



Covid-19

Ministerial Correspondence Log/Tracker

From the Leader of the Council

Dated:	From:	To:	Subject (s):
1. 18 March 2020	Leader 1095lh Robert Jenrick MP.pdf	Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick MP	Refocussing Business Growth Programme
2. 28 March 2020	Leader Birmingham Ltr to Chancellor Covid-19 2	Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak MP	Local Government finance & support for business
3. 2 April 2020	Leader 1101tr Rt Hon R Jenrick Covid 19.pdf	Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick MP,	PPE, Testing, Food Distribution & Supply
4. 3 April 2020	Leader LettertoSoS MHCLG Funeral Costs 3 April .	Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick MP	Funeral Costs
5. 8 April 2020	Leader [together with Met Leaders] 1106tr R Jenrick PPE.pdf	Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick MP,	PPE
6. 16 April 2020	Leader with Rt Hon. Liam Byrne MP and Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell MP. 1110tr Health Sec & R Jenrick PPE.pdf	Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick MP	PPE
7. 21 April	Leader 1112tr Rt Hon C Pincher Covid 19 Birm	Rt Hon. Christopher Pincher MP	PPE/Testing/Food Distribution Response to Letter dated 16 April 2020
8. 30 April	The Leader	Prime Minister	Covid 19 Local Government Funding

	 1122tr Prime Minister V2.pdf		
9. 05 May	Leader  1123tr Home Secretary P Patel.pdf	Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP	No recourse to public funds
10. 05 May	Leader  050520 Letter to MinisterPincher.pdf	Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP	PPE and Food Distribution
11. 07 May	Leader  1127lh - Letter to the Prime Minister .pdf	Prime Minister	Local Government Funding
12. 07 May	Leader  1128lh Letter to the Chancellor .pdf	Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak MP	Economic Impact of Covid 19
13. 15 May	Leader, Rt Hon. Liam Byrne MP and Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell MP  1130tr Rt Hon M Hancock.pdf	Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP	Covid 19 Impact on BAME Communities
14. 15 May	Leader and Cllr Sharon Thompson  1131tr Luke Hall MP.pdf	Rt Hon. Luke Hall MP	Re: Everyone In
15. 19 May	The Leader and Cllr Jayne Francis  1133tr G Williamson MP Schools.pdf	Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson MP	Re: Birmingham Schools
16. 19 May	The Leader  1136tr R Sunak Chancellor.pdf	Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak MP	Re: Pay Freeze
17. 22 May	Leader and Cllr John Cotton	Rt Hon. Chris Philp MP	Re: Britannia Hotel

	 1138tr C Philp Britannia Hotel.pdf		
18. 29 May	The Leader  1141tr C Pincher.pdf	Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP	PPE and Food Distribution
19. 05 June	The Leader and Cllrs Jayne Francis and Kate Booth  1143tr G Williamson MP Free School Meal	Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson MP	Re: Free School Meal Vouchers – Summer Holidays
20. 05 June	The Leader, Liam Byrne and Andrew Mitchell  LtrSoS05062020.pdf	Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP	Re: Covid 19 Test & Trace
21. 18 June	Leader, Liam Byrne, Andrew Mitchell and Robert Alden  1150tr Rt Hon O Dowden MP .pdf	Rt Hon. Oliver Dowden MP	Re: Birmingham's Creative & Cultural Sector
22. 03 July	Leader, Liam Byrne and Andrew Mitchell  1155tr Rt Hon Matt Hancock Test & Trace	Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP	Re: Test and Trace
23. 06 July	Leader  1157tr S Clarke .pdf	Rt Hon. Simon Clarke MP	Re: Local Government Finance Covid 19 & Beyond
24. 16 July	Leader, Rt Hon. Liam Byrne MP and Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell MP  1166tr Rt Hon M Hancock Test & Trace	Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP	Re: Test and Trace
25. 28 August	Leader	Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP	Re: Stone Road Asylum Centre

	 1185lh Letter to Home Secretary - 28 /		
26. 04 September	Leader and MET Leaders  1191tr Matt Hancock MP Covid 19 Financial	Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP	Re: Covid 19 – Financial support for low income households during periods of self isolation
27. 10 September	Leader and MET Leaders  1197tr Matt Hancock MP Covid 19 Removin	Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP	Re: Covid 19 – The mechanism for removing increased local restrictions
28. 11 September	Leader and Rt Hon. Liam Byrne MP  1198tr Matt Hancock MP Test and Trace.pdf	Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP	Re: Test and Trace, testing capacity
29. 17 September	Leader and MET Leaders  1202tr R Sunak Hospitality Sector.pdf	Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak MP	Re: Future restrictions & financial support to the hospitality sector
30. 30 September	Leader, Cllrs Jayne Francis and Kate Booth  1218tr G Williamson Free School Meals.pdf	Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson MP	Re: Free School Meals



**COUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1095/Ih

18 March 2020

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Secretary of State

Covid19, Refocussing Business Growth Programme

As you will be fully aware, Covid19 is having a major impact on our economy. I am asking for your assistance in ensuring that our small businesses receive as much help and support as is possibly available.

It is unlikely that our small businesses can handle such a shock on their own – we need to quickly and efficiently deploy all the tools and resources that are available to us.

Birmingham City Council have been successfully managing and delivering the EU funded Business Growth Programme (BGP2) since 2016. Currently, the programme is focussed on growth, investment and new jobs. However, given the current challenging economic environment, there is an urgent need to refocus the remaining uncommitted programme, circa £7m, on business survival and safeguarding existing jobs.

I would appreciate your support on flexing all uncommitted EU programme funding towards the survival and safeguarding of local jobs.

We are currently in the process of undertaking a quick survey of local small business across Birmingham to assess the impact of COVID 19 and to identify the type of interventions small business may be seeking in order to navigate this challenging trading period. The findings from this survey will enable us to develop a specific package of support for SME's to address the impact of Covid19.

Yours sincerely

**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**



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LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/CoE

28 March 2020

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Her Majesty's Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

SENT VIA EMAIL ONLY TO: rishi.sunak.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Chancellor

Re: Financial Support required for Birmingham - Covid-19

We write collectively on behalf of Birmingham's Members of Parliament, and Leadership of Birmingham City Council first, to thank you for the £500 million Hardship Fund for local authorities which is extremely welcome, and second to propose two minor reforms to the public finance regime, which together will significantly ease the cashflow risks to the Council's response to the emergency, which continues to evolve.

The £500 million Hardship Fund for is extremely welcome and very important. There are however, four key risks to local authority cashflow:

- The new illiquidity in inter-authority borrowing. The main source of short term borrowing for local authorities is other local authorities, some of whom have surplus cash available to lend. Today, however, all authorities are keeping their cash close and are not lending in the normal way. As a result there is currently almost no short term borrowing available to local authorities, including Birmingham.
- Uncertainty about the timing and scale of the costs the authority will incur
- Uncertainty about the scale of income loss or delays in income from normal sources such as fees, charges, business rates and council tax.
- The necessity for locally specific measures to support businesses and individuals, some of which may involve deferring income or advancing expenditure, particularly in

the light of the economic risks which we flag in survey results from the business community, set out in Appendix 1.

These risks to managing cashflow could be ameliorated quickly with two key measures.

- (i) **Continuation of a payment in advance system by the Government will be a major help in the coming months.** The Government has responded very helpfully in providing major COVID funding quickly, including the general support grant to local authorities (already received) and the funding for business support (arriving on Monday 30 March 2020). This has eased the immediate cashflow pressure the City Council was facing. However further Government advice about future cashflows in current circumstances would be helpful.
- (ii) **A short-term borrowing facility for local authorities.** This could readily be done using the arrangements in place in the DMADF (Debt Management Account Deposit Facility) which since the 2008 banking crisis has been available to take short term deposits of temporarily surplus cash from local authorities. It should be straightforward to extend this into a short term borrowing facility for local authorities. CIPFA's Treasury Management Panel requested a DMADF borrowing facility in a meeting with HM Treasury last Friday. The existing PWLB borrowing arrangements are not suitable for this purpose, as PWLB loans are for a minimum of 1 year and the rates are high. This means that if an authority needs to borrow for only say 2 weeks to cover a temporary cash outflow, it would have to borrow for 12 months at high interest rates, which could cost millions of pounds over a whole year. A positive response from Treasury to facilitate short term borrowing for local authorities along these lines would be welcome.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues in more detail via telephone conference as the earliest available opportunity. It would also be useful to have a weekly telephone update with a single point of contact within Government.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Ian Ward, Leader of Birmingham City Council

Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP

Encs.

Appendix 1:

1. Impact on Business

We very much welcome the unprecedented steps that Government has taken to support the economy.

Over the last few days Birmingham City Council has surveyed businesses to understand what support is required. A total of 900 businesses responded and we attach a briefing with the key findings and recommendations. The highlights are:

- An overwhelming number of businesses (86%) are asking for **grant** funding as opposed to **loan** funding.
- The majority of businesses require additional funding to continue operating over the next 6 – 12 months. If funding is not directed to businesses as soon as possible, then it is inevitable that many of them will be forced to close.
- Over the next 6 months 87% of businesses expect that they will be forced to either temporarily lay-off staff or will be operating to a reduced working week. 28% of businesses expect to make redundancies over the next 6 months.
- Over 75% of respondents were from outside of the hospitality and retail sectors – given the critical issues facing business highlighted by the survey it is clear that grant eligibility needs to be extended to all sectors.
- In response to the above points the City Council also needs immediate flexibility to direct £7 million from the EU funded Business Growth Programme into ongoing efforts to safeguard businesses and jobs. The Leader of Birmingham City Council has already written to Government asking for this flexibility **[a copy of the letter dated 18 March 2020 is attached below]**, but the request was refused.
- Almost half of businesses have expressed a need for sickness pay to be extended to existing salary levels. Although the funding commitments made by the Chancellor to date are unprecedented, the message from business is that statutory limits are insufficient to enable their workforce to take the necessary time off and recover.

Further details of Birmingham City Council's business survey are attached below.

In addition, this week's submission to the weekly call of Birmingham MP's from our Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business (FSB) flagged the following:

- a) Businesses are now taking decisions to let people go or close for good as cash flow positions become untenable.
- b) Larger Firms are reporting issues with banks demanding directors' guarantee for the 20% not underwritten by government. This is hampering firm's willingness to use the facility.
- c) The FSB is reporting that firms with business rate arrears are reluctant to apply for grants, as they fear rejection until the business rates arrears are cancelled.
- d) SMEs that business rates via their landlord are ineligible for support as the SME grant is contingent on businesses receiving small business rates relief or rural rates

relief. Many small businesses that rent space from landlords do not pay business rates directly themselves; rather they are managed by the landlord as part of their total rates bill.

Birmingham City Council, our Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business would appreciate more advice and guidance from Government on these issues.

Attachments:-

Birmingham City Council Business Survey (COVID-19 impact)



Birmingham City
Council Business Surv

Letter from the Leader of Birmingham City Council to Rt Hon. Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State, Housing, Communities and Local Government dated 18 March 2020.



1095lh Robert
Jenrick MP.pdf



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1101tr

02 April 2020

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Urgent support required for Birmingham Covid - 19

I write in relation to the ongoing emergency response to the Covid-19 crisis. Whilst the Council welcomes the assistance received from Government to date [across departments], there are certain key issues that require urgent resolution to enable us to protect and support some of the most vulnerable people in our city.

1.Food Distribution to the shielded vulnerable

We are working hard to put in place measures to begin the distribution of food to the most vulnerable but urgent clarity is required relating to:

- a). When the finalised list of shielded vulnerable will be available?
- b). Where the food to the shielded vulnerable will be sourced from?

In relation to point a), so far we have received details of 3649 people from Acute providers in the NHS. Two further lists have been provided to us with several thousand names on them and we are still awaiting information from GPs. We have not been told when a finalised list will be made available.

The above is exacerbated by a complete lack of clarity in respect of point b) which is hampering our ability to properly organise the distribution of food to shielded vulnerable residents. We received guidance last week that food was to be supplied to the Council [by the Army] for distribution on Monday 28 March 2020. We promptly established all of the necessary contact centre and distribution elements required to support this. It was anticipated that this food 'drop-off' would be the first of a number of waves of supplies to be made by Government.

In fact, the supplies delivered by the Army were only received on Wednesday 31 March at 6am [the Council was therefore left waiting 6 days for delivery], with confirmation being given that this would be the only time food would be delivered to the Council for onward distribution. This is obviously contrary to the previous guidance given regarding food supplies. The failure to meet previously agreed deadlines for the delivery of supplies, coupled with a total lack of clarity as to whether Government will be providing any additional support in terms of the provision of food, makes it impossible for us to plan effectively, at a time when our resources are already stretched in dealing with the emergency.

We respectfully suggest that a more efficient means to manage the sourcing of food for onward distribution would be for local Councils to work directly with local branches of national supermarket chains. It would be far easier for us to work with local stores, asking them to keep aside, for example, 10% of their non-perishable food stock (items such as pasta and tinned food etc) making that available to the Council for distribution – as opposed to having to seek out and negotiate with food wholesalers [for your information some wholesalers are also telling us that they will not provide food to Local Authorities because they have been instructed by Government to support the ‘national effort’ which only exacerbates the challenges that we face].

We would, of course need Government to enter into dialogue with the management of national supermarkets to facilitate this.

Clarity on the funding of this programme of food distribution is also needed in terms of whether the Council will be able to recoup the full costs associated with it.

Food supplies are also required to support local food banks that are dealing with unprecedented levels of demand. As a conservative estimate, the Council is looking to provide a total of 4000 food packages per month, which over three months would cost in the region of £750,000. The total number of food packages required may well rise exponentially over the coming months.

To put this in context the Council has already spent far in excess of the funding provided by Government to date, to deal with the Covid-19 emergency [further details are provided below].

2. Personal Protective Equipment

Whilst we recognise the importance of ensuring that NHS staff have access to protective equipment, the army of frontline staff in local government providing care and support to our most vulnerable must not be forgotten. There is a desperate need to provide not only the Council’s own staff, but those working in the city’s care settings with basics such as gloves, aprons, masks and in certain instances eye protection. These staff are operating in situations that leave them potentially more readily exposed to Covid-19. It is therefore vital that we do all we can to ensure their protection and the vulnerable people to which they are providing care. We ask that the Government adopt the level of protection as recommended by the World Health Organisation for all care staff.

We of course operate in an integrated health and care system. If the social care element were to fail due to a shortage of staff or an uncontrolled spread of Covid-19 amongst vulnerable groups in receipt of care, this will simply serve to increase the burden on an already stretched NHS or locally, potentially lead to a partial collapse.

3. Testing for Covid-19

A Covid-19 testing centre will soon be operational in the city. We understand, however, that this will only have the capacity to test 150 people a day [so approximately 1000 a week]. This is woefully inadequate and needs to be significantly increased for it to have a meaningful impact given the thousands of staff that work for the NHS and other public services in the city.

On the issue of who is being tested, there is no debate that frontline NHS staff should be prioritised, however as articulated above, given the vital role that social care staff play we believe that it makes sense that they should follow NHS staff in terms of priority for testing.

I am therefore urging you to release guidance confirming that social care workers should be 'next in-line' for testing after NHS Staff.

4. Summary

I appreciate that this is an unprecedented situation and that we are all working to protect and care for our citizens, but in order to respond as effectively and efficiently as possible local government needs the appropriate support from central government; without it lives are being put at risk.

On that basis I would be grateful if you could provide the following:-

- i. Absolute assurance that those most vulnerable in Birmingham will be identified as soon as possible to allow us to provide support to them;
- ii. Urgent clarity and action regarding the situation with food deliveries to the city for the shielded vulnerable;
- iii. Recognition of the vital role social care workers play within our healthcare system with a guarantee that Government will urgently support their protection through the supply of PPE [in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organisation].
- iv. That social care workers will be prioritised for testing [with the capacity to test being significantly increased within the city], following those that work in the NHS;
- v. Funding will be made available as Birmingham's share of the £1.6bn being £38.7m has been spent twice over and we have not yet reached the peak.

Should your officials require any further information in relation to the above, the Council's Acting Chief Executive & Gold Commander, Professor Graeme Betts, would be happy to speak with them as required.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**



**COUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW

3 April 2020

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Funeral Costs

We are writing to alert you to significant issues relating to funeral costs and the impact on local residents.

Cremation and burial costs are, of course, set by local authorities and cover the cost of maintaining facilities and providing this service. There are also many private facilities in operation. Added to the necessary expense of cremation and burial are those costs applied by Funeral Directors. Setting fees and charges is undertaken annually and market conditions are taken into account.

The cost of a funeral is an unwelcome expense at any time but there are currently several factors to be considered in order to help the bereaved in the current climate.

We would therefore ask for funding from government to be made available to allow local authorities to pay for funeral costs of residents in the following circumstances:

- For those in receipt of benefits and for those awaiting receipt of universal credit
- For those who are furloughed and are on low incomes
- Where there are multiple deaths in an immediate family

We currently do not charge for still births or the funerals of children under the age of sixteen.

We would also suggest an increase in the Bereavement Support Payment and removal of current restrictions to make it more widely available, such as the necessity to have paid National Insurance contributions for at least 25 weeks.

We would be happy to discuss this with you or your officials to work up the finer details of any proposal, in a bid to support our communities at this very difficult time.

Yours faithfully



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**

**Rt Hon. Liam Byrne
Member of Parliament for Hodge Hill**

**Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell
Member of Parliament for Sutton
Coldfield**



**COUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1106tr

8 April 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL:- psrobertjenrick@communities.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

URGENT: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) situation in the West Midlands

We are writing to you as the Leaders of the seven West Midlands Metropolitan Local Authorities. In your letter dated 5 April 2020 to Chairs of Local Resilience Forums, copied into Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives, you stated that 30 million pieces of PPE would be distributed across the country. This was welcome news and provided some assurance that our very urgent PPE needs were being addressed.

Unfortunately, we have been informed today that the deliveries did not contain anywhere near the quantity of equipment expected. Indeed, the table below, highlights that, in most instances, less than half of the promised equipment was received. As I am sure you are aware, this is unacceptable and could have dire consequences.

We would urge you to ensure that the remaining stock is delivered, without delay, by the end of the week. Further clarity is also needed on the frequency of future deliveries so that teams across the region can plan ahead and prepare.

We do acknowledge the immense challenges you face at present and, whilst we are grateful for the support provided to date, the issue of PPE is likely to remain a 'live' one for the duration of the Covid-19 emergency.

	Local Authority	Popula-tion aged 65+	% split	Aprons	Gloves	Type IIR Masks	FFP3s	Cleaning Equip-ment	Clinical Waste Bags (Yellow)
Expected	Birmingham	147,944	32.80%	127,038	317,597	63,519	3,176	794	1,588
Received				64,000	150,000	29,400	1,620	0	0
% received				50.38	47.23	46.29	51.01	0	0
Expected	City of Wolverhampton	43,446	9.60%	37,307	93,267	18,653	933	233	466
Received				1,900	42,000	8,400	420	0	0
% received				5%	45%	45%	45%	0	0
Expected	City of Coventry	49,968	11.1%	42,907	107,268	21,454	1,073	268	536
Received				21,000	48,000	9,900	480	0	0
% received				49%	45%	46%	45%	0	0
Expected	Dudley	65,175	14.5%	55,965	139,914	27,983	1,399	350	699
Received				28,000	70,000	12,900	720	0	0
% received				50%	50%	46%	51%	0	0
Expected	Sandwell	49,258	10.9%	42,297	105,744	21,149	1,057	264	529
Received				21,000	50,000	9,300	480	0	0
% received				50%	47%	44%	45%	0%	0%
Expected	Solihull	45,226	10.0%	38,835	97,088	19,418	971	243	485
Received				19,000	48,000	9,000	480	0	0
% received				49%	49%	46%	49%	0	0
Expected	Walsall	49,866	11.1%	42,820	107,049	21,410	1,070	268	535
Received				21,000	50,000	9,300	480	0	0
% received				49%	47%	43%	45%	0%	0%

Coverage and re-supply are the two key issues that we are facing. This is a dynamic situation, and PPE equipment such as gloves, masks and aprons need to be replaced often.

Critically, we are expecting the Covid-19 ‘peak’ to occur sometime around 17 April 2020 – which means that demand for PPE will be at its highest over the coming weeks. Therefore, we would urge you to work with us to develop sustainable plans for the **regular** re-supply of equipment across regional sectors and providers.

Health and social care is in a fragile position due to unprecedented demand. We have received many representations from care providers in desperate need of PPE equipment. Should their vital staff be unable to support vulnerable people, because they catch Covid-19, this would have a very serious and detrimental impact upon the whole health and social care system.

We also need to guarantee PPE supply for other key workers such as waste collection teams and those colleagues who work with other vulnerable groups including rough sleepers/homeless people. A supply should also be available to those volunteers that are supporting efforts within our communities.

What we would value, and indeed need from you, as soon as possible, is your Government’s plan for regular resupply of PPE, given the impending Covid-19 peak. To expedite matters, our Chief Executives are happy, and waiting on standby to speak to your officials direct.

We look forward to hearing from your team as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council



Councillor Ian Courts
Leader of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council



Councillor Patrick Harley
Leader of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Ian Brookfield
Leader of City of Wolverhampton Council

Councillor George Duggins
Leader of Coventry City Council

Councillor Yvonne Davies
Leader of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Mike Bird
Leader of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1110tr

16 April 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL to mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk and PSRobertJenrick@communities.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretaries of State

Urgent: Personal Protective Equipment ['PPE'], Birmingham

We write collectively on behalf of Birmingham's Members of Parliament and leadership of the City Council.

Two separate letters have been written to Government by the Leader of Birmingham City Council raising the urgent need for the regular and sufficient supply of PPE [on the 2nd and 8th April 2020 - appended for ease of reference].

At the time of writing no response has been received to either letter whilst the situation 'on the ground' remains extremely tough. The City Council is taking steps to prioritise the usage of PPE to only those functions where it is absolutely necessary [**as set out in the Table A below**], however supplies are running desperately low.

Table A

Housing Options – Temporary Accommodation	Face to face interview e.g. Temporary Accommodation – Health & Safety Inspection of rooms in hostels *where risk assessment determines
Mortuary	Invasive AGP [Aerosol Generating Procedures]
Rough Sleepers Team - Temporary Accommodation	Face to face interview e.g. Rough sleeper Assessment - presenting as homeless/police intervention * where risk assessment determines
Careline	Installation/repair of Careline equipment in homes * where risk assessment determines
Social work teams - community, hospital AMHP, Specialist Services & Out of Hours	Dom & Social Care - face to face interview
Care Centres	Residential care - direct resident care
Shared Lives	Dom & Social Care - washing and dressing
Internal Day Centres	Dom & Social Care - washing and dressing
Enablement	Dom & Social Care - washing and dressing
Occupational Therapy	Dom & Social Care - face to face interview
Social work teams and Family support workers	Dom & Social Care - face to face interview
Domiciliary care	Dom & Social Care - washing and dressing
Residential/nursing care	Residential care - direct resident care
Shared lives	Dom & Social Care - washing and dressing
Supported living	Dom & Social Care - washing and dressing
Extra-care housing	Dom & Social Care - washing and dressing
Neighbourhoods Estate Caretaking and Cleaning Teams	Outcome of service area assessment (dealing with defecation & bodily fluids, unblocking refuse chutes - releasing bacteria/viruses/fungal spores) * These are outcomes of risk assessments as per H&S at Work Act 1974

Birmingham City Council - approach to date

As well as utilising existing supplies the City Council has identified PPE stock from a number of alternative sources:-

- **Offers to purchase equipment from private businesses** – the Council are working with businesses in the UK and abroad to purchase equipment [e.g. in one case up to 800,000 facemasks]
- **Co-ordinating Procurement across the Region** – Procurement Officers have established a project to procure 1.4m facemasks for regional authorities (West Midlands and several County Councils) through single contractor appointment
- **Working with partners to secure donations** – via this route the Council has secured 30,000 protective gloves from Kier, one of its suppliers, and are actively encouraging other donations

The distribution of this stock is being managed from a central hub to ensure effective and efficient co-ordination.

Despite this proactive approach there are still significant issues, which have been exacerbated by the Government's strategy for supplying PPE.

Firstly, the City Council's ability to purchase PPE directly from suppliers is being hampered by the creation of the Government's PPE Dedicated Supply Channel (the '*Clipper*' scheme) which is meant to organise the distribution of PPE on a national basis. Various wholesalers the Council have engaged with have confirmed that they are withholding further supplies to it due to prioritising Government requirements through the PPE Dedicated Supply Channel.

We understand that the Clipper scheme is 3 weeks away from being operational which, quite frankly, will be too late to deal with the emerging crisis around PPE.

From a practical perspective, as all regions/organisations are struggling to cope with a shortage of PPE, the lack of available supply within the market is exacerbated by huge competition for equipment, driving up prices, with no guarantee that equipment is going to areas of maximum need. This is a consequence of not having a nationally co-ordinated response to PPE.

Secondly, direct supply of PPE by Government is via the Local Resilience Forum [LRF]. Through the LRF, MHCLG has arranged for a limited provision of PPE supplies. The first two drops of these supplies were provided (in part) to the City Council in the last week.

We understand that a proportion (roughly 10%) of the promised supply to the Council has been taken at source to provide for the regional mortuary facility as no allowance had been made for that provision from elsewhere in national stocks. Even with those deductions taken into account, the City Council is still approximately 25% short of the promised number of face masks and some items (such as clinical waste bags and wash kits) have not been delivered at all.

However, the guidance that accompanied these supplies has extended the service areas that the Council is expected to supply with PPE to include the following groups:

Table B

Adult social care (care homes, personal assistants, homecare)
Children's home
General Practitioners (GPs)
Secure Children's home
Residential Special School
Prison
Court
Police
Funeral services
Mortuary
Mental health community services
Hospices and Palliative Care
Primary care
Pharmacists
Emergency dentists

The demand being driven by the inclusion of the above services to the City Council's distribution list of PPE, means stock is running desperately low. To put this in context if demand for protective facemasks continues as is predicted, the City Council's supply [currently 38,000] **will only last for a further 2 weeks for use in the services listed in Table A**, without making any allowance for the demand to provide equipment to the services referred to above in **Table B**.

The situation is critical.

Support required

The fundamental issue to resolve is how we can get the appropriate levels of PPE to the key workers in all those service areas listed above and indeed the NHS, particularly when we know that the Covid-19 peak is still to come and demand is only going to increase.

We cannot compromise the health and safety of the very people that are going to help this City and indeed the country get through this crisis. Nor can we compromise the wellbeing of those *cared for* by these key workers in their homes, hospices and care facilities.

We are trying to work productively with you to find solutions, but without a clear understanding of the specific product and stock you are able to supply, this is extremely difficult.

If the issue nationally is not one of logistics, but in fact a lack of supply then Government should simply acknowledge this and we will work with you to try and solve this problem.

Given the urgency of matters we will make ourselves available for an urgent telephone conference with your officials this week to discuss how we can work together to deal with this PPE emergency.

