

# Support for jobs, incomes, and businesses in Wokingham

I have received this update from the Government:

Dear John,

**On 8 July, I set out the government's next step towards economic recovery and securing the UK's long-term prosperity in our Plan for Jobs. As we embark on this next phase, the latest figures demonstrate that we are continuing to support jobs, incomes, and businesses across every corner of the UK.**

- As of 02 August, the government has helped 1.2 million employers to furlough 9.6 million workers and as of 19 July has supported over 2.7 million self-employed individuals across the UK.
- As of 30 June, in England more than 7.6 million jobs had been supported under the furlough scheme and 2.2 million self-employment claims had been made; in Scotland, 736,000 jobs had been furloughed and 155,000 self-employment claims had been made; in Wales, 378,000 jobs had been furloughed and 108,000 self-employment claims had been made; and in Northern Ireland, more than 240,000 jobs had been furloughed and 76,000 self-employment claims had been made.
- As of 02 August, Bounce Back Loans have been approved to 1.1 million small businesses, and over 58,000 loan facilities have been approved through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.
- In the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors and via the Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund, as of 05 July 2020, over an estimated 902,000 business premises in England have received grants worth up to £25,000, and approximately 373,000 ratepayers will pay no business rates for the whole of 2020-21. Nurseries in England will also not pay rates for 2020-21.

**In Wokingham, the government has supported:**

- 13,500 workers furloughed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (figures up to 30 June);
- 3,600 self-employed people through the Self-employment Income Scheme (figures up to 30 June);
- 1,602 local businesses through offers of government-backed Bounce Back Loans, whilst separately supporting local businesses through offers of 71 government-backed Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme facilities (figures up to 02 August);
- 551 local business hereditament in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector and 24 nurseries that will pay no business rates this year (figures up to 05 July);

- 1,043 local business hereditament that have received cash grants of up to £25,000 (figures up to 05 July).

The government has done the right thing helping people and businesses through the pandemic and we are continuing to support them as we come out of it.

**The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP**

**Chancellor of the Exchequer**

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## [The Planning White Paper – the faults of the current system](#)

There is much to support in the Planning White Paper. I have long advocated a map based approach where each area designates which places are to be green space or farms, which can be developed for housing and which have general commercial use. Speedier decisions, Local Plans only one third of the current length and a simpler approach to an Infrastructure levy or contribution on developers are all welcome.

The present system is complex, expensive and frustrating to developers and local communities alike. It often does not allow a local community to protect areas from housing development if they are not specially designated as Green belt or SSSIs. Whatever the Local Plan says, determined and well funded developers hire expensive lawyers and keep on with appeals and changed submissions until on national appeal they overturn the local Plan and get their way with a further planning permission. Developers have to allow for many years of battles, have to pay big fees to planning consultants and lawyers and enter a variable negotiation over developer contribution.

Local Councillors often are dragged from seeking to protect a piece of land from development which is not designated for development in their approved local plan, by the appeals process. They seek a deal with a determined developer on the advice of their planning officers. They are told if they do not do a deal the Council will lose out on a Section 106 Developer Contribution Agreement, as they will lose on appeal and one may not be awarded. They are also told they may land the Council with large planning and legal fees trying to defend their local plan, only to lose and have to explain why they wasted all that money.

The Councillors who give in then become very unpopular with the local community who sometimes suggest unreasonable collaboration with the developer, when in most cases it is the run of official advice and the likelihood of loss in the system that causes the about face. The local community wants the Council to defend green spaces and keep local communities apart from continuous urban sprawl.

The government wishes to hit high targets for future housebuilding. As the White Paper acknowledges, the problem is often poor build rates despite large numbers of outstanding planning permissions. Landowners and developers can game the current system by building slowly on land with approvals in order to persuade Planning Inspectors to allow more planning permissions where the local community wants to keep green space. The government should also as part of this policy exercise improve its control of our borders and set a sustainable figure for economic migrants as past Conservative governments did or promised to do, to ease some of the development pressures.

In future blogs I will look at more of the detail of the proposals in the White Paper in preparation for putting in my response to this consultation document. I look forward to hearing from constituents in particular about how this might affect us in Wokingham and West Berkshire.

