**CORONA VIRUS INFORMATION FOR BUSINESSES**

**Business support measures** The Chancellor has set out a package of measures to support public services, people and business through disruption caused by COVID-19. Measures to support businesses include:

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- **A Coronavirus Job Retention scheme**
- **Deferring VAT and Income Tax payments**
- **A Statutory Sick Pay relief package for small and medium sized businesses (SMEs)**
- **A 12-month business rates holiday for all retail, hospitality, leisure and nursery businesses in England**
- **Small business grant funding of £10,000 for all business in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief**
- **Grant funding of £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with property with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000**
- **Bounce Back Loan for smaller businesses**
- **The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5 million for SMEs through the British Business Bank**
- **A new lending facility from the Bank of England to help support liquidity among larger firms, helping them bridge coronavirus disruption to their cash flows through loans**
- **The HMRC Time To Pay scheme**

Full details of support are at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses on GOV.UK. The guidance for employers and business https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19 on COVID-19 can also be found on GOV.UK and will be updated in line with the changing situation.

**Business Interruption Insurance** Businesses that have cover for both pandemics and government-ordered closure should be covered, as the government and insurance industry confirmed on 17 March 2020 that advice to avoid pubs, theatres etc is sufficient to make a claim as long as all other terms and conditions are met. Insurance policies differ significantly, so businesses are encouraged to check the terms and conditions of their specific policy and contact their providers. The government is pushing for insurers to pay where cover against diseases is included and see ABI website at https://www.abi.org.uk/news/news-articles/2020/03/statement-on-business-insurance-and-coronavirus/

**Business Rates and cash grants** The Chancellor’s announcement included the following measures:

- Giving all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England a **100% business rates holiday** for the next 12 months
- **Increasing grants** to small businesses eligible for Small Business Rate Relief from £3,000 to £10,000

- Providing further **£25,000 grants** to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses operating from smaller premises, with a rateable value over £15,000 and below £51,000
- For nurseries in England that pay business rates, there will be a business rates holiday for the 2020/21 tax year. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses about support for nursery businesses that pay business rates.

The Government has issued guidance on expanded retailer discount at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-rates-retail-discount-guidance and further guidance and details of business grant arrangements is awaited and when available grants to small businesses will be paid by the Council. For businesses that pay business rates and are eligible to apply for business grants, there is now the availability to apply for these on line – please see the following for further details: **https://richmond.gov.uk/services/business/services_for_business/business_rates/business_rates_budget_statement** Please note The Chancellor has announced that the retail, hospitality and leisure discount will apply to estate agents, lettings agencies and bingo halls that have closed as a result of Covid-19 measures. Many high street businesses that have closed due to Covid-19 will now be exempt from business rates. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has revised the guidance for the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Discount to reflect these changes.

Richmond Council is working hard to put in place the measures allowing this support to be available to local businesses as soon as they can and information is updated at Business Rates pages https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/business/services_for_business/business_rates as soon as possible. This year's Business Rates bills were issued prior to the Chancellor's announcements and the Council will be issuing further information on how these should be treated.

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**Top-up grants** represent £617 million aimed at ongoing fixed property-related costs. Local authorities have been asked to prioritise businesses in shared spaces, regular market traders, small charity properties that would meet the criteria for Small Business Rates Relief, and bed and breakfasts that pay council tax rather than business rates, but local authorities may choose to make payments to other businesses based on local economic need, but funding distribution will be at the discretion of local authorities. Businesses must be small, under 50 employees, and they must also be able to demonstrate that they have seen a significant drop of income due to Coronavirus restriction measures. There will be three levels of grant payments. The maximum will be £25,000. There will also be grants of £10,000 and local authorities will have discretion to make payments of any amount under £10,000. It will be for councils to adapt this approach to local circumstances."

**Claiming Statutory Sick Pay and/or benefits if self-employed** - Those who are not eligible for Statutory Sick Pay, i.e. the self-employed or people earning below the Lower Earnings Limit of £118 per week, can now more easily make a claim for Universal Credit or Contributory Employment and Support Allowance. For the duration of the outbreak, the Government has suspended the universal credit minimum income floor for those with COVID-19 or who are self-isolating, ensuring self-employed claimants will receive support. Read more on GOV.UK https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19

**Support for self-employed** The Chancellor has announced that self-employed people facing financial difficulties will be able to have 80% of their monthly wages covered by the Government**.** Support will be capped at £2,500 per month and will initially last three months. It will be calculated using average monthly profits over last three financial years. The scheme will only be open to those who are already self-employed and have a self-assessment tax return for 2019 and it will apply to those with trading profits up to £50,000 a year. The Chancellor has said he and his colleagues hope people will be able to "access" the scheme "no later than June" **https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/self-employment-income-support-scheme/**

**Loan schemes** A Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme is being delivered by the British Business Bank, with the aim of supporting the continued provision of finance to UK businesses during the COVID-19 outbreak. The government will provide lenders with a guarantee of 80% on each loan (subject to a per-lender cap) to give lenders further confidence in continuing to provide finance to SMEs. The government will not charge business or banks for this guarantee and the scheme will support loans of up to £5 million. Businesses can access the first 6 months of the finance interest free as the government will also cover the first 6 months of interest payments. Lenders will be banned from requesting personal guarantees on loans under £250,000 and a new scheme has been announced for larger firms not currently eligible for loans and the current loans scheme will be extended so smaller businesses can apply. **The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)** opened for applications 26th March at

https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/coronavirus-business-interruption-loan-scheme-cbils/for-businesses-and-advisors/ at https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/coronavirus-business-interruption-loan-scheme-cbils/

A number of **high street banks** are providing support/making funds available to small businesses affected by Covid-19. These include:

**Barclays** has a range of measures that can help customers impacted by COVID-19 as well as a dedicated helpline for UK Business Banking clients affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. Contact via telephone: 0800 1971 086 and at https://www.barclays.co.uk/business-banking/coronavirus/

**Halifax** has a number of options to help customers whose income has been affected by the disruption from coronavirus. These include no fees for missed payments on credit cards, loans and mortgages, payment holidays on mortgages and loans, emergency access to savings in fixed term accounts, and increases to deposit limits for mobile banking. Read more at https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/business/services_for_business/covid19_support_for_businesses

**HSBC UK** has announced a package of support for customers as they tackle the financial impact of COVID-19. They have also provided advice on how business can respond to the situation. See more at https://www.business.hsbc.uk/en-gb/gb/campaign/coronavirus

**Lloyds Banking Group** has announced how it will support UK small businesses impacted by COVID-19. Additional financial support and advice will be available to those affected. – further info at https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/Media/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/lloyds-banking-group/lloyds-banking-group-ready-to-support-uk-small-businesses-impacted-by-covid-19/

**NatWest** has pledged £5 billion working capital support extension to its successful Growth Funding Package and is also offering ongoing support and practical advice for businesses and read more at https://www.rbs.com/rbs/news/2020/03/natwest-pledges-p5bn-working-capital-support-for-smes-during-cor.html

**Bounce Back Loan** The Bounce Back Loan enables SMEs to borrow between £2,000 and £50,000 with the government guaranteeing 100% of the loan with no fees or interest to pay for the first 12 months. Loan terms will be up to 6 years and no repayments will be due during the first 12 months. The government will work with lenders to agree a low rate of interest for the remaining period of the loan. The scheme will be delivered through a network of accredited lenders - https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-coronavirus-bounce-back-loan

**Job Retention Scheme** https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses and all UK employers will be able to access support to continue paying part of their employees' salary for those employees that would otherwise have been laid off during this crisis.

**Corporate Financing Facility** where larger firms will be offered support at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses where the Bank of England will buy short term debt from larger companies. This will support companies affected by a short-term funding squeeze and enable finance for short-term liabilities.

**New small business grant fund scheme** On 2 May, the Government announced the launch of a discretionary fund set up to accommodate certain small businesses previously outside the scope of the business grant funds scheme, that have ongoing fixed property-related costs. The Council is waiting to receive full details and guidance from the Government on this scheme. Information and details of the application process will be published by Richmond Council as soon as it becomes available**.**

**Network Rail** is cancelling all first quarter (25 March to 23 June 2020) rent payments due from tenants in their commercial estate portfolio, providing significant relief for small businesses.

**Tax payment holidays** HMRC has set up a dedicated phone helpline to support businesses and self-employed people concerned about not being able to pay their tax due to COVID-19. Through this, businesses may be able to agree a bespoke Time to Pay arrangement.

You can call this helpline for help and advice: 0800 0159 559. Opening hours are Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, and Saturday 8am to 4pm. Information too regarding help with taxes at https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tax-helpline-to-support-businesses-affected-by-coronavirus-covid-19

**Commercial Tenants** - Government has announced that commercial tenants who cannot pay their rent because of coronavirus will be protected from eviction and these measures, included in the emergency Coronavirus Bill currently going through Parliament, will mean no business will be forced out of their premises if they miss a payment in the next 3 months
- https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-protection-for-businesses-with-ban-on-evictions-for-commercial-tenants-who-miss-rent-payments

**Prince's Trust and NatWest Relief Fund** The £5m Enterprise Relief Fund will offer grants to 18 to 30-year olds across the UK who are self-employed and/or running their own business. The initiative also offers one-to-one support and guidance - https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/coronavirus-response/enterprise-relief-fund

**Tax payment holidays** For the self-employed, Income Tax payments due in July 2020 under the self-assessment system will be deferred to January 2021; https://www.gov.uk/pay-self-assessment-tax-bill . Businesses may also be able to agree a bespoke Time to Pay arrangement; https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19#support-for-businesses-paying-tax-time-to-pay-service . VAT payments will be deferred from 20 March 2020 until 30 June 2020; https://www.gov.uk/guidance/deferral-of-vat-payments-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19 .

