

Cabinet Member Decision Note

Re-opening the High Street Safely Grant

To: Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills, Cabinet Member for Highways, Maintenance and Waste Services

Date: 5th June 2020

Author: Head of Strategic Growth and Place

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report sets out the Council's approach to the Reopening the High Street Safely fund.
- 1.2 In response to the Coronavirus, COVID-19, the Government in May 2020 announced a funding allocation for each Local Authority to support the re-opening of retailers across Swindon and to enable safe movement and queuing for residents and shoppers. Swindon Borough Council's allocation is £198,797.00.
- 1.3 This report seeks authority to spend part of the grant in order to implement measures ahead of the reopening date of 15th June 2020, as the official grant offer and its terms and conditions have not been issued to date.
- 1.4 The grant is available to support a range of measures that align with the corporate priority to "Improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing, low-carbon economy." Helping pledges 3 to "Refresh and implement the Masterplan for Swindon Town Centre" and 4 to "Support businesses by working in partnership to create conditions in which businesses succeed and grow."
- 1.5 Measures proposed may also involve temporary road closures and adaptation of the public realm to enable safe movement so require agreement of delegated powers to implement these changes.

2. Recommended Action to be Authorised by a Cabinet Member Under Delegated Powers

Recommended that:

- 2.1 Director of Operations, the Head of Streetsmart, the Head of Strategic Growth and Place, and the Head of Highways and Transport, in consultation with the Corporate Director of Finance and Assets, be authorised to fund from existing budgets the measures recommended as part of the Reopening of the High Street

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Safely work until funding agreements are finalised with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

- 2.2 The Head of Highways and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways, Maintenance and Waste Services, be authorised to implement traffic orders as identified by Members and highways colleagues.

3. Detail

- 3.1 In response to the Covid19 virus, the Government has committed to fund a grant of £198,797 for the local authority to support measures to assist in re-opening the High Street safely. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued guidance in May 2020 setting out how support can be provided. It is for each local authority, in partnership with local businesses and stakeholders, to develop their own plans for their High Street and town centres to re-open safely. A link to the copy of the guidance is attached at Appendix One.
- 3.2 The guidance indicates that eligible expenditure is as follows:
- 3.2.1 Developing an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies
 - 3.2.2 Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely
 - 3.2.3 Business-facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely
 - 3.2.4 Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely
- 3.3 Engagement with businesses and local stakeholders has commenced within the town centre area, Old Town and other parts of Swindon, to consider measures to support the safe opening of the High Streets and keep customers and pedestrians safe during this period of social distancing requirements.
- 3.4 Consultation has also been undertaken with Ward Members around the arrangements that can support the High Street in rural and outlying areas of Swindon; these plans are in development and their suggestions for use of the grant have been collated and considered.

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- 3.5 Signage supporting use of the public highway to accommodate queues whilst people wait to enter shops is a key component of the plans to date; this can, if necessary, be supported through measures such as one-way systems along carriageways, or closure of roads to promote pedestrian movements and safe distancing requirements.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council does not have to implement any of these changes, although it is expected to implement these measures in order to help protect the businesses concerned.
- 4.2 Wait until the grant offer letter has been issued and then implement plans, but this will be some time after 15th June 2020, when non-essential retailers will begin to reopen to trade and this may have an impact on how businesses can operate.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The following Opposition and Minority Group Spokespersons / Ward Members have been consulted on the recommendations of the report and their responses are also summarised below:

Councillor Bob Wright - "I support the intention of changes to movements due to the Corona virus, addressing all forms of movements. I have the following observations:

How will the use of existing funding affect planned works and more to the point what funding is available as we understand there is an overall budget shortfall and there has been some overspend in some areas.

It is a matter of record the council was told to spend what it takes in tackling the virus and the council will be provided by government funds. Recent cabinet statements seem to be rolling back on this promise and could leave the council with a huge debt. How will this government funding be protected and not subsumed into the wider debt? I can summarise this as a problem with confidence in promises being met.

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The pressure on the council is palpable and the short time frame may mean the acceptance that good intentions may lead to unintended consequences. Can you ensure the funding has the capacity to adapt and change if required.

I have seen no specific details to comment on the actual design but could you please ensure there are numerous opportunities for drop offs and parking for the disabled and those who struggle to walk long distances. This might mean providing opportunities similar to bus stop bays but not parking for 3 hours due to a disabled badge.”

Councillor Jim Grant –

“Councillor Wright has covered all the aspects of this issue that i would want to raise. Can you accept his submission on behalf of both of us.”

Councillor Stan Pajak – “Just a note to say I very much support this initiative and the provided paper. Speed is critical in the push towards normality and reopening of our High streets to shoppers”

6. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1 The Council is being recompensed by Central Government for the works implemented up to a value of the grant award. The works will be funded by existing budgets until such time as funding agreements with MHCLG can be finalised. The guidance sets out that expenditure incurred from June 1st is eligible, subject to the grant agreement being in place.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 6.2 Legal and Human Rights considerations have been taken fully into account in compiling this report. It is considered that the steps taken by the Council in relation to Business Rates reliefs are proportionate and compatible with convention rights.

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Climate Change Impact

- 6.3 The proposals would not bring a change in the service delivery and Officers believe that there is no expected effect on the Council's carbon footprint.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 6.4 This will help businesses through a very difficult time and no major impacts have been identified.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 6.5 No adverse effects have been identified on the nine statutory and one locally defined protected groups by the implementation of these reliefs. A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been undertaken and a copy can be obtained from the report author.

Risk Management

- 6.6 If the Council granted reliefs in excess of the amounts that Central Government will recompense there would be an additional burden on Council Taxpayers, but work has been undertaken to ensure the suggested schemes prevent this.

7. Consultees

- 7.1 The Corporate Director of Finance and Assets (s151 officer) and Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.
- 7.2 Ward councillors are being consulted and their comments will be appended when collated.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1 None

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix One: Re-opening the High Street Safely Guidance Document
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/888818/Reopening_High_Streets_Safely_Fund_-_Guidance_-_Final_v2.pdf (clf you are unable to access the PDF, please contact the named officer in the footer of the Cabinet Member Decision notice.)
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Philippa Venables on telephone 07824 550469 or via email pvenables@swindon.gov.uk.

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9.2 Appendix Two: Consultation responses from Ward Members.

10. Declarations of Interest

Opposition and Minority Group Spokespersons / Ward Members

- 10.1 Opposition spokespersons / Ward Members are reminded to consider whether they have any known interests in any of the matters referred to in this Decision Note. If such an interest exists this should be declared to the Monitoring Officer (or Senior Committee Clerk), and they should take no part in the consideration of the Briefing Note and should refer the Briefing Note to their Group Leader.

Cabinet Member(s)

- 10.2 Cabinet Members are reminded to consider whether they have any known interests in any of the matters referred to in this Decision Note. If such an interest exists this should be declared to the Monitoring Officer (or Senior Committee Clerk), and they should take no part in the consideration of the Decision Note and should refer the Decision Note to the Leader of the Council instead for consideration.

11. Sign-off

- 11.1 The Cabinet Member is requested to respond with 5 days of the date of this report (by 12th June 2020).

- 11.2 The Cabinet Member is requested to indicate one of the following responses to the Recommendations set out in Section 2 of this report:

Note and support the proposed action to be taken under delegated authority –

Yes / ~~No~~

Note and request the proposed action be reconsidered —~~Yes~~ / No

Reasons for Reconsideration: N/A

Request Report be Referred to Cabinet - ~~Yes~~ / No

NB To protect against identity theft, Cabinet Member's signatures will be redacted on public versions of the signed Briefing Note.

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Date ...5th June 2020.....

Signed ... SIGNED ELECTRONICALLY - REDACTED... Cabinet Member (1)

Note and support the proposed action to be taken under delegated authority –
Yes / ~~No~~

Note and request the proposed action be reconsidered –~~Yes~~ / No

Reasons for Reconsideration: N/A

Request Report be Referred to Cabinet - ~~Yes~~ / No

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Date ...5th June 2020.....

Signed ... SIGNED ELECTRONICALLY - REDACTED... Cabinet Member (2)

Note and support the proposed action to be taken under delegated authority –
Yes / ~~No~~

Note and request the proposed action be reconsidered –~~Yes~~ / No

Reasons for Reconsideration: N/A

Request Report be Referred to Cabinet - ~~Yes~~ / No

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Signed ... SIGNED ELECTRONICALLY - REDACTED... Cabinet Member (3)

- 11.3 Decisions of Cabinet Members will be published in the Members' Bulletin. The Decision must not be implemented until such time that a five-day "Call-in" period has expired. This date will be specified in the Members Bulletin. If a Decision is "called-in" it will be referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration. It must only be implemented if the Scrutiny Committee has raised no objection. If an objection is forthcoming the matter will be referred back to the Decision-Maker.