



Welcome Back Fund Summative Assessment

A Final Report by Hatch
31st August 2022

MHCLG



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Disclaimer & Limitations of Use

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Hatch was appointed as part of a Wavehill-led consortium by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to complete a summative assessment of the Welcome Back Fund (WBF), formerly known as the Reopening the High Streets Safely Fund (RHSSF). WBF is entirely funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and is required to submit a summative assessment as part of the programme closure procedure.
- 1.2 A new Priority Axis 10 was added to the national ERDF Operational Programme, with the WBF being the only project funded under this new priority axis.
- 1.3 A bespoke WBF team established within the Funding Delivery Team in MHCLG led the WBF project from application through project delivery and consultation. Local authorities in receipt of grants delivered the grant activities at a local level.
- 1.4 The WBF grant scheme sought to help local authorities put in place measures that supported their business communities in response to Covid-19, helping to establish a safe trading environment for companies and consumers, particularly in high streets. The later stage of the fund in the form of WBF also sought to support a safe public environment for tourism, as well as providing local authorities with the opportunity to pilot projects and formulate strategic responses to address and reverse the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on local economies, particularly where they related to the high street.

Evaluation Approach

Addressing ERDF Evaluation Questions

- 1.5 The purpose of conducting a summative assessment is to gain an independent understanding of the practical experience of implementing the WBF, its value-added and the impacts achieved.
- 1.6 The summative assessment evaluates whether the fund has delivered project performance against intended inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts, reviews delivery and management performance with a view to assessing which delivery approaches work and why. This includes reviewing any examples of best practice, challenges experienced, and lessons learnt which can be applied in the design and delivery of future interventions.
- 1.7 The summative assessment for the WBF adopts an approach which is consistent with the requirements of ERDF guidance. Every summative assessment must cover the following five themes:
 - **Relevance and Consistency** - the summative assessment must explore the continued relevance and consistency of the project, considering any changes in policy or economic circumstances during its delivery period.
 - **Progress Against Contractual Targets** - the summative assessment will set out the progress of the project against contractual targets, any reasons for under or over performance, and the expected lifetime results.
 - **Experience of Delivering and Managing the Programme** - the summative assessment must explore the experience of implementing and managing the project and any lessons which have emerged from this.

- **Economic Impact Attributable to the Programme** - the summative assessment, where possible, must show the economic impact attributable to the project, including both the intended and actual outcomes and impact.
- **Cost Effectiveness and Value for Money** - the summative assessment, where possible, must analyse the cost-effectiveness of the project considering its intended and unintended outcomes and impacts, and hence its value for money.

Approach to the Summative Assessment

1.8 To inform the summative assessment, information was triangulated from a range of sources, including data and qualitative insights from MHCLG, local authorities and desk-based research. In particular, this included analysis of:

- **Logic model** - aside from reviewing WBF's background documentation, an assessment and update of the logic model, which underpins the programme's intervention logic;
- **Programme performance data** – detailed analysis of the programme's monitoring data to assess performance against contracted ERDF output and financial commitments;
- **Programme delivery review** - conducting stakeholder consultations with design and delivery team members to obtain feedback on the programme's processes, from delivery to management and governance;
- **Beneficiary consultation** – using an online survey to collect beneficiaries' perspectives, exploring activities delivered, satisfaction, impact and views on the programme overall; and
- **Value for money assessment** – due to the nature of the WBF, it has not been possible to undertake quantitative impact modelling to estimate the additionality of the programme as a whole in terms of jobs and gross value added (GVA) created. The overall findings of the primary research have been used to provide conclusions on whether WBF has delivered value for money.

Structure of this Report

1.9 The report has been drafted to provide an overview of the important messages which have emerged from the analysis. As such, the report is structured around the following chapters:

- **Section 2: Programme Context** – considers the programme's **logic model** – alongside the economic and policy context in which the programme was designed, including the nature of the market failure, the programme's objectives and the rationale for the delivery approach;
- **Section 3: Changes to Delivery Context** – considers the changes in the **economic and political environment** which may have impacted the programme's continued relevance and delivery;
- **Section 4: Financial and Output Performance** – considers the **progress with programme implementation** against expenditure and output targets;
- **Section 5: Programme Delivery Performance** – provides a qualitative analysis of the **programme's delivery performance** and implementation, and considers the elements of programme delivery which have worked well and less well;

- **Section 6: Outcomes and Impacts** – sets out the progress made towards the **outcomes and impacts** set out in the programme’s logic model; and
- **Section 7: Conclusions and Recommendations** – outlines the conclusions which can be drawn from the evaluation and the **lessons learned** from programme delivery for WBF use, as well as for policy makers and those designing and implementing similar programmes in the future.

2. Programme Context

- 2.1 This section considers the economic and policy context in which the WBF programme was designed, explores the nature of the market failure it was seeking to address, and the programme's objectives and rationale for the delivery approach adopted. It is based around the programme's logic model and analyses the appropriateness of the programme's design given its objectives.
- 2.2 The analysis in this section has been informed by:
- Review of background documents to the programme, including the programme's original application form and other internal programme management and delivery documents.
 - Interviews with members of the programme's management, design and delivery team (a full list of interviews is provided in Appendix B).

Programme Logic Model

- 2.3 The Logic Model, presented in Figure 2.1, outlines the programme's intervention logic, tracing the programme's rationale to its intended outcomes in a step-by-step manner.

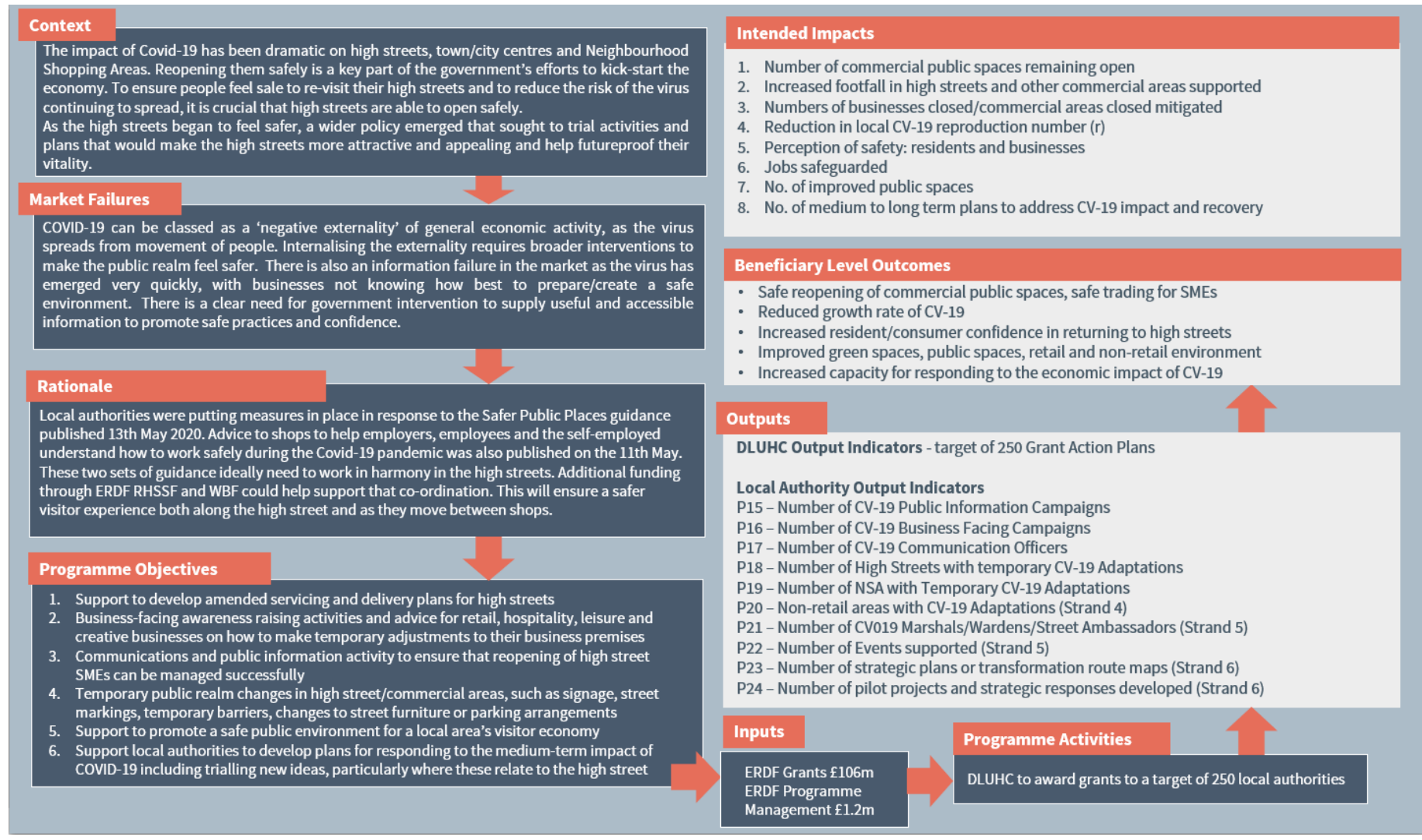
Programme Need and Rationale

- 2.4 High Streets are vital to the economy, inject billions of pounds, create jobs and allow small businesses to thrive. In recent years, high streets have faced significant challenges as consumer patterns have changed and spending moved online. The Covid-19 pandemic brought a further challenge to the high street and town centres. At the start of the pandemic, there was a huge risk that remaining closed for longer would exacerbate these problems and change behaviour permanently, as well as causing many businesses to close and jobs to be permanently lost.
- 2.5 Over the years, High Streets have also played a key role in providing a sense of community, which was greatly diminished during the lockdown periods.
- 2.6 In May 2020, £50 million of European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) was announced by MHCLG to help boost the recovery of high streets. The RHSSF/WBF grant funding was allocated to all District and Unitary authorities in England. Hence the funding was available to 309 Local Authorities in England to support the safe return to high streets. Smaller authorities such as town and parish councils were able to participate by acting as delivery partners. It was intended that the funding would enable local authorities to support businesses in high street locations/urban spaces with social distancing measures to trade safely and profitably.
- 2.7 Local authorities were already putting measures in place to respond to the Safer Public Places guidance and shops were responding to published government advice on how to work safely during the pandemic. The guidance needed to work in harmony on the High Streets and the additional funding made available in the form of RHSSF and WBF aimed to help support that co-ordination, providing local authorities with extra resources to reflect the role of high streets as focal points for town and city-centre commerce. The WBF was therefore a key part of the government's efforts to kick-start the economy in a safe way and reignite a sense of community.
- 2.8 ERDF funding delivered through the RHSSF was intended to provide a short-term boost to help build confidence as the high streets opened, and to be available until March 2021.

- 2.9 Building on the RHSSF strands of activity, in March 2021, the WBF continued the grant support to local authorities and offered an additional injection of ERDF monies of £56m. This extra financial support no longer just focused on making spaces safer but reflected the Secretary of State's desire to encourage people to visit the high street, making them more attractive and appealing and to trial and test new approaches for what could work. WBF ran from March 2021 to the end of March 2022. In addition to widening the scope of the intervention, WBF also expanded the geographical coverage of financial support. The expansion was inclusive of other public, rural and coastal areas that had originally fallen outside of defined towns, high streets and neighbourhood shopping areas but which lay within local entities' boundaries. Appendix A presents the WBF allocations per local authority (this includes both RHSSF and WBF allocations).
- 2.10 Research has shown that coastal towns (and ex-industrial towns) were most economically vulnerable to the shutdown¹, with coastal towns having the highest proportion of workers in the industries most affected by closures such as tourism and retail. It was recognised that coastal communities had been particularly hit by Covid-19 and hence additional monies were allocated to some of the coastal communities as part of the WBF. Coastal communities therefore had a slightly higher allocation of funding in the second round when the WBF was introduced.
- 2.11 In the policy context, WBF is covered by the ERDF England thematic objective 8: Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility. The thematic objective involved setting up a new Priority Axis 10 in the Operational Programme. The four strands of activity set out in the WBF project were not considered to meet the criteria of any of the ERDF Operational Programme outputs, other than the new P14-P19 outputs which were developed by the Managing Authority from the European Commission team.
- 2.12 The programme's activities were developed by a small policy team in the context of a change in EU regulations to specifically support Covid-19 related activity and with a national ministerial drive to halt the impacts that Covid-19 was having on high streets at a time when decimation of high streets had already been occurring.
- 2.13 A small sample of local authorities were consulted ahead of the launch of the fund, regarding the costs associated with implementing the Safer Public Spaces guidance in their high streets. This helped provide an indication of costs that local authorities were likely to face, and where the ERDF fund could support an additional sum for high streets, on top of local authority expenditure. The consultation also highlighted that councils were positive about this intervention, with numerous enquiries for further detail on the fund.

¹ <https://www.centrefortowns.org/reports/covid-19-and-our-towns/viewdocument/21>

Figure 2.1 WBF Logic Model



Source: MHCLG, Hatch

Market Failures

- 2.14 The rationale for public sector intervention in this area is based on several market failures.
- 2.15 The first was that Covid-19 is a negative externality of general economic activity, as the virus spreads from the movement of people. Internalising the externality required broader interventions to ensure the public realm felt safer.
- 2.16 The second market failure was an information failure in the market as the virus emerged quickly and was not something that had been experienced in the UK before. Businesses did not know how best to prepare or create a safe environment. There was a need for government intervention to supply accurate and accessible information to promote safe practices and confidence.
- 2.17 Lastly, since lockdown, high streets across the UK had experienced year-on-year declines in footfall, between -74% and -89.5% (according to MHCLG daily footfall data). This was larger than the average UK rate of decline. Retail parks had witnessed smaller year on year footfall declines compared to high streets and shopping centres. Reopening the high streets was an important part of the government's plan to restart the economy. However, the costs involved in doing so safely were likely to be prohibitive if done efficiently and effectively, and hence not something that local authorities could have shouldered without public intervention.
- 2.18 Overall, the Market Failure case made for the WBF was clearly defined.

Programme Objectives

- 2.19 RHSSF and WBF is a £106m grant funding programme applied for and led by MHCLG and delivered by 306 or 98% of local authorities in England.
- 2.20 Funding for the RHSSF and WBF was drawn from an existing available ERDF budget. Minister Simon Clarke MP gave his approval for RHSSF and the allocation methodology. The grant allocation methodology is based on a local authority's population and serves as a proxy for the footfall they may anticipate on their High Street and the degree of safeguarding required.
- 2.21 The WBF had the following objectives:
- Support to develop amended servicing and delivery plans for high streets;
 - Business-facing awareness raising activities and advice for retail, hospitality, leisure and creative businesses on how to make temporary adjustments to their business premises;
 - Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of high street SMEs could be managed successfully;
 - Temporary public realm changes in high street/commercial areas, such as signage, street markings, temporary barriers, changes to street furniture or parking arrangements.
 - Support to promote a safe public environment for a local area's visitor economy; and
 - Support for local authorities to develop plans for responding to the medium-term impact of Covid-19 including trialling new ideas, particularly where these related to the High Street.

Programme Activities

- 2.22 The WBF aimed to achieve a target of 250 local authority Grant Action Plans (local recovery action plans) being produced against the indicator: *Number of entities supported*.

- 2.23 Within each action plan, local authority activities could be delivered across six activity strands. Table 2.1 presents the six Activity Strands for the WBF. Strands 1 to 4 were the first key intervention measures for RHSSF up until 31st March 2021, at which point the WBF introduced a wider remit of spending for local authorities, including two new additional strands: Strand 5 and 6. The WBF therefore included Strands 1 to 6. The two new additional strands gave local authorities the opportunity to futureproof their high streets with piloting and testing of new ideas for the medium term.

Table 2.1 Activity Strands

Strand Number	Type of activities
1. Support to develop an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies.	This plan could have been new, amended or build on an existing plan such as high street servicing and delivery plans. All local authorities were encouraged to engage local businesses, business organisations, lower tier authorities such as parish councils, and other relevant stakeholders when considering how to use the award.
2. Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.	Examples of communications activities to citizens highlighting how the local economy would reopen safely including: online and digital; media and press activities; print and publications such as posters and leafleting campaigns.
3. Business facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.	These campaigns are focused on communicating to retail businesses how they could make temporary adjustments to their business premises to reflect revisions to Covid-19 guidance. There was scope within the activity strand for funds to support information officers to speak directly with SMEs.
4. Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.	This activity sought to enhance the physical environment to increase the level of safety measures, to improve public realm attractiveness and outdoor settings.
5. Support to promote a safe public environment for a local area's visitor economy.	To boost the look and feel of the high streets, local authorities were able to invest in activities to make high streets welcoming and promote the visitor economy. This included for example: placed based marketing, e.g. supporting safe celebration events on high streets and in local towns; Marshals; public space maintenance; beautification activities including graffiti removal; activities that future proof the high street; improvement of green space and provision of outdoor seating areas.
6. Support local authorities to develop plans for responding to the medium-term impact of COVID-19 including trialling new ideas particularly where these relate to the High Street.	This activity strand built on Strand 1 and recognised that the impact of Covid-19 on local economies would be significant. The strand supports opportunities to further develop, pilot projects and strategic responses to address and reverse the long-term impacts of Covid-19 particularly on high streets.

Source: Hatch

Inputs

- 2.24 The total cost of the WBF's ERDF package (included around £1.2m for the delivery of the project by MHCLG²) was £107.2m. This primarily included:

² A final figure for delivery of the WBF project will not be available until the project has closed.

- £106m on grants to local authorities
- £1.1m on salaries for delivery of the project, with 15 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) individuals directly involved in delivery from MHCLG
- Minor budgets for IT and office equipment and for the summative assessment activity.

2.25 All programme cost projections were based on MHCLG average staff salaries provided by the MHCLG HR department.

Outputs, Results and Impacts

2.26 Output targets for Action Plans were set according to the Managing Authority policy team.

- The WBF delivered against PA10 PCV33 of the ERDF Operational Programme: Entities supported in combating or counteracting the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a target of **250 Grant Action Plans**. The single formal ERD output for PA10 PCV33 activity – 250 grant action plans – was based on 314 Local Authorities in England having potential access to WBF allocations.
- The forecast for the output of 250 action plans was forecast for the life of the project, with 170 action plans set for Q4 2020, 50 in Q1 2021 and 30 in Q2 2021. This reflected the timescales for contracting with local authorities and the submission of grant action plans, estimating a smaller number of grant action plans to be received and contracted towards the later stage of the project.
- The grant action plans were to describe the activities each local authority would deliver across the six activity strands, indicative costs, volumes against the WBF's own measures and information required to support ERDF compliance with regards to financial management, procurement, State Aid, Branding and Publicity. The first four strands of activity directly aligned with three of the six examples for action in support of local recovery action plans, to ensure full delivery against the Priority Axis.

2.27 It was recognised that due to the complex nature of ERDF, unique Covid-19 response position and relatively small levels of funding per area, not all Local Authorities would take up the opportunity to deliver activities through the WBF and develop the associated grant action plan. For this reason, the project set the target of 250 action plans.

2.28 In addition to the single formal ERDF output for PA10 PCV33, the WBF would measure activity against a suite of priorities, the project outputs (PO)³. It was expected that the grant action plans would capture the planned outputs per local authority. Approximate output forecasts as set out in the RHSSF ESIF Form 2-010 (there were no additional output forecasts when the WBF was introduced) were as follows:

- P14 – Number of Covid-19 Action plans – **94 local authorities** would deliver against the action plan output
- P15 – Number of Covid-19 Public Information Campaigns – **280 public information campaigns**

³ Office for National Statistics and High Streets Task Force data and reports informed the indicative output figures. The RHSSF also received 500 email correspondences from local authorities regarding the fund since the at-risk launch. The information from the communication further informed the output figures.

- P16 – Number of Covid-19 Business Facing Campaigns – **150 business facing campaigns**
 - P17 – Number of Covid-19 Communication Officers – **100 Covid-19 communication officers**
 - P18 – Number of High Streets with Covid-19 Adaptations – **200 high streets with Covid-19 adaptations**
 - P19 – Number of Neighbourhood Shopping Areas with Covid-19 Adaptations – **100 neighbourhood shopping areas with Covid-19 adaptations**
- 2.29 Additional project outputs included as part of the WBF from April 2021, did not have accompanying forecasts:
- P20 – Non-retail areas with Covid-19 Adaptations (Strand 4)
 - P21 – Number of Covid-19 Marshals/Wardens/Street Ambassadors (Strand 5)
 - P22 – Number of events supported (Strand 5)
 - P23 – Number of strategic plans or transformation route maps (Strand 6)
 - P24 – Number of pilot projects and strategic responses developed (Strand 6)
- 2.30 The WBF logic model highlighted the following outcomes/impacts for the WBF:
- Safe reopening of commercial public spaces, safe trading for SMEs
 - Increased footfall in high street and other commercial areas supported
 - Numbers of businesses closures/commercial area closures mitigated
 - Reduction in local Covid-19 reproduction number (r)
 - Increased resident/consumer confidence in returning to high streets
 - Jobs safeguarded
 - Improved green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environments
 - Increased capacity for responding to the economic impact of Covid-19.

Delivery Context

- 2.31 Since programme inception, MHCLG submitted a Project Change Request (PCR) in September 2021 following a request from the Managing Authority to extend the project under the ‘Welcome Back Fund’ title. This marked the transition from RHSSF to WBF.
- 2.32 The PCR was submitted largely to change the scope of what was being supported, moving to a wider remit and geographical area scope. This change recognised that areas close to the high street were important and had linkages to the activity on the high street. With these linkage areas included under the WBF, it was expected that this would help bring more people to the high streets. The PCR also recognised the need to include the opportunity to look at the future of the high streets through the WBF. This approach extended the time that local authorities would have to spend their allocations and due to interventions being future looking, they would require a longer period to be put in place which helped justify investments running on.
- 2.33 Table 2.2 provides an overall summary of the project finances and intervention rate with regards to category of region⁴, revenue and ERDF public funding. The project’s total expenditure

increased with an additional £55,875,535 in grants to local authorities, with an additional £1m administrative project costs for staff and other revenue costs.

- 2.34 The project remained 100% ERDF funded, with no match funding.

	Current	Proposed	Variance	Variance (%)
ERDF (Revenue)	£51,000,000	£107,875,535	£56,875,535	111.52%
More Developed Revenue ERDF £	£40,851,000	£84,546,759	£43,695,759	106.96%
Transitional Revenue ERDF £	£9,598,200	£22,025,953	£12,427,753	129.48%
Less Developed Revenue ERDF £	£550,800	£1,302,822	£752,022	136.53%

Source: Hatch

- 2.35 Previously, local authorities were permitted to submit claims at the end of the project with no requirement for forecasting. This was amended in the PCR with quarterly forecasts, progress reports and quarterly claims required from local authorities. The introduction of the WBF also required local authorities to revise their action plans in light of the wider remit and geographical scope.
- 2.36 Table 2.3 highlights the expenditure profile changes following the PCR.

Table 2.3 Summary Changes to Expenditure

	Current	Proposed	Change £	Change %
Grants to Local Authorities	£50,000,000	£105,875,535	£55,875,535	111.75%
Salaries	£826,088	£1,145,751.37	£319,663	38.70%
Flat Rate Indirect Cost	£123,912	£171,863	£47,951	38.70%
Marketing	£0	£0	£0	
Consultancy	£50,000	£100,000	£50,000	100%
Office Costs	£0	£0	£0	
Other Revenue	£0	£582,386	£582,386	100%

Source: Hatch

- 2.37 The PA10/PCV33 entities supported in the combating or counteracting the effects of the Covid-19 remained at 250 Action Plans.

3. Changes to Delivery Context

- 3.1 This chapter of the report assesses changes in the economic and political environment which have affected WBF, particularly on whether such changes have affected the programme's original rationale or delivery.

Key Contextual Factors

- 3.2 The Reopening High Streets Safely Fund specifically responded to the national policy to reopen high streets safely from mid-June 2020, due to the prevalence of Covid-19 in England.
- 3.3 Nationally, the activity proposed was designed to enhance, coordinate and provide additionality regarding the activities undertaken by local authorities in response to current national guidance of Safer Public Places published 13th May 2020 and advice provided to shops on 11th May 2020 detailing how to work safely during the pandemic.
- 3.4 The two sets of guidance needed to work in harmony on the High Streets and the additional funding made available in the form of RHSSF and WBF aimed to help support that co-ordination, providing local authorities with extra resources to reflect the role of high streets as focal points for town and city-centre commerce. The WBF was therefore a key part of the government's efforts to kickstart the economy in a safe way and reignite a sense of community.
- 3.5 WBF (including RHSSF) was one of a number of mechanisms available for local authorities to access financial resources for High Street, town and area-wide interventions in response to Covid-19 and developing towns more widely. These included the MHCLG CLGU Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund (July 2021), all complementing the £3.2 billion package of support MHCLG was providing to local authorities in response to Covid-19.
- 3.6 Part of the new regulations brought in that enabled the WBF was the ability to support projects at 100% funding. This took away the need for match funding from the private sector and gave the speed and greater flexibility required. Two further initiatives were introduced by the government that were aligned to direct business support, which complemented the WBF.
- The £10 million Kickstarting Tourism Package (July 2020) gave small businesses in tourist destinations grants of up to £5,000 to help them adapt their businesses following the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - Small and medium sized businesses in England were able to access grants between £1,000 and £5,000 for new equipment, technology and specialist advice.
- 3.7 These two funds enabled businesses to navigate Covid-19 and was linked to businesses on the high street. The funds were seen as complementary to the WBF.
- 3.8 Since the programme's inception, the national and local economic landscape has changed.

EU Exit

- 3.9 The EU exit has increased supply chain challenges and labour shortages. The former has meant that materials and equipment have become more difficult to source, whilst labour shortages have had a significant impact on sectors such as hospitality, such as staff serving in restaurants or in the form of delivery workers.
- 3.10 The overall impact of these changes on the WBF project has been to make sourcing materials harder, delaying activities taking place.

Covid-19

- 3.11 The onset of Covid-19 has impacted the WBF in a number of ways.
- 3.12 Firstly, changes in restrictions due to spikes in Covid-19 over the life of the WBF has meant that planned activity was quickly stopped or paused. For example, as the case study for Bury (Appendix D) highlights, radio campaigns leading up to Christmas to drive footfall for the Christmas period and encourage people into the centre had to be 'axed' due to the onset of the Omicron variant.
- 3.13 Secondly, pent up demand as a result of Covid-19 restrictions has meant that tradespeople have been exceptionally busy and often not able to undertake a job for months ahead. This has also impacted outputs of the WBF project, delaying and sometimes preventing activities.
- 3.14 Thirdly, WBF projects have had to work alongside restrictions for home working as well as adapting to the new hybrid working patterns since the pandemic. In larger/core city centres the change in working patterns has hampered recovery, with a large proportion of the gap to pre-Covid spending levels being the result of missing weekday spend. This trend impacted on the outputs of the WBF, including lower footfall on the high streets. In contrast, in some towns/more peripheral centres have benefited from home working and recovered more quickly as a result.
- 3.15 Lastly, the pandemic has further enhanced the impact of online spending that had already taken off before Covid-19 hit the high streets. Online spending today is still much higher than pre-pandemic levels. Through the WBF programme, local businesses have been helped with putting their business online, helping them create a hybrid offering.
- 3.16 The futureproofing aspects of the WBF, Strand 6, could help in creating a more resilient high street that adapts to the changes faced.

Project Impact

- 3.17 The WBF sought to be part of a coordinated approach in the local area, rather than operating in isolation. Key changes were made to the WBF, at the PCR stage, whereby the Fund was no longer responding to an immediate problem nor was a short, sharp intervention. Rather, the WBF during the operational period took on a future outlook which helped create a longer-term impact for the high streets and navigate some of the changes discussed above.

4. Financial and Output Performance

4.1 This section provides a summary of WBF's performance against ERDF contracted financial and output targets, and analyses performance to date.

Performance Against Contractual ERDF Targets

4.2 An overview of the WBF's contracted output targets and performance, as at end-June 2022, is displayed in Table 4.1. A detailed analysis of financial and output performance follows this below.

Indicator	Targets		Performance at Time of Evaluation Against Target	
	Original (£m)	Adjusted (£m)	Achieved (£m)	% target
Capital Expenditure (£m)	-	-	-	-
Revenue Expenditure (£m)	£106	£106	£85.4*	81%*
ERDF (£m)	£106	£106	£85.4*	81%*
Private Match (£m)	£0	£0	£0	£0
No. local authorities engaged	250	250	309*	124%*
P14 – Number of CV-19 Action Plans – Strand 1	250	250	306*	122%
P15 – Number of Covid-19 Public Information Campaigns	280	280	263**	94%
P16 – Number of Covid-19 Business Facing Campaigns	150	150	2,000**	1,333%
P17 – Number of Covid-19 Communication Officers	100	100	890**	890%
P18 – Number of High Streets with Covid-19 Adaptations	200	200	201**	101%
P19 – Number of Neighbourhood Shopping Areas with Covid-19 Adaptations	100	100	917**	917%
P20 - Non-retail areas with CV-19 Adaptations			329**	
P21 - Number of CV-19 Marshals/Wardens/Street Ambassadors			324**	
P22 - Number of Events supported			1,926**	
P23 - Number of strategic plans or transformation route maps			120**	
P24 - Number of pilot projects and strategic responses developed			156**	

Source: MHCLG, 2022

* Figures cover the period from the start of the programme to 21st June 2022, representing the latest claim position as at the time of the summative assessment.

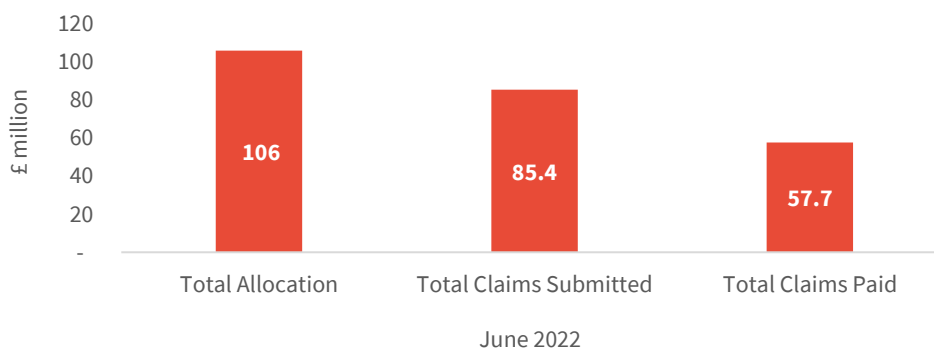
** Figures cover the period from the start of the programme to 19th July 2022, representing the latest claim position. These figures are not yet final as any local authorities with claims outstanding won't be included. Figures include the position for WBF as a whole. There were no forecast output targets for P20 to P24.

- 4.3 The four strands of RHSSF activity set out in the project description were not considered to meet the criteria of any the ERDF Operational Programme outputs, other than the new P14-P19 outputs which were developed by the Managing Authority.
- 4.4 The WBF therefore set out to deliver against a single formal ERDF output for PA10 PCV33 of the Operational Programme, which was entities supported in combating or counteracting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This equated to a target of 250 Grant Action Plans (local recovery action plans) being achieved against the indicator: *Number of entities supported*. The output of 250 Action Plans forecasted for the life of the project set out 170 plans in Q4 2020, 50 in Q1 2021 and 30 in Q2 2021. It has not been possible to report actual outputs for the number of action plans per quarter as this was not something that was measured during the course of the programme.
- 4.5 The WBF outperformed the single formal ERDF target output of 250 action plans by 122% or 306 action plans in total.

Overall Performance

- 4.6 The WBF is now at the end of the ERDF contract period. A total of £106m was budgeted for WBF grants across 309 local authorities invited to participate. To date, £85.4m of claims have been submitted across 287 local authorities, of which £57.7m (or 68%) has been processed (see Figure 4.1). As at June 2022, the value of claims in the pipeline was £20.9m with £6.8m of claims awaiting payment scheduling or quality assurance.
- 4.7 The total underspend relative to allocations across the local authorities is currently £20.8m, or 19.6% of the total target revenue expenditure. In other words, 81% of the target spend across all local authorities has been achieved or is in the pipeline.
- 4.8 Costs associated with the programme are estimated at £1.2m. No spend was used for communications or marketing.
- 4.9 The WBF has achieved 81% of the target spend or the total allocation of £106 million.

Figure 4.1 Total allocation against claims submitted and claims paid (as at June 2022)



Source: MHCLG (2022)

- 4.10 A total of 309 local authorities⁵ were invited to participate, of which 305 have been confirmed as participating. Of the four local authorities that did not participate, one was originally contracted but did not claim any funds and one gave their allocation to another local authority. Two local authorities have not participated at all.
- 4.11 A total of 1,293 separate claims have been made by local authorities between Q1 2021 and Q1 2022. The total value of claims processed has generally increased at each quarter:

Table 4.2 Value of claims paid quarterly as % of total, Q2 2021 – Q1 2022

Old Claims	Q2 2021	Q3 2021	Q4 2021	Q1 2022	Total
£9,616,951	£11,169,737	£7,410,077	£11,526,595	£17,947,168	£57,670,528
17%	19%	13%	20%	31%	100%

Source: MHCLG, 2022

- 4.12 As at June 2022, 9 local authorities have claimed and scheduled payments amounting to 100% of their allocation. 22 of the contracted local authorities are recorded as having claimed 0% of their total allocation, regardless of the approval status of claims. MHCLG records 155 live claims that still require completion.

Local Authority Performance

- 4.13 Figure 4.2 shows the distribution of claims made as a percentage of a local authority's total allocation, for all local authorities where the claim has been fully paid. The map reveals pockets of low claim rates in the East Midlands, North East and along coastal areas in the East of England. Coverage is strongest across Yorkshire and the Humber.
- 4.14 Figure 4.3 shows the distribution of claims that have been paid *or are still due to be paid* as a percentage of the local authority's total allocation. Here, there are more local authorities claiming 80-100% of their allocated revenue. Where the claims due or paid exceed 100% of their allocation, this will be reduced when outstanding claims are settled.

⁵ This figure is lower than the total number of local authorities in the UK. This is because funding was allocated to all District and Unitary authorities in England but not all County authorities, as this could have resulted in doubled up funding for areas with two-tier local governments. Smaller authorities such as town and parish councils were able to participate by acting as delivery partners.

Figure 4.2 % Claims Paid vs Allocations

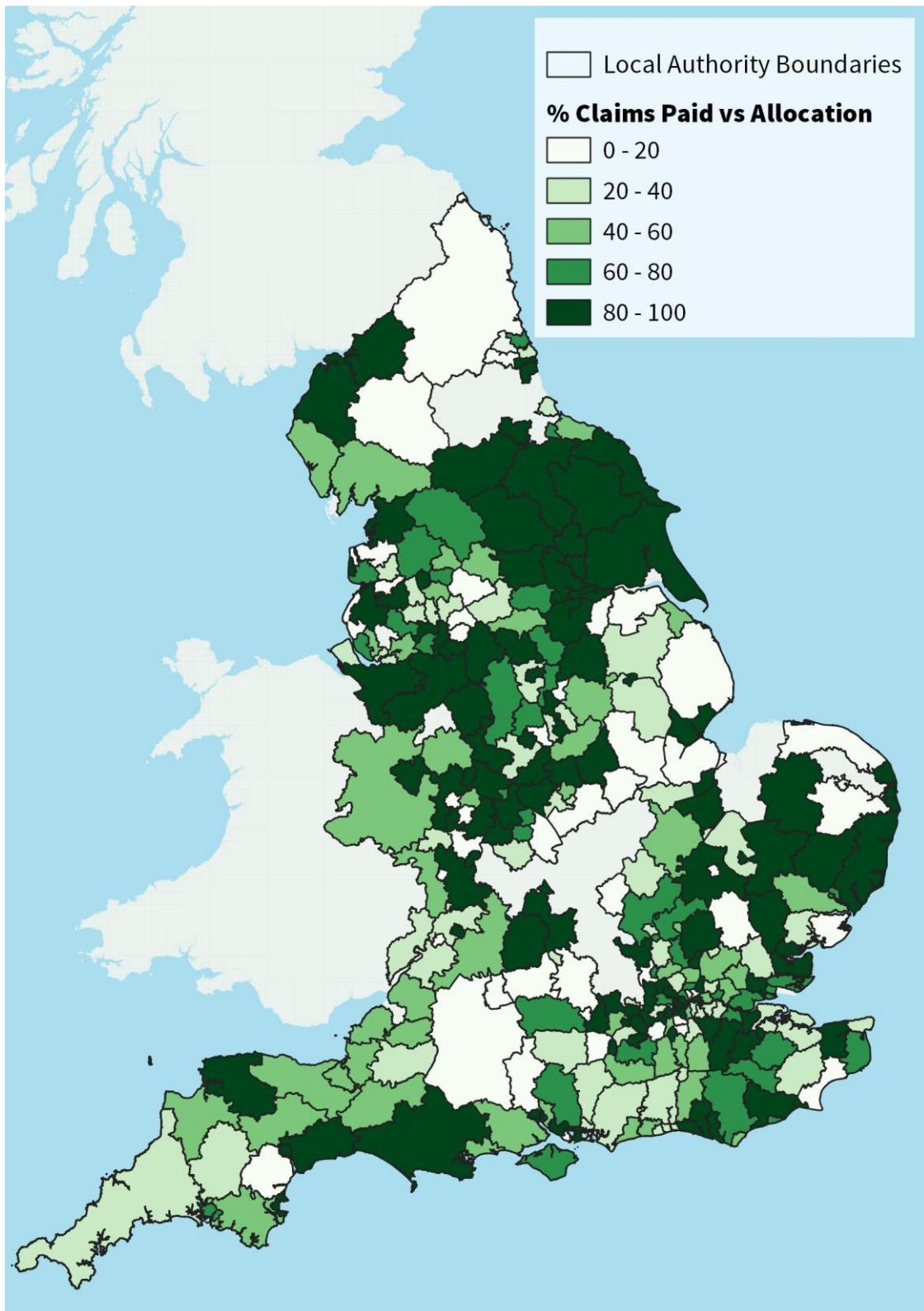
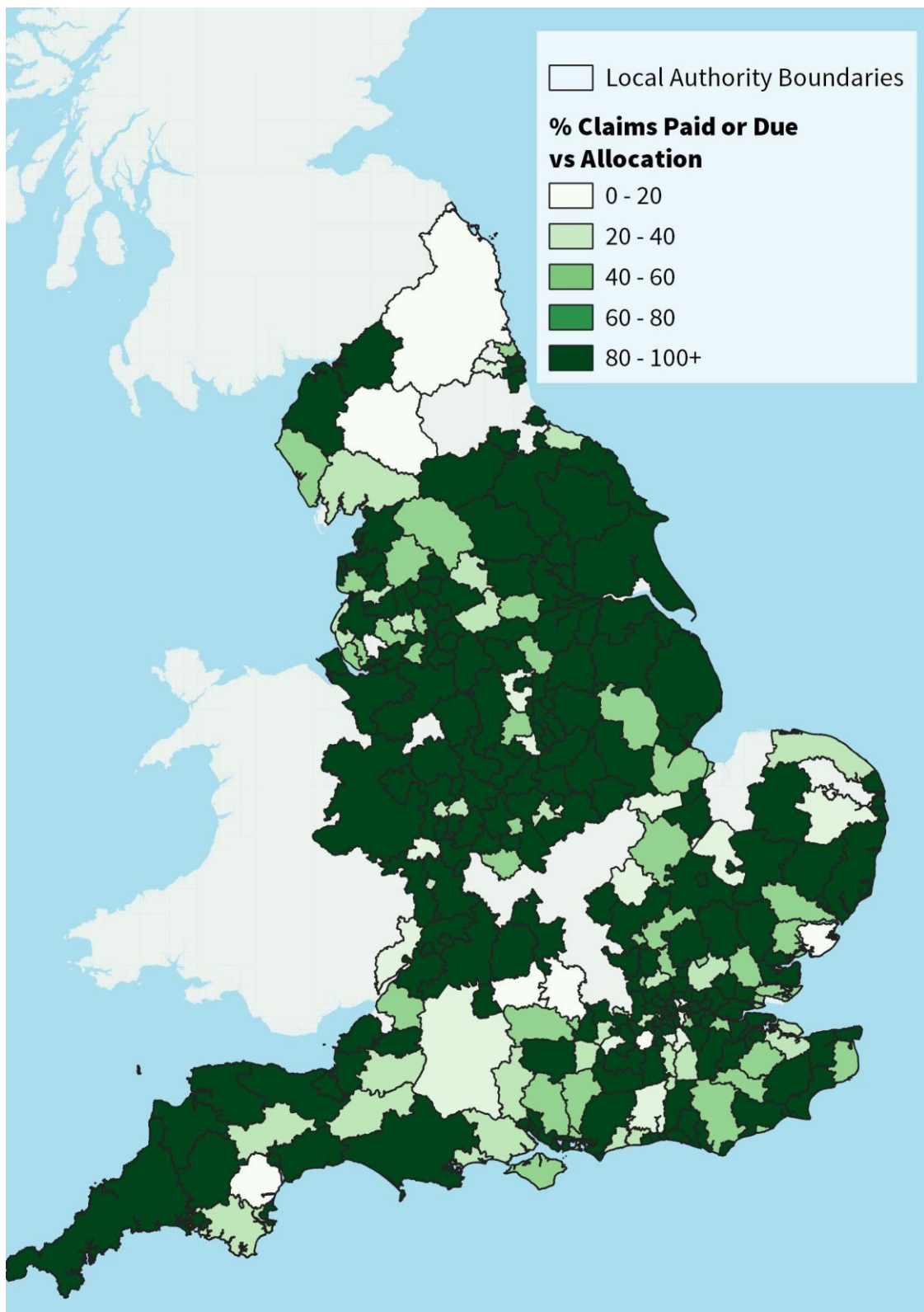


Figure 4.3: % Claims Paid or Due vs Allocations



Source: MHCLG, Hatch Analysis

Local Authority Sample Analysis

- 4.15 Due to timescales and resources, access to the full set of local authority monitoring information as collected by MHCLG was not possible. Instead, it was agreed that a representative sample of local authorities would be used to pinpoint spend and output performance.
- 4.16 The following analysis uses a sample of 27 local authorities based upon the size of their allocation and their regional distribution. The allocation size was determined using the following ranges:

Size	Allocation range
Small	£0 to £200,000
Medium	£200,001 to £400,000
Large	£400,001+

- 4.17 The sample includes a local authority for each allocation size within every region across England. Coastal authorities were explicitly included to allow further analysis of the sample. The proposed spend for each local authority was taken from their approved RHSSF Action Plan or WBF Activity Plan (depending on the time at which the local authority was formally contracted to the programme). The proposed and actual spend was disaggregated according to six activity strands and 11 outputs for each sampled local authority.
- 4.18 The reader is referred to Table 4.3 which sets out the six WBF activity strands and their corresponding output indicators. This table can be referred to in navigating the local authority spend and output performance.

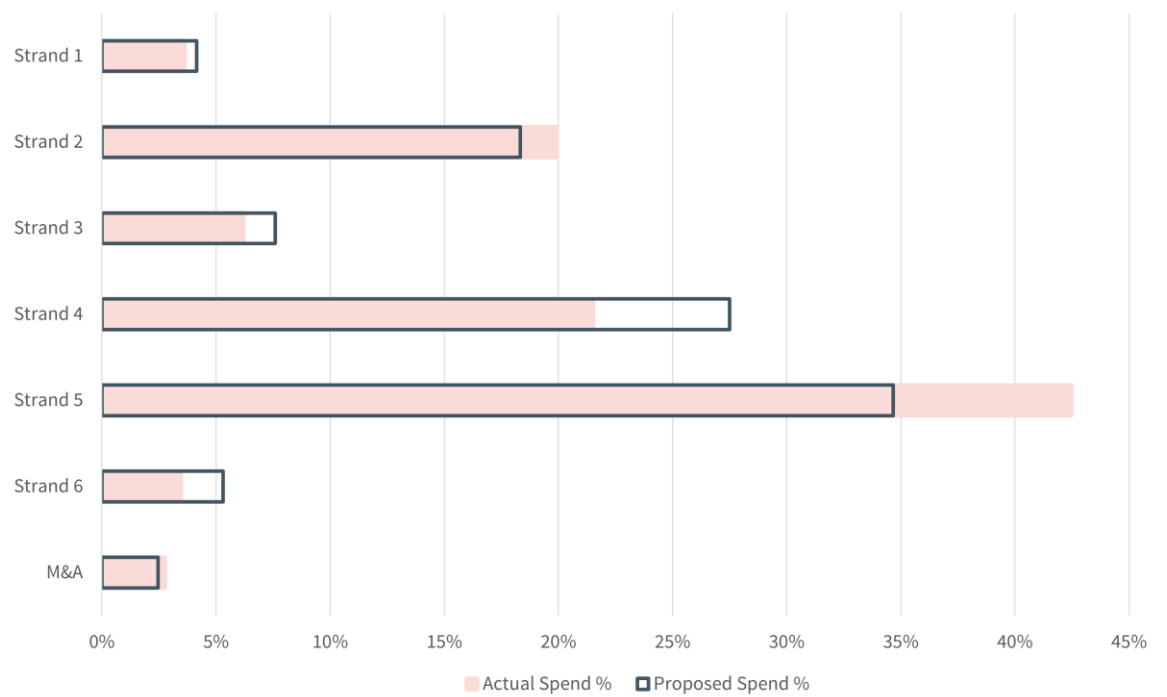
Strand Number	Output
1. Support to develop an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies.	P14 – Number of Covid-19 Action Plans.
2. Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.	P15 – Number of Covid--19 Public Information Campaigns.
3. Business facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.	P16 – Number of Covid-19 Business Facing Campaigns; P17 Number of Covid-19 Communication Officers.
4. Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.	P18 – Number of High Streets with Covid-19 Adaptations; Number of Neighbourhood Shopping Areas with Covid-19 Adaptations; P20 Non-retail areas with Covid-19 Adaptations. P19 – Number of Neighbourhood Shopping Areas with Covid-19 Adaptations. P20 - Number of events supported.
5. Support to promote a safe public environment for a local area’s visitor economy.	P21 - Number of Covid-19 Marshals/Wardens/Street Ambassadors; P22 – Number of Events supported.

	P22 - Number of events supported.
6. Support local authorities to develop plans for responding to the medium-term impact of COVID-19 including trialling new ideas particularly where these relate to the High Street.	<p>P23 – Number of Strategic Plans or Transformation Route Maps; P24 Number of Pilot Projects and Strategic Responses Developed.</p> <p>P24 – Number of pilot projects and strategic responses developed (Strand 6) - the PCR for WBF did not include any forecasts for these outputs.</p>

Source: Hatch

4.19 Figure 4.4 shows the proposed spend and actual spend according to the six activity strands and Monitoring Information activity, as a percentage of overall spend across the sampled local authorities. It shows that there was a significant actual overspend on Strand 5 activities which focused on interventions to support the visitor economy. There was a relative underspend on Strand 4 activities which focused on temporary public realm changes. This is likely to be a reflection of changing Covid-19 restrictions over the course of the programme, with longer-term interventions proving more popular as measures to control the spread of Covid-19 became less relevant following submission of initial activity plans.

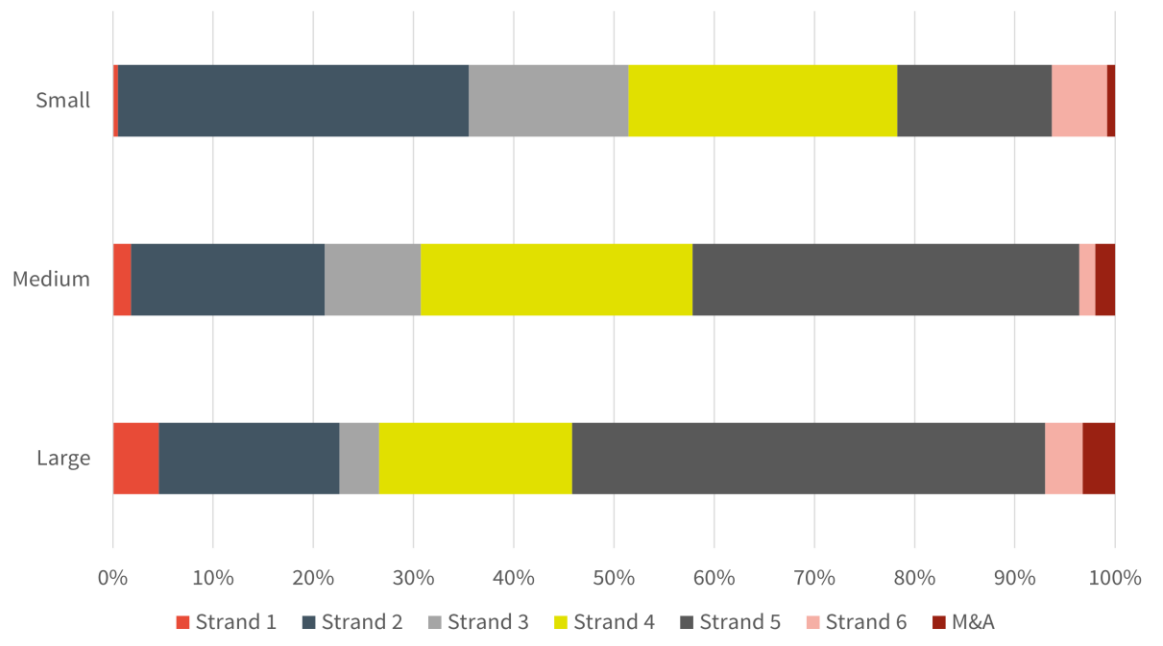
Figure 4.4: Proposed and Actual Spend across Activity Strands (Local Authority Sample)



Source: MHCLG Sample, June 2022

4.20 Figure 4.5 shows the actual spend by activity strand according to the size of the sampled local authority. Smaller local authorities tended to spend more on Strand 1 activities, which centred on getting support to develop an action plan, whereas larger authorities tended to spend a greater proportion of their allocation on Strand 5 activities relating to support for the visitor economy.

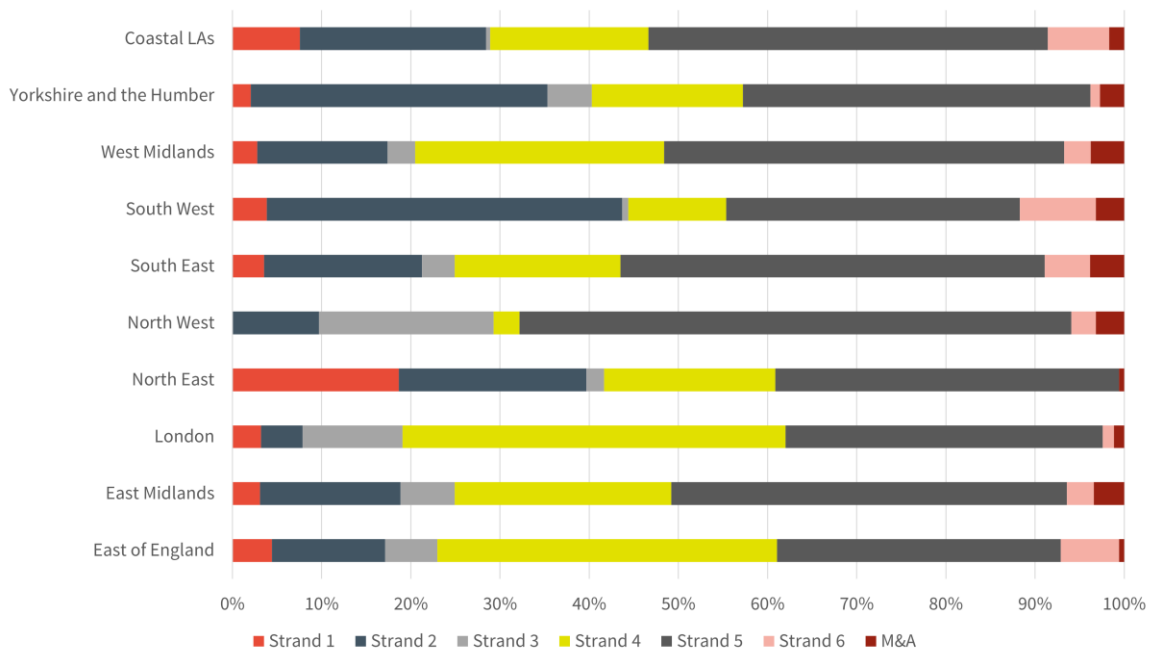
Figure 4.5: Actual Spend across Activity Strands by Local Authority Size



Source: MHCLG Sample, June 2022

4.21 Figure 4.6 shows the proportion of activity strand spending by region/coastal geography. It indicates that the London region spent a greater proportion of its allocation on temporary public realm changes (Strand 4), whereas the North East region and coastal authorities allocated a greater proportion of spending to the development of an action plan (Strand 1).

Figure 4.6: Actual Spend across Activity Strands by Region



Source: MHCLG Sample, June 2022

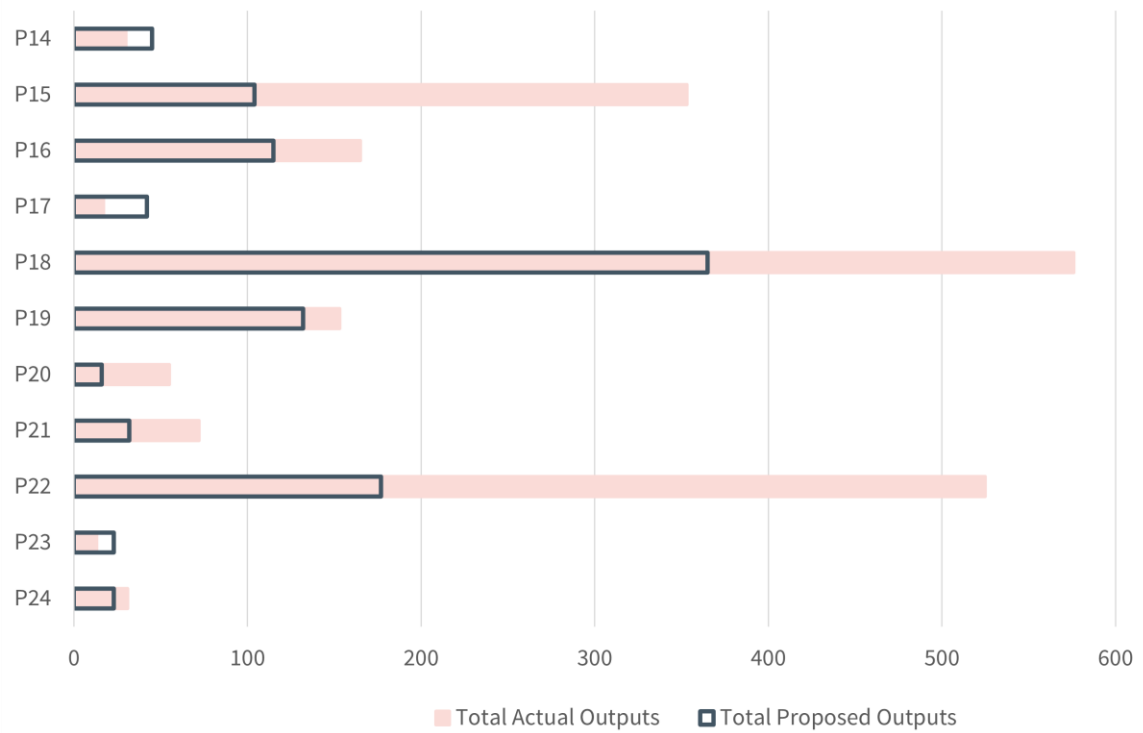
- 4.22 Finally, an analysis of underspending by sampled local authorities across different categories is summarised in Table 4.4. Underspend was generally higher across coastal local authorities, small local authorities and local authorities in the North East or South East.

Category		Underspend as % of allocation	Average underspend across sample
Coastal Geography	Coastal LAs	15%	9%
	Non-Coastal LAs	7%	
Size	Small	16%	
	Medium	13%	
	Large	7%	
Region	East of England	4%	
	East Midlands	11%	
	London	0%	
	North East	32%	
	North West	7%	
	South East	22%	
	South West	9%	
	West Midlands	3%	
	Yorkshire and the Humber	5%	

Output Performance

- 4.23 A key output indicator for the WBF is the number of Grant Activity Plans developed by local authorities, as an indicator of overall engagement with the programme. Against a target of 250 local authorities, **309 local authorities were engaged** with and **306 completed a Grant Activity Plan**.
- 4.24 Where possible, the local authority sample included the output forecasts provided with the first claims made following the WBF expansion. The sample is not fully representative of the intentions of all local authority participants as these outputs were not agreed until the WBF expansion, in addition to the fact that not all local authorities provided a forecast of their proposed outputs.
- 4.25 Figure 4.7 shows the number of proposed outputs across all local authorities compared to the actual outputs recorded. It shows an overall higher number of outputs (1,990 compared to 1,074 proposed), with particular increases in outputs P15 (Number of Covid-19 public information campaigns), P18 (Number of High Streets with temporary Covid-19 Adaptions) and P22 (Number of Events supported – Strand 5).
- 4.26 Several proposed outputs for P14 (Number of Covid-19 Action Plans), P17 (Number of Covid-19 Communication Officers) and P23 (Number of strategic plans or transformation route maps – Strand 6) were reported less frequently in the actual figures.

Figure 4.7: Proposed Outputs and Actual Outputs across Local Authority Sample



Source: MHCLG Sample, June 2022. Note: these proposed and actual output figures do not correspond with the original output targets set out in Section 2, as these figures are only based on a sample of local authorities for which information was available at the point of the evaluation.

4.27 Based on the sample analysis, Figure 4.7 shows that the WBF programme has performed generally well against proposed and actual local authority outputs.

5. Programme Delivery Performance

5.1 This section assesses the effectiveness of WBF, both in terms of implementation and delivery, and draws on evidence, information and insights from a range of sources:

- **Programme performance data and background information** collected by the programme for and throughout its delivery;
- Consultations with the **programme design, delivery team and management** at the WBF – for a list of consultees see Appendix B;
- Consultations with **Contract Managers** – for a list of consultees see Appendix B; and
- Responses to an online beneficiary survey, sent to all **beneficiaries**, that received support from the programme. The survey provides a broad and high-level view of what the WBF funded and delivered and subsequent benefits.

Project Design

Delivery model

5.2 The Managing Authority sought to design a delivery model that facilitated speed and that was compliant with ERDF rules. The delivery model gave confidence and the ability to move quickly. Key aspects of the delivery model included:

- The removal of the need for a competitive call and bidding for monies.
- Local authorities were given the flexibility to put forward their own position as opposed to a more centralistic approach (which would have taken time to design and not had the speed and immediacy necessary).
- The only formal ERDF output indicator was for a local authority to create an action plan. The MHCLG team asked local authorities for other metrics to be reported, but these were optional. Hence there were not many conditions attached to beneficiaries receiving the WBF that required providing feedback to MHCLG, as the time of project design. By default, completing the grant funding agreement, and having an action plan, meant that the local authority met the targets that were set in the operating programme.
- The desire for proper consultations with parish and town councils when developing action plans was a political aspiration and one that seems to have been achieved by a good proportion of local authorities.
- The RHSSF was designed with lockdowns in mind and aimed to bring people back to the high street during the pandemic. It was a short-term intervention. As the project evolved and pressures became less acute, the coming of the WBF meant that there was space and time to deliver more effectively.

Management and Governance

- 5.3 Once up and running the MHCLG WBF delivery team was empowered to decide how the ERDF monies were delivered to the local authorities through a grant funding agreement. The Managing Authority and the MHCLG delivery team had regular meetings, with a considerable number of exchanges to discuss and clarify on matters such as eligibility. The main governance conversations focused on the context of the programme and the desire to fully expend the value of the programme. Consultations highlighted that there has been a good open relationship between contract managers and the MHCLG delivery team.

