

1 July 2020

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP  
Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

Dear Secretaries of State

### **SUPPORTING BUSINESS COMMUNITIES THROUGH ‘LOCAL LOCKDOWNS’**

I write privately today to share urgent recommendations from the Chamber of Commerce network on how the impact of ‘local lockdowns’ on our business communities can be minimised.

Drawing on the experience of our Chamber business community in the East Midlands over the past few days, as well as wider experience, we set out a framework of recommendations grouped around Clarity, Communications and Data, and Support.

We strongly recommend that government uses the framework to develop a tightly-focused and well-communicated approach to ‘local lockdowns’ – so as to minimise their impact on our businesses, communities and jobs.

Absolute clarity is needed on a range of key issues, including the statistical triggers for lockdown, whether transport and schools can remain open, enforcement, and expected duration. Better communication of how decisions are taken, which should draw on the input of all relevant Departments and local representatives including Chambers of Commerce, would help maintain business confidence. Advance notice should be given in confidence to key individuals, including Chamber business leaders, to support preparedness.

Additionally, HM Government and the Devolved Administrations should put in place specific, additional financial support for businesses which, through no fault of their own, face further damage due to local lockdown.

As we begin the next stage of managing the pandemic, the Chamber Network stands ready to help those experiencing localised lockdowns, and to be the go-to local business partner for HM Government and the Devolved Administrations in each affected area.

I look forward to discussing these proposals – given the importance of ensuring business continuity and confidence as essential public health challenges are tackled. Adam Szpala in my team ([a.szpala@britishchambers.org.uk](mailto:a.szpala@britishchambers.org.uk)/[+447961138964](tel:+447961138964)) can work with your private offices to find a suitable time.

Yours sincerely



Adam Marshall  
Director General

### ***Annex – Detailed Framework for Future Lockdowns***

#### ***Clarity***

1. **Decisions, Triggers and Review** – whilst we understand the Leicester decision had to be taken quickly for pressing public health reasons, businesses would welcome much more clarity on the metrics that would trigger a local lockdown and, equally crucially, what would see it released. This would allow them to prepare as fully as possible and, potentially, help to dampen down infection within that area.

Businesses and local decision-makers should also be directly involved in the review of any local lockdown as decisions are taken about whether to keep the lockdown in place.

2. **Location** – there was considerable confusion overnight about which areas of Leicester were locked down. The area eventually chosen did not correspond to any well-understood administrative area. In future, the area should be as limited and precisely-defined as practicable, with that information shared at the same time as the lockdown is announced.
3. **Restrictions** – there remains a lack of clarity over what the Leicester lockdown means in practice on the ground, and how those restrictions are being enforced. Businesses are not clear on how to advise employees who live within the lockdown zone, but work or trade outside it, for example.

This clarity should extend to giving businesses and their employees certainty about whether schools, childcare and public transport will remain open, and on how the lockdown will be policed and enforced.

This should be clarified in the Leicester case, and then standardised for other local lockdowns. A Red-Amber-Green traffic light system setting out different phases and requirements of a local lockdown would help.

- 4. Decision-Making** – business communities need to know who takes the decision to impose a local lockdown; by what process; and how they will be able to contribute to discussions on implementation, troubleshooting and review. Chambers of Commerce, with their intimate knowledge of local economies, should be included in that process.

### ***Communications and Data***

- 5. Communications** – the official intention to instate a local lockdown should be communicated as early and detailed as possible, giving businesses time to prepare fully for the change in conditions.

We urge the government to put the Chamber Network – rooted in every locality and with the respect of the business community – at the heart of local communication plans and acknowledge that formally. Specific, clear guidance and communication for businesses is needed.

- 6. Precise and rapid data** – significantly more detailed and quicker data at a local level would enable decision-makers to tailor any lockdown as precisely as they can. If possible, early access to that information would allow work with communities to dampen infection rates before formal lockdown conditions are imposed.

### ***Support***

- 7. Additional Support** – businesses within a local lockdown area will be disadvantaged compared to those in other areas. This will be particularly acute for SMEs but will also affect larger firms in complex supply chains. As we called for in our recent submission to the Chancellor ahead of the 8<sup>th</sup> July economic statement, local lockdowns should be accompanied by extended support for business.

This point will become even more important from the end of July when the CJRS starts to taper and later as support schemes finish. For example, CJRS is, effectively, closed to new entrants now. Many companies which did not previously need support could be pushed into extreme difficulty by a local lockdown, and yet would find themselves unable to access CJRS support because they had successfully traded through the general lockdown without furloughing. That creates unhelpful messages and perverse outcomes.

Grant, furlough and compensation mechanisms for businesses materially affected by local lockdowns should be considered.