

Information correct as of 2e1/08/20.

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.

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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.

We have been working with Government on the future of working safely. The Government is currently preparing sector-specific guidelines for returning to work when the lockdown is eased, and is working with stakeholders from industry, trade associations (including the REA) and trade unions to do so. The REA has been using the log of issues provided by members and input from our Policy Board to feed into these discussions and to highlight the relevant barriers and requirements for the renewables and clean technology sector.

As part of our business continuity work, we have:

- Calls with the Minister of State at the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Kwasi Kwarteng MP to highlight our priorities for safe and practical working
- 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
- Been working with Government on the development of guidelines for safe working in the future, as detailed above
- Distributed a survey on 'Working Safely' and fed back to Government
- 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
- Running business support information webinars to help members understand the financial support available

The REA and industry have had the following successes for the sector:

- On 23rd June Ofgem approved a proposal to defer BSUoS charges, but decided not choose the original proposal, which the [REA opposed](#), along with a handful of other respondents to the consultation. The original proposal would have seen a large and permanent loss of value for embedded generation, and was proposed to be backdated, which would have seen embedded generators being asked to return money they had already been given.
- On 13 May, following requests for clarification from the REA, the National Grid ESO issued a letter regarding Ofgem's decision to approve the Grid Code Modification on Disconnecting Embedded Generation as a last resort. The [letter for the industry](#) confirmed in writing that disconnection would only be a very last resort and is unlikely to be used.

- Similarly, on 14 May the Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks responded to the REA following a request regarding its likely prioritisation order in which generators would be disconnected. Wind power was at the top of the list, followed by solar, synchronous generators, and then generators within more complex industrial sites, e.g. CHPs.
- On 24 April, following the REA's request for clarification, the DEFRA confirmed to the REA ahead of a government announcement that all essential workers would be eligible for testing. You can read the [REA's information on who is entitled to be tested and how employees can arrange for tests.](#)
- Following a conference call with Ofgem and members in mid-April regarding the Fuel Measurement and Sampling Questionnaires across the RHI and RO schemes, Ofgem issued a [detailed response](#) to the concerns and queries raised. One key clarification from Ofgem was confirmation that members do not need to wait for Ofgem's approval before using a new consignment.
- 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

Guidance on attending work and Key Workers

From 4 July, most of the remaining businesses that had been closed [reopened](#), with further reopenings throughout July.

The Government published new '[Working Safely](#)' guidance, including for tradespeople on 11 May. This includes guidance on social distancing, hygiene, and PPE, and instances where tradespeople should or should not enter a home. 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.

This set of guidance includes a useful list of [five steps](#) that companies should take to ensure that they are working safely.

The [2m rule has now been relaxed](#) in circumstances where distancing of 2m is not possible for a viable business operation.

Energy, waste and recycling, and utility companies have never been 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.

Construction workers were [exempt](#) from the order to stay at home, so long as they were able to practise social distancing. Later, when the lockdown was eased, they were actively encouraged to return to work.

Social Distancing Penalties

On 13 August the Prime Minister [announced](#) tougher penalties for failure to comply with social distancing rules. These include a fine of up to £3,200 for those who repeatedly flout the rules about face coverings, and new fines for people hosting raves or other unlawful gatherings of more than 30 people.

Suppliers of public bodies and local authorities

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.

Update: In June the Government published [a new PPN](#) for public bodies and local authorities, in the context of easing lockdown restrictions.

Roadmap for Ending Lockdown

On 11 May the Government published a [roadmap for ending restrictions](#). This 60-page document sets out three stages – the first of which the UK entered that week, with people able to take more exercise and a very limited number of businesses permitted to reopen. On the whole, the public should continue to work from home unless their job cannot be performed from home, but must avoid using public transport as much as possible and should use a bike or travel by foot if their work is within a feasible distance. Face-coverings are recommended for use in shops.

Taskforces for reopening the economy

The Government has announced the set-up of five new ministerial [taskforces](#) for relieving the lockdown. These separately focus on the following areas: pubs and restaurants; non-essential retail, including salons; recreation and leisure, including tourism, culture, entertainment and sport; places of worship; international aviation.

