April 2020

Information correct as of the afternoon of 21/04/20.

Summary of Government, Regulator, Trade Body and Trade Union Covid-19 Policies

An overview of the work being undertaken by government departments to cope with the economic impact of the Covid-19 outbreak, new economic and business advice committees recently set up by the government, and of the policies advocated by trade unions and trade bodies.

We have included an update on our own most recent activities as to how we are working to put our sector on the agenda when it comes to business continuity measures.

The contents page below provides links to the latest updates within each organisation.

Contents

- Parliamentary Estate
- Select Committees

Trade Bodies and Trade Unions

- Confederation of British Industry
- Chartered Institute for Waste Management
- Federation of Small Businesses
- GMB
- UNISON
- Unite

REA Activity Update

At the Association of Renewable Energy & Clean Technology, we have launched an advice page on which members can find links to access information and support. The page also details how we are consulting members about the best way we can represent the industry's interest to government in the difficult months ahead. Our activities are detailed below.

Progress on Covid-19 Business Continuity Work

The REA is prioritising business continuity work for our members at this current time of national and international pandemic. As part of this, we have:

- Weekly calls with a Senior Director within BEIS to press our members concerns
- Regular calls with the group feeding in Business Continuity messaging to Number 10
- Senior level contact with all other relevant Government Departments and Regulators
- Compiling and updating a Log of all member concerns, and sending to Government regularly
- Set up a dedicated area of the REA website to keep members updated
- Upload the latest information to the area daily
- Send out regular specific news items to relevant affected members

In the past fortnight the REA and industry have had the following successes for the sector:

- On Monday 31 March BEIS issued a letter that clarifies which construction site workers are able to continue work and which should not, during the current lockdown. We now also have the Site Operating Procedures (SOP) published by the Construction Leadership Council which must be followed at operational sites.
- Confirmation that the FiT deadline (for community, hydro and some AD projects) has been extended by six months
- Initial response on certain rules for biomethane plant injection (re the addition of propane).
- Clarification that the resource and waste industry and biomass heat supply chain are considered an essential service (following the high-level declaration that the energy, transport and water sectors are all essential services)
- We continue to raise all your concerns with the relevant contacts and held an REA Policy Board discussion this week on the topic- please send us any issues you are encountering so we are as up to date as possible

We are working to progress over thirty identified issues at this vital time and this list is growing - please contact us to discuss how we can assist your business.

Government and Regulators

Cabinet Office

Key workers and guidance on attending work

On 23 March the Cabinet Office issued guidance to clarify which businesses and workers are effected by the 'stay home' order given on the evening of 23 March.

Energy, waste and recycling, and utility companies are not included in the list of businesses ordered to close. These are key sectors and therefore any employees whose roles are essential in relation to keeping the service going, are also entitled to send their children to school. All workers can travel where they 'absolutely cannot work from home', which indicates that work such as boiler or other equipment maintenance, biomass fuel or waste deliveries and AD operators can continue to go to work, as are construction workers. The public is strongly encouraged to work from home unless their jobs are important for the functioning of the country's health, social and transport systems or utility and food supply.

Robert Jenrick, the Housing Secretary, clarified on the evening of 23 March that construction workers are exempt from the order to stay at home, so long as they practice a social distancing policy.

On 30 March, the Cabinet Office issued a more detailed guidance document, listing businesses that are expected to close and exceptions. One notable exception for our industry is that tradesmen are permitted to continue installations and other work at residential properties, provided that none of the parties involved has symptoms or is self-isolating.

Suppliers of public bodies and local authorities

On 7 April government revised a Procurement Policy Note and FAQs for public authorities. It aims to provide them with guidelines about maintaining their commitments to suppliers. The document outlines what is expected of public bodies and stresses that they should pay their suppliers, identify suppliers that may be at risk of going bust and put in measures to ensure that suppliers can maintain cash flow.

On 14 April, the REA received clarity on a query back from the Crown Commercial Service about the PPN. The REA noted that for many organics businesses, e.g. garden waste collection sites, business is very seasonal, as collections can peak in the spring and summer months. Therefore the payments due should be calculated based on the same period last year, rather than the last three months. The CCS clarified that local authorities should be taking a pragmatic approach, and that for seasonal businesses, it would be appropriate for local authorities to select the same period last year when calculating payments.

