



## City of Westminster

Rt, Hon. Rishi Sunak MP,  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
Her Majesty's Treasury  
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Westminster, London  
SW1A 2HQ

Westminster City Hall,  
64 Victoria Street,  
London SW1E 6QP

**Cllr Rachael Robathan**  
**Leader of the Council**

cc. Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick, Secretary of  
State for Housing Communities and  
Local Government

3 April 2020  
Tel : 020 7641 3255

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Dear Chancellor,

I want to thank you for all your efforts to date to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 virus on both businesses and residents.

Here in Westminster, our business community has been badly hit and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. However, we have consulted with the community and believe there are certain, further actions that Government can take now which would place Westminster – and of course other parts of the UK – on a much sounder footing. These actions would help to leave our economic and social infrastructure intact to ensure that we are all on the front-foot once we emerge from this crisis.

We welcome the extensive measures you have already announced to support businesses, but a significant number of companies in Westminster have approached the Council in the last week alone because they are falling through the cracks or have concerns about their survival because of the way in which support packages are being administered. In particular:

**Self-employed workers:** While self-employed workers will be able to claim relief from June onwards, which for many will be too late to cover basic fixed costs. It is unclear if those who are self-employed and are paid through limited company dividends as company directors will be able to benefit from the extended Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan (CBILS) Scheme. A loan may also not be enough for these individuals who are set to lose their income in the same way as sole traders simply because of how they have constituted their business. We would urge the government should look at whether its relief schemes for businesses are reaching as many businesses as it would like and in the timeframe required.

**Salary reimbursement:** There is concern that cash flow issues will arise for organisations if the reimbursement of 80% of salaries does not credit employers' bank accounts until a number of days after the payroll payment run. We would ask the government to credit employers' bank accounts without delay to avoid significant cash flow issues or clarify alternative routes to avoid this issue arising in the first place.



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**Business Improvement Districts (BIDs):** The Coronavirus Act 2020 extended the current term of all BIDs - which is positive and welcome. As the Government has rightly recognised that BIDs will be vital to the economic recovery there is a need also to support BIDs' financial position. With Westminster BIDs agreeing not to enforce collection of BID levies, the BIDs are left without a source of income. We would appreciate the Government considering a financial backstop for BIDs which are close to expending their reserves and under threat of insolvency.

**Car parks:** Car parks are being asked to stay open to support essential services by offering vital free car spaces to frontline NHS and other staff but are invariably operating with low footfall and therefore low revenue. Car parks are however, still liable for business rates. With very little income to pay for the running costs of the business, operators may have to consider closing to reduce costs unless fixed costs such as business rates can be reduced in line with provisions made for other businesses. We would therefore ask you to consider expanding the business rate relief scheme to those car parks offering free provision for frontline staff battling the virus.

As you say, we must do whatever it takes to see the country through this time, and I hope you take the suggestions made in this letter in this spirit. All the measures above have been identified in consultation with our business communities – learning the lessons from the frontline.

Taken as a whole, we believe these measures will go a long way to ensure that we come out of this crisis better prepared to recover – both socially and economically. I would be more than happy to discuss any of these specific measures further with you or your officials.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Rachael Robathan  
Leader of the Council  
Westminster City Council