

19<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Herefordshire Business

**COVID-19 SUPPORT AND RESPONSE**

All of us in Herefordshire Council understand that this is a difficult time for you, your business, and your employees. This letter is the first of what will likely be many communications in relation to Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Herefordshire and how the council and others can support you through this difficult time.

The council is monitoring the situation closely and coordinating with Public Health England. We are taking all possible steps to keep people safe. For further information on how the council is addressing the COVID-19 situation please visit <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/coronavirus>

We recognise that your business may be impacted in numerous ways. To enable the council and partners to support you and others, it would be helpful to know the extent of this impact and to understand what the potential solution could be. We will use this information to inform and lobby government and will share with other partners who may also be able to influence the policy for combating COVID-19.

The government is providing daily updates to reflect the constantly changing situation. For businesses wanting the latest position on COVID-19 we signpost you towards the Marches Growth Hub website (a partnership initiative between Herefordshire Council and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership) <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/coronavirus-information-for-businesses/>

The government announced a package of measures in the 2020 Budget to support public services, individuals and businesses affected by COVID-19, and has since announced additional measures. The latest information is here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>.

We understand that the government measures, and advice, is likely to be updated as the situation develops so you should regularly visit these websites to get the latest position. Some of the measures in the initial package include:

- statutory sick pay relief package for SMEs
- 12-month business rates holiday for all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England
- small business grant funding of £10,000 for all business in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief
- grant funding of £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with property with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000
- the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme to support long-term viable businesses who may need to respond to cash-flow pressures by seeking additional finance
- the HMRC Time To Pay Scheme

We are awaiting further guidance from government on how these schemes will be operated and the council's role in getting this support to business. We are ready to operate schemes as soon as this information has been received which the Government has indicated will be released by the end of the week. We will publish the details on our website as soon as we receive them.

Further information about Business Rates can also be found at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/businessrates](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/businessrates)

In addition to the national support, in Herefordshire there is a range of local support available. This includes grants available for Herefordshire based businesses. We have listed below those that may be relevant, and the Marches Growth Hub website [www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk](http://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk) will have details of other funded schemes and programmes available:

- Business Growth Programme - <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/directory/v/-318>
- Marches Building Investment Grant - <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/directory/v/-207>
- BEEP - <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/directory/v/-183>

We recognise that aside from financial and business support you, your supply chain, or your employees may want to access mental health and wellbeing advice. Please visit <https://www.wisherefordshire.org/mentalhealth> for details of the local advice and services.

Alongside these economic measures, the government continues to emphasise the public health advice. If you or your staff want more information on the precautions that need to be taken (washing hands, not touching face, maintaining a minimum distance), or general guidance for a particular sector, here is a link to the public health guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

I am consistently amazed by the level of support that Herefordshire's people and businesses give to each other and to their communities in times of need. If, as a result of COVID-19, you recognise that your business does have a need (deliveries, staffing problems etc.), or you can offer support to others, please do let us know.

As the COVID-19 situation develops, the council will continue to communicate with you, either via letter, social media, or the council or Growth Hub websites. Apologies if you have received this via several routes. I wish you well in the coming weeks and months as we look to support residents and businesses to the best of our abilities throughout this crisis for our county and country.

Kind regards,

**Cllr Dr Ellie Chowns**  
**Cabinet Member- Environment, Economy & Skills**