Committee on Climate Change

On the 14th April, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) announced that they will be refocusing their annual Progress Report to Parliament in June to include advice on supporting a resilient recovery following the pandemic, alongside the statutory assessment of the UK's progress in reducing emissions. The Committee will also be writing to Ministers over the next few weeks to set out initial advice on ensuring a just transition is included in the rebuilding efforts and towards achieving Net

Zero. Advice on the Sixth Carbon Budget expected in September will now be published in December to reflect the impacts of the crisis.

Competition and Markets Authority

The competition watchdog has decided to streamline its operations and focus on the most urgent issues only. While relaxing competition rules for supermarkets, it is also launching a taskforce to crack down on profiteering due to the Covid-19 outbreak. At the moment, the taskforce will focus on incidents in which prices have been increased due to demand far outstripping supply, and on misleading claims about the benefits of products.

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Financial Support

The Department has collated links and information about the range of financial support for businesses on one central page. BEIS has also launched a 'support finder tool' – a one-minute questionnaire to help businesses identify which support they might be eligible for.

BEIS has also released more detailed guidance on the eligibility of businesses for the Small Businesses Grants fund, in light of the coronavirus crisis.

On Monday 23 March the government launched the details of its business support package, including a loan scheme for small and medium-sized businesses. Small companies have been reporting that lenders are unaware of the scheme and unwilling to provide loans to help them survive the crisis. Banks are allegedly continuing to use pre-crisis criteria for lending. The Federation of Small Businesses told the Financial Times that this is being widely reported by members.

The new business support package includes a Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, open for applications from 23 March. The Loan Scheme will give businesses with a turnover of up to £45 million the opportunity to get loans of up to £5 million to help them survive the crisis. The government will cover interest payments and any lender-levied fees for an initial period of 12 months, and is providing lenders with an 80% guarantee on each facility. The scheme is currently available through around 40 accredited lenders, however this number is expected to rise.

On 8 April the government also published details of a Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme, to enable large businesses to access loans of up to £25 million, also with an 80% guarantee from government. The scheme is expected to be open for applications from late April. This was revised on 16 April to include businesses with turnovers of more than £500 million, which were previously ineligible.

The Bank of England also has a new lending facility for larger businesses, the Covid Corporate Financing Facility. This, too, is open for applications from 23 March. The scheme will enable larger business to purchase commercial paper, also known as short-term corporate debt. The hope is that this will help companies that are 'fundamentally strong' but experiencing short-term cash flow problems. Firms need to be able to demonstrate that they were in good financial health prior to the crisis.

Alongside the two loan schemes, the government is also launching an information campaign to try to ensure that businesses are aware of the help available and how to access it. The campaign will use social media, radio, television and a new central website, soon to be launched. The measures sit alongside the Job Retention Scheme launched on 20 March.

Financial support for Innovation Businesses

As part of a £1.25 billion support package for firms driving innovation, the government has announced the Future Fund, a loan scheme worth a total of £500 million. Half of the Future Fund financing will come from government, and half from businesses. SMEs focussing on research and development will also be able to access loans and grants from a fund of £750 million through Innovate UK. Innovate UK will accelerate payments to existing customers and increase funding to them, and take on an additional 1,200 firms for support.

To qualify for a Future Fund loan, businesses will need to have gained a total of £250,000 investment from funding rounds across the last five years and be able to match the government funding with private investment. The government loans will be worth up to half the original funding, so from a minimum of £125,000, with a maximum of £5 million. When the loan matures after 36 months, the loan will either need to be repaid or converted to shares. The scheme is expected to be available from May.

Banks and Lending

On 2 April, new rules were announced for banks on issuing government-backed loans to businesses. This means that banks are banned from requesting personal guarantees on these loans, and that businesses can apply for the loans even if they have not previously applied for a commercial loan and been denied. Before, businesses had to have applied for a commercial loan and been denied in order to qualify.

The Secretary of State told banks in a speech on 1 April that it is 'completely unacceptable' to deny businesses coronavirus loans, particularly in the context of the bailout that many banks received with public funding during the financial crisis of 2008. He also noted that the Chancellor, with the Bank of England and Financial Conduct Authority, has written to the chief executives of British banks to 'urge them to make sure the benefits of the Loans Schemes are passed on to businesses and consumers.

Measures for the Energy Sector

BEIS has announced an extension of the Feed-in-Tariff Accreditation Deadline for eligible projects. Although the FiT remains closed to new projects, this extension will apply to community projects, Anaerobic Digestion and Hydro projects still had time to benefit. The deadline has been extended to 30 September, for projects that were likely to miss deadlines falling in March due to coronavirus. It also offers a six month extension to projects whose deadlines fall after 1 April.

On 19 March the Department announced that it had agreed new emergency measures with the energy industry to protect energy supply to the most vulnerable. From 19 March onwards, energy customers with pre-payment meters (often used by those on low-incomes) who may not be able to add credit to the meters, will be able to liaise with suppliers about continuing their usage. This may include nominating a third party for top ups, having a discretionary amount added to their credit, or being sent a pre-loaded top-up card. The Department has also agreed with suppliers that they will support customers going through financial difficulties.

The department has also recently released a package of measures to support the heat sector. These can be read here.

On 17 March, one newspaper reported that energy suppliers have agreed to halt all nonessential maintenance of energy infrastructure, due to concerns about possible staff shortages during the pandemic. The measure that has been met with concern from trade unions. The government has yet to confirm that an agreement has been reached, but Ofgem has said that it is prioritising essential work.

Key Worker Definitions

The government has included energy sector (oil, gas and electricity) workers in the list of key workers, whose children are permitted to continue to attend school. Transport and utilities such as water (including sewerage), and waste disposal services are also included in the list.

It is important to clarify that this definition applies for the purposes of childcare provision and is not an indication in itself of whether someone is able to continue to work or whether a business should remain open.

Site Operating Procedures and Construction

On 31 March, the Secretary of State, Alok Sharma, published a letter confirming that construction work should continue to go ahead with work, if work cannot be carried out from home. The government has developed coronavirus Site Operating Procedures in coordination with the Construction Leadership Council – these were updated on 14 April and the revised version is linked.

Manufacturing

On 8 April Alok Sharma published a letter to the British manufacturing industry. The key message of the letter was that there are no restrictions on the continuation of manufacturing under current rules. The letter also stressed the importance of keeping services, parts and raw materials available to ensure that services can continue to function.

Social Distancing and the Workplace

BEIS has published an extremely detailed guide on social distancing in the workplace across different industries and types of service. Within a sub-section on waste collection, the advice is that social distancing should be conducted where possible, and especially if staff cannot be more than 2m apart at all times. When staff have to share an enclosed space, such as a vehicle, they should wash their hands for more than 20 seconds after leaving that space.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Survey of Waste Industry on Covid 19 Impacts

Defra has published a questionnaire to gauge the impact that the Covid-19 outbreak is having on the Waste Industry. The results will aid Defra to make informed policy decisions and contingency planning to support the sector at large. The questionnaire will be repeated again in a few weeks to assess how the situation has changed.

The questionnaire will take around 15-30 minutes to complete and includes questions on staff numbers; supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE); volumes of material you are processing; and any changes to capacity you are experiencing. Any data publicly reported on will be anonymised. The questionnaire is available here and the deadline for submission is 23:59 on Tuesday 14th April.

Carrying over annual leave

On 27 March the Department announced, along with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, that rules around carrying over annual leave are to be relaxed. Up to four weeks of annual leave per person will be permitted to carry over into the next two working years. This measure is designed to help give businesses flexibility, meaning that staff can continue contributing to the national effort against coronavirus without losing annual leave entitlements. It will also allow businesses to ensure that workers can carry over leave, at a time when many businesses in some key industries such as food production are already short-staffed.

Key workers

In response to recent concerns raised by the REA to Defra, on 25th March we received a confirmation from the department that workers in waste disposal services are classified as key workers. This includes waste collection and treatment including AD.

