

## **TRAFFORD COUNCIL**

### **DELEGATED EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION REPORT**

**Report to:** Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration  
**Date:** 25 June 2020  
**Report for:** Decision  
**Report of:** Corporate Director Place

#### **Report Title**

**Reopening High Streets Safely in Trafford**

#### **Summary**

As part of its response to COVID-19 the Government implemented measures leading to the closure of non-essential retail businesses and retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. As those measures are slowly being lifted with non-essential retail being allowed to re-open from 15 June, the Government has created the Covid-19 Secure Guidelines for businesses to enable the high street to open safely. To support local authorities in the safe reopening of high streets, the Government has also announced a £50 million Reopening High Streets Safely Fund with Trafford being allocated c£211 k.

This report details the Council's Action Plan for utilising this funding to support the safe reopening of town centres in the borough, and highlights other activity to support businesses in Trafford's town centres.

#### **Recommendation(s)**

That the Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration:

- (i) Notes the activity to support businesses in the borough's town centres.
- (ii) Approves the measures to support the reopening of the hospitality sector.
- (iii) Approves the Trafford Reopening High Streets Safely Action Plan and proposed actions as detailed in the report.
- (iv) Delegates authority to the Corporate Director of Place to make amendments to the Trafford Reopening High Streets Safely Action Plan as is prudent and respond appropriately to any changes to the Government guidance.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Stephen James (Head of Strategic Growth)  
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Background Papers: None

Appendix One: Local Authority Reopening High Streets Safely Fund  
Appendix Two: Reopening High Streets Safely Action Plan  
Appendix 3: Stakeholder Consultation Summary  
Appendix 4: Public Consultation Summary

*Implications:*

Relationship to Policy Framework/ Corporate Priorities	<p>The Action Plan will support the safe reopening of high streets as the measures implemented in response to COVID-19 are relaxed.</p> <p>The Action Plan will also support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan (2019), including the priorities Successful and Thriving Places and Targeted support.</p>
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	<p>At a GM level the Action Plan will support the response to COVID-19 and the Build Back Better strategy.</p>
Financial	<p>Trafford's allocation from the Reopening High Street Safely fund is £210,672. This funding is ERDF and claims have to be made for eligible expenditure quarterly in arrears. This has an element of financial risk for the Council but effective monitoring and financial recording systems will be put in place to ensure spend is carried out in-line with the scheme guidance and evidence of activity is properly recorded.</p> <p>The funds are for expenditure in the financial year 2020/21 and it is anticipated that funds will be used by the end of the 2020 calendar year.</p>
Legal Implications:	<p>Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that the expenditure of the funds meet the ERDF criteria and outputs of the scheme. Local authorities are also responsible for the implementation of the publicity requirements of ERDF funding.</p>

	Legal shall support the proposals set out in paragraph 5.3 but the legality of the proposal will need to be considered on a case by case basis.
Equality/Diversity Implications	The full impact is unknown at this stage but delivery of the Action Plan will be closely monitored.
Sustainability Implications	The full impact is unknown at this stage but delivery of the Action Plan will be closely monitored.
Resource Implications e.g. Staffing / ICT / Assets	Existing staffing resources will be used, however there is an action within the plan to recruit a temporary, part-time Communications Officer and temporary Information Officers.
Risk Management Implications	If expenditure doesn't meet the fund criteria and/or the publicity requirements are not met, then there is a risk that claims will be rejected.
Health & Wellbeing Implications	The full impact is unknown at this stage but delivery of the Action Plan will be closely monitored.
Health and Safety Implications	The full impact is unknown at this stage but delivery of the Action Plan will be closely monitored.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak the Government announced the closure of non-essential retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in March 2020. As these measures are being slowly lifted and non-essential retail business allowed to open from the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020, and hospitality businesses from the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020 (at the time of this report) the Government has established the £50m Reopening High Streets Safely Fund (the Fund) to support local authorities in the safe reopening of the high street. The £50m available has been shared between local authorities across England with Trafford Council being allocated £210,672. The funding is from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and is to be claimed quarterly in arrears.
- 1.2. The current intention is that the Government will have a funding agreement in place with all local authorities in England by the end of June 2020 then claims for reimbursement for expenditure incurred from 1 June 2020 can begin to be made. The grant awards will be available to access up to the end of March 2021 but the Government expects it to be used by the end of 2020. The expenditure incurred by the Council under the ERDF fund will be met by a quarterly claim, in arrears, of all eligible spending.

## **2. Reopening High Streets Safely Fund Guidance and Local Criteria**

### ***National Guidance***

- 2.1. The Fund is to be used for activity that isn't already taking place and only expenditure after the 1st June 2020 is eligible - see link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/888818/Reopening\\_High\\_Streets\\_Safely\\_Fund\\_-\\_Guidance\\_-\\_Final\\_v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/888818/Reopening_High_Streets_Safely_Fund_-_Guidance_-_Final_v2.pdf)

- 2.2. The outputs of the Fund fall under four main strands:

- Support to develop an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies.
- Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
- Business-facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.
- Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.

- 2.3. There are three main categories where activities cannot be supported:

- Activity that provides no additionality
- Capital expenditure
- Grants to businesses

- 2.4. For costs to be eligible the Council will need to ensure that it can evidence how these costs are over and above any that they might otherwise have incurred. The Council will need to ensure that all procurements are awarded in line with the Public

Procurement Regulations and that funding is managed in accordance with State Aid law.

### 3. Action plan

- 3.1. An Action Plan has been developed to deliver the outputs of the Fund in Trafford and support the safe reopening of high streets (see Appendix 1). The table below shows a summary of the specific interventions within the Action Plan.

**Table 3.1: Action Plan Interventions**

Intervention	Description
Stakeholder Consultation	Stakeholder and public consultation to identify key locations where social distancing will be difficult or impossible to maintain, and to identify potential locations for consumption of food and drink from local businesses.
Town Centre Assessment	Town centres assessment to identify suitable locations for signage.
Marketing Campaigns	Marketing & PR campaigns (digital and traditional) to reinforce the Governments social distancing message.
Digital Tools and Resources	Creation of tools and resources for businesses to assist them in becoming Covid-19 secure and maintaining that status.
Information Officers	Provide Information Officers to work directly with SMEs in the town centres to provide advice and support.
Covid-19 Comms Officer	Recruitment of a part-time temporary Communications Officer.
Floor Messaging	Messaging on floors to reinforce social distance requirements.
Street Furniture	Removal, blocking off or repositioning of street furniture, bins etc. where necessary to support social distancing.
Highways Prioritisation	Assess roads with a view to repurpose as extensions to pavements (or similar) if necessary and possible.

### 4. Monitoring

- 4.1. The Council will be required to report activity to MHCLG whether a claim is submitted or not. This will need to include any required monitoring of outputs as set out in Annex B of the fund guidance. The following is a summary of the outputs:
- Number of CV-19 Action Plans
  - Number of CV-19 Public Information Campaigns
  - Number of CV-19 Business Facing Campaigns
  - Number of CV-19 Communication Officers
  - Number of High Streets with CV-19 Adaptations
  - Number of Neighbourhood Shopping Areas with CV-19 Adaptations

- 4.2. Effective monitoring and financial recording systems will be put in place, in close liaison with Finance, ensuring spend is carried out in-line with the scheme guidance and evidence of activity is properly recorded.

## **5. Helping the Hospitality Sector to Re-open**

- 5.1. In addition to the activity within the Action Plan, the Council is looking at how businesses in the hospitality sector can be supported to open safely, initially by considering the regulatory barriers to short term solutions, i.e. planning, licensing and street café licenses.
- 5.2. As it is currently unknown what measures the Government may implement to facilitate re-opening of the hospitality sector, the following set of measures provides an approach which it is believed complies with current legislation.

<b>PHASE 1 (July – early August)</b>	
Planning	Employ 28 Day temporary use rule – but requiring formal notification of use.
Licensing	Promote Temporary Event Licence. This is the main limitation, in that up to 21 days are permitted – hence around 4 or 5 weeks depending how many days per week the premises operate
Table & Chair Permit	Temporary Permit lasting 1 month.

<b>PHASE 2 (August - October)</b>	
Planning	Where a license (as below) has been granted, resolve not to enforce for a period of 3 months or 'under enforce' where appropriate.
Licensing	Employ the Minor Variation procedure to govern the sale and consumption of alcohol.
Table & Chair Permit	Extended Permit lasting 3 months.

- 5.3. It is proposed that the Council can consider proactively identifying larger areas within pedestrianised areas or blocked off highway which could be cordoned off for use by nearby bars / cafes. This might be particularly suited to locations where there are a cluster of hospitality businesses. In this case the Council would address the regulatory matters directly – but make a charge for businesses to use designated space within the larger zone. As this is a new process, existing procedures would need to be adapted to handle it. Some of the set up costs may be able to be met via the re-opening high streets fund – such as additional bollards, barriers and street furniture. Subject to Legal confirming the measures detailed above comply with current legislation, they will be implemented shortly.
- 5.4. It is proposed to review the 5 designated town centre areas taking account of the responses received to date from the consultation exercises detailed in section 7 below. Overall there is a desire from businesses to expand out into the highway due to a perceived limit in space for social distancing. Therefore road layouts and parking bays in key locations will need to be assessed in terms of suitability for potential road closures, and the expansion of business premises onto the street on a case by case basis.