New devolved powers and consultation on cohesive internal UK market

The Government [proposes to devolve powers](#) formerly decided at the EU level in around 70 policy areas to the devolved administrations, including aspects of employment law, land use and air quality. The Government is also [consulting on proposals to make the UK internal market more cohesive](#), these include: proposals to introduce a principle of mutual recognition of different laws in parts of the UK, and the principle of non-discrimination to prevent discrimination against companies in different parts of the UK.

Committee on Climate Change

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) published its annual [Progress Report](#) to Parliament on 23 June. On the 14th April, the 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 has also written to Boris Johnson and the Scottish Environment Minister 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.

Companies House

In April temporary easement measures were introduced in response to Coronavirus which included suspension of strike-off action. From 10 October, [compulsory strike-off action will resume](#) if there is reasonable cause to believe a company is no longer in operation.

Competition and Markets Authority

The CMA has [published](#) an outline of its current policy in relation to mergers and how it expects to process investigations into mergers and assessment of competition, including how this will be affected by coronavirus. The CMA has [warned](#) that it will not tolerate the breaking of competition laws, but that it will allow businesses to cooperate temporarily around key issues such as shortages of essential products and critical problems arising due to Coronavirus.

The competition watchdog has decided to [streamline](#) its operations and focus on the most urgent issues only. While relaxing competition rules for supermarkets, it has launched a [taskforce](#) to crack down on profiteering due to the Covid-19 outbreak. The taskforce initially focussed on incidents in which prices were increased due to demand far outstripping supply, and on misleading claims about the benefits of products.

The Chair of the CMA has published a [paper](#) on how competition policy can contribute to a robust and sustainable economic recovery.

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

The Business Secretary has now launched five [Working Groups for the Coronavirus Recovery](#), in the fields of: the future of industry; green recovery; backing new businesses; increasing opportunity; the UK is open for business. These are ministerial-led taskforces.

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. The government has also launched a [business support helpline and webchat service](#).

On Monday 23 March the government [launched the details](#) of its business support package. The business support package includes a Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme. The Loan Scheme gives micro, small and medium-large sized 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. The [scheme was reformed in July](#) to enable small businesses to access the scheme and avoid elements of the 'undertakings in difficulty' test.

In late April the Government launched 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. From 26 May, larger businesses were able to [borrow up to £200 million](#).

The Bank of England also has a new lending facility for larger businesses, the Covid Corporate Financing Facility. The scheme enables 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.

In early June the Government published [statistics](#) on the uptake of its loan and grant schemes and the success rate of applications. This reveals that the approval rate on the large business loan scheme is fairly low, around 1/5. Just over 1/2 of general CBIL applications were approved, around 3/4 bounce back loans are approved, and only c.460 Future Fund applications were received by early June. Around 9/10 Local Authority Grant fund applications have been approved.

Bounce Back Loans

The government launched a loan scheme called the '[Bounce Back](#)' scheme on 4 May. This is aimed at small to medium sized businesses and enables them to borrow between £2,000 and £50,000. The government will guarantee 100% of the loan and there won't be any fees or interest to pay for 12 months. Businesses cannot apply if they are already claiming funding through the Coronavirus Loan Scheme, but there are fewer eligibility checks than for this scheme. It has also been confirmed that unlike the Coronavirus Loan Scheme, businesses are eligible even if they were in financial difficulty prior to the pandemic.

The Government has also launched a [£20 million grant scheme for small businesses](#) to provide grants of between £1000 and £5000 for new equipment and technology and to provide specialist advice. The funding has been allocated to Growth Hubs within each LEP for distribution.

Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund

The Government has created a Local Authority Discretionary Fund, from which local authorities can provide small and micro businesses with grants of up to £10,000. Grants will be provided to businesses which have been particularly hard hit by coronavirus, businesses with ongoing high property costs, and businesses which occupy property with a rateable value or annual rent or mortgage payments of below £51,000. To class as a small business, turnover must be smaller than £1 million and staff must number below 50. [Applications opened on 29 May.](#)

Financial support for Innovation Businesses

As part of a £1.25 billion [support package](#) for firms driving innovation, the government has launched the Future Fund, a loan scheme worth a total of £500 million. The [scheme opened to applications on 20 May.](#)

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. On 30 June the [Government widened the criteria](#) for the scheme so that companies which have previously benefited from 'accelerator programmes' can now participate.

On 21 May the Government also launched the Clean Growth Fund. Announced before the pandemic, this fund will provide at least £40 million funding to green start-ups. It is hoped that the funding will eventually increase to £100 million with private sector investment. You can read more about it [here](#).

On 27 June the Government launched the [Sustainable Innovation Fund](#), worth £200 million. Businesses will be able to apply to this funding if their work promotes sustainable living or industry. Applications opened on 29 June.

The Government has additionally provided [support to R&D](#) through two support schemes – one to enable universities to access short-term, low interest loans, and £200 million to help support salaries now.

Banks and Lending

On 2 April, new [rules](#) were introduced 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.

Small companies reported in the early days of the crisis that lenders were unwilling to provide loans to help them survive the crisis. Banks were allegedly continuing to use pre-crisis criteria for lending. The Federation of Small Businesses [told the Financial Times](#) that this was being widely reported by members.

Trade Credit Insurance support

The Government announced that businesses which rely on Trade Credit Insurance for cover in the supply chain will be further supported. Due to Coronavirus and trade restrictions, businesses can struggle to pay bills, and face having credit insurance withdrawn or premiums raised to unaffordable levels.

To protect businesses from this, the [government will temporarily guarantee business-to-business transactions currently supported by Trade Credit Insurance](#). This will support supply chains and keep trading confidence. On 4 June, a £10 billion Trade Credit Insurance guarantee was [announced](#).

Corporate Governance and Insolvency Bill

New legislation has been passed to give businesses the best chance of survival when facing insolvency. [Measures include](#) (but are not limited to) introducing a moratorium to give businesses space from creditors while they seek rescue; prohibiting termination clauses that engage on insolvency, preventing suppliers from ceasing their supply or asking additional payments while a company is going through a rescue process; introducing a new restructuring plan that will bind creditors to it; enabling the insolvency regime to flex to meet the demands of the crisis; temporarily removing personal liability for wrongful trading from directors who try to keep their companies afloat; allowing closed AGMs; temporarily prohibiting creditors from filing statutory demands and winding up petitions for coronavirus related debts. These measures will also apply retrospectively.

The Government ran two webinars (accessible retrospectively) for businesses with questions on how the Act will apply to them. A [webinar on the governance aspects](#) of the bill was held in conjunction

with trade association R3 – Rescue, Recovery Renewal. A further [webinar with R3 on the insolvency aspects](#) of the bill was held on 7 July.

Measures for the Energy Sector

On 8th July the Government announced a range of interim measures to stimulate the economy, including £2 billion for energy efficiency retrofit in privately owned housing, and £1 billion for the decarbonisation of the public sector. Other measures included £50 million for pilot schemes to decarbonise social housing and £40 million for decarbonisation of the courts. The REA's [briefing](#) can be accessed here.

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, have been 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 29th June the Government announced [£80 million investment](#) to reduce emissions from homes and energy intensive industry. This includes [£30 million for the first phase of the Industrial Energy Transformation Fund](#), £25 million for heat networks, and £24 million for innovative projects to help develop energy efficient homes.

Contracts for Difference and the Capacity Market

BEIS proposed [changes to the Electricity Supplier Obligation Regulations](#) in response to coronavirus. The consultation closed on 19 May, and a [response](#) published on 4 June will see the amount of the increase in electricity supplier's obligations for quarter 2020 which would otherwise be collected in July by the LCCC, deferred to quarter 2 2021. The Government will protect suppliers from up to 80% of the increase in obligations, an increase from 67% in the original proposals.

BEIS published details of a temporary [relaxation of Capacity Market rules](#) during the pandemic. You can read more about this at the REA's [Member Briefing](#) on the outcome of this consultation and two other important Capacity Market consultations.

Key Worker Definitions

The government included energy sector (oil, gas and electricity), transport, utilities and waste disposal workers in the [list of key workers](#).

In late April the Secretary of State [Alok Sharma wrote to workers](#) in the energy sector to thank them for continuing to work during the lockdown and for their efforts to adapt. The letter also signposted [social distancing guidance](#) for workers.

It has been announced that certain key workers will be [exempt from quarantining](#) should they leave the UK and return. These include (but are not exclusive to) energy and waste workers carrying out essential or emergency works related to generating systems, electricity interconnectors, a district heat network, communal heating, automated ballast cleaning and track re-laying systems or networks. Workers with specialist technical skills required for essential or emergency works in waste management, gas and electricity networks and system operators are also included in the exemption.

A letter with guidance on exemption can be [read here](#).

Site Operating Procedures and Construction

The government has developed coronavirus [Site Operating Procedures](#) in coordination with the Construction Leadership Council.

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. Later, construction workers were actively encouraged to return to work.

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.

The Government is running webinars for businesses on how make workplaces Covid-19 secure. You can [sign up here](#).

Recovery Advice for Business scheme

[Free advice](#) is being offered to small businesses through the scheme run by Enterprise Nation, from thousands of advisors. The advice includes legal, bespoke, accountancy, advertising, marketing, recruitment and digital advice. Each advisor has offered at least one hour of their time until the end of 2020.

Holiday Entitlement and Pay

The Government has published [detailed guidance](#) (for England, Wales and Scotland only) on how holiday entitlement and pay will operate during the pandemic.

Furloughed workers will continue to accrue holiday entitlement and pay, but an employer should not automatically pay holiday pay while an employee is on furlough, although furloughed employees can take annual leave.

Funding for Green Recovery

The Government has committed [£350 million](#) to cut emissions in heavy industry and transport, including aviation, space, construction and other heavy industry. The package includes £139 million to support the transition from gas to clean hydrogen and scaling up CCS. £149 million will fund innovation in low-carbon materials in heavy industry. The Government has also launched a Jet Zero Council.

The Government has published the fine details of the £2 billion Green Homes Grant scheme. An REA briefing on this can be accessed [here](#). The £900 million [Getting Building Fund](#) also includes already allocated funding for clean energy projects.

Small Business Leadership schemes

The Government has invested £20 million in [two training programmes](#) to help develop management skills in small businesses. The 10-week, online Small Business Leadership Programme will focus on leadership skills to help address challenges, some of which have arisen during Coronavirus. The Peer Networks Programme will help business owners to improve problem-solving skills through guided exercises.

Other resources

The government has also published details of how other [organisations](#) such as Companies House and the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, along with charities, are providing support. The government has also published a [list of trade bodies](#) offering support to different sectors.

Department for Education

The Department for Education has [published information on training, assessing, furloughing apprentices](#). The comprehensive pack of guidance is designed to be relevant to employers, apprentices, training providers and assessment organisations.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Disposal of PPE

The Department has published [detailed guidance](#) on how businesses and individuals should dispose of PPE.

Household Waste and Recycling Centres (in England and Wales – see Scottish Government section for guidance on HWRCs in Scotland)

DEFRA has published in-depth [guidance](#) on managing HWRCs during the pandemic. The non-statutory guidance is designed to help local authorities keep open or reopen HWRCs. Householders should only take waste to the sites if unable to store it at home. The guidance stresses a recognition that HWRC's cannot be managed with a one-size-fits-all approach, but asks that HWRC's follow social distancing advice and shield vulnerable people appropriately. [Environment Minister Rebecca Pow](#)

[described HWRCs as a 'top priority'](#), and said that the guidance aimed to help local authorities re-establish waste disposal and reduce the likelihood of fly-tipping.

Farm Payments

Farmers have been given an [extra month to claim BPS payments and to claim funding for the Countryside Stewardship, Environmental Stewardship and woodland legacy payments](#). Farmers will now have until 15 June to claim the payments without any penalty.

Carrying over annual leave

[Rules around carrying over annual leave have been 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 in hard-pressed sectors such as food and social care can continue contributing to the national effort against coronavirus without losing annual leave entitlements.

