

## COVID-19 – Weekly Round-up

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### Friday 6 November 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.

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### Headlines

- Month-long lockdown begins in England
- Furlough scheme extended to March
- Brexit party to rebrand as anti-lockdown party
- Mass testing pilot to take place in Liverpool
- Government accelerates regulatory reviews of vaccines
- Government provides funding for green innovation

### Month-long lockdown begins in England

**31<sup>st</sup> October:** On Saturday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson [announced](#) that England will enter a second national lockdown from 5<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

The decision comes as incidences, reproduction rate and hospitalisations from COVID-19 continue to rise around the country, despite the Government's implementation of localised lockdown restrictions in areas with the highest infection rates.

Under the latest rules, individuals will be required to stay at home and may only leave for specific reasons including education, work (if working from home is impossible), outdoor exercise, medical reasons, shopping for essential goods, and to care for vulnerable people. Pubs, bars and restaurants have been forced to close, except for takeaway and delivery services. Overnight stays have also been banned. The current lockdown is scheduled to last until 2<sup>nd</sup> December, with regions then planned to return to the previous localised tiered system of restrictions. However, the Prime Minister inferred that this date may be subject to change.

Boris Johnson's announcement of the the national lockdown on Saturday is thought to have followed a leak from the highest echelons of Government. The decision, which is seen as a substantial U-turn for a government determined to follow a localised "Tier-based" approach, is thought to be based off projections that saw the NHS overwhelmed by coronavirus patients by Christmas if further action was not taken. The projections were only made publicly available due to the leak, which will be a cause for alarm for many and reduce faith in Government transparency.

### ***More than 30 Conservative MPs vote against national lockdown measures***

**4<sup>th</sup> November:** On Wednesday, Parliament **voted** on legislation to implement the Government's four-week national lockdown, which passed despite more than 30 Conservative MPs voting against national lockdown measures. The rebels mainly stemmed from the libertarian wing of the party. Chairman of the 1922 Committee, Graham Brady, is a vocal critic of lockdown measures and claimed that Number 10's approach was "reaching too far into the private and family lives" of constituents. Former Prime Minister Theresa May notably abstained on the motion and claimed in an address to the House of Commons that the lockdown will "shatter livelihoods".

### ***International quarantine requirements***

**5<sup>th</sup> November:** For the duration of the national lockdown period, national and international travel is **restricted** from England except in limited circumstances, such as for work or education purposes. Since the announcement, the Government has been notably quiet on the subject of international quarantine requirements, and while travel corridors are still **inplace**, several countries have been removed from the travel corridor list in the past week. Cyprus and Lithuania were removed on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November, and Germany and Sweden are scheduled to be removed on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> November, with the list likely to diminish further in coming weeks.

### ***Furlough scheme extended to March***

**6<sup>th</sup> November:** On Thursday afternoon, the Chancellor Rishi Sunak **announced** a five-month extension to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme – commonly referred to as the furlough scheme - out until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Employers can continue to claim 80% of their usual monthly wage costs for furloughed employees, capped at £2,500 per individual per month.

The Government also announced that increased support will be provided through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, with the third grant between November and January being calculated at 80% of average trading profits, up to a maximum of £7,500.

As a result, the Job Retention Bonus announced in September as part of the Chancellor's Winter Plan will now fall away and be redeployed at the appropriate time.

This reversal in policy was justified by the Chancellor on the basis that the economic effects of COVID-19 are much longer lasting for businesses than the restrictions themselves. The furlough extension will be reviewed in January to

examine whether employers will be asked to increase their contributions beyond current requirements, which only include National Insurance and employer pension payments.

In order to finance the Chancellor's latest policy, the Bank of England will **purchase** £150 billion of Government bonds, in addition to the £100 billion cash injection the Bank agreed with the Government in June. Investors had initially expected a £100 billion boost to quantitative easing on Thursday, however Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey is **reported** to support "going big".