Defra also confirmed that AD is a key working sector. A quote from Defra: *"You can assume that the reference to gas and energy production would cover those operators that are producing biogas especially if this is to feed into the grid or to provide biofuel etc. to keep services/industries operating."*

Food and garden waste collections and HWRCs

The government has published (7 April) non-statutory guidelines for local authorities on the prioritisation of waste collections in England during the coronavirus pandemic. Devolved administrations are responsible for determining their own guidelines and the REA is participating in Scottish Government's COVID-19 Waste Sector Forum.

Food waste is categorised as high priority as too are mixed food and garden waste collections and should be maintained as far as possible. Garden waste on its own is categorised as low priority and if it cannot be collected at least once per fortnight Defra seems to be recommending temporary suspension of this service. Household Waste Recycling Centres are categorised as medium priority, with recommendation to keep them open if possible but if not to consider whether priority sites can be maintained with restricted access. Essential are adequate staffing levels for health and safety and security purposes and maintaining social distancing rules. The REA has flagged HWRCs due to their contribution to the supply of garden wastes to composting facilities and non-garden woody wastes to various operators in wood waste processing sectors.

In response to news reports on fly tipping and pressure on waste services, on 14th April Defra published a blog which encourages councils to open their HWRCs or keep them open if not already closed. Emphasizing aspects of its 7th April advice to local authorities on prioritising waste collections Defra's blog recommends that 'councils' top priority should be the collection of residual 'black bag' waste to stop the build-up of waste and protect public health'. The department is also 'encouraging councils to keep their HWRCs open to ensure that bulky waste can continue to be disposed of, but only if social distancing guidelines can be adhered to on site'. If an HWRC is open, 'then as per the laws and guidance currently in place, members of the public should only take their waste to a HWRC if the journey is 'essential', i.e. because the build-up of waste in the home may pose a risk of injury or to health.'

These guidelines show that Defra has acted further since its first response to the REA's request that food and garden waste collections should be regarded as priority collections, in which Defra clearly stated that Government would do whatever is necessary to support councils in their response to coronavirus. Defra continues to work with local authorities and the waste industry to ensure that waste collections are prioritised to protect the environment and human health.

On 16 April the Environment Minister Rebecca Pow MP published a letter to those working in the waste sector to thank them for their hard work and highlighting the safety procedures and guidelines published by the government.

Incinerators

Defra has published a regulatory position statement which applies to operators of permitted municipal waste incinerators. Usually, incinerators will breach their permit if they accept waste beyond the types stated in their permit. The RPS allows incinerators to accept and destroy Covid-19 possible infectious waste such as used PPE, so long as the sites follow specified guidelines.

Department for Transport

Airlines

The Department is focussing on working with the Treasury to announce a series of measures to save Britain's airline industry.

The Department for Transport is also heavily involved in government efforts to repatriate hundreds of thousands of Britons left stranded abroad by border closures and flight cancellations. The government has announced a £75 million partnership with airlines to get stranded Britons abroad home.

Rail and Bus

On 3 April a £397 million support package was announced for bus companies, to help them stay in business and keep bus routes open so that key workers can continue to use them for commuting and members of the public can use them for essential journeys.

Rail franchises have been temporarily suspended to avoid train operators collapsing, after a 70 per cent fall in the number of passengers. Instead, the government is paying a small fee to operators to keep a limited service running. As of Monday 23 March, operators are running a significantly reduced service. The Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced that those with advance tickets will be entitled to full refunds, while season ticket holders will be able to get a refund calculated using the amount of time that the ticket will go unused.

Hygiene guidance for transport sector workers has also been issued.

Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency

On Monday 30 March the government announced that annual inspections of dangerous goods vehicles have been suspended, and those wishing to transport goods classified as dangerous will need to apply for a waiver, if their authorisation is due to expire during the lockdown. There is no fee for a waiver.

Vehicle approval tests (required for imported, privately built or radically altered vehicles) have been suspended by the government for at least three months, although companies and individuals working in 'critical' sectors will still be able to get an emergency test if necessary. Vehicles eligible for an emergency test include light goods vehicles, heavy goods vehicles, and trailers.

This is in addition to the 6-month MOT exemption, extending MOT expiry dates by 6-months if they are due to happen during the course of the outbreak.