Key workers

In response to [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 (in England only)

The government 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 the 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. 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 has also been '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 Health and Social Care

The Department has launched the [NHS Test and Trace](#) scheme, which will aim to ensure that those who have come into prolonged contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus are notified and instructed to stay at home for 14 days. The scheme employs thousands of tracers to phone those diagnosed with the disease or who have come into close contact with someone who has been diagnosed, and to encourage them to stay at home. How the Test and Trace scheme will work in context of the workplace is outlined above. [Reporting forms for other diseases](#) have also been updated to include Covid-19.

[From 24 July wearing masks have been compulsory in shops](#) and supermarkets, but not cafes, restaurants or pubs. A fine of £100 applies, except for children under 11 and those with certain disabilities. Shops are entitled to refuse entry, and call the police if people refuse to comply.

On 30 July the [self-isolation period](#) when suffering symptoms of Coronavirus was changed from 7 days to 10 days to reflect updated medical advice.

Department for Transport

Airlines

The Department for Transport has been [involved](#) in government efforts to repatriate hundreds of thousands of Britons left stranded abroad by border closures and flight cancellations. In April the government 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. 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. [Face coverings have been made mandatory on public transport](#) for staff and passengers.

Social distancing on the roads

The Government has issued new [traffic signs](#) to help support social distancing, such as on pavements and around roadworks. As part of the same package the Government has also issued guidance to local authorities on how to reallocate road space for use by pedestrians and cyclists.

Transport for London

On 15 May it was announced that [TfL will receive a £1.6 billion funding package](#) to help protect services. This comes after news that TfL would have had to reduce services without additional funding due to the steep drop in income. A reduction in services would have threatened social distancing on public transport in London, a major concern in keeping the R number low.

This will include money to convert driving lanes into cycling lanes and to create wider pavements. It is hoped that this will encourage more Londoners to avoid public transport.

Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency

[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.

From 1 August [mandatory MOT tests](#) for cars, motorcycles and vans have been reintroduced.

Environment Agency & Forestry Commission

On 3 July the EA revised an [update](#) to its activities going forward to include information on water safety. The EA has made a promise that those needing payment plans and delayed payments could approach the EA for support.

Billing

The Environment Agency has issued a [letter regarding its annual billing](#) for permits/licenses and other costs. The EA stresses that it needs to bill to pay for its activities, but that companies which may struggle to make payment can contact the EA to discuss it.

EA message to regulatory stakeholders

On 20 June the EA issued a [letter to regulatory stakeholders](#) detailing how it expected them to carry out regulatory duties going forward. The letter explains that EA staff continue to work from home but notes that they are preparing to return to the office. The EA is also reviewing the Covid-19 RPS statements, which are due to expire soon.

The EA had previously 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. Some regulatory visits can take place virtually. 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 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](#).

Forestry Commission

The Forestry commission has published an [update](#) on its operational policies going forward. In the event of local lockdowns, operations in the area will be reviewed. Grant and regulatory site visits continue to be prioritised. Felling licenses are being processed online.

Financial Conduct Authority

The [FCA announced on 1 May that is going to court](#) in an attempt to get a quick answer to an urgent question: whether, and to what extent, businesses are entitled to compensation from insurers for losses suffered. The FCA wants this to speed up the processing of contentious claims being resisted by insurers, which argue that policies were never intended to provide cover for the pandemic or a nationwide lockdown.

The FCA [confirmed](#) on 9 April, to aid people with overdrafts, loans and credit card debt. People with existing overdrafts will 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.

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. 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 Treasury & HM Revenue and Customs

The Government has published information [on how to check which expenses and services are taxable for office equipment for use in the home](#).

The government announced a [deferral of VAT payments](#) due between 20 March and 30 June 2020. Businesses have the option to either defer the payment to a later date, so long as it is paid before 21 March 2021, or pay the amount as normal. Businesses do not need to tell HMRC that they are deferring their payment of VAT.

HMRC has also confirmed that people will continue to be entitled to the [same amount of tax credits](#) as they previously were, even if they are working reduced hours.

The [Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme](#) was launched on 26 May. It allows small and medium sized employers to recover the costs of paying Coronavirus-related Statutory Sick Pay.

Furlough Scheme and Self-Employment Support Scheme

On 29 May the Chancellor announced details of how the furlough scheme will be wound down, and introduced more flexibility. From [1 July](#), employers have been able to partially furlough employees, paying them as normal for a certain amount of days each week which the employee can work, while the Government pays for the remaining days.

