



5th June 2020

Dumfries and Galloway Council
109-115 English St
Dumfries DG1 2DD

Dear Cllr Murray and Cllr Davidson

We are writing to you at the request of local food, drink and hospitality businesses who took part in a recent Zoom meeting organised by Savour the Flavours.

We are hosting these meetings on a weekly basis to create a safe space for the industry to talk amongst itself, to collaboratively solve challenges and to identify common needs; in response to the economic trauma of the covid lockdown.

At the meeting held on 2nd June the participating businesses expressed a strong desire for Dumfries & Galloway Council to adopt an enabling approach in relation to its statutory and enforcement obligations, with the goal of supporting local food and drink businesses on the path to restart and recovery.

The businesses we spoke with have a very clear desire to work proactively with members of the Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licencing teams as soon as possible. They are keen to seek advice and guidance at an early stage to ensure their reopening plans adhere to all the new covid guidelines, and to help them plan business adaptations accordingly.

The industry felt that having a single point of contact, or interface role, to coordinate with these teams may be an efficient way to provide advice and support, rather than individual businesses needing to navigate multiple departments within Dumfries & Galloway Council. Further, while recognising that these teams have statutory obligations and enforcement responsibilities, the businesses we spoke to wondered whether there is an opportunity to intertwine business support and enforcement, in order to streamline, simplify and make more efficient the advisory input provided.

It was unanimously felt that working collaboratively, perhaps as a Restart Taskforce, might ensure best adherence to guidelines, whilst also maximising the potential for economic recovery within our local communities.

There are some specific barriers to restart that the industry would invite Dumfries & Galloway Council and its officers to consider. These are:

- Removal, wherever possible, of cost and administrative barriers to small businesses seeking to adapt their trading activities to covid-related restrictions. These incidental costs are burdensome to businesses in distress, and the removal of them would be an act of goodwill from the local authority in



supporting local business recovery and protecting jobs. For example, the £20 fee to vary an alcohol premises licence for a licence holder seeking to make more productive use of outdoor space; or the £224 fee to apply for a street trader license, which may be sought by producers hoping to sell food products from vans in rural communities, some of which do not have local food outlets. The industry would greatly appreciate Dumfries & Galloway Council reviewing its requirements in areas such as this, in order to minimise cost and administrative barriers to restart for our region's small, local businesses.

- Clarity around permissions for use of public outdoor space, such as outside seating for cafes, by small businesses. Local businesses understand that there is likely to be increased demand within our towns and villages for businesses to increase their outdoor footprint to enable trading while social distancing remains in place. Businesses are very keen to understand the process by which permission for use of public space is sought and permitted, and any costs associated with this. Business priority is that such decisions are fair and appropriate for their local communities, rather than being granted on a first come first served basis. We would appreciate clear direction from Dumfries & Galloway Council on how permission to use outdoor space can be sought.
- The industry is also keen to emphasise the very severe mental health and trauma impact that lockdown is having on small and micro business owners. We are a region whose economy is built on small businesses and self-employed people – our local businesses are so much more than just economic units; they are the glue that holds our local communities together. While grant support is of course very welcome, and businesses are grateful for it, so too is understanding of the emotional impact and, consequently, the reduced capacity of business owners to navigate bureaucracy. The more that Dumfries & Galloway Council can make it easy for business owners to get things right, the swifter our local economic recovery will be.

In addition, clusters of businesses, such as farmers' market organisers or restaurants, would welcome the opportunity to have a group Q&A session with Trading Standards advisors to discuss issues arising from restart collaboratively. Savour the Flavours would be happy to facilitate this if required.

We are happy to discuss these issues further with you or your officers. We have restarted Savour the Flavours on a voluntary basis to support the sector in response to these extremely challenging circumstances. We understand both the short term trauma and the longer term economic devastation that could be wrought on our region's fragile rural economy by the current circumstances. Our single objective at this time is to do everything we can to help save every local business that can be saved. We are keen to support Dumfries & Galloway Council in doing the same.

With very best wishes

Liz Ramsay, Lorna Young, Ian Findlay and Rachel Findlay