

Invest West Norfolk
Business Insight Survey Findings
Executive Summary

July 2020

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Overview

The Invest West Norfolk business insight survey took place online from Friday 26th June – Sunday 5th July. The purpose of the survey was to understand the impact of Covid-19 on businesses in west Norfolk, and their challenges and concerns, and confidence in the future. The survey also sought to understand business priorities for investment in safe trading measures in communities, in light of EU funding which has been made available for the borough council to support of business communities.

The survey ran concurrently with a consumer insight survey and priorities consultation with parish councils and members of the King's Lynn BID.

In total, 114 west Norfolk businesses fully or partially completed the survey.

The survey was promoted extensively via the borough council social media as well as in the local media. It was also shared via parish and town councils, and via Discover King's Lynn, maximising engagement in the survey.

Key Themes

There are some key themes emerging throughout the findings:

- **Uncertainty:** there is significant uncertainty about the future, including around employing staff and confidence in the future. This reflects the nature of the current circumstances, and it aligns with the findings of other consultation (Vision King's Lynn insight consultation, June 2020);
- **Online:** there is a recognition of a need to enhance services through online use and technology to meet customers' needs remotely in future. It is clear from the findings that there has been limited online adaptation to date but there is an understanding that enhanced technology will be required in future;
- **Financial and marketing:** businesses feel they need the most support around financial needs – in the form of reduced costs and grants - and marketing; they want help to attract customers and footfall.

Key Findings

A: Impact of Covid-19

- The most common response from businesses (28.1%) is that they are continuing to operate with social distancing measures;
- Around 10 per cent of businesses are closed and are uncertain when they will reopen.

- Overall, 87.9% of respondents state that the impact on their business over the last three months has been negative with the majority of these (62.6%) stating that this has been significant.
- The main adaptations that businesses have made over the last three months have been to implement social distancing measures (69.7%) and sanitising and cleaning practices (67.7%).

B. Staffing and Training

- The overwhelming majority – 90.2% - of respondent businesses employ 15 or less employees, suggesting a prevalence of micro and small businesses.
- Nearly half of all businesses have furloughed no staff at all, whereas 40.2% of respondents have seen between 1-5 staff furloughed. This correlates with the size of the businesses suggesting that although the numbers of staff being furloughed, the impact is proportionate.
- Almost half (47.8) of the businesses envisage making no change to staffing in the next 3 months.
- The overwhelming majority – almost 90% - of respondents do not employ apprentices, and nearly 80% of businesses do not intend to do so in future.
- Over one quarter – 26.4% - are uncertain if they are interested in employing apprentices. This represents a potential opportunity, and could signify a lack of knowledge and awareness around apprenticeships.
- At three quarters – 74.1% - of respondent businesses, staff are unable to work from home. This is unlikely to change significantly with 72.9% of respondents stating that staff will not be able to work from home in the future. This reflects a continued need for a physical presence in west Norfolk.
- Adapting services online and accessing and using technology was where businesses felt they would need most training and upskilling support in the next 6 months.

C: Looking Ahead

- Getting business – attracting and retaining customers – and financial concerns are the biggest challenges which respondents believe they will face in the next 3-6 months.
- Respondents feel that they need financial support – grants, reduced costs and rates, access to funding – and marketing to help to bring in business.
- Almost half of respondents (48.8%) are uncertain about their prospects in the next 6-12 months, underlining the uncertainty of the circumstances businesses are operating in.
- 38.8% declared themselves confident for their business's prospects in the next 6-12 months with just 12.5% not confident at all.

D: Town Centre Priorities

***The full analysis of all the priorities consultation can be found in the separate priorities report.**

- The three clear main priorities which businesses would like to see are:
 1. Hand sanitiser stations in High Streets/Neighbourhood shopping areas;
 2. Covid safe posters and signage;
 3. Good practice guidance on temporary adjustments and social distancing for businesses.

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