

Milton Keynes founder of 'Cheerful Little Letter' project wins PM award

Press release

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Lucy Murray started the project in March to tackle social isolation safely by matching children with the elderly as pen pals. Her Facebook group has paired local children with over 1100 older people and has inspired similar initiatives across the UK.

In a personal letter to Lucy, the Prime Minister said:

I was so heartened to hear of your wonderful initiative supporting children to become pen pals with the elderly and vulnerable.

The thousands of letters you have inspired will have brought precious moments of comfort and happiness to many who are being shielded at this time, while forging lasting bonds between young and old across our society.

So today, I wanted to send a letter to you, to say a huge thank you on behalf of the whole country.

Reacting to the Prime Minister's announcement, Lucy said:

It is a huge honour to receive this award and I would love to dedicate it to the wonderful children and their families who have made this happen and put so much love and care into their letters. I would also like to say a huge thank you to the amazing care

workers who have made the project possible by supporting their residents to receive their post and taking time from their busy schedules to help them reply.

The Prime Minister's UK daily Point of Light award was first launched in April 2014 to recognise outstanding individuals making a difference where they live. Lucy is the 1369th person to be recognised.

Published 12 May 2020

[Funding to support armed forces charities doing vital work during pandemic](#)

- £6-million for those supporting the defence community affected by the coronavirus
- elderly veterans, those struggling with mental and physical health, and service children among organisations eligible for funding can apply from Tuesday 12 May.

Serving personnel, veterans and their families will benefit from an additional £6-million of new funding to ensure they get the support they need during the coronavirus outbreak, announced today by Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer (Tuesday 12 May).

Today's sum is part of a package of support announced by the Chancellor in April to ensure charities can continue their vital work during the pandemic. It will be offered in addition to existing funding for veteran's mental health and the Armed Forces Covenant Trust.

The funding is available to apply for from Tuesday 12 May (today). It will be distributed in the form of grants administered by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, backed by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Cabinet Office, and will be given to charities across the UK that work in 9 key areas affected by the impact of the coronavirus.

These include:

- support to the elderly (including Care Homes)
- mental and physical health
- welfare
- domestic violence
- housing
- criminal justice system

- service families (including childcare)
- bereavement
- employment

The latest funding is in addition to the £10-million the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust received in the budget for support to veterans' health and wellbeing and the annual government contribution of £10-million for the Covenant Fund, £3-million of which has already been protected for veterans particularly affected by the coronavirus.

The announcement follows the recent launch of 2 platforms specifically designed to support the defence community. [Veterans' Gateway](#), an app with 24-hour point of contact for support with finances, employment, relationships and physical and mental health, and [HeadFIT](#), a new platform, spearheaded by The Duke of Sussex launched with online tools to help defence personnel take a more proactive approach to their mental health and fitness.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

At such a difficult time I want to make sure our people, including those still serving, veterans, and their families, know they're not alone.

Military charities do a fantastic job in supporting this community and today's important new investment will ensure that they have the funding they need to continue their brilliant efforts.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

Having just celebrated the 75th anniversary of VE Day, our veterans, armed forces and their families are rightly at the front of our minds, so I'm pleased we can give military charities supporting them through coronavirus extra help.

Our brilliant charities are vital to the national effort to beat the virus and this funding is part of the unprecedented charity support package pledged by the government to get help to the most vulnerable people in Britain.

David Richmond CBE, Director of the Office for Veterans' Affairs, said:

Charities play a vital role in supporting our veteran community by providing a wide range of support and services.

It's critically important that the government is providing support to them to allow essential services to continue during these difficult times and The Office for Veterans' Affairs will continue to work closely with the charities to ensure the funding reaches

those who need it most.

General Sir John McColl KCB CBE DSO, Chairman of Cobseo, said:

Cobseo members have demonstrated true grit and determination in adapting, and in some cases revolutionising, how they support the armed forces community during this crisis, and this funding will help to provide a more secure immediate future and sustain vital services.

Many members have shifted their services to online support; and they are continuing to reach out to combat loneliness, isolation and promote mental wellbeing; as well as working hard to deliver food and essentials for Veterans in need".

Today's funding is part of comprehensive measures to support vulnerable people through the pandemic and the government is working closely with councils, charities and other partners to ensure they get the support they need. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has led the allocation of funding to support charities providing key services to help vulnerable people during the crisis.

Small and medium sized charities can also bid for funding through the National Lottery Community fund, which has an allocation of £370-million to support the sector.

The application process will be published on [Covenant Fund Trust](#), and a separate decision-making board will be established to decide where the funding is best allocated. The board will include representatives from MOD, the Cabinet Office and COBSEO, the sector body for Armed Forces charities.

[If you're going to the coast](#)

News story

Update for those going to the coast



In England, now more than ever people need to respect our coastline.

Whether you're local or not, experienced around the water or a novice, the sea can still catch you out. Beaches may not be lifeguarded. Social distancing must be observed. If you get into trouble call 999 and ask for the coastguard and we will come to your aid.

But coronavirus hasn't gone away and we all need to follow the rules. Remember your choices might put people, including yourself and frontline responders, at risk. Take extra care in these extraordinary times. #StayAlert

Don't forget though, in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, nothing has changed. Give the coast a miss. #StayHomeSaveLives

Published 12 May 2020

[Chancellor extends furlough scheme until October](#)

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will continue until end of October
- furloughed workers across UK will continue to receive 80% of their current salary, up to £2,500
- new flexibility will be introduced from August to get employees back to work and boost economy

In a boost to millions of jobs and businesses, Rishi Sunak said the furlough scheme would be extended by a further four months with workers continuing to receive 80% of their current salary.