We look forward to hearing from you as soon as reasonably practicable.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**

Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP

Encs

Letter dated 2 April 2020

Letter dated 8 April 2020



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Jenrick Covid 19.pdf



1106tr R Jenrick
PPE.pdf



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1112tr

21 April 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

Rt. Hon Christopher Pincher
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
Ministry of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister

Covid-19 - Birmingham

Thank you for your letter dated 16 April 2020 in response to my letter dated 2 April 2020. My letter had asked for urgent assistance and clarification in relation to the following issues:

- Food distribution to shielded vulnerable;
- Testing for Covid-19;
- supply of Personal Protective Equipment [PPE] to frontline workers and;
- Local Government Finance.

Whilst there has been some progress in the time that has elapsed since my letter was sent and your response was received, significant issues remain and require resolution.

1.Food distribution to the shielded vulnerable

You will recall that, in my previous letter, we had concerns due to the lack of a finalised list of shielded vulnerable people that require food parcels, alongside a lack of clarity as to where the food for distribution was to be sourced from. The list is still not complete as we await further information from GPs, however matters have progressed.

At the time of my letter, Brakes (who are being engaged directly by MHCLG to undertake food distribution on a national basis) were delivering food parcels to only a few hundred shielded individuals in Birmingham when the total understood to be eligible based on the

known criteria was several thousand. Had it not been for the City Council's early intervention around sourcing food and arranging for delivery, many of our most vulnerable people would have gone without the support that they needed.

I am pleased to say that matters have improved with Brakes with information supplied by the company on Friday 17 April 2020 that it had delivered approximately 3800 food parcels during that week.

However, this leaves close to 2700 food parcels where the local authority is required to undertake delivery of basic food supplies to vulnerable citizens given the known extent of the shielded list provided to us. It has not been made clear when Brakes will be in a position to take over this responsibility.

Please can you confirm as a matter of urgency when the system of National food distribution will be in a position to assume its full responsibilities? This will enable the Council to reallocate resources to other areas of its emergency response.

Quality of Food Parcels

I wanted to raise with you an issue around the quality of the food parcels that are currently being delivered. These comprise of non-perishable items such as pasta and tinned foods.

The parcels were initially put together at a time when it was not clear how long the lockdown would last. Taking into account that the lockdown has been extended by a further three weeks - and could well continue for a matter of months or longer for those that are being shielded - Government may wish to consider whether the contents of these food parcels are of sufficient nutritional value for those with clinical vulnerabilities.

In addition, we understand that many deliveries have been left on doorsteps by Brakes without any acknowledgement that they have been received by the intended recipient. The accompanying letter provided by Brakes in these delivery packages does not provide any means of contact to discuss the delivery. We also understand from another of the Government's food distributors (Bidfoods) that where citizens have attempted to contact them to decline a future food package (as it is not required) the option of cancelling is not one that the distributor is able or willing to apply, as their contract with Government compels them to deliver the parcel regardless.

Defra/Aldi Food Supply Agreement

We understand that the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has entered into an agreement with the supermarket chain Aldi, for the provision of food.

What is not clear, however, is the exact purpose of this agreement. Questions that arise include:

- Who are the intended recipients of the food supplied by Aldi?
- Is this agreement to act as a 'top-up' service to Brakes' national distribution?
- What is the relationship between this food supply and the work that local authorities are doing to supply those with specific dietary requirements? Specifically, can local authorities obtain food from Aldi for this purpose via the arrangement with Defra?

You may be aware that several local authorities, including ourselves, had recently entered into an agreement with Aldi for the distribution of food. Now that the national agreement with Defra is in place, we understand that Aldi is no longer willing to honour this agreement and would ask for your comments on that position.

Furthermore, as Brakes national distribution begins to expand many wholesale food providers are now unable to supply local authorities directly as they are being asked to prioritise the supply of the Government's national scheme.

The consequence of the above is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the City Council and other local authorities to find wholesalers that will provide a consistent supply of food for distribution. This is especially concerning considering that, as set out above, the national scheme is not yet functioning at a level that meets all current demands and there are still gaps that local authorities such as Birmingham are required to fill. The 2700 or so food parcels that the Council is distributing this week is clear evidence of this.

This is in addition to the ongoing duty [as per national guidance] for local authorities to supply food parcels for those shielded vulnerable that have specific dietary requirements based on either medical conditions or religious beliefs.

Finally, as a Council, we also need to consider those vulnerable people that are not 'shielded' but still require help and support in these challenging times, including a reliable supply of food.

I had suggested in my letter of 2 April that it would be more effective and efficient for Local Authorities to be able to source food from local suppliers (such as supermarkets) closer to the source of demand. I note that you have not responded to this suggestion and would urge you to do so. This would help resolve some of the issues of sourcing food on a national basis as highlighted above.

Please can you provide urgent clarification as to the purpose and role of the Defra/Aldi agreement, and what measures will be put in place to ensure a secure supply of food for the City Council to meet the needs of local vulnerable residents?

2. Testing

Unfortunately, our experience is that the national approach to testing remains chaotic with a widespread lack of communication and coherent joint working between national partners. This has led to local confusion over site provision, pathways, eligibility and access to testing. We have worked very closely with NHS Birmingham and Solihull CCG since the start of the outbreak and are very clear that the confusion is due to national dysfunction rather than local partnership working.

Specific examples include:

- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) offering an online registration portal without making either the NHS or Local Authorities aware of the approach; when it has been used, care workers received notification of appointment slots after the time for the appointment has passed e.g. appointments scheduled for 15:30 but email notifications sent at 16:30;
- The announcement of children's testing without clinical governance or consideration of the effectiveness of testing being done by a parent or carer as opposed to a trained clinician;
- Multiple different national partners approaching venues in the city about becoming additional testing sites without any discussions with local partners that know the area best;

- The failure to provide clear and coherent guidance on returning to work following a negative test that takes into account that much of primary care and the social care sector do not have occupational health support to tailor advice.

As set out in my letter of 2 April, our primary focus is to ensure sufficient testing capacity for frontline staff in the NHS and those that work in the social care sector in Birmingham. It appears that we have made progress in this regard, but issues still remain in terms of testing in care homes, and a lack of opportunity for staff without access to a car (and hence ability to travel to locations) to be tested. This is disadvantaging those on the lowest incomes.

We are also keen to see testing beginning in the community. The Government has stated on multiple occasions that its aim is to reach a target of 100,000 tests per day by the end of April. On 19 April testing nationally stood at only 19,316. There are now only nine days to hit this target.

Please can you provide details of how testing capacity will be increased within the City, when and in which locations?

3. Personal Protective Equipment [PPE]

The situation regarding the supply of PPE in Birmingham remains extremely serious despite the proactive efforts of the City Council and partners to source equipment from all available sources, both here and abroad.

I note your reference to the West Midlands having received '*two additional drops last week, with another drop to follow in short order.*' With respect, the drops of PPE that you refer to were woefully inadequate and in Birmingham's case the initial drop contained only approximately 50% of the equipment that we were expecting. We have only just received the balance of the equipment that was outstanding. Even with these deliveries, the level of PPE provided only 'scratches the surface' in the terms of the demand for equipment across the City.

By way of example there are over 20,000 care staff working in Birmingham, and we have received 40,000 items of PPE. This simply provides each care worker 2 items of PPE per drop, without taking into account all of the other service areas and staff that require protective equipment.

Last week (16 April 2020), I wrote to Matt Hancock MP and Robert Jenrick MP setting out how critically low the stock of certain types of PPE, such as facemasks, had become.

I am yet to receive a response and I attach a copy of the letter for your reference. **I ask that you work with your colleagues to urgently address the concerns raised and provide a clear understanding to us of the specific product and stock of PPE the Government is able to supply and when it will be available.**

4. Local Government Finance

I acknowledge the Government's announcement of an additional £1.6bn to support local authorities (18 April 2020) in meeting the ongoing financial challenges of dealing with the Covid-19 emergency, however await confirmation of what the City Council's share of this funding will be.

The Government's first award of funding in March allocated the sum of £38.74m to the City Council. As set out in my letter of 2 April 2020 this sum has already been accounted for in paying for Covid-19 related costs.

Local authorities are facing the twin challenges of rising demand and a reduction in income. For Birmingham this could mean a financial gap for the full financial year 2020/21 of approximately £200m.

I will be writing more substantively on this issue to the Prime Minister and will ensure that you are copied into this correspondence.

In the meantime, I await your urgent reply to the issues raised in this letter.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council

Enc

Letter to Rt Hon. Matt Hancock & Rt Hon
Robert Jenrick dated 16 April 2020



1110tr Health Sec &
R Jenrick PPE.pdf



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1122tr

30 April 2020

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
Westminster
London
SW1A 2AA

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Prime Minister

Re: Covid-19 Crisis - Local Government Funding

On behalf of everyone at Birmingham City Council I would like to congratulate you on the birth of your son; I hope mother and baby are doing well. I am also pleased to see that you have returned to good health following your recent illness.

The purpose of this letter is to set out the financial challenges being faced by Birmingham City Council arising from Covid-19 and seek your assurance that sufficient funding will be made available from central government to meet those challenges.

You will have experienced first-hand the tireless efforts of staff in the NHS in helping the country get through the coronavirus crisis and I can assure you that this dedication and commitment extends throughout the public services, not least in local authorities up and down this country.

In his open letter to local government workers of 18 April 2020, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick wrote:

“....the work you are doing has never been more vital. You are keeping the country moving, helping to protect the NHS and enabling them to save lives..... All across local government people are going the extra mile for their communities. It’s truly humbling.”

Mr Jenrick sums up perfectly how councils are leading the response ‘on the ground’ to this unprecedented emergency.

In Birmingham, the City Council and partners are working hard to support our communities as follows:

- Sourcing food supplies and arranging for the distribution of food parcels for clinically vulnerable people;
- Leading the city's efforts around the supply and distribution of PPE;
- Protecting the city's most vulnerable adults and children by meeting their social care needs;
- Working with our schools to ensure thousands of children currently receiving free school meals do not go hungry;
- Collaborating with partners to support the city's homeless and those victims of domestic abuse;
- Supporting Birmingham's businesses in a concerted effort to protect jobs and livelihoods across the city;
- Dealing with unprecedented demand for bereavement services;
- Clamping down on coronavirus-related scams and on rogue traders, raising awareness, tackling dual pricing and seizing dangerous products.

The financial challenges arising out of the Covid-19 emergency are significant and are likely to be long lasting. What is required is an honest discussion in relation to how the costs of dealing with the emergency will be met, and secondly how we can collaborate to ensure that the city's economic and social recovery is as strong as it can be.

Covid-19; Financial Impacts on the City Council - 2020/21

In March the City Council received a grant of **£38.74m** [Birmingham's share of emergency funding made available from a national pot totalling £1.6bn].

We estimate that by the end of April we will already have used £16.25m. The remainder of this grant is committed and will be spent in full [details of how this funding has been allocated are set out in Table A of the Appendix to this letter].

Today, we have received notification that the Council will receive a further **£31.57m** from a national fund of £1.59bn.

Whilst we are grateful for the financial support offered, unfortunately, it is in no way adequate to meet the ongoing call on the Council's resources, arising out of Covid-19, in a city of over one million people.

To illustrate the point, in Adult Social Care we are anticipating cost pressures of £56m over the course of the next six months with Children's Services expecting £20m of additional spending. Costs pressures in those two areas alone are greater than the total funding received from Government to-date.

Based on modelling for the remainder of this financial year we estimate that total Covid-19 related costs for 2020/21 will be **£112m** [full details are set out in Table B of the Appendix].

The Council has also lost a substantial amount of income. Due to significant reductions in revenue support grant over the last decade, we are now more reliant on the income generated locally to deliver vital public services.

We estimate that lost income for April alone will be **£17m**, with a forecasted loss for the whole financial year of **£149m** [full details are set out in Table C of the Appendix].

This loss of income coupled with the additional costs of dealing with the Covid-19 emergency will lead to an estimated financial gap of **£190.69m** for 2020/21, based on current planning assumptions and after utilising the grants referred to above.

Estimated Covid-19 Costs & Loss of Income [2020/21]	Total
Covid-19 related costs	£112m
Loss of income	£149m
Grant Allocation [March]	(£38.74m)
Grant Allocation [April]	(£31.57m)
Financial Gap 2020/2021 [Estimated]	£190.69m

These additional Covid-19 related costs together with lost income are also creating concerns around our cashflow with a shortfall of £15m emerging by June 2020.

Without sufficient funding from central Government, the ability of the City Council to recover financially from the position set out above will be compromised and with it our ability to deliver vital public services in the medium term - at a time when our communities need us the most.

These funding challenges only relate to dealing with the **emergency response**. A lack of appropriate funding moving forward will also compromise our ability to lead the city's recovery, post-coronavirus. It is essential that we enter into further dialogue with Government, as soon as is practicable, to understand how it will support social and economic recovery in Birmingham.

Summary

Referring back to Robert Jenrick's letter he stated:

"I said that I would ensure you had the resources you needed to do the job, and I meant it. I promised that I would champion your cause and fight your corner as we work together, and I meant it..."

We need Government to match its words with deeds, without equivocation, by **providing the assurance that any costs incurred by the Council associated directly with dealing with the emergency response to Covid-19 and any indirect financial impacts, such as a loss of income, will be recoverable in full**.

Prime Minister, you have said many times that in order for this country to ‘win’ the ‘fight’ against coronavirus we need to come together. I entirely agree, and I hope that the above illustrates that councils cannot shoulder the financial burden of this battle, either now or as we look to rebuild in the future.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**

Cc:

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Rt Hon Christopher Pincher, Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Cllr James Jamieson, Chairman, LGA
Cllr Nick Forbes, Leader of LGA Labour Group
Sir Keir Starmer MP, Leader of the Opposition
Steve Reed MP, Shadow Secretary of State, Communities and Local Government
Peter Robbins, LGA Labour Group

Appendix

Table A - Deployment of £38.74m Covid-19 Grant by service area

Service area	Estimated proportion of grant funding likely to be deployed in this area, %
Adult Social Care (not pooled with CCGs)	50%
Adult Social Care (pooled with CCGs)	0%
Children's Social Care	15%
Education	5%
Highways and Transport	0%
Public Health	0%
Housing (including homelessness services)	5%
Cultural services	0%
Environmental and regulatory services (including excess death management)	25%
Police	0%
Fire and rescue	0%
Planning and development	0%
Finance/corporate services	0%
Other services	0%
Not yet allocated to a service area	0%
Total	100%

Table B - Estimated additional pressures by service area not covered by emergency Covid-19 grant for April 2020 and full financial year 20/21

Service area	Estimated additional pressure in March 2020, £m	Estimated additional pressure in April 2020, £m	Full Year Effect 2020-21 (if known) £m
Adult Social Care – additional demand (<i>additional requirements for domiciliary, residential and nursing care including demand due to enhanced discharge support and reductions in informal care</i>)	0	1.333	20.112
Adult Social Care – supporting the market (<i>non-workforce related increased provider costs or to support provider resilience e.g. in line with the LGA/ADASS/Care Provider Alliance guidance on COVID-19, published in March</i>)	0	2.000	12.000
Adult Social Care – workforce pressures (<i>including cost of staff absence within your authority and within providers</i>)	0	1.667	12.100
Adult Social Care – other (<i>including PPE</i>)	0	0.726	4.351
Children's Social Care – workforce pressures	0	0.019	0.112
Children Social Care – other	0	3.052	14.006
Children's Services – SEND	0	0.047	0.210
Education – excluding SEND	1.127	1.303	2.670

Highways and Transport	0	0	1.900
Public Health	0	0	0
Housing (including homelessness services)	0	0.350	3.172
Cultural services	0	0	0
Environmental and regulatory services (including excess death management)	0	4.079	13.578
Police	0	0	0
Fire and rescue	0	0	0
Planning and development	0	0	0
Finance/corporate services	0	0.545	12.465
Other services	0	0	15.400
Estimated total spending pressure	1.127	15.121	112.076

Table C – Estimated Loss of Council Income [April 2020 and full financial year 20/21]

Income source	Estimated reduction in income in March 2020, £m	Estimated reduction in income in April 2020, £m	Full Year Effect 2020-21 (if known) £m
Retained Business Rates (net rates payable)*	0	3.677	44.120
Council Tax	0	1.347	16.161
Sales, fees and charges	0.794	9.757	59.118
Commercial Income	0	2.284	20.022
Other	0	0.017	9.742
Estimated total reduction in income	0.794	17.081	149.163



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1123tr

05 May 2020

SENT VIA E-MAIL

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
House Of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Home Secretary

Re: Suspension: No Recourse to Public Funds Condition

I am writing to you on behalf families and individuals with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) during this time of national emergency. We estimate that there are currently 1000 families in the City with NRPF supporting 3000 children.

As the COVID-19 outbreak unfolds, these children and families are at high risk of falling through the gaps into abject poverty as they are unable to access vital benefits.

Many households across the United Kingdom, including many in Birmingham will be plunged into an unexpected financial crisis during the COVID-19 outbreak.

We welcome the package of measures announced by the Government to ensure businesses can stay afloat and households can keep their lights on, as well as the additional funding announced for local government, which will enable councils like mine to continue to support our communities and most vulnerable residents through this crisis.

However, as you will be aware, thousands of migrant families live and work in the UK with no financial safety net to fall back on when times are tough. Many migrant

workers are currently on the frontline – risking their lives to protect us. They are our cleaners, care assistants, supermarket attendants, teaching assistants and refuse workers. Some of these workers and their children will be excluded from the measures so far introduced to support other families affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. At a time of national unity, this is not right.

Having NRPF means that affected children and families are prevented from accessing in-work and out-of-work benefits such as child benefit, tax credits, Universal Credit, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, income support, and housing benefit. All too often, councils are left to find ways to support these families for whom there is nowhere else to turn. Local authorities like Birmingham are likely to face increasing requests for support from people with no recourse to public funds as a result of the pandemic, but as you will be aware government does not fund local authorities for supporting people with no recourse to public funds.

Home Office data has previously shown that many individuals with an NRPF condition attached to their immigration status are single-parent households headed by mothers. These parents are often working on zero hours contracts, in insecure or low-paid professions and have to prioritise childcare responsibilities. The Department for Education has itself recognised that this policy is not fit for purpose, especially in a time of crisis, by extending the Free School Meals Voucher scheme to those with NRPF who have been identified by local authority children's services.

Coronavirus will not be the first or the last crisis that these migrant families face, but it is shining a light on the brutality of being outside of the nation's safety net – the social security system. I am urging you to suspend the no recourse to public condition. The Home Office must acknowledge the acute vulnerability of this group, as well as the additional responsibility that NRPF places upon local authorities, by suspending the condition.

I have copied this letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**



**COUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/Pincher

5 May 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL:- PSChristopherPincher@communities.gov.uk

Rt. Hon Christopher Pincher
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
Ministry of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister,

Covid-19 - Birmingham

Thank you for your letter dated 1 May 2020 in response to my letter of 21 April 2020.

We are keen to engage constructively with Government. As you will appreciate, given the dynamic situation in which we are all operating, it is vital that we keep channels of communication open, in order that we can keep you fully updated on how matters are developing 'on the ground' and what support is required by our citizens.

1. Food Distribution to the Shielded Vulnerable

As we enter the seventh week of lockdown the City Council is still providing in the region of 4,000 food parcel deliveries per week to those on the clinically shielded list. The Brakes and Bidfood (the Government's suppliers) contribution currently stands at just under 5,000 deliveries per week. By this stage, (in accordance with the Government's own guidance) Brakes and Bidfood should have taken over full delivery of food parcels to the shielded to enable the Council to focus on providing parcels for those with specific dietary requirements.

This has not happened. A number of our citizens have contacted us to explain that their Bidfood delivery has not arrived. As instructed, we have been directing this to your shielding inbox which advises that there will be a response in 48 hours. This is simply unacceptable.

We cannot expect vulnerable citizens to be without basic food supplies for two full days, so we have been compelled to step in to provide a separate food parcel.

We urgently require a clear statement from Government as to when the Brakes contract will be fully operational, in order that the Council can start redirecting resources to other members of the community, in need of food, at this incredibly challenging time.

Covid-19 has placed additional economic pressure on citizens across Birmingham, plunging already deprived neighbourhoods into further poverty. Increasing numbers of households are having to rely on foodbanks, many of which have seen their stocks depleted, resulting in increases in food poverty. Birmingham City Council is working closely with community and voluntary groups to help meet this demand both now and during this immediate crisis. We are exploring food sustainability for what is likely to be a longer-term impact upon our most vulnerable adults and families.

We will of course need resources to support this effort (see below) and would expect to receive financial support from the Government to enable this.

2. Personal Protective Equipment [PPE]

[i] Current Supply

I welcome the news that an online channel will be created to allow for the ordering of PPE equipment, however, would stress the urgency of it becoming operational as soon as possible. We are still experiencing challenges as set out below.

As set out in my previous letter the supply of items provided to us by Government via the Local Resilience Forum is still inadequate, both in terms of quantity and process. Notification of deliveries is still extremely short notice (making forward planning and stock management extremely difficult), is random in terms of the items supplied and still woefully inadequate in terms of the amount of PPE being provided, when measured against the demand from the services the supply is supposed to support. We are currently down to less than one week of stock on FFP2 masks and we only have a few days of FFP3 masks left, given the continued supply of date-expired stock from the Government.

[ii] Date Expired PPE

The Government's PPE deliveries have consistently contained date expired stock. These related to approximately 4000 type FFP3 face masks manufactured by 3M which are **6 years out of date** based on their original production information.

This face mask is used in mortuary settings, for example, when invasive Aerosol Generating Procedures [AGPs] are required. They are also used in several other frontlines service areas.

We have been endeavouring to obtain guidance from Government as to whether these date expired face masks are safe for use. We were first made aware of a potential issue with the masks on 22 April 2020. We have been chasing for written confirmation of the safety of these items, from MHCLG/DHSC on a daily basis since.

If the testing of the equipment has been carried out by any combination of MHCLG, DHSC or the HSE, a clear, documented audit trail should be readily available. It is therefore incredibly concerning that despite the severe implications of not providing the assurances required, specifically that the City Council has only a few days supply of FFP3 masks left to distribute, the Government has failed to do so.

Our primary objective is to protect the health and safety of those that may need PPE. We will not jeopardise their safety by releasing potentially ineffectual, date expired stock.

It is quite frankly outrageous that we are having to chase the Government on this issue. Those workers, that are putting themselves in harm's way to help the City get through this crisis, should not be put at even greater risk with the supply of potentially defective PPE.

Please can we receive the Ministry's **urgent written assurance** that our current stock of date-expired PPE is safe to use? If the equipment is not safe for use, then please can you offer your support in terms of sourcing additional FFP3 masks?

[iii] Demand for PPE as we exit lockdown

There is already high demand for PPE. As we prepare to leave lockdown, it is likely that this demand will only increase as public services, businesses and members of the public prepare for life in the 'new normal', where precautionary measures are still required as the risk of Covid-19 remains high – with this being the case for the foreseeable future.

We are pleased that the NHS has reiterated that it is 'open for business' to non-Covid cases, but inevitably this will mean that supplies will be diverted to meet the demands on the NHS at the expense of Councils and care providers. This will ultimately compromise the ability of care providers to deliver services safely which may then result in people being admitted to hospital – not because they are ill but because of the inability of providers to source enough PPE for care workers.

As we move out of lockdown, a centrally co-ordinated approach is therefore essential, to avoid a repeat of the early days of dealing with the Covid-19 crisis where effectively Local Authorities, NHS Providers, Care Homes and in some instances Government were competing with each other for the same limited supply of PPE, driving up prices.

There will, of course, also be huge competition for supplies of PPE globally, as countries from around the world seek to ease lockdown restrictions.

I would be grateful for details of Government's plans to ensure a sufficient and regular flow of PPE for the coming months.

In your letter you refer to the fact that the City Council has not yet responded to an offer from the Mayor of the West Midlands and the West Midlands Combined Authority ('WMCA') to source PPE for local Councils in the region.

I can assure you that the City Council is working incredibly closely and effectively with local authorities in the West Midlands and WMCA to aggregate volume and procure collectively during the Covid-19 emergency. For example, by adopting a co-ordinated approach, procurement officers from across the region have sourced 3.1m facemasks for local authorities across the West Midlands with two separate suppliers (Birmingham City Council led on one procurement and Wolverhampton City Council led on the other with these suppliers).

3. Local Government Finance – Covid-19

I note you have referred to the increase in Core Spending Power of West Midlands Local Authorities of £304.8m following the latest Local Government Financial Settlement for 2020/21 (announced in February). I am afraid it offers little or no comfort and is not relevant to the Covid-19 funding crisis. The funding you refer to was required to deliver vital public services in 'normal' times to some of our most vulnerable residents, after years of reductions to the revenue support grant by Government.

My previous letter was focussed on the unforeseen financial impacts of Covid-19 on the City Council and the related costs and lost income that have arisen as a result of this emergency. We estimate that for the full year 2020/21 additional costs and lost income will create a shortfall in the Council's budget of £212m. This has increased from £191m since my letter to the Prime Minister of 30 April 2020 which demonstrates how dynamic the situation is.

Birmingham City Council has been allocated £70.3m of the Government's £3.2 billion Emergency Covid-19 Funding. Unfortunately, this is in no way adequate to meet the ongoing call on the Council's resources. In Adult Social Care we are anticipating cost pressures of £56m over the course of the next six months with Children's Services expecting £20m of additional spending. Costs pressures in those two areas alone are greater than the total funding received from Government to-date.

It is essential that previous commitments around financially supporting Local Authorities are honoured in full, as promised by Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick.

Given the urgency of the matters raised in this letter, particularly relating to PPE, I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council
Enc.**

CC. Rt Hon Robert Jenrick



**COUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1127/Ih

7 May 2020

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
Westminster
London
SW1A 2AA

SENT VIA EMAIL to dutyclerk.mail@no10.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Prime Minister,

Covid-19 Crisis - Local Government Funding

We write collectively on behalf of Birmingham's Members of Parliament and leadership of the City Council.

For the reasons set out below we are hoping for specific clarification about government plans to help the Council survive financially in the face of loss of income and additional expenditure arising out of the Covid-19 emergency.

At the start of this crisis Ministers were clear that councils should spend 'whatever it takes' to keep our communities safe and were assured that they would receive full reimbursement.

To reconfirm that commitment, in his open letter to local government workers of 18 April 2020, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick wrote:

"I said that I would ensure you had the resources you needed to do the job, and I meant it. I promised that I would champion your cause and fight your corner as we work together, and I meant it..."

Obviously, Leaders and Chief Executives of Councils from across the country and here in Birmingham, took the Government at its word, and have led the emergency response to supporting our communities during the most challenging times faced by this country since the Second World War.

However, the comments made by Robert Jenrick to the House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee ('HCLG') on 4 May 2020 have led to inevitable uncertainty over this commitment and created a huge amount of worry.

We are concerned by Mr Jenrick's statement to the HCLG Committee that,

"It's clear that the funding we've provided is more than enough in total."

"We wouldn't want anyone to labour under a false impression that what they were doing is guaranteed to be funded by central government."

You will understand that without guarantees from Government in relation to covering both the Covid-19 costs and the inevitable lost income that arises from this crisis Birmingham City Council will not be financially sustainable in both the short and the medium term.

