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To businesses,

We started 2021 in a way none of us envisaged nor wanted, with additional national restrictions now in place to limit the spread of the new strain of COVID-19, protect our NHS and save lives.

Before I go any further, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you on behalf of the Scottish Government for all that you have done to protect employees, reduce transmission and contribute to the national endeavour. I recognise that it has been incredibly difficult. Across the country, your support and actions have been vital to our collective efforts.

It is therefore, with genuine regret, that we have asked for even greater adherence and your continued support. As you are aware, there have been two significant developments in our fight against COVID-19. Firstly, and positively, the approval of COVID vaccines has enabled us to implement a massive rollout programme. Alongside this development, however, we now see a new, faster spreading variant of the virus.

As the First Minister has said, we now face a situation comparable to a race – between rolling out the new vaccine and the rapid spread of the new variant which is 70% more transmissible. We have prioritised the speeding up of our vaccination programme and taken immediate steps to reduce the spread of this new variant.

We are immensely grateful for your co-operation to help us suppress the virus. The law now requires people to stay at home unless leaving for essential purposes so we are now asking every business to reconsider whether there are any functions of your site operations which can be transferred to a home working environment. Where employees do need to be in work, now is the time to continue taking steps to stop transmission e.g. regular cleaning and making sure people stay 2 metres apart. We have also increased the social distancing requirements in cafeteria/rest areas from 1 to 2 metres.

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Given the importance of minimising household mixing, workers should only be entering other people's homes to carry out work where that work is absolutely essential.

Unfortunately, we reluctantly took the decision to close schools and our early learning facilities. I know this will have significant impact on your business and your employees, in both the work and home environments. May I thank you for the extensive support and flexibility you have already afforded to your employees in this situation and with other caring roles. At the end of this letter there is a link to our revised guidance covering Key Workers and the additional support available which you may find helpful.

If any of your employees are in the "shielding" category, our clear advice is that they should not go into work at all. Our Chief Medical Officer has written to those individuals directly. This letter represents a "Fit Note". Again, we are asking for your empathy and support to help us reduce the spread of the virus amongst this key category of workers.

We have also had to continue and expand the restrictions placed on the retail sector and their supply chains, hopefully for a temporary period.

I know this is not the position we wanted to be in. We are very conscious of the immense impact this is having on your business, your employees and your own wellbeing. We have already introduced a package of business and financial support working with our local authorities and enterprise agencies and I am continuing to review this, driven by business feedback, to ensure that we continue to do all that we possibly can. I have included further information on the support available below.

I know that we have asked a lot from business over the last 10 months. All your efforts have been invaluable at both sustaining as many jobs as possible, and keeping our economy running.

The First Minister has set out this week that the current restrictions will be in place until the middle of February with a further review taking place on 2 February. We commit to not keeping restrictions in place any longer than is absolutely necessary.

To enable us to emerge from this situation as soon as possible and reopen our economy, please continue to encourage and enable anyone connected to your business to report symptoms and for employers and employees to follow the public health advice. The more people who have downloaded and activated the Protect Scotland app the better we can protect and trace people.

Our economic future relies on protecting the health and wellbeing of all of Scotland. I am grateful for your continued support in working with us to overcome at what we sincerely hope is our final hurdle.



KATE FORBES

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Annex 1: Available Business Support

Information on all funds available for businesses is available on the Find Business Support website: <https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/coronavirus-advice>

Over a third of overall funding spent on Covid-19 has been spent on business support. Right now, 90% of all funding announced is live, with some of the smaller schemes due to come on stream in the coming weeks.

The Strategic Framework Business Fund is the main source of support for businesses as all non-domestic-rated businesses that are required by law to close are eligible for grants, with almost 50,000 businesses across the country currently able to apply.

Applications are made through local authorities. A business only has to apply once and they will then receive the four-weekly recurring grant for as long as they remain eligible:

- temporary closure grant - £2,000 or £3,000 (depending on rateable value) if a business is required to close by law
- business restrictions grant - £1,400 or £2,100 (depending on rateable value) if a business can remain open but is specifically required to modify its operations by law

In addition to the Strategic Framework Business Fund, there are additional funds to target financial support at those businesses and sectors that are not eligible. These are set out below.

The following targeted grant schemes are now live:

- Taxi and Private Hire Fund
- Creative Freelancer Hardship Fund
- Museums Recovery and Resilience Fund Top up
- Travelling Show People Support Fund
- Culture Collective Fund
- Youth Arts Access Fund
- Creative Communities
- Sector and Destination Operational and Market Readiness fund
- Scotland Pivotal Event Business Fund

Funds going live this month are:

- Mobile Close Contact Services Support Fund including driving instructors and hairdressers
- Newly Self-Employed Hardship Fund
- Outdoor Tourism Sector Recommissioning Fund
- Travel Agents Fund
- Wedding Sector Support Fund
- Events Industry Support Fund
- Grassroots Music Venue Stabilisation Fund
- Brewer Support Fund
- Indoor Football Centres Fund

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Funds due to go live in February are:

- Tour Operators Fund
- Visitor Attractions Fund
- Ski Centre Support Fund
- Visitor Accommodation Hostels Fund
- Large (7 or more guests) Self-Catering Grant
- Exclusive Use Grant Self-Catering

We recognise that some sectors require further support which is why a number of the above funds are now in the second round of funding including the Newly Self-Employed Hardship Fund.

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Annex 2: Links to useful information and advice for businesses and employees:

Further detail on the new restrictions can be found on the Scottish Government website at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/>.

More information on the virus and measures to stop its spread can be found at <https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

NHS 24 also has a Covid helpline 0800 028 2816 for those who do not have symptoms but who have concerns and are looking for general advice.

Further guidance that identifies categories of key workers for prioritisation on school access found on the Scottish Government website at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-re-opening-arrangements-for-january-2021/pages/children-of-keyworkers/>.

Food Standards Scotland guidance for different sectors and food related businesses and a risk assessment toolkit can be found at: [COVID-19 Guidance for Food Business Operators and Their Employees | Food Standards Scotland](#)

Guidance for schools, local authorities and parents setting out plans for a phased start to the spring term 2021: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-re-opening-arrangements-for-january-2021/pages/schools-opening-timeline/>

Parent Club Coronavirus microsite: <https://www.parentclub.scot/topics/coronavirus>

Parent club FAQ on childcare options during current restrictions: <https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/your-guide-childcare>

Breathing Space website - information and support on mental health: <https://breathingspace.scot/> or call 0800 83 85 87

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