

# Extension to furlough welcomed – but should go further

Following the Chancellor's [announcement this morning](#) that the UK Government furlough scheme will be extended until March, politicians have reacted in a variety of ways.

Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, said: “The furlough scheme was designed and delivered by the Government of the United Kingdom on behalf of all the people of the United Kingdom – wherever they live. It is a demonstration of the strength of the Union – and an undeniable truth of this crisis – we have only been able to provide this level of economic support because we are a United Kingdom.”

SNP Shadow Chancellor, Alison Thewliss MP, said Rishi Sunak had been forced into a ‘shambolic last-minute U-turn’ after six months of pressure from the SNP and devolved governments – and said it was ‘a democratic disgrace’ that Westminster was only willing to act when England faced lockdown and not when Scotland needed support.

Ms Thewliss said the Conservative government had ‘hindered Scotland’s ability to respond to the crisis by withholding funds and blocking the devolution of financial powers’ – and said the only way to properly protect Scotland’s interests is to become an independent country. Ms Thewliss said: “This

long-overdue Tory U-turn is welcome but it comes after six months of sustained pressure from the SNP and devolved governments, who have consistently called for a full furlough extension but were repeatedly told 'no' by Westminster.

"The Chancellor has been forced into this shambolic last-minute U-turn after months of Tory cuts, delays and uncertainty. For many it is far too late. Thousands have already lost their jobs, many good businesses have gone under, and millions have been excluded completely. The UK faces a Tory unemployment crisis – and the blame lies squarely with Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak.

"It is a democratic disgrace that Westminster was only willing to act when England faced lockdown and not when Scotland needed support – proving yet again that Scotland will never be an equal partner in the UK. By withholding funding and blocking the devolution of financial powers, the Tory government has hindered Scotland's ability to respond to this crisis.

"We await the full details of this announcement, to ensure Scotland will receive full 80 per cent furlough and self-employed support, on current eligibility, with the gaps in the system filled, whenever it is required by the Scottish Government in future. That it will apply equally at 80 per cent to people in all tiers of restrictions, and that Scotland will get its full share of Barnett consequential support for businesses and local government in England.

"Scotland shouldn't have to wait for Westminster to act. Other countries have used the powers at their disposal while Tory cuts and delays have caused unemployment to soar. It is clearer than ever that the only way to properly protect Scotland's interests is to become an independent country."

# **Liberal Democrats want furlough extended even further**

Liberal Democrat Treasury Spokesperson Christine Jardine immediately asked for a further extension.

Ms Jardine said: "This is yet another example of the Government's incompetence and indecision delaying the action the country needs.

"It was clear to everyone that the furlough scheme needed to be extended to stop people falling into poverty, however until now the Chancellor stubbornly and cold-heartedly refused.

"Rather than extending the furlough scheme to June 2021 as the Liberal Democrats called for, the Chancellor has made piecemeal changes before finally making the necessary U-turn today. Although this change is welcome, the delay will have cost businesses and individuals an untold amount as they were left in uncertainty at the hands of this Government.

"The Liberal Democrats are clear the furlough scheme must remain in place until June 2021 if Ministers are to support all those in need. The Chancellor must put this in place immediately as, so far, his knee-jerk reactions have left far too many wondering how they will put food on the table, rather than ensuring no-one is left behind as he promised."

## **The Scottish Conservatives have claimed credit for the increased funding – which they say amounts to £1 billion in Scotland – announced**

## **by the Chancellor.**

Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross said the Chancellor has gone 'above and beyond' with the extension of the scheme. Mr Ross asked the Prime Minister on Monday to confirm payments would be available in any future lockdown to all parts of the UK. Mr Ross said: "Scottish Conservative pressure has delivered. All week, we've made the case that Scottish jobs had to be protected at all costs.

"We've worked constructively with the UK Government and pushed them for answers where necessary.

"Rishi Sunak has now gone above and beyond. He has blown the SNP's grievances out of the water with an extra billion pounds for Scotland, and shown again that the UK Government will do whatever it takes to support jobs throughout this pandemic.

"This massive financial backing to protect Scottish jobs is only possible as part of the United Kingdom."