

Business to receive almost £10 billion in rates relief

- Businesses are set to receive a discount of £9.7 billion on their rates bills this financial year in response to coronavirus
- Support comes after Budget 2020 increased business rates retail discount to 100% from 50% for 2020 to 2021
- Part of comprehensive package of measures to support businesses during the coronavirus pandemic

Businesses are expected to receive almost £10 billion in business rate relief as part of the government's comprehensive package of support for the economy during the coronavirus pandemic.

[New statistics published today](#) (22 April 2020) by the government show the business rate relief predicted by councils for businesses across England in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector.

It means that those which may be the hardest hit by the pandemic, such as eligible shops, restaurants, cafes and pubs will pay no business rates whatsoever this financial year.

Businesses are benefiting from this scheme right now with discounts on their rates bills helping them with their cashflow. The government has committed to compensating local authorities in full for the business rate relief with payments due to begin shortly.

The news follows the announcement that £3.2 billion of extra funding is being given to councils, helping them continue to provide essential services and support to those who need it most. This includes getting rough sleepers off the street, supporting new shielding programmes for clinically extremely vulnerable people and assistance for our heroic public health workforce and fire and rescue services.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Today's figures demonstrate that, through working with local authorities, we are giving businesses the support that they need during this national emergency; an unprecedented nearly £10bn in business rates relief.

The government was clear that we would do whatever it took to support local business and that is exactly what we are doing. We stand behind them and their employees as we work to protect the NHS and save lives.

Minister for Local Government Simon Clarke MP said:

This government has announced a comprehensive programme of support for business to help them deal with the economic impact caused by the Covid19 pandemic, including providing 100 per cent rate relief for the retail and leisure industry.

It is great that councils estimate they will provide almost £10 billion in additional business rate relief this financial year. This will provide businesses with a much-needed boost at this unprecedented time and builds on over £6 billion already awarded to business in grants announced earlier this week.

In the Budget last March, the government announced it would take the exceptional step of increasing the Business Rates Retail Discount to 100% from 50%. This, and the measures announced in response to the Coronavirus, take the value of the Expanded Retail Discount and the Nursery Discount to £10.1 billion in 2020/21.

This support comes as part of a wider package of measures to help businesses to deal with the economic impact of Coronavirus.

It includes a £12.3 billion package for local authorities to deliver grants of up to £25,000 to eligible businesses and the commitment to pay the wages of millions of employed and self-employed people by covering 80% of monthly incomes through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self Employment Income Support Scheme.

- Some properties are eligible for discount from their business rates bill – this is called business rates relief. Local authorities bill businesses a standard rate with a total on how much they have to pay in a certain year. Today's announcement means that local authorities will issue updated bills to business that reduce their bills substantially.
 - Businesses do not need to take any action as their local council will apply the discount automatically.
 - See [more information](#) on which businesses are eligible for the relief.
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Coronavirus (COVID-19): letter to councils about extending the statutory audit deadlines for 2019 to 2020

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

Puma helicopter performs first island medical evacuation

An RAF Puma helicopter based at Kinloss has supported the NHS in Scotland with the first transfer of a critically ill patient from the Isle of Arran.

Three Pumas are currently based at Kinloss Barracks in Scotland as part of a new Aviation Task Force which was set up to support the government's response to coronavirus.

The crew were called at 0100 on Wednesday to support the transfer of a critically ill patient from the Isle of Arran to the University Hospital Crosshouse in Kilmarnock after the patient showed severe symptoms of coronavirus. The three-person helicopter crew flew to Arran, where they landed at KnockenKelly and met the emergency medical care team on site.

UK Government minister for Scotland Douglas Ross said:

"I would like to wish the patient a speedy recovery and thank the team from Kinloss Barracks who were involved in the airlift. This is another example of the fantastic effort the UK's Armed Forces are providing to support patients across the UK and help health professionals tackle coronavirus."

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

"Today's medical evacuation is a great example of the UK Armed Forces' ability to support our most remote communities across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. I am proud of the skill and professionalism of our personnel and their support to colleagues in the NHS and social care."

The Scottish Ambulance Service has significantly increased capacity for airlifting patients off the islands and to ensure that any patients from our island communities, including those with coronavirus symptoms, can be transported to receive the appropriate healthcare when they need it. This includes the use of SAS resources, ferries, maritime coastguard, Logan Air and the armed forces.

