

COVID-19 – Weekend News Bulletin

Monday 1 June 2020

Heart of London Business Alliance is committed to ensuring our members receive the support they need while the situation in relation to COVID-19 is fast-changing. Our Daily Bulletin provides you with an update on the important announcements and guidance from the Government. In addition, it is recommended that our members monitor the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website for guidance regarding COVID-19.

Together with our local Member of Parliament, Nickie Aiken, Heart of London will continue to lobby Government for support for our members and your employees during this difficult time.

Headlines

- Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick announced an easing to the shielding guidance for clinically vulnerable individuals which now permits individuals to leave their homes and go outside for the first time in 10 weeks.
- The Government announced that the “British sporting recovery has begun,” with the publication of new guidelines that will allow the resumption of elite sports behind closed doors from Monday.
- Three members of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) – the group advising the Government during the COVID-19 pandemic - publicly warned that the easing of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in England from Monday may be happening too soon and could lead to a new spike in infections.
- The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, provided further details on the way in which employers will begin financially contributing to the new flexible Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.
- The Chancellor also announced a final August payment for those on the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, which was originally scheduled to close this weekend.

Government Daily COVID-19 Press Conference – Sunday

- Sunday’s Downing Street press conference was led by Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. He was joined by Dr Jenny Harries Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England and Dame Louise Casey the Prime Minister’s adviser on rough sleeping.
- Jenrick outlined the changes to the guidance for the clinically vulnerable people that have been shielding for almost 10 weeks. From Monday 1st June, vulnerable individuals included in this cohort will be able to go outside and meet one other person from outside of their household if they live alone.
- The general recommendation for this vulnerable group remains to stay at home. The advice applies to England only, though Jenrick confirmed that the devolved administrations would be providing their own advice in the near future.
- Despite schools reopening, clinically vulnerable children who are shielding will not be able to return to school with their classmates.
- Jenrick summarised the support the Government has given to this shielded group during the pandemic. This includes setting up the national shielding service, which has delivered 2.5 million free food boxes, established priority supermarket delivery slots, facilitated medicines being delivered and worked closely with local government and NHS volunteer responders to support this vulnerable group.
- 350,000 people who are shielding have registered for government assistance, and more than half have requested someone to talk to on the phone. Jenrick confirmed that the Government will continue to update the advice for this vulnerable group with the wider guidance for the whole country, next due on 15th June.
- When new guidance is issued the NHS will write to shielded individuals outlining the new advice.

- Jenrick also provided an update of Government support to rough sleepers. 15,000 people have been housed and protected by moving them out of communal shelters, and 90% of known rough sleepers had been offered accommodation. Emphasising that the Government wants to prevent as many people as possible from returning to the streets, 6,000 new supported homes will be made available on a permanent basis. 3,300 will be made available in the next year with £433 million dedicated supporting this initiative, including new funding for specialist treatment in mental health and addiction.
- Dr Harries outlined the latest data which demonstrated that coronavirus cases are continuing to fall across the country. She noted that a testing milestone was reached this weekend, with more than 200,000 tests performed in a 24-hour period, providing spare capacity for the track and trace system.

Government Daily COVID-19 Press Conference - Saturday

- The press conference was led by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Oliver Dowden and Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer.
- During the conference, Mr Dowden announced the release of a package of detailed guidelines that will allow the safe return of elite sports in the UK.
- Matches and sporting events will be able to take place behind closed doors from Monday, without fans in attendance and social distancing rules in place at venues up until the “first whistle”.
- Mr Dowden also announced a further relaxation of exercise rules, allowing individuals to exercise with up to five others from different households, as long as social distancing is maintained.
- Questions from the media focused on concerns voiced by members of the scientific community that the lockdown in England is being eased too quickly. In response, both Mr Dowden and Mr Van-Tam re-emphasised the Government’s commitment to taking a cautious, science-led approach and claimed that “scientific opinion always varies.”
- Questions were also asked about the effectiveness of the test and trace programme, with Mr Van-Tam confirming that the system is “ready” and that no difficulties will be caused by each UK nation having its own tracking system.

Government Daily COVID-19 Press Conference - Friday

- The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, announced further details on the way in which the updated Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) will operate.
- Explaining the modifications to the CJRS, which has supported millions of jobs and businesses, the Chancellor stated that employers will be expected to begin “modest” contributions from August.
- The timeline for the evolution of the scheme includes:
 - From August, employers will begin paying National Insurance and pension contributions (accounting for 5 per cent of total employment costs). The Treasury’s contribution to wages will remain at 80 per cent;
 - By September, employers will be expected to begin paying towards wages, with taxpayers contributing 70 per cent of the grant and employers 10 per cent
 - At the end of October, the scheme will close but throughout that month taxpayers will contribute 60 per cent and employers the remaining 20 per cent.
- Sunak clarified that the new flexible CJRS will be in place from 1st July and will allow employers the maximum flexibility to choose the right arrangements for them and their staff. Employees will be able to return to work part-time whilst still receiving support from the scheme.
- These new changes mean that the current scheme will close for new entrants on 10th June.
- Finally, the Chancellor announced that the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, which has had 2.4 million applicants, will be extended with a final payment being given on 1st August.

