



Subject:	Stall Fees for St George's Market - Request for Further Rent-Free Period
Date:	24th September, 2021
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Clodagh Cassin, Markets Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update members on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a request from traders at St George's Market for a four-week rent free period due to continuing COVID-19 restrictions; and• the financial implications of any decision to waive the stall fees for a further four-week period.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to consider this request from St. George's Market traders to waive stall fees at St George's Market for a further four weeks from 1st October 2021, with an associated loss of income of £31,000, based on current rent figures for the market.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	Members will be aware that St George’s Market was closed to the public due to COVID-19 on a number of occasions over the last eighteen months; most recently between December 2020 and April 2021.
3.2	Taking account of the difficulties faced by the traders during the previous periods of lockdown and subsequent limited re-opening, the Council agreed a rent-free period for St George’s Market traders from July 2020 to December 2020. This resulted in a loss of income of £233k to the Council. Members also agreed a further 12-week rent-free period from the end of December 2020. As the market went into lockdown following this decision, this rent-free period commenced when the market re-opened on 19 April 2021. This meant that the traders at St George’s Market did not pay daily rent for their pitches until 9 July 2021. This 12-week rent-free period has meant a further loss of income to the Council of £143k.
3.3	Following the July 2021 re-opening, the capacity in the market was limited in order to comply with the Northern Ireland Executive’s social distancing requirements for retail premises. This meant that no more than 350 visitors at a time could access the market. Staff had to manage the capacity by putting in place queuing arrangements and actively managing the social distancing requirements within the market. As a result, visitor numbers were around 40% of pre-COVID-19 figures. Given the reduction in capacity, the traders at St George’s Market expressed a concern about their ability to generate income. As a result, they made a request for the Council to consider a further rent-free period of four weeks. In the interim, traders have been paying rent on their stalls in line with the existing fee rates.
3.4	Since the initial request was made by the traders, Government guidance on social distancing has changed. This means that the current capacity in the market building at any one time has increased from 350 to 550 visitors. Since this expanded capacity has been in operation, footfall numbers in the market have increased. However, like all retail outlets, some restrictions remain both in market capacity and also in our ability to offer the full “market experience” in terms of live music performances and other animation. As further announcements are made by the Northern Ireland Executive, we will keep these arrangements under review, and will continue to take advice from the Council’s Corporate Health and Safety Unit in terms of implementation and management.
3.5	Members will be aware that, prior to lockdown, work had been undertaken on a development and investment plan for St George’s Market. One of the driving factors behind this plan was

	<p>the need to ensure that the market retained its status as a unique asset in the city centre. In light of the challenges currently facing the city centre, attractions such as St George’s Market will be more critical than ever in supporting city recovery. However buildings of this nature require ongoing investment and have significant operational overheads, and it is critical that there is an underpinning investment programme to ensure that they continue to offer a quality experience. As the work on the implementation of the development plan moves forward, it is important that consideration is given to managing the costs associated with running the market, including the level of council investment available to support this work.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.6	<p>A four weeks stall freeze would result in a cost to council of a further £31,000 based on current stall figures of 140 for each market day over the three-day weekend with the current restrictions continuing.</p>
3.7	<p>There is currently no provision in any departmental budget to cover these increased costs</p>
	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.8	<p>No specific equality/good relations implications. No negative impact on rural areas.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	None