



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP

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

***Ministry of Housing, Communities &
Local Government***

Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

www.gov.uk/mhclg

To all Leaders and Chief Executives in England

23 March 2021

Dear Colleagues,

SUPPORT FOR HIGH STREETS

I want to set out some important measures I have taken to support high streets and town centres. Government recognises that this is a challenging time for everyone in the country and COVID-19 is having a significant impact on our communities, businesses and town centres.

That is why we have this weekend announced a package of support for high streets including a new “Welcome Back Fund”, expert support for 70 local authorities from the High Streets Task Force, amended planning rules to allow businesses such as pubs and restaurants to serve more customers outdoors and the Government’s response to the consultation which was held in the Autumn of 2020 on the private parking Code Enforcement Framework.

These measures will support a safe and successful reopening of our treasured high streets and seaside resorts, giving people the reassurance that they can shop and socialise in a COVID-secure way.

This builds on the Government’s comprehensive package of support of £200 billion, to help businesses that have been affected by COVID-19. This package includes the small business grants, the coronavirus loan schemes, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, as well as deferral of income tax payments.

Welcome Back Fund

This new £56 million Fund will help councils boost tourism, improve green spaces and provide more outdoor seating areas, markets and food stall pop-ups – giving people more, safer options to reunite with friends and relatives.

Part of this funding will also support coastal areas in the same way as they prepare for a great summer, with funding going to all coastal resorts across England to safely welcome holiday makers in the coming months and have a successful summer. The funding can also be used by councils to:

- Boost the look and feel of their high streets by investing in street planting, parks, green spaces and seating areas to make high streets as beautiful and welcoming as possible.

- Run publicity campaigns and prepare to hold events like street markets and festivals to support local businesses.
- Install signage and floor markings to encourage social distancing and safety.
- Improve high streets and town centres by planting flowers or removing graffiti.

The allocations to each local authority have been published today and can be found [here](#).

I would strongly encourage you to pass this funding on to lower tier authorities such as town and parish councils, given the important role they will need to play in delivering initiatives in the community and on your high streets. My department will be collecting information on where and how this is done as funding is distributed and spent. I also encourage you to engage with businesses, business organisations, and other relevant stakeholders including MPs when considering how to use this award.

We also recognise that the impact of COVID-19 on local economies will be significant. Local authorities can therefore also use the Fund to develop plans for responding to these impacts this could include considering how other funding streams could help address those challenges in the future.

The team responsible for delivering the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund will also deliver this new funding. They will be in touch shortly through their existing working level contacts to set out more detail on activities in scope and how local authorities should set out their spending priorities. They can also be contacted through the following email address RHSSFund@communities.gov.uk

High Streets Task Force Expert Support

We have also announced the next 70 local authorities to receive support from the High Streets Task Force. The High Streets Task Force was established by government to support local leaders in their work on high streets, and the 70 local authorities will receive targeted, in-person support from high street experts.

This support will include a one-day diagnostic visit by a Task Force expert and, depending on the result of this diagnostic, may then include further support through expert advice on a specific issue, such as planning or design, workshops to develop a high street's vision, or mentoring or training.

The places announced this week have been selected based on a combination of Indices of Multiple Deprivation and retail per population within each local authority. Support for these local authorities will be staggered over 2021 and 2022. We will be announcing further local authorities to receive the Task Force's expert offer later on in the lifetime of the programme, which runs up until 2024. If you are one of the places announced this week, the Task Force will be in contact with an induction pack explaining next steps.

The support offered to each local authority will be focused on one high street in that authority, but many Task Force products will be replicable and the advice will benefit other high streets that local authorities work with in their area.

The expert support announced this week builds on the Task Force's open to all offer, which I would encourage you to explore and to share with business improvement districts and community groups within your area. All high streets are able to benefit from online training modules, webinars and a repository of best practice and research at <https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk/>.

All local authorities in England will also receive at least one data dashboard for a high street in their area. This dashboard will use footfall data to help those engaged in place management to understand the performance of their town centre or high street.

Planning flexibilities to support outdoor hospitality

To support the hospitality sector to reopen as the restrictions ease, businesses such as pubs and restaurants – including where these premises are in listed buildings – will be allowed to use their land more flexibly to set up marquees and provide more outdoor space for diners.

Last year we provided greater freedom for people and businesses to use their land more flexibly without planning permission, including to set up car-boot sales and to allow businesses such as pubs to set up marquees in their gardens. We legislated to increase the number of days that such temporary uses were allowed from 28 to 56 days. We now intend to legislate to extend flexibilities further, allowing businesses such as pubs, restaurants and cafes to use the right for the whole of summer 2021 and widening the scope to cover land within the curtilage of listed buildings. These measures will enable businesses to serve more customers safely once they are allowed to reopen and support them to recover from the effects of the pandemic.

Many hospitality businesses which made use of the fast track licensing process introduced last year with respect to outdoor seating and tables wish to do so again this spring and summer. The flexibilities remain in place and are designed to ensure a simple, fast and inexpensive process. I would strongly encourage you to respond to new requests in this spirit. Some licenses granted previously have or are shortly due to expire. Again I would urge you to handle their rollover in the swiftest, least burdensome way possible (including allowing licences issued last summer to continue to apply unless there are very good reasons not to), given the pressure on these businesses.

Parking

On Saturday 20 March 2021, we published the Government's response to the consultation, which was held in the Autumn of 2020, on the private parking Code Enforcement Framework, taking forward the implementation of the Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019, which was introduced by Sir Greg Knight MP, and supported by the Government.

We sought views on the process for managing appeals against parking charges, including the proposal to mandate the use of a new independent appeals service; the funding, monitoring and enforcement of the upcoming Code of Practice; and a new system for private parking charges.

In light of the overwhelming support from respondents for the proposal, we announced that we will support the creation of a single independent appeals service for motorists to turn to if they receive a private parking charge.

The consultation response also set out an innovative new approach to parking charges, which will provide greater consistency and fairness to motorists and protect the rights of residents, private landowners and businesses to manage parking on private land. We are adopting, for example, some the principles of the local authority system, which contains upper and lower levels of charge depending on the seriousness of the breach and provides a 50% discount if paid within 14 days.

The Government is working with British Standards Institution (BSI) to develop the Code of Practice itself as a British Standard. In August 2020, BSI consulted on a draft Code and we

are now working closely with the project's Steering Group to reach consensus on the draft wording before the Code is finalised.

Robert Jenrick.



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