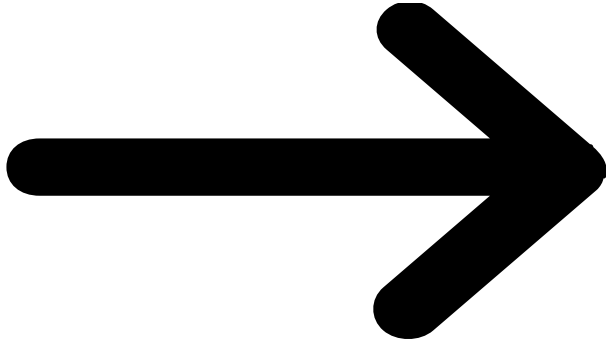


Scottish Conservatives force u-turn on business relief

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The SNP government has bowed to pressure from the Scottish Conservatives to increase support given to businesses struggling to stay afloat amid the coronavirus pandemic.

After weeks of pressure from firms all across Scotland, finance secretary Kate Forbes finally agreed to provide emergency funds by property rather than by business.

The change still falls short of the UK Government initiative, and will see £25,000 given to the first business property, with subsequent premises given 75 per cent of that.

In England and Wales, all properties get 100 per cent of the £25,000 fund.

Businesses warned that the SNP's failure to replicate the UK Government scheme would ruin Scotland's high streets and cost thousands of jobs.

And up until this morning, SNP ministers had stuck resolutely to the original plan, claiming it was superior to Westminster's system.

As recently as yesterday afternoon's daily briefing, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon was still refusing to change tack.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"The SNP government has spent weeks defending its approach in the face of severe criticism from Scotland's business community.

"Now, after pressure from the Scottish Conservatives, it has finally accepted its failings.

"These changes should have been made sooner, and that would have spared a significant amount of anxiety across Scotland's small business community, among owners and their employees.

"We've always argued that if the SNP takes a divergent approach from the rest of the UK, it has to show why this is of benefit for Scotland.

"Nicola Sturgeon wasn't able to do so in this case, and I'm glad she's finally realised her mistakes in this critical issue."