

Further selected emails received by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee as part of the inquiry into “the impact of coronavirus on businesses and workers”

Received 24 to 27 March 2020

We are a small independent business and we are good bosses. We value our team and see them as family. We are doing everything we can to save our business so that they will have jobs to come back to. We've built up our business from nothing over 8 years with no backing or investment. We are an independent clothing shop. This past month our sales fell off a cliff, before we closed up for the safety of our staff and customers last week. Our suppliers have mainly been understanding, especially the larger ones, and the government help with wages was a relief. Our major problem now is our landlord - an offshore company with multiple properties - who will not help us. Our location is in [redacted] and if we have to continue paying central London commercial rent whilst we can generate income we won't survive this. The rateable value is just above the threshold for the grants. We welcome the emergency legislation to give extra protection to businesses who miss payments, but is there anything more you can do to help such as asking commercial landlords to give a rent holiday during this time? This would mean our business can survive this situation and keep all the jobs.

I work for EE in a call centre selling phones and we are still being made to go into work and are being called “key workers.” There are hundreds of people working in our centres, there has been no deep cleaning done and some people are off self-isolating because they have symptoms of the virus, no tests can be done on these advisors so we don't know if any of them have the virus or not but they still were coming to work before going off to self-isolate. We are asked now to stay 2 metres apart when at desks but when all the teams are in this is going to prove very difficult as there will not be enough workspace to do this. We are still using the one lift we have altogether and still passing each other on the stairs, in the toilets and in the canteen and also queuing for food together.

I'm unsure how advisors selling phones are classed as key workers and we are all scared to be in work, we would happily work from home if they could arrange this for us but it doesn't look like this will be happening and still being forced to come in to sell phones which I don't see how this is more important to mine and everyone else's health in the call centre.

Wren Kitchens the "UK's #1 employer" sacked hundreds and hundreds of employees up and down the country last night an hour before the lockdown order fully aware that the government would have paid wages anyway, instead hundreds of workers were left with no government support or job. The reason for the redundancies were "due to the ongoing global situation", and many were encouraged to reapply and come back after it's all over. They're also still open despite not being an essential service.

I can't confirm the exact number sacked but I know its several hundred, mainly showroom staff. I know the company has been going on for weeks about how they're very rich and will be fine and will take care of the employees as the pandemic unfolds, and they've been extremely reluctant to accept anything was happening, refusing to close, or provide any kind of protective equipment to employees at risk. They phoned employees between 6-7:30pm last night and abruptly informed

them that due to the ongoing global situation that is constantly changing they would have to be let go. They also cited continual performance review and "non-performance" despite sacking well performing employees. Lots of those who had been working for the company for under a year were sacked, as the company's probation period is 1 year and within which they can contractually sack you at any point for any reason.

I know that the company has lost £4.2 million to cancellations and refunds over three days last week due to coronavirus uncertainty, and they've been struggling to generate new business and are experiencing cash flow problems. They offered nothing in the way of support and many people were sacked in the office shortly after making the company thousands, and others were phoned after getting home from work.

There was no warning, no notice given and staff were told they would be paid their basic salary (which often makes up less than 1/2 of the real monthly pay) in lieu of their one weeklong notice and to expect their P45 shortly.

Some staff were also encouraged by management to re-apply and come back after the pandemic is over, and the decision has clearly come from well above line management.

This leaves all the staff unable to claim the 80% of their wages the government would have paid without Wren having to lift a finger, and is just plain evil.

They also continue to operate stores nationwide, with swathes of future sackings imminent as they continue to operate despite being a non-essential business. The head office in Barton upon Humber employs 1200 people and they continue to go into work despite the government order.

Argos is currently using the loophole of having stores in a supermarket (Sainsbury's) to continue to trade as normal, despite virtually everything being sold being non-essential in the current crisis.

Paddling pool, play sand, wardrobes, TV's, video games and console, all non-essential.

As the stand-alone stores are closed, this is driving huge numbers of people to gather in their stores, to the point where people are queueing across the whole Sainsbury's.

They are actively encouraging on their website people to go and buy these non-essential items in these stores.