Marketing and Engagement

- 5.4 At the start of the RHSSF, the MHCLG team established their contract base and distribution lists with local authorities. This was followed by encouraging take up in what was a challenging time, promoting what could be delivered through the Fund, the scope, and making clear the ERDF eligibility rules. Given that the WBF was announced very quickly, a lot of local authorities were not aware that the Fund was ERDF funded with specific procurement, branding and publicity requirements. It was important for the marketing activity to make local authorities aware of these requirements straight away.
- 5.5 Due to the fact that the grant funding scheme was announced and allocations were given to all local authorities, the MHCLG team didn't feel that they needed to undertake a sizeable amount of promotion of the Fund to ensure take up. The Communications manager felt that, had a marketing budget been assigned, it might have encouraged the MHCLG team to have a little more variety in engagement.
- 5.6 The internal WBF Communication Strategy ensured that other high street government teams were aware of what the WBF was doing and its links with other funds.
- 5.7 A range of engagements with local authorities were employed by the Fund:
- **Email bulletins** were distributed on a weekly basis to all participating local authorities to make them aware of what was happening, any updates and reminders. This provided a reference point of how the WBF was being delivered.
 - In the early days of the Fund, a **strategic engagement forum** with participating local authorities from across the nine regions was set up and acted as a sounding board to collect feedback on how the WBF was progressing, to understand the challenges and act as a test bed if the MHCLG team was changing forms or trying a new approach. The forum met bi-weekly. The local authorities participating in the forum helped inform the widening scope when the Fund expanded to WBF.
 - **Webinars** were delivered on thematic topics to help local authorities submit claims correctly, to follow procurement requirements and to provide ideas of the types of activities that local authorities could do. The webinars were adhoc. The December 2021 webinar shared best practice with local authorities and the MHCLG team produced a table of activity ideas that had been delivered through the fund, to maximise ideas.
 - The **project knowledge page** was an online platform that was set up to be used as a sounding board for local authorities between themselves. Questions could be asked and local authorities that had not previously been in contact were put in touch. Topics discussed included fund delivery or tackling procurement issues. Whilst the page was slow to gain momentum, it had 351 members signed up by the end of the WBF.

- 5.8 There was a general feeling that the engagement processes of the MHCLG team had greatly helped overcome some of the initial barriers that were preventing local authorities from participating fully during the first year of funding.

Project Delivery

Resourcing

- 5.9 In the early days of the RHSSF, the MHCLG WBF delivery team was small and did not reach full capacity until much later in the Fund, once a better structure had been established. The Communications manager came into post around four to five months after the announcement of the Fund. Hence the messaging about certain requirements about how the funding was to be delivered was slightly delayed. The Communications Strategy was developed six months after the Fund announcement.
- 5.10 Staff resourcing issues were also found in the delivery stage with applications needing processing, contracts sent out and people helped to start processing web activity, but with a lack of staff.
- 5.11 Further findings include:
- Consultations highlighted that the number of MHCLG contract managers fluctuated over the lifetime of the WBF project and had a consistent number been maintained, this would have been greatly beneficial.
 - The MHCLG team has had some staff turnover over the duration of the WBF. This was highlighted by the contract managers and local authorities as a challenge, with one point of contact throughout the Fund being preferred.
 - Contract managers felt that they did not have the time and resource between RHSSF and WBF to review (to deliver better value for the Fund), to promote good practice and highlight the success stories. The focus really has been on helping local authorities to spend the Fund.

Eligibility

- 5.12 In the early days of the announcement of the Fund, local authorities began spending their allocation. Whilst the MHCLG team spent a considerable amount of time educating local authorities on the type of activities that met the ERDF eligibility rules and that they could spend on, in the first instance local authorities spent the fund in a potentially ineligible way.
- 5.13 As one of the stakeholders highlighted, ideally, the education of what was eligible would have been better provided up front of the programme.
- 5.14 With the introduction of WBF activities, local authorities that had incurred spending that was ineligible (e.g. procurement rules weren't followed with single tender actions), were able to use the money that they still had for other activities when they had a better understanding of how it could be used. It was unfortunate that the EU constraints were not fully understood by those delivering. However, with the extension of WBF and a longer period of Funding, grant recipients were able to recoup the money given by ERDF. It would be fair to say that the WBF approach was better at enabling delivery compared with the RHSSF approach.

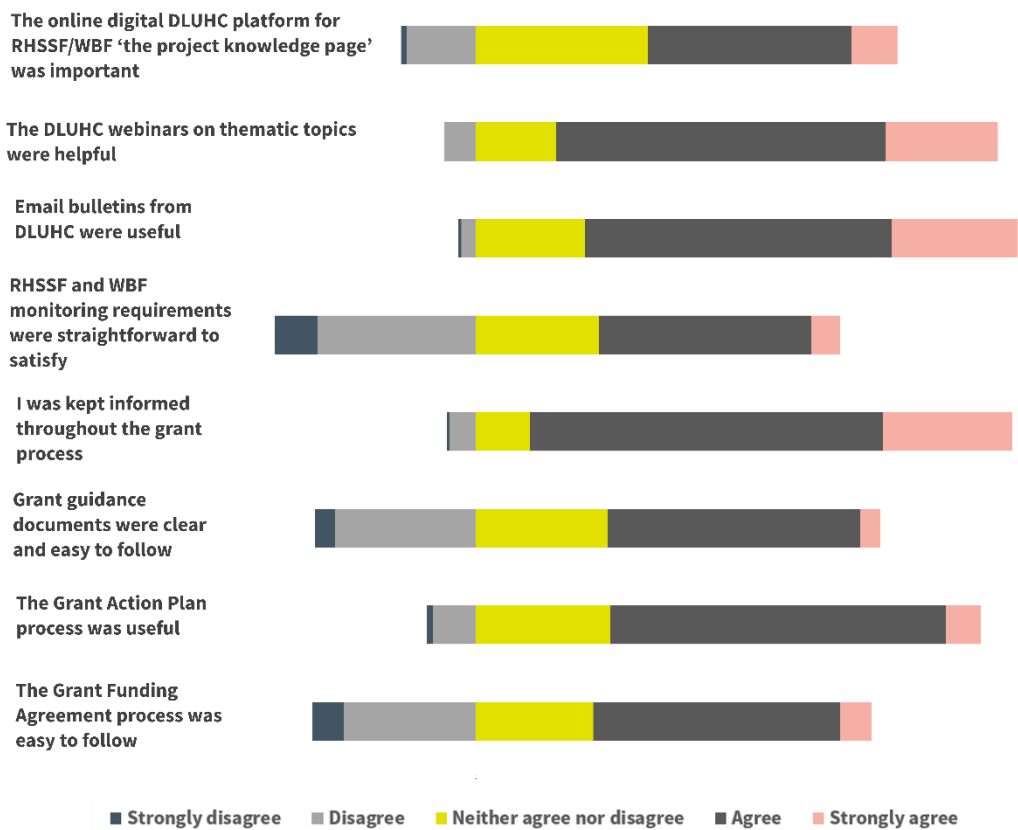
5.15 Restrictions that started to manifest themselves in the RHSSF were learnt and altered in WBF. For example, during the RHSSF period, ERDF eligibility rules were focused on high streets. This meant, for example, that local authorities wanted to support cleaning and maintenance of toilets, but the Fund couldn't be used for this purpose as not only people using the high street would use the toilet, hence it couldn't be said that the money was exclusively being used for the purpose of the high street. With the introduction of the WBF, this restriction was removed.

Local authority experience of WBF

5.16 The majority of local authorities felt that the MHCLG webinars, bulletins and online digital platform were helpful and important. Respondents agreed that they were well-informed throughout the process and that the Grant Action Plan process was useful.

5.17 More negative feedback was directed at the monitoring requirements, guidance documents and Grant Funding Agreement process, where these were felt to be less straightforward to follow or satisfy.

Figure 5.1 Experience of WBF support by local authorities



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q24: "Using the categories identified below please indicate your view on the following statements.", n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.18 Additional comments on the WBF process centred around the following common themes:

Staffing

- There was a lack of capacity or knowledge within some local authority teams to deliver the funding effectively.
- There was positive feedback for programme support officers and contract managers, although some issues where staff changed regularly and with insufficient handover.
- Prior experience of ERDF funding significantly helped to secure RHSSF/WBF funding.

Restrictions and Guidance

- Changing eligibility and guidance for activities was confusing and difficult to follow.
- The onerous and restrictive claims process meant local authorities found it easier to seek funding from other sources due to the time required.
- Monitoring and reporting requirements were found difficult where the outcomes did not align clearly to strands.

Support from the WBF programme

- The knowledge page was not used enough by different fund recipients to be useful.
- Local authorities would have appreciated more ideas for spend at the start of the Fund.
- There was an improvement from RHSSF to WBF in terms of guidance and eligibility rules.⁶

5.19 Other insights from consultations with contract managers revealed that:

- Local authorities had found the name change of the Fund confusing, with some understanding that they were two separate streams of funding.
- The stop and start nature of the Funding was found to be challenging – with the original end date extended and then extended again.
- Local authorities that had staff with ERDF experience found the process much easier. Contract managers found that local authority staff working on the WBF didn't have a wide range of European and grant funding experience. This may be reflective of the loss of staff within local authorities over the last 12 years.
- There were a range of items in the grant funding agreements that local authorities were supposed to meet but didn't. With the introduction of the WBF, a number of these were addressed, including ensuring the submission of quarterly claim forms.
- Local authorities welcomed the fact that they didn't have to put in an application to receive funding.
- Local authority staff were perceived to be very busy and often struggled to have time to read the WBF guidance, which would have helped greatly.

⁶ Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q24: "Using the categories identified below please indicate your view on the following statements. If you would like to leave additional comments relating to any of the statements below, please use the open comment box in the next question", n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

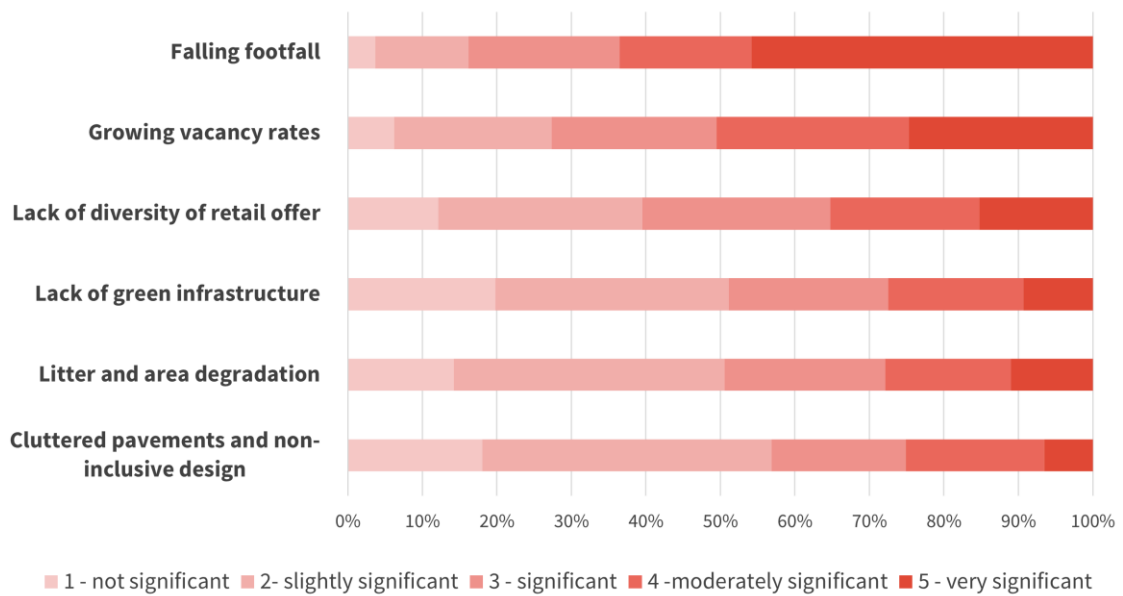
- There was a notable amount of change in local authorities with staff members leaving. This meant that contract managers had to build relationships and start the WBF process again, including explaining what was eligible, how to put a claim together etc.
- The revision of action plans with the introduction of the WBF in April 2021 created additional tasks for the local authorities.
- The WBF had a very strict time schedule near the end of the programme, '*spend it, defray it, get your claim in, evidence it.*' It was recognised as being a very intense time for both the local authorities and the contract managers.
- Some urban local authorities have had a number of business grants to focus their attention on and hence in some cases WBF slipped down the priority list for them.
- Salary costs were found to be confusing for a range of local authorities and in some cases meant that local authorities didn't take up the opportunity to hire staff to help run the Fund.
- The ERDF logo in some cases was seen as a barrier to spending the WBF. A number of local authorities questioned why the logo was still being promoted when England had left the EU. The contract managers received a notable amount of correspondence from MPs querying the use of the ERDF logo. This resistance meant that some local authorities were not keen to hold events (as they advertised the ERDF logo) and instead used their WBF allocation on activities that didn't require the use of the ERDF logo, such as public realm.

5.20 Whilst the Knowledge webpage was noted above to not have been used by many local authorities, the MHCLG delivery team and contract managers highlighted the substantial use of the Knowledge page, providing a channel for sharing ideas between local authorities on the type of activities that were possible. Contract managers were also able to easily send out information to local authorities for quick feedback which helped the local authorities to revise plans and think out of the box. As noted in the marketing and engagement sub-section, the knowledge page had 351 members at the close of the WBF.

Motivations and Take-Up

5.21 Falling footfall, growing vacancy rates and a lack of diversity in the retail offer were considered to be the most challenging issues facing local authorities that took up the WBF allocations.

Figure 5.2 The most challenging issues facing local authorities that received WBF



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q5: “How significant were each of the following challenges to the growth/progress of your High Street/Town Centre/District Centre/Neighbourhood Shopping Area/City Centre Area?”, n=193, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.22 A number of other challenges were commonly identified by the local authorities:

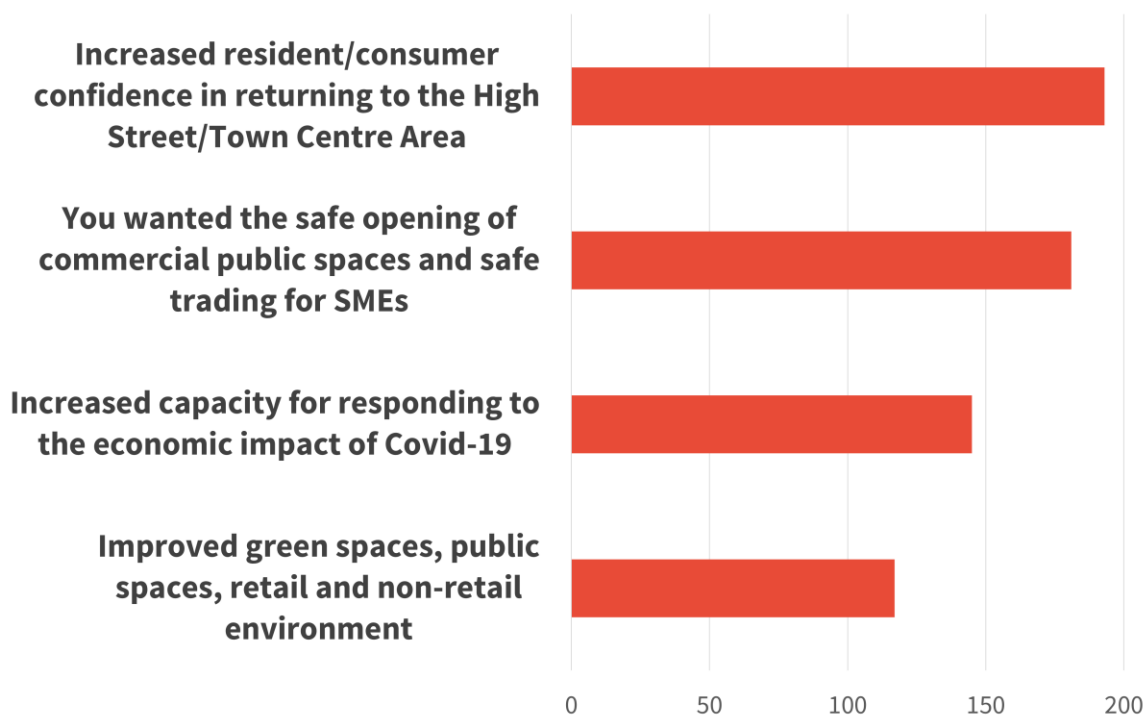
- Antisocial behaviour
- Reduced local spending capacity
- A need to build relationships with local business communities
- Parking issues contributing to cluttered pavements and congestion
- Recruitment issues following the national lockdown
- A need to respond locally to the climate emergency
- A need for more events and cultural experiences to supplement the retail offer
- Concerns around Covid safety⁷

5.23 The most common aspiration for the funding was to increase resident or consumer confidence in returning to the high street or town centre area.⁸

⁷ Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q8: Are there other aspirations that you had but aren’t listed in Question 5? Please specify if this is the case or otherwise write N/A. n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

⁸ Note: respondents could select multiple aspirations so total results do not sum.

Figure 5.3 Aspirations for what local authorities wanted to achieve from WBF



Source: Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q7: "How would you have described your aspirations?", n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.24 WBF Beneficiary respondents were given the opportunity to list any alternative aspirations for the funding not already covered in the survey. The most common were:

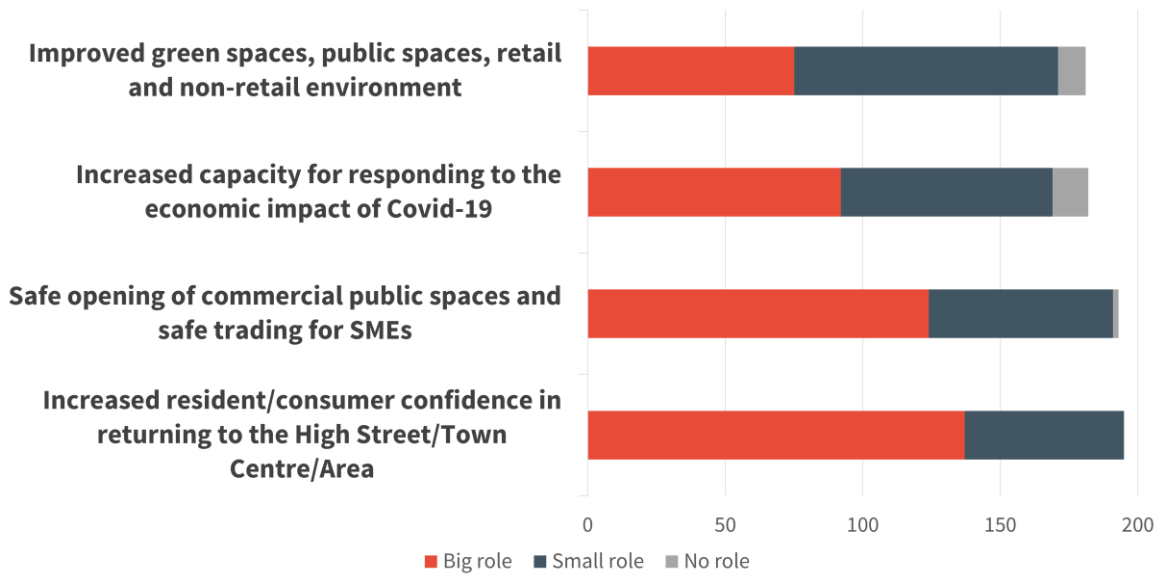
- Promotion of places to local and regional visitors, with the offer of new events
- Support for the overnight visitor economy and tourism (for larger areas such as Sheffield and Leeds)
- Support for the events industry
- Exploring new ideas/directions for the town centre area
- Improving direct relationships with the local business community
- Adapting to long-term structural changes e.g. shift to online retail
- Promoting a joined up, cohesive approach across the district⁹

5.25 More local authorities in the North East were looking to increase their capacity for responding to the economic impact of Covid-19 than other regions, whereas local authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber, London and the East of England were more focused on the safe opening of commercial public spaces and SME trading.

⁹ Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q9: "Are there other aspirations that you had but aren't listed in Question 5? Please specify if this is the case or otherwise write N/A.?", n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.26 Having received the funding, it was thought to have played the largest role in achieving increased resident/consumer confidence and the safe opening of commercial public spaces for safe trading. Notably, only 7% of local authorities felt that the funding played no role in achieving improved green spaces, public spaces and retail/non-retail environments, nor in increasing the capacity for responding to Covid-19.

Figure 5.4 What type of role did WBF play in helping you meet your aspirations?

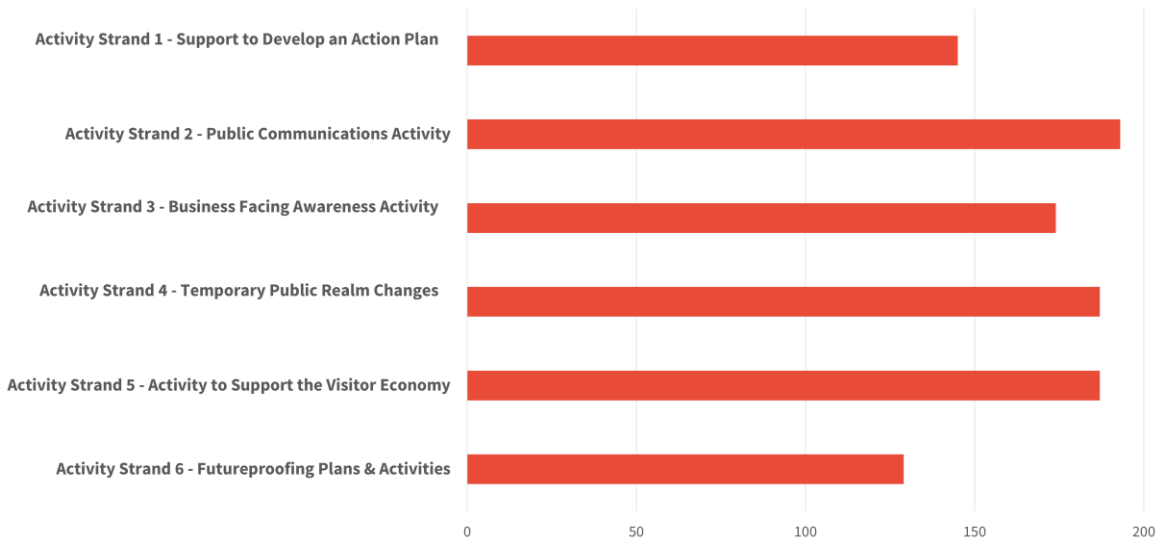


Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q9: “How big a role (if at all) did the RHSSF/WBF play in meeting these aspirations?”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

Types of Activities Funded

- 5.27 The beneficiary WBF survey was used to gather further details on the activities funded by WBF and the specific locations that benefited.
- 5.28 The most common activity strand pursued by local authorities was Public Communications Activity, followed by Temporary Public Realm Changes and Activity to Support the Visitor Economy. The less likely activity strand was Futureproofing Plans & Activities (Strand 6).

Figure 5.5 Types of activities funded

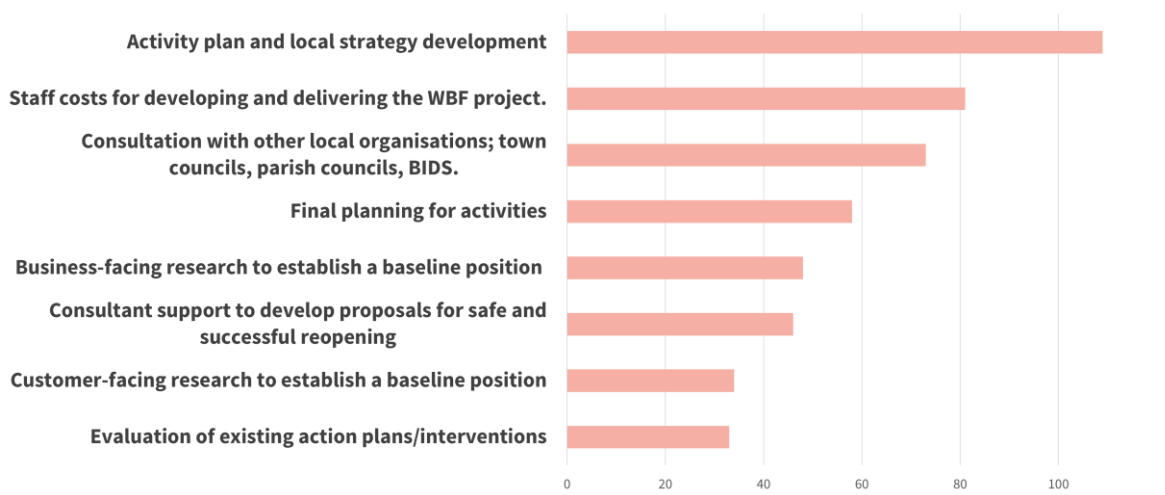


Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q11: “Please select from the six Activity Strands the types of activities that your local authority delivered through the RHSSF/WBF.”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.29 Strand 1 activities focused on support to develop an action plan. The most common activities within this strand were the development of activity plans and local strategies, staff costs for delivering the WBF project and costs of consultations with other local organisations, town councils, parish councils and BIDs.

5.30 The distribution of activities pursued within Strand 1 is shown below:

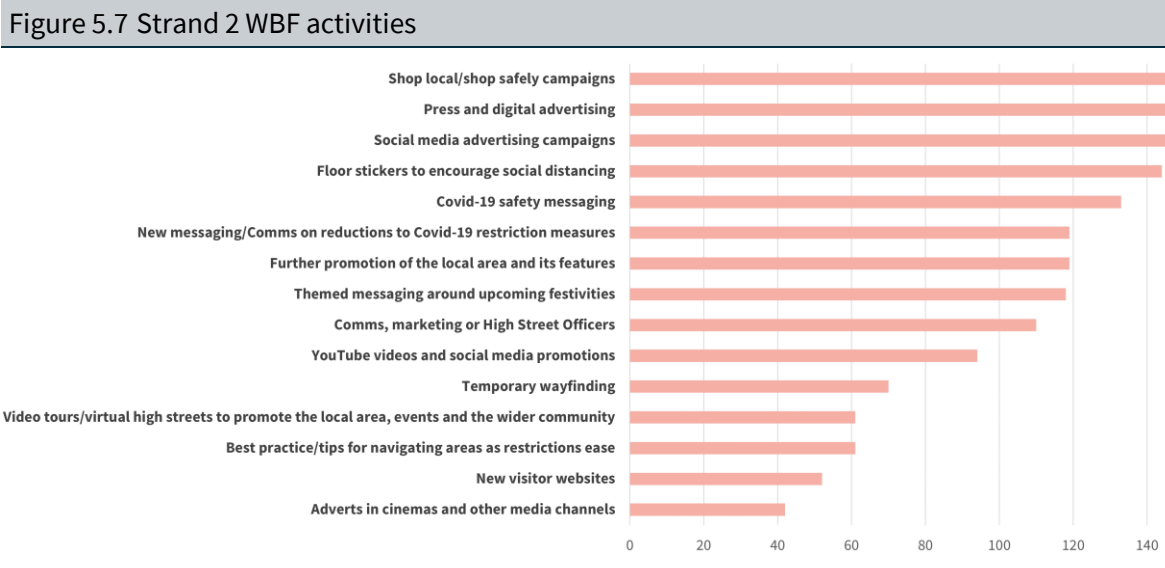
Figure 5.6 Strand 1 WBF activities



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q11: “Please select from the six Activity Strands the types of activities that your local authority delivered through the RHSSF/WBF.”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.31 Strand 2 activities focused on public communications. The most common activities within this strand were shop local/shop safely campaigns, press and digital advertising and social media advertising campaigns.

5.32 The distribution of activities pursued within Strand 2 is shown below:



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q11: “Please select from the six Activity Strands the types of activities that your local authority delivered through the RHSSF/WBF.”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.33 Strand 3 activities focused on business facing awareness activity. The most common activities within this strand were information updates and bulletins for businesses, visits, advice and webinars to support business trading and share best practice, and provision of decorative pieces for businesses.

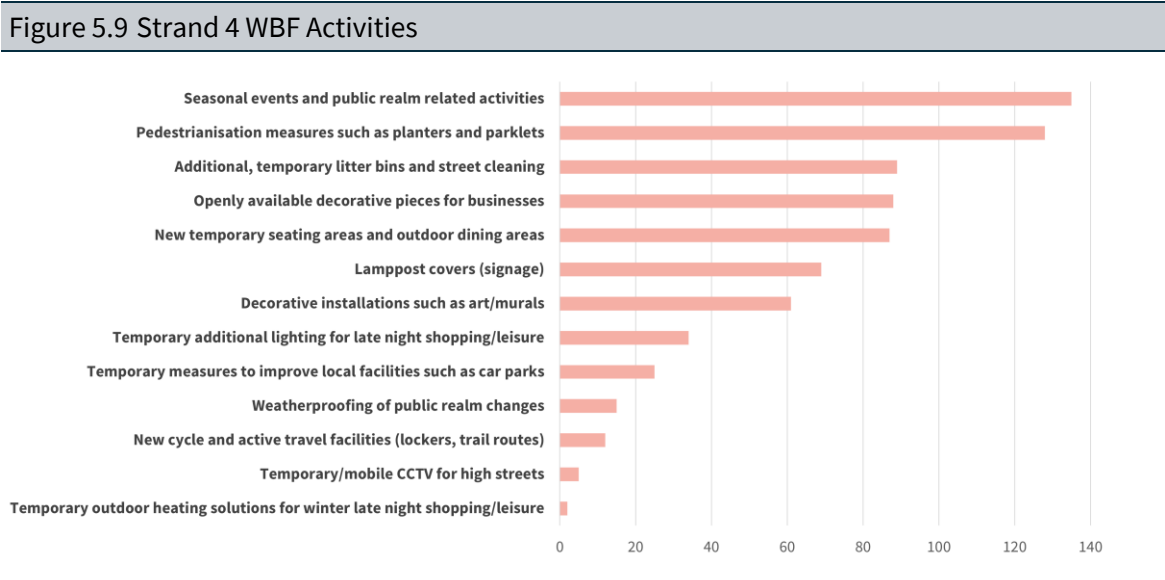
5.34 The distribution of activities pursued within Strand 3 is shown below:



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q11: “Please select from the six Activity Strands the types of activities that your local authority delivered through the RHSSF/WBF.”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.35 Strand 4 activities focused on temporary public realm changes. The most common activities within this strand were seasonal events and changes to the public realm, pedestrianisation measures (such as planters and parklets), and additional temporary litter bins and street cleaning.