As we reopen the economy, we need to support people to get back to work. From the start of August, furloughed workers will be able to return to work part-time with employers being asked to pay a percentage towards the salaries of their furloughed staff.

The employer payments will substitute the contribution the government is

currently making, ensuring that staff continue to receive 80% of their salary, up to £2,500 a month.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak said:

Our Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has protected millions of jobs and businesses across the UK during the outbreak – and I've been clear that I want to avoid a cliff edge and get people back to work in a measured way.

This extension and the changes we are making to the scheme will give flexibility to businesses while protecting the livelihoods of the British people and our future economic prospects.

New statistics published today revealed the job retention scheme has protected 7.5 million workers and almost 1 million businesses.

The scheme will continue in its current form until the end of July and the changes to allow more flexibility will come in from the start of August. More specific details and information around its implementation will be made available by the end of this month.

The government will explore ways through which furloughed workers who wish to do additional training or learn new skills are supported during this period. It will also continue to work closely with the Devolved Administrations to ensure the scheme supports people across the Union.

The Chancellor's decision to extend the scheme, which will continue to apply across all regions and sectors in the UK economy, comes after the government outlined its plan for the next phase of its response to the coronavirus outbreak.

The scheme is just one part of the government's world-leading economic response to coronavirus, including an unprecedented package for the self-employed, loans and guarantees that have so far provided billions of pounds in support, tax deferrals and grants for small businesses.

Today the government is also publishing new statistics that show businesses have benefitted from over £14 billion in loans and guarantees to support their cashflow during the crisis. This includes 268,000 Bounce Back Loans worth £8.3 billion, 36,000 loans worth over £6 billion through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, and £359 million through the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

Mike Cherry, National Chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

The Job Retention Scheme is a lifeline which has been hugely beneficial in helping small employers keep their staff in work, and it's extension is welcome. Small employers have told us that part-time furloughing will help them recover from this crisis and it is

welcome that new flexibility is announced today.

BCC Director General Adam Marshall said:

The extension of the Job Retention Scheme will come as a huge help and a huge relief for businesses across the UK.

The Chancellor is once again listening to what we've been saying, and the changes planned will help businesses bring their people back to work through the introduction of a part-time furlough scheme. We will engage with the Treasury and HMRC on the detail to ensure that this gives companies the flexibility they need to reopen safely.

Over the coming months, the government should continue to listen to business and evolve the scheme in line with what's happening on the ground. Further support may yet be needed for companies who are unable to operate for an extended period, or those who face reduced capacity or demand due to ongoing restrictions.

Dame Carolyn Fairbairn, CBI Director-General, said:

The Chancellor is confronting a challenging balancing act deftly. As economic activity slowly speeds up, it's essential that support schemes adapt in parallel.

Extending the furlough to avoid a June cliff-edge continues the significant efforts made already and will protect millions of jobs.

Introducing much needed flexibility is extremely welcome. It will prepare the ground for firms that are reawakening, while helping those who remain in hibernation. That's essential as the UK economy revives step-by-step, while supporting livelihoods.

Firms will, of course, want more detail on how they will contribute to the scheme in the future and will work with government to get this right.

Above all, the path of the virus is unpredictable, and much change still lies ahead. The government must continue to keep a watchful eye on those industries and employees that remain at risk. All schemes will need to be kept under review to help minimise impacts on people's livelihoods and keep businesses thriving.

The greater the number of good businesses saved now, the easier it will be for the economy to recover.

Further information

	Cumulative number of approved facilities	Cumulative value of approved facilities	Cumulative number of applications
Bounce Back Loan Scheme	268,173	£8.378 billion	363,646
Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans Scheme	35,919	£6.094 billion	71,316
Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loans Scheme	59	£359 million	358

- the applications figure includes approved applications, those applications that are still to be processed, applications that have been declined and those applications that may turn out not to be eligible or cases where customers will decide not to proceed
- figures show cumulative applications and approvals up to close of business on 10 May 2020
- these figures include data from BBB accredited lenders shared directly with HMT by close of business on 11 May 2020

Number of Jobs Furloughed	7.5 million
Number of Employers Furloughing	935,000
Total £ claimed	£10.1 billion

- these figures are up until 9am today

[Traffic Commissioners applaud road transport industry](#)

News story

This weekend marked the 75th anniversary of victory in Europe at the end of World War 2. As a nation, we have spent the weekend celebrating those who defended the nation during that time.



Similarly, in recent weeks, we have celebrated the lifesaving, vital work that frontline NHS staff have done to combat the coronavirus. The Traffic Commissioners for Great Britain also want to recognise the efforts of key workers within the road haulage and passenger transport industries who have contributed to the national effort in fighting the coronavirus outbreak.

In particular, we recognise the often-unheralded role that commercial vehicle operators and drivers play. They are the lifeblood of this country, vital to our economy and the citizens who rely on them. Hauliers transport the food we buy in supermarkets, medicines for shops, pharmacies and hospitals, and medical supplies for use both in the home and in a clinical setting. PSV operators have continued to transport staff to vital work within the NHS, research facilities and elsewhere, while following social distancing requirements.

It is in large part thanks to the efforts of operators and drivers that we can continue to function as a country. We appreciate that these are difficult times for many operators. The future can look uncertain but we can help you to mitigate against some of the regulatory challenges.

Please read our [advice and guidance for operating during the coronavirus pandemic](#) for details of the measures we've put in place to help the road transport industry. You may also want to take a look at the [coronavirus statutory guidance and directions document](#) we published.

We are here to help – please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please email Enquiries@otc.gov.uk if you have any questions.

Thank you for everything you are doing.

Published 12 May 2020