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To:

Local Authority Chief Executives

26 March 2020

Dear Chief Executive

As you will be aware, the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and business is a fast moving situation. Coronavirus is affecting all our daily lives, including our workplaces. We recognise the very challenging position that many employers and workers are now facing. We need a partnership, working in the national interest, to get through the next few months - a partnership that involves the public sector, unions, businesses, 3rd sector organisations, and all workers and managers – supported by the advice of the Fair Work Convention. We are hugely appreciative of the many cases where this is already in place.

The Scottish Government is doing what it can. On 18 March, my colleague, Aileen Campbell announced £350 million of support for local government, including a £50 million hardship fund which local authorities can use as they see fit. That day, I also outlined support for businesses, including a package of measures worth £2.2 billion from 1 April. Additionally, all of the consequential from the welcome support already announced by the Chancellor will also be passed onto Scottish businesses to help them and workers through this challenging period.

I and my fellow ministers are determined that the Scottish Government and our public sector partners will set an example, and we are encouraging all other employers to do the same.

On 25 March, the STUC General Secretary Grahame Smith and I issued a joint statement outlining the shared commitment to fair work practices in Scotland, calling on employers, trades unions and workers to work together to ensure workers are treated fairly. The statement is available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-fair-work-statement/>. I urge you to reflect on this and act accordingly.

Our top priority must be protecting people's safety, health and wellbeing and in these exceptional times, adopting a Fair Work approach is more important than ever.

Partnership with workers and unions in managing the Coronavirus is crucial to making the right decisions for protecting workers and public safety, and for helping to maintain effective public

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services and keep people in employment. Scotland's success as an economy is built on a partnership between workers and employers and this approach will help us get through the current economic crisis.

The health of the public and workers must come first. Health protection advice is updated regularly including on working from home where possible. It is there for a reason - to help save lives - please do follow it.

I am proud of Scotland's reputation as a leader on Fair Work and remain committed to Scotland becoming a Fair Work nation. The Scottish Government will continue to lead the way in promoting best practice in fair work and in dealing fairly with businesses. As an employer, we have concluded an agreement with the Scottish Government civil service unions on how we will work together during the coronavirus crisis and this sets our expectations for the approach to be taken across the public sector and beyond throughout Scotland. We will continue working closely with the STUC and COSLA to help management of the crisis and share information.

I am sorry if we have not been able to involve everyone in the responses we have been developing this week. However please be reassured that we are working hard to be as inclusive as possible in this fast-paced and changing situation to ensure local government has the latest facts as they arise and can inform our thinking going forward. Please also be assured we greatly value the partnership working we have with COSLA and yourselves, and commend the rapid responsive effort being made at this challenging time.

As the public sector in Scotland we need to consider every lever at our disposal to relieve the pressure faced by our organisations. I am restating our commitment to our Fair Work First policy as a way to encourage fair working practices at this crucial time.

The national endeavour to get us through this health crisis will require an unprecedented economic response shared collectively, deliberately and with purpose - by government and our public sector partners, business and the public.

Thank you for your help in this matter.

Kind regards
Fiona Hyslop

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