They are also forcing all Argos workers from their closed stand-alone stores, to go and work in the stores that are still trading, or a local Sainsbury's, rather than allowing them to stay at home (where the government says they should be). If they refuse, they are being sent home without pay, and refused furlough.

These actions are surely going to undermine the government's plans to contain this Pandemic, leading to the deaths of hundreds, if not thousands of vulnerable people.

AXA Motor Claims are still forcing staff members to commute into the [location redacted] office whilst the Operations Managers work from the comfort and safety of their own homes. The staff are understandably scared and upset about this as their jobs can be done from home. Even when the PM first announce the guidelines AXA's response was "well our stance hasn't changed, staff are expected in as usual." If the staff didn't come into work 'as usual' they'd be forced to take it as annual leave or unpaid leave.

Yesterday, high risk members of staff were forced to commute into the office for training on 'how to work from home.' The training should've taken 45 minutes but staff were made to wait around for 3 hours until AXA realised the training couldn't be delivered and the staff were sent home without laptops.

Shocking behaviour from a company who advertises how important health is.

I work for a large construction company based in north London, [company name redacted]. I am based in the head office (containing around 400 people). Our work allows us to work from home but the owners are not allowing this to happen as per good practice guidelines. We have no choice but to come into the office. The 2m distancing rules are being ignored and staff continue to sit at less than 1m apart. Some staff have taken it upon themselves to not come into the office but have been told they cannot work from home and therefore will not be paid.

We also have people who are in high risk of the virus such as people with asthma, someone who is going through immunotherapy and women pregnant etc...

All of us unfortunately continue to come to the office as it feels like we have no better options.

The atmosphere is terrible, each day we fear we might get a virus from each other.

Myself, I feel emotionally drained and tired.

I hope the government will make some move especially towards construction industry as this is what the owners are using as an excuse to continue having all offices open. As there was no mandatory instruction to close construction sites therefore the owners say sites are open so offices can remain open. This includes one office in Borehamwood, one in Putney and another in Euston not to mention the many site offices that are in operation. We hope we can receive instruction and guidance on how to proceed.

I am writing to you as my partner, a Mum with three children is being forced to work by her employer, IWG Group (who own Regus business Centres).

There is no flexible working or working from home, no hand sanitiser and they are being asked to continue to conduct tours of the centres, host meetings and key-holders continue to come into centres. It seems madness these remain open when libraries, schools, retail outlets are forced to close.

Staff are being told if they do not come in, they will not be paid.

This means my partner is having to go into work, breaking government guidelines and potentially infecting our household. It is beyond irresponsible and communicating that Regus is very much 'open for business' sends the wrong message.

There is a backlash on Twitter, a petition and staff are in tears as they are put in an invidious position, deciding between health or an income.

My husband is a depot worker for DPD at their U.K. site in [location redacted].

Last week they were handed information for the coronavirus outbreak which told them, amongst other things, that if they take time off to self-isolate or because they have contracted the

coronavirus, this would be added to their Bradford factor index score - therefore risking disciplinary action and/or termination of employment.

In another set of printed FAQs regarding coronavirus, it stated that employees having to take time off due to school closures would be given unpaid leave, if an employee lived with over 70s or other vulnerable at risk groups, that they would have to keep away from them and still come into work, as it's not the employee that's at risk. There were many more inhumane points made to lower skilled DPD depot staff making them worried for their finances and job safety during this global pandemic.

I called my husband's Business People Partner which is supposedly a head office employee that does some 'on the ground HR' work. She completely defended the use of the Bradford factor scale during this crisis and told me that 'people shouldn't even be worrying about their finances and jobs during this time,' I couldn't believe what I was hearing, especially as she is working from home right now with full pay as are many of the office and executive workers there.

We are now left in a position where we are self-isolating, with no income apart from SSP if they decide to pay it and the threat of job loss hanging over my husband's head.

DPD deem themselves an essential service and that workers are key workers during this crisis. I really have to disagree, there is no need for people to be ordering pointless online goods right now, I understand they may perhaps deliver food or medicine under certain circumstances but surely this could be left to supermarkets and Royal Mail under the circumstances?