5.36 The distribution of activities pursued within Strand 4 is shown below:



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q11: “Please select from the six Activity Strands the types of activities that your local authority delivered through the RHSSF/WBF.”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.37 Strand 5 activities focused on undertakings to support the visitor economy. The most common activities within this strand were the development of festivals and events, bunting, beautification, seasonal events and the creation of town trails. Least popular among the strand 5 activities were temporary performance stages, temporary designated graffiti space, rain shelters, planting and green displays and the maintenance of additional play equipment.

5.38 The distribution of activities pursued within Strand 5 is shown overleaf:

Figure 5.10 Strand 5 WBF Activities

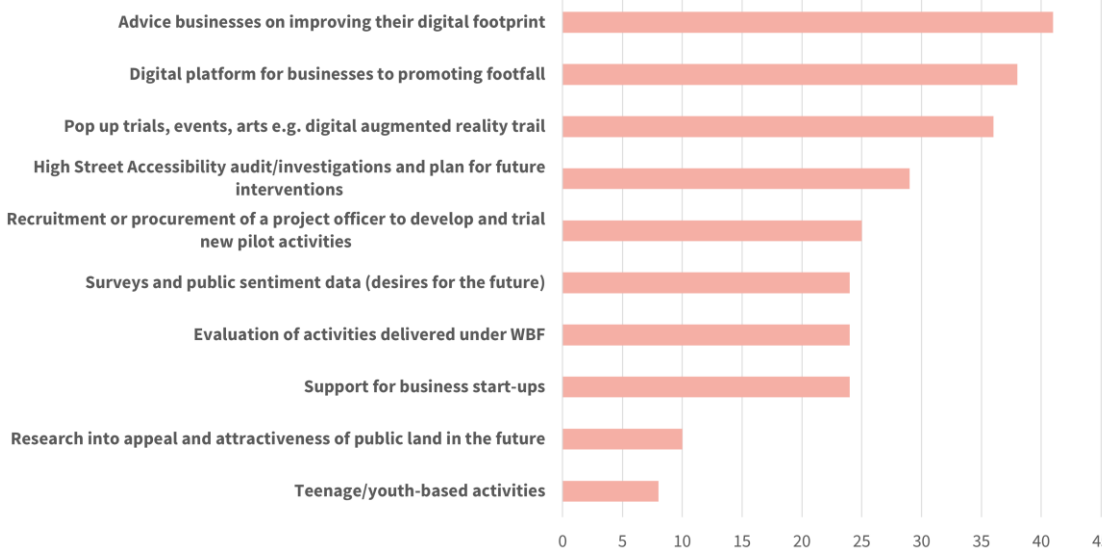


Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q11: “Please select from the six Activity Strands the types of activities that your local authority delivered through the RHSSF/WBF.”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.39 Strand 6 activities focused on future proofing plans and activities. The most common activities within this strand were advice to businesses on digital strategy, digital platforms for businesses to promote footfall and pop-up trial events. Physical feedback boards for gauging public opinion of high streets and shopping areas were the only activity not taken up by any local authority.

5.40 The distribution of activities pursued within Strand 6 is shown overleaf:

Figure 5.11 Strand 6 WBF Activities

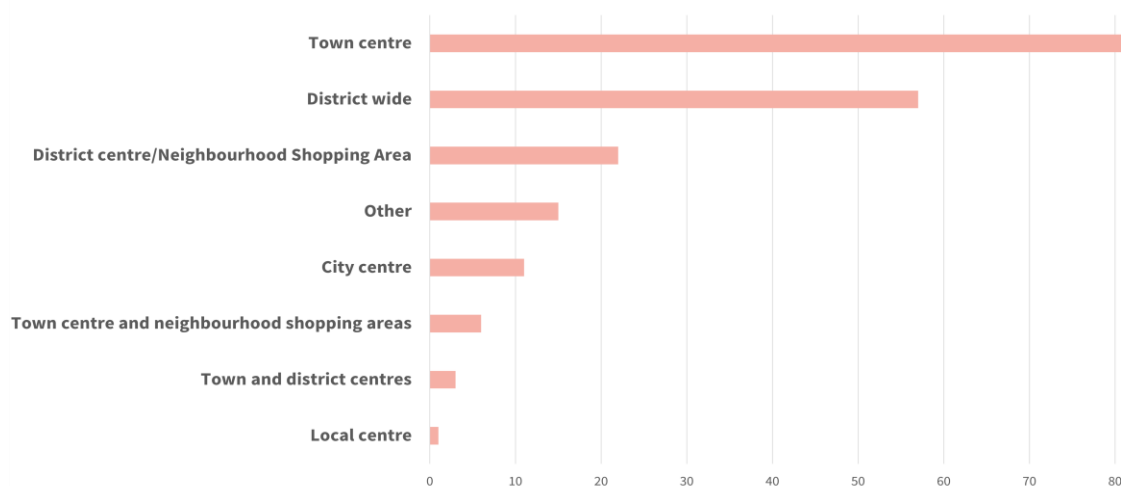


Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q11: “Please select from the six Activity Strands the types of activities that your local authority delivered through the RHSSF/WBF.”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

Locations Supported

- 5.41 The majority of allocations were spent in town centres and local authority districts (which tended to include a combination of different areas). City centres and local centres were less commonly reported as areas for spending within local authorities.

Figure 5.12 The types of locations that the WBF funded



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q17: "Please select the type of location that your Fund allocation supported.", n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

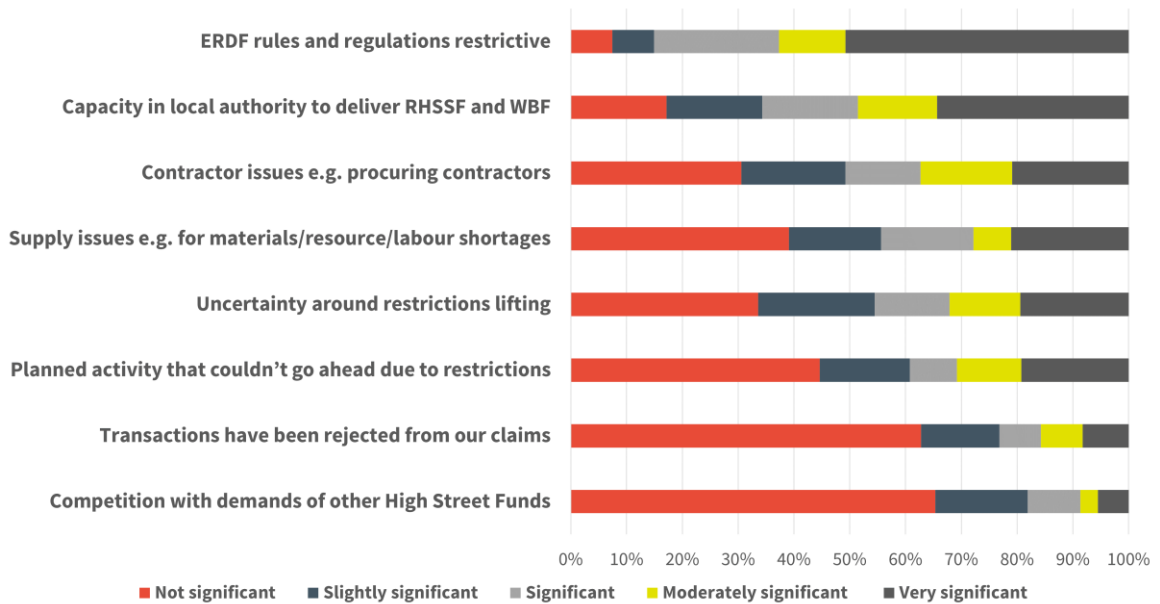
Key reasons for underspend

- 5.42 Overall, 81% of the WBF has been spent by local authorities. Underspend of the WBF therefore equates to £20.6m. There have been a number of reasons for underspend of the WBF. The key reasons are focused on the following:

- Firstly, being tied to ERDF rules and regulations meant that the fund was quite restrictive initially. Local authorities found it very difficult to know what to spend the money on.
- Secondly, there was uncertainty around restrictions lifting and then coming back into play, this was particularly challenging for local authorities. In some cases, activities were planned but local authorities weren't able to follow through with them due to a change in restrictions.
- Thirdly, once restrictions were lifted, businesses were seeking similar materials and resources but had issues finding suppliers. There were reported issues of procuring contractors for general improvement work as well around high streets and centres, as well as resource shortages.
- Fourthly, the WBF hasn't been a key priority for some local authorities, with other demands to attend to. Capacity in local authorities has been an issue as suspected at the start of the Fund.
- Lastly, three of the local authorities did not participate and hence didn't spend their allocation.

5.43 WBF Beneficiary survey findings highlight that of those local authorities who underspent their allocation, the most significant reasons were cited as the restrictive nature of ERDF rules and regulations and the (lack of) delivery capacity within local authorities. Far less significant was competition from other High Street Funds or rejected transactions.

Figure 5.13 Key reasons for underspend of WBF



Source: Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q28: "If relevant, please identify the key reasons for underspend of the total value of your RHSSF/WBF allocation.", n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

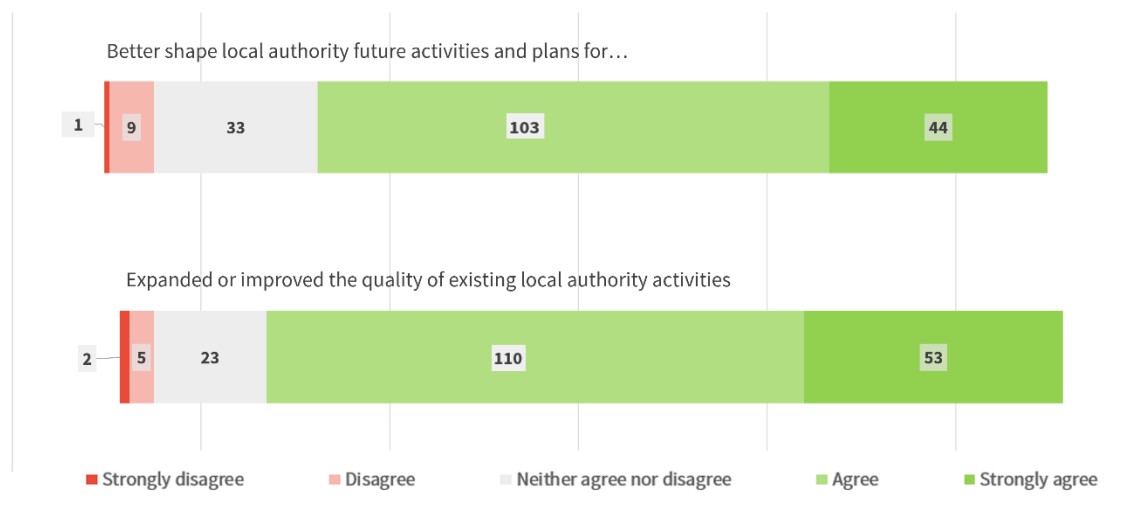
- 5.44 Other reasons given for an underspent allocation can be broadly grouped into the following headlines¹¹:
- Procurement rules meant certain suppliers could not be used or were delayed beyond the need for the activity
 - Local authorities chose to use other sources of COVID funding with fewer restrictions to cover activities
 - Significant amounts of work had already been completed before the WBF was announced
 - Change of staff mid-project with poor handover
 - Low expenditure projects were chosen to reduce risk of claim being rejected and not reimbursed
 - Unrealistic timescales and late announcement of fund

Benefits of the WBF to local authorities

- 5.45 The beneficiary WBF survey also sought to highlight the benefits that the WBF has provided in support of town centre recovery plans. As well as seeking to gather insights on the extent to which the WBF has enabled local authorities to expand or improve the quality of their existing activities. An understanding of the scale of the contribution of the WBF to different indicators e.g. attractiveness of town centre, safety of town centre establishments and developing alternative high street uses was also sought from the beneficiary survey.
- 5.46 The following key benefits were identified:
- A large proportion of local authorities reported that the funding enabled them to better shape future activities and plans for their area. There was a slightly higher proportion of local authorities in agreement that the funding had enabled them to expand or improve their **existing** activities.

¹¹ Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q29: “Was there any other reason not listed for the underspend of the total value of your RHSSF/WBF allocation?”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

Figure 5.14 The extent to which WBF enabled local authorities to...



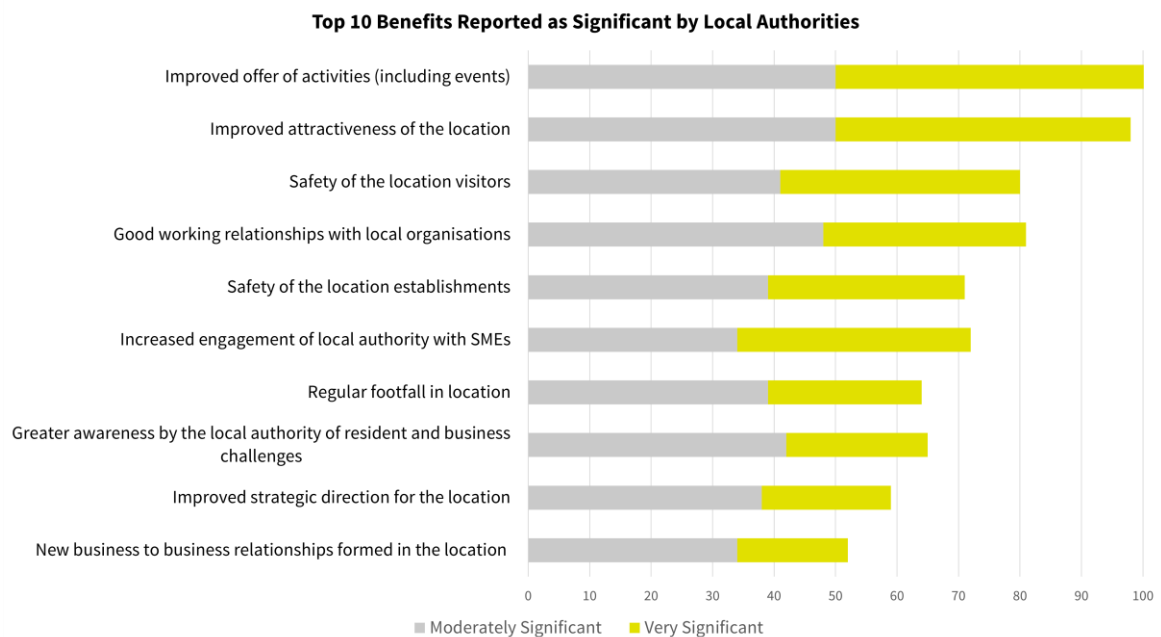
Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q18: "To what extent has the RHSSF/WBF enabled your local authority to do the following for its existing High Street/Town Centre/District Centre/Neighbourhood Shopping Area/City Centre Area?", n=196*, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

*Including those responding with "Don't Know/Not Applicable" not shown on graph.

5.47 In terms of specific benefits, those seen as most significant by local authorities are those identified in the chart below. The most commonly reported and significant benefit was:

- An improved offer of activities for the area (including events).
- The overall improvement to a high street/areas' attractiveness.
- Improvements to working relationships with local organisations.
- Regular footfall in the location.
- Safety of the location establishments and visitor safety was also noted as significant benefits.
- Increased engagement of local authorities with SMEs.
- Greater awareness of the local authority of resident and business challenges.

Figure 5.15 Top 10 Benefits reported as significant by local authorities



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q20: “What would you say have been the benefits for your location (e.g. High Street/Town Centre/District Centre/Neighbourhood Shopping Area/City Centre Area) from receiving the RHSSF/WBF allocation?”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

5.48 Other benefits explicitly stated by local authorities could be broadly grouped accordingly:

- The WBF funding complemented existing funding received, allowing greater general benefit.
- The WBF encouraged town councils to think more ambitiously about how to drive change in their areas.
- Creation of new online marketing tools through dedicated funding and staffing
- The WBF encouraged more engagement between different local bodies and a joined-up approach to tackling local challenges.
- The WBF helped with capacity building within local organisations.¹²

5.49 Of the twenty benefits where feedback was asked for by Hatch, the least significant were ranked with a weighting for those described as ‘not significant’. As a result, the least significant benefits as reported by local authorities included:

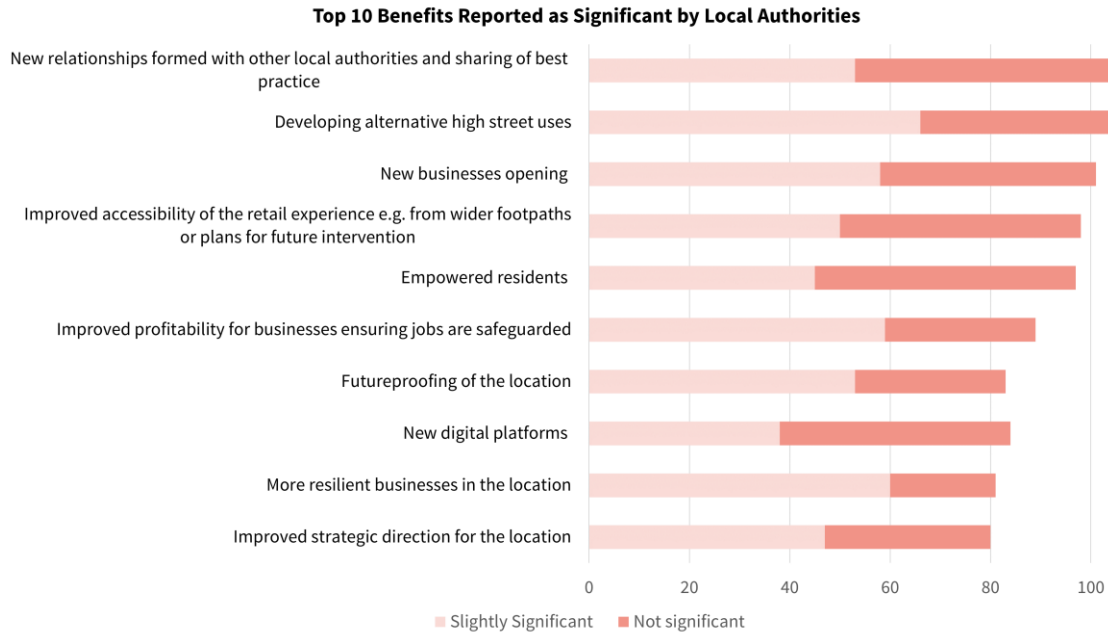
- Developing alternative high street uses,
- Forming new relationships with other local authorities,
- New businesses reopening and improved profitability of existing businesses.

¹² Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q21: “Have there been any other benefits from receiving the RHSSF/WBF allocation not listed above for your location?”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

- Greater resilience and futureproofing of locations were also less commonly reported benefits.

5.50 Figure 5.16 shows the less significant benefits reported by local authorities.

Figure 5.16 Top 10 Benefits Reported as Least Significant by Local Authorities



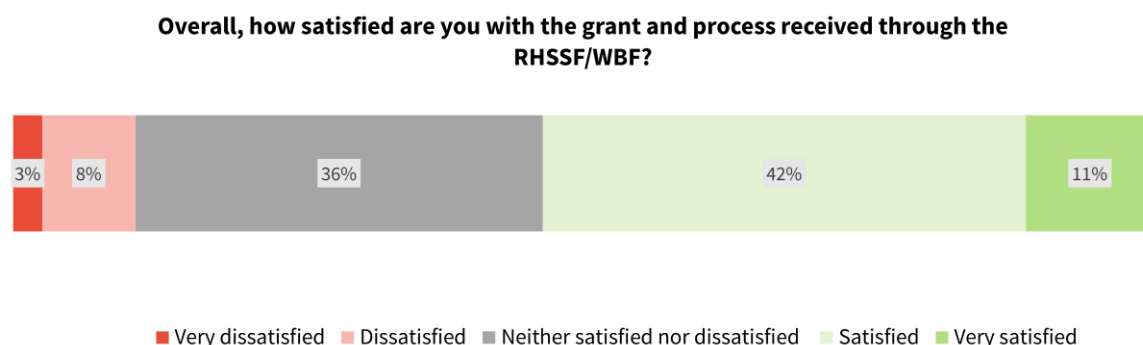
Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q20: “What would you say have been the benefits for your location (e.g. High Street/Town Centre/District Centre/Neighbourhood Shopping Area/City Centre Area) from receiving the RHSSF/WBF allocation?”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

- 5.51 Overall, 80% of local authorities felt that without the WBF, they would not have been able to achieve the same benefits and results. 18% felt that the same results could have been achieved without the funding, but over a longer timeframe, and 3% felt that they could have achieved the same results.
- 5.52 Contract managers highlighted a huge amount of activity around Strand 5 and 6, with considerable feedback from local authorities that they had been able to test out activities, events, times of year and whether they activities were financially viable. *‘There was a considerable amount of work, that they hadn’t done before, that they did through WBF.’*
- 5.53 The research and footfall monitoring that was enabled through the WBF has set a pathway to take forward into a next phase, helping to shape future plans and helped with submissions for other funding bids.

Beneficiary experience of WBF

- 5.54 Overall, the majority of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the process of receiving a grant through the RHSSF/WBF.

Figure 5.17 Satisfaction with the WBF grant and process



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q41: “Overall, how satisfied are you with the grant and process received through the RHSSF/WBF?”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

What worked well

5.55 Consultations with stakeholders and contract managers as well as findings from the beneficiary survey and case studies highlight the following aspects of the WBF that have worked well:

- Good timing for funding being announced, giving impetus for spending money quickly on targeted areas.
- Having an allocation rather than competitive bids, and the fact it was revenue-based.
- Sufficient funds allocated to make a difference.
- Ability to allocate various small-scale interventions according to specific locality/street/neighbourhood needs.
- Fund encouraged engagement with local partners and smaller authorities.¹³
- Broad scope of funding with ideas and examples of eligible projects provided.
- GAP scoping exercise useful for identifying priorities and sharing with WBF.
- Good communication with WBF team and generally smooth contract managing process.
- Knowledge hub, forums, updates and provision of named grant manager/officer support.
- Additional flexibilities when WBF launched, with greater visibility in the district and involvement and understanding of local partners.
- Regular claim periods allowed quick repayments of funds.
- Positive responses from visitors and residents when projects delivered.

¹³ Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q42: “Overall, what do you think worked well and less well on the RHSSF/WBF?”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

What worked less well

5.56 Consultations with stakeholders and contract managers as well as findings from the beneficiary survey and case studies highlight the following aspects of the WBF that have worked less well:

- ERDF restrictions, evidence requirements and claim documentation that were hard to satisfy and use in a short time frame. These were seen as disproportionate to grant amounts offered.
- Onerous processes which challenged staffing resources (especially with long term sickness and general impact of the pandemic) and also complicated hiring of new staff for the programme.
- Written WBF guidance was less effective than webinars/officers, alongside changing guidance and claims forms.
- Temporary activities resulting only in short-term differences (in some cases), and being less environmentally friendly in terms of waste generated.
- Delays between submission of Grant Action Plan and Grant Funding Agreement.
- Confusion around branding rules and grey areas around funding (especially on definition of temporary activities).
- 4% management cost funding was unrepresentative of actual staff costs as administration was labour intensive.
- Risk of needing to spend allocations before claiming back was off-putting for local authorities, and also created cash flow problems for some partner organisations.
- Procurement of street furniture and landscaping worked less well due to delays.
- Changing contract managers caused inconsistencies in advice, knowledge and messaging.¹⁴

¹⁴ Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q42: "Overall, what do you think worked well and less well on the RHSSF/WBF?", n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

6. Outcomes and Impact

- 6.1 Section 6 sets out an assessment of the programme's outcomes and impacts. At its core, RHSSF and WBF (aimed to help local authorities with their high streets, town, district and city centres to put in place measures to support businesses and consumers in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. A year into RHSSF (with the name change to WBF), the focus was widened to help local authorities turn their attention to how to futureproof their high streets to the medium-term impact of Covid-19. To evaluate this, it is important to understand the way that the challenges of Covid-19 to the high street have been overcome and how that has led to enhanced outcomes and impacts.

Outcomes and Impacts

- 6.2 Evidence on the effects of the WBF on outcomes and impacts have largely been drawn from the beneficiary web survey and case study evidence.
- 6.3 It is important to highlight that the variety of outcomes local authorities sought to achieve at the start of WBF were deliberately vague and left open by the MHCLG team. Hence, whilst the key outcomes achieved are aligned with those intended by the RHSSF and WBF, there are also new outcomes and possibly unplanned successful results that have occurred.
- 6.4 The outcomes and intended impacts for the WBF from the Logic model are presented again below.

WBF Beneficiary Level Outcomes

- Safe reopening of commercial public spaces, safe trading for SMEs
- Reduced growth rate of Covid-19
- Increased resident/consumer confidence in returning to high streets
- Improved green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environment
- Increased capacity for responding to the economic impact of Covid-19

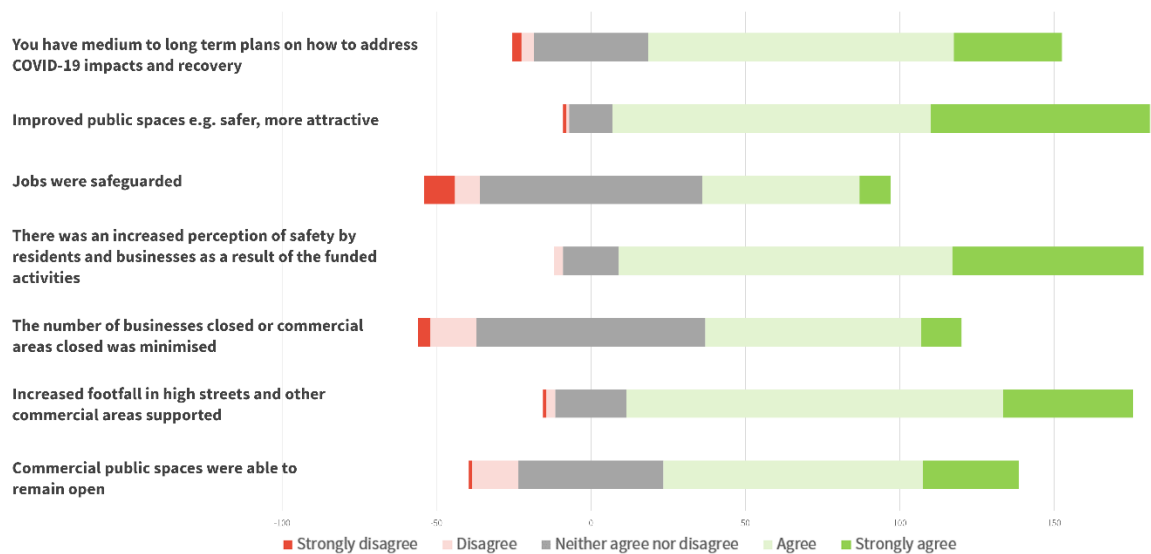
WBF Intended Impacts

- Number of commercial public spaces remaining open
- Increased footfall in high streets and other commercial areas supported
- Numbers of businesses closed/commercial areas closed mitigated
- Reduction in local Covid-19 reproduction number
- Perception of safety by residents and businesses
- Jobs safeguarded
- Number of improved public spaces
- Number of medium to long term plans to address Covid-19 impact and recovery

Outcomes that performed well

- 6.5 Results from the beneficiary survey and case study work highlight that the WBF has performed well in terms of increasing footfall, increasing the perception of safety on the high street and in improving public spaces, green spaces, retail and the non-retail environment.
- 6.6 According to the 196 local authorities surveyed, the WBF performed well in terms of increasing footfall in high streets and commercial areas.
- 85% of beneficiaries surveyed agreed/strongly agreed that increased footfall in high streets and other commercial areas had been supported as a result of the WBF.
 - 87% believed that footfall would have grown but by a smaller amount or would have reduced without WBF support.

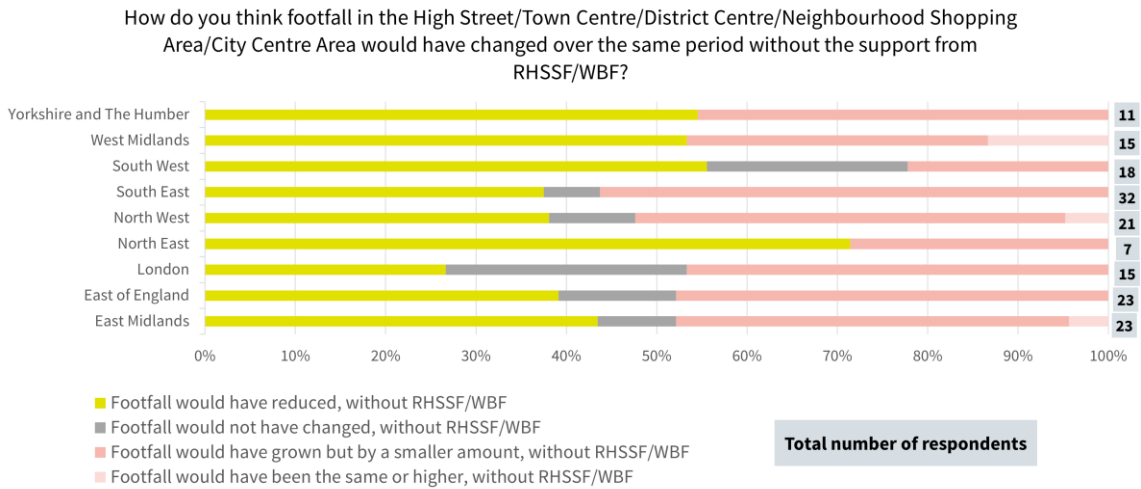
Figure 6.1: How do you think footfall in the high street would have changed without WBF?



