

## Covid-19 Recovery: WCBC Weekly Briefing Note, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2021

As members will recall this is the first Members Covid Recovery Briefing Note.

As cases have remained persistently low and we look forward to further downgrading of national alert levels our focus as a council necessarily changes to recovery over the coming months.

### COMMUNICATIONS

This note is accompanied by a couple of graphics about vaccination and changes to restrictions on Monday, May 17. Please feel free to share these with your communities on social media.

Also, please feel free to share the link to today's public briefing note:

<https://news.wrexham.gov.uk/covid-19-briefing-note-wales-moves-down-to-alert-level-two-on-monday/>

### SERVICES

It is crucial to note that during the course of the pandemic the vast majority of council services have continued to deliver support to our communities. The method through which this has been achieved may have changed in many areas, but services have continued to support.

Examples of this include:-

- Schools-* Have maintained support to children through online lessons and oversight for children.
- Social Care-* Where appropriate digital contact has been made with children, families and adults. Face to face contact has been maintained.
- Libraries-* The Library service has been operating an order and collect service throughout the pandemic and successfully increased its digital membership
- Public Protection-* The Public Protection team has been instrumental in running the TTP system and enforcing the Covid-19 regulations during the lockdown
- Registration-* The registration service has continued to provide a service throughout; appointments at the Guildhall are currently limited to birth registration and notices of marriage and small ceremonies with very limited numbers in attendance.
- Environmental-* General Services such as refuse collections, recycling centres and grass cutting have continued to function throughout the pandemic and have remained largely uninterrupted

As we progress from a period of responding to the pandemic to active recovery increasingly services that we need to deliver in person will resume contact in person in a measured way and with risk assessments in place to maintain the safety of the public and our staff. Any recovery of this form will be closely aligned to government guidelines

Over the last few weeks and consistent with the relaxation of covid rules the following changes are examples of those that have and will occur:-

**Social Care-** Day Services in the Cunliffe Centre have resumed in a phased way, with Erlas Centre also due to resume support in person imminently. Face to face contact here is essential to lighten the load on carers and provide valuable interaction for service users.

**Libraries-** Are now moving to pre-booked sessions for people to begin to return to the libraries.

**Public Protection-** As the lockdown eases and the alert levels reduce the team will be visiting and advising establishments on the new regulations while also resuming their normal public health functions. This will entail a mixture of office, home and site-based working.

**Environmental-** In line with the relaxation of regulations the service has supported some unlocking in the form of opening facilities such as Sports pitches & Pavilions allowing for resumption of activities within communities.

## **ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

### **Tourism:**

Latest STEAM data headlines show the following impact on the Tourism sector resulting from the year of lockdowns and various restrictions:

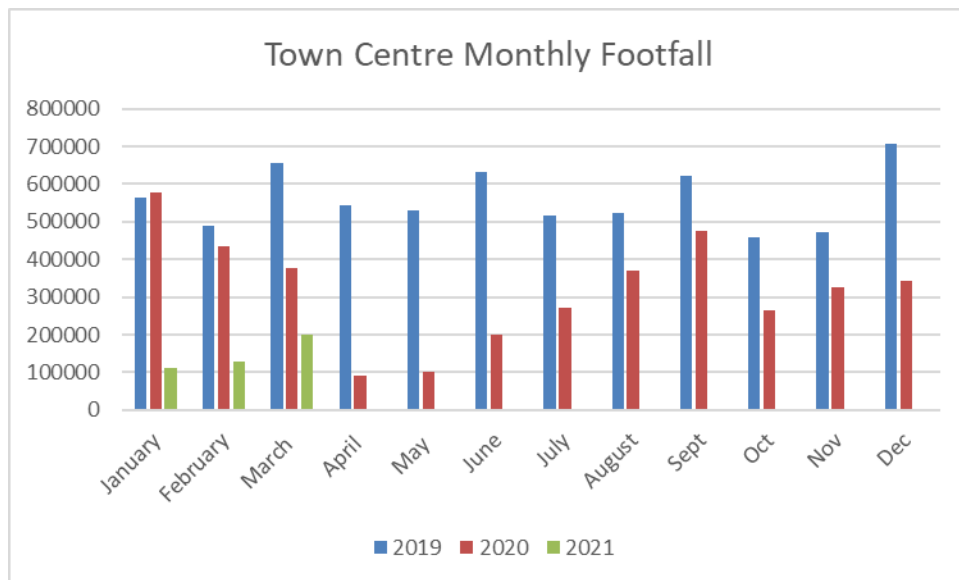
- Total economic impact of tourism on Wrexham County in 2020 = £40.3m (a reduction of 66.1% on 2019 data. Regionally this was a reduction of 62%).
- Overnight accommodation experienced a -70.5% loss in Wrexham County / regionally it was -61.5%
- Total visitor numbers to Wrexham County were down by -69% compared to 2019. Regionally this was -64%.

