

# REPORT TO EVENTS WORKING GROUP RESIDENT COVID IMPACT SURVEY 2021

**Report Reference** E-21-10  
**Meeting Date** 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021  
**Agenda Item** 8  
**Prepared by** Town Centre and Marketing Officer

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SURVEY BACKGROUND

The survey was commissioned to gain insight how the pandemic and subsequent restrictions have affected town centre businesses and their plans for the future.

### 1.2 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey was issued on February 11<sup>th</sup> with a closing date for responses of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. It was promoted via email, the Knutsford One WhatsApp and Facebook groups. There was no cost in distributing the survey.

The survey was split into 4 sections:

- About their business
- Digital & social media
- Impact of Covid 19
- Recovery ideas.

## 2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It should be noted responses were gathered whilst the country was still in a national lockdown and for responses received in February in the early stages of the vaccination roll out. The response rate was low with only 36 businesses responding (from over 200 businesses contacts) and very few responses were from the hospitality sector.

### 2.1 HEADLINE DATA

- Responses were received from 20 retail shops, 9 professional businesses and 4 from each hospitality and beauty. 1 response was from a charity shop. 83% were independent businesses.
- Over half of respondents have been trading in Knutsford for over 10 years.
- Staff employment levels remain fairly stable.
- 65% employ 1-10 local people
- The majority of businesses have a website with 43% having an ecommerce facility.
- Facebook and Instagram are the most popular forms of social media, with 58% increasing

their usage over the pandemic.

- Fewer businesses turned over £100,000 per quarter in 2020 compared to 2019 and more business turned over £20,000-£50,000.
- Sales and orders for 81% of businesses have decreased, although 54% of business have no redundancy plans.
- A 28% feel their business will recover to pre-covid levels in 1-3 months with 19% are not confident they will return at all
- Reduction in rent, VAT and rates alongside more grants (and easier access to grants) were highlighted as the main business aids required by central government.
- 63% of respondents were up to date with rental payments with 9% concerned of eviction.
- 76% had utilised the government grant schemes.
- 36% were making no changes to their business premises.
- The most common suggestions for improving business were the removal of the barriers, more free parking, more business focused events, loyalty schemes and increased promotions.

## 2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the feedback provided in the survey, it is recommended that the council:

1. Continue implementation of the Town Centre Recovery Plan as approved at the January Events Committee meeting.
2. Ensure the social distancing barriers (toblerones) are removed on July 19<sup>th</sup> in line with government guidelines regarding social distancing and in agreement with Cheshire East.
3. Work with any business (and CEC) who wishes to have parklet outside their premises
4. Continue with promotion of the town centre via social media posts, especially Knutsford Virtual High Street, Knutsford Life and Knutsford Matters
5. Re-name Knutsford Virtual High Street to a more generic name to suit post lockdown times
6. Distribute the 'Welcome Back Pack' for a #shoplocal Saturday (postponed to July 31<sup>st</sup>)
7. Implement shopping experience days such as Knutsford At Home, Restaurant Week and Flash Fashion Knutsford
8. Produce a new edition of the Shopping Map before Christmas
9. Continue and increase social media promotion and other shop local initiatives (e.g. Fiverfest)
10. Implement the alfresco dining evenings (Head out not Home) for 6 and 7<sup>th</sup> August and 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of September
11. Work with retailers to develop incentives for shopping local (such as competitions with Knutsford vouchers as prizes) given the huge swing to online clothes shopping.
12. Organise a business focus group to plan incentives for September – March.
13. Organise Christmas Shopping incentives – 24 reasons to shop local this Christmas.
14. Implement agreed loyalty scheme and continue with the voucher scheme.
15. Increase promotion of Knutsford as a tourist destination for example, as is currently happening at the Tatton Park Pop-Up Festival and The Foodies Festival
16. Build up closer relationship with hotels, bed and breakfasts, AirBnB's to promote Knutsford as a tourist destination

### 3.0 SURVEY DATA

#### BUSINESS DEMOGRAPHICS

Business Category	Responses
Retail	20
Professional/Commercial Services	7
Hospitality	4
Charity	1
Health/Beauty/Hair/Wellness	4

Business Type	Responses
Independent	30
Regional	1
National	4
Franchise	1
Other	1

Time Trading in Knutsford	Responses
<1 year	3
1-5 years	10
6-10 years	4
10 years +	19

Staff employment levels	Pre March 2020	Current (inc. furloughed staff)
0	3	3
1-10	23	24
11-19	6	6
20+	4	3

Staff Living within 3 miles of Knutsford	Responses
0	8
1-10	21
11-19	2
20+	1

## ONLINE PRESENCE

- 31/36 businesses operate a website and all were in place before COVID
- 14/31 of those websites include an e-commerce facility
- 4/14 did not have an e-commerce facility before COVID

Social Media Platforms	% of respondents using it
Facebook	86%
Instagram	75%
Twitter	50%
Pinterest	3%
LinkedIn	25%

- 58% of businesses increased their use of social media during the pandemic

## IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Respondents were asked to provide turnover figures within brackets:

- 0-20k
- 20k – 50k
- 50k-100k
- 100k+

The tables show the percentage of responses where the bracket reported was different. It should be noted that a business with a 99k turnover dropping to 51k turnover would show as “no change” within these parameters. A more precise data capture should be used for future surveys. 52% of businesses saw a reduction in turnover (by brackets), compared with 1% of businesses seeing an increase.