From August, employers will be expected to contribute National Insurance and pension payments. During September, the Government will pay 70% of wages while employers will be expected to contribute 10%, and during October, the Government will pay 60% while employers will pay 20%. The scheme will close at the end of October.

HMRC has published detailed [guidance](#) for employees to enable them to check whether their employer is eligible for the furloughing scheme. The Government has also arranged [free webinars to explain flexible furloughing](#), which will continue to be available, after they are held.

Furloughed workers will receive their [full parental leave entitlement](#). The government has also published information about how employers should calculate parental leave pay and bereavement leave pay, as well as [shared parental leave](#), when employees have been furloughed.

On 29 May the Chancellor also announced an extension to the self-employment scheme. On 21 August, the [second phase](#) of the scheme launched. This will cover the equivalent of 70% of a person's wages across three months. The cap will be £6570 in total, slightly lower than the first grant.

The Government [announced](#) on 8 July that every employer who retains furloughed staff until the end of January 2021 will get £1,000 per furloughed employee they keep on under a Job Retention Bonus scheme. [Further details of the scheme](#) were published on 31 July, which explained that workers will need to earn £520 or more per month and that transferred employees under TUPE legislation will be eligible.

The Government has also announced a new law to ensure furloughed employees get [redundancy pay](#) calculated from their normal rate of pay.

New jobs

The Chancellor announced several schemes to stimulate job creation, particularly for those aged 18-24. These include the £2 billion Kickstart Scheme, a fully funded 6-month traineeship for under 25 year-olds, hundreds of millions of funding for apprenticeships and traineeships, and increased support for those seeking employment.

Business Support Webinars

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.

London

As well as the funding for TfL (see under Department for Transport), [two new boards](#) have been set up to help London exit lockdown. A new London Transition Board will include a wide range of experts to help London begin to resume normal economic activity. It first met on 9 June and you can view the membership of the Board [here](#).

A London Recovery Board will look at how the economic damage caused by restrictions can be repaired. These boards will see the Communities Secretary and the Mayor of London work together.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

On 2 July the Government [announced](#) a further £500 million non-ringfenced funding for local authorities, which increases the total funding given to local authorities to £4.3 billion. The Government also announced a new scheme to reimburse local authorities for lost revenue. Where losses are more than 5% of a Council's planned income from sales, the Government will reimburse up to 75p per £1 lost. Council tax and business rates deficits can also be repaid over 3 years instead of 1.

Charter for Safe Working Practice

On 14 May the Government published a [charter](#) in agreement with major housebuilders and with the Construction Leadership Council. This can be displayed as a poster at sites, setting out what the site management has agreed to do to maintain safe working practices and contact information.

Commercial and Home Tenancies

A new [Code of Practice](#) has been developed to help commercial tenants and landlords work together to keep businesses viable. The Government has also [extended the moratorium](#) on commercial rent evictions until the end of September.

Many of the [usual routes for eviction](#) by which landlords pursue payment of unpaid rent have been voided, to prevent aggressive rent collection and forced closure.

On 21 August the Government [extended the ban on residential evictions](#) by 4 weeks to the end of September. The Government has also introduced a measure requiring 6 months' notice to be given for evictions in England, meaning that in practice no evictions can happen until March 2021.

Expert Taskforce

The government has established a [taskforce](#) comprised of experts from local government, the military, police, health sector, adult social care, and resilience professionals. This advises and assesses plans of the Local Resilience 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 works with the LRF's to 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.

Planning

The Government has announced some [relaxations on planning and construction rules](#) to help the construction industry recover. This includes an extension of planning permission deadlines until April 2021.

The new measures will also permanently enable the Planning Inspectorate the ability to use more than one procedure – written representations, hearings, and inquiries, at the same time when dealing with a planning appeal, to speed up the process. There will also be flexible working hours at construction sites to facilitate social distancing.

The Government has also recently [announced](#) wide-ranging reforms to the planning system to encourage brownfield development. A Planning White Paper is expected in July.