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q30: "Please indicate for each of the outcomes below whether you think they have been achieved as a result of the RHSSF/WBF funding.", n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

- 6.7 The majority of local authorities interviewed as part of the case study work argue that without WBF their footfall would have been reduced. Eastleigh and Leeds local authority highlight key examples of how bespoke WBF activities have increased footfall for a particular period, for example half term activities and the aerial photography exhibition. The Leeds case study highlighted that *'without it, Leeds would not have recovered as well from the pandemic.'*

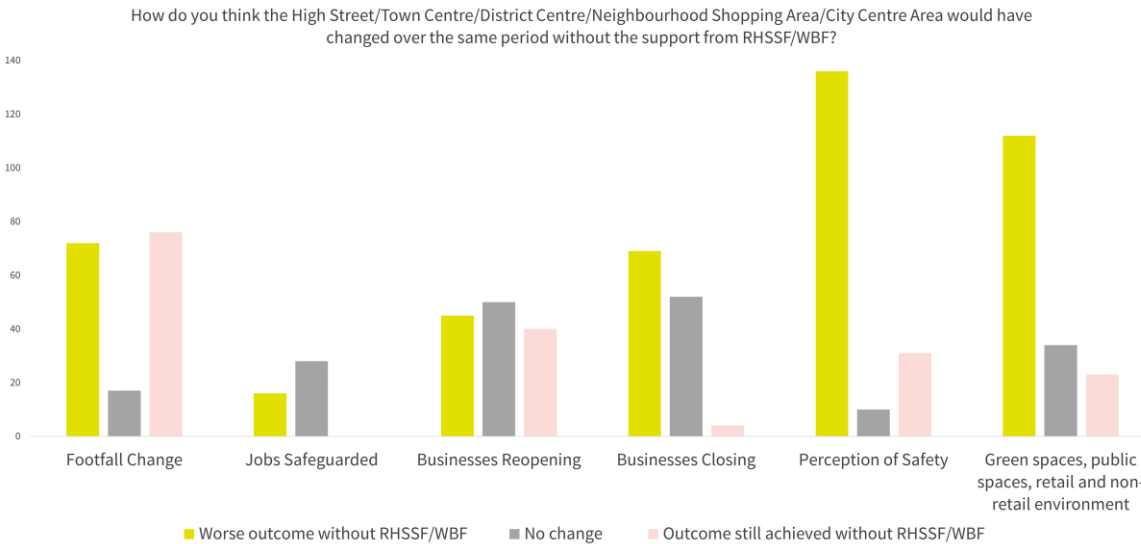
Figure 6.2: How do you think footfall in the high street would have changed without WBF?



Source: Hatch Survey

6.8 The WBF was reported to have had the greatest positive or mitigating influence on footfall in the North East region, whereas local authorities in London generally did not attribute the fund to any positive changes in footfall experienced. It is important to highlight here that London¹⁶ has been found to be an area with some of the slowest recoveries in footfall, and is still considerably short of pre-pandemic levels. This may therefore influence the response to this survey question.

Figure 6.3: How do you think your high street would have changed without WBF?



Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q32-36 (see corresponding questions in Figures 6.2 and 6.4-6.7), n=196*, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

*Including those responding with “Don’t Know/Not Applicable” not shown on graph.

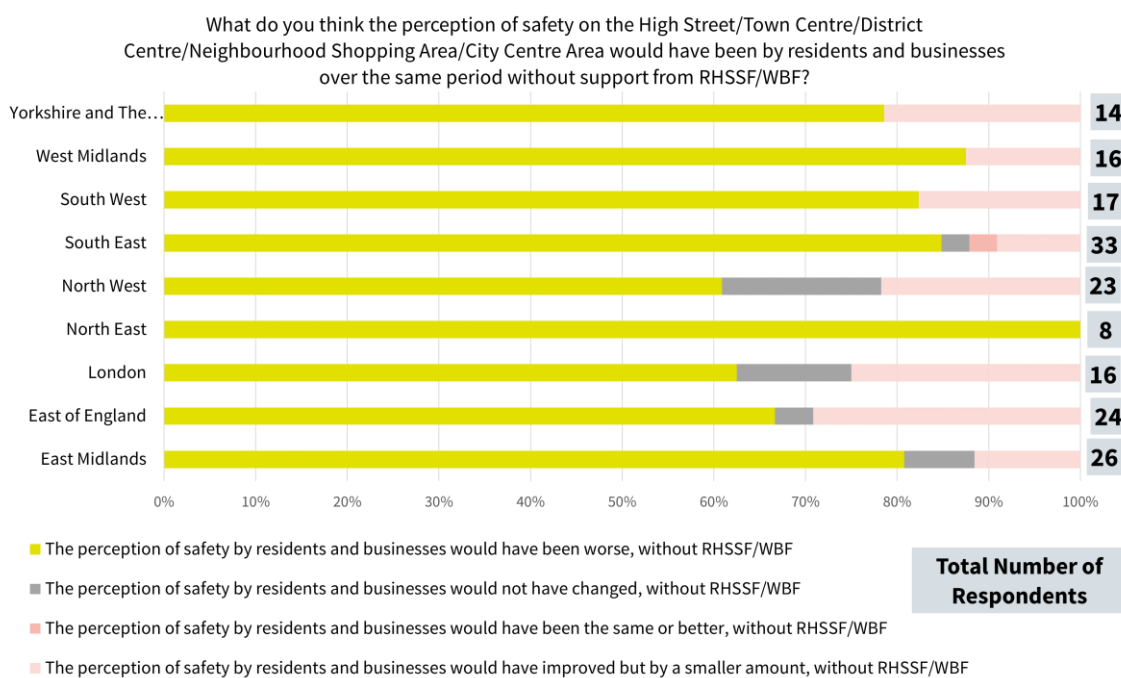
6.9 It is fair to conclude that, whilst the WBF was not the sole driver of improvements in footfall in the allocated funding areas, it did play an important role. The case studies highlight a number

¹⁶ <https://www.centreforcities.org/data/high-streets-recovery-tracker/>

of isolated cases where WBF was the main contributing factor to increases in footfall. For example, the Leeds case study highlighted an aerial photography exhibition that brought a big exhibition to one of the city centre public spaces – *‘rather like an outdoor gallery.’* The local authority WBF team received feedback from the adjacent museum and art gallery, reporting that the exhibition had helped drive footfall back to the art gallery.

- 6.10 The Eastleigh case study also directly attributes half term activities funded by the WBF to a rise in footfall, with all shops remarking on this trend. A shopping centre highlighted that its footfall was 7.5% above pre-pandemic rates when the half term activities were held.
- 6.11 Perceptions of safety were also seen to have been mitigated or positively changed as a result of the WBF programme. As a range of local authorities highlighted in the case study work *‘more people went back to the high street’*, as a result of the WBF activities, and *‘felt safer.’*
- 6.12 88% of beneficiaries surveyed agreed/strongly agreed that there was an increased perception of safety by residents and businesses as a result of the funded activities. 86% believed that the perception of safety would have been worse or would have improved by a smaller amount without WBF support.
- 6.13 This was particularly felt in the **North East, West Midlands** and **South East** regions.

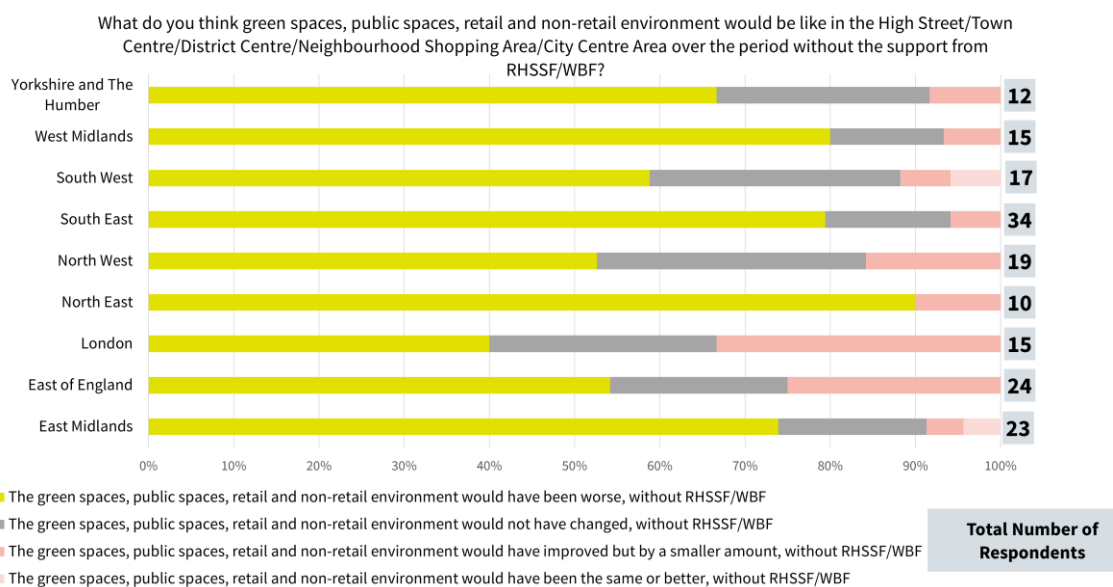
Figure 6.4: Perception of safety in the high street without WBF



Source: Hatch Survey

- 6.14 There was a strong indication that the WBF helped to mitigate a worsening of green spaces, public realm and retail environments in local areas. 90% of beneficiaries surveyed agreed/strongly agreed that the WBF had improved public spaces making them safer and more attractive. 69% agreed that green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environment would have been worse or improved but by a smaller amount without WBF.
- 6.15 The majority of local authorities in London reported no change or a positive change to green spaces and public realm without additional funding from WBF.

Figure 6.5: Green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environment without WBF



Source: Hatch Survey

6.16 WBF also performed well in terms of preparing local authorities for dealing with Covid-19 impacts. 69% of beneficiaries surveyed highlighted that they had a medium to long-term plan to addressing Covid-19 impacts and recovery.

Outcomes that performed less well

6.17 Local authorities reported weaker outcomes in terms of safeguarding jobs, minimising the number of businesses that closed and those that reopened.

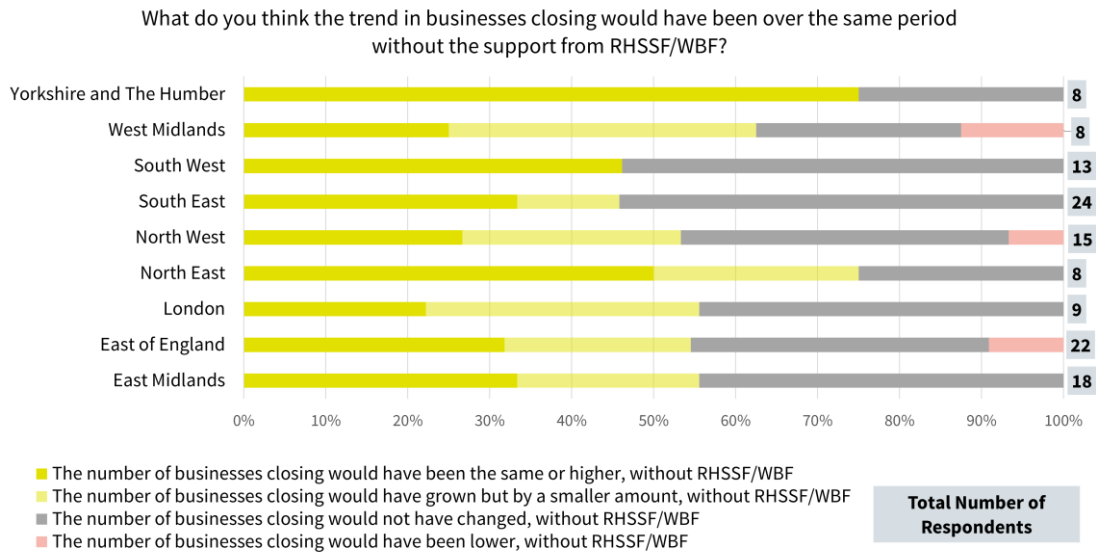
6.18 Local authorities were largely unsure as to whether the WBF had safeguarded jobs; 77% of beneficiaries surveyed replied that they didn't know. 8% surveyed felt that jobs had been safeguarded as a result of the WBF. The remaining 15% replied negatively to this question.

6.19 Around 42% of local authorities surveyed agreed/strongly agreed that the *number of businesses/commercial areas closed was minimised* was an outcome achieved by the WBF. However, local authorities highlighted that these business closures were largely mandated by government restrictions (such as the 'rule of 6' and restrictions on Christmas shopping) and so the Fund could not mitigate against this even where it achieved longer term benefits for the area.

6.20 Overall, the impact of WBF on business closures/openings was less recognised compared with impacts such as footfall, perceptions of safety and green spaces. However, the case study for Bury reports that the WBF played a big role in its impact on business closures/openings. Covid support officers were reported to have delivered support across the Borough, helping SMEs to be Covid compliant and to access wider business support. Encouraging businesses to apply for the Government Additional restrictions Grant was one of the support roles provided by Covid officers. This in turn was seen to have helped businesses *'still [be] there now.'*

6.21 The WBF was reported to have had the greatest positive or mitigating influence on business closures in **Yorkshires and the Humber** and the **West Midlands** regions. Again, local authorities in London generally did not attribute the fund to any positive changes in business reopening experienced. Local authorities in **South West** and **South East** regions mostly reported that the RHSSF/WBF fund had no real influence on business closures.

Figure 6.6: Trends in businesses closing without WBF

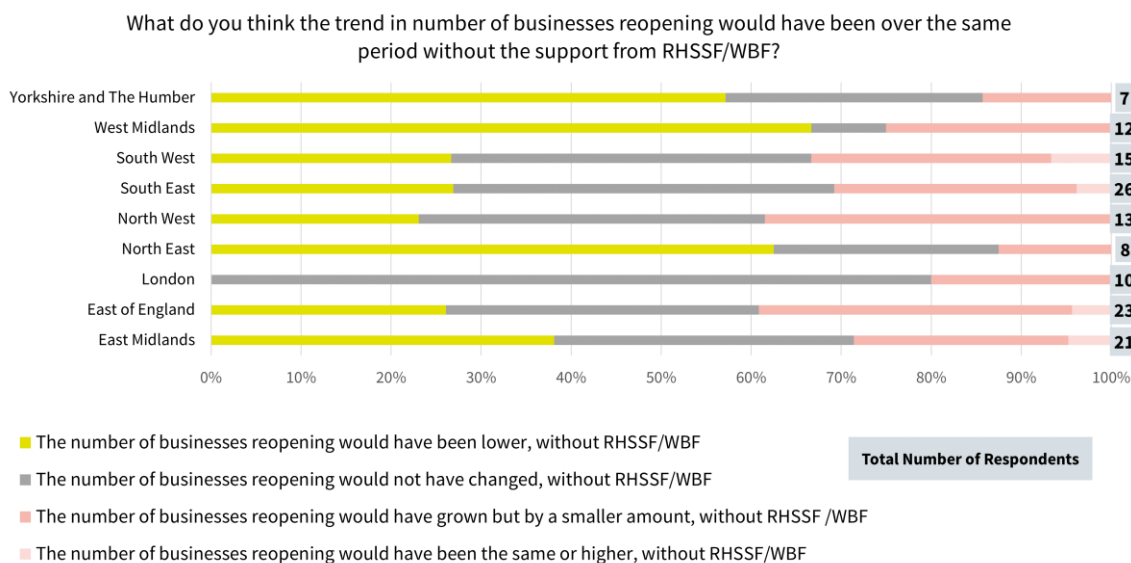


Source: Hatch Survey

6.22 Around 41% of beneficiaries surveyed felt that the number of businesses reopening would have been lower or grown but by a smaller amount without WBF. As before, the number of businesses reopened were not seen to have changed as a result of the Fund due to the greater influence of government restrictions on these indicators.

6.23 The WBF was reported to have had the greatest positive or mitigating influence on businesses reopening in the West Midlands and North East regions. Again, local authorities in London generally did not attribute the fund to any positive changes in business reopening experienced.

Figure 6.7: Trends in the number of businesses reopening without WBF



Source: Hatch Survey

Other outcomes

6.24 Other common outcomes listed by local authorities included:

- Support for the tourism economy (in addition to increased local footfall)
- Improvements to data monitoring for town movement, footfall, travel and events
- Development of a discovery app to help support local businesses
- Increased use of robust health data and partnership working with Public Health colleagues to inform decision making and reduce health inequality
- Increased sense of civic pride and connection with the local area
- Improved partnership working and communication with local businesses, parishes and other external stakeholders and delivery partners¹⁷

Wider Benefits

6.25 In addition to the outcomes above, some of the most important and valued wider benefits, highlighted by beneficiaries were as follows:¹⁸

- Improved partnership working across businesses, parishes and other local organisations/stakeholders
- More knowledge of the issues facing local businesses and town centres, including improved data monitoring capabilities

¹⁷ Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q30: “Was there any other outcome not listed as a result of the RHSSF/WBF allocation? How strongly do you agree/disagree that this has been achieved?”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

¹⁸ Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022. Q39: “Are there any wider benefits not already mentioned which have been delivered as a result of the RHSSF/WBF?”, n=196, confidence interval=10%, margin of error=4.5%.

- Key WBF interventions have provided local authorities with tools such as footfall monitors
- Creation of future events based on success of trials and newly acquired resources (e.g. tables, chairs, bunting)
- Development of skills and understanding of central government funding within local authority teams
- Community cohesion and a sense of coming together to deliver positive outcomes
- Opportunities to contract local freelancers and suppliers on fair wages
- Development of longer-term strategies and direction
- General improved confidence among businesses and visitors in terms of Covid safety and the ability to try new things
- Encouragement of tourism and creation of promotional materials.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 7.1 This section looks to summarise its findings against the five summative assessment themes, as set out below and in the ERDF summative assessment guidance and provides recommendations for future programmes.

Conclusions

Programme Relevance and Consistency

- 7.2 **Relevant and met the need.** Against the programme's original needs and rationale, WBF was relevant and continued to be throughout its duration. The need to revitalise the high street, town, district and city centres and encourage footfall has not gone away. Some of the market failures inhibiting the market from delivering a socially optimal outcome are still present, although most are significantly subdued.
- 7.3 **An adapting programme offering considerable value.** The design of the programme saw one major change over the course of its lifetime, with the introduction of the WBF. This change served to build on lessons learnt in the first 9 to 12 months of delivery and spurred beneficiaries on to widen horizons on what was possible on the high street. A good proportion of benefits and activities were undertaken in the second stage of the Fund.

Progress Against Contractual Targets

- 7.4 **Programme spend has been maximised to a good degree.** Since the programme's inception in June 2020, changes at national and international level have affected WBF's ability to deliver. The programme has effectively managed spend with the MHCLG team working hard to ensure take up of the Fund. Local authorities have also worked to maximise the benefits and use of the Fund. When originally conceived it was recognised that the Fund may well not achieve full take up.
- 7.5 **Output performance has been strong.** A review of output claims against contracted targets shows good performance. Approximate output forecasts were set out for the RHSSF and these have been significantly exceeded by local authorities.

Delivery and Management Performance

- 7.6 **The WBF took a while to gain momentum** as the MHCLG team grew to full capacity and guidance for local authorities was slow to be published. Once established the MHCLG team provided substantial and good quality inputs to local authorities delivering the WBF. Some local authorities noted changes in contract managers over the course of the programme, which in some cases caused extra work and were reported to impact on programme activities.
- 7.7 **Eligibility and spending restrictions that were manifested in the RHSSF activities** were worked through and learnings translated into a more accommodating spending environment for the WBF.
- 7.8 **MHCLG programme support activities were key drivers** in facilitating the take up of the WBF. The webinars, bulletins and online platforms were important in adding value to the types of WBF activities offered by local authorities.

- 7.9 **The claims procedures were found to be very onerous and time consuming by local authorities** and the revision of action plans with the introduction of the WBF appeared to create additional tasks for local authorities.

Outcomes and Impacts

- 7.10 **WBF has had a positive impact on the high streets, town and city centres** in which it has been allocated. WBF has helped the majority of beneficiaries to make progress against their aspirations, most commonly around increasing the perception of safety by residents and businesses which in turn resulted in people coming back to the high street. WBF activities have improved the look of public spaces and helped local authorities put in place medium term plans to address the impact of Covid-19.
- 7.11 **The intangible benefits were equally important.** At the beneficiary level, improved partnership working and communication with local business, parishes and other external stakeholders and delivery partners was commonly cited as of particular value generated from the WBF.

Cost Effectiveness and Value for Money

- 7.12 Due to the nature of the WBF, it has not been possible to undertake quantitative impact modelling to estimate the additionality of the programme as a whole in terms of jobs and gross value added (GVA) created.

Recommendations

1. Refined approach to the MHCLG WBF team

- 7.13 The MHCLG WBF team were under resourced when the programme began. The resourcing issues at the start of the programme meant that a good understanding of how to spend in an eligible way was not immediately embedded within local authority WBF teams. MHCLG WBF staff resourcing issues were also found in the delivery stage with applications needing processing, contracts sent out and people helped to start processing web activity. The monitoring and evaluation information was set up quickly and late; the *'contract managers always felt like they were running a bit behind and reacting, rather than setting up exactly what was needed.'* A fully functioning MHCLG WBF team at the start of the programme would have greatly rectified a number of the problems experienced by local authorities. For example, a faster turnaround of claims and confirmation of funding in advance of activities beginning.

2. Clear advice to local authorities to hire personnel

- 7.14 The WBF was a resource intensive Fund to deliver. A lack of capacity to deliver the WBF effectively was an issue highlighted by a wide range of local authorities. A clear directive for local authorities to hire personnel from the start of the WBF, who could manage the WBF internally and be funded through the WBF, would have helped overcome a range of the challenges highlighted by local authorities and contract managers.

3. Clearly defined time frame for delivery

- 7.15 The WBF had a number of time and scope extensions. A knowledge of how the Fund was due to change and extend over time would have helped local authorities to plan activities better and put additional resources in place from the start of the programme.

Appendix A - WBF allocations

Table A.1 WBF allocations per local authority (includes both RHSSF and WBF allocations).

Local Authority	Reopening High Streets Safely Fund	Welcome Back Fund	Total
Adur	£56,721	£121,721	£178,442
Allerdale	£86,416	£186,416	£272,832
Amber Valley	£113,424	£113,425	£226,849
Arun	£143,718	£208,718	£352,436
Ashfield	£114,527	£114,528	£229,055
Ashford	£116,814	£116,815	£233,629
Babergh	£81,635	£146,635	£228,270
Barking and Dagenham	£189,384	£189,384	£378,768
Barnet	£352,546	£352,546	£705,092
Barnsley	£219,400	£219,400	£438,800
Barrow in Furness	£58,858	£158,859	£217,717
Basildon	£165,814	£165,814	£331,628
Basingstoke and Deane	£155,751	£155,751	£311,502
Bassetlaw	£104,654	£104,654	£209,308
Bath and North East Somerset	£172,615	£172,615	£345,230
Bedford	£154,129	£154,129	£308,258
Bexley	£220,176	£220,176	£440,352
Birmingham	£1,016,937	£1,016,936	£2,033,873
Blaby	£91,482	£91,483	£182,965
Blackburn with Darwen	£131,610	£131,610	£263,220
Blackpool	£122,772	£222,771	£345,543
Bolsover	£71,400	£71,400	£142,800
Bolton	£253,140	£253,140	£506,280
Boston	£62,811	£62,811	£125,622
Bournemouth	£351,322	£416,323	£767,645
Bracknell Forest	£108,686	£108,686	£217,372
Bradford	£477,170	£477,170	£954,340
Braintree	£134,417	£134,418	£268,835
Breckland	£125,275	£125,275	£250,550
Brent	£295,907	£295,908	£591,815
Brentwood	£67,382	£67,383	£134,765
Brighton and Hove	£259,269	£324,269	£583,538
Bristol	£415,785	£415,785	£831,570
Broadland	£116,155	£116,155	£232,310
Bromley	£295,177	£295,178	£590,355
Bromsgrove	£88,668	£88,668	£177,336
Broxbourne	£85,547	£85,548	£171,095
Broxtowe	£101,458	£101,459	£202,917
Buckinghamshire	£481,588	£481,588	£963,176

Local Authority	Reopening High Streets Safely Fund	Welcome Back Fund	Total
Burnley	£78,757	£78,758	£157,515
Bury	£169,235	£169,235	£338,470
Calderdale	£186,099	£186,099	£372,198
Cambridge	£110,674	£110,675	£221,349
Camden	£239,768	£239,768	£479,536
Cannock Chase	£89,622	£89,623	£179,245
Canterbury	£146,699	£211,700	£358,399
Carlisle	£95,875	£95,875	£191,750
Castle Point	£79,835	£144,835	£224,670
Central Bedfordshire	£255,873	£255,873	£511,746
Charnwood	£165,450	£165,450	£330,900
Chelmsford	£159,001	£159,001	£318,002
Cheltenham	£103,577	£103,578	£207,155
Cherwell	£133,843	£133,843	£267,686
Cheshire East	£339,533	£339,534	£679,067
Cheshire West and Chester	£305,395	£370,395	£675,790
Chesterfield	£92,638	£92,638	£185,276
Chichester	£108,161	£173,161	£281,322
Chorley	£105,438	£105,438	£210,876
City of London	£30,000	£30,000	£60,000
Colchester	£174,002	£239,003	£413,005
Copeland	£59,919	£159,920	£219,839
Cornwall	£509,639	£609,639	£1,119,278
Cotswold	£81,144	£81,144	£162,288
Coventry	£334,307	£334,308	£668,615
Craven	£50,436	£50,436	£100,872
Crawley	£100,152	£100,153	£200,305
Croydon	£341,995	£341,995	£683,990
Dacorum	£137,473	£137,473	£274,946
Darlington	£94,239	£94,239	£188,478
Dartford	£100,466	£100,466	£200,932
Derby	£228,224	£228,224	£456,448
Derbyshire Dales	£63,808	£63,808	£127,616
Doncaster	£276,789	£276,790	£553,579
Dorset	£335,426	£400,426	£735,852
Dover	£105,542	£170,543	£276,085
Dudley	£285,548	£285,548	£571,096
Durham	£469,256	£569,256	£1,038,512
Ealing	£300,759	£300,759	£601,518
East Cambridgeshire	£79,895	£79,895	£159,790
East Devon	£130,992	£230,991	£361,983
East Hampshire	£108,114	£108,114	£216,228
East Hertfordshire	£132,170	£132,170	£264,340

Local Authority	Reopening High Streets Safely Fund	Welcome Back Fund	Total
East Lindsey	£126,238	£226,238	£352,476
East Riding of Yorkshire	£301,870	£401,870	£703,740
East Staffordshire	£106,046	£106,046	£212,092
East Suffolk	£222,198	£287,198	£509,396
Eastbourne	£91,624	£156,624	£248,248
Eastleigh	£118,435	£183,435	£301,870
Eden	£46,899	£46,899	£93,798
Elmbridge	£120,877	£120,878	£241,755
Enfield	£295,948	£295,948	£591,896
Epping Forest	£116,694	£116,694	£233,388
Epsom and Ewell	£71,062	£71,063	£142,125
Erewash	£102,534	£102,534	£205,068
Exeter	£116,632	£116,633	£233,265
Fareham	£103,270	£168,270	£271,540
Fenland	£91,408	£91,408	£182,816
Folkestone and Hythe	£100,751	£165,751	£266,502
Forest of Dean	£77,635	£77,635	£155,270
Fylde	£71,758	£171,758	£243,516
Gateshead	£178,928	£178,928	£357,856
Gedling	£105,213	£105,213	£210,426
Gloucester	£115,135	£115,135	£230,270
Gosport	£75,131	£140,131	£215,262
Gravesham	£94,146	£94,146	£188,292
Great Yarmouth	£88,301	£153,301	£241,602
Greenwich	£258,441	£258,441	£516,882
Guildford	£131,382	£131,381	£262,763
Hackney	£252,053	£252,053	£504,106
Halton	£114,260	£179,260	£293,520
Hambleton	£80,700	£80,700	£161,400
Hammersmith and Fulham	£166,896	£166,896	£333,792
Harborough	£83,483	£83,483	£166,966
Haringey	£239,933	£239,933	£479,866
Harlow	£77,121	£77,121	£154,242
Harrogate	£141,714	£141,714	£283,428
Harrow	£221,203	£221,203	£442,406
Hart	£86,003	£86,003	£172,006
Hartlepool	£82,445	£182,445	£264,890
Hastings	£82,026	£147,026	£229,052
Havant	£112,726	£177,726	£290,452
Havering	£231,057	£231,058	£462,115
Herefordshire	£172,188	£172,189	£344,377
Hertsmere	£92,495	£92,495	£184,990
High Peak	£81,981	£81,980	£163,961

Local Authority	Reopening High Streets Safely Fund	Welcome Back Fund	Total
Hillingdon	£272,855	£272,855	£545,710
Hinckley and Bosworth	£101,469	£101,469	£202,938
Horsham	£128,132	£128,133	£256,265
Hounslow	£240,811	£240,810	£481,621
Huntingdonshire	£157,826	£157,826	£315,652
Hyndburn	£71,676	£71,676	£143,352
Ipswich	£120,858	£120,859	£241,717
Isle of Wight	£126,269	£191,270	£317,539
Isles of Scilly	£30,000	£130,000	£160,000
Islington	£215,682	£215,681	£431,363
Kensington and Chelsea	£137,830	£137,830	£275,660
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	£134,654	£199,654	£334,308
Kingston upon Hull	£230,406	£330,406	£560,812
Kingston upon Thames	£156,784	£156,784	£313,568
Kirklees	£389,715	£389,715	£779,430
Knowsley	£133,288	£233,288	£366,576
Lambeth	£290,782	£290,783	£581,565
Lancaster	£128,905	£228,905	£357,810
Leeds	£701,810	£701,810	£1,403,620
Leicester	£318,069	£318,069	£636,138
Lewes	£91,677	£156,678	£248,355
Lewisham	£272,218	£272,219	£544,437
Lichfield	£92,501	£92,501	£185,002
Lincoln	£87,816	£87,816	£175,632
Liverpool	£443,129	£443,129	£886,258
Luton	£187,988	£187,988	£375,976
Maidstone	£153,551	£153,551	£307,102
Maldon	£57,609	£122,609	£180,218
Malvern Hills	£70,271	£70,270	£140,541
Manchester	£488,628	£488,628	£977,256
Mansfield	£97,256	£97,255	£194,511
Medway	£246,396	£246,396	£492,792
Melton	£45,239	£45,239	£90,478
Mendip	£102,863	£102,863	£205,726
Merton	£182,103	£182,103	£364,206
Mid Devon	£73,686	£73,686	£147,372
Mid Suffolk	£91,892	£91,893	£183,785
Mid Sussex	£133,898	£133,898	£267,796
Middlesbrough	£123,875	£123,875	£247,750
Milton Keynes	£239,276	£239,276	£478,552
Mole Valley	£76,828	£76,828	£153,656
New Forest	£159,208	£224,208	£383,416

