

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for the charity sector

Understandably, charities are concerned about what to do during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, so we have set out our response to the most commonly asked questions.

We want to assure charities that our approach to regulation during this uncertain period will be as flexible and pragmatic as possible in the public interest, whilst helping trustees to be aware of and think about the wider or longer impact of their decisions on their charity.

We will update this page with responses to further questions on an ongoing basis.

## **How do I get support to pay my charity staff?**

The [government has announced that organisations, including charities, will get support to help them pay wages.](#)

Employers will be able to contact HMRC for a grant to cover most of the wages of their workforce who remain on payroll but are temporarily not working during the coronavirus outbreak. Any employer in the country- small or large, charitable or non-profit will be eligible for the scheme.

## **Can I use reserves and restricted funds to help my charity through the crisis?**

We understand that many charities are currently very concerned about their financial position. In the first instance, trustees should consider what are their short, medium and longer term priorities, and see if they need to amend their financial planning given their current situation. Trustees are encouraged in particular to think about whether or not certain projects, spends or activities can be stopped or delayed in order to focus on essential spending if they are facing financial challenges at this time.

Reserves can be spent to help cope with unexpected events like those unfolding at present.

You should identify which of your funds or assets have limits on their use. If these are internal only – for example your charity has decided to earmark certain funds for a particular purpose – you may be able to re-prioritise these. If they are restricted funds, meaning they cannot be spent at your (trustees) discretion, then they may only be used for a particular and defined purpose. For example, a fundraising appeal may restrict funds to a specific purpose, or if you have a permanent endowment, it may have restrictions on selling it to release funds.

If there are restrictions, in some instances there may be ways to amend these restrictions, but accessing or releasing restricted funds should only be considered if other options such as reserves are not possible. The Commission encourages you to also carefully consider the wider and longer term impacts of making such a decision on your financial resilience and donor relationships. You should seek professional advice on this if you can. The Commission will be as helpful as possible, and offer what guidance we can.

All decisions on such financial matters should normally be taken collectively, and significant decisions and action points noted in writing. We have further more detailed guidance on [financial resilience](#); on [charity reserves](#); and a [general tool to help trustees work out what to focus on](#).

## **Can I cancel or postpone my charity's AGM or other key meetings?**

Coronavirus is having a major impact on charity events and the government's health advice may lead to some charities having no choice but to decide to cancel or postpone their AGMs and other critical meetings.

If as trustees, you decide it is necessary to do so, you should record this decision to demonstrate good governance of your charity. This is particularly important if it is not possible to hold your AGM which may make it difficult for you to finalise your annual reports and accounts.

Wherever possible, we would ask you to try to get your annual reports to us on time. However, where the situation impacts on the completion of annual returns and accounts, charities with an imminent filing date can call us.

## **Can I use video, teleconferencing and the internet in place of face-to-face meetings?**

In the current situation, it is becoming increasingly difficult to hold face-to-face meetings. Some charities have clauses in their governing documents that allow them to meet virtually or to use telephone facilities, so we advise trustees to check their governing document and see if they can make amendments themselves to facilitate changes as to how or when meetings are held.

Where there is no such clause in your governing document and you decide to hold meetings over the phone or using digital solutions, we will understand but you should record this decision and that you have done this to demonstrate good governance of your charity.

## **What do I need to report to the Charity Commission?**

We appreciate that during the coronavirus pandemic the charity sector will face extremely demanding and ever-changing challenges. Charities' primary interest, and ours, must be looking after the public and the communities that we serve.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the charity trustees to continue to report serious incidents using our current guidelines, and we will continue to ask trustees to use their judgement in deciding whether an incident is significant in the context of their charity and should be reported to us.

We will continue to prioritise those incidents that place individuals at risk, or incidents that have had a significant impact on a charity's operations and therefore serious harm to the charity's work.

## **Keeping people safe**

This pandemic is already giving rise to that spirit of charity and community that brings people together, and we appreciate and value that people will want to help others during the challenges we are all facing. But now more than ever it is critical to ensure that charities protect and safeguard their beneficiaries, volunteers and staff.

This is all the more relevant for those directly helping communities or vulnerable members of society who are self-isolating. Our [safeguarding guidance](#) is a source of support on how to keep people safe, and what steps you should take if you identify concerns.