People are scared. Not only of the virus itself but also for their families and homes and income.

I work for Barclays Bank, [location redacted].

Myself and my colleagues are really struggling with their approach to dealing with the current health crisis.

The bank seems to feel it's business as usual.

We are currently open 8-3.30, where most other higher street banks have reduced their opening times significantly i.e. 10am-2pm & closing on a Saturday.

We have been told if we have any childcare issues we will only receive our emergency carers days entitlement then we have to choose whether to take holiday if it's available or unpaid leave. Working for a global company this is shocking.

They have said they will pay £50 for childcare cost daily but I really don't know who they think people are going to be allowed to leave their children with these facilities being closed off and would also contravene government advice.

An area leader is condoning staff bringing their children into work if they don't have childcare which again goes directly against the government ruling on maintaining social distancing.

To encourage our customers to social distance staff have had to go on their own volition and out of their own pocket pay for tape to mark out spaces on the floor, the 2-metre rule isn't being followed between customers or colleagues.

Our branch hasn't been cleaned this week as our current cleaner is on holiday and there are not provisions to replace her this week. Meaning staff are having to do this.

Staff decided off their own back to only allow two of our self-serve devices to be used to adhere to the rules, again us front line workers devised this as nothing had been forthcoming from management.

Our two tills behind glass are both being used, again not providing colleagues with the appropriate distance and safety. I feel truly vulnerable.

We received a very blunt alert message Monday evening saying we are key workers and have to continue to attend work.

My daughter's school is pleading not to send the children in due to infection risk, yet I feel I have not option.

I have some serious concerns about the way matters are being managed with a total lack on consideration for the wellbeing of frontline branch-based staff. The message about children particularly was, I think, immoral. We have no control over whether schools will accept our children and the offer of paying for childminders is totally inappropriate. Colleagues are therefore left to choose between risk exposing their children in breach of government instruction or not get paid. I am staggered the bank have behaved like this and feel no option but to call it out.

Your beloved Covid-19 response line, operated through 111 is made up of hundreds of temporary employees, without proper contracts, no benefits, no holiday entitlement and worst of all we are crammed into a call centre. We are a very key service in managing the flow of traffic for the 111 guys, yet we are forced to work in a call centre. If you've had the pleasure of never having to work in one before let me break this down.

We sit within the 2 meters (3 steps) guideline beside our colleagues because we have to, but we are on the phone all evening telling people that they need to stay away from the people they live with. We have swipe access security passes (RFID) but the exits to those doors are operated by a push button security system, so every person needs to push that same button to leave the call floor for break, lunch and end of shift. On the breaks thing, we are getting no paid breaks, not a necessity but as we were signed into a contract for 40 hours then on our first day were ushered into a room and told that "there's been a mistake in the advertising of this job, it's 35 hours not 40, if you have an issue with that you can leave". I work night shift, so I'm on when it's quiet, but when it's busy it's so much worse.

All we have been told to do is to sanitise our workstations every few hours. But since the site isn't being sanitised on the same regime it makes it redundant. I've never seen our communal equipment getting sanitised. We have been informed that we will be on SSP companywide if we choose to stay at home, all of the employee comments on our shared comms system are saying "I can't afford to live on that, I'll be in no matter how bad I get" and I've seen sick people coming into our call centre [location redacted] displaying symptoms.

The best part about this all is that it is so easy for us to work from home, Teleperformance have started sending Aviva and Eon workers home. Which means that people who hold far more personal data than we do have this info at home, but we have been told that it won't happen for our campaign because our campaign doesn't bring in as much money. I don't care how much money we bring in, I care about my life. Teleperformance bosses only listened to its Indian call centre after a Twitter storm and the media picking up on the working conditions we are faced with. We are

definitely key workers, but we are key workers that could be kept safe at home if our bosses just pulled the finger out and gave us some help.

We already have contracts that are worthless, less hours than we were promised, been told that if we get sick and don't want to come in we are on SSP, and we are one of your front-line services. It's all well and good clapping for NHS workers but you aren't taking care of us.
