



LAURA FARRIS MP

Member of Parliament for Newbury

23 March 2020

Dear Rishi

I would like to start by saying, on behalf of business owners and employees in the hospitality and leisure sectors in Newbury, that we are extremely grateful for the support you are providing via the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

It is quite literally the decisive factor for their future survival, when many such businesses have had to temporarily shut up shop. We understand the scale and cost of the implementation exercise that lies ahead and greatly appreciate the amount of work that you are putting in.

However, I must also raise my voice on behalf of my many self-employed constituents in Newbury – including (but not limited to) taxi-drivers and childminders – who find themselves in a very different position. In the last few days I have received significant volumes of correspondence describing their precarious financial positions now that work has dried up and the difficulties of meeting their living costs on Universal Credit (notwithstanding the enhancement you announced on Friday).

I understand the practical difficulties inherent in identifying loss in self-employed earnings and the provision of other measures – such as the 12-month interest free loan – that are available. However, whilst recognising that any solution will be imperfect, I would be grateful if the Treasury could consider some form of temporary hardship support, perhaps linked to tax paid in previous years, subject to a cap and clawback provisions should subsequent tax returns show that there has been no drop in income.

This seems one way of ensuring fairness between different categories of worker and recognising the important contribution of many self-employed people to the economy.

With very best wishes,

Laura Farris