

23 March 2020

Dear business owner,

We are writing to you from Camden Council to express our support for businesses in Camden and to recognise the unprecedented pressures you are under – as employers, as tenants, as ratepayers and as members of our community. Camden, in our position at the heart of London, is facing particular challenges.

We would like to thank all the businesses who are stepping up to help the community and support your employees – by providing them with sick pay, allowing them to work from home as far as possible, and giving them leave to care for relatives and family members. We welcome all you are doing to cooperate with national advice to limit the spread of infection and ensure the most vulnerable are protected. We ask that you continue to follow advice and require your employees and partners to do the same. If your business is a shop, we particularly urge you to make sure that your staff and customers are practising social distancing – keeping two metres between people.

We are proud to have so many arts, culture, leisure and hospitality businesses in our borough, and recognise that many of these organisations are facing an incredibly difficult future. We also know that COVID-19 could impact all of our businesses, so we want to make sure you know how we'll be supporting you.

At Camden Council, we are doing the following:

- If you're struggling to pay your business rates, please call us so that we can discuss alternative options with you on **020 7974 6460**.
- Retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, and private nurseries, will automatically get a 12-month business rates holiday starting now.
- We are waiting for further guidance on the cash grants referenced by the government for small businesses. As soon as we know more we will write again to eligible businesses.
- We are speaking with our Business Board and the Federation of Small Businesses about the support they need and will update you as soon as we can.
- We are contacting our commercial tenants and we will provide support to those facing difficulties in paying their rent.

In addition to the above, the government has announced a number of measures to support local businesses and people across the country.

This is what the government is doing:

- We welcome the government's financial package of help, including paying 80% of wages. But it's important that businesses know they'll be able to access this money quickly, so we're urging the government to clarify how and when it can be accessed. In the meantime, we urge businesses to hold on to their staff.

- If you or a member of your workforce are worried about being able to pay tax as a result of coronavirus, call HMRC's dedicated helpline on **0800 0159 559**.
- Statutory Sick Pay will be available from day one rather than day four and, if you employ fewer than 250 people, the cost of providing 14 days of Statutory Sick Pay per employee will be refunded in full by the government.
- If you manage a pub, club or a theatre and have an insurance policy that covers you for pandemics, you'll be able to make a claim.
- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme will support lenders to offer loans of up to £5 million with no interest due for six months.
- If any of your employees have a zero-hours contract, please let them know they'll be able to access Universal Credit and the new Employment Support Allowance.
- Mortgage lenders will support customers who are experiencing financial difficulties by giving them mortgage holidays for up to three months.

We welcome that the government is working with trade unions and businesses to protect jobs during this period. Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 will take years, not weeks, and we are calling on the government to think long term about how to rebuild an economy that is open, fairer to business and fairer to staff.

COVID-19 is going to bring us all new challenges, and we will all need to work collectively to tackle them. We want to ensure that the voice of Camden business is represented to the government, and so we would be really grateful for your stories about how this challenge is affecting you, your staff and your community, so we can effectively lobby the government and reflect on what support we can provide. We want to hear from you about what you need in the short and long term so please let us know your thoughts by completing the survey at **camden.gov.uk/coronavirus**. You can also sign up for email updates at that address to keep updated.

Camden businesses are a vital part of our community, city and country. We will need all of our collective efforts to get through this. This crisis will end, and when it does we must work together in solidarity across the public, private and third sectors to ensure that our community is able to recover together. In the meantime, please share this information with your employees, follow public health advice and help us to ensure the most vulnerable are protected.

We expect further announcements from the government so please check **camden.gov.uk/coronavirus** for the most up to date information, guidance and support. Please also share this link with your employees. If you do not have access to the internet, please call **020 7974 4444** (option 9).

Lastly, our day-to-day aim in Camden is to make sure that no-one gets left behind – and this will focus our efforts as we face up to this crisis – so please get in touch if you are struggling.

With very best wishes,

Georgia Gould, Leader of Camden Council
Danny Beales, Cabinet Member for Investing in Communities and an Inclusive Economy,
Camden Council