Environment Agency

EA message to regulatory stakeholders

The EA have issued a letter setting out how they will carry out their regulatory duties during the pandemic. They will act quickly, decisively and proportionately and be flexible. They are exploring options for carrying out regulatory visits using alternative approaches (e.g. desk based compliance and remote working). Whilst they expect operators to take all reasonable steps to comply with legislation, they understand it is a difficult time and are monitoring the situation and will consider the appropriate regulatory response. All updates will be published here.

Regulatory Position Statements

The Environment Agency has published a Regulatory Position Statement on Storing treated sewage sludge you cannot move because of COVID-19 restrictions. It provides a relaxation of two conditions in the S3 exemption, which is typically used for sludge storage by Water and Sewage Companies (WaSC). The RPS allows treated sewage sludge to be stored at a place other than where it is to be used and for up to 3,000 tonnes of it to be stored at that place at any one time. A WaSC is required to contact their water company account manager to get Environment Agency written agreement before they can use the RPS.

On 6 April the Environment Agency published a regulatory position statement on temporarily exceeding the waste storage limits at permitted sites because of Covid-19. The EA will allow this provided site management comply with the RPS guidelines.

The EA has also published an RPS on social distancing when signing and handing over waste transfer and consignment notes in person. When you do not need to sign or hand over waste transfer or consignment notes in person because of Covid-19 restrictions.

An RPS has also been published on monitoring emissions from installations, radioactive substance and waste sites. This details when you can delay and reschedule some emissions to air and water monitoring and other environmental monitoring because of Covid-19 restrictions.

TCM

The Environment Agency has acknowledged to the REA that some biofuel, biomass and waste businesses may be concerned about being able to satisfy attendance requirements of technically competent management (TCM) while sites are running at reduced staffing levels. The agency has indicated that it is willing to be pragmatic in its approach but warns that it is a requirement to have TCM as a component of the permit. They note that where TCM cannot attend, the operator should be capable of operating the plant safely through training and EMS. Operators should ensure that they have incident response plans and rotas in place. The EA's detailed response about TCMs can be read here.

As competence test centres are now closed, the agency will not view failure to attend a continuing competence assessment as a failure to comply with the Wamitab Assessment Scheme.

James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency has issued an open letter to industry setting out their approach to the virus. Within it he confirms that they have put in place arrangements to carry out regulatory activities in a safe, secure and effective way as far as possible. Although they will need to stop or slow some of their normal activities in order to focus on the most important and urgent issues. The full letter can be read here.

Financial Conduct Authority

The FCA issued proposals on 2 April, to aid people with overdrafts, loans and credit card debt. The FCA proposes that people with existing overdrafts should not be charged interest on the first £500 for 90 days. It is also working on plans to freeze loan, store card and credit card repayments for 3 months, for people who are in financial difficulty. Interest would continue to accrue on the loans. The FCA has asked banks to respond by 6 April and is anticipating that its new measures will come into force on 9 April.

On 15 April the FCA published a letter to the insurance industry regarding payouts, with particular reference to small businesses. The letter notes that most insurance policies do not cover pandemics and therefore insurers are not required to pay out, in some circumstances insurers should be paying out and should do so in a timely manner. With regards to disputes about payouts to small businesses, sending the process through the Financial Ombudsman Services rather than the Court Process is likely to result in a quicker decision. The FCA has established a small business unit, which will look into concerns that insurers are failing to pay out small businesses on unreasonable grounds.

HM Revenue and Customs

On 15 April HMRC announced an extension to the cut-off date of the furlough scheme. The cut off date is now 19 March 2020, meaning that employees who started work on or prior to that date are eligible to be furloughed. The previous cut-off date was 28 February. The department has confirmed that the portal for employers to register furloughed staff will open on Monday 20 April and that payments will begin to be processed on 24 April. In order to be paid by 30 April, employers will need to complete and submit their applications by 22 April.

The furlough scheme has also been extended to the end of June, having been originally scheduled to last until the end of May.

The department published detailed guidance on 14 April about how it will calculate the amount of support that self-employed people are entitled to via the income support scheme. The OBR has stated that the furlough scheme is limiting the effect of the crisis on unemployment rates.

HMRC has published detailed guidance for employees to enable them to check whether their employer is eligible for the furloughing scheme.

HMRC are running free webinars for businesses to help provide information and answer questions on how businesses can access support. The webinars cover a range of information including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, refunding eligible Statutory Sick Pay costs, and furloughed employees.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The government has announced that commercial tenants will be protected from eviction, if they cannot pay their rent because of the outbreak. The measures are included in the emergency Coronavirus Bill.

Pressure is growing on the government to further strengthen protections for commercial tenants – some businesses are reporting that they are being threatened with legal action because they are unable to pay rent, despite the moratorium on rent payments until 30 June.

Expert Taskforce

The government has announced the creation of a taskforce comprised of experts from local government, the military, police, health sector, adult social care, and resilience professionals. This will assess the plans of the Local Resilience Forums to and provide advice to the Forums.

There are 38 LRFs across England. They provide opportunities for dialogue and cross-coordination between the emergency services, government agencies, health bodies and local authorities.

The taskforce will work with the LRF's to commission a tabletop exercise for each area, discuss support for vulnerable people and the maintenance of key services, analyse the relationships between LRFs and Local Health Partnerships, and analyse the LRF's preparedness for a flu pandemic.

Inspections

In addition, the government has announced the suspension of Ofsted and Routine Care Quality Commission inspections. The deadline for local government financial audits has been extended to September. The government is also considering removing the legal requirement for annual Council meetings to take place in person, and introducing legislation to permit Council meetings to be held virtually, on a temporary basis.

Crisis experts

Up to 70 MOD planners and Liaison Officers have also been brought on to the response by government to liaise with and advise local authorities and public services. Local authorities are also required to identify social care volunteer opportunities.

New Committees

The government has created four new implementation committees, focussing on health, public sector preparedness, economy and the international response. The Chairs of the committees will each attend the daily Covid-19 meetings of key ministers and senior officials.

The committees:

- Healthcare – chaired by the Health Secretary to focus on the preparedness of the NHS, in particular the critical care system, and the medical and social care packages for those who will be subject to the new 'shielding' measures.
- General Public Sector – chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The committee will focus on preparing the rest of the public sector and critical infrastructure.
- Economic and Business – chaired by the Chancellor, with the Business Secretary as the Deputy Chair. This considers the impact on businesses and the economy, including the effect on supply chains. It will also coordinate roundtables with key sectors to be chaired by the relevant Secretaries of State.
- International – chaired by the Foreign Secretary. This committee has been set up to coordinate our international response through the G7, G20 and other routes.

Office for Low-Emission Vehicles

OLEV has issued guidance to chargepoint installers on how to protect staff and customers during the outbreak. It recommends that installers follow the broader public advice, noting that they are categorised as key workers, and should contact households ahead of installation to check whether they are isolating or vulnerable to infection. Installers should not accept offers of food or drink when at the property.

In light of the recent decision to reduce the size of grant available for domestic installations after 31 March 2020, OLEV has taken the decision to extend the grant period, in cases where an installation was due to take place before 31 March and has been delayed because of coronavirus. A transition period will apply for orders placed before 12 March but due to take place after 31 March – these can now take place up to 31 May and still be eligible for the £500 grant. For WCS installations, OLEV has extended the period in which vouchers are eligible, if they originally applied before 31 March. However, OLEV must be notified within 5 working days of any missed installation.

OLEV has announced an extension to its consultation on ending the sale of new petrol, diesel and hybrid cars by 2035 at the latest. The new deadline for submissions to the consultation is 31 July 2020. OLEV has also extended the tender deadline for Beyond Off-Street, the smart-meter enabled electric vehicle charging trial. The new deadline to submit a tender is 15 May, although businesses must notify OLEV of the intention to submit a tender by 21 April.

Ofgem

Ofgem has published a collated page of its policies around coronavirus for energy licensees. These include the policies for the prioritisation of services and works, a revised timeline of dates for projects and consultations, and advice.

On 8 April Ofgem published two detailed guidance letters on how to support customers through the crisis – one letter to networks and one to suppliers. These set out Ofgem's expectations for good and safe practice, Ofgem's priorities and what may be deprioritised if necessary.