Local Authority	Reopening High Streets Safely Fund	Welcome Back Fund	Total
Newark and Sherwood	£108,976	£108,976	£217,952
Newcastle under Lyme	£115,378	£115,379	£230,757
Newcastle upon tyne	£267,011	£267,011	£552,022
Newham	£316,668	£316,668	£633,336
North Devon	£86,191	£186,191	£272,382
North East Derbyshire	£90,043	£90,043	£180,086
North East Lincolnshire	£141,143	£241,143	£382,286
North Hertfordshire	£118,251	£118,251	£236,502
North Kesteven	£104,404	£104,404	£208,808
North Lincolnshire	£152,741	£252,740	£405,481
North Norfolk	£93,332	£158,331	£251,663
North Northamptonshire	£312,221	£312,220	£624,441
North Somerset	£191,439	£256,439	£447,878
North Tyneside	£183,918	£248,918	£432,836
North Warwickshire	£58,610	£58,610	£117,220
North West Leicestershire	£93,217	£93,218	£186,435
Northumberland	£284,807	£349,808	£634,615
Norwich	£125,962	£125,961	£251,923
Nottingham	£294,601	£294,601	£589,202
Nuneaton and Bedworth	£115,040	£115,040	£230,080
Oadby and Wigston	£50,503	£50,504	£101,007
Oldham	£210,417	£210,418	£420,835
Oxford	£134,950	£134,950	£269,900
Pendle	£81,195	£81,195	£162,390
Peterborough	£181,516	£181,516	£363,032
Plymouth	£233,129	£333,129	£566,258
Portsmouth	£191,340	£256,340	£447,680
Preston	£125,813	£125,813	£251,626
Reading	£144,780	£144,780	£289,560
Redbridge	£269,587	£269,588	£539,175
Redcar and Cleveland	£121,632	£221,633	£343,265
Redditch	£75,088	£75,088	£150,176
Reigate and Banstead	£132,263	£132,264	£264,527
Ribble Valley	£53,771	£53,771	£107,542
Richmond upon Thames	£175,408	£175,408	£350,816
Richmondshire	£46,921	£46,921	£93,842
Rochdale	£197,050	£197,050	£394,100
Rochford	£77,836	£77,836	£155,672
Rossendale	£63,416	£63,416	£126,832
Rother	£85,837	£150,838	£236,675

Local Authority	Reopening High Streets Safely Fund	Welcome Back Fund	Total
Rotherham	£235,727	£235,728	£471,455
Rugby	£96,315	£96,315	£192,630
Runnymede	£78,590	£78,590	£157,180
Rushcliffe	£106,208	£106,209	£212,417
Rushmoor	£83,473	£83,474	£166,947
Rutland	£35,627	£35,628	£71,255
Ryedale	£49,266	£49,265	£98,531
Salford	£230,071	£230,071	£460,142
Sandwell	£292,628	£292,628	£585,256
Scarborough	£96,527	£161,528	£258,055
Sedgemoor	£109,807	£174,808	£284,615
Sefton	£244,167	£344,166	£588,333
Selby	£80,408	£80,409	£160,817
Sevenoaks	£107,106	£107,106	£214,212
Sheffield	£520,216	£520,216	£1,040,432
Shropshire	£288,194	£288,194	£576,388
Slough	£132,636	£132,636	£265,272
Solihull	£192,058	£192,058	£384,116
Somerset West and Taunton	£138,806	£203,806	£342,612
South Cambridgeshire	£140,440	£140,440	£280,880
South Derbyshire	£95,419	£95,419	£190,838
South Gloucestershire	£255,356	£255,356	£510,712
South Hams	£77,370	£177,370	£254,740
South Holland	£84,587	£84,588	£169,175
South Kesteven	£126,454	£126,455	£252,909
South Lakeland	£92,936	£192,936	£285,872
South Norfolk	£125,889	£125,889	£251,778
South Oxfordshire	£125,160	£125,160	£250,320
South Ribble	£97,965	£97,965	£195,930
South Somerset	£149,354	£149,354	£298,708
South Staffordshire	£99,469	£99,469	£198,938
South Tyneside	£133,554	£198,554	£332,108
Southampton	£225,271	£290,271	£515,542
Southend on Sea	£163,096	£228,096	£391,192
Southwark	£285,961	£285,961	£571,922
Spelthorne	£88,049	£88,049	£176,098
St Albans	£130,464	£130,464	£260,928
St Helens	£160,220	£160,220	£320,440
Stafford	£121,848	£121,848	£243,696
Staffordshire Moorlands	£87,090	£87,090	£174,180
Stevenage	£77,818	£77,818	£155,636
Stockport	£259,403	£259,403	£518,806

Local Authority	Reopening High Streets Safely Fund	Welcome Back Fund	Total
Stockton on Tees	£174,891	£274,891	£449,782
Stoke on Trent	£227,484	£227,484	£454,968
Stratford on Avon	£116,036	£116,036	£232,072
Stroud	£106,463	£106,463	£212,926
Sunderland	£244,835	£309,835	£554,670
Surrey Heath	£78,494	£78,494	£156,988
Sutton	£182,487	£182,486	£364,973
Swale	£134,057	£199,058	£333,115
Swindon	£198,797	£198,798	£397,595
Tameside	£200,741	£200,741	£401,482
Tamworth	£67,445	£67,445	£134,890
Tandridge	£77,880	£77,880	£155,760
Teignbridge	£119,835	£219,835	£339,670
Telford and Wrekin	£160,347	£160,348	£320,695
Tendring	£131,110	£196,110	£327,220
Test Valley	£112,403	£112,403	£224,806
Tewkesbury	£84,931	£84,931	£169,862
Thanet	£126,456	£191,456	£317,912
Three Rivers	£82,174	£82,174	£164,348
Thurrock	£155,810	£155,810	£311,620
Tonbridge and Malling	£117,531	£117,531	£235,062
Torbay	£121,293	£221,293	£342,586
Torridge	£61,179	£161,179	£222,358
Tower Hamlets	£292,962	£292,963	£585,925
Trafford	£210,672	£210,671	£421,343
Tunbridge Wells	£104,842	£104,843	£209,685
Uttlesford	£80,809	£80,809	£161,618
Vale of White Horse	£121,938	£121,939	£243,877
Wakefield	£311,389	£311,389	£622,778
Walsall	£253,601	£253,601	£507,202
Waltham Forest	£247,283	£247,283	£494,566
Wandsworth	£292,844	£292,844	£585,688
Warrington	£185,805	£185,805	£371,610
Warwick	£127,085	£127,085	£254,170
Watford	£85,637	£85,636	£171,273
Waverley	£111,270	£111,270	£222,540
Wealden	£143,302	£208,303	£351,605
Welwyn Hatfield	£109,901	£109,901	£219,802
West Berkshire	£139,795	£139,795	£279,590
West Devon	£49,619	£49,619	£99,238
West Lancashire	£100,989	£100,989	£201,978
West Lindsey	£84,598	£84,598	£169,196
West Northamptonshire	£360,868	£360,867	£721,735

Local Authority	Reopening High Streets Safely Fund	Welcome Back Fund	Total
West Oxfordshire	£97,972	£97,973	£195,945
West Suffolk	£159,294	£159,294	£318,588
Westminster	£232,924	£232,924	£465,848
Wigan	£290,046	£290,046	£580,092
Wiltshire	£449,858	£449,858	£899,716
Winchester	£110,972	£110,971	£221,943
Windsor and Maidenhead	£133,672	£133,673	£267,345
Wirral	£286,292	£386,291	£672,583
Woking	£89,172	£89,173	£178,345
Wokingham	£151,819	£151,820	£303,639
Wolverhampton	£234,488	£234,488	£468,976
Worcester	£90,121	£90,121	£180,242
Worthing	£98,168	£163,168	£261,336
Wychavon	£115,925	£115,925	£231,850
Wyre	£99,180	£199,180	£298,360
Wyre Forest	£90,196	£90,196	£180,392
York	£186,219	£186,219	£372,438

Appendix B - Consultees

B.1 The following individuals were consulted as part of the summative assessment

MHCLG

- Simon Jones, Assistant Director
- Naomi Hollows, Project Leader, Welcome Back Fund
- Laura Clayton, Head of Local Regeneration Programmes
- Jake Marsh, Project Manager, WBF
- Dominic Lamb, Project Manager, WBF

MHCLG Team Contract Managers

- Pat Ali
- Karen Turner
- Jo Turnbull
- Jo Cadell
- Glyn Jones
- Kamila Hadley
- Daniel Hickman
- Catherine Surtees
- Denise Durston

Local Authorities:

- South Holland District Council, John Mullen, External Funding Officer and Beth Stinson
- Graveling Borough Council, Anita Tysoe, Service Manager
- North Tyneside Metropolitan Council, Graham Sword, Senior Manager for Regeneration
- Ashfield District Council, Trevor Middleton, Town Centres and Markets Manager
- Barrow Borough Council, Helen Houston, Head of Regeneration and Planning Policy
- Eastleigh Borough Council, Camilla Sharp, Head of Economy and Business, Beatrice Pearson, Action Plan Manager, WBF
- Leeds City Council, Laura McNutty, City Centre Project Coordinator and Mark Durham
- Mid Devon District Council, Andrew Busby, Corporate Manager for Property, Leisure and Climate Change
- Council of the Isles of Scilly, Keith Grossett, Senior Officer: Capital Development and Procurement
- Bury Council, Tracey Flynn, Service Manager – Business and Investment Directorate for Business Growth and Infrastructure

Appendix C - Survey Representation

- C.1 An invite to the beneficiary online survey was circulated to all local authorities with WBF allocations. The survey was designed and completed in Microsoft Forms. The survey received 196 unique responses, which represents a response rate of 64% across participating local authorities in England.
- C.2 In two instances, respondents were completing the survey on behalf of two combined councils: Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils and South Norfolk & Broadland Council. For the purposes of this analysis they have been broken down into their constituent authorities to reflect the latest administrative boundaries. As such, 198 local authority respondents are distributed across the following regions:

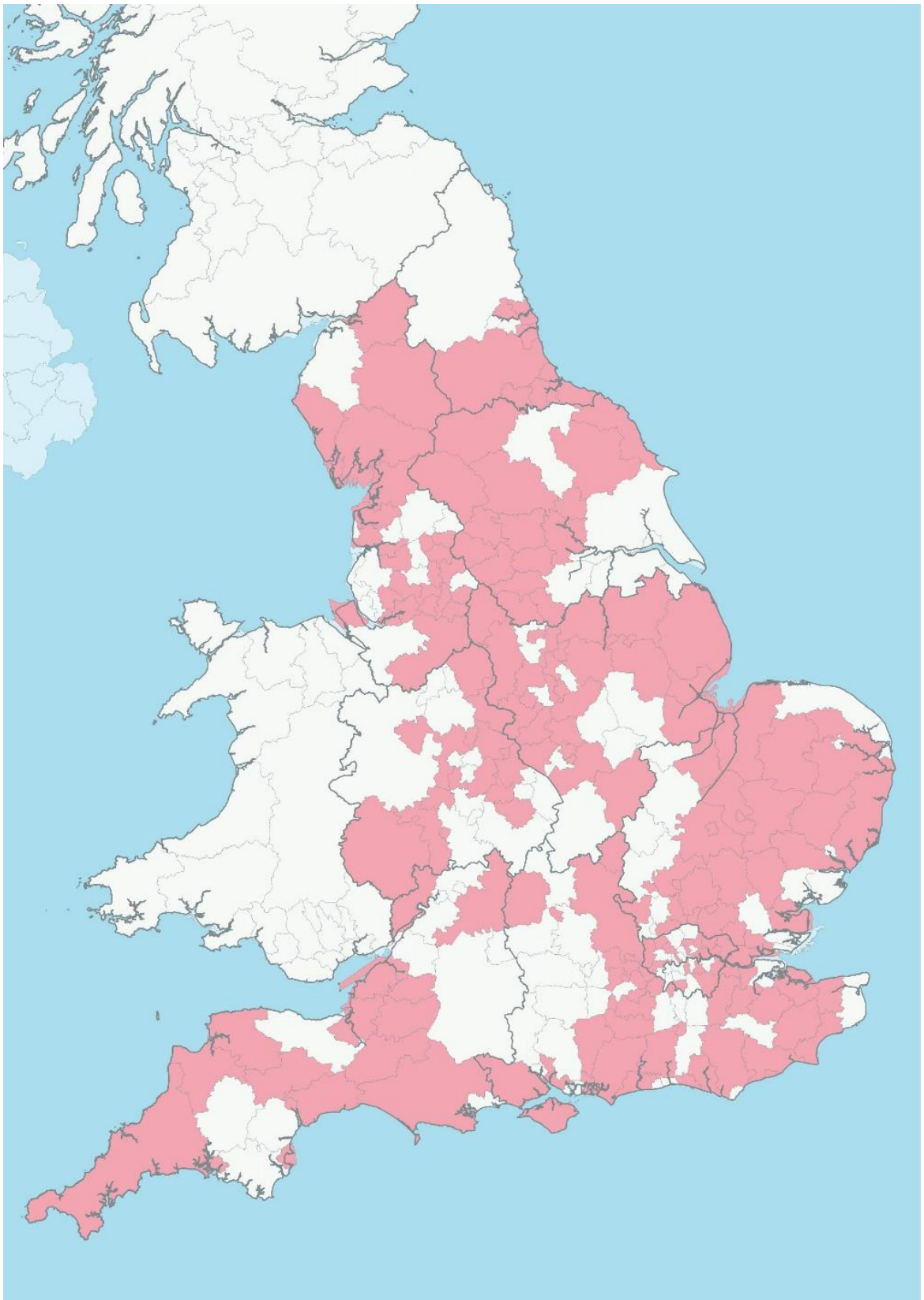
Figure C.1 : Survey Respondents by Region

Region	No. Respondents	As % of LAs in Region
East Midlands	22	63%
East of England	29	64%
London	18	55%
North East	9	75%
North West	24	62%
South East	46	72%
South West	19	63%
West Midlands	19	63%
Yorkshire and The Humber	12	57%
Total	198	64%

Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022

The survey distribution was spread relatively evenly across England:

Figure C.2 : Survey response distribution across England

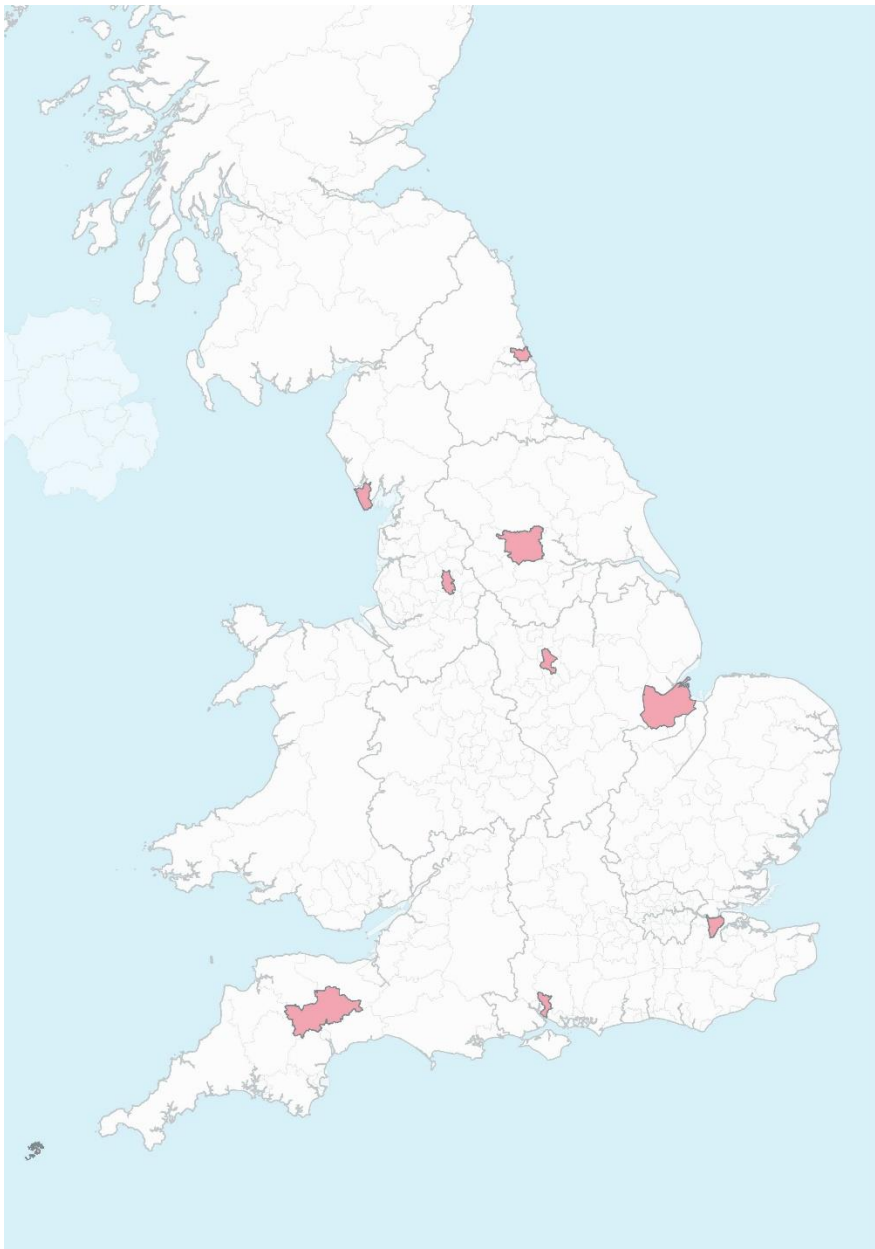


Source: Hatch Survey, July 2022

Appendix D - Case Studies

- D.1 As part of the WBF beneficiary survey, participants were asked whether they would be willing to discuss their WBF activities in more detail and to be included as a case study in the final summative assessment evaluation report. Over 90 beneficiaries responded positively.
- D.2 The final case studies were chosen based on a number of factors: their geographical location (ensuring a coastal dimension was included as well as a good spread from across England); the local authority's experience with the WBF claiming process; the proportion of the WBF allocation used; economic characteristics of the local authority and best practice in terms of WBF outputs.
- D.3 Ten case studies of local authorities from across the regions of England have been undertaken. The areas cover a range of different economic and geographic characteristics and different uses of WBF funding. The local authorities included are: Ashfield, Barrow, Bury, Eastleigh, Gravesham, Isles of Scilly, Leeds, Mid Devon, North Tyneside and South Holland.
- D.4 The case studies highlight the added value of WBF in supporting town centre recovery. Where possible we have explored evidence for the intended outcomes of WBF activities.

Figure D.1 : Case Study Locations



Source: Hatch Consultation, 2022

South Holland Local Authority



South Holland District Council covers six high streets, including Spalding, Holbeach, Long Sutton, Crowland, Donington and Sutton Bridge. Geographically located in Lincolnshire in the East Midlands, the district area has economic sector specialisms in agriculture, horticulture and food manufacture.

South Holland was allocated £169,175 RHSSF/WBF, and almost 80% of the allocation was spent by the local authority in partnership with town councils, businesses and the community. In order to ensure spread of spend and support for the WBF, the Programme had been consulted on and promoted throughout the six local high street areas; this impacted in part to delaying the local authority's WBF work to spread the support for potential activities and reach higher levels of spend whilst consultations took place. The Fund had focus and spend across all district high street areas with local demand increasing in the two settlements of Spalding and Holbeach.

WBF activities have covered temporary Covid-19 adaptations including deep cleaning activities across the 6 towns as well as funding a range of local high street and markets festivals and events. Much of the local authority's work with WBF also focused on interventions via Strands 5 and 6, to test pilot schemes that futureproof the high street including Spalding Business Improvement District (BID) feasibility work, digital skills and training for retailers and adaption of amenities such as high street WC's.

Prior to the pandemic, long term town centre improvement planning through a wide partnership of businesses, community groups and other stakeholders for both Spalding and Holbeach had already commenced. "WBF aligned well with the town centre improvement plans". Without the WBF, developments in the two town centres would have happened over time (as a result of a pre-covid decision by the council to set aside funds to support Spalding and Holbeach), but not with the same focus due to the pandemic or in some circumstances as quickly as they have with WBF.

As part of the WBF, the Spalding Town Centre Improvement Plan Steering Group explored the possibility of a business partnership or a formal Business Improvement District through a Feasibility study. WBF funded the first research and development stage, and as part of this stage, there was extensive engagement with the Business community. That study has gathered evidence to suggest a business partnership and/or a formal BID is feasible for the town. The council are now looking to move this forward.

Futureproofing the high streets was an important element and focus of the Fund locally that the partnership had responded well to. The local authority hopes to maintain activities that were focused on this area of the fund *‘this will make a long-term positive difference to the high streets in the district.’*

Figure D2: South Holland WBF activities (sample)



Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

The local authority highlighted that some of the activities completed using WBF will benefit future funding bids and other high street activities. For example, the WBF funded footfall monitors, which for the first time allowed Spalding and Holbeach town centres to gauge the ups and downs in high street shopper/visitor activity. This has given the local authority the ability to measure the impact of staged events and other investment activities. These types of measurables will prove useful when applying for larger funding schemes.

WBF also helped support businesses digitally, through a programme of on-line support via workshops. The Fund invested in a retail advisor to improve opportunities for trading digitally. It was felt that this has brought a good number of businesses in the area the sort of support that could improve their future potential to remain and develop a stronger presence in the local high street economy.

‘During lockdown, shops closed, a lot of businesses struggled and couldn’t open for long periods [...] the work the retail advisor did with businesses [...] will be really beneficial for them going forward.’

The WBF triggered much joint working within and between councils and across different disciplines and made sure that things happened quickly.

The local authority feels that WBF played a big role in the safe opening of commercial and public spaces as well as enhancing trade for SMEs, increased resident/consumer confidence in returning to the high street/town centre and increased their capacity to respond to the economic impact of Covid-19.

The local authority reported that footfall monitors didn't come into position as readily as they hoped and so they weren't able to monitor footfall trends and provide a before and after picture of the WBF period. The local authority felt that footfall would have grown but by a smaller amount if WBF had not been allocated.

High Street vacancy rates and openings were monitored and in the local authority's final claim to the MHCLG team highlighted the following:

- There were 0 business units that reopened in June 2020 in the six town centres, but over the period to March 2022, 26 business units reopened.
- The local authority felt that the perception of safety for shoppers and visitors improved in all towns in response to the actions funded by both RHSSF and WBF.

Gravesham Borough Council



Gravesham Borough Council is a local authority with borough status in north-west Kent, England, having a population of 106,900. The largest town is Gravesend with a population of just over 58,000. Parish councils included in the borough area are Chalk, Higham, Meopham, Cobham and Luddesdown and Vigo. The borough's strongest sectors in terms of jobs, include construction and food services.

Gravesham Borough Council was allocated a WBF of £188,292. By the end of the Fund, they had spent 91% of their allocation. WBF supported the Gravesend Town Centre high street and the neighbourhood shopping areas of Perry Street Northfleet, The Parade Valley Drive Gravesend, Camer Parade Meopham, Higham Village and Istead Rise.

Figure D3: Gravesham WBF activities (sample)



Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

Gravesham Borough Council had a town centre recovery action plan developed as part of their WBF funding.

In the early stages of the Fund, the local authority introduced support for the queuing systems on the high streets, understanding how people were flowing in and out of shops and worked a lot with businesses to monitor footfall. For some retailers, such as the butcher and banks, footfall returned which resulted in queuing, whilst for other smaller retailers footfall did not return straight away. Gravesham Borough Council worked with different businesses around this area of increasing footfall with WBF funding.

Bringing a softer touch to social distancing, the local authority introduced temporary planters. Signage and graphics on lorries and windows highlighted to the public that they were being welcomed back to shop locally and safely: *'we are one community and in this together.'*

The WBF enabled engagement in a large repainting project for the town which was well-received and visibly pointed the public to a 'business as usual' feel.

A good number of events were also held at key times of the year, to welcome back residents and shoppers to the high street. These included a Christmas WBF events activity, a Virtual Realty event and a Prince and Princess event.

WBF supported engagement with businesses, whereby consultants were hired to look at how businesses could change their model to deliver services in a different way: *'To have the conversations about where they were before lockdown, where they are now [...] what they were seeing in the change of customer habits and [...] these are the ways that you might be able to work in the new Covid world'*. The intervention helped grow business confidence and reassured them that it was feasible to trade in different ways and customers will still use them.

The benefits of the activities supported by the WBF meant that there was:

- an improved attractiveness of the location.
- an improved offer of activities.
- A sense of community.

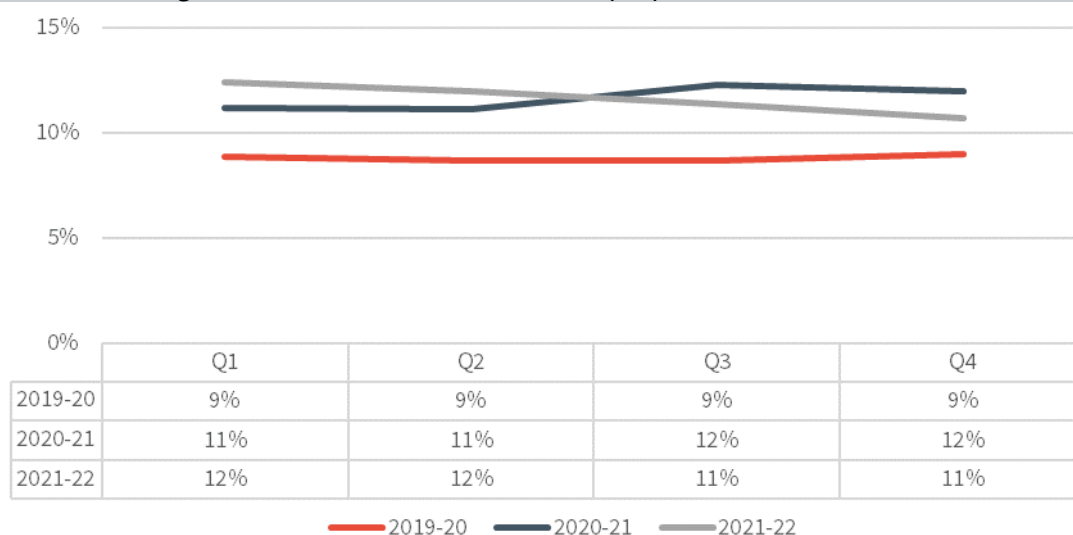
The local authority agreed that they would not have been able to achieve the same results without WBF as they wouldn't have had the funding for some of the activities.

Outcomes of the WBF funding for the local authority area and their high streets focused around the following:

- The local authority agreed that an increase in footfall in high streets and other commercial areas has been achieved as a result of WBF funding. Whilst it was difficult to monitor footfall and clearly ascertain whether a particular activity was definitely having an impact, footfall figures saw recovery to about 80% of the pre-pandemic level. The WBF actions have helped to show that *'there was an emergence from the situation and that was all part of a much longer journey that the local authority is on'*.
- There was an increase in the perception of safety by residents and businesses as a result of the funded activities. The WBF supported confidence building in the areas with people returning to the town. The idea of investment in the high street helped give a sense of things moving forward.
- The local authority reported that they now have medium to long term plans on how to address Covid-19 impacts and recovery.
- Without the support green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail would have improved by a smaller amount.

Overall, Gravesham has fared well (with a sizeable number of independents) compared to the national picture in terms of vacancy rates. Figure D4 reports vacancy rates in Gravesham town centre up to Q4 of 2021-2022. The WBF funding came to an end in the final quarter reported. The town centre vacancy rate continued to improve slowly but had yet to reduce to the levels seen prior to the pandemic. The national vacancy rate in Town Centres was just over 14% (Local Data Company) in the later quarters of 2021-2022.

Figure D4: Percentage rate of vacant town centre retail properties - Gravesham



Source: Gravesham Borough Council

The local authority felt that the WBF could have been improved by:

- Publishing guidance as soon as the announcement of Fund allocations were released.

- A clearer set of guidance on how to claim for staff costs. The biggest pressure was the capacity to deliver alongside everything else.
- A longer period of spending time.
- Activities that could be permanent – it could have been deemed that temporary was wasteful – for same level of funding there could have been permanent changes made.

North Tyneside Local Authority

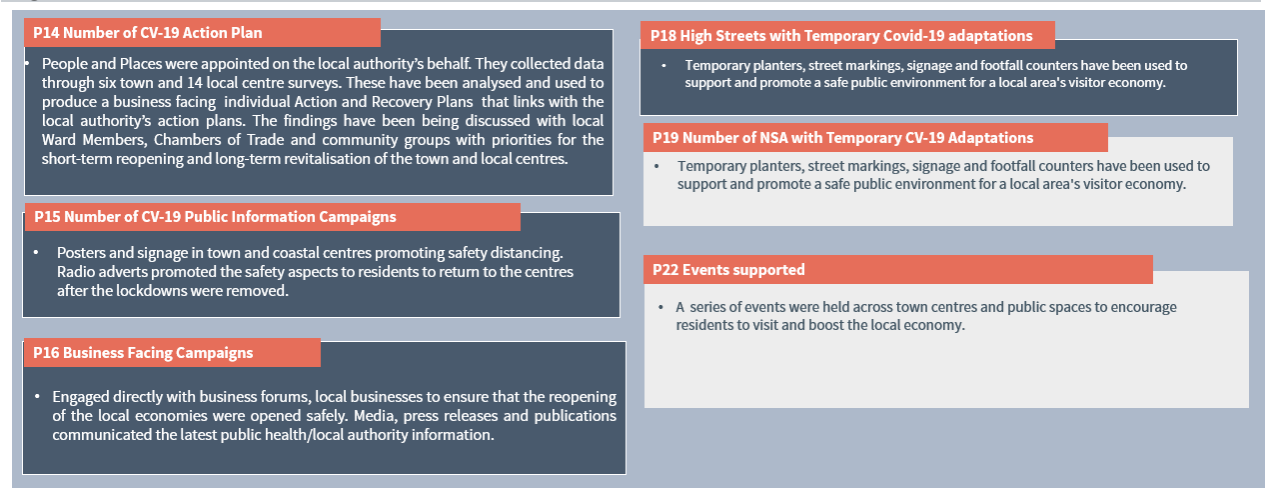


North Tyneside is a Metropolitan District Council in the metropolitan county of Tyne and Wear, England. The district has a population of around 208,900 with industry specialisms in business support services, manufacturing (creative media, food) and ICT, media and creative activities.

The district is coastal, and the WBF supported the following areas: Whitley Bay, North Shields, Wallsend, Tynemouth, North Shields, Fish Quay, Forest Hall and Cullercoats. The area received a WBF allocation of £432,836, spending around two thirds of its allocation (69%).

There were three town centres within the remit of the local authority, all with very different characteristics. Whitley Bay was very healthy, had great vitality and a mix of independent retailers whilst North Shields was reliant on high street multiples and a number of banks. The area was in decline before the pandemic and work had already started on a masterplan with funding acquired through Historic England (Heritage Action Zone, DoT (the Transforming Cities Fund) and the North East LEP (Getting Building Fund). The challenge was to manage the three different town centres for the WBF and the local authority had to adapt its approach for each.

Figure D5: North Tyneside WBF activities (sample)



Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

With little capacity in the authority team to devote time to WBF, an individual was seconded from the Communications and Engagement team into the Regeneration and Economic Development team to deliver the WBF. The WBF funded activities including town centre survey health checks and the acquisition of footfall sensors in the town centres. *'The data has been gold dust, I don't know how we have survived for so long without this detail in terms of not just footfall but how people move around the town [...] this is something the Council is keen to help support going forward'*. The footfall information has helped shape policies and priorities going forward for the town centres.

Other WBF activities included signage and separating people by 2m distances in town centres with physical temporary structures in place such as planters and flower baskets.

Town centres such as Whitley Bay put in place temporary footpath closures to enable principally food and drink establishments to have pavement licences. *'Whitley Bay had a coffee culture, a continental feel to it. There is an appetite for people to continue with this. It has helped change a dynamic in some of the town centres.'*

The WBF funding was *'money available that we wouldn't have ordinarily had'*. The local authority commissioned the People and Places Partnership to provide action and recovery plans for the town centres. This enabled interactions with businesses and the public. The information gleaned from this process has helped inform the masterplans for Wallsend and any next steps in Whitley Bay subsequently will provide some substantial evidence as well. *'Action and recovery plans provide a great baseline position taking forward improvements in town centres. We know what people want, what they don't like about the town centres [...] how they use them, the different areas of the town centre.'*

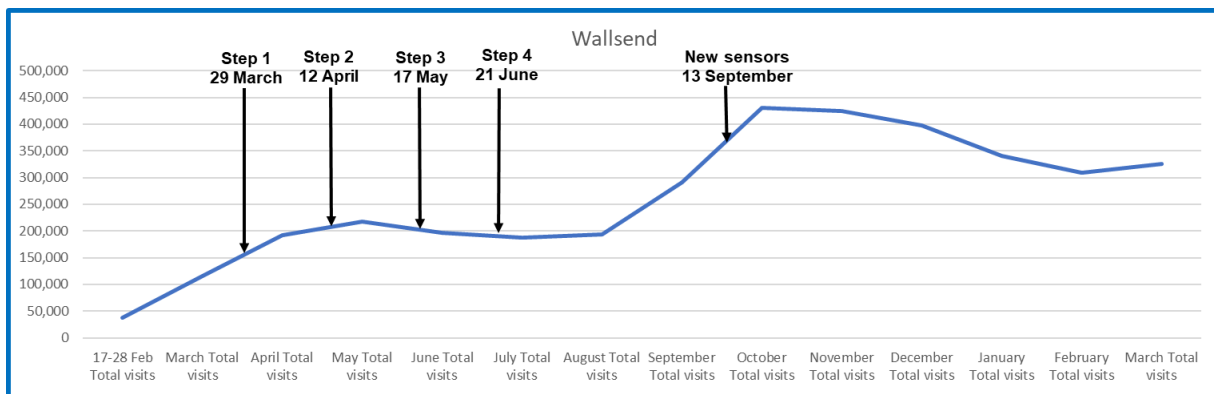
The WBF was seen as 'needed'. The local authority was conscious that some businesses were suffering and that government business grants weren't enough in itself. *'There was more that was needed, so that customers could feel safe coming back into town centres.'*

In terms of outcomes, the local authority felt that as a result of the WBF:

- Commercial public spaces were able to remain open.
- There was an increased perception of safety by residents and businesses as a result of the funded activities

- They have medium to long term plans on how to address Covid-19 impacts and recovery.
- The local authority felt that in the town centres, ‘*footfall would have reduced without WBF.*’ At the start of the WBF, very basic footfall information was collected for two of the shopping malls in the town centres. A much more sophisticated system is now in place that recognises mobile phone signals. Figure D6 presents footfall data collected for Wallsend for the period 2021-2022. Since new footfall monitors have been installed, the data shows a higher footfall overall, with a fall, picking up slightly in February and March 2022.

Figure D6: Wallsend Footfall, 2021-2022



Source: North Tyneside Metropolitan District Council

The local authority reported to not have many permanent business closures. The local authority felt that ‘*the number of businesses reopening would have been lower without WBF.*’ Monthly business closures data for the period April 2021 to December 2022 for Wallsend is presented in Figure D7. The vacancy rate is slightly lower in March 2022 compared with April 2021. Through the spring and summer months, the number and rate of vacancies had been falling. Vacancies in April 2021 equated to 38 or a vacancy rate of 14% and 41 vacancies (or 15%) in November 2021.

Figure D7: Wallsend Business Vacancies, April 2021 to March 2022

	Vacancies	Units	Vacancies %
April 2021	38	275	14%
May	33	272	12%
June	32	273	12%
July	32	272	12%
August	31	272	11%
September	31	272	11%
December	36	272	13%
March 2022	36	273	13%

Source: North Tyneside Metropolitan District Council

As part of the Town Centre Baseline Survey Report May 2021 funded by WBF for Wallsend, a town centre perception survey was undertaken by customers and businesses. The survey didn't ask questions about how safe residents felt in the town centre with reference to Covid-19. A word cloud from the survey highlighted the most prominent words used to describe Wallsend by customers included references such as "run-down", "tired", "dump", "takeaways" and "depressing". As the report mentions *'it will be informative to see how perceptions change as work is undertaken to revitalize Wallsend'*. The local authority as part of the beneficiary survey for the WBF felt that *'the perception of safety by residents would have been worse, without WBF'*, as well as noting that *'the green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environment would have been worse, without WBF.'*

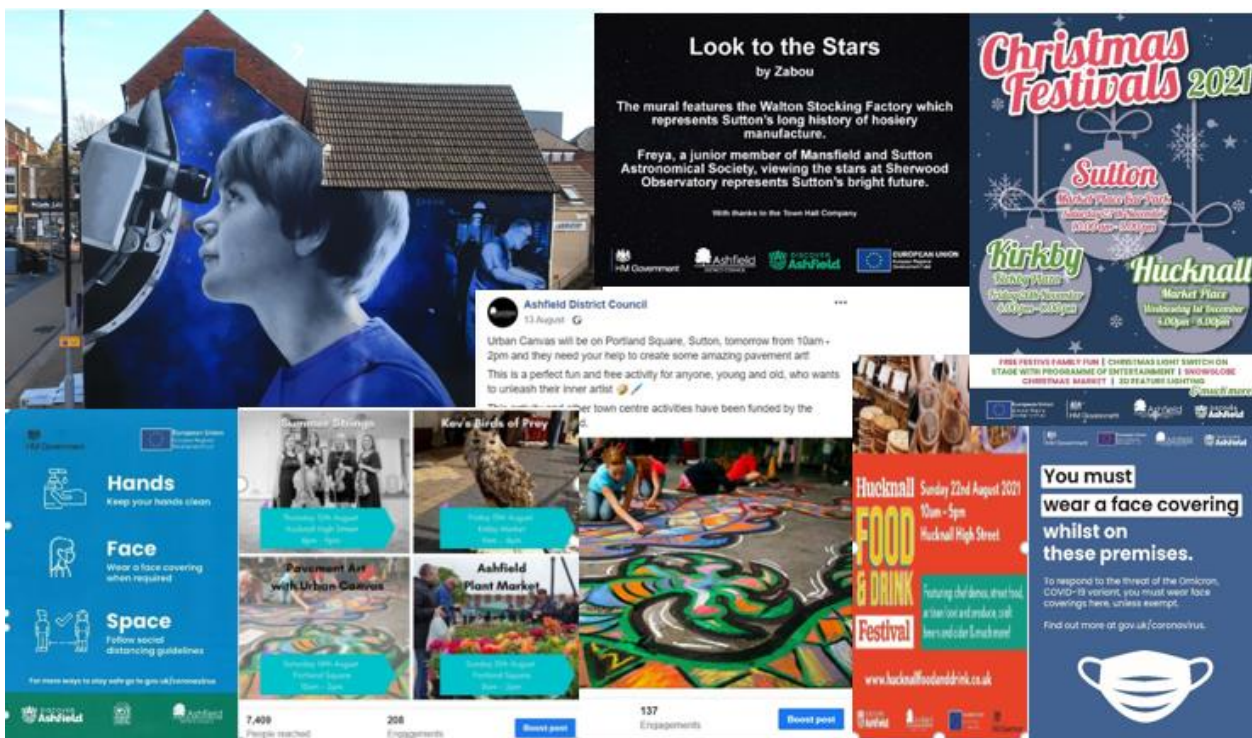
The Town Centre Baseline Survey Report for Wallsend also brought together survey responses about businesses' perceptions. It is notable that businesses felt fairly positive about the local customer base, while noting that marketing and promotion, including the lack of tourist customers, are the most negative aspects of trading in the town centre.

The local authority felt that the WBF played a big role in:

- Meeting their aspiration to provide the safe opening of commercial public spaces, safe trading for SMEs
- Meeting their aspirations to increase resident/consumer confidence in returning to the high street/town centres
- Meeting their aspiration to increase the capacity for responding to the economic impact of Covid-19.

North Tyneside felt overall that the WBF helped them better shape local authority future activities and plans for the area, with action and recovery plans forming the basis for masterplans for some of their centres. *'We would not have been able to achieve the same results'* without the WBF, due to a lack of revenue support for such activities which would have resulted in little intervention.

Ashfield Local Authority



Ashfield local authority is located on the western side of Nottinghamshire, with an estimated population of 126,600. The authority, although predominately rural, has three large towns: Sutton-in-Ashfield, Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Hucknall.

Ashfield was allocated a WBF of £229,055 of which 97% was spent. The first steps for the local authority were to prepare an action recovery plan through extensive consultation from a wide party of interests including environmental services, environmental health and community safety and partners such as local schools and colleges.

Very early into the Fund, five information officers were recruited to go into businesses and find out what was needed. The authority as a result has a detailed database of 1,100 high street businesses and SMEs. In the weeks where the authority was waiting for the funding to be up and running, the high street businesses that could open had adapted well to the new regulations. They were very appreciative of the support the WBF Information Officers provided regarding how to comply with Government guidelines, particularly social distancing and hygiene regulations.

If the WBF hadn't been provided *'we wouldn't have been where we are now.'*

Footfall counters were introduced as part of the WBF activities and the local authority have kept this activity ongoing since the WBF ended. Overall, the district is currently operating at 80% of footfall levels pre-pandemic.

The authority used the funding imaginatively across the district with the aim of increasing community confidence and creating interest in choosing to visit their town centres. This included the installation of a high street mural by an international renowned artist which has formed a real legacy of WBF. A number of films were also produced that recreated local historical events and significant individuals, using local actors and suppliers from the locality with the aim of increasing knowledge and pride in the area.

Figure D8: Ashfield WBF activities (sample)



Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

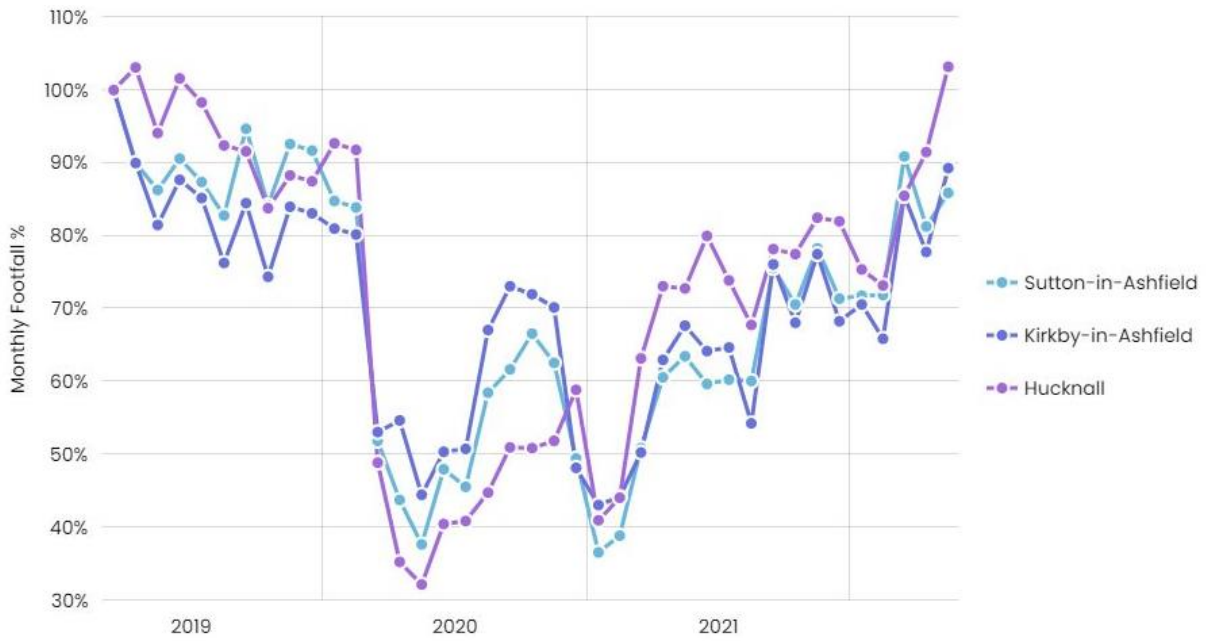
The local authority believe that the Fund played a big role in meeting their aspirations around wanting the safe opening of commercial public spaces and safe trading for SMEs. As well as a big role in increasing resident/consumer confidence in returning to the high street/town centres. They also recognised WBF playing a big role in increasing the capacity for responding to the economic impact of Covid-19.

Outcomes of the WBF funding for the local authority area and their high streets focused around the following:

- The local authority strongly agreed that commercial public spaces were able to remain open.
- The number of businesses closed or commercial areas closed was minimised.
- There was an increase in the perception of safety by residents and businesses as a result of the funded activities.
- The information collated on retailers is being used to measure the health of the high street going forwards and as a means for engaging with landlords holding properties that have been vacant for over a year.

In terms of footfall, *without WBF the local authority felt that footfall would have reduced*. The figure below highlights in May 2022 that footfall had reached above 2019 levels for the first time in Hucknall.

Figure D9: Footfall Trends in the three large towns of Ashfield local authority



Source: Ashfield District Council

The authority also highlighted that without the WBF the number of businesses reopening would have been lower.

- In July 2020, 381 town centre businesses reopened, in Q1 2022, 6 new businesses opened.
- In the baseline position, there were 43 town centre businesses closed or vacant. In Q1 2022, there were 2 businesses closed.

Barrow Local Authority



Barrow-in-Furness is a local government district with borough status in Cumbria and has a population of around 66,700 people. Being at the edge of the Furness peninsula, north of Morecambe Bay and south of the Duddon Estuary, the case study is representative of one of the coastal allocations in the WBF. The main town in the district is Barrow-in-Furness. The area has industry specialisms in High Tech manufacturing and Utilities and Waste.

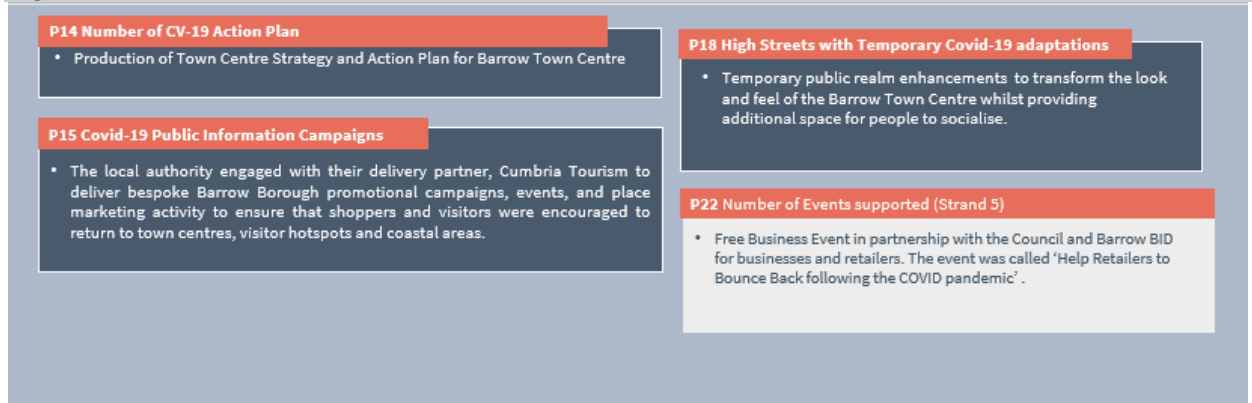
Barrow was allocated a WBF of £217,717 of which they spent 98%.

There had been a significant impact in Barrow town centre due to Covid-19 as people turned to working from home, with commercial and municipal buildings including the council offices being relatively empty. The town centres also felt the loss of commuter workers. Overall, footfall was low. However, being close to the Lake District and having caravan and camping sites nearby meant that when the holiday period came, Barrow benefited from staycations and the visitor economy. The local authority had aspirations with the WBF to make sure that people came to the area and could move around safely.

The local authority sought to increase footfall and assist struggling businesses to help them diversify their offer and adapt ways of working with their WBF allocation. They also wanted to make their outdoors spaces more attractive and for people to be able to dwell in the town centre for longer periods, drinking and eating outside.

In the early days of WBF, Covid-19 marshals were employed to instil confidence in the public that they could visit the town centre.

Figure D10: Barrow WBF activities (sample)



Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

For Barrow, 2021 brought very visible WBF interventions and the local authority decided to undertake a range of activities, such as temporary public realm changes in partnership with the BID, piloting where they might invest in infrastructure in the future.

In the summer holidays, the WBF funding allowed the local authority to deliver a number of events outside including outdoor theatre and music. This is being continued this summer (2022).

The local hospitality businesses applied for café licenses, creating outdoor Alfresco style eating areas. Clubs and restaurants developed their own eating and drinking spaces, following on from the interventions. This allowed people to stay in the town centre longer than rather just 'nipping in'.

Moving towards Christmas 2021, retail and businesses were raising concerns; *'what if people don't come and spend.'* Through the WBF the local authority undertook a lot of promotion around Christmas in terms of the shops and services and what they were doing and providing.

After Christmas 2021, Barrow lost major national retailers including WHSmith, Body Shop, Goldsmiths and River Island. This has had a big impact on the look of the town centre. With WBF the local authority sought to showcase the independents and national retailers that were still on the high street. They recruited the help of specialists in social media and window dressing and highlighted ways that businesses could adapt following Covid-19. This was a well-attended process and businesses embraced different ways of working.

The partnership between Cumbria Tourism and Barrow local authority is another success story for the WBF. With a big push on social media, blogging, the Visit Barrow website by the local authority (funded through WBF) and campaigns with Cumbria Tourism, a huge momentum for Barrow from a visitor tourism perspective was generated. The feedback, reach figures, the number of people visiting the Visit Barrow website, leaving comments and liking posts was *'phenomenal.'* *'We couldn't have imagined it would work so well.'*

The general promotion of the area to visitors and residents meant that both visited attractions that hadn't been visited before or not for a while were seeing visitors and are continuing to do so. The WBF funded videos and imagery, leaflets and a map. *'We have all the content now, that's available for us and Cumbria Tourism [...] who are now promoting Barrow [...] more so than in the past.'* This fits well with Cumbria Tourism's attract and disperse campaign to help encourage people to other parts of the Lake District as key areas of the World Heritage Site get very busy.

The local authority reports that in a small location with a lot of independents, the business levels have been sustained. Whilst there are some vacancies, businesses have reopened and have been supported by the public. There are a handful of businesses that were there in 2019 that aren't there now, *'but new businesses have opened.'*

The WBF has played a big role in improving the green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environment in Barrow. It has also played a large role in increasing the local authority's capacity to respond to the economic impact of Covid-19.

The WBF is reported to have helped the local authority:

- Have a greater awareness of resident and business challenges.
- Have good working relationships with local organisations.
- Increase engagement of local authority with SMEs.
- Futureproof the location.

The local authority would not have had the resource to achieve the results without the funding.

Outcomes of the WBF funding for the local authority and the high street/areas include:

- The local authority agreed that an increase in footfall in high streets and other commercial areas has been achieved as a result of WBF funding.
- There was an increase in the perception of safety by residents and businesses as a result of the funded activities.
- They strongly agreed that there had been an improvement in public spaces.
- They now have medium to long term plans on how to address Covid-19 impacts and recovery.
- Footfall has returned to the high street of Barrow. The local authority perceive that the footfall would have grown but by a smaller amount without WBF funding.

Eastleigh Local Authority



The Borough of Eastleigh is a local government district and borough in Hampshire, England, bordering the unitary authority of Southampton, Test Valley, the City of Winchester and the Borough of Fareham. The borough has a population of around 135,520 people. The area has industry specialisms in higher tech manufacturing, financial and professional services, construction and warehousing and logistics.

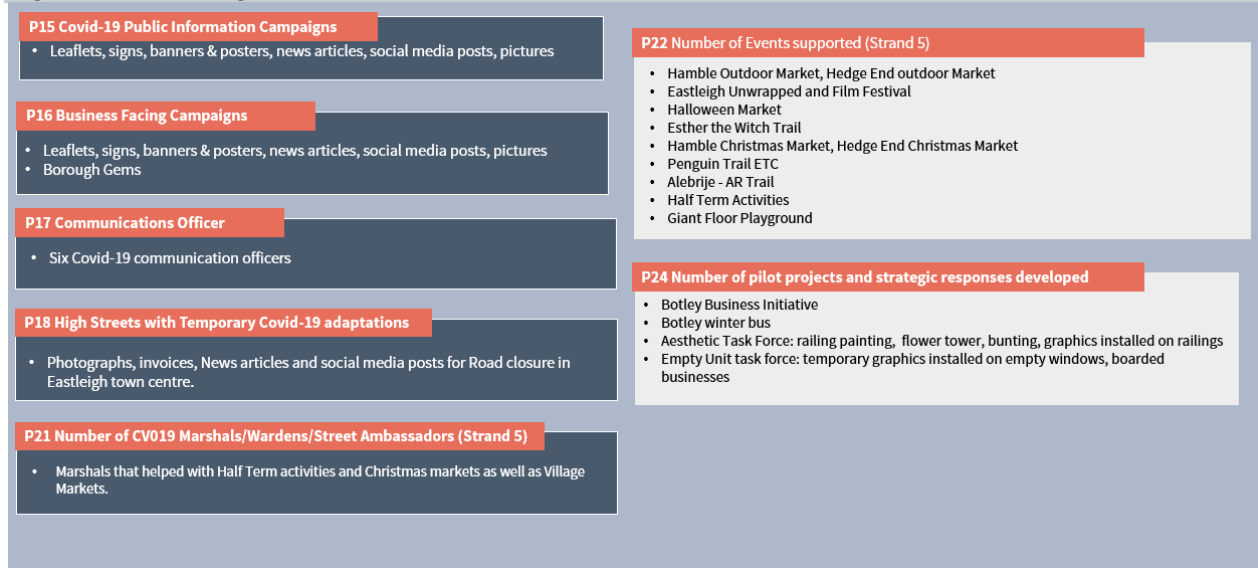
The Borough has a range of different villages and towns: rural areas that are prosperous, a retirement village, and a sailing village with seasonal prosperity, in addition to some larger towns, and Eastleigh which has the biggest centre and shops.

Eastleigh was allocated a WBF of £301,870. Approximately 89% of their allocation was spent by the closure of the Fund. As the WBF work commenced, the action plan manager built up extremely strong relationships with parish clerks in each of the Borough areas. The good relationships have remained and engagements continue even after the end of WBF, given the good rapport.

A team of 3 or 4 full time equivalent (FTE) individuals were recruited as part of a team to work on the WBF project. The team completed surveys, face to face meetings with businesses, talked to all of the local parishes and undertook social media campaigns. The survey work involved a thorough analysis of how many businesses were on each high street, whether they were closed or open or empty units. This resulted in a large database that provided a forensic analysis of the differences in each of the village centres and threw light on what was driving their local economies.

The team focused on the issue of declining footfall – this was a problem even before the pandemic that was affecting the towns and villages, some more than others. The local authority focused efforts at first on making sure that everyone was in a position to open safely on 15th June 2020. The communications campaign with the public was to ensure that they felt confident that they could come back to the high streets. When the second phase of funding came into play, the aspiration turned to encouraging people to support their local businesses. The WBF team undertook some safe Shop Local campaigns for Christmas and generally to highlight all of the different independent businesses in the Borough.

Figure D11: Eastleigh WBF activities (sample)



Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

The WBF team also worked on changing the look and feel of the some of the larger towns with some temporary changes – for example, painting railings and vinyls on empty shop windows to bring more colour to the area. In Eastleigh town centre, which suffered the most and had the largest number of voids during the pandemic, properties are almost all occupied now.

The Borough Gems campaign picked out 40 independent retailers across the borough and highlighted them in an extensive media campaign that was repeated at Christmas. It was incredibly popular, with 16,000 hits on the top performing Gem and an average reach of 6,000 hits across the 40 articles. Residents were quoted saying *'I never knew this shop existed. This is marvellous, I'm going to drop in.'* This has been a really positive change as people have realised what they have got on their doorstep. The WBF team did follow up with businesses to see what impact the WBF Gems campaign had achieved, and they clearly identified that they had had an increase in business since the campaign.

The local authority felt that they wouldn't have done any of the activities without the WBF.

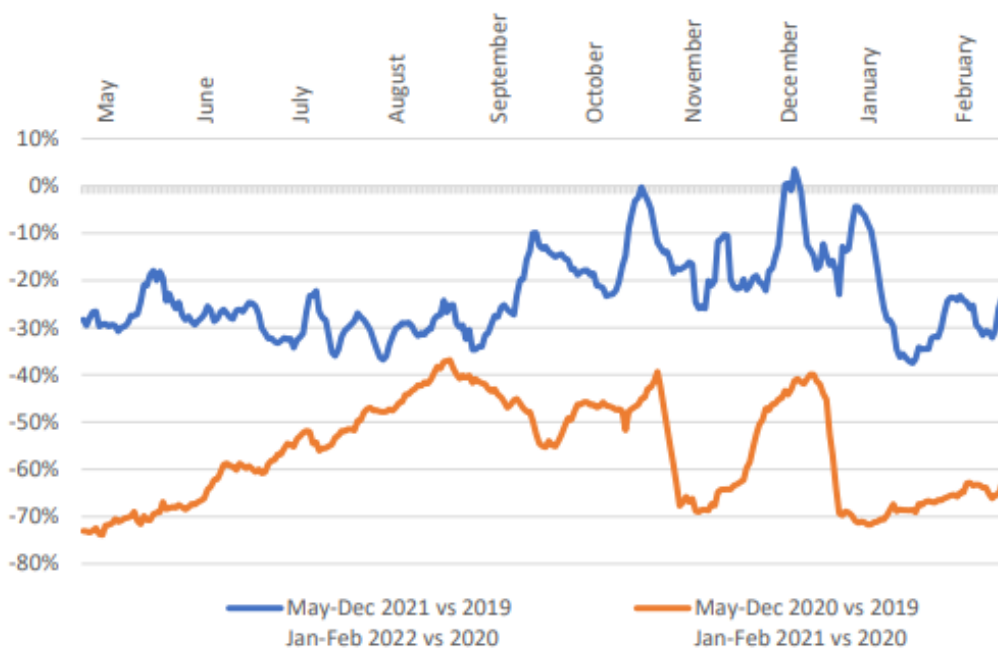
Other activities that can be directly attributable to the WBF were the half term activities which were very popular, with all shops remarking on the rise in footfall. A shopping centre highlighted that its footfall was 7.5% above pre-pandemic rates when the half term activities were held.

The WBF has played a big role in meeting the local authority's aspirations to safely open commercial public spaces and ensure safe trading of SMEs. It has also played a big role in improving the green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environment.

Outcomes of the WBF funding for the local authority and the high street/areas include:

- The local authority felt that there was an increase in the perception of safety by residents and businesses as a result of the funded activities.
- The local authority strongly agreed that there had been an improvement in public spaces.
- The local authority agree that they now have medium to long term plans on how to address Covid-19 impacts and recovery.
- The local authority agreed that an increase in footfall in high streets and other commercial areas has been achieved as a result of WBF funding. During the Christmas period in 2021 footfall figures were similar to pre-Covid levels, indicating a significant recovery since the onset of the pandemic. However, the emergence of the Omicron variant at the start of January stalled these improvements and overall footfall numbers remain 20-30% below pre-Covid levels.
- Successful village centre markets were established in Hedge End and Hamble. Since the closure of the WBF, Hedge End Town Council has taken over the organisation and management of their weekly market so this can be considered a legacy of the funding.

Figure D12: Footfall numbers, 7 day average difference



Source: Eastleigh Borough Council. The orange line compares pre-covid footfall (2019) with the first year of the pandemic (2020). The blue line compares footfall pre-covid (2019) with the second year of the pandemic (2021).

Although many businesses closed down, the local authority reported that they also had many new ones opening, which helped mitigate the impact of store closure. Figure D13 highlights the number of businesses open, closed due to restrictions and closed down in January 2021, December 2021 and March 2022.

