

## Letter to Home Office (23 April 2020)

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- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

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## New measures to protect UK high street from aggressive rent collection and closure

- Government to introduce temporary new measures to safeguard the UK high street against aggressive debt recovery actions during the coronavirus pandemic
- statutory demands and winding up petitions issued to commercial tenants to be temporarily voided and changes to be made to the use of Commercial Rent Arrears Recovery, building on measures already introduced in the Coronavirus Act
- landlords and investors asked to work collaboratively with high street businesses unable to pay their bills during COVID-19 pandemic

High street shops and other companies under strain will be protected from aggressive rent collection and asked to pay what they can during the coronavirus pandemic, the Business Secretary has set out today (23 April 2020).

The majority of landlords and tenants are working well together to reach agreements on debt obligations, but some landlords have been putting tenants under undue pressure by using aggressive debt recovery tactics.

To stop these unfair practices, the government will temporarily ban the use of statutory demands (made between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2020) and winding up petitions presented from Monday 27 April, through to 30 June, where a company cannot pay its bills due to coronavirus. This will help ensure these companies do not fall into deeper financial strain. The measures will be included in the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill, which the Business Secretary Alok Sharma set out earlier this month.

Government is also laying secondary legislation to provide tenants with more

breathing space to pay rent by preventing landlords using Commercial Rent Arrears Recovery (CRAR) unless they are owed 90 days of unpaid rent.

This will further safeguard the high street and millions of jobs by helping to protect them from permanent closure during this time. However, while landlords are urged to give their tenants the breathing space needed, the government calls on tenants to pay rent where they can afford it or what they can in recognition of the strains felt by commercial landlords too.

Business Secretary, Alok Sharma, said:

In this exceptional time for the UK, it is vital that we ensure businesses are kept afloat so that they can continue to provide the jobs our economy needs beyond the coronavirus pandemic.

Our unprecedented package of support can help commercial landlords, including through the recent expansion of the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans Scheme.

I know that like all businesses they are under pressure, but I would urge them to show forbearance to their tenants. I am also taking steps to ensure the minority of landlords using aggressive tactics to collect their rents can no longer do so while the COVID-19 emergency continues.

The temporary emergency measures are designed to acknowledge the pressures landlords are facing while encouraging cooperation in the spirit of fair commercial practice. They also come on top of a substantial package of business support measures, including a moratorium on evictions for commercial tenants for at least a 3-month period.

Communities Secretary, Robert Jenrick, said:

During this period of significant disruption, we are doing everything we can to ensure that commercial tenants are as well placed as possible to get back to business from the pandemic.

We understand that landlords are facing their own very serious pressures and are concerned about their position with lenders. We are working with banks and investors to seek ways to address these issues and guide the whole sector through the pandemic.

Chief Executive of the British Retail Consortium, Helen Dickinson OBE, said:

Rents are a huge burden for retailers that must be paid even where shops are closed. We have raised this problem with government and today's announcement protects firms who – during these extraordinary times – are unable to meet their rent obligations.

We thank Alok Sharma for his swift action, which will give retailers some vital relief and help safeguard millions of jobs all across the country. We look forward to the finer details, however it is clear government is listening and willing to act.

Chief Executive of UK Hospitality, Kate Nicholls, said:

This is a very helpful and pragmatic response from the Secretary of State and will give hospitality businesses some very valuable breathing room.

Many businesses in our sector have no revenue whatsoever coming in, so paying rents has been out of the question for some. This extra space will allow businesses to survive and to find a way to work with landlords. If social distancing measures are to be in place for some time, as we now believe they will, this measure may need to be extended to ensure that businesses can survive.

These new emergency measures come on top of the government's support package for business and workers during the economic emergency:

- the [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) where small and large employers will be eligible to apply for a government grant of 80% of workers' salaries up to £2,500 a month, backdated to March 1 and available for at least 3 months, with first grants to be paid within weeks
- a deferral of the next quarter of VAT payments for firms, until the end of June – representing a £30 billion injection into the economy
- £330 billion worth of government backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses
- a business rates holiday which is worth over £9.5 billion to business across the UK
- small business grants and grants for retail, hospitality and leisure

Under these measures, any winding-up petition that claims that the company is unable to pay its debts must first be reviewed by the court to determine why. The law will not permit petitions to be presented, or winding-up orders made, where the company's inability to pay is the result of COVID-19.

The new legislation to protect tenants will be in force until 30 June, and can be extended in line with the moratorium on commercial lease forfeiture.

Legislation will also be brought forward to prevent landlords using commercial rent arrears recovery (CRAR) unless 90 days or more of unpaid rent is owed.

The Financial Conduct Authority, the Financial Reporting Council and the Prudential Regulatory Authority have also issued a joint statement encouraging investors and lenders to take into account the issues arising directly from the COVID-19 pandemic in responding to potential breaches of covenants.

Emergency legislation already introduced by government includes a suspension of forfeiture rights, which prevents all commercial tenants from being removed from their properties until 30 June. The government has also announced [new insolvency measures](#) which will provide further support to businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

More information is available on the [government's support and guidance for businesses affected by coronavirus](#).

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## [Letter to the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Fire Services Management Committee](#)

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## MHRA approves COVID-19 vaccine trial in 7 working days

In our commitment to prioritising potential treatments for COVID-19, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) approved the COVID-19 Oxford Vaccine Trial request to trial a vaccine to prevent COVID-19 in a little over one working week.

The application was made on 18 March, and on 26 March the MHRA gave the COVID-19 Oxford Vaccine Trial the green light. The procedures for tailored scientific advice and guidance, and a speedy approval process, are part of MHRA's pledge to [prioritise clinical trial applications submitted for COVID-19](#).

Scientists in Oxford started working on designing a vaccine early in January 2020, and have now identified one to start the first clinical testing phase. If the vaccine is proven to be safe and effective in this and larger trials, it could protect people and help save lives.

The project is supported by [a joint funding scheme](#) between the [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) and [National Institute for Health Research \(NIHR\)](#).

The MHRA is dedicated to supporting researchers and all those who are working on a response to COVID-19. We are providing scientific advice and informal guidance for all aspects of product development.

**Science Minister, Amanda Solloway, said:**

"The government is doing all it can to support the science and research community who are working tirelessly to identify a vaccine to combat coronavirus.

"Accelerating UK vaccine development, including clinical testing, will ensure that any successfully developed vaccine can be made available to people as soon as possible.

**Dr June Raine, Chief Executive for the MHRA, said:**

"The dedicated scientific advice and rapid approval of this important clinical trial demonstrate our commitment to working together to find a vaccine for this pandemic.

“We support the development and expedite authorisation of clinical trials for COVID-19 treatments, whilst maintaining our high regulatory standards to ensure the safety of people involved in the trials.

“Protecting health and saving lives is at the forefront of our work, and we are committed to enabling the development of safe and effective vaccines and treatments for this virus.’

## **MHRA prioritises trial applications for COVID-19**

Clinical trials applications can be submitted directly to the MHRA Clinical Trial Helpline by emailing [clintrialhelpline@mhra.gov.uk](mailto:clintrialhelpline@mhra.gov.uk), in parallel to the normal Common European Submission Portal (CESP) route, so we can begin work as soon as possible. We then liaise closely with any applicants to ensure it's managed as efficiently as possible.

More information on [clinical trials applications for coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

We are currently offering an expedited review and approvals process for COVID-19 clinical trials, aiming to complete our review in a week.

We are also able to provide advice on any aspect of a clinical trial. Manufacturers, researchers and other regulators who are working on a response to COVID-19 can email or call our Clinical Trials Unit on [clintrialhelpline@mhra.gov.uk](mailto:clintrialhelpline@mhra.gov.uk) or 020 3080 6456.