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## [Broadband provision in the Thames Valley area](#)

I have received this update from the Government:

Dear John,

Thank you for your correspondence of 18 May, in which you request details of the government's plans to improve broadband provision in the Thames Valley area. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area and I apologise for the delay.

The government has invested heavily in Berkshire, with over £5 million of central government funding allocated. Delivery is managed by our local delivery partner, Superfast Berkshire (<http://www.superfastberkshire.org.uk/>). Through their programme and through commercial intervention, 97% of premises in your constituency have access to superfast broadband – up from 61% in 2010. 70% of premises in your constituency have access to gigabit-capable connectivity.

This infrastructure is providing fast, reliable, and future-proofed technology and these figures will increase as the government strives to meet its ambitious broadband targets. However, if constituents are still suffering from slow speeds, I would recommend that they contact Superfast Berkshire who will hold the most up to date plans and timeframes for delivery.

For those premises in rural areas of your constituency, constituents may be eligible for the Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme. Businesses can claim up to £3,500 and residents can claim up to £1,500 to contribute towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable infrastructure when part of a group project. It is also possible for residents to pool their vouchers together, bringing the

cost of installing gigabit-capable connectivity down for all of those involved in the project. It is worth noting that at least two connections will be required to be eligible for the scheme. Further details can be found at the following address: <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>.

The government has made a commitment to deliver nationwide coverage of gigabit-capable networks as soon as possible. Much progress has already been made by the government, working with the telecoms industry. The government will continue to take action to remove barriers and to ensure that those in the hardest to reach areas are not left behind. For example, we have already introduced the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill into Parliament, which will make it easier for network builders to access blocks of flats where there is an absent or unresponsive landlord.

Improving our digital infrastructure will be instrumental in boosting productivity across the UK. This government will deliver on its promise to commit £5 billion of public money to make sure the hardest to reach areas are not left behind. We will do this via a so-called "Outside-In" approach, where we focus on those areas that have received less commercial investment. With this funding, we can deliver world-class connectivity in rural areas at the same time as it is deployed to our cities, to ensure that a connected, 21st century Britain is a reality for all communities across the UK.

I hope that this information is helpful.

With best wishes,

Matt Warman MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Digital Infrastructure

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## [Rescuing the health sector](#)

The last figures for UK output and incomes from the ONS take us to end May. They revealed an 18.9% drop in service activity in the 3 months to end May. Unsurprisingly eating and drinking out and the motor trade led the falls, given the lock down impact. Less predictably the other two sectors the ONS singled out as the main drivers of the collapse were health and education, down 31.4% and 37.8% respectively. Many other private sector service areas had much smaller declines thanks to working from home, using remote technology and identifying key workers to keep the service going.

Getting health and education back to where they were should be a priority now. Ministers have said they want the full range of treatments to be available again on the NHS, and to see the backlog of delayed operations and treatments being tackled. So far the NHS has struggled to get back to anything like the capacity before the virus. It has also been unable to fill

the private hospitals contracted to support it.

It is now policy to either have isolation hospitals for CV 19 or to have isolated and sealed parts of hospitals to contain CV 19 patients and those helping them. This should enable normal infection control procedures to resume for all the other work the NHS does. Some of the shortfall in work has been patients reluctant to attend medical centres and hospitals for fear of catching the virus when they already belong to an at risk group. The isolation strategy needs to reassure them.

Remote technology has allowed many private sector services to continue as before, substituting remote communication for the previous client and customer contact that was common. The NHS is learning to use this technology for primary care and for consultations with hospital doctors. Where treatment needs contact in a hospital between staff and patient then the hospitals have expertise in infection control and the staff must have access to high quality protective clothing and equipment.

The private sector is still willing to offer capacity to the NHS to help with the backlog. This coupled with the extra money many available for CV19, winter pressures and other issues should enable the health sector to recover more quickly.

It is important the government defends the proposition that choice is an important driver of innovation and Quality. Private hospitals can offer good service and extra capacity which the NHS buys into when it needs to.

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## **Emergency assistance grants to local Councils to help those in need**

West Berkshire is receiving £103,352 and Wokingham £77,342 to make grants to people struggling with food bills and the cost of other essentials.

Payments under this scheme can be made to those already in receipt of normal social security payments, and getting help from the Covid Summer Food fund.

The government is determined no-one need go hungry, and leaves it to Councils to use their skills and knowledge of local deprivation to distribute money where needed.