



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP

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

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Dear Colleague,

We are facing a national and international challenge in responding to this pandemic. Our primary focus is on keeping people safe and supporting the health service to respond.

Local authorities are already playing a vital role in supporting our communities and local economies. I am sure that you, like me, will want to thank all the staff working so tirelessly in local government during these difficult times. I am writing to set out how the Government is working to support the vulnerable, and local authorities themselves.

PROTECTING THOSE WHO ARE EXTREMELY VULNERABLE

The NHS has identified that there are up to 1.5 million people who are extremely vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus due to their medical status, please see the full definition in the annex A attached. From this week, those identified will be contacted by letter and, where possible, text and advised to stay at home and avoid face to face contact for at least the next 12 weeks to protect themselves. You can find the guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable from Covid-19 on gov.uk.

I know that the announcement and letter will cause concern for people with these conditions, and their families and friends, though many in this group are already taking sensible measures to protect themselves. People will also be concerned about the practicalities of everyday life – how to get food, everyday household items, sanitary products and medicines. Many people will have family, friends and neighbours who will step in to help. But not everyone will have a support network for all, or part of, the isolation period. To provide that safety net the Government is setting up a local support system for those that cannot use friends and family to get their basic supplies.

People who have been identified as extremely medically vulnerable will be able to access this delivery package through a specific website and hotline. We will deliver this in partnership with Local Authorities, Local Resilience Forums, the food suppliers and voluntary organisations. There will be no charge for the standard box of supplies. Community pharmacies will ensure those in this group that need medicines will get them.

I hope this support package will provide some certainty and comfort to people that they are not alone in this. The country is taking on an unprecedented challenge and everyone has their part to play in stopping the spread of the virus. Shielding this group of people is one of the most important steps we can take in order to save lives. I do of course welcome any thoughts that you might have, or those on behalf of your constituents, on this matter.

SUPPORTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

You will have also seen that on 19 March the Government announced £1.6bn of additional funding to support local authorities in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. This funding is intended to help local authorities address the pressures they are facing across their services.

I have written to local authority leaders, chief executives and chief financial officers to set out the funding each authority will receive. The full list of allocations is attached at Annex B.

The funding is intended to cover the first phase of the response and I expect payments to be made on Friday 3 April to ensure Local Authorities have the confidence to continue with their work. As my Department continues to monitor costs, I would appreciate your support in working with us to understand pressures on local government in your constituencies.

You will also want to be aware that my Department has now published guidance to local authorities on the implementation of the Expanded Business Rates Retail Discount 2020-21 and the Nursery (Childcare) Discount. I have been clear that local authorities will be fully compensated for the loss of income associated with granting the expanded reliefs, and that administration costs will be met. The guidance below can be found on gov.uk:

Business rates: expanded retail discount – guidance

Business rates: nursery (childcare) discount 2020 to 2021: coronavirus response – local authority guidance

Today I also confirmed a £500 million Hardship Fund which will provide council tax relief to financially vulnerable people and households to help those affected most by coronavirus. Guidance published today provides clarity for councils on how to allocate the funding following its announcement at Budget. The guidance on the Hardship Fund can be viewed on gov.uk.

Local government is central in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. We must support and work with them to protect the local communities we serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick." followed by a horizontal line underneath.

RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP