



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Scrutiny – Place Overview Committee 9 th December 2020	6 <u>Public</u>

Re-opening our Highstreets safely and social distancing response for COVID-19

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This report will update Place Overview Committee on the approach and activity to date undertaken to facilitate reopening of high street safely and social distancing in our towns with our partners and stakeholders.
- 1.2 This report will update on possible next steps - post Covid-19 for discussion.

2. Recommendations

- a) **To note the activity and outcomes to date and provide Place Overview Committee an opportunity to review and comment.**
- b) **To note further reports to this committee on current and post Covid-19 activity will be provided as the reaction to the virus impacts upon our highstreets.**
- c) **To note that further work on capturing data in our wider market towns relating to footfall, anonymous mobile phone data to evidence and inform future responses is a piece of work that carefully needs to be considered and brought forward.**
- d) **To note the joint working across the council particularly with colleagues in Economic Growth and Public protection and with our Business Improvement Districts, Town Councils and Chamber of Commerce to facilitate this work in our towns.**

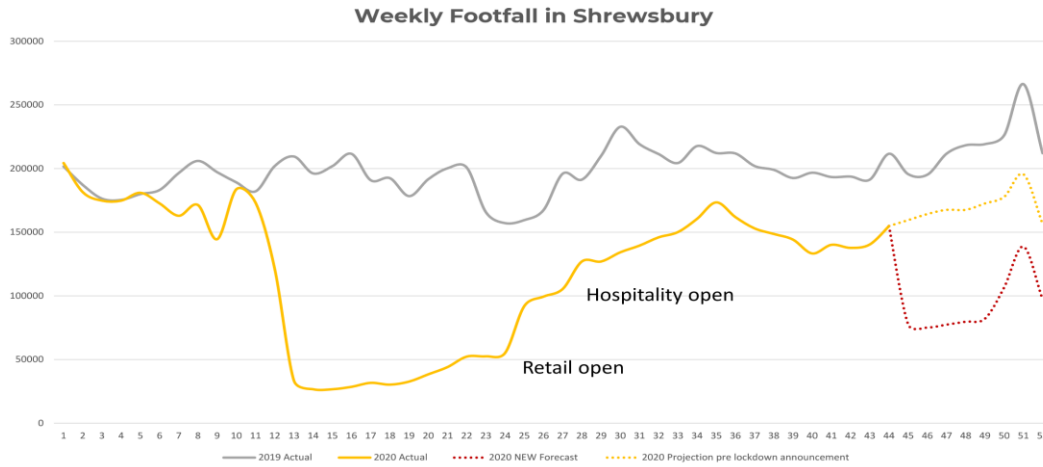
3. Background

- 3.1 The impact and ongoing pressure of Covid-19 on the economy across the country is now well rehearsed and understood. The impact upon our high streets, vibrancy of our towns and the economic and social impact continues to be significant. Combined work across all areas of the council, the joint working relationship with Economic Growth and Public Protection has provided outcomes and benefits that should not be unrecognised and has been undertaken to support and ameliorate this issue. Whether there be social distancing in town centres, marketing/promotion, issuing government grants and/or rate relief to local business, the activity and scale of works has been significant and has impacted upon the service and its staff. The activities detailed in this report perhaps underplay the time and trouble taken in negotiating and steering through, in some areas significant interventions, into town centres, and ensuring that a wide array of partners and groups are engaged with.
- 3.2 The beginning of the social distancing work began when Government publications, letters and guidance were received in preparing of the end of the first lock down, these communications were regarding preparing high street to reopen safely and provide level of confidence and “psychological “comfort to encourage a return. It should be clear that no such previous activity, experience or understanding of this work had previously existed, and in effect this was an iterative process based upon the guidance and documentation received.
- 3.3 The image below relating to footfall in Shrewsbury provides a visual of the issue at hand that was facing high streets in general, and to a degree the scale of the issue and the speed / quality of response is clear.

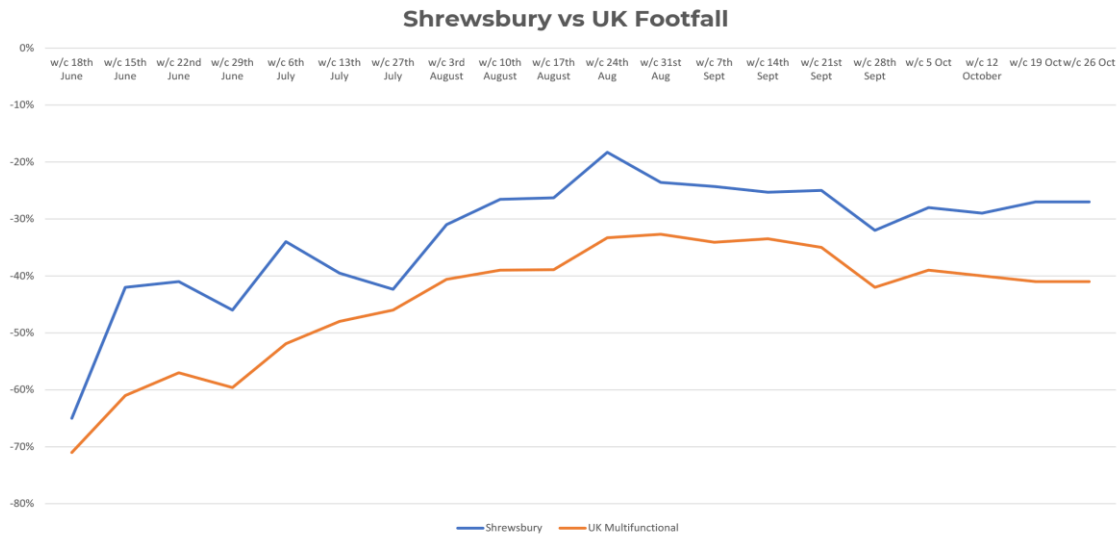
Weekly Footfall in Shrewsbury



3.4 The second image demonstrates how recovery and the second lock down impacted.



3.5 The two images provide a key representation of the issue at hand, and the point is accepted that similar foot fall counters and use of anonymous mobile phone data is a key area of work to progress upon is that quality data for other market towns can be generated.



3.6 It should be noted and made clear that the work and the funding is “reopening high streets safely” and the intent of the funding is to support our high streets, via social distancing and support the national Highstreet Task Force, and the conditions and parameters of that funding also dictate the work that can be undertaken. Hence the work is wider than social distancing as how: -

- Car parking was managed
- Bus routes redirected
- Liaison with Blue light services

- Internal liaison with colleagues in Economic Growth / Public Protection and Communications was intrinsic.
- Marketing and Promotion

As one item in isolation is probably not enough but a package of measures will support return to high streets'

3.7 It should be noted that social distancing (the scope of this report) was not the only "flurry of activity" being managed at the time by staff: -

- Public Transport issues buses.
- School transport
- Active Travel was coming into prominence
- Waste HRC'S and opening was also a key issue
- Routine aspect of work continued
- Car parking charges

Hence there was a requirement to receive, consult, interpret, understand and react to external funding requirements, and this should not be overlooked.

3.8 Government funding for Reopening High Street Safely was received to a value of £288,184 and an approach and way forward was presented to Directors and Groups leaders in May 2020 with an accompanying presentation that set out the approach and principles of how this work would be move forward.

3.9 This approach consisted of four key pieces of work

1. Install Covid-19 - social distancing signs, One-way system signs and demarcation lines on key footways across the County.
2. Consult, engage and implement Social Distancing Measures
3. Respond to issues with Partners and stakeholders (chamber of commerce, public transport, emergency services).
4. Ensure constant liaison and joint working with key partners such as Economic Growth, Public Protection, Public Health.

3.10 The chronology of events / activities is: -

23rd March 2020	Government announces first National Lockdown for Covid-19.
11th May 2020	Government published a national Covid-19 recovery strategy, setting out the conditions for easing lockdown and the steps that will be taken in England to enable more activities to take place whilst continuing to control the spread of Covid-19.
12th May 2020	Letter arrives from Government setting out the details of how to respond to the easing of lockdowns in preparation for the 4 th July 2020.
14th May 2020	Developed the town centre/Covid-19 Social Distancing Team to plan and deliver response.
15th May 2020	Town visits began to determine interventions with local members, town councils, BIDS and Chamber of Commerce.
27th May 2020	Presentation to Cabinet and Directors on Social Distancing and approach.
28th May 2020	Corporate Town Centre recovery Group is formed and meets monthly thereafter to coordinate activities and responses from a Corporate preservice. The group includes Shropshire Council (highways and transport, economic growth, Public protection, public health, communications).
28th May 2020	Shrewsbury town centre recovery group is formed to support the town centre recovery, and includes Shropshire Council (highways and transport, economic growth, Public protection, public health, communications), Shrewsbury BID, Shrewsbury Town Council.
4th July 2020	Lockdown eases and high streets and hospitality can reopen with appropriate social distancing Measures.
4th July 2020	Social distancing measures in high street start to be implemented.
16th July 2020	Social distancing Claim form is submitted to Government for full value of the grant.

28th September 2020	Update presentation to Cabinet and Directors on Social Distancing.
5th November 2020	Because of the lock down Shrewsbury and Ludlow Social Distancing measures are removed, pending reinstatement,

3.11 Aims of Social Distancing activity

The Aim of the Social distancing work was captured and presented to Cabinet and Directors, and followed the advice and guidance and funding requirements from central government as received, further other bodies such as the High Streets task force and the Grimsey report were providing information and perhaps provoking thoughts on the opportunities that could be offered.



