



Treasury Select Committee – Call for evidence on the Government’s coronavirus financial package North Somerset Council response

- A package of support is desperately needed for freelancers and home-based workers who cannot access the grants or SSP relief. Cash grants would be the best starting point. North Somerset Council. 90% of 89.7% of North Somerset’s enterprises are micro businesses (0-9 employees) and a significant number of these will be self-employed people and free-lancers. The highest number of calls from businesses that we are receiving are from people in this group not currently covered by any significant financial support.
- Speed of support coming through i.e. announcing a support package at the national level and then not making it available to local authorities to distribute for 2 weeks is causing concern and confusion in the business community. Guidance is needed to local government more quickly so we can prepare and ensure businesses get the support they need as quickly as possible. Government needs to recognise that distributing and designing the processes for payment of grants requires administrative resource which local government does not currently have.
- Additional financial support is needed for bus and coach operators Our principal operator, First have seen a 60% patronage decline in the last week in the WoE area. They may be unable to operate services past June. And we ask that the Government works with us as a matter of urgency to provide financial stability to the bus network.
- Insurance (it feels like the £25k and 10k grants are, to an extent, subsidising insurers not paying out). We are seeing a number of these concerns coming through. Government should be in discussion with insurance companies about flexibility around these policies.
- Many Councils including NSC are reliant on a wide range of government grants to help drive their economy and to support business and communities. Many of these are subject to imminent deadlines, either to apply for funding or to spend and claim grants. Given the pressures on council capacity and early warnings from contractors about delivery, government needs to greatly streamline applications processes and to allow flexibility on meeting milestones and/or claiming grant
- Language – many businesses do not realise grants do not need to be repaid, we are pushing this messaging now – but government needs to start speaking the language of small businesses, so they are aware of the support on offer.
- On average the calls we take from businesses are c.45-60mins and cover a wide range of connected issues: mental health, technical business support right through to food security and mortgage issues. This is resource intensive and more support is needed to provide call-handlers at the local and regional level or a script from national government which we can add in local information to which can be used to support all colleagues answering phones to businesses.



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- Government needs to consider bolstering regional support around shortening the communications loop between redundancies being made and key sectors needing to recruit. Is there scope for support for fund a regional taskforce bringing together local authorities, JCP and other welfare to work, employability and skills providers.
 - Clearer guidance is needed around funding and support for colleges, universities and training providers. This is particularly in relation to outcomes-based funding models.