

FULL TEXT OF EMAIL TO LOCAL AUTHORITY CHIEF EXECUTIVES AND LEADERS

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM NMTF CEO JOE HARRISON

I am sorry to have to trouble you again in these difficult times, but I wanted to draw your attention to three serious issues regarding the response to Covid-19 in the markets industry. Of necessity this must be a blanket email to all local authority leaders and chief executives, and I appreciate you will not all have markets in your area.

From today (15 June), both outdoor and indoor markets can open for the sale of essential and non-essential goods (street food and cafes must be takeaway, personal care must remain closed). Whilst this is most welcome and we are supporting our members to reopen safely to meet 'Covid-Secure' guidelines, I felt I had to write to central government to outline some concerns.

Find the letters attached. To summarise:

Local Government Discretionary Grant Fund

Most market traders are not bricks and mortar. We ask that local authorities use their discretion to enable outdoor market traders, street traders, and events traders to access this crucial financial support.

I recognise you may have finalised your scheme by now. So, I ask that you reserve a portion of this fund to provide grants to outdoor market, street, and events traders excluded from it as they run a business that is mobile.

We have made some observations to help your local authority to do this: <https://www.nmtf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NMTF-Observations-Local-Authority-Discretionary-Grants-Fund.pdf>.

Claiming back rent during lockdown

57% of market and street traders told us that they had received a rent waiver that they did not have to pay back – thank you if your local authority did this.

But 13% told us they had received a 'payment holiday' with rent continuing to accrue and 30% told us they were being charged as normal. This is noose around market traders' necks.

Market traders cannot be expected to pay rent for a stall or unit that they have been unable to use – either due to closure, shielding or self-isolating. Please do the right thing.

Support to reopen and recover

It was fantastic to see outdoor markets open for business from 1 June and I look forward to indoor markets reopening from today. We have published a guide for market and street traders: <https://www.nmtf.co.uk/info/bounceback/>.

Changes to how markets are run will need to take place and we all must work together to achieve this, but traders cannot be expected to pay the same level of rent for possibly reduced days, hours, and footfall.

Help us to ensure markets bounce back! Introduce a rent payment plan that is free at first, rising to an appropriate, adjusted amount over an agreed term that reflects trading conditions during this period of recovery.

I hope you can understand why a letter to the Secretaries of State was needed.

Markets should be at the forefront of the campaign for retail recovery out of this crisis. They can be the places where our communities come together to heal, but not without your attention and care.

Thank you for reading this and, depending on the situation within your local authority, I hope it will lead to serious consideration being given to the plight of market, street, and events traders.

FULL TEXT OF EMAIL TO BUSINESS SECRETARY ALOK SHARMA AND COMMUNITIES SECRETARY ROBERT JENRICK:

Dear Secretary of State

I write to you from the NMTF, the only national trade association for market and street traders, events retailers, and mobile caterers in the UK. We represent around 20,000 microbusiness owners who trade from markets, high streets, and festivals and fairs across the four nations. I wanted to raise your attention to three serious issues regarding the response to Covid-19 in our sector and ask for your assistance with helping to safeguard the businesses and protect the livelihoods of those affected.

Local Government Discretionary Grant Fund in England

I welcomed the inclusion by central government of market traders as a priority group to access this fund. Sadly, most are unable to access it. Guidance issued to local government focused attention on those market traders with 'fixed building costs.' 60% of market traders who sell essential goods trade outdoors, as do all street traders. 97% of events traders have had events cancelled¹. It is an uneven playing field for those without non-domestic property.

I recognise that local authorities have the discretion to tailor their schemes to meet local economic need. Local authorities to be applauded for supporting market and street traders include Cambridge City Council² and West Suffolk Council³. But most are following the guidance to the letter. Some are passing traders from pillar to post, unwilling to consider people who work in but do not reside in their authority (and vice versa, frustratingly).

The NMTF has developed a set of observations to support local authorities to administer the fund with respect to market, street, and events traders⁴. But we recognise most local authorities have finalised their schemes. I ask that you support our call for local authorities to reserve a portion of this fund to provide grants to market, street, and events traders excluded from it as they run a business that is mobile.

Claiming back rent during lockdown

The NMTF has taken a clear position that rent should not be charged to traders who are unable to use their stall because the market is closed, or they are shielding or self-isolating. I made this plea to local government leaders in April and we welcomed news from our members that rent has been waived for 57% of them. But for 30% rent has continued to be charged as normal and 13% have received a 'payment holiday.'

Now the market manager has come knocking to collect a debt. A common argument from those demanding payment is that if a trader is in receipt of any grant from central government, they must use this to pay their rent. But 33% of market traders have received no support from central government. Most

markets in the UK are run by local authorities. So, to give with one hand to take with the other – morally, this cannot be right.

I will be writing again to local government leaders and making the plea to do the right thing. I ask that you support our call for this. I recognise that local authorities are under considerable financial strain but filling council coffers with grants intended to secure the livelihoods of market traders is not the answer. We must consider our markets in terms of their value to local communities and not as income generators for local authorities.

Support to reopen and recover

At the time of writing, outdoor and indoor markets are reopening for the sale of essential and non-essential goods in England and Northern Ireland. It is hoped that Wales and Scotland will soon follow suit and reopen markets by the end of June. To support market and street traders in all four nations to return to work, we have published a practical guide⁵, which I ask that you endorse and share within your networks.

Just like shops on the high street, changes in how markets operate will need to take place to make them 'Covid Secure.' Outdoor markets that have remained open for the sale of essential goods during lockdown have set an excellent standard. The NMTF is encouraging our members to work proactively with market management to adapt markets for the 'new normal' and give our communities confidence that they can return to the high street.

But we cannot expect traders to pay the same level of rent for possibly reduced days, hours, and footfall, alongside the additional costs of 'Covid Secure' measures. I ask that you support our call for a national 'Bounce Back' scheme for markets. This should include a rent payment plan that is free at first, rising to an appropriate, adjusted amount over an agreed term that reflects trading conditions during this period of recovery.