**Message from the President of BLS**

Following the Prime Minister’s announcement on Saturday in relation to a national lockdown, we thought it would be important to provide you with an update on the latest developments and what they mean for local businesses and clients.

We appreciate that it is a worrying time for the legal sector, universities and the staff within them. As usual, we will continue to keep you updated throughout this period of lockdown and would direct you to our COVID-19 page on the website.

* From the 5th November until at least the 2nd December strict new COVID-19 regulations will be in place:
* Non-essential shops, leisure and entertainment venues will be closed. Click and collect services can continue and essential shops, including supermarkets, will remain open.
* Pubs, bars, restaurants must close, except for takeaway and delivery services.
* People should work from home wherever possible. Workplaces should stay open where people cannot work from home – for example, in the construction or manufacturing sectors.
* Everyone must stay at home, and may leave only for a limited set of reasons. These include for work, if you cannot work from home.
* Schools, colleges and universities will remain open. In addition, Courts will remain open.

**Government Support**
All businesses will be able to continue to access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) which has been extended for 1 month (click [[**here**](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/LF2mC2723sp0Am1ILV16C?domain=greaterbirminghamchambers.us12.list-manage.com)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/furlough-scheme-extended-and-further-economic-support-announced) for more details). Businesses required to close will be able to access “tier 3” grants of between £1,300 and £3,000 a month (further details expected soon).

The Prime Minister will provide Parliament with more details today, and MPs are set to vote on the measures on Wednesday.

However, we need to receive clarity from the government on whether the legal sector continues to fit into the category of essential workers because there is concern about access to legal services. For example, businesses may be able to renegotiate on rent, leases and supplier contracts, but they will need sound legal advice. There is a wealth of local knowledge and experience within our members’ lawyers who can help you navigate how to keep your business afloat – whatever the size of business.

You may recall that during the first lockdown in March, lawyers were included in the list of essential workers. A number of law firms and chambers have successfully put measures in place in order to ensure that their premises are COVID safe environments. First and foremost we need to make sure that staff are safe and that we continue to provide a good service to our clients.

The need for clear guidance is even more important due to the laws now in place, including fines for non-compliance. Fines of £200 could be handed out for a first offence, while hosting – or being involved – in a gathering of over 30 people could see a fine up to £10,000. Already, the West Midlands Police has handed out over 400 fines related to Covid-19.

The legal framework now in place to deal with the COVID-19 situation amounts to much more than a ‘slap on the wrist’. The fines that can be levied are significant and are meant to act as a deterrent, but it is vital that this is communicated in advance to the public.

Birmingham Law Society can provide access to a large pool of lawyers for anyone impacted by the new restrictions, including a list of free and trusted local advice agencies. People can also call Birmingham Law Society on 0121 227 8700 for support.

For more information please visit <https://birminghamlawsociety.co.uk/>

Yours sincerely



Inez Brown

President of Birmingham law Society