

Framework for Developing Local Area Economic Sustainability Initiatives to Support Local Business – 23 November 2020

Introduction

Section 5.5 of the Government’s ‘Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19’ includes a commitment to develop local area economic sustainability initiatives which support local business. It is recognised that we are now entering a critical time in the pre-Christmas period and emphasis on local area economic sustainability initiatives must be to the fore and require agile, responsive, and appropriate measures be taken.

From a business perspective, three critical timelines have been identified which require a variety of measures.

1. In the short term, the critical phase in the pre-Christmas period, as restriction levels are eased.
2. The Q1 period from January to March 2021, a period which is traditionally a challenging trading time.
3. The lead-in to what is hoped will be a new phase from Q2 and the second half of 2021.

In the short-term and in the demanding weeks leading up to Christmas in particular, Local Authorities who are working with a wide range of stakeholders, will continue to facilitate, support, engage and innovate to assist businesses through the next phase of living with COVID -19

Local Authorities will support and facilitate an agile and appropriate response to business and community needs as we emerge from Level 5. It is important that the business community also play a central leadership role in the planning, implementation and monitoring of health and safety requirements. LAs have been key drivers in the implementation of the community and wellbeing frameworks and are committed to the success of a framework for business

The management of the public realm in city centres, towns and villages will be critically important to ensuring businesses can continue to trade safely and that the public and consumers feel assured they can enjoy amenity, recreation and hospitality facilities and shop locally in a safe way. Extensive work has been underway across the LA sector to develop, reimagine and accommodate new ways of utilising the public realm. In addition, the Guidance for Public Realm events/activities which Fáilte Ireland have developed in conjunction with other key stakeholders will inform the organisation and management of events.

It is prudent to plan for a significant increase in footfall in December, with associated traffic and travel possible. Robust communication and clear messaging are key, as is a partnership and collaborative approach across all stakeholders.

Retail and personal services may operate extended hours to cater for increased demand. LAs will support the business community as much as possible from a public realm perspective. Several measures have already been taken by LAs such as the widening of footpaths, developing of parklets and reviewing areas which could be utilised to assist businesses trade.

Consideration will need to be given to designated shopping and travel times for vulnerable members of the public, elderly, for click and collect and for staff safe travel on public transport. The success of the community forums through the local government sector can once again play a vital role in assisting our vulnerable community members, at this time when isolation can be felt to a greater extent.

Issues in relation to permitting and the easing of delivery restrictions for December will need to be addressed in advance, given the increase in demand for the short period.

LAs will continue to respond to all requests that can be facilitated from the hospitality and retail sector.

Local authorities and the business community are committed to ensuring clear messaging of public health guidelines and being seen to actively adhere to those guidelines. In this context, clear signage erected in advance of possible re-opening will be important in relation to wearing of face coverings on busy street areas, restricting congregation and non-bubble/family socialising on street will be important. Other mediums such as Loudspeaker systems, Social Media, dedicated radio services can also assist in ensuring this message is heard.

Framework

Where possible in busy areas, business associations should be encouraged to work together to ensure the management of crowds and footfall.

There are three key areas of focus within the Supporting Local Business Framework to which LAs are central as:

1. Safety Public Spaces – Town and Village Centres,
2. Helping your Business Trade (trading on-line, click and collect, outdoor street queuing etc),
3. Activation Measures – Keeping Safe (travel to and from urban/town/villages, public realm).

1. Safer Public Spaces – Town and village centres

- Active Travel
- Outdoor space for business
- Outdoor space for communities
- Visible and active management of public realm, continuity and flow of footfall and minimising congregation

- Clear signage and messaging on face coverings, street flow and congregation and event areas

2. Helping your business trade

- Use of public spaces keeping safe
- Use of public space to trade, parklets, street furniture
- Mentoring and support to meet changing business needs
- Managing click and collect areas and pick-up for delivery services
- Permitting of extended opening hours
- Easing restrictions on delivery times to accommodate increased demand.
- Guidance and permitting of canopy and other weather protective measures
- Trading online vouchers and assistance with online presence.

3. Activation measures – Keeping Safe

- Active Travel measures for workers and local communities
- Pedestrian Cycleways/greenways
- Walking routes to and from shopping/hospitality areas from periphery parking
- Outdoor attractions, Christmas lights, public realm improvements
- Reimagining events and creating attractive public realm with lighting etc
- Collaboration with Arts Sector to enliven public areas.

Across the sector Local Authorities have already been active in planning and developing programmes and establishing partnerships and collaborative approaches with the business community, community groups and town teams. Some of the programmes include: -

Public Realm

- ‘In It Together Charter’ asking businesses to work together about queuing in busy periods, emphasising the importance of communication to amplify the message in the pre-Christmas period.
- Across the sector ‘parklets’ have been rolled out to support businesses to broaden their offering and ‘shop floor’.
- Maximizing the use of public realm in terms of access to business without compromising social distancing requirements.
- Shop Front Scheme(s) supported across the sector.
- Collaborative and partnership approach to local strategies.
- Promotions on smart benches, bus shelters, signage.
- Enhanced social distancing signage.
- Christmas themed social health warnings.
- Highlighting the importance of town presentation to the local economy.
- Provision of click & collect on street spaces.

Direct Supports

- Continued roll out of the Trading-on-Line Vouchers (TOVs) to Businesses.
- Campaigns to promote shop local, trade directories, free advertising
- Virtual streets – online shop local – Domestic Tourism demand creation and channel distribution support programmes.
- PR Support for companies supported by Local Enterprise Offices.
- LEO #LookforLocal Campaign – national radio, print, social media campaign.
- Partnership working with local BIDS companies to implement initiatives.

Activation Measures

- On-line Christmas markets.
- Outdoor attractions – Christmas lights – remaining events.
- Light projections to buildings (with messages of hope etc).
- Socially distanced outdoor Christmas themed walks & trails.
- Virtual streets – online shop local – Domestic Tourism demand creation and channel distribution support programmes.
- Extension of Public Parking Hours.
- Promoting active Travel, Leisure Activities, Sports, Exploring our Heritage properties.
- Rollout of media campaigns to promote Shop Local #openforbusiness #safedestination
- Promotional social media campaigns for retailers to engage with Councils.
- Interviews with Retailers on importance of local spend in the town.
- Survive & Thrive Webinars.

Moving into 2021

As we move into the new year, the programmes which have been developed under the three key areas above can continue to support the business community. Programmes and funds to encourage the business community in the new year will be required. Getting people back into the high street.

The creative community working with LAs can also play a key role. Identification of spaces that could accommodate appropriate safe and compliant performances. Inspiring and activating vibrant communities.

Local domestic Tourism will be key in the 6-to-9-month period post Q1.

Programmes to encourage the rediscovering of local areas could include:

- Reimagine creativity to animate urban centres in conjunction with Arts Sector.
- Promote destination attractions to domestic local tourism
- ‘Day Out Campaigns’ at a local level.
- Continuation of an existing series of successful programmes.