

### Agenda item 3

For information - Update on retail and hospitality sectors & support provided during Coronavirus outbreak

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#### Summary

This paper provides an update on the retail and hospitality sector in Frome during the Coronavirus outbreak, including an outline of the support FTC and partners have provided to this sector.

At the meeting we will hear from representatives from the retail and hospitality sector on their experiences and the help they feel is needed to support recovery – this is intended to inform our recovery planning

#### Background

On 20 March 2020 all cafes, restaurants and pubs were closed due to Coronavirus. This was followed by a further announcement on 23 March for the public to stay at home except for essential shopping resulting in all non-essential shops closing for lockdown on 26 March.

Non-essential shops were allowed to re-open from 15 June and cafes, restaurants and pubs opened to the public from 4 July.

#### Grant Funding

Grant Funding of up to £25,000 was made available through Mendip District Council to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with a rateable value below £51,000. FTC promoted the funding opportunity through its Business Bulletins, social media channels and the Retail Group to local businesses. We also liaised with MDC to help with businesses who sat outside the original funding criteria.

#### Advice and training

We ran a webinar on 25 March with retail communications consultant 'The Farm' to help local retailers in Frome plan for alternative ways of trading during the lockdown. This included discussion on new ways of online working and building on customer loyalty.

Take up for online training has proved popular and FTC worked with Frome Chamber of Commerce to run a series of online Discuss & Do events during lockdown including training on social media and podcasting. We also signposted to relevant online training being offered across the county and nationwide to support businesses.

## Communications

Throughout the lockdown FTC has sent out regular Business Bulletins to businesses on our Business Update list regarding funding opportunities, training, and steps to help businesses operate effectively. A new area on the FTC website was set up highlighting news and information to help businesses during the Coronavirus outbreak.

We contacted local retailers and hospitality providers directly to hear about what services they were offering during lockdown. These were promoted on the new section Discover Frome website which highlighted services shops and eateries were offering to residents to encourage people to continue to shop locally, including delivery services, online shopping, and voucher schemes.

### Actions to help retailers/ hospitality providers as lockdown eases

Following the announcement that non-essential shops could re-open from 15 June, a meeting was held to discuss the challenges retailers would face as they plan to re-open. The group shared ideas on what could be done both within shops and around the town centre to help with new regulations and social distancing. Resulting from the discussions, a trial of closing Palmer Street, Catherine Hill, Stony Street, and King Street to through traffic was actioned to help shoppers social distance on these streets.

Banners highlighting the 2m distance rule were put up around the town centre. Subsequent banners have also been installed on the outskirts of the town centre to welcome shoppers and visitors back to the town centre.

Retailers were contacted to see who would be opening from 15 June, or what online services they were planning to continue running. Twenty-five retailers came back to let us know about their new opening arrangements, with quotes welcoming back their customers. These were featured in a double page spread in the Frome Times.

A subsequent double page spread was organised in the next edition of the Frome Times showcasing 16 restaurants, cafes and pubs that were planning to re-open over the summer and the measures they were putting in place to keep their customers safe. Also featured were some creative online offers and delivery services for those waiting longer to open.

### Next steps

We have been in touch with restaurants, cafes, and pubs to hear if any businesses are taking up the Government's 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme and will promote accordingly.

As new legislation comes into place, we will assist hospitality providers with their application for pavement licences and are also in discussion with eateries about what we can do to help them serve customer outside, such as using our FTC gazebos.

FTC will continue to monitor how social distancing is working in the town centre and continue to work on campaigns to encourage shoppers to confidently return to shop locally. We will also be in touch with retailers and hospitality providers to hear what new services they want to

provide, such as online sales and deliveries, and what training needs they may need to help roll these out.

Retailers and hospitality sectors employ a significant number of young people in the town, and we are aware that following discussions with Jobcentre Plus it is young people who are likely to experience most difficulty in finding jobs. Therefore, we will be working closely with Jobcentre Plus and training providers in the town to find opportunities for young people, including promoting new support for apprenticeships and traineeships.

At this stage, it is not possible to understand the full impact that Coronavirus has had on this sector. We are in touch with retailers and hospitality providers to understand the individual issues they are currently facing and are working with Somerset County Council on a business survey to go to businesses across the county to learn more about the impact coronavirus has had on their business. The survey asks businesses how their workforce has been impacted, how the way they work has been affected, what are the specific challenges or opportunities, how they feel about their future, and what support they most need.

[www.somerset.gov.uk/businessrecoverysurvey](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/businessrecoverysurvey)

The deadline for businesses to complete the survey is 14 August. In the meantime, FTC will continue to communicate with local retailers and hospitality providers to help us identify actions that will support the town's recovery.