Summary of UK COVID-19 Business support schemes

The UK Government has announced a series of economic interventions aimed at supporting employees, employers and businesses through the uncertainty and potential loss of income resulting from the Covid-19 crisis and the restrictions on business activity as a result.

The Government has established a business support [web portal](#) with details on eligibility and how businesses can apply for support. A summary of those measures is listed below. Please see overleaf.

Summary of UK COVID-19 Business Support Schemes (with hyperlinks)

Employment Retention Measures

- **COVID-19 Job Retention Scheme:** Employers can claim 80% of their usual monthly wage costs for furloughed employees, limited to £2,500 per individual per month, plus the associated Employer National Insurance and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions. Claims can be made to cover the period 1st March – 31st October 2020. From August furloughed workers will be able to work part-time, with employers sharing salary costs with the Government. Amendments to the scheme announced on 29 May include the following: From August, employers will begin paying National Insurance and pension contributions and the taxpayer contribution will remain at 80 per cent; By September, employers will be expected to begin paying towards wages, with taxpayers contributing 70 per cent of the grant and employers 10 per cent; Throughout October taxpayers will contribute 60 per cent and employers the remaining 20 per cent.
- **Statutory Sick Pay Rebate:** The Government will refund eligible SSP costs to all employers with fewer than 250 employees. This applies to a claim as a result of COVID-19 self-isolation and is limited to two weeks per employee. While existing systems are not designed to facilitate such employer refunds for SSP, the Government will work with employers to set up a repayment mechanism as soon as possible.
- **Self-employed Income Support Scheme:** Most self-employed workers will be able to apply for a grant of up to 80% of average monthly profits from the last three years, capped at a maximum of £2,500 per month. The scheme will cover three months' earnings with the first lump sum payments anticipated in June. The scheme will be open to those with trading profits of up to £50,000 in 2018-2019 or an average annual trading profit of up to £50,000 from 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19. At least half of a claimants' income must come from self-employment.

Bridging Loans to Mitigate Business Disruption

- **COVID-19 Commercial Financing Facility:** The Bank of England's Covid-19 Commercial Financing Facility is intended to support large companies of investment grade standing. Loans, through the purchase of commercial paper of up to one-year maturity, will be provided to support short term liquidity, mitigating against cashflow disruption. The scheme has been extended to include those businesses that are too large to qualify for the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (see below) but do not have an investment-grade rating. This will be achieved by constructing a credit rating from information about firms' relationships with their banks.
- **Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme:** To support small business access to bank lending and overdrafts, the Government is guaranteeing 80% on loans provided through the scheme, up to an individual value of £5m (subject to a per lender cap on claims). Most UK businesses with turnover of under £41 million will be eligible. The scheme is being facilitated by the British Business Bank through participating partners (which includes most high street banks). For borrowers, no interest will be charged for the first twelve months of the loan, which will be paid by the Government. The Government will not charge businesses or banks for this guarantee. As of April 3, the Government has extended the scheme so that all viable small businesses affected by COVID-19, and not just those unable to secure regular commercial financing, will now be eligible should they need finance to remain operational.
- **Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme:** The Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme will provide a government guarantee of 80% to enable banks to offer loans of up to £25 million to firms with an annual turnover of between £45 million and £500 million. This is intended to give banks the confidence to lend to more businesses which are impacted by coronavirus. Loans backed by a guarantee under CLBILS will be offered at commercial rates of interest and further details of the scheme will be announced later this month.
- **Bank of England Term Funding Scheme:** The Bank of England has introduced a new Term Funding Scheme with additional incentives for Small businesses financed by the issuance of central bank reserves. Over the next 12 months, the scheme will offer four-year funding of at least 5% of participants' stock at interest rates at, or very close to, Bank Rate.
- **Future Fund:** The Government will offer a new unsecured convertible loan facility for amounts between £125,000 and £5,000,000 for a maximum 36-month term. The scheme will launch in May and will initially be open until September 2020. To qualify a company must have raised at least £250,000 in equity investment from third party investors in the last 5 years and be based in the UK. The Government loan must be matched by third party investment and be used for working capital.
- **Innovate Loans:** UK businesses driving innovation and development will be helped through the coronavirus outbreak with a £1.25 billion government support package to ensure firms in some of the most dynamic sectors of the UK economy – ranging from tech to life sciences – are protected through the crisis so they can continue to develop innovative new products and help power UK growth. The Innovate Loans scheme will be a £750 million fund for targeted support for small and medium sized businesses focusing on research and development and be made available through Innovate UK's [national innovation agency] grants and loan scheme and will accelerate up to £200 million of grant and loan payments for its 2,500 existing Innovate UK customers on an opt-in

basis. An extra £550 million will also be made available to increase support for existing customers and £175,000 of support will be offered to around 1,200 firms not currently in receipt of Innovate UK funding. The first payments will be made by mid-May.

- **Bounce Back Loans:** From Monday 4 May, small businesses will be eligible for a fast-track finance scheme providing interest free loans with a 100% government-backed guarantee for lenders. The scheme will allow businesses to borrow between £2,000 and £50,000 (up to 25% of turnover) from accredited lenders, and will not need to begin repayments for the first year.

Grant Funding measures

- **Grant Funding for Businesses who qualify for SBRR:** Individual grants of £10,000 will be made available through local authorities to businesses eligible for Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) that already pay little or no business rates.

Tax Relief Measures

- **VAT Deferral:** The Government will defer VAT payment demands for the next quarter, meaning that no business will pay any VAT until the end of June. Businesses will have until the end of the year to reconcile any accumulated tax debts.
- **Temporary Changes to the Statutory Residence Test:** HM Treasury has proposed a series of changes to UK Tax legislation and the Statutory Residence Test to ensure that for “any period(s) between 1 March and 1 June 2020 spent in the UK by individuals working on COVID-19 related activities will not count towards residence tests that potentially bring global earnings within the purview of UK taxation. These changes are time limited and will only support those people whose skillsets are currently required.” These changes are designed to allow skilled individuals to come to the UK and help respond to the pandemic.
- **Support for Businesses Paying Tax:** HMRC have established a dedicated COVID-19 helpline to support businesses and self-employed individuals unable to meet tax demands due to Coronavirus related disruption. Bespoke Time to Pay arrangements will be offered to those businesses with a legitimate need and support their recovery while operating through any temporary financial challenges. HMRC will also waive late payment penalties and interest where a business experiences administrative difficulty due to COVID-19.
- **Deferral of Self-Assessment Payment:** Income tax payments on account due under Self-Assessment on 31st July 2020 will be deferred until 31st January 2021. All self-employed individuals will be eligible.

Sector-Specific Support Measures

- **Retail and Hospitality Grant Scheme:** A cash grant of up to £25,000 will be made available to businesses in England operating in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors with a rateable value of between £15,000 and £51,000. For businesses in these sectors with a rateable value of under £15,000, they will receive a grant of £10,000.
- **Business Rate Relief for Retail/Hospitality/Leisure venues:** A 100% business rates holiday will be applied from 1st April for a period of one year to all retail, hospitality and leisure venue, including shops, pubs, restaurants and theatres. There is no limit to rateable values.
- **Business Rate Holiday for Nurseries:** Nurseries in England will not have to pay business rates for the 2020-21 tax year. This will apply to properties that are occupied by providers on the Government’s Early Years Register and are wholly or mainly used for the provision of nursery education.
- **Support Package for Charities:** Charities across the UK will receive a £750 million package of support to ensure they can continue their work during the coronavirus outbreak. This will include hospices.
- **Supermarket Competition Law:** To address a spike in public demand, the Government has waived a selection of competition laws to allow supermarkets and food retailers to coordinate operations such as opening times, product resources and the pooling of staff.

Other

- **Business Support Checker Tool:** The UK Government have released a new “support find tool” for businesses and self-employed people across the UK, to allow them to quickly determine what financial support is available to them, to handle the consequences of the pandemic. The new platform asks business owners and the self-employed to fill out an online questionnaire first.
- **Extension Period on Filing Accounts:** Businesses can apply for an additional three months to file accounts with Companies House to help avoid penalties as they deal with the impact of Covid-19. Applications can be made through a fast-track online system.

- **Coronavirus Business Support Hub:** Businesses can now access a new online portal which aims to compile “key information for businesses including on funding and support, business closures, your responsibilities as an employer and managing your business during coronavirus. The hub also includes information for self-employed people and sole traders.”
- **Business Interruption Insurance:** The Government has confirmed that the business impact of government advice restricting individuals’ movements – and the knock-on impact on their financial activity – provides sufficient grounds for businesses to claim on their insurance where they have appropriate business interruption cover in place.
- **Protection for Commercial Tenants:** The Government has guaranteed that commercial tenants who are unable to pay their rent because of the COVID-19 outbreak will be protected from eviction. The measure applies for the next three months and is intended to support ongoing conversations between landlords and tenants about their arrangements.
- **Flexible Insolvency Rules:** Changes will include allowing businesses undergoing restructuring to continue trading and receive supplies. There will also be a temporary suspension of wrongful trading provisions for company directors to remove the threat of personal liability, which will apply retrospectively from 1st March.
- **Gender Pay Gap Reporting Suspension:** The UK Government has now also suspended enforcement of gender pay gap reporting deadlines for this reporting year (2019/20). “This decision means there will be no expectation on employers to report their data.”

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