

CASTLE STREET CLOSURE: UPDATE

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with information to inform their scrutiny of the Castle Street closure, its impact on businesses and the economy of Cardiff and the proposed approach to options generation and appraisal for the way forward.

Scope of Scrutiny

2. At their work programming forum meeting on 29 September 2020, Members decided to explore the closure of Castle Street looking in particular at:
 - a) The impact on business and the economy, including
 - i. Businesses taking part in the outdoor dining area;
 - ii. Businesses in arcades
 - iii. Other city centre businesses
 - iv. Other businesses in nearby locations, such as Pontcanna, Riverside and Grangetown;
 - v. Any other known impacts relevant to this Committee's terms of reference, such as visitors' feedback.
 - b) Options being considered for Castle Street and how these will be appraised and consulted on.

Closure of Castle Street

3. As part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, all non-essential businesses were closed in order to limit social contact and contain the spread of the virus. On 22 June 2020, non-essential businesses in Wales were permitted to re-open, with strict social distancing rules to ensure a safe environment for residents, workers, visitors and businesses.

4. In order to assist the city to recover from the pandemic, to ensure a safe environment and to help safeguard jobs and businesses in Cardiff, the Council has worked with partners on Cardiff Recovery arrangements. This includes modifications to some of the open space in the city centre to assist with social distancing requirements including directional walking systems, queuing systems and road closures on Castle Street and Mill Lane.
5. Castle Street was closed from 12 noon on Sunday 21 June 2020, utilising a Traffic Regulatory Order that lasts for eighteen months¹. A letter explaining the reasons for the closure was sent by Andrew Gregory, Director of Planning, Transport and the Environment, to local businesses and residents and is attached at **Appendix A**; this contains a map illustrating the road closure and associated restrictions.
6. During late June and July 2020, the Council worked with FOR Cardiff² and Yoello³ to develop the Castle Quarter Café directly on Castle Street. This is a covered outdoor seating area for 240 people - in front of one of Cardiff's most iconic landmarks, Cardiff Castle - which meets social distancing regulations. It is open from 10am – 10pm, and customers can order and pay for food and drink from a range of restaurants and cafés across the city. Customers use their smart phone to access an online platform or scan the QR code provided on the tables. The customer pays through the secure payment platform and the food and drink is delivered directly to their table. There are no advanced bookings and the maximum seating is for six, with tables of four also available, which can also be used by people on their own and couples.

Impact on Businesses and Economy

7. Castle Quarter Café opened on Friday 31 July 2020 and was widely reported to have generated £80,000 for the local economy in the first weekend. The 'FOR Cardiff' website contains the following quotes from local businesses:

¹ TRO information supplied to Environmental Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 15 September 2020

² FOR Cardiff is the city centre Business Improvement District, a business-led, not for profit organisation aiming to improve Cardiff city centre.

³ A Cardiff based FinTech company

- **Wok to Walk** – *‘It has been really good. We have received a constant stream of orders to go along our normal in-store trade. We are really happy with how it is all working.’*
 - **Dusty Knuckle** – *‘We have been taken aback by how popular it has been and it is fantastic what Cardiff Council, FOR Cardiff and Yoello have set up to support businesses such as ours. We have had to dramatically increase our stock to cope with demand as trade has been fantastic.’*
 - **Nata & Co** – *‘It receives a big thumbs up from us as we have been very busy.’*
 - **Marco Pierre White** – *‘we have been really pleased with the demand from the wonderful people of Cardiff. It has been a fantastic way of supporting the business and we are delighted to be part of it.’⁴*
8. Since opening, the number of businesses participating in the Café has increased, providing a wider choice for customers and helping to support local eateries that may have struggled to serve as many customers in their own venues, due to social distancing requirements.
9. Adrian Field, Executive Director of FOR Cardiff adds to this, saying:
- ‘We believe that this is a great opportunity for so many businesses to create additional covers for so many businesses who don’t have much space or resource to create their own digital solutions at this time... Hearing that so many of our members have already seen a positive difference to their bottom line is exactly why we wanted to bring this opportunity to them and we’re delighted that after such a short amount of time it has already made a difference.’⁵*
10. At the start of the road closure, some businesses in nearby locations, such as Castle Arcade and High Street Arcade, expressed concerns about how the road closure would operate, including how they would receive deliveries and how delivery/ takeaway services would be affected. Some businesses also stated that they were not notified, or consulted, by the Council prior to the announcement of the road closure.⁶

⁴ <https://www.forcardiff.com/successful-launch-of-the-castle-quarter-cafe/> downloaded 30-9-2020

⁵ As above

⁶ <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/castle-street-cardiff-closed-traffic-18461366> downloaded 30 September 2020

11. The Council's responded stating that letters had been sent to residents and businesses in the city centre (*this is the letter attached at **Appendix A***) and that Council staff then visited businesses that had expressed concerns to work through issues and put arrangements in place to assist them. This included staffed delivery points either side of the Castle Street closure, to ensure that businesses are able to arrange deliveries during working hours.⁷
12. At the 15 September 2020 meeting of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee, Andrew Gregory, Director of Planning, Transport and Environment, informed Members that the work to date to ensure social distancing, pedestrian safety and an attractive environment has meant that footfall in Cardiff city centre is 15% higher than in other Core Cities⁸ across the UK. This demonstrates that work to encourage people back into the city centre is proving effective, helping to protect businesses and retail whilst keeping people safe.
13. In preparation for this scrutiny, Scrutiny Services contacted FOR Cardiff to offer the opportunity for them to contribute up-to-date information on the impact for their members. FOR Cardiff are providing a narrative on this, which is at **Appendix B**, marked '*to follow*'.

Options Generation & Appraisal

14. At the 15 September 2020 meeting of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee, Andrew Gregory, Director of Planning, Transport and Environment, informed Members that the existing Traffic Regulatory Order is temporary, valid for eighteen months. During this time, officers will be working with partners to generate and appraise options, resulting in due course in a report to Cabinet to recommend a permanent proposal. Any permanent proposal that involved changes to the road layout and usage would require significant consultation, as part of the statutory process.

⁷ As footnote 6

⁸ Core Cities comprises: Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield

Way Forward

15. Councillor Caro Wild (Cabinet Member – Strategic Planning & Transport), Councillor Russell Goodway (Cabinet Member – Investment & Development), Andrew Gregory (Director of Planning, Transport and Environment) and Neil Hanratty (Director of Economic Development), will attend, to give a presentation and to contribute to the discussion and respond to points raised.

Legal Implications

16. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

17. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to:

- i) Consider the information in this report, its appendices and the discussion at the meeting; and
- ii) Decide the way forward for any future scrutiny of the issues discussed.

DAVINA FIORE

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