

Our new Strategic Approach to managing Covid will set out our planned levels of support for business in the event of any future restrictions.

We are already supporting town centres to respond to the challenges presented by COVID-19 in recognition of the unique role they play in our economy and society

- Since March 2020 we have provided an additional £21 million in recovery and resilience funding for town centres and Business Improvement Districts, alongside the existing £50 million 2019-20 Town centre capital fund.
- This is made up of £18 million capital funding as part of the economic stimulus package and £3 million of support since March for towns and Business Improvement Districts to finance recovery projects as well as looking forward to renewal.
- In July the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and local government launched a review of the Town Centre Action Plan to strengthen the contribution of local town centres to our national economic, social, and environmental future.
- The Review group consists of business, community and local government leaders, and is chaired by Professor Leigh Sparks Professor of Retail studies at Stirling University. The Group has carried out a call for written evidence and held a series of oral evidence sessions consulting with a wide range of business, local government, community, and third sector town centre stakeholders, and held a public opinion survey.
- The Review Group will provide advice on 20 minute neighbourhoods as set out in the PfG and will report in December 2020.
- The Programme for Government committed £275 million over 5 years for a Place based investment programme which will include long term investment for town centre revitalisation.
- 78 projects have recently been approved through the Town centre fund and will benefit 188 towns. The town centre fund leveraged £830,000 additional investment from partner bodies.
- We have also initiated a “Scotland Loves Local” Campaign in collaboration with Scotland’s Town Partnerships
- Applications opened on 18 October for our £1 million Scotland Loves Local fund, which is a PfG commitment.
- We fund Scotland’s Towns partnership to promote and support Towns and manage Scotland’s Improvement Districts.

I would urge Douglas Ross to support our calls to the UK Government for more funding or additional fiscal flexibilities so we can support businesses through the ongoing challenges that Coronavirus will inevitably present

- While we welcome the support that the UK Government has made available so far it is clear that more needs to be done to assist affected businesses and that is why we alongside the Welsh Government and N.Ireland Executive have repeatedly called on the UK Govt to transfer greater fiscal powers.

- Our new £40m COVID-19 Restrictions Fund, which includes a £20m grant support scheme – being delivered by local authorities –will provide grants of up to £3,000 to businesses most affected, an £11m Hardship Fund, and a £9m scheme to support furloughed employees.
- Information on the eligibility criteria for support and how to apply is now available on the Scottish Government website. Local authority websites were updated on Tuesday 20 October, allowing business to complete applications.
- We know the Fund is limited and that is why we have targeted it at those most affected by the current closures.
- We are discussing the delivery of the furlough support with HMRC, COSLA, the STUC, businesses and local authorities to ensure we can provide this as quickly as possible to the people who need it.
- The COVID-19 Restrictions Fund is part of a package of measures to support businesses and jobs - we have provided £2.38 billion in support businesses through the crisis.

We aim to give businesses as much time as possible to respond and adapt to the new restrictions but controlling the virus demands swift and decisive action

- Waiting a week before implementing the most recent measures as Douglas Ross suggests would mean that we are not acting on the most up-to-date data and information. We would therefore risk making the wrong decision on what are appropriate and proportionate measures to control the virus.
- Waiting a week before lifting or modifying a restriction would also put us in contravention of our legal duty to constantly consider proportionality and to lift restrictions as soon as they are no longer proportionate or necessary.
- Keeping a business closed, or controlling people's movements for a further week once it was known where there was no longer a public health justification for doing so would be legally challengeable.
- We will endeavour to strike the right balance between timely implementation and preparation time in order to both support businesses and save lives.

With regard to the Job Security Councils that Douglas Ross proposes, I understand that Sweden's Job Security Councils are independent, bipartite social partner institutions (i.e. run by unions and employers) operating under collective agreements

- We would welcome specific, detailed proposals for a Scottish equivalent recognising that we have a different history of collective bargaining coverage and large scale cooperation between employers and unions.

Going forward, we intend to replace the temporary restrictions with a new strategic approach to managing the pandemic

- Part of this new strategic approach will set out the different tiers or levels of intervention and restrictions which may be applied in future – either locally or across Scotland - depending on how the virus is spreading.
- When we publish this new framework we will indicate, based on the latest advice from the National Incident Management Team and from our clinical advisers,

what level of intervention should apply to each part of the country when the temporary restrictions end on 26 October.