

## Parliament to meet

I am pleased that Parliament is to meet today and in the following days, with new rules encouraging participation from remote locations. I had made an early request for our return, and am delighted the Speaker has been so active in securing a way of bringing it about.

In the meantime there have been various routes to make points to Ministers and to contribute to the policy debate, as I have been doing.

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## COVID-19: Business 'support finder' tool and ventilator specifications

The Government has launched a new 'support finder' tool which will help businesses and self-employed people across the UK to quickly and easily determine what financial support is available to them.

For more details, please visit this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/business-coronavirus-support-finder>

The Government has produced an update to the specification for any manufacturers seeking to make ventilators.

For more details please visit this link:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/specification-for-ventilators-to-be-used-in-uk-hospitals-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak?utm\\_source=284796da-db81-4c5e-b732-7a20710333bf&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/specification-for-ventilators-to-be-used-in-uk-hospitals-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak?utm_source=284796da-db81-4c5e-b732-7a20710333bf&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

If your business is able to support, please register that capability here:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-support-from-business>

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## Dear Constituent

The government has decided to continue the lock down for another three weeks. They are afraid that an early relaxation would allow the virus to spread more rapidly again, losing some or all the gains seen in fewer patients going to hospital in recent days.

In response to past representations by myself and others the government is now doing more work on a timetable for getting more people back to work. It is unfortunate there may be no early arrival of a vaccine to protect the population in large numbers, nor even an early medical agreement on a treatment which makes it much more likely patients with severe cases on Covid 19 survive. For that reason we need to plan to live with the virus whilst still being able to run our economy at a reasonable level of output with more people in jobs and more companies generating revenue than today.

I have suggested to the government that a back to work plan should encompass new ways of working with better protection for employees. Office based businesses could encourage much more homeworking, with limited numbers of staff in the main office observing social distancing. Factories and warehouses need to operate at levels that do not require staff to be close together, with additional automation where necessary. Any business staff in touch with the public should be given protective screens or personal protective clothing suitable to the risk level.

We should continue to give strong advice to at risk groups to stay at home, and do more to support them with remote technology to ensure deliveries and safe social contact. The protection of care homes needs more work. I supported moves to ensure all patients to be discharged from hospitals back to care homes should be tested. We need to avoid introducing the virus into a home through the return of a patient. I am pleased the government has now promised to do this.

Yesterday saw the Furlough scheme to subsidise employment which I have long championed open for claims. It is vital as many jobs as possible are saved by this means, to keep them in being until their employers can re open and afford the wages again. The self employed package still excludes some groups who deserve support and is still on the low side so I am asking the Treasury to look again at it.

Let us hope the positive trends in cases and deaths continues as a reward for the sacrifice many are making. On the latest figures too many people are still dying, but our death rate in relation to total population is still well below Belgium, Spain and Italy who have suffered particularly badly. The next few days are important. If the rate of death and of new patients to hospital continues to decline we should be able to start to relax controls. In the meantime I am conscious there are pressing needs like getting more dentists to work on emergency treatment, and tackling some of the backlog of medical appointments that were cancelled or delayed to make way for Covid 19 patients.

I would like to say another big thank you to all of you who have volunteered to help in so many ways. Some are delivering food parcels, some tackling loneliness of those staying at home alone, some are making protective clothing. I also wish to thank all who are going to work to care for people, to treat people in hospital, to provide us with food and to keep basic services and deliveries going.

Yours sincerely

## **Job Retention Scheme open for claims**

I have received this update from HMRC:

Dear Sir John,

Employers in your constituency can now claim online for a grant for 80% of their furloughed employees' salaries, up to a maximum of £2,500 per employee, per month, through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. This scheme will be open until the end of June 2020.

### **Before employers in your constituency claim, they need to:**

- Read all the available guidance on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) before applying;
- Gather all the information and the precise calculations they need before starting their application. If they have a payroll provider, they will be able to help them with this;
- Employers can find out more in the [calculation guidance](#) where they can access a claim calculator. This will allow them to check their claim for most employees who are paid the same amount each pay period;
- Access our simple, step-by-step guide on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) for additional help.