Ofgem has released its position on the annual sustainability reports required under the RHI and RO schemes. There have currently been no changes to previously set deadlines for either schemes. Should a site visit not be possible because of coronavirus restrictions, justification will need to be provided to

Ofgem, but the risks of not performing a visit can be mitigated. Further information can be found on the REA webpage, linked above.

Ofgem has split its advice page into two sections – one for consumers and one for licensees and industry.

A statement released on 19 March by CEO Jonathan Brearley stated that Ofgem is working closely with the government to protect the security of the UK's energy supply. Ofgem stresses that its priority is to safeguard jobs in the industry and protect customers. Brearley's statement said that Ofgem is exploring ways to ensure that a reliable service continues, especially for vulnerable users. He acknowledged that there were queries around how self-isolating customers could get essential repairs to meters, and that some may struggle to pay their bills, however he asked that companies put plans in place for how self-isolating customers could be serviced.

A further statement on 27 March sought to reassure consumers that a rigorous prioritisation of work is taking place in order to protect the energy supply. Brearley also urged consumers not to call their energy provider's helpline unless the issue was very urgent, in order to ensure that the most vulnerable consumers were serviced quickly.

Brearley said that Ofgem will be 'pragmatic' with its approach to compliance during the pandemic. Ofgem has also taken the decision to postpone RIIO-2 hearings, and is exploring how to consider the impact of Covid-19 on its consultations throughout the year.

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

SEPA have launched a Covid hub. This is where SEPA sets out its overall approach and it is where SEPA will publish guidance relating to the response, including temporary regulatory positions. This is an update to the previous position so that could be removed from the briefing. Key points for members can be viewed on the REA website here.

SEPA has issued a position statement on how they will be dealing with waste management regulatory issues during the pandemic. They are keen for operators to make them aware of any compliance challenges directly. SEPA expect operators to ensure impacts on the environment are minimised and recognises that the consequences of the outbreak may mean it is not possible for operators to comply fully with their environmental obligations for reasons beyond their control. SEPA will take account of the challenges faced by operators in its approach to compliance assessment and enforcement during this exceptional period.

SEPA state that recycling services should be maintained for as long as possible in line with the Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012. The position statement includes information of the provision of Technical Competence cover and arrangements for using remote electronic systems for signatures on waste transfers.

Scottish Government

Procurement – Supplier Relief

The Procurement Policy Note published by the UK government does not apply in Scotland. The Scottish Government has issued a policy note set out guidance for public bodies on options for payment to their suppliers, to ensure a continuity of service.

Additional Guidance

There is a central page of guidance from the Scottish Government. In addition, there is specific guidance on social distancing and business, with a section on those sectors designated as Critical National Infrastructure, which includes energy and waste businesses.

The Scottish Government has also provided advice on social distancing in non-healthcare public services, which is relevant for waste collection crews. Crucially, 'social distancing of 2m (6 ft.) should be adhered to whenever feasible at the workplace, including at breaks. When it is not possible to implement the 2m social distancing guidance at the workplace, a brief risk assessment should be undertaken as the whether the task is essential and if so, the distance between workers can be reduced to no less than 1m, except with break times when the 2m social distance guidance applies'.

Waste Industry Safety & Health forum

The Waste Industry Safety and Health forum (WISH) has produced an **information document** on managing COVID-19 risks in the context of a range of waste management activities. The document was revised on 15 April and the second version is linked – this includes a change to guidance on the reporting of injuries and diseases.

It gives information on what to do if an employee shows symptoms, some general precautions and then advice for specific waste management operational types and functions.

Parliamentary Activity

Bills

The Coronavirus Bill has officially passed with no amendment and received Royal Assent on the 25th March. The Bill is 329 pages long and covers matters relating to:

- The postponement of elections, referendums, recall petitions and canvass
- Increasing the health and social care workforce
- Ease the burden on frontline staff
- Slowing the spread of the virus
- Management of the deceased
- The suspension of port operations
- Giving Police the powers to enforce self-isolation for those showing symptoms
- Statutory sick pay and pensions

COP 26

On the afternoon of April 1st, Italy and the UK alongside the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) made a joint statement announcing intentions to delay COP26 until 2021. New dates for the Conference are yet to be announced. The full statement is available here.