The Government has announced [new, mid-term planning rules](#) to inhibit the demolition or redevelopment of cultural institutions such as theatres, concert halls and live music venues. Councils will now be able to take into account the temporary affects of Covid-19 when considering an application for change of use, demolition or redevelopment for such venues. This is designed to enable councils to block attempts to demolish or redevelop venues. The rules will be in place until December 2022.

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

In March the government created four new implementation committees, focussing on health, public sector preparedness, economy and the international response. The Chairs of the committees 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 decision to reduce the size of grant available for domestic installations after 31 March 2020, OLEV took the decision to extend the grant period, in cases where an installation was due to take place before 31 March and was delayed because of coronavirus. A transition period applied to orders placed before 12 March but due to take place after 31 March – these could now take place up to 31 May and still be eligible for the £500 grant. For WCS installations, OLEV 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.

Ofgem and the National Grid ESO

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 16 June Ofgem published three letters regarding its regulatory expectations from network companies, energy supply companies and the ESO going forward. From 1 July, [network companies](#) are expected to comply with all their regulatory obligations, with the only exceptions being where works and services cannot be delivered to the required standard because of the need for network companies, their supply chain, or customers to comply with Government Covid-19 related guidance. For [energy supply companies](#), customer needs are expected to be met from 1 July, particularly for the most vulnerable customers, and that they ensure the safety of customers and staff. Ofgem will continue to take a pragmatic view particularly where face-to-face appointments are necessary. From 1 July, [the ESO](#) will be expected to meet all license obligations, with the only exception being instances where activities cannot be delivered to the required standard because of the need to keep people safe.

In early June Ofgem published an [update](#) on its policies going forward. This included details of the price cap, indicated support for suppliers in continuing to allow consumers to access energy even when bills are unpaid, and explained that Ofgem expects some return to normal standards of practice from partners. Ofgem also published [a letter](#) that set out how suppliers could delay payment of certain network charges – in a package totalling £350 million.

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.

NG ESO Grid Code Modifications

The National Grid ESO issued a grid modification to allow the disconnection of embedded generators in case of an emergency situation where supply significantly exceeds capacity and threatens to overwhelm the grid. This was approved in May by Ofgem. Following a request for clarity from the REA, the NG ESO issued a letter to the industry explaining that this would be a measure of last resort only and is not expected to be used.

A grid code modification proposing to defer some additional Covid-19 BSUoS charges was passed (but an alternative option was chosen). You can read the REA response to the proposal [here](#). On 16 July a further modification was raised to alter the arrangements and was later approved by Ofgem – you can view a summary and briefing [here](#).

Rural Payments Agency

The RPA has released [detailed guidance](#) for farmers, landowners and rural businesses on a range of payments and annual costs, and how payments have changed, including concessions, as a result of the pandemic.

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

The REA has produced a [Member Briefing](#) detailing the policy decisions taken by the Scottish government that are particularly relevant to organics and recycling members. It also includes other guidance and information.

[HWRCS reopened on 1 June](#). [Guidance](#) has been released by the Scottish Government in conjunction with COSLA.

Energy and Waste Sector Support

The Scottish Government has created a [guidance and support hub for the waste sector](#).

In June the Scottish Government launched a [£62 million fund](#) to help the energy sector recover from the dual affects of Coronavirus and the oil, gas and power price crash. The fund will be targeted at Net Zero projects and helping to accelerate the transition to Net Zero.

The Scottish Government and Zero Waste Scotland have launched a [new grant](#) of up to £10,000 per recipient for Scotland's waste resource management sector to help assist with operational adaptations required in response to COVID-19. A grant of up to £10,000 per site is available towards the capital costs for changes to infrastructure, plant and equipment that will contribute to an improvement in the operator's ability to maintain environmental performance and sustainability while implementing the controls required to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Examples of possible modifications include the installation of Perspex screens, alterations to sorting lines or implementing traffic management on site. The deadline for submissions is 21 August.

Business Support

The Scottish Government has announced a [£100 million support fund](#) for SMEs in addition to the funds that businesses can access via the UK Government. The support fund is split into three separate pots.