To receive payment by 30 April, employers will need to complete an application by 22 April.

We expect to be very busy so we would ask that employers only call us if they can't find what they need on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) or through our webchat service – this will leave our lines open for those who need our help most.

### **After employers have made a claim, they should:**

- Keep a note or print-out of their claim reference number – they won't receive a confirmation SMS or email;
- Retain all records and calculations for their claims, in case we need to contact them;
- Expect to receive the funds six working days after they apply, provided they claim matches records that we hold for their PAYE scheme. Employers should not contact us before this time.
- Ask their furloughed employees not to contact us directly – we will not be able to provide them with any information on individual claims.

HMRC will check claims made through the scheme and will act to protect public money against anyone who makes a claim using dishonest or fraudulent information.

We also encourage all employers to protect their own credentials and please

be aware of potential scammers and opportunist criminal activity.

I'd be very grateful if you could share this information with employers in your constituency.

I wish you well at this challenging time,

**Jim Harra**

First Permanent Secretary and Chief Executive, HMRC

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## **More money for Councils**

I have received this update from the Government:

Dear John

### **SUPPORTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN RESPONDING TO COVID-19**

Local government is an essential part of our response to Covid-19 and has mobilised to help us keep the country moving, protect the NHS and save lives, whilst delivering social care and other vital public services.

I announced on Saturday another £1.6 billion in funding to support local authorities in delivering essential frontline services during the Covid-19 pandemic. With this funding councils can continue to provide support to those who need it most, including getting rough sleepers off the street and supporting new shielding programmes for clinically extremely vulnerable people. It will also provide assistance for our heroic public health workforce and fire and rescue services.

This new funding is in addition to the £1.6 billion announced on 19th March and means that local authorities will have received over £3.2 billion, an unprecedented level of additional financial support in recent times. This will also help councils to continue delivering vital services from adult social care and children's services to waste collection. The grant will be un-ringfenced, recognising local authorities are best placed to decide how to meet the major Covid-19 service pressures in their local area. I will write out with confirmation of individual allocations as soon as practicable.

I have been meeting regularly with council leaders and officers from across the sector so I can understand their local challenges, including the additional costs and pressures on their finances they are facing as a result of the current crisis. The package I have announced today responds to these and demonstrates my commitment to making sure councils, including upper and lower tier authorities, have the resources they need to support their communities through this challenging time.

Alongside providing additional funding, I have also taken a number of measures to support immediate cash flow concerns, most recently deferring £2.6 billion in local authority payments of the Central Share of retained business rates and making an upfront payment of £850m in social care grants this month.

In summary the Government's package of support for local areas is:

- • £3.2 billion in funding for local authorities to deliver essential frontline services
- • £2.6 billion in deferred local authority payments of the Central Share of retained business rates
- • £850 million upfront payment in social care grants this month
- • 250,000 food boxes delivered so far to help shield those who are clinically vulnerable – funded directly by central Government
- • £20 billion in business rates support and grant funding to help businesses manage their cashflow
- • £10,000 grants for businesses eligible for Small Business Rates Relief and Rural Rates Relief
- • Up to £25,000 for businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors, subject to their rateable value
- • £3.2 million of initial emergency funding for local authorities to support rough sleepers, provided before the un-ringfenced funding
- • £2 million additional funding to bolster domestic abuse helplines and online support

And this very comprehensive and coherent support comes on top of the 2020/21 financial settlement, the most generous for local government in a decade.

I will continue to work with councils over the coming weeks to support them as they lead the national effort at the local level.

I am extremely grateful to everyone working in local government, from care and social workers to refuse collectors, for the role they have played in ensuring we keep the country moving during this period. They are the unsung heroes of the coronavirus response and the funding package announced today recognises that the work our local councils undertake has never been more vital.

**RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP**