

Getting about with social distancing

Today we should learn more about how people can get to work given the advice that public transport cannot be used by great numbers to avoid the virus spreading.

I am pressing for more relaxed conditions over parking near to factories and offices for those who live too far away to walk or cycle. The government could offer to help Councils financially if they will waive some parking fees. They should encourage Councils to make more areas available for commuter parking into towns and cities.

The government should also make money available to Councils to make it easier for vans and cars to get into and out of urban areas through a series of measures to increase capacity across junctions and bridges. I have before identified various proposals to optimise traffic lights, segregate right turning traffic from the rest, put in more roundabouts and add to road capacity near and across junctions where the main delays occur.

The economy is relying more and more on van deliveries of on line orders and will now need to let more people get to work by vehicle to allow social distancing from other travellers.

There should also be more discussion of safe working practices in offices and factories where people do need to work outside their homes. This will be based on a combination of greater distancing between people and the provision of protective clothing.

I would be interested in other ideas to make safe working easier for more people, so we can begin to rescue our economy and people's livelihoods from the damage done by the last few weeks of lock down.

Government Financial Support for the Self-Employed and Small Businesses

I have received this answer to my recent Parliamentary Question:

Question:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will increase the Government's financial support for (a) self employed and (b) small businesses during the covid-19 lockdown. (41870)

Tabled on: 01 May 2020

Answer:

Kemi Badenoch:

On April 27 the Government announced the new Bounce Back Loans (BBL) Scheme, which will ensure that the smallest businesses can access loans in a matter of just days. These loans will be from £2,000 up to £50,000, capped at 25% of firms' turnover. The Government will provide lenders with a 100% guarantee on each loan, to give lenders the confidence they need to support the smallest businesses in the country. The Government will cover the first 12 months of interest payments and fees charged to the business by the lender.

Small businesses may also be able to benefit from the new Discretionary Grant Fund announced by the Government on 1 May. The Government has provided up to an additional £617m for Local Authorities in England to enable them to make grants payments to businesses which are facing high fixed property-related costs, but have been excluded from the existing grants schemes because of the way they are treated by the business rates system. Local Authorities are responsible for defining precise eligibility for these funds, and businesses will need to apply to their Local Authority in order to receive grants.

Businesses and self-employed individuals may also benefit from a range of other support measures including:

- The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)
- A 12-month business rates holiday for all eligible retail, leisure and hospitality businesses in England
- Small business grant funding of £10,000 for all business in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief;
- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)
- VAT deferral for up to 12 months
- The Time To Pay scheme, through which businesses and self-employed individuals in financial distress, and with outstanding tax liabilities, can receive support with their tax affairs
- Protection for commercial leaseholders against automatic forfeiture for non-payment until June 30, 2020

The Business Support website provides further information about how businesses can access the support that has been made available, who is eligible, when the schemes open and how to apply –

<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support>.

[Controlling our borders](#)

There is understandable impatience by many over the illegal migrants turning up across the Channel after chancing to people traffickers. It is high time the governments on both sides of the Channel clamped down more effectively on this wicked and dangerous trade.

Whilst governments will want to help anyone in peril on the sea, they should also wish to send clear signals to all involved that people trafficking will not profit the organisers and will not gain the objective of the customers. If both parties think they will get what they want out of their rash and dangerous actions, they are likely to continue. If the traffickers deliberately put the customers at risk in an unsuitable boat, forcing rescue by government, it is important that the people trafficker is apprehended and not remunerated. The UK and France need to step up joint action, and France needs to try harder to stop the boats leaving their shore or proceeding far out to sea with the danger that introduces.

Prime Minister's tv address

I am asking about the detail behind the PM's statement of approach on Sunday night. In particular

1. Can Garden Centres open on Wednesday as briefed?
 2. Is it right that Fishing, golf and other sports and pastimes where an individual can avoid contact with others are now allowed?
 3. Is there any change in the range and purpose of shops which can now open with suitable precautions?
 4. What are the rules on use of public transport to get to work?
 5. As cars are being encouraged as safer ways of going to work, what additional support will there be to make it easier for cars to get into towns and cities? What advice is there on staggering hours?
 6. Is there now agreement on the advice and guidance for employers for safe working practices?
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Test and trace

In order to get out of lock down the government will want to put in place a system of tracking and testing for the presence of the virus, to ensure those with it self isolate to stop the spread. They will doubtless want to follow WHO advice on these matters.

The WHO proposes that a country combines technology with people driven systems. Technology can help, but not everyone has smartphones and not all smartphone users will want to download the app. Some who do will get flat batteries or forget to switch on from time to time.

In practice any system relies on people in the country to identify symptoms and self isolate if there is good reason to think they have the virus. They

should now have access to tests so they can find out more quickly than 14 days if they need to continue with their self isolation.

It means a person who does have a test and tests positive for the virus also needs to co-operate over recent contacts. The smartphone app could help. Otherwise they need to list their contacts to the authorities who can then in turn advise those people. Even with the app there may well need to be interpretation of the contact advised by the phone, as some may not be serious or lasting contacts, or there may have been some physical separation or barrier which the phone could not see.

As we are dealing with millions of people and possibly thousands of cases, there will be many cases where judgements are made that others may disagree with. What matters is that overall, the majority of cases successfully self isolate all those with the disease and those who came into too much contact with them pending their own tests. It also rests on quick reliable and easy tests. I trust the government now has in place these measures which it says it wants, to allow a more general return to work which is vital for livelihoods and the supply of goods and services.