### **Brexit party to rebrand as anti-lockdown party**

**2<sup>nd</sup> November:** The Brexit party has **launched** an application to the Electoral Commission to rebrand itself as Reform UK, in a bid to become the voice of the UK's anti-lockdown movement. In an announcement by the party's leader Nigel Farage, and chairman Richard Tice, the pair stated it was "time to redirect our energies" towards developing a new strategy for tackling the coronavirus so that the UK can "learn to live with it, not hide in fear of it". Farage and his party recommend the "Great Barrington Declaration" as an alternative to current measures, which would involve lifting lockdown restrictions on young and healthy people while focusing protection measures on the elderly.

While a party marketed towards lockdown skeptics may seem to be a narrow agenda, the Brexit party similarly started as a single-issue party, but is thought to have been instrumental in creating a new radical-right. Nigel Farage is known for his political antennae, and he has picked up on the sincere lack of lockdown opposition in Parliament, while anti-mask demonstrations and public skepticism continue to grow.

### **Mass testing pilot to take place in Liverpool**

**3<sup>rd</sup> November:** This week, the government launched its pilot scheme of its rapid testing initiative, "Operation Moonshot". From Friday, people living in Liverpool are to be regularly **tested** for COVID-19, whether they present symptoms or not. This pilot scheme is a first for a "whole city approach" to testing. Hundreds of thousands of new, rapid turnaround tests have been deployed that can produce results within one hour without the need for a laboratory. The tests will be provided via a partnership between Liverpool City Council, NHS Test and Trace and the Ministry of Defence, with logistical support from the Armed Forces. The pilot is intended to help inform a blueprint for how mass testing can be achieved and rolled out across other UK cities, in hopes of becoming the route out of lockdown.

The UK has already **awarded** contracts worth £1 billion to companies providing the rapid testing, with many of the technologies provided through these contracts feeding into the Liverpool trial. However, scientists have voiced concern about the accuracy of the lateral flow tests, which are being used as part of the pilot, due to their tendency to miss cases of active infection. Delays in assessing technologies produced in the UK have also led to additional

frustration around the Government's awarding of contracts to overseas companies during a time when many British businesses are struggling.

### Government accelerates regulatory reviews of vaccines

**30<sup>th</sup> October:** The UK's drug regulator has **begun** an acceleration of reviews of two COVID-19 vaccines under development by Pfizer and AstraZeneca, in an attempt to get the first successful vaccine approved as quickly as possible. The Pfizer vaccine is undergoing a rolling review which allows regulators to see clinical data in real time, as well as engage in discussions with companies around ongoing trials and manufacturing processes, so that approvals can be granted more quickly. A spokesperson for AstraZeneca confirmed that the Astra-Oxford vaccine is also under an expedited review. However, this comes at the same time as chief investigator of the Oxford vaccine, Professor Andrew Pollard, cast doubt on the likelihood of a timely vaccine, **stating** that there is only a "small chance" the Oxford vaccine would be ready by Christmas.

### Government provides funding for green innovation

**4<sup>th</sup> November:** The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and Innovate UK have **announced** £134 million of Government investment to help businesses "build back greener". At present, 1,069 clean growth projects have been identified for funding to help them develop new technologies, secure and create jobs, drive productivity and tackle climate change. Each business will receive up to £175,000 in funding. The £134 million comes from Innovate UK's Sustainable Innovation Fund, which was launched as part of the £550 million package of measures to support innovative SMEs' responses to COVID-19.

### Devolved Nations

- **29<sup>th</sup> October:** First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon **delivered** an address to the Scottish Parliament, confirming details of Scotland's new tiered COVID-19 restrictions which came into effect on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> November.
- **28<sup>th</sup> October:** The Scottish Government has **published** a new 'NHS Winter Preparedness Plan' designed to support the Scottish Health Service over the winter period.
- **28<sup>th</sup> October:** Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford has **outlined** simpler national restrictions that will follow Wales' current "firebreak" lockdown.

### Other News

- **2<sup>nd</sup> November:** On Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October, NHS Test and Trace's testing capacity **surpassed** 500,000 tests, as the NHS prepares to meet demand over the winter period.

- **5<sup>th</sup> November:** Scientists at Rockefeller University in New York have [found](#) the strongest evidence yet that people who recover from COVID-19 may mount a faster and more effective defence against the virus if they encounter it again.

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