

Helping London's Adventure Playgrounds as they rise to the challenge of COVID 19



London's adventure playgrounds are clearly rising to the challenge presented by the coronavirus pandemic, with most are actively continuing to support vulnerable children and families in their communities. Haringey's Somerford Grove, pictured above, is one of several adventure playgrounds to have become a hub for food distribution for people in need. Others are doing doorstep deliveries, and many have moved services online.

Our recent survey of London adventure playgrounds highlighted a need for more information and/or clarity over the status of current funding agreements, access to government support and emergency funds, staff furlough and more. In response, with our partners at A5cend, we have developed this briefing which we hope will help you navigate the choppy waters ahead. Note that the information contained here is correct at the time of writing; but please bear in mind that the situation is rapidly evolving and liable to change at short notice. This briefing includes the following sections:

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1. Operational things you can do NOW

It is important to be realistic, face the issues head on, and not ignore them. Don't panic and make hasty decisions before fully reviewing all options.

- Devise, and update daily, a business continuity plan that has a specific clause on a pandemic. Communicate with your team, users, funders and suppliers
- Review your balance sheet. Think about whether any decisions or commitments can be deferred, such as recruitment and pay rises. Can you exit any contracts that you have recently signed up to, or negotiate terms on existing ones?
- Look at your short-term cash outflows and identify any that you can put on hold. Speak to your suppliers – they should want to work with you to keep your business
- Review your cash inflows and speak to income sources to understand if payment is still likely to be on time. Make sure your expectations are realistic, not optimistic
- Identify any cash gap. Where do the outflows exceed the inflows? How will you manage that?
- Estimate how much of a disruption you are likely to experience during this time of uncertainty, identifying any heightened needs in your community.
- There will be opportunities for some playgrounds, but many will be facing staff shortages, losses in funding and you need to establish whether to continue delivering services remotely (to satisfy funders/commissioners/vulnerable users) work out how to pay for these (existing funding, furlough staff, new crisis funding) and how to do this safely.
- Prepare cash flow projections and to be able to present these to those providing you income as and when needed.

2. Financial help for organisations

There are several options open to playgrounds depending on your mix of funding. This advice is based on the assumption that you are **closing your usual operations** as a result of social distancing measures. Here we cover three options – government support, furloughing staff, and fundraising.

A. GOVERNMENT SUPPORT IN GRANTS AND LOANS

The government has announced a range of support for businesses, followed up in recent days with support for charities, specifically those providing vital support for people and communities that are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

Business measures are outlined here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

Support for charities is outlined here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-sets-out-extra-750-million-coronavirus-funding-for-frontline-charities>

Grants

The government has just announced a £750m package of support for charities.

£360m in direct cash grants will be allocated directly to identified priority recipients by government departments, with the aim for charities to receive money in the coming weeks

£370m has been allocated to support those organisations at the heart of local communities which are making a big difference during the outbreak, who will be invited to apply for grants via the National Lottery Community Fund grant pot is expected to be operational within a similar period of time.

There is additionally a business grants fund but this is only available to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. See this link for guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Loans

You may be able to apply for a loan to cover business interruption through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme

Apply through an approved bank lender: <https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/coronavirus-business-interruption-loan-scheme-cbils/accredited-lenders/>

More information is here: <https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/coronavirus-business-interruption-loan-scheme-cbils/for-businesses-and-advisors/>

Eligibility checklist here: **Your business must generate more than 50% of it's turnover from trading activity:** <https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CBILS-SME-Eligibility-Check-FINAL.pdf>

This loan facility is available for 12 months interest free and is useful for cash flow. There is still little information about the specific requirements from each lender and the information you need to submit – likely cash projections to show the loan is repayable.

VAT deferment

If you're a UK VAT registered business and have a VAT payment due between 20 March 2020 and 30 June 2020, you have the option of deferring your payment until the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

You will still need to submit your VAT returns to HMRC on time, but it is automatic and doesn't require any contact with HMRC.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/deferral-of-vat-payments-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

Business rates holidays/rebates

Businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors in England will not have to pay business rates for the 2020 to 2021 tax year. Nurseries that are on Ofsted's Early Years Register or provide care and education for children up to 5 years old are also eligible for this rates holiday and will be contacted by their local council.

Most adventure playground organisations should already pay very little in the way of business rates. But there does appear to be support for businesses that **pay little or no business rates**. Small Business Grant Scheme funding through local authorities and can be up to £10,000 to meet ongoing costs. You need to occupy property and contact your local authority about this – although they are supposed to be getting in touch with those that are eligible.

Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme

The Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme will repay employers the current rate of SSP that they pay to current or former employees for periods of sickness starting on or after 13 March 2020 and covering up to 2 weeks.

