

# May 11<sup>th</sup> Newsletter



**LIZ SMITH MSP** **Scottish Conservative MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife**

## VE Day 75th Anniversary



The Queen's message to the nation on the 75th anniversary of VE Day drew the strongest possible parallel between the wartime generation and today's generation as it continues its fight against a very different enemy.

She said that the spirit of the nation today, most especially the willingness of individuals and communities to support and care for each other, is something which the wartime generation would recognise and in which it would take great pride.

In these ongoing very tough times, The Queen's message to "never give up and never despair" has the same resonance now as it did in 1945.

## Lockdown

For the time being, lockdown remains exactly the same in Scotland with only one minor change relating to taking exercise.

As Jackson Carlaw said yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives have consistently argued for an agreed four nation approach throughout this crisis, within which variations can occur in different parts of the UK so long as these variations reflect different medical circumstances. The variations must be led by the science and the necessary evidence must be published to provide full transparency about each decision that is made.

The battle against Covid19 is slowly bearing fruit. This is because the public has both recognised and accepted the need for very tight discipline. That must continue.

## Agriculture Bill



Earlier this month, I spoke on the Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Bill, urging the Government to consider various changes. The bill would continue the financing system of the EU's Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) upon us leaving the EU later this year.

This bill is necessary to ensure there is a smooth and stable transition for our

farmers when we leave the EU.

However, in my speech to Parliament, I drew attention to the fact that as it stands, the bill does not allow for us to design and implement a new, post-CAP agriculture policy that meets the needs of Scottish farmers. A lack of long-term planning is a clear problem with the bill, and we can't expect to meet targets such as a 75 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 or being net zero by 2045 without clear vision in which to get there.

I spoke about the fact that, if this bill was unamended, it would potentially leave too much power in the hands of the Scottish Government to indefinitely regulate on the future of farming, a point which may cause worry for many across Scotland. I specifically asked for a "sunset" clause and additional safeguards.

The major concern is that this Government's proposals do not pave the way for unity between Scotland and the rest of the UK especially when it comes to issues like marketing standards.

## The UK Government's financial support for business during the pandemic



Through these challenging times, the UK Government has sought to put money back in the pockets of hard-working business owners across the UK – spending billions to ensure that whether it be a small B&B, or a family farm, employers have the capacity to weather the scale of disruption not seen in decades.

The UK Government has announced a series of initiatives for business, including stepping in to pay people's wages, providing loans where



ensure all rubbish is lifted quickly. In these exceptional circumstances there is no time for bickering about whose responsibility this is. The public want the rubbish lifted, and soon.

## Mental Health During the Lockdown



The lockdown is vital to UK wide strategy to limit the spread of the coronavirus and to prevent the NHS's critical care wards from being overwhelmed with coronavirus patients. It is this measure along with social distancing that has helped flatten the curve and prevent further infections and therefore saved lives.

However the lockdown has put a strain on many people, especially the most vulnerable in society or those who live alone.

Many will be aware that the lockdown has led to an increase in mental health related problems. It is for this reason that last Tuesday, in the Scottish Parliament I asked Michael Russell the Cabinet Secretary for Government business and constitutional relations for assurance that the Scottish Government was taking mental health risks into account when considering lockdown restrictions.

He assured me that in the Scottish Government's discussion on the lockdown, that mental health was being discussed and is a priority.

I welcome this approach and will continue to keep tabs on the Scottish Government, to make sure that mental health and other important health issues remain at the heart of Scottish Government's considerations around the lockdown.

## Going On The Air



I was delighted to be told of the ingenuity of a Fife primary school that has set up its own online TV channel that gives children different challenges every day during the Covid-19 crisis.

Teachers at St Columba's Primary School in Cupar post a video a day as part of their initiative to establish visual communication with their pupils and families.

In one video, the Principal Teacher demonstrates how to grow plants from the pips and stones found in fruits like apples and avocados.

In another, a teacher sets a science, technology, engineering and maths challenge.

This is a great idea by St Columba's Primary School in Cupar. They have showed great ingenuity in setting up this online TV channel for their pupils.

It must be difficult for many parents trying to keep young children entertained while also doing some of their school work during this lockdown. An online TV

channel works in so many ways – children like watching television and by putting different challenges on every day it keeps the children’s minds active, giving them something challenging but also educational to do at the same time.

I’m sure the initiative will be welcomed by parents and the community in Cupar.

**Apologies to those readers who have not been receiving the recent fortnightly editions of this e-letter. We hope the technical problem is now fixed.**



As ever, please let me know if you need assistance with anything, including supermarket deliveries. I understand some people are still encountering difficulties.

## Important and Useful Links:

**Useful Support Links and Numbers:**

If you or someone you know needs support please use or shared the contact links is below.

**Age Scotland helpline:** 08001244222

**Samaritans helpline for people struggling:** 116 123

**Citizens Advice Scotland:** [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

**Carers Scotland:** <http://www.caresuk.org/Scotland>

**Victim Support Scotland:** <http://victimsupport.scot/> (0800 160 1985)

**Alcoholics Anonymous:** <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>  
(08009177650)

### **Useful Coronavirus Information Links:**

**Covid-19 Medical Advice information:** [www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus](http://www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus) and [www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus).

**Covid-19 Furlough Scheme information:** <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>.

### **If you are looking for work:**

The department of work and pensions has launched a new site to advertise thousands of critical jobs across the UK - <https://jobhelp.dwp.gov.uk/>.

**Covid-19 Statutory Sick Pay Information:** <https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay>

### **Your business may be entitled to reclaim the costs of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) for sickness absence:**

This refund will cover up to two weeks' SSP per eligible employee who are either ill or been told to self-isolate because of COVID-19. This is in line with the recommended isolation period. Guidance on self-isolation can be found here: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19).

**Covid-19 self isolation sick note for your employer:** <https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note>

**If you are newly self-employed and ineligible for the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, you can claim up to £2,000 from your local authority.** You will be eligible if you became self-employed on or after 6 April 2019, over half your income is from self-employment, and your trading profits were below £50,000 in financial year 2019-20. Further information is available at <https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/service/coronavirus/newly-self-employed-hardship-fund>.

**Right now, Universal Credit or new style Employment and Support Allowance can be more easily claimed.** (You will now be able to claim online and access advance payments upfront without needing to attend a Jobcentre Plus). For more information on how to claim, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit> and <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-style-employment-and-support-allowance>.

**If you think you may need financial support from your local council, please read the following information:**

**The 'Scottish Welfare Fund' has received additional funding to provide crisis grants for those in financial emergency.** Details on how to apply via your local authority can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund/apply-or-track-your-application/>.

**The council tax reduction scheme has received additional funding.** To find out if you are eligible please visit <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/benefits/help-if-on-a-low-income/help-with-your-council-tax-council-tax-reduction-s/>.

**Details on how to apply for a council tax reduction via your local authority can be found at** <https://www.mygov.scot/council-tax/discounts-exemptions-and-reductions/>.

**The Scottish Government have indicated their intention to establish a £70 million 'Food Fund' to support households who may be worried about accessing food whether due to an income drop or self-isolation, including older people.** Local councils are free to deploy this funding as they see fit, so questions about how to access funding are best directed to them in the first instance. You can find their contact details at <https://www.mygov.scot/find-your-local-council/>.

**If you are experiencing financial difficulties meeting your mortgage**

**repayments, please read the following information:**

A fund has been launched to provide interest-free loans to landlords for lost rental income on a single property. You can apply at <https://covidlandlordloan.est.org.uk/>

**If you are a student experiencing financial difficulties, please read the following information:** A £5 million package of emergency financial support has been put in place to help students facing hardship. Students should apply directly to their institutions. Further information for students is available at <https://www.studentinformation.gov.scot/coronavirus>

**If you are concerned about facing insolvency, please read the following information:**

The latest information is available from Accountant in Bankruptcy here: <https://www.aib.gov.uk/aib-covid-19-business-continuity>.

**If you think you may be a 'key worker', please read the following information:**

Further guidance for key workers is available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus---school-and-elc-closures-guidance-on-critical-childcare-provision-for-key-workers/>. Questions are best directed to your local council in the first instance. You can find their contact details here: <https://www.mygov.scot/find-your-local-council/>.

**If you are considering letting staff go, please read the government advice and further information at** <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>.

**Your business may be eligible for rates relief and grants:**

Information on how to apply is available at: <https://www.mygov.scot/non-domestic-rates-coronavirus/>.

**If you own a small or medium-sized business that is facing cash flow issues,** you can now apply for a UK Government Bounce Back loan of between £2,000 and £50,000. Small businesses can now apply online through a simple form at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-coronavirus-bounce-back-loan>

***If you have any questions or require any specific information on any government scheme related to Covid-19 or the lockdown please contact me at [elizabeth.smith.msp@parliament.scot](mailto:elizabeth.smith.msp@parliament.scot) and either myself or my staff will in contact.***

**Find Out More About Me Here**