## **Reporting accounts and finances**

The Charity SORP has issued [updated guidance about what and how to report](#).

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## **Supermarkets to join forces to feed the nation**

The government is temporarily relaxing elements of competition law as part of a package of measures to allow supermarkets to work together to feed the nation.

The move allows retailers to share data with each other on stock levels, cooperate to keep shops open, or share distribution depots and delivery vans. It would also allow retailers to pool staff with one another to help meet demand.

The Environment Secretary George Eustice confirmed elements of the law would be temporarily waived in a meeting this afternoon with chief executives from the UK's leading supermarkets and food industry representatives.

The government has also temporarily relaxed rules around drivers' hours, so retailers can deliver more food to stores, and is waiving the 5p plastic bag charge for online purchases to speed up deliveries.

The support for supermarkets comes as the government and retailers continue to urge people to shop considerately and look out for their friends, family and neighbours.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

We've listened to the powerful arguments of our leading supermarkets and will do whatever it takes to help them feed the nation.

By relaxing elements of competition laws temporarily, our retailers can work together on their contingency plans and share the resources they need with each other during these unprecedented circumstances.

We welcome the measures supermarkets are already taking to keep shelves stocked and supply chains resilient, and will continue to support them with their response to coronavirus.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

In these extraordinary and challenging times it is important that we remove barriers to our supermarkets working together to serve customers, particularly those who are elderly, ill or vulnerable in all parts of the UK.

The temporary relaxation of competition law for the food sector will allow supermarkets to cooperate with each other to keep their shops staffed, their shelves stocked, and the nation fed.

I am clear that we will continue to do whatever it takes to support business through this extremely difficult period.

Andrew Opie, Director of Food & Sustainability at the British Retail Consortium, said:

We welcome this important decision by the government to give retailers greater flexibility to work together to tackle the challenges posed by coronavirus. Retailers have been working hard to ensure shelves are stocked and this is an exceptional step taken by government to help retailers and their suppliers cope with problems that might be caused by widescale absences across the supply chain.

This is a short term measure, in the spirit of working together, and will allow retailers to agree common specifications for products to bolster food production, and co-ordinate certain operations to ensure customers anywhere in the UK have access to

the essential items they need.

Legislation will be laid shortly to amend elements of the Competition Act 1998, which prevents certain types of anti-competitive behaviour. It can be relaxed in exceptional circumstances.

This will be a specific, temporary relaxation to enable retailers to work together for the sole purpose of feeding the nation during these unprecedented circumstances. It will not allow any activity that does not meet this requirement.

The announcement comes as the government confirmed today it would temporarily relax drivers' hours rules to allow supermarket delivery drivers to meet the increased demand for home deliveries.

The change to GB drivers' hours rules, which will come into effect tomorrow (Friday 20 March), will mean delivery drivers are able to work slightly longer hours – helping supermarkets offer additional delivery slots, which is particularly important for vulnerable people and those staying at home during the COVID-19 outbreak. It will also provide extra capacity if drivers are unwell.

The move comes after the Government temporarily relaxed the EU drivers' hours rules for store deliveries, helping move food and other essentials more quickly so that shelves can be stocked-up.

Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps said:

We know supermarkets have seen unprecedented demand in light of COVID-19. We're relaxing the GB drivers' hours rules so that supermarkets can complete more home deliveries – which is especially important for vulnerable people at this time.

But driver welfare is of course key and we will be working closely with employers to make sure the safety of their drivers and other people on the road is protected.

On his call with retailers today, the Environment Secretary also confirmed the government will temporarily relax the single-use carrier bag charge for online deliveries in England, to speed up deliveries and minimise any cross-contamination from reusing crates. This will come into force on Saturday 21 March. The charge remains in-place for in-store purchases.

This follows a series of measures the government has introduced to support the food industry's response to coronavirus, including working with local authorities to extend the hours that deliveries can be made to supermarkets to ensure stores are replenished quickly and extending drivers' hours to speed up deliveries.

The UK's food supply chain remains resilient and the Environment Secretary

continues to meet regularly with representatives of the food industry to ensure people can get the food and groceries they need.

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## **COVID-19: CMA approach to essential business cooperation**

That's why the CMA welcomes the Government's announcement today to relax some elements of competition law to help supermarkets work together.

Where agreements are not covered by that legal relaxation, the CMA can offer the following reassurance: the CMA has no intention of taking competition law enforcement action against cooperation between businesses or rationing of products to the extent that this is necessary to protect consumers – for example, by ensuring security of supplies.

At the same time, the CMA will not tolerate unscrupulous businesses exploiting the crisis as a 'cover' for non-essential collusion. This includes exchanging information on longer-term pricing or business strategies, where this is not necessary to meet the needs of the current situation. More guidance on this will follow from the CMA in due course.

The CMA trusts that these announcements will reassure businesses, which it knows are doing their best in difficult circumstances to meet the needs of the public. Businesses must still be aware that any assurance given by the CMA cannot protect against competition litigation by private parties, but wants to offer comfort on its own approach.

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## **COVID-19: update on changes to Veterans UK Services**

Please be reassured that all Armed Forces Pensions, War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme regular payments will continue to be made as usual into your nominated account. We are also maintaining urgent welfare support for Service leavers, veterans and their families via the Veterans Welfare Service (VWS), Defence Transition Services (DTS) and Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans (IPC4V).

The latest position on changes to our services as restrictions begin to ease are as follows:

## **Veterans UK Helpline: 0808 1914 218**

Our teams are working hard taking calls from in the office and at home, Mon – Fri 8am to 4pm, so this may mean you hear some background noise. Thank you for your patience and apologies for any inconvenience this may cause.

We are currently able to provide the following services over the phone:

- reporting a bereavement
- Veterans Welfare Service (VWS), Defence Transition Services (DTS) and Integrated Personal Commissioning for Veterans (IPC4V) assistance
- updating bank account details or address for War Pension Scheme or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments.

If your call is not for one of these reasons, please continue to use our email service via [Veterans-UK@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Veterans-UK@mod.gov.uk).

If you require to speak to someone because you are in need of urgent emotional support then please call the Samaritans directly on 116123, alternatively you can call 0808 1914 218 and listen to the options to be transferred where a Samaritan adviser may be able to assist you.

We have now re-commenced office-based processing and we are doing all we can to move cases forward as quickly as we can. General enquiries are taking a little longer than normal, please bear with us. However, should your enquiry be urgent please contact us on our Helpline number above.

### **Re-joining the Armed Forces**

Veterans seeking information about re-joining the Armed Forces during this period can find details on the [Royal Navy Rejoinder page](#), [Regular Army Rejoinder page](#) and the [RAF Rejoinder Page](#).

### **Veterans Welfare Service Support (VWS), Defence Transition Services(DTS) and Integrated Personal Commissioning For Veterans (IPC4V)**

To protect our staff and the veterans, Service leavers and families we support we have decided to suspend, except in the most exceptional circumstances, all face-to-face meetings with clients whilst national COVID restrictions are in place. This will be reviewed in due course, once all national COVID restrictions are lifted and a decision will be made about how we can continue to provide a quality service to our clients while protecting our staff. Urgent advice, information and support is still available via our helpline service (see above) and, for less urgent enquiries, via email to [Veterans-UK@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Veterans-UK@mod.gov.uk). Please quote your name, national insurance or reference number and contact details and we will be in touch as quickly as we can. See also “Guidance for Service Personnel with imminent discharge dates” below.

WWS/DTS customers can also reach us by emailing the welfare centre nearest to where you live:

Centurion (London, SE and SW England): [veterans-uk-vws-south@mod.gov.uk](mailto:veterans-uk-vws-south@mod.gov.uk)

Kidderminster (South and Central Wales, Midlands and East England): [veterans-uk-vws-wales-mid@mod.gov.uk](mailto:veterans-uk-vws-wales-mid@mod.gov.uk)

Norcross VWC (NW England, Yorkshire and Humber, North Wales and IOM): [veterans-uk-vws-north@mod.gov.uk](mailto:veterans-uk-vws-north@mod.gov.uk)

Glasgow (Scotland, NE England, NI and ROI): [veterans-uk-vws-scot-ni@mod.gov.uk](mailto:veterans-uk-vws-scot-ni@mod.gov.uk)

DTS customers can also reach us by emailing [DBSVets-DTS-Central@mod.gov.uk](mailto:DBSVets-DTS-Central@mod.gov.uk).

## **War Pension Scheme and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS)**

Please be reassured that all War Pension, War Widows Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments will continue to be made as usual into your nominated account.

Although in March 2020, we had to pause casework, including new claims and appeals against previous claim decisions, because such work cannot be delivered remotely, we are now back in the office at full capacity processing all of our case load. Staff are working hard on the recovery of our service delivery that was unfortunately impacted by COVID-19. We wish to reassure those still affected that we are doing all we can to continue to move cases forward as soon as possible. We continue to ensure that no-one will fall out of payment during this time. If you experience a problem with your payments or have an urgent question, please call our helpline service or email [Veterans-UK@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Veterans-UK@mod.gov.uk) and we will reply as quickly as possible.

## **War Pension Scheme: Mesothelioma**

To protect our staff and veterans, we have decided to suspend, except in the most exceptional circumstances, all face-to-face meetings with clients. However, advice, information and support is still available via our helpline service and email.

Every effort will be made to ensure that procedures are followed to ensure that timely informed choice discussions about [lump sum payments](#) are held with those who have been diagnosed with Mesothelioma, where an intention to claim is made.

## **Medical Examinations: War Pensions and AFCS**

With effect from 17 March 2020, all planned medical examinations in relation to compensation scheme claims were cancelled. We are currently unable to recommence examinations, but an ongoing [pilot scheme](#) launched in August 2020 which changes the way we gather medical evidence for War Pensions Scheme claims and reviews is enabling us to continue our processing of cases.



We won't be issuing requests for medical board examinations or Hospital Case notes, instead we will be issuing a Primary Care Factual report and a supplementary Self-Assessment Form directly to the claimant. A letter will explain everything and provide instructions to follow so the claimant can complete the relevant forms before returning them to us.

## **Appeal Tribunal Hearings**

With effect from 26 May 2020 the tribunals across the UK began to conduct some appeal hearings remotely. This involved all parties joining using the telephone or a video connection. For the most up to date information regarding your appeal hearing and how it may take place now and, in the future, please visit the relevant tribunal services website from the links below.

[HMCTS weekly operational summary on courts and tribunals during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak.](#)

[Scottish Courts and Tribunals Coronavirus \(COVID-19\).](#)

[Department of Justice Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Continuity Arrangements.](#)

## **Armed Forces Pensions**

Please be reassured that all Armed Forces Pensions payments will continue to be made as usual into your nominated account.

Pension enquiries can still be answered by calling the JPA Enquiry Centre on 0800 085 3600 during the hours of 7am to 7pm Monday to Friday.

All other work is being maintained, although our timescales may be longer than usual.

## **Guidance for service personnel with imminent discharge dates:**

Service personnel and their families who expect to face significant challenges as they prepare to leave the military should seek guidance and support from their Chain of Command in the first instance. Defence Transition Services may also be able to help. Please visit [Help for service leavers from Defence Transition Services](#) for how you may be able to get more support and extra help from Defence Transition Services when leaving the Armed Forces.

## **Medals**

The MOD Medal Office has resumed operations. Regrettably, due to COVID-19 restrictions, there are delays in accessing pre-1980 hardcopy Service documents across MOD sites, which is impacting our normal timescales for processing applications. However, we continue to prioritize cases involving death in service and for veterans over 90 or who are terminally ill. If you are wanting to apply to obtain a medal entitlement or a physical medal(s) for either yourself, or a relative please follow the guidance on the [medals GOV.UK page](#). We will then deal with your application as soon as possible. We

acknowledge that this may be frustrating. Please be assured that our officials are endeavouring to action all enquiries and applications as soon as feasible. Your patience and understanding during this challenging time are appreciated.

General information on medals can still be obtained by calling the JPA Enquiry Centre on 0800 085 3600 during the hours of 7am to 7pm Monday to Friday, or via [DBS-Medals@mod.gov.uk](mailto:DBS-Medals@mod.gov.uk).

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## [Contingent liability arising from the Covid-19 Corporate Financing Facility](#)

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Email address

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