

Commenting on the Scottish Government's announcement of an initial package of support to help businesses being affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, Dr Liz Cameron, Chief Executive of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce said:

"As we have seen the number of cases of Covid-19 rise in Scotland, we have heard calls from increasing numbers of businesses across the country for measures that will support them through these challenging times. Issues over cancelled bookings and orders, cashflow as well as disruption to supply chains and workforces are having severe impacts for businesses right across Scotland.

"Today, the Scottish Government have outlined an initial number of measures that will be welcomed by businesses - particularly in the most affected sectors such as retail, hospitality and tourism - following on from the measures introduced in the UK Budget earlier this week.

"The Support Grant for small businesses across Scotland is a positive intervention. The Scottish Government has allocated £80 million to provide grants of a minimum of £3,000 or more for businesses in sectors most affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. Our Chamber Network stands ready to work with the Government to ensure that the grant is as accessible as possible to all that need it. This is a useful tool that might need further expansion if the situation worsens.

"We welcome the extension of business rates reliefs on properties in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors with rateable values of up to £69,000 – who will receive 75% worth of reliefs. This will be of particular benefit, as this enables significantly more firms in the most affected sectors to receive much needed rates relief. In light of the massive impact that COVID-19 is having upon these sectors, we would call upon the Scottish Government to consider reviewing how the business rates system can provide further support for firms in these sectors.

"Whilst these sectors are experiencing major reductions in bookings and orders, other sectors are also experiencing similar issues and there needs to be further consideration for support measures that can be tailored to the differing challenges and needs of all sectors and industries that provide jobs and growth in our economy.

"This is a positive initial response by the Scottish Government, but the situation needs to be reviewed on a daily basis to identify what additional support is required, particularly around how business can retain employees and the cost of businesses changing their operating models, for example to flexible working practises.

"We stand ready to work with our Chamber Network, our members and the Scottish & UK Governments to discuss and evaluate what further support will be required as the virus continues to develop and causes more economic pain for our businesses."