We are advised by the council's officials that the latest assessment of increased costs and losses of income due to the Covid-19 crisis, for the full financial year 2020/21, is £282.3m. We are very grateful for the government's additional grant funding of £70.3 million but you will appreciate that this leaves a funding gap of £212m.

In Mr Jenrick's letters of 20 March and 30 April it was made clear to local authorities that they would be funded for the additional costs of social care, vulnerable people, reduced income and rising demand for services. These are precisely the costs and losses of income that Birmingham City Council has identified in these specific categories. We attach as an appendix the income and expenditure forecasts which have been drawn up by council officials so that you can see specifically the problem that the Council is facing in each of the following areas:

1. Social Care/Support for the Vulnerable
2. Reduced Income from services
3. Business Rates and Council Tax Income

We appreciate that the Government will want to scrutinise the detail that sits behind these figures; the Council is not asking for a 'blank cheque'. What is required however, is urgent confirmation that in principle the areas of spend identified are capable of recovery, in line with previous assurances. We are sure that you will understand that these are huge sums and not ones that the Council can possibly 'soak-up' from existing resources.

We would very much welcome the government's comments on the position. We fully understand that this is not unique to Birmingham and we hope our comments are helpful in designing and implementing a package of financial measures which enables the Council to continue serving our local communities.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward

Leader of Birmingham City Council

Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP

Appendix

Social Care/Support for the Vulnerable

The City Council is doing everything it can to support the NHS by transferring people out of hospital as quickly as possible and into social care settings and is sourcing PPE for our frontline workers.

Since the start of the Covid-19 crisis the Council has been asked to support the transfer of 400 people out of hospital into the community or residential care settings.

Alongside this it is providing care and food packages for particularly vulnerable families who are shielding or whose income has reduced. For the latter they may either not be eligible for national support schemes or these have been recently introduced and the Council has filled a need in the interim. The Council is delivering approximately 4000 food parcels per week.

The Council's additional estimated Covid-19 related costs are £92m which exceeds the value of Government grant provided to the Council to-date of £70.3m.

Reduced Income from services

The Council has also suffered reduced income, arising from lockdown, which is unlikely to reach pre-Covid levels for the foreseeable future.

This includes income lost from services such as school meals, libraries and leisure centres, with the latter being closed following Government guidance. In the meantime, costs of premises and staffing remain fixed (local authorities are not eligible to furlough).

The Council is also incurring significant losses from carpark income as demand has reduced due to lockdown. The same applies to rental income from commercial premise that the Council owns across Birmingham which is now impacted due to inability of tenants to pay. We would expect the Government to compensate the Council for all types of lost income with current estimates standing at £95m.

Business Rates and Council Tax Income

Birmingham City Council is currently heavily reliant on Business Rates and Council Tax income. Business rates income may reduce by 10% together with a reduction in collection rates for Council Tax. This lost income would be exacerbated by a forecasted 10% **increase** in the levels of working age Council Tax support. This will leave a shortfall in income of around £64m in 2020/21.

It is worth noting that the Council's heavy reliance on income is in line with the Government's strategy for local authorities to be more reliant on generating revenue by growing the local tax base and acting commercially, in a bid to fund vital public services and mitigate the impacts of more than a decade of reductions to the Revenue Support Grant. Unfortunately, this strategy is undermined by economic shocks (such as the one being experienced at the moment) and unlike businesses, a council cannot ignore growing demand due to its many and varied statutory duties. It is at times like these, that people need councils the most.

Overview of funding challenges

Challenge	Cost (£m)
Additional Social Care Costs (children's and adults)	82
Additional support for the vulnerable who slip through the cracks of the national schemes introduced	10
Loss of income due to services temporarily closing	45
Loss of commercial income due to the economic impacts of the crisis	50
Loss of Council Tax and Business Rates income	64
Other including non-delivery of savings due to our focus being on responding to the crisis	31
Total	282

Based on this high-level assessment it is apparent that these items fall within the scope of the Government's criteria for funding costs/losses arising out of Covid-19.



**COUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1128/Ih

7 May 2020

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Her Majesty's Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

SENT VIA EMAIL ONLY TO: CEU.enquiries@hmtreasury.gov.uk

Dear Chancellor

Re: Responding to the economic impact of COVID-19

We write collectively on behalf of Birmingham's Members of Parliament and leadership of the City Council.

The Government support that has been made available to help businesses survive the Coronavirus pandemic is unprecedented and extremely welcome.

However, while we welcome the measures that have been introduced, we believe it is vital that key Coronavirus schemes are maintained until businesses are able to return from lockdown. The Job Retention Scheme is the single most important, and a sharp 'cliff edge' and arbitrary end of the scheme may not take account of the new economic reality.

Birmingham is likely to be one of the most affected European cities by the coronavirus outbreak in 2020, according to a recent Oxford Economics study. The work by Oxford Economics estimates that the city's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is likely to contract by nearly 7% in 2020.

The City is home to many automotive manufacturers; they make up nearly 6 percent of the local economy. This sector faces a severe downturn as a result of supply-chain factors interrupting production and falling demand as consumers cut back spending. According to the Society of Motor Manufacturing and Traders, the number of new car registrations fell by 44 percent in March, compared to one year ago. Lockdown was not in place for the entire month.

Our businesses have strong views on the help they believe is needed from the government to ensure their survival and many feel that a flexible Job Retention Scheme is vital. Wherever possible grants rather than loans are desired and in particular longer-term funding to help businesses re-design their business models, re-build their cash position and deal with what may be a long and drawn out recovery in demand.

It is in all our interests to help businesses recover in the shortest possible time to support the broader economic recovery. In that respect we are working closely with the Mayor of the West Midlands as you would expect.

We would appreciate your reassurance on these matters as soon as your plans are clear, in the meanwhile, we hope these comments are helpful.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Ian Ward, Leader of Birmingham City Council

Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1130tr

15 May 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Right Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health & Social Care
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Covid-19 Impact on BAME Communities

In light of the Office of National Statistics findings regarding the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people of black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, we are writing to call for urgent Government action to address this disturbing inequality.

Over 42 per cent of Birmingham citizens are from BAME backgrounds and they are demanding answers after it emerged that Black people are more than four times more likely to die from Covid-19 than white people, while Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities also have a significantly higher risk of dying.

The ONS findings have further fuelled mounting concerns in Birmingham's BAME communities and there is an urgent need to investigate whether the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people of BAME backgrounds could have been prevented or mitigated and to act on any lessons learned.

Even before the publication of the ONS figures - a Special Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board meeting on April 23 heard of growing concerns among this significant section of the population. Chair of the Board and Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care Cllr Paulette Hamilton subsequently shared over 600 questions from BAME citizens with you, as she called for analysis of how the Covid-19 pandemic was affecting different communities. As community fears continued to grow, a second letter on 6 May called for an urgent inquiry.

We are now writing on a cross-party basis to request that the Government publicly releases all data relating to this issue and, more importantly, sets out a clear and measurable action plan for addressing this blatant inequality. There is a clear need for openness and transparency in this matter and we believe this approach will give people, especially for those who have lost loved ones, answers.

There is an urgent need to restore public confidence amongst people from BAME backgrounds at this very sensitive time. Our communities need to see a deliverable action plan to address inequalities and, more importantly, effective interventions must be quickly in place to avoid any repeat.

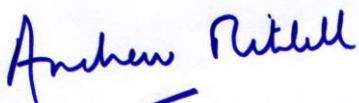
Yours faithfully



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**



Liam Byrne MP



Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1131tr

15 May 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

Luke Hall MP
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
4th Floor, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister

In light of media reports claiming that Government funding for the 'Everyone In' initiative is to be withdrawn, we are writing to request urgent clarification of Government plans going forward for rough sleepers and those with no recourse to public funds during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

To our knowledge Birmingham City Council has not been notified of any changes to the current arrangements and I accept that the reports may well be inaccurate. So my question to you is simple: Is there any truth in the reports that the Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government has now 'drawn a line' under this programme?

If the answer to that question is yes, please can you outline the plans, timeline and any guidance for local authorities?

We are proud of the work that has been carried out in Birmingham at a hugely challenging time and remain keen to work with Government to support and protect this vulnerable cohort .

In your letter to Birmingham City Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority on 29 April, you outlined your commitment to ending rough sleeping entirely and in that spirit, we would welcome a meeting with yourself and Dame Louise Casey to discuss the best way forward.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council



Councillor Sharon Thompson
Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods

Cc: Dame Louise Casey DBE CB – Louise.Casey@communities.gov.uk
Thanqam.debonnaire.mp@parliament.uk



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1133tr

19 May 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL sec-of-state.ps@education.gov.uk

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State

These clearly are difficult times and as leaders we seek to make the right decisions for the children, families and communities we serve.

We are sure you will agree that staff in schools across the country have shown exceptional commitment and dedication in recent months to support children, young people and their families. Birmingham schools have been open for vulnerable children and those of key workers throughout the coronavirus outbreak, including during school holidays and on bank holidays.

We welcome the recent guidance produced by your department and support the return of pupils in the prioritised year groups in addition to vulnerable children and the children of key workers where it is safe to do so. We have produced a risk assessment to support Birmingham schools as they prepare for an increased number of children attending/returning to school and are in regular conversations with school leaders across the city about this.

We must however raise concerns where we believe that your guidance has so far failed to address the anxieties of Birmingham schools and families, namely the scientific advice on which your decision was based and the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 outbreak is having on BAME communities.

In our discussions with school leaders there are real concerns relating to the disproportionately negative impact that Covid-19 is having on BAME men and women, specifically those from the Black community. School leaders tell us that these concerns were further heightened when reading the 'Overview of scientific advice and information on coronavirus (COVID19)' published by your department on Friday 15 May.
The guidance states:

'This provisional analysis has shown that the risk of death involving coronavirus (COVID-19) among some ethnic groups is significantly higher than that of those of White ethnicity. Further research is needed to understand why some ethnic groups have higher death rates from coronavirus (COVID-19) than others...Schools should be especially sensitive to the needs and worries of BAME members of staff, BAME parents and BAME pupils.'

Over 42 per cent of Birmingham citizens are from BAME backgrounds and there are understandable concerns in light of the Office of National Statistics findings regarding the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people of black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

When schools have contacted BAME parents as part of their plans to reopen, the vast majority have stated that they will not be returning their children to school on 1 June. Parents expressed their concerns on the disproportional impact on them as black parents if their child were to contract the virus and bring it home. We feel that further guidance is required for schools with large BAME communities on the implications of reopening.

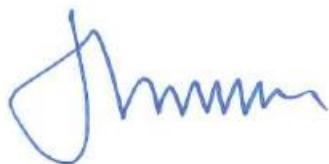
Finally, we would welcome your department publishing the scientific advice on which the overall decision to reopen schools was based to reassure us and the wider education community that it was taken on solely public health grounds. All communities in Birmingham must feel safe to return their children to school.

We look forward to your response to the concerns we have raised.

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**



**Councillor Jayne Francis
Cabinet Member for Education, Skills & Culture**



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1136tr

19 May 2020

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Her Majesty's Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

SENT VIA EMAIL ONLY TO: CEU.enquiries@hmtreasury.gov.uk

Dear Chancellor

Re: Rumoured Public Sector Pay Freeze

We are writing to express very grave concerns regarding reports that the Government is planning a two-year public sector pay freeze in light of COVID-19 and to request urgent assurances that our workers will not be financially punished as a consequence of the pandemic.

Public sector workers, including staff at councils and schools, are currently on the very frontline of the response to this national crisis, working around the clock to serve and protect the most vulnerable in our towns and cities.

As you are aware, the local government workforce has endured years of pay restraint, as a decade of austerity saw council funding cut by nearly 50 per cent in the 10 years from 2010. That pay restraint has had a disproportionate impact on women, with women making up more than three quarters of the local government workforce.

These are the very people we are now clapping every Thursday evening and, without their professionalism and dedication, the council services residents rely on would simply not be deliverable at these challenging times. Any decision to now financially penalise these workers would represent a deeply damaging betrayal.

Our workers will play a vital role in the post-COVID recovery and an investment in them represents an investment in local services and the economy.

We therefore urge the Government to publicly rule out the rumoured pay freeze and give assurances that public sector workers will not once again be left footing the bill for a national crisis.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ian Ward". It is enclosed in a thin rectangular border.

Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council

Cc: Caroline Johnson - UNISON
Harry R Harris - Unite the Union
Paul Coombes - GMB



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1138tr

22 May 2020

SENT VIA E-MAIL: chris.philp.mp@parliament.uk

Chris Philp MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Immigration Compliance and the Courts
Home Office

Dear Mr Philp

Re: Intended Home Office use of the Britannia Hotel, Birmingham.

Yesterday evening, on 21 May, officers at Birmingham City Council received the news that the Home Office intends to procure 241 bed spaces for asylum seekers in the Britannia Hotel in Birmingham City Centre by Wednesday 27 May.

We wish to set out, in the strongest terms, the City Council's opposition to this proposal and particularly bring to your attention the following, important points:

1. The existing burden the city carries in this portfolio

You will know that Birmingham already hosts two units of official Initial Accommodation in the Stone Road hostel and the Kensington Hotel, with 270 and 123 service users respectively. Additionally, we have been hosting 200 service users in contingency accommodation at the Rowton Hotel since October 2019. This brings the existing total of service users in Initial Accommodation in Birmingham to 593 individuals, far higher than any single other local authority and in fact a higher number than any single other region in the country.

In addition, at any one point, Birmingham is also home to in the region of 1,500-2,000 dispersed asylum seekers, and within some parts of our local authority boundary this is far in excess of the nominal 1:200 limit.

