



Ein cyf/Our ref KS/01773/20

Elinor Weekley
Director
Royal Society of Architects in Wales

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4 May 2020

Dear Elinor,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 20 April to the First Minister regarding the concerns Royal Society of Architects in Wales (RSAW) members have raised with the impact of COVID-19. This has been passed to me to respond as the majority of the concerns you have raised fall under my portfolio responsibilities.

I recognise the incredibly difficult and uncertain circumstances currently being experienced by businesses and individuals at this challenging time and the Welsh Government are absolutely committed to providing the support and assurance you need.

With regards to extending non-domestic rates relief, the Welsh Government recognises that not all businesses will benefit from the rates relief and grant support being provided however the package has been designed to be affordable within the available funding.

To ensure clarity and consistency in administering the schemes, there are no plans to amend the eligibility criteria. However, the Welsh Government has established a further package of support to help businesses which are not eligible for the rates relief or rates-related business grants which include a £500 million support package to be delivered through our new Economic Resilience Fund.

We recently paused our new Economic Resilience Fund to examine how we use the remaining funding to maximise the benefits for those firms who need it and to protect our economy, further details on a second phase will be announced soon.

Please refer your members to our Business Wales website for the most up to date information on current and emerging support from UK and Welsh Government.

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice>.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

In terms of the Innovative Housing Programme (IHP), the new programme was due to launch on the 24 April, however, the programme has been paused and delayed for at least the first three months. A new launch date will be dictated by the public health advice from the Chief Medical Officer and Public Health Wales. Officials are currently considering how a condensed timetable will look this year based on a number of scenarios, launching at various times of the year and what flexibility can be offered regarding the grant conditions at year end. The IHP will have a strong part to play in building economic recovery in Wales after the pandemic.

With regards to existing IHP schemes and construction sites in general in Wales, all workplaces have a role in stopping the spread of coronavirus and we have urged employers to prioritise the health and wellbeing of their employees during this challenging period. Construction sites which do remain open must adopt strict measures to protect their workforce and employers should follow the guidelines including, where possible, maintaining a 2 metre distance from others and regularly washing their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or using hand sanitiser gel if soap and water is not available). It also includes what to do if someone develops symptoms of Coronavirus on site:
<https://gov.wales/guidance-employers-and-businesses-covid-19>

We have also updated the law to put a new duty on all workplaces to follow the 2m rule. The rule is about taking reasonable steps to ensure 2m separation between people and we are asking all workplaces to take a proportionate approach to observing social distancing. Taking these steps will allow many types of workplace to carry on through the period of social distancing. Please refer to the guidance for the full details:

<https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace#section-40099>.

<https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace-supplementary-guidance>

You will appreciate that the response to the crisis is evolving rapidly and we are taking regular advice from Public Health Wales and I would urge you and your members to refer Welsh Government Coronavirus website pages for further regular updates as the situation develops - <https://gov.wales/business-and-employers-coronavirus>.

Yours sincerely



Ken Skates AC/AM

Gweinidog yr Economi, Trafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru
Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales