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Covid-19 Member Update

Monday 20 April

Summary

All eyes will be on Westminster this week after a tumultuous weekend of unfortunate news for the Government. Criticism of the UK's response to the coronavirus crisis seems to be ramping up as news outlets report that the Government's medical and economic preparedness for the pandemic was nowhere near where it should have been. To make matters worse, [The Times](#) reports that internal Treasury projections for the economic impact of the lockdown are far bleaker than those published by the Office for Budget Responsibility last week. Expect to hear more about this during tonight's Downing Street press conference, which will be led by Chancellor Rishi Sunak.

But it's not all bad news this morning. News outlets are reporting on internal government discussions around post-lockdown Britain. Ministers are beginning to develop an 'exit strategy', which [The Times](#) says will likely feature a progressive relaxation to lockdown measures over the coming weeks or months. Government is said to want to avoid a second peak at all costs, and will only modify measures "when the time is right". Expect to hear more about this throughout the week, as Ministers will face increasingly pressing questions from journalists around government plans for the future.

Below, please find a summary of this weekend's announcements, and the actions undertaken by the team at ukactive to support the physical activity sector throughout the pandemic.

Government announcements

Government press conferences continued as usual over the weekend, hosted by different Cabinet ministers in the continued absence of Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The key announcements from the press conferences are detailed below:

- Business Secretary Alok Sharma took Friday's press conference at which he revealed the extension of the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme until the end of June. This is outlined in more detail below. The Scheme itself opens for applications today.
- Sharma also announced the formation of a Vaccine Taskforce to pool UK resources in order to achieve a vaccine faster. At the same press conference, Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance said with all vaccine developments there was a small chance of



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discovering one, but with this Taskforce the UK stood a much better chance.

- On Saturday, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick announced £1.6 billion in funding for councils, after concerns many were facing bankruptcy as a result of the pandemic. This doubles the specific funding pledged to councils, and reflects both an increase in demand for services as well as reduction in revenue. Jenrick also used the conference to urge parks to remain open.
- Sunday's press conference saw Education Secretary Gavin Williamson deliver a tribute to young people during the lockdown, the day before children would have returned to school following the Easter holidays. As well as noting the £1.6 billion pledged by Jenrick would go in part towards children in care, Williamson also announced the Government would be providing laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children to ensure their studies weren't unduly affected.

Furlough Scheme Extension

On Friday 17 April, Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced that the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will be extended until the end of June.

The scheme, which allows companies to furlough employees with the government paying cash grants of 80% of their wages up to a maximum of £2,500, was originally open for three months and backdated from the 1 March to the end of May.

Mr Sunak confirmed that he would keep the scheme under review and continue extending it if necessary.

Applications for the scheme have opened today, with the Government under pressure to ensure the scheme delivers funding quicker than the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, especially with the April payroll imminent.

More information about the scheme can be found [here](#).

Expected Announcements

Chancellor Rishi Sunak will be leading tonight's Downing Street press conference to publicize a new government scheme launched this morning to help tech startups hit by the outbreak, with a



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£500 million investment fund for high-growth firms and a £750 million pot in grants and loans for businesses focused on research and development. Mr Sunak will also face pressing questions from journalists about reports that the internal Treasury projections for the economic impact of the lockdown are far worse than those outlined by the Office for Budget Responsibility last week.

ukactive engagement with Government

ukactive is in constant dialogue with multiple government departments on additional support available for our members. This includes continued engagement with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, on issues such as rental payments, and discussions with the Department for Education on continued support for children's activity providers. Discussions with Treasury over its latest announcements continue.

All insights gained from this engagement will be fed back to members through the daily briefing. Please contact a member of the ukactive team if you have any specific questions:

publicaffairs@ukactive.org.uk

You can find all the latest information on what Covid-19 means for the sector, as well as guidance and support for your organisation in our ukactive [Covid-19 hub](#).