and a good example of this is the Eat Out to Help Out scheme. We also try and encourage businesses to use social media to display their efforts in combating Covid 19 in their store and outline the measures that have been put in places for the safety of the customers.

At the start we had businesses unaware of the government guidelines and new legislation. I am of the opinion that covid-19 Officers have prevented businesses being closed or be shut down by environmental health due to a lack of knowledge in this area. I also think the role has helped educate members of the public and 'break down barriers' within Beeston, and I am very proud of this. After this pandemic has passed I believe the Covid-19 officers will still have a role ensuring the businesses have suitable support moving forward. '

Janice

'In bringing Broxtowe 'Back to Business', high street businesses and citizens have welcomed and been reassured by the presence of Covid-19 Information Officers usually on daily patrols we:

- proactively seeking guidance
- businesses have been keen to present their businesses safely for customers
- seeking best practice
- actively raising concerns
- keen to keep up to date and understand the changing guidelines

Businesses have in the main have listened and acted on guidance and appreciated the patrols. In Stapleford, Kimberley and Eastwood, I have adopted a 'wave and goes' system, having seen the businesses initially and given guidance. A wave to the business staff member who wave back if all is ok, with the opportunity to beckon me in if required. Exceptions to this are where guidance has significantly changed for certain businesses and premises are visited to ensure understanding and best practice.

Businesses have been encouraged to develop practices that work best for their modus operandi whilst remaining within the guidelines and developing best practice. Significant advice and guidance has been given on the use of business premises windows to highlight the measures taken by businesses to keep the public safe, 'The Mary Portas Approach'. Those businesses who have done this are experiencing higher footfall.

Advice given has also included:

- public access and control to buildings
- public advice notices for each business
- sanitiser provision (with 60% alcohol content)
- use of signage and floor markings in business premises
- sneeze protection screens at pay points
- encourage contactless payments
- identification of cleaning requirements for touch points

The businesses of greatest concern in respect of long-term sustainability are those in the beauty sector with close contact services still on hold at the time writing this report. These businesses rely on practitioners often renting space within a salon. Consequently, within a salon, several small businesses exist within one building.

Survey Update:

Committee members will recall agreeing to the approach of data gathering, in order to better understand the challenges all businesses are facing in light of Covid-19 and inform what the Council's responses may be to the main issues identified directly by the business community.

A 5-stage approach was agreed which included:

1. Contacting all the businesses – using the agreed questions,
2. Collate data and assess trends,
3. Decide next steps,
4. Monitor outputs and react,
5. Conclusion

Since the previous committee, the Economic Development team have been overseeing stages 1 and 2 in tandem. An online version of the survey has been shared through the Council's digital communication channels, including Email Me bulletins to Business topic subscribers and social media accounts.

The Covid-19 officers were informed of this process and have been encouraging the Town Centre businesses to fill in the form online, to assist with this process. Furthermore, some furloughed staff from LLeisure agreed to make telephone calls with businesses, to ask the agreed question during the call, or signpost the businesses to complete the survey via the online form.

The current proposal is to carry on this survey until the September 30 and then collate the data and report our findings to the meeting of Jobs and Economy in November.