Figure D13: Number of businesses open, closed down and new Jan 2021, December 2021, March 2022

	Jan-21				Dec-21				Mar-22			
	Open	Closed due to restrictions	Closed down	Total	Open	Closed down	New (included in Open)	Total	Open	Closed down	New (included in Open)	Total
All	219	341	37	597	550	48	9	598	581	48	8	629
Botley	27	38	0	65	57	2	0	59	62	2	0	64
Chandler's Ford	56	92	8	156	134	7	3	141	149	6	3	155
Eastleigh (all)	73	147	27	247	239	34	6	273	246	36	5	282
Swan centre	15	37	7	59	53	9	0	62	52	10	0	62
Eastleigh (High Street)	58	110	20	188	186	25	6	211	194	26	5	220
Hamble	14	18	0	32	29	2	0	31	31	1	0	32
Hedge End	26	33	1	60	58	1	0	59	60	1	0	61
West End	23	13	1	37	33	2	0	35	33	2	0	35

Source: Eastleigh Borough Council

Figure D14 presents the occupancy rates for a number of areas benefiting from WBF funding. The Swan centre and Eastleigh high street had occupancy rates of 84% and 88% respectively by March 2022. Rates were highest in Hedge End at 98.4%.

Figure D14: Occupancy Rates, January 2021, December 2021 and March 2022

Occupancy rate	Jan-21	Dec-21	Mar-22
All	93.8%	92.0%	92.4%
Botley	100.0%	96.6%	96.9%
Chandler's Ford	94.9%	95.0%	96.1%
Eastleigh (all)	89.1%	87.5%	87.2%
Swan centre	88.1%	85.5%	83.9%
Eastleigh (High Street)	89.4%	88.2%	88.2%
Hamble	100.0%	93.5%	96.9%
Hedge End	98.3%	98.3%	98.4%
West End	97.3%	94.3%	94.3%

Source: Eastleigh Borough Council

Leeds Local Authority



Leeds is a Metropolitan District Council with a population of around 798,000. The district covers the administrative centre of Leeds and the towns of Farsley, Garforth, Guiseley, Horsforth, Morley, Otley, Pudsey, Rothwell, Wetherby and Yeadon. The WBF was not used in all of the 30 district centres; its use depended on council staff availability and capacity to deliver interventions.

Industry specialisms for the area include Business support services, utilities and waste (gas, water and electricity) and financial and professional services.

Leeds local authority was allocated a WBF of £1,403,620 and spent 94% of their Fund. Aspirations for the WBF focused on: helping support the recovery of Leeds visitor economy in terms of overnight stays and visits from out of Leeds; supporting the returning office worker/rental sector, and encouraging residents and their families back to the city and district centres by providing reassurance and animation.

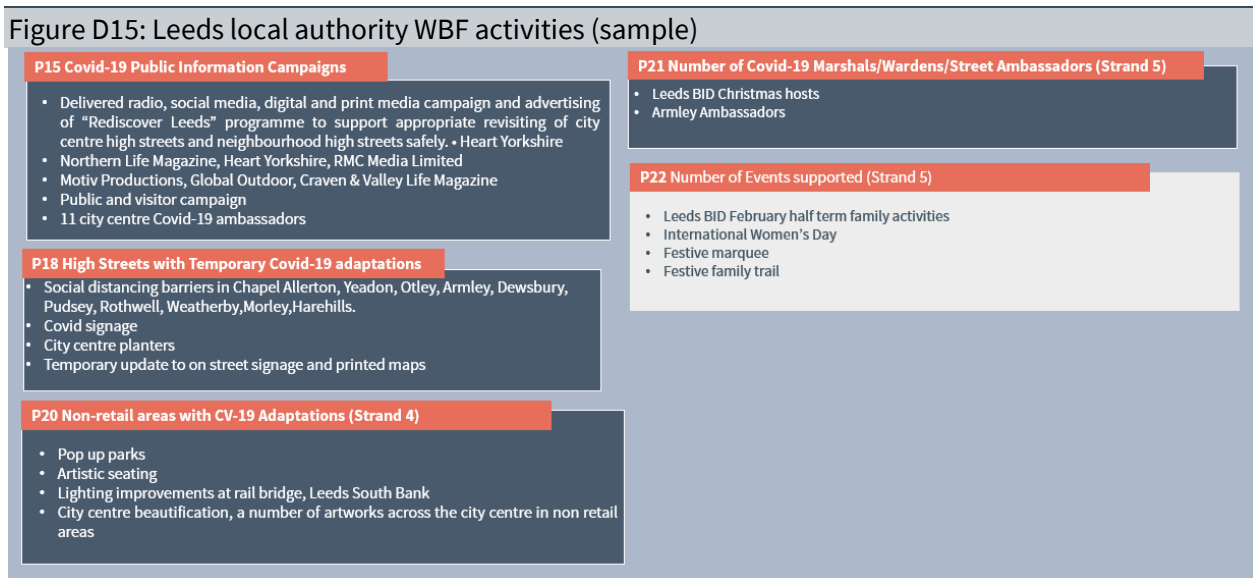
The headline for the area was one of very low footfall in the city centre and district centres due to lockdown. Even when emerging from the first lockdown, footfall remained low and the local authority saw they needed to regain people's confidence in visiting the city and district centres.

Cleansing and hygiene were really important during this early stage and still today. The local authority funded a team of Ambassadors using RHSSF to provide an on-street resource, welcoming people back to the city centre and helping to manage queues *'having the human touch that we didn't have before.'*

The local authority then took to animating the city centre to ensure that it looked good and attractive and different, *'giving people reasons to come in... when they did get back they would keep coming but the first step of actually coming back was important.'* A festive tipi in Leeds city centre in November and December 2021 was *'amazing and well received.'* This has driven the local authority to think about how they can work with the companies involved using a different funding model, such as a profit share scheme to bring things like the festive tipi back year after year. The festive tipi was a success and has broadened the local authority's horizons on how spaces can be animated.

One of the district centres, Meanwood, funded a community market that has now been picked up by local businesses, taking place on a monthly basis. As part of the market, street artists delivered a number of temporary interventions locally. Monthly markets continue to take place (the Welcome Back Fund funded start-up costs); a spring Window Wanderland helped promote local businesses. A community spring planting event (using newly purchased and painted planters) took place in March 2021, with further events planned in the future (funded separately). The market has gone from strength to strength and draws in a varied and high-quality offer which adds vibrancy to the local district centre.

Figure D15: Leeds local authority WBF activities (sample)



Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

In another more deprived area, Armley, an ambassador scheme took off as a result of WBF funding. Four local people were recruited as Ambassadors and were well received by local businesses and residents. The team provided a much needed on-street service and contributed towards the high street recovery of this deprived area which sees high levels of anti-social behaviour (including an embedded street drinking cohort and poor levels of investment by building owners along the high street). WBF funding also supported a local events programme which brought local families back to the high street, supported the local economy and improved public perceptions of the area. The success of both projects helped secure further money for a 2022 events programme in Armley. Without WBF this scheme would not have been possible.

An aerial photography exhibition was commissioned through the Ordnance Survey and other partner organisations which brought a big exhibition to one of the city centre public spaces – *‘rather like an outdoor gallery.’* The local authority WBF team received feedback from the adjacent museum and art gallery that it had helped drive footfall back to the area.

The WBF funding has played a significant role for the Leeds visitor economy and the local authority put significant effort into communicating with people outside of Leeds. They advertised on, radio stations in the south of England, and in railway stations, including in Scotland and around the country. This was funded by the WBF. Research also went into why people visited Leeds and why they didn’t. *‘The main way [they] measured the health of the city centre is every hour of every day footfall [...] but it’s hard to attribute to one intervention.’*

The local authority appreciated *‘the certainty and clarity on the amount of WBF’,* received, which allowed them to plan according to an exact budget. The local authority took a different approach to other areas and delivered a large number of small projects, this they felt *‘was exactly what was needed for Leeds and was the right approach. Even though it did create much more administrative work.’*

If the WBF funding had not been available, the local authority would have only been able to do the basics. *‘We would have probably done the Covid signage, hand sanitisers, some additional cleaning [...] would never have put on animation [...] events [...] we didn’t have the money to do more’.* The WBF activities *‘genuinely attracted people back in.’*

The broadening of the fund with the introduction of the WBF was very useful, *‘the MHCLG team were very helpful in tweaking proposed activities to ensure they were eligible and could go ahead.’*

Going forward, the local authority hopes to be able to undertake a lot of the WBF activities again through SPF. *‘We want to have more street officers and street resources for both the daytime and night time economy.’* The local authority would also like to have a Summer and Christmas programme of activities and events. *‘WBF gave us the opportunity to do this for one and a half years [...] hopefully we can roll this out for another three years through SPF.’*

Footfall remains down 15% on pre-pandemic levels in Leeds city centre, although at weekends footfall has nearly recovered. The sandwich and coffee shops are the ones still struggling and day to day stores lose out in the week. The local authority feels that there is still work to be done to help revitalise the high street.

Very significant benefits to the city centre, town and districts centres of the WBF have been noted as being:

- Safety of the location establishments
- Improved attractiveness of the location
- Improved offer of activities (including events)
- Improved accessibility of the retail experience e.g. from wider footpaths or plans for future intervention
- Improved relationships with local parish and town councils
- Much improved database of local town centre businesses
- Increased awareness of council services for businesses thanks for information officers

The WBF has played a big role in:

- Meeting the local authority's aspirations to safely open commercial public spaces and ensure safe trading of SMEs.
- Increasing resident/consumer confidence in returning to the city centre and high street.
- Improving the green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environment.
- Increasing the capacity for responding to the economic impact of Covid-19.

Outcomes of the WBF funding for the local authority and the high street/areas include:

- The local authority that footfall would have reduced without WBF and agreed that the WBF was much needed. *'Without it, Leeds would not have recovered as well from the effects of the pandemic.'*
- The local authority agreed that the number of businesses closed or commercial areas closed was minimised.
- The authority strongly agreed that an increase in the perception of safety by residents and businesses was a result of the funded activities.
- They local authority strongly agreed that there had been an improvement in public spaces.

Mid Devon Local Authority

Shop local, search local and stay safe in Mid Devon this Christmas

To celebrate shops reopening, visitors can enjoy free parking on weekends throughout December

Tiverton's four shopping quarters welcomes you back

Posted On: 29-07-2020
Posted In: Business and economy

There is lots of excitement across the town centre with all four shopping quarters welcoming back their customers. The majority of independent shops are open and ready for business, operating in accordance with the government guidance making it safe for visitors to return.

Tiverton's Riverside Quarter which incorporates Angel Hill, Bridge Street and Westexe. Discover a range of independent shops in the area from health and wellbeing, specialist wine, fabric and hobby shops, a bakery and eateries. Westexe North has a one-way pedestrian system in place. Take a stroll down over the bridge and enjoy the waterfront along the River Exe.

Tiverton's Gateway Quarter covers Fore Street and Phoenix Lane in the heart of the town centre, offering traditional town centre businesses. Fore Street hosts Tiverton's department store and a variety of chain stores including clothing and charity shops as well as pharmacies and banks. This is complemented by a suite of independent outlets featuring a jewellers, sweetshop, butcher and baker. Cafés and eateries dotted throughout create a real buzz in this part of the town. There is a one-way system in this area next to Boots where pedestrians are asked to keep left.

Tiverton's Independent Quarter (Gold Street and Lowman Green) is a wondrous treasure trove of unique and boutique retail including pottery, art and gifts as well as men's and women's clothing, shoes and accessories. Gold Street also features an independent bookshop, cafés, specialist camera and photography shops, several health services plus pet supplies and general stores. There is a lot to discover in this upmarket quarter!

Tiverton's Market Quarter incorporates Bampton Street, Market Walk and Tiverton Pannier Market, which offers weekly general markets as well as a monthly farmers' market. This quarter has some of the longest standing independent shops and stalls in the town with a mixture of retail, including a dedicated zero waste shop, florist, games store, antiques, fashionware, a health store, cobblers, post office, cafés,



Mid Devon is a District Council with a population of around 83,000 people. It is the fourth largest local authority area in Devon, located in the north east of the county. Exeter is situated just south of the district. Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton are the district's three main market towns.

Industry specialisms for the area include agriculture and mining, food and general manufacturing, wholesale and construction.

Mid Devon local authority was allocated a WBF of £147,372 and spent 86% of their Fund. The local authority was facing challenges in the town centres including low footfall, growing vacancy rates, a lack of diversity in the retail offer and a lack of green infrastructure. In the early days of the pandemic, safety was paramount for the authority - *'giving people (who were nervous) the confidence to come back to the town centre as well as making businesses thrive within the town - was key.'*

With WBF funding, the local authority commenced by engaging with parish councils, making all town councils within the district aware of the fund. Tiverton was the main town to take up the WBF. Other areas that also participated included Crediton, Bradninch and Cullompton. The local authority highlighted that the ERDF grants claim process prevented some areas getting involved, due to its 'complex' nature.

The local authority embarked on numerous public information press releases¹⁶ with regards to COVID-19¹⁷ to inform members of the public of the closed areas during the pandemic and post-pandemic and to update them when the town centre was reopening. A sound system was installed at the Pannier Market in Tiverton for announcements to be made and as a way for music to be played to attract people into the Pannier Market. Media such as local newspapers and radio stations were also used to promote the new seating areas at the market and the new décor.

The local authority displayed signage, direction arrows, in line with government restrictions for social distancing, which directed members of the public around a one-way route in the town centres.

To support and promote a safe and successful visitor economy, a fayre took place in Bradninch town Fayre in September 2021, providing a celebration for the whole community, and which was organised by the community. The town Fayre included a fun run, community picnic, spit roast, stalls and café and further attractions that were supported by the WBF.

Although a dedicated town manager wasn't in place in any of the town centres, the Pannier Market in Tiverton had a manager in place who undertook a wide range of WBF activities. The WBF provided the Pannier Market with folding tables to encourage more footfall into the market. These extra tables helped suppliers engage better with visitors. Gazebos, parasols and heaters allowed members of the public to visit the market in all weathers. Picnic benches provided additional seating for visitors to enjoy the setting and enabled people to *'come together'*. It was felt that these changes and improvements did have an impact on footfall to the Panier Market. Since the WBF, the local authority highlighted that Tiverton's Panier Market has *'got a different feel [...] it's more vibrant.'*

WBF also helped support a firework display in Bradninch and the Christmas trees and lights project in the town.

With footfall increasing in Tiverton town, there was a requirement for the CCTV to be monitored more frequently. The WBF funded additional CCTV operative hours to monitor the town centre following the Covid-19 pandemic.

¹⁶ <https://www.devonlive.com/special-features/shop-search-local-safe-christmas-4765186>

¹⁷ <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/tiverton-s-four-shopping-quarters-welcomes-you-back/>

Figure D16: Mid Devon local authority WBF activities (sample)



Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

The key benefits of the WBF were felt to be to businesses themselves – the social value and impact on businesses around the town *‘would be the lion’s share of the benefit.’* The WBF *‘came at a good time [...] there was fear that shopkeepers were not having the footfall coming through.’* *‘The additional budget was vital support during the Covid-19 pandemic and helped with welcoming back visitors to our towns.’*

The local authority has been able to retain all of the shops in Tiverton precinct: *‘the ones there pre-pandemic are still there [...] we have no voids [...] this speaks volumes’.* The local authority acknowledged that there would be have been a higher risk of losing businesses without the WBF interventions.

The authority agreed that if there hadn’t been any WBF, that they would have introduced some signage themselves, but this would have come at a cost to another cost centre. Other WBF activities, aside from the signage and cleaning would not have been completed. *‘Without the WBF funding, businesses wouldn’t have felt engaged with as they were.’*

Very significant benefits to the town centres participating in the WBF have been noted as being:

- Safety of the location establishments
- Improved attractiveness of the location
- Improved offer of the activities (including events)
- Improved accessibility of the retail experience e.g. from wider footpaths or plans for future intervention

The WBF has played a big role in:

- Meeting the authority’s aspirations to safely open commercial public spaces and ensure safe trading of SMEs.
- Increasing resident/consumer confidence in returning to the city centre, high street.
- Increasing the capacity for the local authority to respond to the economic impact of Covid-19.

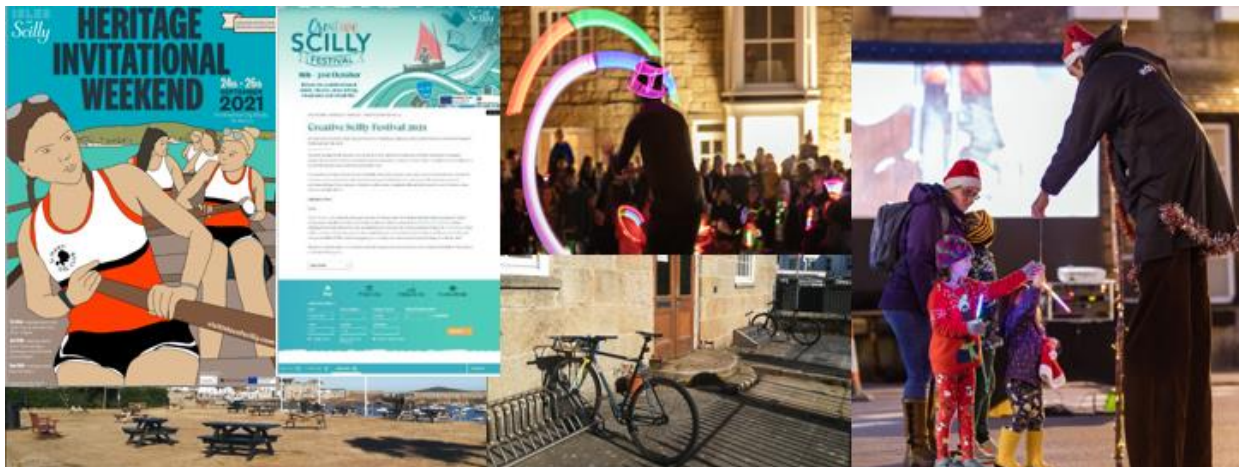
Outcomes of the WBF funding for the local authority and the high street/areas include:

- The local authority agreed that footfall would have been reduced without the WBF and that one of the outcomes of the Fund was increased footfall. Prior to the pandemic, footfall monitoring was completed on an adhoc basis, some data was collected during the WBF.
- The authority also agreed that commercial public spaces were able to remain open and were improved (e.g. safer, more attractive) as a result of the WBF.

The local authority agreed that the number of businesses closing would have been the same or higher without WBF funding.

In terms of ways that WBF could be improved, the local authority highlighted *‘the level of grants for level of return, level of information required was onerous [...] the process wasn’t straightforward’*. The WBF ERDF procurement rules were also felt to be a real barrier for the project. Sourcing suppliers during the pandemic was also mentioned as difficult, *‘suppliers were all over the place, shut down because of furlough.’*

Isles of Scilly Local Authority



The Isles of Scilly is off the west coast of Cornwall and has a population of around 2,200 people. The Isles are a group of islands situated 28 miles South West of Land's End. There are 5 inhabited islands: St. Mary's, Tresco, Bryher, St. Martins and St. Agnes.

The case study area is representative of one of the coastal allocations in the WBF. Tourism is the biggest driver of the Isles of Scilly economy after agriculture. The island hosts the World Pilot Gig Championships in May each year.

The Isles of Scilly was allocated a WBF of £160,000 of which 63% was spent. The local authority participated in the WBF only and not the RHSSF (due to the scale of the RHSSF allocation being disproportionate to the cost delivery).

Around the time of the WBF allocations, the local authority sought to create an environment that would be welcoming and safe for the visitor economy. *‘We also wanted to maximise on the place-based marketing to put together a range of activities to demonstrate that we’re open for business.’*

Figure D17 presents a selection of the activities funded by the WBF in the Isles of Scilly.

Figure D17: Isles of Scilly local authority WBF activities (sample)

<p>P14 Number of CV-19 Action Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established a project board, developed a delivery plan and recruited a delivery partner for the WBF. 	<p>P22 Number of Events supported (Strand 5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taste of Scilly events across all Islands to promote the islands food and drink opportunities August-October 2021. Creative Scilly Festival including the introduction of new events promoting the culture of the islands to new visitor audiences (cultural visitors) October 2021. Heritage Gig Festival that welcomed approximately 400 visitors associated with mainland rowing clubs to the Islands for a historic vessel championships weekend. In addition to racing the festival hosted a number of cultural and arts activities. Pre-Christmas festival combined with a series of late night opening and street market events on St Mary's high street. The event included local craft and farmers market stalls, temporary festive lighting and sheltered market stalls.
<p>P18 High Streets with Temporary Covid-19 adaptations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional cycle racks to reduce vehicle movements to increase space for safe pedestrian flows in Hugh Town, St Mary's. Increase cleaning of public toilets - increase contracted hours to keep Covid safe. Additional cleaning of public conveniences on St Mary's. 	<p>P23 Number of strategic plans or transformation route maps (Strand 6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of Isles of Scilly Economic Plan.
<p>P19 - Number of NSA with Temporary CV-19 Adaptations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor seating at Holgate's Green, the Park and Porthcressa on St Mary's and the off-islands. Planters and hanging baskets to improve the public realm through the addition of planters at The Town Hall, The Park, Holgate's Green and across the off-islands. 	

Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

The local authority delivered a number of impactful activities including:

- A Christmas festival in December which successfully demonstrated '*that the community could get together in the open air. We had plenty of visitors.*' The three-hour activity helped the local authority demonstrate to visitors that the high street/area was open for business.
- The Creative Scilly Artistic festival gathered significant interest via social media channels and attendance at a total of 73 events across the Islands. The event engaged 14 Island-based and 13 visiting artists with an audience of around 1,500 people. A sample of attendees indicated that 64% of the audience were visitors to the Islands.
- To kickstart the tourism season in 2022, the local authority undertook a Mini Taste of Scilly event, linked to the Islands' very popular main food and drink festival in September. Supported by businesses on the St Mary's Island, the week-long event involved a celebration of locally cooked food and drink experiences for visitors and locals. In tandem with the events programme, the local authority produced a lifestyle publication¹⁸ telling the story of Scilly through food and drink, helping to raise the sector's profile locally and further afield. All businesses of the island of St Mary's were either fully booked or had to turn people away for the event.
- Street furniture and cycle storage were procured. Both resources were deployed on the island to increase cycle parking capacity, encourage the use of cycles instead of cars on the high street and so decrease crowding during peak periods.
- With a drop in restaurant capacity, some restaurants not opening, and an increase in takeaway activity, the local authority wanted to '*provide somewhere for people to sit to have fish and chips.*' The new seating furniture as funded by the WBF has been successful in improving the look of the high street and surrounding area of St Mary's.
- The authority commissioned a research consultancy to explore the economic impact of Covid-19 on the visitor economy on the Isles of Scilly. The commission developed an economic recovery plan that built upon the outdated Islands Futures Economic Plan and

¹⁸ https://issuu.com/simpliscilly/docs/ios-taste_publication-v11-awb-digital

The Destination Management Plan identifying pilot projects to reverse the impacts of Covid-19 on the Island economy. The Plan has been used as part of the business case going forward for the authority's Shared Prosperity bid.

The local authority reports that the WBF has played a big role in increasing residents' and consumers' confidence in returning to the high street, as well as playing a large role in improving green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environment on the Island. The authority feels that the WBF has played a big role in increasing its capacity for responding to the economic impact of Covid-19.

Without the WBF, the authority would not have been able to achieve the same results. *'It improved the breadth of our offer and the depth of who we could reach out to.'*

Outcomes of the WBF for the local authority and the high street/areas include:

- The local authority agreed that an increase in footfall in high streets and other commercial areas has been achieved as a result of WBF funding. Without the WBF, footfall would have reduced. The authority made use of footfall information gathered at the Tourist Information Centre as a gauge for footfall. According to the authority, the base footfall data highlights ups and downs that follow the trend of Covid cases rising and falling. *'It's hard to say how much you can attribute increases in footfall to WBF activity. In the past when the Islands have been featured in a TV programme [...] the Tourist Information Centre reported a massive hike in interest/footfall. We haven't been able to demonstrate this, this time around [for WBF].'*
- The local authority were unable to say whether they thought the WBF had helped with mitigating business/commercial area closures. On St Mary's high street, the total number of businesses operating is *'probably no change, there are ins and outs across the piece'*.
- The authority felt that the perception of safety by residents and businesses and the green spaces, public spaces, retail and non-retail environment would have been worse, without the WBF.

Bury Local Authority



The Metropolitan Borough of Bury is a metropolitan borough of Greater Manchester in North West England, just north of Manchester, to the east of Bolton and west of Rochdale. The borough consists of six towns, Bury, Ramsbottom, Tottington, Radcliffe, Whitefield and Prestwich.

The borough has a population of around 190,700 people and has industry specialisms in creative and media manufacturing, wholesale and hospitality, leisure and recreation.

Bury Metropolitan Borough was allocated a WBF of £338,470. By the close of the Fund, the local authority had spent over 82% of their allocation. WBF supported the towns of Prestwich, Bury, Ramsbottom, Whitefield, Radcliffe and Tottington.

The local authority had aspirations to *'not rest on laurels, but to continue to embed their economy, as a visitor destination, tourism, retail [...] but also as part of a bigger picture attracting inward investment'*. It was recognised that in the future, they would want to attract businesses to the area and *'they've got to have a good offer'*.

The six town centres experienced a drop in footfall; *'some areas have recovered better than others. The more local areas, Whitefield and Ramsbottom, have bounced back quickly and Bury is still busy'*.

Across the Borough, public facing information was shared to make visitors and residents feel confident about returning to support their local town centres and High Streets. Campaigns were bespoke to local areas and also included an overarching Borough wide campaign, amplified by local campaigns to reach a wider audience. All campaigns were supported by businesses and residents.

Three SME Covid support officers delivered support across the Borough, helping SMEs to be Covid compliant and to access wider business support. Support provided included 121 visits, distribution of information, help to undertake risk assessments, attendance at Town Centre Boards and compliance support and reporting for non-compliant establishments. The local authority saw these posts as *'working really well'*.

Figure D18: Bury local authority WBF activities (sample)

<p>P15 Covid-19 Public Information Campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Borough wide within Town Centres and Highstreets safe reopening campaigns covering Prestwich, Bury, Ramsbottom, Tottington, Whitefield and Radcliffe. Bury town centre safe return campaign commissioned by the Bury Town Centre Board. Photographs of Business people outside their business location for the Ramsbottom Welcome Back Campaign. 	<p>P17 Communications Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Business Support Officer were recruited in the initial claim period. They engaged across all 6 townships of the borough of Bury, helping SME's be Covid compliant and to access wider business support.
<p>P16 Business Facing Campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Branding design for Ramsbottom Town Centre Festive wreaths for Ramsbottom town centre retail shops 	<p>P23 Number of strategic plans or transformation route maps (Strand 6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One action plan for Ramsbottom Town Centre which looked at the place and the barriers that prevent recovery to pre-Covid activity including movement of people. A comprehensive plan for future growth was produced. Town traders and businesses were consulted and the town centre board were involved from conception. Place narrative for Ramsbottom.

Source: Local authority WBF Claim Output excel worksheets

As part of the WBF activities, individual township recovery boards were established in five of the six towns, with a focus on supporting town centres and local high streets to reopen and remain open for safe trading. The boards were facilitated by a senior local authority officer but were business led. Individual town centre boards commissioned bespoke marketing messages for the unique needs of each area, with *'locally managed, purchased, procured, marketing outputs. It was hard to manage but they had good results- [...] it was really good to get the local marketing campaign and activity'*. It was noted that as businesses were able to open, they did become disengaged in the town centre boards.

A Borough wide marketing campaign was also successful in terms of reach. Unfortunately, the radio campaign leading up to Christmas to drive footfall for the Christmas period was interrupted as *'Omicron hit [...] and the campaign had to be pulled'*.

The benefits of the activities supported by the WBF meant that there was an improvement in:

- Safety of the location establishments
- Safety of the location visitors
- Attractiveness of the location

The local authority highlighted that they would have not been able to achieve the same results with the WBF.

In terms of the outcomes associated with the WBF for the local authority area and their high streets:

- The local authority felt that the WBF didn't play a significant role in improving footfall; *'it would have happened anyway'*.
- The authority did recognise that the WBF encouraged people to *'be compliant and safe during Covid.'*
- The WBF played a big role in its impact on business closures/openings. Covid support officers encouraged businesses to apply for the Government Additional Restrictions Grant for businesses that weren't eligible for the Covid Business Support Grants. The Government Additional Restrictions Grant required businesses to prove that a reduction in footfall had impacted their business. *'Some of those businesses are still there now.'*
- The local authority also agreed that the WBF had an impact in terms of the improved perception of safety by residents and businesses.

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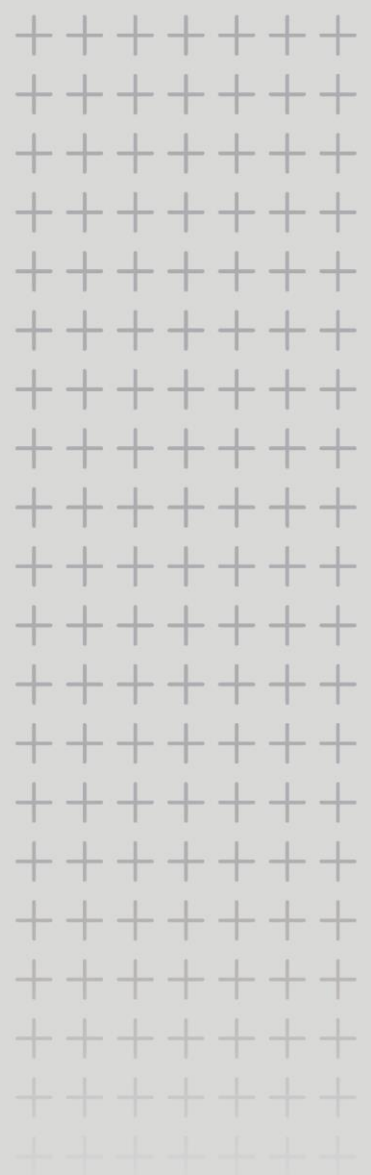
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