# Motion: Unlocking the potential of local high streets

**This Council believes** that healthy high streets are essential for community cohesion, civic pride, employment, shopping, services and leisure. But many shops and businesses were struggling even before the Covid pandemic: high street retail employment fell in more than three-quarters of local authorities between 2015 and 2018 according to the Office of National Statistics[1] and more than half of all UK consumers were shopping online before the pandemic[2].

**This Council notes** that retail is among the sectors most affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and retail workers have been on the frontline of the crisis throughout. The almost complete shutdown of non-essential shops between March and June 2020 has hit businesses hard, and the need for social distancing has changed the way many businesses operate, reducing footfall. The pandemic has accelerated what, in many cases, has been a longer trend of lower footfall and changing shopping habits. As the Portas Review a decade ago acknowledged, the form and function of many high streets needs to radically change if they are to adapt and survive.

**This Council welcomes** the willingness of Government to acknowledge the problems and come forward with initiatives in response to these challenges such has the furlough scheme, the Covid support business loans, and the High Street Taskforce. However, as the Treasury Select Committee stated in 2019, the current system of Business Rates places an unfair burden on "bricks and mortar" businesses compared to online ones, and the Business Rate system needs radical overhaul[3].

**This Council resolves to:**

- Write to the Government to urge them to undertake an urgent review of business rates in order to support high street businesses recover from the pandemic and level the playing field between online and high street businesses, to make it fair and sustainable for all.
- Sign up to the Co-operative Party's Unlock the High Street Campaign and explore what local action can be taken to revive our high streets now whilst business rates are reviewed.

<u>Suggested actions (any combination of these can be added to council motion if helpful)</u>

- Sign [NAME OF COUNCIL] up to the Co-operative Party's campaign to devolve the Towns Fund, Levelling Up Fund, UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other national funding pots, to give local communities, councils and regions the ultimate say in how it is spend in their area.
  *(NB: the Towns Fund only applies to councils in England)*
- Explore the creation of Community Improvement Districts to reconnect communities with the levers that drive economic development in town centres and create an equal partnership of business and community organisations to galvanise action at a local level.
- Make any data held by the council on ownership of high street properties public and in an accessible format, so that community groups seeking to buy empty shops through a community share offer have the information they need to do so.
- Make full use of s215 planning enforcement powers where empty units are attracting antisocial behaviour or creating an eyesore on the high street
- Proactively contact landlords of vacant premises (and work with Chambers of Commerce, Landlord Associations and BID managers) to explore meanwhile use options and/or encourage alternative rental models (e.g. turnover rather than market rent) to enable new co-operatives, SMEs, social enterprises and community businesses to open their doors on the high street.

co-operative party

1 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/highstreetsingreatbritain/march2020#:~:text=High%20street%20retail%20employment%20fell,29%25%20in%20Great%20Britain%20overall.
2 https://www.retail-insight-network.com/features/uk-online-shopping-growth/
3 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmtreasy/222/22203.htm#_idTextAnchor000