Squadron Leader Johnny Longland, Detachment Commander said:

“Just over 3 hours after the crew received the call, the patient had travelled 162 nautical miles and was in the Intensive Care Unit. The training that we conducted with the emergency medical teams across Scotland ensured that, when the time came, we were all ready for a quick and smooth transfer of a patient.

“We’re extremely proud to be able to help the NHS in Scotland and it’s rewarding to see the team pull together so quickly and effectively when they were needed. Our thoughts are with the patient and their family and we wish them a swift and full recovery.”

On its arrival on the Isle of Arran, the aircraft temporarily shut down while the emergency medical team attended to the patient and prepared them for transfer.

The Scottish Ambulance Service Emergency Medical Retrieval team travelled on the aircraft with the patient and met their Special Operations Response Team and Divisional crew on landing for onward transfer to hospital.

Using procedures previously rehearsed with the emergency care teams, the patient was then swiftly loaded onto the aircraft and transported to the Intensive Care Unit in Crosshouse Hospital, Kilmarnock. The patient is now receiving the enhanced care required to support their recovery.

The aircraft crew were wearing PPE for the duration of the flight and both the crew and aircraft underwent strict decontamination procedures on their return to Kinloss.

The COVID Aviation Task Force has helicopters on standby across the UK to support the government’s response to coronavirus. The RAF Puma, Army Air Corps Wildcat, RAF Chinook and Royal Navy Merlin provide essential medical evacuation capabilities as well as the ability to swiftly deliver essential equipment and personnel to where they are needed across the nation.

[Positive progress in the Great Lakes](#)

Region must continue despite Covid-19

Thank you very much, Mr President, and let me join others in thanking Special Envoy Xia Huang for his briefing to the Council today. It's also been good to hear such broad consensus in the Council, particularly on the impact of COVID-19 situation across the region and, as others have, the elections in Burundi.

First, on COVID. As detailed in the Special Envoy's briefing, it's really encouraging to see renewed regional momentum towards the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) by the countries in the Great Lakes region, particularly over the last year or so. But hopefully we can continue to capitalise on this. But as others have said, we are meeting during uncertain times because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which will undoubtedly create challenges for maintaining this momentum. The pandemic demonstrates once again the necessity for really effective regional cooperation. And I was really glad to hear the Special Envoy speak about his role in engaging countries to try and address the challenges of COVID together. I think this will be really critical. So we encourage the Special Envoy and his team to consider innovative ways to support the Great Lakes region to ensure there is continued progress in this period. The threat of the pandemic might engender cooperation in combating COVID across the region, in line with the spirit of the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.

And I was very glad also to hear the Special Envoy talk about the way that he was seeing real progress, not just in the main conflict areas, but in the states across the region, trying to do more to enhance their security cooperation as well.

I think the other thing we need to think about in this format, is how we come together at some point to begin to analyse the impact that COVID is having, and what we can do to address some of the longer term impacts that it will have on regional stability and also on the economic and humanitarian situation.

Looking at the security situation specifically, we also think it's critical to continue to address the underlying security challenges across the Great Lakes. We've seen in recent weeks increased reporting of cross-border incursions, as others have mentioned, and also other security spikes across the region. I think this underscores the need for full and swift implementation of the PSCF. And it was very good to hear Special Envoy Xia's list of priorities focusing on advancing regional security cooperation, including military and non-military measures.

I think while we commend Special Envoy Xia's efforts to promote economic integration, we just want to reiterate here that economic initiatives will only be successful if we are simultaneously tackling those underlying drivers of the conflict: challenging aspects such as the illicit cross-border trade of natural resources and the war economy. Those things should not be

overlooked.

I want to touch briefly on Eastern DRC. The UK encourages Special Envoy and his team to work closely with MONUSCO to develop a joint strategy on the conflict in Eastern DRC. And we think the Special Envoy can provide an important link between MONUSCO's efforts within the DRC and the regional efforts that need to be built around that. This will be critical to ending the conflict.

We had hoped to receive more information in this briefing on the status of the UN Peace and Security strategy for the Great Lakes region. This has been under development for quite some time now and we'd be grateful for more information from the Special Envoy, including whether MONUSCO and the international community will be consulted on the strategy relatively soon.

Finally, Mr President, the UK is concerned about the electoral environment surrounding Burundi's May elections. It's vital that all political parties are given equal access to the media and that special measures are implemented by the Government in response to COVID-19 to ensure that the elections are fair, in this regard.

Thank you very much, Mr President, and thank you, Special Envoy Xia.

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