**Rent relief for commercial tenants** The government has announced that commercial tenants who cannot pay their rent because of coronavirus will be protected from eviction. These measures, included in the emergency Coronavirus Bill currently going through Parliament, will mean no business will be forced out of their premises if they miss a payment between 23 March and 30 June 30 2020; see https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-protection-for-businesses-with-ban-on-evictions-for-commercial-tenants-who-miss-rent-payments

**Transport for London tenant rent relief** All small and medium businesses on TfL's estate, which make up 86% of tenants, are to get 100% rent relief. This will start from start from 25 March for the next three months; https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2020/march/tfl-takes-steps-to-support-tenants

**Network Rail tenants** Network Rail/The Arch Company has published details of the £10 million Hardship Fund that will be used to cover the cost of a three-month rent free period (March to May) for independent small businesses in the retail, hospitality, leisure and overseas travel sectors, as well as others severely affected by COVID-19 - https://www.thearchco.com/existing-tenants/coronavirus-support-unit/

**Support for businesses trading internationally**
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-uk-businesses/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-uk-businesses-trading-internationally

**High street banks** Some high street banks are providing support/making funds available to SMEs affected by COVID-19 such as Bank of Ireland, Barclays, Halifax, HSBC UK, Lloyds Banking Group and NatWest

**Further information available at:-**

The FAQs highlight that with the exception of the businesses the Government ordered to close (please find the full list here: https://bit.ly/BizClose) there has been no Government ordered closure of any other business.

**Grants for sporting and community clubs**

Also we encourages local sporting clubs and community organisations to apply for a grant to help keep us active during the coronavirus pandemic. Sport England has £195 million of funding available to help its partners, clubs and community organisations cope with the impact of COVID-19:-

- A £20 million Community Emergency Fund, which is open immediately for clubs and community organisations to bid into. Grants between £300 and £10,000 are available.

- A £5 million pot for existing Sport England partners to bid into if they're facing specific financial difficulty
- £55 million to support the sector during an ongoing period of restrictions; to fund new and innovative ways to keep people active and then, when it is over, to help organisations get back to business and adjust to a different environment.
- A £115 million rollover of current funding into 2021/22 to give certainty to over 100 well established partners who play a vital role in the delivery of sport and physical activity in England.

Full details, including the application process for the new Community Emergency Fund are available here on the Sport England website https://www.sportengland.org/news/195-million-package-help-sport-and-physical-activity-through-coronavirus

**Useful links**

**General business guidance https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19**

**Covid-19 hygiene https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses/guidance-for-food-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19**

**Working safely https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19**

**Advice for employers on social distancing during coronavirus**

**Safety of your business at** https://nbcc.police.uk/news/letter-from-the-nbcc-regarding-covid-19 businesses that pay business rates and are eligible to apply for business grants, there is now the availability to apply for these on line – please see the following for further details:

**New police powers over lockdown** People breaking coronavirus lockdown rules can be arrested or fined £60 under new police powers. Introduced on Thursday with immediate effect, the new powers will give police the means to ensure people stay at home and avoid non-essential travel.

If members of the public do not comply, police may:

- Instruct them to go home, leave an area or disperse;
- Ensure parents are taking necessary steps to stop their children breaking the rules;
- Issue a fixed penalty notice of £60, which will be lowered to £30 if paid within 14 days;
- Issue a fixed penalty notice of £120 for second time offenders, doubling on each further repeat offence.

**Read more https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-police-get-power-to-issue-60-fines-or-arrest-britons-breaking-lockdown-rules-11964102**

**Hotels hostels and B & B** remain open to support key workers and vulnerable https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-hotel-accommodation-to-support-key-workers-and-vulnerable-people

**Businesses closures** Updated Government guidance on which businesses and premises should be closed at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close and https://bit.ly/FAQsStayHome
Government advice is that people can travel to and from work, but only where the work they do absolutely cannot be done from home. With the exception of the organisations covered in the link above, the Government has not required any other businesses to close. A number of constructions across London have committed to closing down their construction sites for the time being.

**Businesses staying open** Employers should facilitate their employees working from home. If your employees cannot work from home, because they operate machinery, work in construction or manufacturing or are delivering front-line services, then employees can still travel to work and of course following all Government advice re social distancing, washing of hands and not touching face, provided they are well and no one in their household is self-isolating – follow PHE/Chief Medical Officer Advice at all times.

**Further information on COVID-19 support for your business can be found on the following websites:**

- **ACAS - https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus**
- **GLA Growth Hub - https://www.growthhub.london/covid-19-coronavirus-support-for-businesses-and-employers/**