

Environment Minister's letter to the waste sector on the impact of coronavirus

To those working in the waste sector,

As a nation we are undoubtedly going through one of the greatest health challenges we have faced in a generation, and I want to pay tribute to all of you who are working in such challenging times to protect the environment, local amenity and people's health – your work is vital.

The Government has taken some unprecedented steps; instructing people to stay at home, to protect our NHS and save lives. However, there are many key workers, like yourselves, who are crucial to the health of our country. I am writing to thank you for the vital service that you are delivering. To thank you for keeping waste moving. Maintaining the rates of black bag rubbish collection, working behind the scenes in recycling centres, treatment plants, energy recovery centres and disposal sites despite all the challenges that Coronavirus brings.

As a country we are all facing challenges and I know that you are feeling these too – staff absences, social distancing, a drop off in commercial waste and an increase in household waste. Some of you have had to take difficult decisions to furlough staff or close down your operations. But you have also responded, adapted and maintained an excellent level of service where you have been able which protects public health and is crucial in keeping our society and economy going.

I also appreciate the cooperative spirit with which you are approaching the situation in such testing times. I know you are looking at ways you can work together and have been an invaluable help to us in Government, feeding back important information on the impact of the outbreak. In Government we will continue to do whatever we can to help you. The Government has published guidance on personal protection equipment (PPE) and social distancing at work to provide reassurance for you so that when you're doing your job, you can do so safely.

We have also published guidance to help local authorities prioritise waste services. We know what an excellent and crucial job is being done to keep services running, but due to the impact of the outbreak we understand the additional pressures that you are facing. Our guidance provides advice on how services can be prioritised and underlines how critical black bag household waste collections are to protect people's health and the environment.

Workers in the waste sector may not get the headlines that other workers do during this challenging time, but I want you to know that you are not forgotten within Government. I am enormously grateful for all you are doing, and will continue to do, and proud of your commitment to the services you

provide.

Thank you.

Rebecca Pow MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment

Secretary of State hosts virtual roundtable with NI business leaders

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- 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.

Furlough scheme cut-off date extended to 19 March

- eligibility cut-off date for Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme extended to 19 March 2020
- the change will mean thousands more workers can be furloughed
- scheme expected to be fully operational next week

Under the scheme announced by Chancellor Rishi Sunak last month, employers can claim a grant covering 80% of the wages for a furloughed employee, subject to a cap of £2,500 a month.

To qualify and to protect against fraudulent claims, individuals originally had to be employed on February 28 2020.

But following a review of the delivery system and to ensure the scheme helps as many people as possible, new guidance published today has confirmed the eligibility date has been extended to March 19 2020– the day before the scheme was announced.

Employers can claim for furloughed employees that were employed and on their

PAYE payroll on or before 19 March 2020. This means that the employee must have been notified to HMRC through an RTI submission notifying payment in respect of that employee on or before 19 March 2020.

This change makes the scheme more generous while keeping the substantial fraud risks under control and is expected to benefit over 200,000 employees.

HMRC have been working at pace to delivering the scheme, which is due to be fully operational next week.

The CJRS is part of an unprecedented package of measures announced by the Chancellor to protect individuals and businesses.

This includes significant support for the self employed and immediate steps to give businesses access to cash to pay its rent, salaries or suppliers.

If any employer now thinks they are eligible for support, they can find out more [here](#).

British Ambassador to Turkeminstan's interview with Arzuw News

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Joint statement on safety of journalists and access to information during the COVID-19 crisis

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the undersigned chairs and members of the Group of Friends on the Safety/Protection of Journalists are calling on all states to protect journalists' and media workers' safety, safeguard a free and independent media and ensure unhindered access to information, both

online and offline.

Free, independent and pluralistic media play an indispensable role in informing the public during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Everyone has the right to comprehensible, accessible, timely and reliable information concerning the nature and level of the threat COVID-19 poses to their health, allowing them to follow evidence-based guidance on how to stay safe.

Public health needs public trust. Trust is crucial to achieving adequate support for and compliance by the general public with efforts by governments to help curb the spread of the virus.

Trust cannot be achieved without transparency and accountability provided and guaranteed by a free media. Conversely, free and independent media has an important role in pushing back against disinformation by providing access to accurate, fact-based and verified information. In this context, it is essential that governments and private entities address disinformation, foremost, by providing reliable information themselves.

We see with great concern an increase in restricting measures taken by States that disproportionately limit the right to freedom of expression and impede journalists and media workers from reporting on the COVID-19 crisis. Arrests, persecution and harassment against journalists and media workers, especially women, as well as smear campaigns to discredit their work and the expulsion of foreign journalists due to their COVID-19 coverage or the criminalisation of alleged misinformation, online and offline, may constitute human rights violations. There should be no place for impunity in democratic societies.

Internet access is essential to ensuring that information reaches those affected by the virus. Governments should end any internet shutdowns, ensure the broadest possible access to internet services, and take steps to bridge digital divides, including the gender gap.

Furthermore, journalists and media workers are subjected to significant physical and psychological risk by being at the frontline reporting on the COVID-19 crisis. They are working under extremely challenging conditions, partly because of lack of sanitary precautions and training, but also because of psychological stress linked to the rapidly evolving situation. Declarations of state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic should not be used as a basis to limit freedom of expression and constrain the working environment of journalists and media workers. It is crucial for societies and the international community as a whole that governments preserve a free, safe and enabling environment for journalists and media workers and ensure that they can report on COVID-19 and inform about responses and consequences without undue interference.

We welcome a range of initiatives aimed at supporting journalists' and media workers' safety in the light of COVID-19 undertaken by international organisations, such as UNESCO and civil society, media associations as well as social media companies. Projects to strengthen media in developing countries in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, such as those undertaken by the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication, are

particularly welcome.

We also welcome the joint statement of 19 March published by David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media; and Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights as well as the press release and statements made by Moez Chakchouk, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, published on 27 March.

We agree with their call that governments must be making exceptional efforts to protect the work of journalists at a moment of public health emergency and we remain fully committed to protecting media freedom and safety of journalists at this critical time.

Signed by Austria, France, Greece, Lithuania and Sweden as the chairs and co-chairs, respectively, of the Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists in New York, Geneva, Vienna (OSCE) and Paris.

Annex

List of co-signatories, members in any of the four Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists at UNESCO in Paris, the United Nations in New York and Geneva and the OSCE in Vienna, in alphabetical order:

Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Morocco, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay