

Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 6 July 2021
Report Subject	Town Centre Markets
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Economic Development
Report Author	Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, markets across the UK had struggled to sustain themselves in the face of changing customer behaviours. The pandemic has had a severe, and still evolving, impact on street market businesses by reducing their ability to trade for extended periods.

The Council has supported the market businesses during the pandemic with either deferred rent periods or free street market rents and has been promoting the importance of local businesses to residents throughout the last nine months.

With the pandemic underway and restrictions still in place the markets remain under severe pressure and the ability of the Council to respond through promotion remains limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the current status of the markets in Flintshire is reviewed and the work which the Council have undertaken to support them is noted.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	
1.01	Across the UK, street and indoor markets have declined in scale and vitality in parallel with the town centres that host them. Customer behaviour has shifted over time to increasingly favour larger retail centres, supermarkets and internet shopping. Only markets in larger retail centres

	have thrived. In consequence, there are relatively few entrants into the industry which threatens its sustainability.
1.02	Flintshire County Council operates an indoor market in Mold and street markets in both Mold and Holywell. The Council also licences market trading activities in the County by other operators. A very small street market in Connah's Quay was transferred to the Town Council to operate in 2018. The Flint street market also closed in 2018.
1.03	The majority of the costs of operating the street markets are staffing costs. The current markets service team comprises a full time Senior Markets Officer, one full time and two part time Markets Officers. The Council also incurs costs in terms of additional street cleansing.
1.04	<p>There are numerous benefits to operating street markets. For the shopper there is the advantage of value for money; increased choice; the charm of exploring and social interaction within a vibrant town centre.</p> <p>Markets generally contribute to the economic and social vitality of towns and can bring increased footfall to benefit the wider businesses and services. Further, street markets are rooted in the local economy and spend with local traders brings an added "multiplier" impact compared to spend in large national chain stores.</p>
1.05	Mold indoor market comprises 16 stalls and is currently 90% occupied. The units in the market are let to retail and service businesses on a commercial basis. The majority of the stalls in the market were forced to close during the pandemic lockdowns with only the essential retail stalls able to trade. Some traders were able to establish click and collect services.
1.06	The Mold street markets on Wednesdays and Saturdays remain one of the most successful in the region and, pre-pandemic, drew coach trips of visitors from across North Wales and the North West. Although traders have seen a considerable reduction in the scale of trade over time the market had continued to enjoy a sustainable level of trade and was a popular location for traders, drawing them from across North Wales, the North West and the Midlands. Around 45 traders currently attend the market although there is space for 54.
1.07	The Holywell street market on Thursdays has struggled traditionally to attract both customers and traders although the recent support by the Town Council and Friends group has helped to bring in some additional traders. Those traders that attend, though, report a sustainable level of trade and good customer loyalty. Around 10 traders attend the market although there is space for considerably more. The Council has offered heavily subsidised rents to traders in Holywell for many years to help to maintain the market and to attract new traders (who can trade for free).
1.08	The pandemic has brought very serious impacts to the businesses that make up the markets in Flintshire. The majority have been unable to trade for a considerable period and the availability of funding support has been less certain than for traditional High Street businesses. The traders have worked proactively and flexibly with the Council to accommodate the

	changing Covid-19 regulations. Although the number of traders returning to the market after the last lockdown period is consistent with those beforehand, the majority of businesses have not found that trade has recovered to pre-pandemic levels which will be threatening sustainability. It is, though, still too early to judge the full impacts of the pandemic on both the town centres and their markets, not least because the pandemic is still ongoing.
1.09	The Council was due to operate Christmas markets in Mold and Holywell during 2020 and these were cancelled earlier in the year due to Covid risks and restrictions in place. The Council took the decision at the start of 2021 not to commit resources to organising any specialist markets during the year due to the risk of cancellation. The Council continues to licence private sector operators should they wish to operate additional market activity subject to them working closely with health and safety and regulatory teams.
1.10	Since the start of the pandemic the Council has waived all rents for street market traders to help them to maintain resilience. Rents are currently returning to normal levels following a phased reintroduction. The commercial rents for the indoor market businesses have been maintained but deferred payment periods were offered to help businesses to maintain cashflow.
1.11	There appears to be increased support for local shopping and local businesses in general that has arisen during the pandemic. The Council has been heavily promoting the importance of local businesses, especially Shop Local, since September 2020 focussing on the critical role they have played during the pandemic. This campaign has featured a wide range of businesses including market traders. The campaign will continue until August 2021.
1.12	The ability of the Council to fully promote the markets is limited during the pandemic. Once restrictions are fully lifted the Council will work closely with the market traders and other stakeholders to develop a new promotional campaign targeting both local and regional customers and reintroduce pre-pandemic support including hotel and group travel engagement, subsidised shuttle buses from the major caravan parks and supporting trader social media activity. It will also develop a new support campaign for potential market (and wider retail) businesses to help to attract and develop new traders.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None arising from this report.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	None.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	None.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Niall Waller (Enterprise and Regeneration Manager) Telephone: 01352 702137 E-mail: niall.waller@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	These are provided corporately on the Infonet (link) and maintained by the Executive Office