A disproportionate amount of the national burden in this portfolio is carried by Birmingham; by the local authority and other statutory partners, as well as by the very active voluntary and community sector in the city. All this activity has been totally unfunded by central Government and this remains the case in this time of national crisis

2. Use of this specific location

The Britannia Hotel is situated in Birmingham city centre and is a high-profile location. There are long-term issues with rough sleepers, community safety and criminality in the immediate area, that we and our partners are working hard to address. There is a significant risk that rough sleepers who are currently in temporary accommodation will soon reconvene in this area, sparking significant community tensions. In addition, New Street hosts a number of businesses who will soon be trying stay above water following the intense economic impact of Covid-19. Given this, we are in no doubt, as should you be, that both the Police and the Retail BID will be vehemently opposed to this proposal in all relevant respects.

3. The ability of the Home Office and Serco to ensure the wellbeing of Service Users

Significant time and resource from statutory partners including ourselves, Sandwell & West Birmingham CCG, Public Health England as well as the voluntary sector was necessary to ensure the Home Office and its providers put in place adequate measures to meet even the most basic of safety and wellbeing needs of service users in the Stone Road hostel after nine of them developed Covid-19 symptoms in March 2020. At a time of national crisis and unprecedented risk to vulnerable people, it took the Home Office and its providers weeks to put in place adequate provision, and we continue to await the honouring in full of important promises made at this time.

This situation is in line with previous experience regarding the levels of support for service users in Initial Accommodation and from our perspective, as local risk assessors and statutory partners, it has significantly undermined our confidence in the ability of the Home Office to ensure the wellbeing of service users at any additional hotel site in Birmingham.

4. Lack of joined-up working by Government

Birmingham faces unprecedented levels of pressure during this extraordinary time. We, with many other local partners, are doing our utmost to support the city's most vulnerable people across multiple portfolios – rough sleeping, early prison release, hospital discharge and asylum. Individually, Government departments are aware of the level of strain on the city's resources and assets. However, these appear not to be communicated between departments and ministries, as each policy area seems to operate upon the basis of an incomplete picture of the city's challenges.

We trust this letter has gone some way towards bringing you up to speed in this regard and would ask that lines of communication between yourself and cross-departmental colleagues are opened and remain so throughout the remainder of this crisis.

Finally, we would draw your attention to the letter you addressed to Alex Fraser of the Red Cross on 27th March this year. In that correspondence, you stated that is unlikely that the Home Office will look to stand up new and emergency contingency units in 'London or some of our other large cities'. It was understood at this time that this was due to pressures around current and further anticipated higher rates of Covid-19. This is a pressure we continue to see in Birmingham.

Rescinding this commitment at a time where collaboration and respect between national and local partners is so vitally important to our ability to deal with and recover from this crisis cannot be tolerated. Furthermore, we understand from Home Office officials that no other areas have, as yet, provided a negative response to your previous communication to Council Chief Executives alerting them to the circumstances around contingency accommodation. Given this, the choice to extend contingency hotel provision in Birmingham amidst all other pressures seems misplaced.

Again, we remind you and colleagues that we as a city remain totally unfunded for this agenda and ask that this position is re-evaluated.

We are proud to be a City of Sanctuary and you will be aware that the Council's Cabinet recently pledged support to welcome 110 refugees under the new UK Resettlement Scheme, following a pledge of 550 refugees under the preceding scheme. It would be extremely regrettable if, in the light of the disproportionate challenges this proposal would create for our city, we had no option but to reconsider our position as regards any future, longer-term resettlement commitments.

We urge you, in the interests of our city and of these vulnerable asylum seekers who deserve proper support, not to implement this proposal.

We await your urgent response.

Yours sincerely



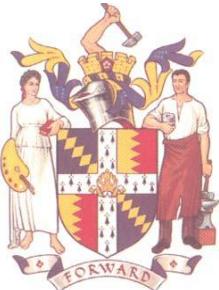
**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**



Councillor John Cotton

Cabinet Member – Social Inclusion, Community Safety and Equalities

- Cc.** Kate Carr, Director, Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration, Home Office
Chris Naylor, Chief Executive - Birmingham City Council
Jonathan Tew, Assistant Chief Executive – Birmingham City Council
Tim Johnson, West Midlands Metropolitan Councils Chief Executive Lead on Asylum and Refugees
Dalvinder Panesar, Lead Officer - West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1141tr

29 May 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL:- PSChristopherPincher@communities.gov.uk

Rt. Hon Christopher Pincher
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
Ministry of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister

Re: Covid-19 - Birmingham

Thank you for your letter dated 15 May 2020. I appreciate the ongoing dialogue. Below I have sought to provide some additional information where further clarity was requested in your previous correspondence.

Food Distribution

As stated in your letter, we did receive notice from Government on 27 April confirming we would be provided with a named contact to support with Shielded Food. A meeting did take place on 13 May 2020 between Council Officials and representatives from Shielded Food where introductions were made to our named contact.

However, prior to this engagement on the 27 April, Birmingham had been providing food for those on the Shielded list for a month with little support from Government, hence our concerns. I am pleased that there has been an improvement in this situation.

Personal Protective Equipment [PPE]

In your letter you have asked for clarity with regard to the City Council's engagement with the Mayor of the West Midlands in relation to the sourcing of PPE.

With regard to the role of the West Midlands Combined Authority the only WMCA initiative that I am aware of is the "Call to Arms" promoted by the Regional Mayor on 8th April. This announcement sought support from businesses to come forward with offers of PPE in the

same way as most local authorities had already done in advance of that action. In addition, the WMCA launched an email address for those businesses to forward expressions of interest or offers of support, again as other authorities had already done either through the provision of an email address or (as in the City Council's case) an online form available through a website. For clarity the WMCA "Call to Arms" was whole-heartedly supported by the City Council and dialogue has been maintained between the City Council and the WMCA as offers of PPE have been made through this channel.

The Local Resilience Forum [LRF] procurement work (which I referred to in my previous letter dated 5 May 2020) has been co-ordinated by the City Council and has yielded a significant level of stock for the LRF area.

This initiative has also enabled opportunities for mutual aid between responsible authorities beyond those boundaries. I understand that the WMCA have supported that procurement process through the administration of meetings (completing action logs, setting meeting dates and invitations, etc) for which all of the responsible authorities are extremely grateful. But with that regional work having been in hand since the early days of the emergency response structure being put in place, it is difficult to see where WMCA (who are not a responsible authority for the distribution of PPE) would have been able to add any real value beyond the administrative support and campaign efforts I have referred to above.

I hope this is useful information and answers any outstanding queries you may have.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1143tr

05 June 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL sec-of-state.ps@education.gov.uk

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Free School Meal Vouchers – Summer Holidays

We are writing to express our disappointment that the Government has rejected calls for the free school meal voucher scheme to be extended to cover the summer holiday period. The withdrawal of this vital support at an already challenging time will have devastating consequences for thousands of families in Birmingham and across the UK and we would urge you to reconsider.

As you know, holiday hunger has been an issue for many families for several years and the COVID-19 outbreak has increased the pressure on the most vulnerable families, not only in this city but across the country. More than 1.3 million children across the UK rely on free school meals, with 61,000 children in Birmingham dependent on this lifeline. With 42 per cent of Birmingham children living in poverty, the proportion eligible for free school meals is currently twice the national average and for far too many children this is the one real meal they have each day.

Families, especially the most vulnerable, have faced unprecedented levels of uncertainty and disruption throughout the pandemic and this summer is likely to be particularly challenging. Removing the vouchers at a time when families most need this support will result in children going hungry over the summer and push many families further into poverty and financial insecurity.

Like local authorities across the country, Birmingham City Council will continue to do everything possible to support our most vulnerable citizens, but we are simply unable to cover the cost of free school meals over the summer holidays.

At Easter the Government listened to representations from parents, pupils, schools and councils and agreed to fund free school meals through the holidays.

We would now urge you to reconsider this decision and support our most vulnerable families over the summer holidays.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council



Councillor Jayne Francis
Cabinet Member for Education, Skills & Culture



Councillor Kate Booth
Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/Test & Trace

5 June 2020

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

SENT VIA EMAIL to mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State,

Urgent: Test & Trace

We write on behalf of Birmingham's Members of Parliament and leadership of the City Council.

The Government launched its Test and Trace service on 28 May 2020 as a central part of its Covid-19 recovery strategy. The primary objectives of the Test and Trace service are to control the rate of Covid-19, reduce the spread of the infection and save lives. In doing so, this will help to return life to as normal as possible, for as many people as possible, in a way that is safe, protects health and care systems and supports the economy.

We support these outcomes and want the Test and Trace service to be a success. It is in that spirit that we write to highlight some initial issues which if remedied will improve the operation of the service in Birmingham.

Visibility of Data

The key elements of the emerging national model are test, trace, contain and enable. In order to effectively deliver each of these four components there needs to be a clearer line of sight of the relevant data sets. Currently, the local authority only has access to testing results

from Pillar 1 at a local authority level with no information on total tests undertaken across the same footprint.

To create the most accurate picture what is required is both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 data sets (including the number of tests carried out and the number of **positive** tests) provided at a local authority level and ideally at a sub local authority level given the size of Birmingham, a city of 1.2 million people.

The complete data picture provided at the appropriate levels can help ensure that the 'contain' component of the national model for Test & Trace (namely using data to target approaches to flareups at a local level) can be properly executed. It will enable a truly local assessment of risks to be undertaken and allow for the targeted allocation of resources to areas where there are spikes in infections (including the ramping up of public health messaging in those areas). One area where this would be of immediate benefit is in relation to the risk assessments being undertaken by schools as they begin the gradual reopening to more pupils.

Gaps in contact tracing data

As at 2 June, a total of 131 Birmingham based residents had been confirmed as cases to the NHS test and trace service since it launched. Of those, 65 utilised the web-based tool for basic contact tracing. A further 16 people were supported via telephone to provide details of their contacts for tracing purposes. That leaves a balance of 50 people who have not provided any information in relation to their contacts, with it currently being unclear how this will be remedied. We recognise that there is a timeframe for contact but the current data does not provide any clarity on the number breaching the 72 hour contact tracing threshold, or the number escalated to PHE West Midlands Centre. This is of obvious concern given the potential risks of the spread of infection and to date none of these cases have been escalated for local support making contact.

Secondly, these 81 people have only provided details of a total of 58 contacts – which is less than one contact per person. This compares to national figures where 6,614 people have generated 7,516 contacts. This is concerning as for Test and Trace to work effectively accurate details of a person's contacts need to be provided and given the diverse nature of our city and the high proportion of households with large families, the low ratio of contacts identified is concerning.

Some of the barriers include that the communications to the public relating to Test and Trace are only in English and hence may not be accessible to diverse groups, we would like to see this gap in national resources to be addressed with urgency. The implementation of a tracing app could well assist, acting as a reminder to people of who they have recently been in contact, and we would welcome clarification of the timeline for the roll out of this additional resource.

Funding

We appreciate that a national funding pot of £300 million has been allocated to support local authorities deliver the local outbreak control plans however specific details of allocations per authority have not yet been provided. Given the financial challenges which the Covid-19 emergency has created for the City Council to-date, an indication of how much funding will be made available, as soon as possible, will allow for appropriate planning.

Should you require any further information or clarity in relation to the issues raised in this letter, Birmingham's Director of Public Health, Dr Justin Varney would be happy to assist your officials.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**

Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1150tr

18 June 2020

SENT VIA E-MAIL TO: secretary.statesoffice@culture.gov.uk

Rt Hon. Oliver Dowden MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

Dear Secretary of State

COVID 19 and the Arts & Culture Sector in Birmingham

We write on behalf of the city's Members of Parliament and Council Leadership.

Developing the city's cultural and creative industries is an important component of the region's strategy for economic growth.

Coronavirus has had a devastating impact upon Birmingham's cultural institutions and the purpose of this letter is to set out some of the challenges being faced and suggest potential remedies for consideration by the Government's new Cultural Renewal Task force.

The Strategic Context

As it stands, approximately 15% of regional jobs are dependent directly and indirectly on the creative industries, culture, tourism and the visitor economy. Building on the investment flowing into Birmingham from the Commonwealth Games and HS2 there is the opportunity to re-position the city and region as a global destination and leader in cultural offers and creative practice. This would align with regional investment linked to Coventry's City of Culture and ongoing investment into our own screen sector, focussed upon world-class production and creative content innovation.

A regional business case is in the process of being produced, with the City Council working in concert with the West Midlands Combined Authority and Greater Birmingham & Solihull Enterprise Partnership. This business case will set out the investment required to deliver long term social and economic benefits deriving from the City Region's cultural/creative offer.

However, long term, sustainable economic growth will not be possible unless the foundations are in place. Commercially successful cultural/creative enterprises are almost exclusively built upon existing local assets: whether that is people and the sharing of knowledge and expertise or physical assets such as venues – both of which create a critical mass which attracts not only new ideas, but also new investment and provides a platform for emerging talent to showcase their creativity.

We currently have a vibrant cultural/creative sector but Covid-19 is placing its future in jeopardy.

It is for those reasons, that it is essential that the right support is given to those existing cultural institutions [both large and small] to help them survive the initial impact of Covid-19 and provide them with adequate time to 'revive' themselves in what will be a phased emergence from lockdown.

Set out in Appendix A to this letter are the results from a recent survey undertaken to understand the impacts of lockdown on cultural organisations in Birmingham, together with details of lost income incurred during this period.

In Appendix B are some initial 'asks' which have been informed by the survey for your consideration as part of the work of the government's new taskforce.

The impacts of coronavirus are likely to be long lasting. As it stands there is a real risk that without adequate support the cultural/creative sector could collapse across England and Wales, with London being the only major city that will enjoy the continued economic and social benefits that these bring.

We must avoid this eventuality at all costs. The West Midlands Mayor, Chair of the Regional Tourist Board and the Chairman of Coventry City of Culture have offered that we should be a pilot area for the return of culture and we strongly support this. We hope you will see this as our whole region playing a constructive role in support of the government's efforts.

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to be in contact.

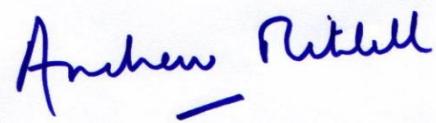
Yours faithfully



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**



**Rt Hon. Liam Byrne
Member of Parliament for Hodge Hill**



**Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell
Member of Parliament for
Sutton Coldfield**



**Councillor Robert Alden
Leader of Birmingham Conservative
Group**

Enc

APPENDIX A

Cultural Sector Impact Study - 27 May 2020

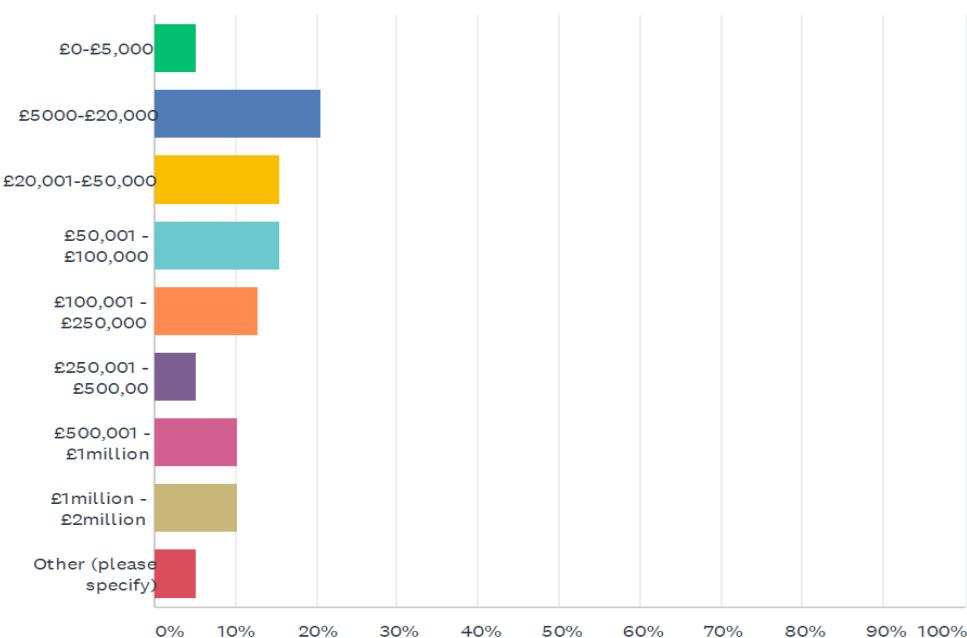
Highlights:

Out of the 89 respondents, 45% were Freelancers/Individual Artists and 55% came from Organisations.

- Organisations and individuals remain concerned about their income for the next six months; 60% of organisations and 53% of individuals are expecting to earn less than 25% of what they generated in the same period last year.
- Both organisations and individuals are having to use reserves and savings to sustain themselves through this current period. 18% of individuals will only be able to maintain up to 25% of their savings and a further 8% have no savings at all and are relying on emergency funding. Meanwhile 31% of organisations do not have any reserves to fall back on.
- 40% of organisations reported that they have refocused their priorities, with 48% making use of the Job Retention Scheme through furloughing all or some of their workforce. 3% of organisations have recruited additional team members but unfortunately 6% have commenced or are planning redundancies – this is a change from the initial survey where there were no organisations reporting the commencement of redundancy processes.
- There remains a good level of awareness of support initiatives for the sector, 97% of respondents from across both freelancers/individual artists and organisations responding to the question around support initiatives were aware of the Government Job Retention Scheme, in addition 89% of respondents were aware of the Emergency Funds, Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, Business Bank Loans for Small and Large Businesses and Business Rate Relief. 87% of respondents were also aware of the Deferral to VAT Payments scheme.
- However, while awareness of support initiatives is high, take up is lower than expected with just 24% of organisations and 18% of individuals applying for these funds out of the respondents to this second survey. There is a feeling that support initiatives are on the whole well received but clarity is sought around what the support initiatives will look like in September and October after initial initiatives draw to a conclusion.
- Individuals reported high levels of awareness of the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme; but only 35% of individuals from this survey have applied to the scheme. There were comments around eligibility especially for those who earn a combination of PAYE income and self-employed income with these individuals failing to receive adequate support.

- Looking ahead there is less optimism in organisations around when they will be able to trade again, only 8% of organisations expect to be trading again immediately once the lockdown is lifted, 35% feel that they would be trading fully within 6 months. 6% of organisations are not at all confident that their business will recover within the next twelve months, with a further 27% stating that they are not so confident. 33% of organisations also feel less optimistic than they did a month ago.
- The survey suggested individuals would be slower to recommence trading. 8% of individuals feel confident that they will be able to start work immediately following the lockdown and 38% are confident they will be able to recommence work within 6 months of lockdown ending.

Estimated loss of income incurred by Cultural Organisations/Businesses in Birmingham since the beginning of lockdown



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
£0-£5,000	5.13%
£5000-£20,000	20.51%
£20,001-£50,000	15.38%
£50,001 - £100,000	15.38%
£100,001 - £250,000	12.82%
£250,001 - £500,000	5.13%
£500,001 - £1million	10.26%
£1million - £2million	10.26%
Other (please specify)	5.13%
TOTAL	39

APPENDIX B

Short-term requests:

- A further extension of the support schemes for the Arts and Cultural sector and further assistance for the large number of freelance and self-employed artists in the cultural/creative industries.
- Specifically, a sectoral extension of the Job Retention Scheme at 80% of wages until at least October; and an extension or replacement of the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. This will protect the wider ecology of the sector, and the thousands of small companies across the UK that allow the sector to function.

Mid-Term requests:

- Additional survival, recovery and income gap funding together with a recalibration of existing business support schemes which for some are difficult to access, for example because of charitable status restrictions and financial structures of commercial operators unable to accommodate debt.
- A realistic lead in time, with regards to re-opening and recognition that this may only be an option for some of the sector, with support packages reflective of this.
- An ability for organisations and individuals who can prove their practice is safe and in line with Government guidelines to be allowed to open when they can if economically viable. Linked to this, a review of insurance and liability policies is required in light of the new risks of re-opening, to allow access by the sector to appropriate insurance. The issue of sourcing appropriate insurance could create a significant barrier to cultural venues re-opening.

Longer-term requests:

- Research, development and investment fund for physical/social distancing innovations in the sector.
- Additional financial support for organisations unable to implement 'Covid-19 Safe' measures for up to 12 months.
- Ongoing funding opportunities and support for our freelance and independent sector.
- Vocal and visible recognition from policy makers of the benefit and value of the sector to the economy, health and wellbeing and social cohesion.



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1155tr

03 July 2020

SENT VIA E-MAIL TO: mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Urgent: Test & Trace

We write on behalf of Birmingham's Members of Parliament and the leadership of the city council.

As you know we wrote to you on the 5 June 2020 about Test and Trace. We hope you will feel that the various suggestions we made from our experience on the ground could help improve the effectiveness of its implementation. A further copy of the letter is attached for ease of reference.

Specifically, we raised the issues of:

- i. Visibility of data
- ii. Gaps in contact tracing data
- iii. Funding

We are grateful that progress in ii and iii has been made and would like to make some further comments on visibility of data.

Visibility of Data

The issues currently faced by our neighbours in Leicester have highlighted the urgent need for the provision of comprehensive sets of data at the **lowest possible geographic level**, to enable the targeting of appropriate interventions.

We welcome the steps taken by Government over the last 24 hours to broaden the type of data being shared with Local Authorities, which will include the provision of data relating to cases at a post-code level.

That said, more can be done. We understand that data is available on a street level via the Public Health England GIS case mapping platform. This enables a rapid understanding of Covid-19 cases in terms of demographics, outbreaks and geography and is especially useful when looking at clusters along the borders of local areas which are not easily linked through the line listed data the Director of Public Health currently receives.

The importance of having this level of insight cannot be overstated.

It will enable interventions to be made swiftly to prevent the spread of the virus. Given that Birmingham has some of the most diverse communities in the country, and consequently communities that are at greater risk from coronavirus, this is all the more important.

We have been advised, however, that this GIS data is not available to Directors of Public Health as a matter of course and would be grateful for your urgent clarification that this will be remedied.

The issue of data is not only crucial in the context of protecting the public, it is also crucial in the context of enabling a sustained economic recovery.

In the eventuality that there are spikes in cases of Covid-19 and further lockdown restrictions are required, putting these in place in a targeted manner, limited to the smallest possible geographies, will enable other areas of the City to continue on their journey to recovery, without interruption.

This will provide a level of certainty and confidence to both the public and businesses alike, that localised spikes will not derail plans to reopen different parts of the economy. Our recovery is in a fragile state as the Government will be the first to recognise and we must all work proactively together to reinforce it – avoiding, where possible, a situation in which whole communities and business sectors are having to switch intermittently between a state of lockdown and relative ‘normality’.

We are hoping to hear from you – urgently- that access to the GIS case mapping platform will be made available to Directors of Public Health as soon as possible. This which will enable greater protection for members of the public and support the emergence from lockdown.

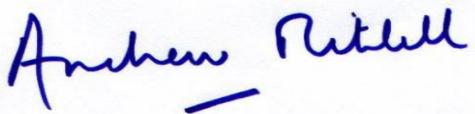
Yours faithfully



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council



Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP



Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP

Enc.

Letter to Secretary of State dated 5 June 2020



LtrSoS05062020.pdf



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1157tr

06 July 2020

SENT VIA E-MAIL TO: PSSimonClarke@communities.gov.uk

Simon Clarke MP
Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister

Re: Local Government Finance – Covid-19 and Beyond

Thank you for your letter dated 02 July 2020 relating to Local Government finance.

We acknowledge and appreciate the financial assistance provided by Government to the City Council during the pandemic and welcome the Government's further commitment of support as set out in your letter.

As we emerge from lockdown and begin the process of rebuilding, councils like Birmingham would value a degree of certainty when it comes to the help on offer from Government. This will assist in our financial planning and enable us to play the fullest possible role in supporting the swift and strong recovery that you refer to in your letter.

In light of the above, on the issue of irrecoverable tax losses (Council Tax & Business Rates) it would be incredibly helpful to receive as **early notification as possible** of the Government's intentions regarding support to Local Authorities. The Spending Review comes in much too late for budget setting in any year, but this is of far greater significance for the next financial year (21/22) as we look to stabilise our finances given the damage caused by Covid-19.

I hope this commentary is useful and if you have any questions or require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ian Ward".

**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1166tr

16 July 2020

SENT VIA E-MAIL TO: mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Urgent: Test & Trace

We write on behalf of Birmingham's Members of Parliament and leadership of the city council.

We refer to our previous correspondence on this issue, most recently on 3 July 2020 (a copy of which is attached for ease of reference).

Visibility of Data

We are pleased to see the progress that has been made over recent weeks in relation to the provision of data at a more local level, however a significant gap remains in respect of data relating to ethnicity.

Data on ethnicity

Currently, there is limited information being provided to Directors of Public Health (DPH) from the national test and trace system in relation to the ethnicity of those people being tested for Covid-19 and subsequently testing positive. In the last two weeks the daily line listings of positive cases had only 2 cases out of 144 with valid ethnicity data.

Knowing the ethnicity of those testing positive can help identify hotspots much more quickly and allow for appropriate interventions to be made. This is of vital importance

given the diverse nature of Birmingham's communities and the additional risks that Covid-19 poses to these communities.

There has been an uptake in testing in the city due in part to the availability of mobile testing units and regional drive-through testing centres. Understanding the ethnicity of those that are being tested will assist in identifying where further targeted messaging and community engagement is required, if it transpires that certain communities are still not being tested in sufficient numbers.

In our letter of 3 July 2020, we referred to the need for DPHs to be given access to the GIS case mapping platform. GIS provides street level data and enables a rapid understanding of Covid-19 cases in terms of demographics, outbreaks and geography and is especially useful when looking at clusters along the borders of local areas which are not easily 'linked' through the line listed data the DPH currently receives.

Crucially, we understand that the GIS platform has linked NHS data on ethnicity. Given the issues raised above, it seems more important than ever that access to the data on the GIS system is made available to DPHs without delay.

National Test & Trace System - Contact follow-Up

Improving the availability of data on ethnicity could be remedied in part by the sharing of data held nationally, with local systems.

It does, however, raise another important issue around some of the weaknesses relating to the national contact tracing system. Other explanations for the lack of data on ethnicity could be that it is not being asked for when contact is made or not being provided by the individual. Either way further follow-up is required, however many cases are not being followed up by the national system. This work could be done locally, but currently the relevant data on individuals is not shared by the national system to enable this.

In addition to ethnicity, other useful data such as a person's workplace should also be obtained, but as it stands is not readily available.

The City Council has applied to be a pilot for trying to close the gap on those who cannot be contacted or where further follow-up is required, and we would appreciate your support in respect of this application.

We trust that the above is useful, and we look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible with confirmation that access to the GIS case mapping platform will be made available to Directors of Public Health.

Should you require any further information, the City's Director of Public Health, Dr Justin Varney will be on hand to assist your officials.

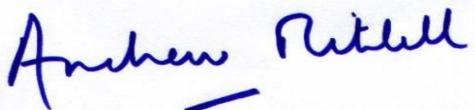
Yours faithfully



**Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council**



Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP



Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP

Enc.