Grimsey Report

- **Localism** – local people be empowered to redesign their own high street
- **Leadership** – need to have a broad range of dynamic & collaborative skills
- **Fewer Cars, More Green Space** – town centres must no longer be designed around the car
- **Supporting key market towns** – to recover and support business vitality but to ensure social distancing measures through the creation of safe spaces, walking and cycling routes, road closures, 20 mph, pedestrianisation, free carparking, relocating bus stops and use of car



parks for social distancing trading -Church Stretton Market, wider footpaths.

- **Working across the Council:** to coordinate a holistic response that supported town centres, provided as degree of safety to people returning to the high street, this was managed and steered via Corporate Town Centre Recovery Group with Public Health, Public Protection, Economic Growth, Communications our BID`s etc
- **Prioritising confidence in our town centres** –by reallocating space, wider footpaths, closed streets, pedestrianisation, one-way systems, signs–it feels and looks safer
- **Communication** –meeting town and parish councillors in their town (socially distance), talking to Chamber of Commerce(s), engaging with Members, working with our BID`s, briefing Directors, Portfolio Holders, Town Clerks and SALC.

The aims above were to consider, understand, manage and make appropriate decisions on issues such as:

- Should social distancing measures be applied in a location?
- Who needs to be consulted or engaged with?
- What issues would be caused?
- How would we adjust?
- Are we compliant with government advice, grant conditions?
- Are we confident in our legal and public health position?
- How do we manage feedback and responses?
- How do we communicate?
- How do we manage opinion and differing agendas?

3.12 Key Groups and communications

To facilitate all the above, three key groups were established in the spring period and are still operating and undertaking their activities to support the council in achieving its outcomes.

<p>Highways Social Distancing Group</p>	<p>The purpose of this group is to plan, prepare, consult deliver the technical requirements that ensure the legal basis for any change on the highway and ensure that basic communications is undertaken.</p> <p>The group is attended by Highways and Transport staff, Public Protection and Communications.</p> <p>Examples of activity has been: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing social distancing measures
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison with town and parish councils and Chamber of Commerce as required. • Responding to feedback on the implemented measures • Implementing social distancing measures outside of schools • Coordination of Pavement Permits and Licences • Coordination of Car Parking activities. • Liaison with towns and parishes and local councils as required.
<p>Corporate Town Centre recovery Group</p>	<p>The purpose of this group is to coordinate and communicate activity and ensure a consistent approach across our town centres when considering the governments guidance, funding, grants, requests for information that may be received.</p> <p>The group is attended by highways and transport, economic growth, public protection, public health, communications, Insight and intelligence team.</p> <p>Examples of this work has been: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informing and issuing grants to businesses • Informing of rate relief to businesses. • Issue of a business support pack and guidance • Surveying business on issues and impact of Covid-19 • Coordinating advice and guidance across numerous issues • Issue of public health advice, guidance and support • Redesign of a process for events and activities during Covid-19 • Consider all activities such as social distancing, car parking, pavement permits, public transport and ensure coordination and consistency with Covid-19 guidelines.
<p>Shrewsbury Town Centre Recovery Group</p>	<p>The purpose of this group is to support the wider town centre of Shrewsbury, and support is return following reopening on July 4th.</p> <p>The group is attended by highways and transport, economic growth, public protection, public health, communications, Shrewsbury Bid, Shrewsbury Town Council, Shopping Centres Manager.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social distancing measures and their effect / impact • Market and promotional activities • Liaison with Shop owners • Implementation of sanitation operatives • Town centre promotions • Business webinars on government grants, funding, legal issues • Joint sanitation project • Working with Public Health on support shop owners • Joint support and working with Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council

3.13 What has been achieved to date?

Across our Market towns the following schemes have been implemented.

Town	Intervention / Measure(s)
Bishops Castle	Prohibition of Parking to increase wider temporary footpaths.
Bridgnorth	<p>Implementation of High Street closure on Saturdays from 6am until 4pm to facilitate social distancing for the market and town centre traders.</p> <p>This was modified to install a running lane for cars and buses to allow traffic and maintain social distancing. This took significant work.</p> <p>During a few Saturdays there we concurrent survey groups in the town to either survey people on the road closure being maintained or survey on the road closure being removed.</p> <p>All agreed with all Members and Chamber of Commerce and Town Council.</p> <p>Issues with the historical market and narrow footpaths continue to raise social distancing issues and this work continues.</p>
Ellesmere	Traffic Management measures have been applied at Cross Street to increase the width of footways.
Ludlow	Closure of high street to aid social distancing on Fridays and Saturdays between 10am to 3pm as agreed with the town council and chamber of commerce.
Market Drayton	Suspension of car parking to aid social distancing - adjacent to the post office
Much Wenlock	Installation of a temporary wide footpath in the High Street, all agreed with the town council and Local Member.
Oswestry	Implementation of wider temporary footpaths in key areas of the town, in accordance with the Town Council, Oswestry Bid to support the town centre and key circulation areas.
Shrewsbury	<i>High Street</i> - closed for all traffic and Pedestrianised between 11am to 6pm
	<i>Wyle Cop</i> two wider temporary footpaths created, and a cycle lane installed, traffic utilise middle lane.
	<i>Victoria Quay</i> - road closed 7 days per week to traffic to allow for social distancing.
	<i>Queen Street</i> – contra flow one-way system and cycle route installed
Whitchurch	Installation of a high street road closure to pedestrians the high street. As agreed with local members and their town council*

3.14 Have any measures been removed? – Whitchurch Town Council asked for their social distancing high street closure to be removed, this was discussed with wider colleagues and was undertaken. All other social distancing measures have been continued or modified over time.

3.15 The interventions listed above, have overall been met with a level of support and the outcome of providing confidence and providing a safer environment seems to have been achieved. Work to capture this in our wider towns and further business and residents' surveys and use of technology should be undertaken to provide this evidence.

3.16 It is also true that concerns for residents in town walls, and Bridgnorth High Street were also valid, and work to resolve these issues and balance the

3.17 What has been the financial cost?

The costs to date are circa £185,726 to date from an initial government award of £288,194. The current forecast is that this funding will expire by Christmas 2020, and then other council funds will need to be identified to support social distancing measures going forward.

3.18 The withdrawal of key social distancing measures during the second lockdown (high street, Wyle Cop and Victoria Avenue) will have supported the financial position, as there is a significant cost in placing these measures on and off during the day, this work is undertaken by a Traffic Management Company. However, ongoing social distancing costs will need to be met by the council (this has been flagged appropriately).

3.19 It should be noted that there is a complex system in place for reclaiming of funding incurred. Shropshire Council is working on defrayed expenditure for the social distancing work as agreed with the City and Local Government Unit of government. officers have been working with project manager on ensure compliance with the funding conditions A bid for the full £288,194 has been submitted there is high confidence that this will be received. This work has taken a significant amount of officer time.

3.20 Hence issues such as an up to date web site, referring the European Structural Investment Fund <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/traffic-management/social-distancing-in-shropshire-market-towns/>

3.21 There have been no capital schemes yet, this is due to the issue that the funding is restricted to revenue funding only. However, this does not mean that opportunities have not been identified.

3.22 What are the opportunities

The response to Covid-19, has expedited issues and agendas, such as on-line shopping and our entire approach should be considered. Prior to

Covid-19 the effective pedestalisation of the high street had not been previously undertaken and perhaps was met with some scepticism. Now it perhaps (with valid concerns from some residents) is seen as a positive in supporting the towns.

3.23 There was significant support in Bridgnorth for improvements to the High Street the Repurposing space – new routes, cycling, walking remodel?

3.24 Work for future development is: -

Low Traffic Scheme for Shrewsbury is one of the key pieces of work, and a proposal to Shrewsbury Members, Shrewsbury Town Council Members and the Big Town Plan Board has been delivered and supported for further work

Public transport – public transport must be enabled to regrow into an efficient, attractive mode of transport once it is safe for more people to travel this way and bringing forward the Park and Ride “Shrewsbury Connect” project will support this initiative.

Economic recovery – we need to support businesses to survive the current Lockdown and to reopen as soon as practical. This work is ongoing across the council and by our colleagues in Economic Growth.

Low carbon, clean air recovery – capitalise on the reduced pollution over recent weeks.

Active Travel – bring forward this agendas and development of a Strategy for Shropshire link to LTP4 that is coming forward.

Improve use of town centre technology - footfall data and anonymous telephone data

Bringing forward Variable Messaging Signs for Shrewsbury - to support public information, direction to parking spaces to reduce circulation time

Understand Social Change – issues such as increased working from home, loss of car parking use, footfall in town centres, increase in on line shopping, use of technology, perhaps a change in attitudes now presents opportunities for consideration and the wider policies of the council?

4.0 Summary

4.1 Implementing social distancing at pace, and with all the Government guidance and instruction received has been a task that has challenged staff. The volume of required work, level of demand and the need to communicate, make consistent decisions and deal with differing needs,

requirements and agendas has placed pressures on staff, to highlight this key highway and transport staff were manning road closures at 5am to ensure public safety , working seven days per week and attending numerous meetings to ensure a balance between public safety, social distancing, supporting high streets was achieved.

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Cllr Steve Davenport

Local Members; All - due to the nature of activities in town centres.

Appendices: None.