

**Responding to the First Minister's statement to the Scottish Parliament on COVID-19, Dr Liz Cameron, Chief Executive of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce said:**

“There will be a level of disappointment amongst Scotland's business community following the First Minister's COVID-19 update. Scotland's businesses will continue to do everything they can to keep their employees and customers safe. To help protect businesses and individuals over the winter, it's more important than ever that we collectively work together to drive down transmission, take the vaccine or the vaccine booster when invited and if you don't have symptoms take regular lateral flow tests – especially before mixing with other people.

“The £100million of targeted support being made available for the hospitality, wholesale and supply chain sectors which businesses called for, whilst welcome, will not go anywhere near far enough to cover the financial losses being incurred.

“What Scotland's businesses need now is an extension of at least the 50% COVID-19 rates relief, beyond the three months set out in the Scottish budget and guaranteed for the next financial year, in full. With these additional restrictions now in place, extended rates relief will be critical to giving thousands of Scottish businesses a shot at survival.

“The UK Government must also step in quickly with further details of what funding provision will be made available for devolved administrations to support businesses, given the tough economic challenges.”

**On changes to the return to office guidance:**

“It's important that employees have options available to them on where they want to work. Office return plans have improved employee health and wellbeing, whilst also boosting morale.

“Scotland's town and city centre economies also rely on a return of office worker footfall and increased home working will undermine the recovery of the high street.

“Businesses need a clear end date for the enhanced home working requirements set out for the New Year to allow them to properly plan ahead. Businesses, in consultation with their employees, are best placed to take decisions on office return and hybrid working plans and it's important that Government enable this again at the earliest opportunity.”

**On social distancing:**

“Small and medium sized businesses will be concerned about the impact that a return of social distancing guidelines will have on their operating capacity and the retail sector must also be granted access to financial support to mitigate the impact of these changes.

“Increased requirements will reduce capacity for many businesses just as they enter the crucial festive trading period and these limits, combined with the household mixing guidance, will create additional challenges at a critical point for business recovery.”

**ENDS**