Letter dated 3 July 2020



1155tr Rt Hon Matt
Hancock Test & Trace.



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1185/Ih

28 August 2020

The Rt Hon Priti Patel
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

SENT VIA EMAIL: privateoffice.external@homeoffice.gov.uk

Dear Home Secretary,

Covid-19 Outbreak: Stone Road Asylum Centre, Birmingham Edgbaston

We write on behalf West Midlands Metropolitan Council Leaders and Preet Gill MP in relation to the recently declared Covid-19 Outbreak at the Stone Road Asylum Centre in Birmingham Edgbaston ('Stone Road'), which is administered by Serco.

Background

Stone Road has the capacity to accommodate 270 asylum seekers together with 30 staff. It consists of shared bedrooms (two per room) and shared bathrooms (five to a bathroom). Communal dining spaces and have the capacity to seat 100 people at any one time.

In March / April 2020, some residents displayed symptoms of Covid-19, however, subsequently did not test positive. This prompted the development of a Covid-19 Standard Operation Procedure for Initial Accommodation settings, prepared jointly by Public Health England, local Public Health teams, the Home Office and its providers.

This set out a number of measures required to prevent and manage outbreaks. Specifically, in relation to Stone Road these included significantly reducing overall capacity; provision of information about Covid-19 in appropriate and accessible languages, the provision of self-isolation capacity including single occupancy bedrooms with en-suite, and accommodating clinically vulnerable residents in such a way that they are not sharing communal hostel facilities or are in more appropriate setting in the dispersal estate.

On 19 August 2020, a first positive case of Covid-19 was detected. To date there have been a total of 26 positive cases, and we are awaiting results for another 20 tests.

Despite the guidance referred to above adequate measures were not put in place to prevent an outbreak.

For example, capacity was not sufficiently reduced and remained at 229 and self-isolation capacity was not implemented in a safe way, for example both positively testing cases and their contacts, whose results were either negative or not yet known, were sharing bathrooms. The hostel was also accommodating six clinically vulnerable residents at the time of the outbreak who were sharing facilities with other residents.

In response, Birmingham City Council has sought to take enforcement action pursuant to Section 3 of the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) Regulations, with a number of conditions imposed, with which Serco are required to comply within the next 48 hours as follows:

- Move all residents into single room accommodation;
- All to be treated as contacts and must self-isolate for 14 days;
- Provide health messages in multiple different languages.

No.10's Tactical Support Team has also been briefed to provide support as required.

Ongoing Concerns

Another SERCO managed site in the City, the Britannia Hotel was visited by the Cabinet Office's C-19 Field Task Force over the weekend together with Birmingham City Council's Director of Public Health.

It was evident that the basic guidance around operating safely in the Covid-19 context was not being adhered to in terms of face-covering or indeed social distancing, despite management confirming that this was the case.

It is beyond reckless, that in the current circumstances, a provider operating under the terms of a Government commissioned contract, failed to take adequate steps to prevent an outbreak and is *continuing* to fail to take even the most basic steps to protect the health of the vulnerable people that they are paid to support.

In addition, Serco has singularly failed to consider the potential impacts of their actions on the broader population of the City of Birmingham as a whole.

You will be aware that over the last week, Birmingham's status has been escalated to that of being an Area of Enhanced Concern due to an increase in the level of Covid-19 infections. The outbreak at Stone Road, which was significantly larger than any other in the City in recent weeks, could have led to further restrictions being implemented in Birmingham which would have caused significant disruption to people's everyday lives and severely hampered our attempts to recover economically.

Thankfully the rates of infection have fallen in the City and no further restrictions are required at this stage, but this goes to the heart of one of Serco's major deficiencies in the administration of the Government's contract; it fails to grasp that it does not operate in isolation and that its actions have an impact on the communities in which it operates.

Welfare of Asylum Seekers

In addition to the concerns around the broader impacts on the health of the population, we should not lose sight of the impacts on the asylum seekers themselves. They are human beings - many of whom have experienced traumatic life events that have led to them seeking asylum in the UK.

At Stone Road, many have been kept in conditions that are demonstrably unsafe in the context of Covid-19 and in some cases have contracted the virus – circumstances where five adult males sharing one bathroom is particularly concerning. We understand that there are serious concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of residents in the centre, some of which have been accommodated there for a period of 9 months with no indication being given as to when they may be re-housed.

Requested Assurances

Given the above we would be obliged if you could confirm the following on an urgent basis:

- a.** That the Home Office will commit to no further placement of asylum seekers in the West Midlands while Birmingham remains an **Area of Concern** – given the interdependency and connectivity between the seven Metropolitan Districts of the West Midlands it is important that this moratorium exists across the whole region. This specific issue was raised in a meeting with the Secretary of State for Health & Social Care, Matt Hancock, on 21 August 2020 to discuss Birmingham's proposals to drive down the rates of infection and he signalled his endorsement;
- b.** That the Home Office provides reassurance that the use of hotels or other establishments by its providers for asylum dispersal within the region is safe in the context of the Standard Operating Procedure for Initial Accommodation (referred to above) together with any related government guidance and that the health and wellbeing of residents is being properly monitored and needs met;

c. The West Midlands is proud to be a region that has welcomed asylum seekers since 1999 and has resettled the third largest number of refugees of any UK region since 2014. Many lives have been rebuilt in our towns and cities and many more will follow. However, we can no longer accept a situation in which less than half of Councils house asylum seekers in their areas, and in which just 20 of the UK's 343 local authorities are home to as many as 50% of all dispersed asylum seekers (including in the West Midlands). This has been, and continues to be in this time of national crisis, unfunded by Government, despite the clear evidence of success achieved by fully funding refugee resettlement. Please therefore advise when Government will announce realistic plans to widen dispersal and the funding that will be made available to local authorities in order that they may invest in integration and prevent crisis and destitution for all those lives yet to be rebuilt in what can and must always be places of welcome and safety.

We look forward to hearing from you in relation to the above as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council



Preet Gill MP
Member of Parliament for Birmingham Edgbaston

Councillor Ian Courts
Leader of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Ian Brookfield
Leader of City of Wolverhampton Council

Councillor George Duggins
Leader of Coventry City Council

Councillor Maria Crompton
Leader of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor Mike Bird
Leader of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

cc. Rt Hon Matt Hancock – Secretary of State for Health & Social Care



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1191tr

04 September 2020

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

SENT VIA EMAIL: mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State

Covid-19: Financial support for low-income households during periods of self-isolation

We write on behalf of the leadership of the seven metropolitan councils of the West Midlands.

Firstly, we would like to offer our thanks to you and your officials at the Department of Health & Social Care for the support and guidance provided over the last few weeks in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

As you know rates of infection had risen in various parts of the West Midlands with Birmingham becoming an Area of Enhanced Support.

Whilst the position has stabilised to a certain degree with the current rate of infection across the West Midlands being 13.7 per 100k (as at 31 August 2020) we have no intention of being complacent and wish to take all necessary action to drive down the rate further.

One area of concern is where people displaying symptoms are not taking steps to self-isolate as they should. In some cases, this is because they cannot afford to take time off work with levels of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) insufficient to meet their needs. This poses the obvious danger of spreading the virus across workplaces and public transport.

Given Birmingham's status as an Area of Enhanced Support and the interconnectivity between the City and the rest of the West Midlands, we believe that

it would be of huge benefit to implement a system, similar to that being operated in Blackburn with Darwen, Pendle and Oldham, whereby payments are made to those receiving Universal Credit or Working Tax Credit at the following rates:

- Individuals who test positive for the virus will receive £130 for their 10-day period of isolation.
- Other members of their household who have to self-isolate for 14 days will be entitled to a payment of £182.
- Non-household contacts who are advised to quarantine through the NHS Test and Trace, will also be paid up to £182 - depending on the length of isolation period.

There are obvious public health benefits of reducing the risk of infection but also significant economic rewards. Whilst there will be a cost of implementing the scheme across the West Midlands, we anticipate the economic benefit of avoiding any further lockdown restrictions and building consumer confidence by returning the West Midlands to a state of 'normality' as soon possible, will far outweigh these costs in the longer term.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council

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Leader of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

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OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1197tr

10 September 2020

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

SENT VIA EMAIL: mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State

COVID-19: The mechanism for removing increased local restrictions

With the national rise in COVID-19 rates reflected across the West Midlands, we fully understand and support moves to put in place local restrictions in areas of particular concern.

The seven metropolitan councils of the West Midlands remain committed to the joint challenge of dealing with the pandemic and would like to thank you and your officials at the Department of Health & Social Care for the ongoing support and guidance.

Now, as people and businesses face up to the possibility of further restrictions, it would be incredibly helpful if you could set out details of the process required for the removal of any additional local conditions.

In particular, local messaging would be made far easier if we had a greater understanding of the reductions in the rate of infections required to trigger the easing or lifting of any additional restrictions.

This information would not only provide useful clarity to stakeholders such as local businesses, it could also motivate people to play their part in the reduction of infection rates and subsequent easing of restrictions. To put it bluntly, people are far more likely to comply with any new local restrictions if they have a clear understanding of the finishing line.

It would also be helpful to understand the agreed process for determining the removal of local restrictions. Who makes the decision and how do local authorities feed into this process?

Across the West Midlands we share your determination to control the virus, reverse the recent rise in infections and save lives. We continue to work hard to that end and look forward to hearing from you on the questions raised above.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council

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Leader of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

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**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1198tr

11 September 2020

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

SENT VIA EMAIL: mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State

With Birmingham now an area of national intervention, we are writing to you as a matter of urgency to secure additional support for our efforts to increase testing capacity across the city.

It is clear that testing will be key to our continued efforts to get the COVID-19 pandemic under control in Birmingham and across the West Midlands and, in light of rising infection rates across the region, upscaling capacity is therefore a matter of growing importance.

Our ambition is to have a minimum of ten local testing walk-through sites active in the city and increase our mobile testing facilities to three mobile testing units deployed across the city. This provision would sit alongside the regional testing unit at Birmingham Airport in Solihull and the pilot of drop and collect.

In order to increase testing capacity we have already put a number of additional sites forward for both drive through and walk through testing sites. Unfortunately this has been slow to mobilise, especially in the case of potential drive through sites.

We have already raised the issues of funding for testing sites with both the DHSC regional lead and the No.10 tactical support team. As you are aware, there is currently no capital funding to prepare unsuitable land (e.g. recently cleared land awaiting redevelopment) for testing sites, nor is there revenue funding for the hire of privately owned land for deployment.

Further, you will be aware that when Birmingham moved to enhanced support on 21 August we requested deployment of the NHS test and trace app and a regional or local authority allocation of call handlers and tracing support. This additional resource has also yet to materialise, and while we welcome the planned national launch for the app, given the rising numbers we are keen to see early implementation in Birmingham to help our efforts to contain the spread.

In addition we are still seeking clarity on how long funding will be allocated to local authorities for test and trace, which as I'm sure you will understand significantly impacts on the flexibility we have to respond. There remains no clarity about whether the funding will be for 12 months from July when it was allocated or for the financial year, i.e. to the end of March, and this has significant impact on how we allocate resources.

The regional support team has been incredibly constructive and supportive in helping us escalate the issues above, but sadly the issues remain unresolved.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council



Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP
Labour MP for Birmingham, Hodge Hill



**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB**

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1202tr

17 September 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL ONLY TO: CEU.enquiries@hmtreasury.gov.uk

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Her Majesty's Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Dear Chancellor

Covid-19: Future restrictions & financial support to the hospitality sector

We write on behalf of the leadership of the seven metropolitan councils in the West Midlands.

The national position relating to the rate of Covid-19 infection is worsening with Birmingham, Sandwell, and Solihull now on the Government's 'watchlist', leading to enhanced measures being put in place.

We appreciate that if rates of infection continue to rise this may lead to further restrictions being implemented which incorporate the hospitality sector. In this eventuality we **believe that it is essential** that further financial support is made available to those businesses affected.

We acknowledge and appreciate the support that Government has provided to businesses and employees during the pandemic via business grants and the Job Retention Scheme.

The economic recovery from Covid-19 was fragile before the recent spike in infections and greater restrictions will weaken it further.

Prior to the pandemic the hospitality sector in the West Midlands supported more than 135,000 jobs contributing around £12.6bn a year to the local economy.

Without the appropriate support it may never recover to those levels. This will have a devastating impact in the short term and also upon the long-term economic growth of the region.

The arrival of the Commonwealth Games, HS2 and the Coventry City of Culture will present huge opportunities, but these will not be fully exploited if the hospitality sector is damaged beyond repair.

We would be grateful for your consideration of this matter with colleagues in Government in order that we can find an effective solution.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to be in contact.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council

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**OUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000
Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1218tr

30 September 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL sec-of-state.ps@education.gov.uk

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Free School Meals

We are writing to express our profound frustration and dismay at the Government's decision not to extend the Free School Meals scheme to cover the autumn half-term and Christmas holidays.

The withdrawal of this vital support at an already challenging time will have devastating consequences for thousands of families in Birmingham and across the country and we would urge you to reconsider as a matter of urgency.

With 42 per cent of Birmingham children living in poverty, the proportion eligible for free school meals is currently twice the national average.

Some 61,000 children in our city are dependent on this lifeline and for far too many, this is the one real meal they have each day.

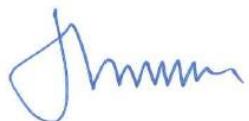
At Easter and again for the summer holidays the Government listened to representations from parents, pupils, schools and councils and agreed to fund free school meals through the holidays.

We would now urge you to once reconsider your position on Free School Meals and reverse the decision to abandon our most vulnerable families at such an incredibly challenging time.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council



Councillor Jayne Francis
Cabinet Member for Education, Skills & Culture



Councillor Kate Booth
Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing