

Support for Businesses Affected by COVID-19

On 17 March 2020, St Helena Government (SHG) announced measures to prevent COVID-19 from reaching the Island as well as limit the spread of the virus if it was to be confirmed here. On 30 March, enhanced social distancing measures were announced to minimise the risk of Coronavirus to the Island. While these measures are an important step towards protecting public health, they will also have an impact on the local economy.

Recognising this, SHG has approved the following support mechanisms to reduce the burden on local businesses. As this is an evolving situation, SHG will continue to evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 response measures and consider additional support where warranted. The support described below will be reassessed when the COVID-19 measures are lifted or no later than June 2020 if those measures remain in place. A review will be undertaken if there is a confirmed case of the virus on-Island.

Extended Sick Leave Support

All individuals returning to St Helena from overseas on or after 14 March are now required to self-isolate for a period of 14 days. Since this time, additional individuals have been required to self-isolate.

On 24 March it was announced that all new arrivals to St Helena will be subject to compulsory quarantine for 14 days.. Further, as of 30 March, SHG is closing schools for 14 days, advising crèches to close for the same period and recommending that individuals who are vulnerable due to age or an underlying health condition take measures to avoid extended social contact.

Any company with an employee who is required by SHG to self-isolate is eligible for a one-time payment of £325 per full-time employee, provided the period of self-isolation is not counted against the employee's sick leave and the employee is compensated at their usual rate for the period of self-isolation. Sole proprietors (i.e. self-employed persons with no employees) may also be eligible for a one-time payment of £325 if they can demonstrate they are unable to work as a result of SHG-imposed self-isolation requirement.

Any company with an employee who is advised to limit social contact or stay at home due to vulnerability is also eligible for a one-time payment of £325 per full-time employee, subject to the same conditions above. Vulnerable people are defined as individuals over 70 years of age, pregnant women, people whose immune systems are compromised, and those who have an underlying medical condition (i.e. heart disease, uncontrolled diabetes especially with other chronic conditions, uncontrolled asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and people receiving chemotherapy). Sole proprietors who meet these conditions will be eligible for a one-time payment of £325 if they can demonstrate that they are unable to work as a result.

Businesses or employers with employees who voluntarily stay at home and are not considered part of a vulnerable population will not be eligible for the support payment.

To apply for Extended Sick Leave Support

Applications should be made in the attached form and should be sent to Alan Bennett via email: alan.bennett@sainthelena.gov.sh. The following information will be required in order to process the application:

- Name of the business
- Name of registered owner
- Tax registration number
- Name and address of each employee you are claiming for
- Reason for claim (e.g., mandatory self-isolation, vulnerability, etc.)
- Confirmation of business account number into which the funds should be transferred.

SHG may require further information in order to process the request. The application will be processed and payment made within five business days following approval of the award to your business bank account.

Hardship Support for Highly Impacted Sectors

Beginning 21 March, only individuals who already have the right to live and work on St Helena will be allowed to enter the Island, impacting tourism-related businesses. Effective from 18 March, eligible privately-owned businesses can apply for monthly Hardship Support of £500 for the first owner/director living on St Helena, £325 for the second owner/director and £325 per additional full-time employee. After an application is made and approved, the business will receive payment for the month of application and each following month in which support is available. It is assumed that an individual can only be a full-time owner/director or employee of one business.

Hardship Support is available to owners of companies and sole proprietorships for whom more than half of their annual income is earned in the following sectors:

- Tourist accommodation providers
- Tour operators, including both land- and marine-based
- Eateries
- Bars and clubs
- Other tourism-related businesses

To apply for Hardship Support

Applications should be made in the attached form and should be sent to Alan Bennett via email: alan.bennett@sainthelena.gov.sh. The following information will be required in order to process the application.

- Name of the business
- Name of registered owner
- Tax registration number
- Name and address of each employee you are claiming for
- Declaration that more than 50% of the owner/director's income is derived from the profit of a business in an eligible sector

- Confirmation of business account number into which the funds should be transferred.

The application will be processed and payment made within five business days following approval of the award to your business bank account.

Business Closure Support

From 30 March 2020, SHG is advising crèches to close for a period of 14 days. Any business that SHG advises to close will be eligible for a one-time payment per owner or full-time employee of £162.50 per week for the duration of the advised closure.

Businesses or employers that voluntarily close without an order or advice from SHG will not be eligible for this payment. Eligible businesses that choose not to close will also not receive this payment.

To apply for Business Closure Support

Applications should be made in the attached form and should be sent to Alan Bennett via email: alan.bennett@sainthelena.gov.sh. The following information will be required in order to process the application:

- Name of the business
- Name of registered owner
- Tax registration number
- Name and address of each employee you are claiming for
- Confirmation of business account number into which the funds should be transferred.

SHG may require further information in order to process the request. The application will be processed and payment made within five business days following approval of the award to your business bank account.

Support from Bank of St Helena

In addition to these proposals by SHG, the Bank of St Helena has announced a series of actions to support customers. Effective 23 March, the Bank will institute a three-month freeze on loan capital and interest repayments for business loans. This assistance is targeted to businesses in the tourism sector (e.g. accommodation, bars, restaurants, eateries, tour operators, etc.). However, consideration will be given to requests by other businesses that can demonstrate that they are adversely affected by COVID-19 related measures.

In addition, the Bank of St Helena will be encouraging more people to take up online banking and local debit cards, which will eliminate the need for queuing for cash and the payment of bills. The Bank is offering free online banking for all personal banking customers for three months to allow them full access to the online banking services.

The Bank will review implementation of these actions after three months.

SHG

1 April 2020