

Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy
and Industrial Strategy
Department for Business, Energy &
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1 Victoria Street
London

**Councillor Leigh Rawlins
Cabinet Member for Finance**

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Dear Mr Sharma

Subject: Covid 19 business rate relief and grants for events companies

I am the Cabinet member for Finance for South Oxfordshire District Council and would like to thank you for helping the businesses in my district during the current pandemic. We have managed to make business grant awards in excess of £25 million to over 2,000 businesses and I know that this help has been much appreciated.

However, there is one business sector which we have not been able to help as much as we would like and this is causing a number of companies in my district a great deal of hardship.

Both our local MP John Howell and our own officers have raised the predicament facing our events companies with BEIS at different times. Unfortunately, we have not received any clarity on the matter and now time is running out.

On 17th March during the economic update in the House of Commons, Greg Smith MP (Buckingham) asked:

“ I warmly welcome the enormous package of measures outlined by the Chancellor. This morning, I spoke to Energy Generator Hire in Kimble Wick in my constituency, which has lost most of its order book and is uncertain about the future. Can he confirm whether event hire companies are included in the envelope of leisure and hospitality?”

Chancellor Rishi Sunak MP replied:

“Those that have business properties will be eligible both for the relief and the grant, which will cover a significant number of events companies that have premises. Obviously, if they do not have premises, they will not qualify for business rates relief, but should be eligible for some of the other measures that I have outlined today.”

As of today there has been no revised guidance on this particular issue and the only extension to the retail, hospitality and leisure provisions was to bring bingo halls, estate agents and letting agencies into the mix for extended business rate relief and associated grants.

The main sticking point is that most events companies are not wholly or mainly used for the sale of goods to visiting members of the public which means we cannot apply the rates freeze or award a grant.

We know of other authorities who have made awards regardless, but my council is mindful that we need to apply the rules in accordance with the guidelines, otherwise we could be penalised and indeed, Government correspondence indicates the potential for recovery action in cases paid in error.

I appreciate this business group can be considered for discretionary grants, but this does nothing to help with the rate liability.

Your urgent clarification, by 25 August, would be very welcome. This would finally allow my council to apply rate relief and pay business grants to these deserving companies by the 28 August deadline.

Yours sincerely

By email

Councillor Leigh Rawlins
Cabinet Member for Finance

CC

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