



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP**

*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and  
Local Government*

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Government**

4th Floor, Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

Tel: 0303 444 3450

Email: [robert.jenrick@communities.gov.uk](mailto:robert.jenrick@communities.gov.uk)

[www.gov.uk/mhclg](http://www.gov.uk/mhclg)

To: All MPs in England

17 March 2020

Dear Colleague

## **SUPPORT FOR COUNCILS IN THEIR CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE**

Firstly, can I put on record my thanks for your work on preparing for the potential effects of Coronavirus (Covid-19) on your constituents and local services. This is an unprecedented challenge for us as a country and I am reassured that we are working closely together to ensure that we are in the best place possible as we deal with this pandemic.

As you will know the local response is being led by Local Resilience Forums, bringing together representatives across the NHS, social care and emergency services. We are working closely with Local Resilience Forums in this response work to ensure they are fully supported in the weeks and months ahead.

As part of this, we have yesterday confirmed that up to 70 military planners will now be available to support Local Resilience Forums in planning their response work, with half of these being focussed on planning around social care specifically.

Wider local government also has a crucial role to play. I have asked them to focus on three areas in particular, namely:

- Social care;
- Supporting vulnerable people who are remaining at home;
- Supporting local economies, in particular through swift implementation of Budget and other measures that will be delivered through local authorities; and
- Continuing to deliver essential local services, for example refuse collection.

However, this also means that local authorities need to suspend non-essential services. We have already taken steps to relax restrictions on supermarket deliveries and the postponement of local, mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections until May next year. The Government will be announcing in due course further information in relation to this.

The Government is also taking steps to relieve day-to-day pressures through the following measures:

- Routine Care Quality Commission inspections will be temporarily suspended for the duration of the COVID19 outbreak.
- Ofsted is to temporarily suspend routine inspections of schools, colleges, early years settings, children's social care providers and local authorities.
- Confirmation from the Information Commissioner's Office that councils will be able to use their discretion on deadlines for Freedom Of Information requests.

We are also considering plans to legislate so that:

- The requirement for Annual Council meetings to take place will be removed; and that
- While essential council meetings should continue, these will be able to take place virtually for a temporary period.

You will be aware, in addition to these practical measures, at Budget, the Chancellor set out a £12 billion package of temporary, timely and targeted measures to support public services, individuals and businesses through the economic disruption caused by COVID-19.

Today, he announced £330 billion for businesses in guaranteed loans, and extended the business rates holiday to all businesses in the retail, hospitality or leisure sector, irrespective of their rateable value. Local authorities in England will be fully compensated for the costs of these measures. My department will publish guidance on this shortly.

The Chancellor will write to you separately on these measures and my department will be providing further guidance in the very near future on those that affect local government. I hope that this additional support will go a long way to bolster our joint efforts to tackle this outbreak of COVID-19.

The Government recognises local authorities will require extra funding particularly for the priority area of social care, and we are urgently looking at this as a matter of priority. I will confirm further details on this shortly.

These are exceptional and testing times, but I am heartened to date by the pragmatic resilience being demonstrated by all those working for and representing local communities throughout the country. We will remain in close contact with you and local areas in the weeks ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick." The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a short horizontal line.

**RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP**