

Robert Jenrick reaffirms support for councils in their coronavirus response

- Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP has today addressed over 300 council leaders in England
- Jenrick reaffirmed government's commitment to giving councils the support they need to contribute to the national effort
- He also confirmed a series of practical measures which will give councils greater flexibility to respond to coronavirus

The government stands ready to do whatever is necessary to support councils in their response to coronavirus, the Local Government Secretary confirmed to council leaders today (16 March 2020).

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP addressed over 300 council leaders and sector bodies in a call on the government's response to coronavirus.

He reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting councils to focus their efforts on the priority area of social care, providing vital support for vulnerable people and supporting their local economies.

He also confirmed additional military personnel will now work with Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) on their coronavirus response plans, following the initial announcement of 38 planners supporting the forums in England.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

As part of the national effort to keep the public safe and deliver essential public services, this government stands with local councils at this difficult time.

My absolute priority is to ensure they are well placed to respond to coronavirus and protect vital services, including social care.

Everyone needs to play their part to help the most vulnerable in society and support their local economy, and the government will do whatever is necessary to support these efforts.

During the call, he also reiterated the practical measures introduced by government which will give councils greater flexibility and allow them to further focus their resources on the response to coronavirus.

In addition to measures previously brought forward by the government, including the relaxation of restrictions on supermarket deliveries and the postponement of local, mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections until May next year, the government has now confirmed:

- Routine Care Quality Commission inspections will be temporarily suspended for the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak
- Ofsted will look very favourably on any requests to defer inspections because of coronavirus
- Councils will be able to use their discretion on deadlines for Freedom of Information requests
- The deadline for local government financial audits will be extended to 30 September 2020
- It will consider bringing forward legislation to remove the requirement for annual council meetings to take place in person
- It will consider bringing forward legislation to allow council committee meetings to be held virtually for a temporary period

For the latest health advice visit: [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus)

The government is working intensively with the local government sector to ensure the most vulnerable people in society are supported while protecting the local economy.

At Budget, the Chancellor set out a £12 billion package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support public services, individuals and businesses through the economic disruption caused by COVID-19.

As part of the Budget, the government committed to providing Local Authorities with £500 million to support economically vulnerable individuals and households. We expect most of this funding to be used to provide more council tax relief, either through existing Local Council Tax Support schemes, or through complementary reliefs.

The government will also increase the Business Rates retail discount to 100% for one year and expand it to the leisure and hospitality sectors, and increase the planned rates discount for pubs to £5,000. Taken together with existing small business rate relief (which provides full relief for businesses using a single property with a rateable value of £12,000 or less), an estimated 900,000 properties, or 45% of all properties in England, will receive 100% business rates relief in 2020 to 2021:

- Businesses that received the retail discount in 2019 to 2020 will be rebilled by their local authority as soon as possible
- Those businesses eligible for the newly expanded retail discount and/or the new pubs discount may need to apply to their local authority to receive the discount
- Any enquiries on eligibility for, or provision of, the reliefs should be directed to the relevant local authority
- Guidance for local authorities on the application of the expanded retail discount will be published by MHCLG by 20 March

The government will provide an additional £2.2 billion funding for local authorities to support small businesses that already pay little or no Business Rates because of Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR).

A new temporary Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, delivered by

the British Business Bank, will launch in a matter of weeks to support businesses to access bank lending and overdrafts.

The request to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is for additional non-uniform personnel to assist Local Resilience Forums to support local authority elements of COVID-19 response plans, including social care. This is in addition to the 38 already involved in helping Local Resilience Forums with local planning.

Up to 70 MOD planners and Liaison Officers have been activated to support public services, local authorities and emergency services in preparing their response to the coronavirus outbreak.