

CABINET STATEMENT

CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY – COUNCILLOR PRETTY

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have been dramatic in their impact on the entire Community. When the Government decided to close all non-essential stores on the 23rd March, and to require everyone to work from home wherever possible it was evident that there would be a significant impact on trade in Eastleigh Town and the local centres. There was likewise a similar impact on the business community throughout the Borough.

The Government made several support grants available to the Council to enable us to provide some degree of financial support through the difficult times. Our staff have worked tirelessly to distribute these in accordance with guidelines provided.

We have distributed £16,400,000 to 1,242 businesses through the support grant and a further £809,500.00 via the discretionary grant to 247 businesses

The Government has also provided support by covering some of wage costs of businesses with the furlough scheme and with HMRC support for the self-employed.

This has helped many businesses through these stressful times, however, unfortunately not all jobs will be protected. Two employment and skills experts have been recruited to help identify and deliver training to residents who may lose jobs, change jobs, or seek to upskill.

On the 15 June non-essential stores could re-open with more restrictions being eased on the 4 of this month.

Our environmental staff led on shop opening compliance during Lockdown and are now working with traders to ensure shops are safe and Covid compliant. We have provided signage and leaflets to traders to help with giving the customers confidence to use the shops. Eastleigh Local Area Committee have introduced a temporary Traffic Regulation Order to close Market Street and High Street to ensure there is adequate space for social distancing and encourage shoppers back into the town centre.

To achieve a successful re-opening it will be necessary for both traders and the Council together in encouraging customers back to the Towns and local centres. Simply lifting restrictions will not see business as before.

We should regard these times as opportunities and not negatives.

Our environmental staff continue to lead on Outbreak control. Our Primary Authority partners have also engaged us to help and advice on their risk assessments and safe re-opening which has given us additional income.

Wessex House has opened its doors again with several tenants choosing to return now whilst others are waiting until confidence returns. This has been quite beneficial allowing us to re-open in a safe manner.

Our Platform 4 Business has been providing business support for just over a year. We need to be promoting the benefits to the SME's who may benefit from advice and support offered.

With the new homes being planned within the Borough it is essential that we continue to provide land for commercial use. The preferred, and logical, developments are Riverside and the North East area of the airport. Our team have met with Diageo, Acheson, the Airport representatives, Network Rail and Solent LEP to develop ideas. It would also be great if we could get HCC on board again and possibly investigate potential funding for the scheme. However, this may be hampered until the Airport extension is decided on and if Government offer support to the aviation industry.

Finally, collection of Business rates and Council tax has continued throughout Lockdown. The collection rate for council tax is only 1% below last year which is good news. Collection of business rates are down 7% and there is currently debate as to when recovery should re-commence as clearly these have a significant impact on both businesses and ourselves.