Impact of pandemic on turnover, comparing 2019 Quarters with 2020 Quarters

All Business - 24 responses

Impact	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
No Change	75%	54%	71%	58%
Increase		4%	4%	13%
Decrease	25%	42%	25%	29%

Retail - 10 responses

Impact	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
No Change	80%	50%	70%	50%
Increase		10%	10%	10%
Decrease	20%	40%	20%	20%

Professional Services - 8 responses

Impact	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
No Change	100%	75%	75%	75%
Increase				
Decrease		25%	25%	25%

Hospitality - 8 responses

Impact	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
No Change	67%	33%	100%	100%
Increase	-	-	-	-
Decrease	33%	67%	-	-

How has your business been affected by COVID	Responses
Sales & Orders have decreased	81%
Sales & Orders have increased	4%
Sales & Orders have remained the same	3%
Cash flow problems have increased	47%
Supply chain problems	39%
Reduced availability of staff	50%
My business has closed (govt guidance)	44%
Lost sales cancelled contracts	31%
Management time spent on govt guidance	36%

*(Respondents could tick as many statements as they wish)*

**Comments**

- We have been able to replace lost customers with new ones – but have not been affected by Covid as retail and hospitality have.
- Home schooling despite being critical workers.
- Shop quiet, online much busier
- I am a new shop on the high street so we haven't had a full year, but predictions shows that we would have made a lot more due to footfall had we remained open to the public and grew online as planned

Do you expect to make staff redundant due to COVID?	Responses
Yes	2
No	19
Unsure	6
I have already made staff redundant	7

**Imagine all restrictions have ceased. When do you feel, your business will recover to pre Covid-19 levels?**

<b>When, following the removal of all restrictions, businesses expect to recover to pre-COVID levels</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Already recovered to pre-lockdown levels	3%
1-3 months	28%
4-6 months	14%
7-12 months	11%
12 months plus	14%
Not confident we will return	19%
My business has grown	3%
Not sure	3%

### **Comments**

- It will take longer than a year. Have to pay back VAT from last March and also payback 50k loan that is now be used as we have not opened up yet. Customer confidence won't start to return until things are back to normal, yet we will need to increase sales to pay back loans and VAT.

**What other incentives or grants would help your business survive long term?**

- Additional Grants x 7
- Reduce Rent x4
- Reduce VAT x 3
- Reduce Rates x 3
- KTC Support x2
- Rent Forgiveness
- More Events
- Additional Bounce back Loans
- Continue Existing Schemes
- Remove Import Duties
- Return to Office Working

<b>Impact of COVID on rental payments</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
No effect – up to date	63%
In arrears – payment plan agreed with landlord	17%
In arrears – in dispute with landlord	9%
Concerned re eviction	9%
Secured a reduced rent or rent-free period	17%

Business Using Government Schemes	Respondents
Grant Scheme (any)	76%
Furlough Scheme	70%
SEIS	18%
Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme	3%
Bounce Back Loan Scheme	54%
Discretionary grants (Cheshire East & Warrington LEP)	12%

Thinking about your current business premises, which statement most accurately fits your future plans?	Respondents
Refit, extend or improve	8%
Move to smaller premises	6%
Relocate outside Knutsford	6%
Close my business	6%
No change	36%
Move to larger premises in Knutsford	-
Uncertain about plans	33%
Sell or merge business	3%

## RECOVERY

What initiatives do you think could be implemented to support the recovery of your business?

- Additional Grants (5)
- Rent Reductions (3)
- Business Rate Reduction/Holiday (3)
- Removal of Restrictions (3)
- More Events and Festivals (2)
- VAT Reduction (2)
- Promotional Events and Campaigns (2)
- Second Eat out to Help Out Scheme (2)
- Make Town Centre more inviting (lights, bunting etc)
- Wider marketing of the town
- Landlord Mediation
- Increased consumer confidence
- Longer Opening Hours
- Continued Social Media Support
- Employment Schemes

What initiatives do you think could be implemented to aid town centre recovery?

- Free Parking (7)
- Assistance with Rents/Rates (6)
- Events and Promotions (4)
- Remove Social Distancing Barriers (4)
- More landscaping

- Improve Roads/Pavements
- Increase opening hours
- Fewer Saturday Family events
- No Free Parking
- Keep doing what you are doing