- 5.5. Each the town centre will therefore be assessed with regard to whether highway changes can be implemented temporarily which will include the following:
- a) Can the road be closed? - taking account of access requirements and bus routes and overall safety considerations
  - b) Can a parking space / layby be closed off? - taking account of deliveries, disabled bays, safety and access.
  - c) Can street furniture be easily relocated? - typically fixed electrical items will be difficult to relocate i.e. lighting and illuminated signage. Items that could be relocated include bins, benches and planters without substantial foundations.
- 5.6. The assessments will also have to take account of, and allow for, free passage of pedestrians who will also need to social distance when reviewing whether a business can expand onto the footway or highway.
- 5.7. Assessments will be undertaken during 22nd to 26th June 2020 and recommendations identified to accommodate business needs and public social distancing requirements where practicable. Due to the cross-cutting nature of this exercise, it is proposed that the recommendations are sent to the Executive Members for Housing and Regeneration; Environment, Air Quality and Climate Change; and Public Safety, Governance and Reform for approval. Following approval, the Council will then advise the relevant businesses on what measures they will need to put in place (barriers etc.) to meet highways, health and safety and other regulatory requirements. In addition key stakeholders, such as Altrincham Unlimited, the Town Centre Partnerships and Altrincham and Sale Chamber of Commerce, will also be informed of the works to take place.

## **6. Existing Support to Businesses and the High Street**

- 6.1. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the public realm improvement programme in Altrincham has continued with Greenwood Street being completed in May 2020 and design works are underway for George Street.
- 6.2. To aid businesses when the lockdown measures were introduced, a Retail & Hospitality Businesses - Trading in the time of Covid-19 - brochure was published providing information on the support available and useful links encouraging business to adapt. This was promoted via partners and PR coverage.
- 6.3. A further guide has just been produced, Retail and Hospitality Businesses – A Guide to Reopening Safely - providing information about reopening and operating safely in-line with Covid-19 Secure guidelines to further support local businesses.
- 6.4. To businesses in receipt of a Trafford Town Centres Business Growth Programme loan, and are still repaying it, the Council has introduced a six month repayment holiday (April to September 2020). Through the grant funding administered by the Business Rates team (i.e. Small Business Rates Grant and Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant) almost 3,400 businesses in Trafford have received support totaling over £41.4m; this includes a significant number of town centre businesses.
- 6.5. For businesses ineligible under the grant schemes mentioned above, the Trafford Discretionary Grants Fund was launched on 21 May 2020. The scheme provides grants of up to £5,000 for businesses in shared spaces, B&Bs paying Council Tax and

regular market traders. To date 204 applications have been received, 151 are currently being processed and 8 grants have been paid totaling c£40k.

## **7. Consultation**

- 7.1 As a first stage, consultation with key stakeholders took place from 4 June 2020 to 9 June via an online interactive map to identify locations where, potentially, social distancing can't be maintained, where queuing may lead to the inability to maintain social distancing and potential public realm sites for use by hospitality businesses. During this initial period the consultation had a total of 41 visitors, making 39 comments most of which relate to Altrincham. The theme of these comments mostly featured locations where there isn't enough space to maintain social distancing and identifying locations for use by hospitality businesses (see Appendix 3). Following the initial consultation with key stakeholders, the interactive map was opened to the public on 10 June 2020 to gain their views. A press release was issued to promote the consultation and is being shared on social media. As of 22 June 2020 the consultation has had 865 visitors, 400 of whom viewed 4 or more pages (but didn't comment) and 61 responded, making 144 contributions. The main themes continue to be those identified in the initial consultation period with the addition of volume of traffic (see Appendix 4).

## **8. Other options**

- 8.1. The Council could choose not to utilise the Reopening High Streets Safely funding but the costs incurred by the Council to support the safe reopening of high streets would not be covered by any other funding. In addition, the Council could choose not to carry out specific works to support the safe reopening of the high street but this would risk greater non-adherence to social distancing measures and not support local businesses.

## **9. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 9.1. Approval of the Trafford Reopening High Streets Safely Action Plan is required to enable the Council access the ERDF funding and subsequently support the safe reopening of the borough's town centres.

Urgency of Decision

This report should be considered as 'urgent business' and the decision exempted from the 'call-in' process for the following reason(s):

- To enable the Council to implement emergency measures during the ongoing Covid-19 health crisis.

**Key Decision** Yes

**If Key Decision, has 28-day notice been given?** No

Finance Officer Clearance ...PC.....  
Legal Officer Clearance ...TR.....



**CORPORATE DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Roe', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Roe  
**Corporate Director Place**

To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Corporate Director has cleared the report prior to issuing to the Executive Member for decision.