

Written evidence submitted by Joanne Stevens, Home Fix

I am responding to your call for evidence as I feel that both as an individual and a business that I have been completely overlooked.

My husband and myself started our small domestic building and maintenance company 13 years ago. We work mainly within our local community and almost exclusively in people's homes. We have 2 fulltime employees in addition to ourselves, and also regularly employ 10 sub contractors. We have also during this time trained 2 apprentices.

Since the beginning of the corona crisis we have gone from a turnover of £25'000 in March to just £1'800 in April.

We work from a home office so have received no grant.

Our monthly business costs including wages are £6'950.

We can only claim 80% of PAYE so currently have a household income of just £575 per month.

With regards to the job protection scheme.

Our 2 employees have been furloughed along with 1 of our 2 directors. This has for the short term protected their jobs, but as a business we have received no support from the government so we are facing the likelihood of making at least one of them redundant in the near future.

As directors only one of us is able to furlough, in order to have any prospect of a business to return to we must be able to respond to customer calls and try and win future work. This means that we have very little income support in to our household, just £575.00 per month.

Solutions

1. Allow furloughed directors to continue to work, as no one should be forced to abandon their businesses, nor be punished for unwittingly undertaking any action that may be deemed fraudulent.

Currently the SEISS allows for claiming and continuing to work, this puts us at a huge disadvantage, both due to our sole trader competitors pricing work very low as they are having their income subsidised, and their ability to respond to new enquiries.

2. Protect our incomes by extending SEISS to encompass small limited company directors based on all income including dividends for the last 3 years capped at £2,500

With regards to ending the furlough scheme, this should be phased out in a way that gives businesses flexibility. Continuing to partially support wages with the % of assistance being gradually reduced.

With regards to returning to work, we need clear and specific advice on procedures to follow and access to reasonably priced PPE if it is compulsory. We must not fear prosecution, as this will make us reluctant to continue to employ.

With regards business support.

We are not eligible for a business grant as we run our business from a home office. A grant would provide us with help to pay our overheads and the confidence to keep our employees with us until we begin to return to normal income levels.

Solution

- 1) Extend Business Support Grants to all small businesses that run from home or are mobile.

We need support now to save and sustain our businesses.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

May 2020