

MARKETS UPDATE

1. Markets

- 1.1 Following the Prime Minister's statement on Monday 23rd March, all non essential shops and stalls in the Market closed. A small number of essential shops remained open. However, a decision was taken to close the market completely on 28th March because it became difficult to manage the social distancing requirements as outlined in the newly released guidance.
- 1.2 During the week commencing 23rd March, the Council contacted Indoor and Outdoor Traders to confirm that they would be given a three-month rent free period, which would be backdated to 16th March. Footfall had already fallen dramatically that week, probably due to the Prime Minister's earlier statement regarding 'lockdown' on Monday 16th March.
- 1.3 On Sunday 24th May, the Prime Minister announced that all none essential retail shops, with some minor exceptions, could probably re-open from Monday 15th June. He also stated that outdoor markets could re-open from Monday 1st June.
- 1.4 This would have meant that, in theory, the outdoor Market in Widnes could re-open on Monday 1st June. However, NABMA (National Association of British Market Authorities) stated that market operators should only take the decision to reopen when they are confident that they manage the facility in a safe manner.
- 1.5 There were a number of factors that were then considered to ensure that the markets complied with Government guidelines.
- 1.6 Clearly, the Council needed to ensure that all signage and social distancing measures were in place. The Market needed to be adequately staffed and more resource would need to be brought in to support the management of the new arrangements. In addition, all traders had to be briefed and receive training in respect of the revised protocols and procedures that had to be put in place.
- 1.7 The availability of staff to work from the market office had been an issue, primarily because of childcare. The reopening of schools has helped. A further issue has been capacity. There are three market officer posts, but one of these is vacant. The support and goodwill from other officers within the department has been important, and now there is confidence that adequate capacity in the short-term can be provided.
- 1.8 A phased reopening of the market was considered by the market office. This would have resulted in the indoor market opening first, followed by the outdoor market. However, given the Prime Minister's announcement, it was proposed that both the indoor and outdoor markets would open from **Monday 15th June**. A small number of stalls have remained closed, as they relate to hair and beauty.
- 1.9 The opening of both the indoor and outdoor market concurrently has helped ensure that procedures and protocols can be managed consistently. It also has provided a significant and positive news story for the borough's residents, many of whom will have missed their regular visits to the market.