### **In terms of recovery:**

- The tourism sector is due to receive a boost from 17th May, with the re-opening of indoor hospitality and attractions, based on the rule of 6 (from differing households). Social distancing measures are still required where possible and full guidance is available for those working in the trade at; <https://www.ukhospitality.org.uk/page/WalesGuidance>
- Test events are also being rolled out this month, following earlier pilots at Theatre Clwyd in Flintshire - although none are scheduled for Wrexham County.
- Our marketing messaging focuses around visiting Wrexham safely & considerately now that all borders and UK travel restrictions have eased. Those in the accommodation sector locally are experiencing high-volumes of bookings from 'staycationers' in the UK and research from the Great Britain Tourism Survey indicates that North Wales accommodation providers should have a busy summer period.
- Finally, the Wrexham Visitor Information Centre on Chester Street is starting staggered re-opening with a front Helpdesk serviced in operation from 18th May. There will not be any retail or events in the new unit until later this summer - but a reduced staffed service will be a welcome re-addition to support the re-opening of Wrexham Town Centre.

### **Town Centre:**

Monthly Footfall data comparing 2019 – 2020 and first 3 months of 2021 shows significant reductions in footfall as a result of the lockdown.



In terms of empty retail properties in the Town Centre an audit in September 2021 identified the following: Total units: 447; Occupied: 402; and Empty: 45. This equates to 10% empty units, compared to 11.2 % in 2019/20 and 14% in 2018/19.

A further count including Eagles Meadow and Island Green which were not previously included results in the following: total of 529 units; 121 empty, equating to 22.8% empty units. This will be used as the new baseline going forward.

### **In terms of recovery:**

There are a number of interventions either in place or in the pipeline to stimulate town centre recovery:

- A range of grants and loan schemes;
- Marketing campaign to encourage safe visits to Wrexham;
- A review and appraisal of empty properties to identify potential use and acquisition.
- Development of an action plan to bring empty and problematic units back into use. Once the action plan is completed, Councils can bid into a national grant fund under-write the identified interventions;
- Green Infrastructure projects that contribute to the attractiveness of flexible open spaces and supporting other regeneration activity in the town centre;
- Additional click and collect bays;
- Extended free pavement licence period until March 2022; and
- Free parking after 11am in all Council Car Parks (with exception of Ty Pawb).

Further details are contained in a report being considered at the EBISC at its meeting on 18 May 2021.

### **Business:**

The last 12 months has been very challenging for all businesses with certain sectors being harder hit than others, with Aerospace, automotive, retail and hospitality suffering the most with many forced to close, make redundancies or needing to furlough staff. The landscape over the last couple of months has been one of improving economic conditions for almost all sectors (hospitality being the notable exception) with many receiving increased orders and production levels returning to 'normal' levels.

Food production, construction (trades), packaging and manufacturing businesses have been reporting high levels of demand and increase activity resulting in many recruiting addition staff.

At recent Business forums held on Llay and Vauxhall industrial estates almost without exception the businesses in attendance reported good trading conditions and were optimistic that economic recovery was well on its way.

In terms of Covid Economic Recovery Funds received in Wrexham, administered by our Business Team, a total of £3,689,000 was paid out, broken down amongst the various grants as follows:

Start Up – 90 awarded £225,000

Firebreak – 389 awarded £708,500

Freelancer phase 1 – 74 awarded £185,000

Freelancer phase 1 Automatic Payment – 57 awarded £142,500

Business Restrictions 1 – 533 awarded £1,066,000

Business Restrictions 2 – 681 awarded £1,362,000

Over the last 12 months there have been a total of 630 redundancies recorded as follows:

Magellan 240

IMC 100+

Crazy Ladies 10

Caparo 80

Charles Owen 40

JCB- 80

Tyson foods-80

## **COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

This phase of the work is overseen sub regionally by Flintshire/ Wrexham Public Services Board formed in the wake of the pandemic.

At a local level a council led Recovery Group also receives updates and oversees this work. This group is chaired by the Chief Officer for Social Care, with Chief Officer for Education acting as vice chair.

Our goal as partners is to support, energise and empower communities, partners, stakeholders and citizens to build back the long-term resilience of our area. The four cross-cutting themes we have and will be focussing on are children and young people, poverty and inequality, environment/carbon reduction and tackling mental health issues.

Each of these themes is being led by a different PSB partner.

The Council's approach to recovery within the wider community will continue to be based on sound data and on local knowledge and will address the aspirations of the community as a whole to reach the "new normal" as quickly as possible. It will take account of the hopes and wishes of the wider population and identify specific actions which can facilitate this. It is important that work at the local Wrexham level informs and guides the work at the sub-regional level.

Further detail on progress within theme areas will follow in future bulletins

## **KEY MESSAGES**

Our core message this week is that we are cautiously optimistic that our path towards recovery is now one that we will be able to remain on. Much as in previous weeks we ask the public to remain careful and to abide by the guidance provided nationally and locally as we go about our daily lives.