



Members of Parliament in England

20 March 2020

Dear Colleague,

COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE

We all have a crucial role to play in supporting people throughout this global pandemic. It's my priority to ensure we get the necessary support to our local authorities, families and individuals across the country.

The UK government has already taken bold action and I'm confident that we will continue to do whatever it takes to get our country through the impacts of COVID-19 and stand ready to announce further action wherever necessary.

I have set out details of new measures introduced by my Department, to provide immediate support in response to COVID-19:

Support for Councils on Adult Social Care

Local authorities are already playing a vital role in supporting our communities and the government has announced an additional £1.6bn funding to support local authorities in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding will help alleviate the pressures local authorities are facing across services. This should enable them to do the following:

- Meet the increased demand for adult social care and enable councils to provide additional support to social care providers;
- CCGs will separately be funding additional costs of discharging and keeping people out of hospital, including social care costs – commissioned by the local authority unless existing local arrangements suggest otherwise;
- Meet the extra demand and higher business-as-usual costs of providing children's social care – including as a result of school closures and the increased need for accommodation to address the need for isolation, including for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children;
- Provide additional support for the homeless and rough sleepers – including where self-isolation is needed;
- Support those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 – who may soon be asked to self-isolate in their homes for the duration of the pandemic;
- Meet pressures across other service – as a result of reduced income, rising costs or increased demand.

The grants will be paid upfront by Friday 3 April. In the first phase of the response, the grant will not be ringfenced, but we will continue to keep this under review. I would appreciate your continued support in working with us to understand pressures on local government in your constituencies.

Support for Councils on Business Rates

At the Budget the Chancellor announced that the government will increase the business rates retail discount to 100% for businesses with a rateable value of less than £51,000 for one year – and expanded this to cover the leisure and hospitality sectors. This tax cut is worth over £1 billion, saving each business up to £25,000.

On 17 March, this relief was extended by removing the £51,000 rateable value threshold – which means all eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors will now pay no business rates at all in England for 12 months from 1 April. My Department has now [published guidance](#) to local authorities on the implementation of the expanded relief.

Local authorities will be fully compensated for the loss of income associated with this expanded relief. While this expanded retail discount scheme will need approval to become a notified state aid, authorities should prepare to award on this basis and my Department will communicate the outcome to local authorities as soon as it is known.

On 18 March, the Chancellor also announced he would be providing this business rates holiday to nurseries. That means non-local authority providers of childcare will pay no business rates in 2020-21 from 1 April. Local authorities will also be fully compensated for the cost of this measure, and guidance for local authorities on the application of the holiday will be published by MHCLG shortly.

Focusing on Local Authorities Priorities

Local authorities are already playing a vital role in supporting our communities and local economies during the Covid-19 pandemic. I am sure that you, like me, will want to thank all the staff working so tirelessly in local government during these difficult times.

As I wrote earlier this week, the government is taking steps to relieve day-to-day pressures through the following measures:

- Routine Care Quality Commission inspections will be temporarily suspended for the duration of the COVID19 outbreak;
- Ofsted is to temporarily suspend routine inspections of schools, colleges, early years settings, children's social care providers and local authorities;
- Confirmation from the Information Commissioner's Office that councils will be able to use their discretion on deadlines for Freedom Of Information requests;
- Working to legislate so that the requirement for Annual Council meetings to take place will be removed; and that, while essential council meetings should continue, these will be able to take place virtually for a temporary period.

Renters Reform

My Department has announced a radical package of measures to protect renters and landlords affected by COVID-19. No renter in either social or private accommodation will be forced out of their home during this difficult time.

We are bringing forward emergency legislation as an urgent priority so that landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict tenants for at least a three-month period. As a result of these measures, no renters in private or social accommodation needs to be concerned about the threat of eviction. There will be a moratorium on all new evictions and clear guidance has been issued stating that existing eviction processes should be dealt with appropriately, prioritising the safety and health of citizens across the country.

To support this announcement the government has worked with the Master of the Rolls to widen the 'pre-action protocol' on possession proceedings, to include private renters and to strengthen its remit. This will support the necessary engagement between landlords and tenants to resolve disputes and landlords will have to reach out to tenants to understand the financial position they are in.

Recognising the additional pressures the virus may put on landlords, we have also confirmed that the three-month mortgage payment holiday announced previously will be extended to landlords whose tenants are experiencing financial difficulties due to coronavirus. This will alleviate the pressure on landlords, who will be concerned about meeting mortgage payments themselves, and will mean no unnecessary pressure is put on their tenants as a result.

Support for Rough Sleepers

My Department is at the forefront of ensuring we take every step necessary to protect and support the most vulnerable. That is why we have allocated £3.2 million of initial emergency funding to support rough sleepers if they need to self-isolate to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This funding will be available to all local authorities in England and will reimburse them for the cost of providing accommodation and services to those sleeping on the streets to help them successfully self-isolate.

Planning Rules for Pubs and Restaurants

We are committed to doing everything we can to tackle the pandemic and support people, businesses and communities through this difficult time. That's why my Department is relaxing planning rules to allow pubs and restaurants to operate as hot food takeaways during the coronavirus outbreak. These changes will provide vital flexibility to pubs and restaurants and ensure people are able to safely stay at home, while supporting some of the great local businesses across the country.

Local Resilience Forum Updates

As I wrote to you earlier in the week, the local response is being led by Local Resilience Forums, bringing together representatives across the NHS, social care and emergency services. We are working closely with LRFs in this response work to ensure they are fully supported in the weeks and months ahead, including making available over 70 military planners to support them, with half of these being focussed on planning around social care specifically.

To support understanding of the latest picture in your local area, I have asked my officials to make arrangements so you receive regular weekly updates, starting next week, from all Local Resilience Forums. My Department is working to ensure the forums have a complete list of all Members in each area and the contact details for Local Resilience Forums can be found online.

My Department is also working with our network of regional chief executives and Local Government Association to encourage all chief executives to continue holding regular meetings with you at this time.



RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP