

COVID-19 – Weekly Round-up

Friday 25 September 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

- Chancellor lays out Winter Economy Plan
- Prime Minister announces further restrictions
- Devolved nations tighten lockdown measures further
- Government launches awaited NHS COVID-19 app

Government tightens social distancing measures

24th September: Chancellor Rishi Sunak [announced](#) further measures intended to support jobs and the economy this week, as the UK faces tighter lockdown restrictions following a rise in Covid-19 cases.

Sunak set out the Government's [Winter Economy Plan](#) in a speech to the Commons on Thursday. In doing so, he emphasised that measures to support the British economy through the pandemic, which had cost the Treasury around £190bn so far, now required a new approach, tacitly acknowledging that previous hopes of a swift return to economic normality were now remote and what will emerge will be a 'new normal'.

- Through a [new Jobs Support Scheme](#), the Government will contribute up to a third of a qualifying employee's wages, provided that such individuals are able to work at least a third of their normal hours and be fully remunerated by their employer for those hours worked. The scheme will run for six months from November, replacing the existing Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, or 'furlough scheme,' when it expires. Use of the new scheme will not exclude businesses from claiming the Job Retention Bonus of £1,000 for each furloughed employee they take back on to the company payroll. The Self-Employed Grant will be extended on similar terms and conditions as the new Job Support Scheme.
- The Chancellor also unveiled a [Pay as You Grow Scheme](#) designed to help businesses with cashflow. The scheme will see repayment times of Business Support Loans extended from 6 to 10 years.
- VAT for the hospitality and tourism sector will also stay at a reduced rate of 5% until March.

The new scheme is based loosely on the German equivalent, *Kurzarbeit*, and is part of the Chancellor's determination to support "viable jobs". Around three million workers are currently on furlough or partial leave.

In a further indication that the Government has accepted that the crisis will persist for longer than hoped, and at least throughout the autumn and winter, the Chancellor has also scrapped plans for an Autumn Budget, stating that “now is not the right time to outline long-term plans”. A spending review, nevertheless reduced in scope, is still expected to take place.

Prime Minister announces further restrictions

22nd September: This week the Prime Minister announced the further tightening of restrictions on peoples’ freedom of movement in England, as the Government grapples with bringing the virus transmission rate back under control in the UK.

Speaking in the House of Commons, Boris Johnson [set out](#) the new rules, which include:

- a closing time of 10pm for all hospitality venues;
- the extending the requirement for customers to wear face coverings to include pubs and restaurants; and
- the recommendation that employees work from home if possible.

While no expiry date was put on these new measures, and the Government intends to keep them under review to reflect any change in circumstances, the Prime Minister implied that he expected the restrictions to remain in place for up to six months. To emphasise the importance of compliance, the fine for failing to wear a mask when required to do so, or breaking social distancing rules in general, are to be increased to £200 for a first offence.

The Prime Minister’s announcement followed a [joint statement](#) from Professor Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer, and Sir Patrick Vallance, the Chief Scientific Adviser, on the now rapid increase in virus transmission. Increasing the Covid-19 alert level from level 3 to level 4, they stated that COVID-19 cases in the UK are doubling approximately every seven days, which unabated could result in a 49,000 new cases being reported every day by October and over 200 deaths per day.

Later in the evening, Johnson [addressed](#) the UK directly via a televised statement, calling on the public to ensure that they were following Government guidelines to halt the spread of the virus. He warned of tougher enforcement measures, including fines of up to £10,000 if rules were broken repeatedly, with the potential for more police on the streets and use of the army to help enforce if necessary.

Devolved nations tighten lockdown measures further

While increased Government restrictions designed to reduce the spread of the virus embody a reversal of its former agenda to open up society again, England is the outlier among the other devolved nations who have taken a more cautious approach to lockdown restrictions.

Following announcements last week that both Scotland and Wales would be mirroring England in the “rule of six”, and this week with the 10pm closing time for hospitality businesses, the devolved nations have introduced further lockdown measures to curb the virus’ spread. This week, the Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon [announced](#) a ban on social gatherings in households, following similar curbs in Northern Ireland [introduced](#) last week. Wales has not allowed mixing of households in private since earlier in the year, and has maintained the 2-metre social distancing rule (as opposed to the 1- metre plus applied in England).

With it universally acknowledged that these new curbs on freedom are likely to be in place for many months, these nuances in application reflect attempts across the nations to strike a balance between controlling the virus, and making restrictions both tolerable for the public and – to the best extent possible - sustainable for the economy in the long term.

Government launches awaited NHS COVID-19 app

24th September: The Government has [announced](#) the launch of its long-awaited NHS COVID-19 app, and urged people across England and Wales to download it in order to boost the effectiveness of the UK’s Track and Trace capabilities. The app, which makes use of Bluetooth technology for contact tracing, contains features such as risk alerts based on postcode district, QR check-ins at venues, symptom checkers and

test booking portals. Businesses are required to display the official NHS QR code posters from today so people can check-in at different premises with the app.

This comes as the Chancellor announced a total £12 billion spend on NHS Track and Trace efforts since the pandemic began. The app was downloaded over one million times in the first 24 hours of its release.

Devolved Nations

- **24th September:** The Welsh Government **announced** a further £84.6 million for bus services to provide more services to meet the challenges of social distancing measures.
- **24th September:** The Scottish Government **announced** a new £24 billion infrastructure plan to boost jobs and stimulate the country's green economic recovery from Covid-19.
- **24th September:** Over 600 students are self-isolating following a major outbreak of COVID-19 at Glasgow University, where 172 students tested positive this week.
- **24th September:** The Northern Irish Government **announced** the allocation of £165 million in COVID-19 response funding for business, infrastructure, culture, schools and local councils.

Other news

- **24th September:** The Government **announced** the removal of Denmark, Iceland, Curaçao and Slovakia from the list of travel corridors for UK arrivals, following an uptick in Covid-19 cases in those countries.
- **22nd September:** Research from Public Health England has **suggested** that people infected with both COVID-19 and the flu between January and April were more at risk of severe illness and death.
- **18th September:** In line with the Withdrawal Agreement, the Government has **received** £31 million in funding from the EU to assist with the UK's Covid response.

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