Parliamentary Estate

Parliament is set to resume as a 'hybrid' system from week commencing 20th April. The hybrid system will see up to 120 MPs be able to take part in parliamentary business virtually with around 50 MPs allowed in the Chamber under social distancing rules. As it stands, parliamentary business will be limited to oral questions, Prime Minister's Questions, urgent questions and statements. There is scope to extend this to debates on motions, the consideration of legislation and remote voting systems. These plans do not include Select Committee meetings which have been taking place virtually for a number of weeks.

As it stands, these plans have been approved by the House of Commons authorities, the Leader of the House and Speaker of the House. The new system can only be passed with the approval of MPs who are expected to vote on the matter on the 21st April.

Select Committees

Several Select Committees have chosen to continue their inquiries and meetings digitally with the Treasury Committee even launching a digital inquiry on the economic impact of coronavirus. As it stands the continuation of Select Committee activity digitally is currently at the discretion of the individual Committees.

Following Jacob Rees-Mogg's announcement that Parliamentary business will take place digitally from the 21st April, it is expected that the majority of Select Committees will resume their work.

Trade Unions and Trade Bodies

Confederation of British Industry

The CBI has created a 'Coronavirus Hub' on its website, with dedicated sections to provide economic insight and analysis, support for business, on how the CBI is responding, and on how British businesses can help the national effort during the outbreak. The Hub includes a call for British manufacturers that may be able to make ventilators, and a consultation form on how the virus is affecting members' businesses.

The Hub's page on how the CBI is responding details its priorities, including: protecting employment and the health of employees, securing supply chains, and how the CBI wants the government to enable better cash flow for businesses. The CBI is asking the government to suspend National Insurance payments for the first quarter of this year and to suspend business rates payments for all businesses, for at least three months.

The CBI is also releasing a weekly update on economic measures and business support packages announced by the devolved nations.

Chartered Institute for Waste Management

CIWM have launched WasteSupport, a 'virtual marketplace' to support the resources and waste sector during the COVID-19 crisis. WasteSupport is a new, free online platform which provides a fully searchable sharing forum. It enables local authorities facing resource challenges during the COVID-19 crisis to indicate where they need service capacity support, as well as other requirements such as PPE or vehicle maintenance engineers. Commercial waste collection firms with surplus capacity will also be able to use the platform to indicate those services they are able to supply, thereby providing a 'virtual marketplace' to facilitate sharing. Zero Waste Scotland have also created a similar tool for Scotland.

Federation of Small Businesses

The Federation of Small Businesses has set up a dedicated page to the impact of Covid-19 on small businesses. This has detailed information about what kind of financial assistance businesses can access, in all the regions of the UK, from business rates relief, to tax, loans and staffing. On 20 March the FSB held an advice webinar, which has now been uploaded to watch on its website. The FSB has urged the government to provide additional support for the self-employed.

On Friday 3 April the FSB is running a free webinar for members on how to access support from local councils.

GMB

The GMB has an advice page on how workers can protect their health, and details about their rights to be paid when self-isolating.

Unite

Unite claims to be the 'foremost' union for energy sector workers in the UK, and to represent tens of thousands in the industry. On Thursday 19 March, it released a statement addressed to Alok Sharma, BEIS Secretary, demanding that energy sector workers be classified as key workers. *The government has since clarified in its list of critical workers that power sector workers are 'key workers'.*

Unite has launched a dedicated Legal Advice helpline for members whose employment and financial circumstances are affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. It has also provided a detailed advice page explaining entitlement to statutory sick pay, employment rights in the context of school closures, and other information.

UNISON

UNISON, the public services union, represents thousands of workers in the energy sector, although it has not released any statement or policy about the Covid-19 outbreak that is specific to energy sector workers. UNISON has welcomed the key worker provisions from the government. UNISON pressed the government (on 20 March) to provide a more coordinated response to widespread panic buying, which is leaving some key workers unable to access food.

UNISON is continuing to offer financial assistance to members through its subsidiary charity, There for You. It has requested that all branches make a donation to the charity.