- A £34 million hardship fund for the newly self-employed.
- £20 million for small and micro enterprises in the creative, tourism and hospitality sectors.
- £45 million for viable SMEs important to the Scottish economy which are vulnerable.

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 to 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'.

The [statement](#) made by Nicola Sturgeon on 2 July regarding working safely and the permission given for individuals to travel up to 5 miles for non-essential reasons does not apply to businesses working in waste. Existing guidance given to these businesses, which have already been encouraged to resume work, should be referred to. Face coverings are now mandatory in shops in Scotland. The 2 metre distancing rule also remains.

The Scottish Government has also issued a [thank you letter](#) to the waste and resources sector to thank workers for their efforts during the pandemic.

Test and Protect

The Scottish Government has produced detailed guidance for both [employers](#) and the [public](#) on testing and helping to protect people who need to isolate. The NHS is now asking anyone who has been in close contact with someone diagnosed with the virus to self-isolate for 14 days.

Waste Industry Safety & Health forum

The Waste Industry Safety and Health forum (WISH) has produced [guidance](#) on managing COVID-19 risks in the context of a range of waste management activities. This has been updated regularly – a summary of the guidance is kept up to date at the [REA webpage on the WISH guidance](#). Recently, the [guidance](#) has included information on how to handle furloughed employees returning to the workplace, and information on where the devolved public health and workplace health guidance diverges, and tips on the risk assessment process.

They have also published a supporting checklist which can be downloaded [here](#) and is an example of how a Covid-19 checklist might be structured.

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.

Welsh Government

The Welsh Government has launched [the second round of funding](#) from its £6.5 million Circular Economy fund. This year's funding of £3.2 million will be targeted at local authorities and public bodies, and will run in parallel to the funding for business. £3.5 million is available for businesses to increase their use of recycled materials in manufacturing, components, or packaging, or re-use, refurbishment and remanufacturing.

Parliamentary Activity

Bills

[The Coronavirus Bill](#) 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. The full statement is available [here](#).

The [new dates](#) for COP26 are between 1 and 12 November 2021 in Glasgow. It has also been announced that the UK Government will be advised by more than 25 experts in global sectors during the COP 26 Presidency, from a range of countries.

Parliamentary Proceedings

On 2 June Parliament returned from recess. Not one to ease into proceedings, the Government got straight to work putting forward a vote to end the hybrid system that has been in place since the lockdown began. MP's – or more accurately those physically able to attend Parliament in person – voted on two amendments; amendment D which would have allowed remote voting in the House of Commons to continue and the unamended government proposal which states that MPs should be "physically within the parliamentary estate" in order to participate.

Amendment D was rejected 242 votes to 185 and the unamended government proposal was passed 261 - 163. From tomorrow, MPs will not be able to take part in debates or votes unless they are physically on the Parliamentary estate – this includes those currently shielding from COVID-19. This has created significant backlash from opposition parties and members of the public on social media who claim that this would see elderly MPs, disabled MPs and those living with vulnerable people discriminated against.

On Tuesday 21st April, MP's officially voted in favour of adopting a 'hybrid' system throughout the pandemic. The new procedure will be as follows:

- The House will meet at 2.30pm on Mondays, and at 11.30 am on Tuesdays and Wednesdays

- Scrutiny proceedings will last for no longer than two hours unless extended by the Speaker of the House
- Scrutiny proceedings taking place are;
 - a) questions to ministers
 - b) urgent questions
 - c) ministerial statements
- MPs can take part in scrutiny proceedings virtually or in person, however, MPs within the Chambers may be limited

The full statement is available [here](#).

Select Committees

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.

On Wednesday 22nd July, Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle announced that a new Statutory Instrument would be laid allowing for the virtual participation in and work of Commons select committees to continue until Friday 30 October.

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 CBI runs [daily webinar](#) updates on Covid-19, the affect on businesses and support available. On 15 July the CBI published a policy paper '[Commuting beyond the Coronavirus](#)', which called on the Government to change the advice on using public transport for essential reasons only, and to invest in EV and ticketing infrastructure, among other asks.

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. The FSB has held numerous support webinars, which can be accessed as recordings via its website.

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 provides [grants of up to £250](#) to help with financial difficulties. It has requested that all branches make a donation to the charity.