This will start from the first day of sickness, if an employee is unable to work because they either have coronavirus OR cannot work because they are self-isolating at home. You can still choose to pay staff at full sick pay if you wish. Keep a record and await instructions from HMRC on how to claim this.

HMRC time to pay scheme

For any outstanding tax payments from business to HMRC (eg VAT/PAYE) an interest free payment plan. 0800 0159 559

B. FURLOUGHING STAFF USING THE CORONAVIRUS JOBS RETENTION SCHEME

This support scheme will provide a grant to employers (including third sector organisations) to keep workers rather than make them redundant. Salaries will be paid at 80% of their current level up to a maximum of £2,500 and the scheme is open to permanent AND sessional/zero hours contract staff.

These grants will be available to apply for by the end of April and you can apply for grants and loans in the meantime to help manage cash flow. However, you must officially make staff 'furloughed' so they can no longer work for you during the furlough period. This will affect their contracts. See also a proforma draft letter for furloughing staff. You must inform them and HMRC when you submit payroll that they have been furloughed.

For permanent staff it looks like the furlough amount will be equal to 80 per cent of their Feb 20 wage slip amount. For sessional staff it will either relate to their May 19 payslip or an average of their last year's earnings.

You have to pay staff then claim this back as a grant from HMRC in late April via an online portal which is yet to become available.

www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme

Furloughing and public sector/grant funding

If the funding for an organisation comes from a number of sources a judgement needs to be made on what that funding is for. If public sector funding explicitly covers staffing costs, then the money still exists to pay for staff and there is no need to furlough. If it does not cover staffing costs the organisation can furlough. Responsibility for that decision lies with the Accounting Officer of the organisation who pays the public funds so that they are clear there is no duplication.

Some funders are **enabling you to furlough staff they pay for** if you then use their funds towards COVID emergency activities or to support your sustainability so it is worth checking in with them if you can move funding around in this way. The National Lottery Fund says:

The National Lottery Community Fund will allow grant holders to vary their grants which had been allocated to paying for staff who are eligible for the CJRS, in order to enable them to allocate funding to other essential activities in order to support communities and ensure continued liquidity.

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/about/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-and-the-national-lottery-community-funds-grant-holders>

But not all funders are of this opinion, so you need to check.

Furloughing and Volunteering

The government guidance on this is confusing. Many charities would like to retain furloughed staff to volunteer for the community during this time as the government says that furloughed staff CAN volunteer. But it is clear at the moment they cannot volunteer for their own organisation.

<https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/furloughed-workers-volunteer-not-own-organisations-government-says/volunteering/article/1678576>

<https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2020/04/07/volunteering-and-furloughing-what-do-we-know/>

NB Insurance: Double check if your insurance covers you for pandemics as you may be able to claim in some way against this towards losses depending on your policy.

C. FUNDRAISING

Don't forget about fundraising! You should first make sure you get in touch with your existing funders. Following this, apply for COVID emergency funds if you are eligible; and check which funders are still inviting proposals and continue applying for longer term funds.

Contact existing funders to change the way you use your funding

You may be concerned about how to meet funder targets etc. The sector is being responsive and supportive and understand you may not be able to deliver to pre-agreed targets.

A collective of funders (<http://covid19funders.org.uk>) has agreed the following measures:

- Adapt activities as far as possible (respecting social distancing measures)
- Get in touch about reporting deadlines
- Use funding in flexible ways to support you through this time
- Discuss any other help or support you may need.

Whether or not your funders are listed here, if you haven't already been in touch, contact them now with a plan for how you wish to delivery any activities remotely, or how you propose to move funding around (depending on your decisions around furloughing and other grant schemes available to you).

Contact existing funders to see if you can access extra funding

Some funders are prioritising existing grantees by giving them extra funds during this difficult time. These include the Paul Hamlyn Trust, Fore Foundation and Esmee Fairbairn but there are many others. If you don't ask you don't get! But have a plan in place about what you would like.

Apply for new COVID-19 Emergency funding to support new COVID-19 emergency activities

If you are starting up new activities, there are a number of funders opening up new programs of funding. This list is constantly changing but grants online seems to be fairly up to date.

<https://www.grantsonline.org.uk/coronavirus.html>

General Fundraising

Sadly, many funders are pausing existing programs to help support the COVID-19 situation.

If you have an application pending for assessment, contact the funder and send in a letter updating how you could still deliver the project under current circumstances. For example, you might extend the period of project set up – change some of the work to remote/online support for families or change the start date of the project.

If you are working on an application that is yet to be submitted contact the funder and check their website (many are posting COVID-update pages) to see if they are still accepting applications before spending more time on it. Also update your application to acknowledge the current situation and make any necessary edits in relation to service delivery etc.

Some of the funders that we are aware of that are currently **pausing existing funding** are:

Heritage Lottery Fund, Sport England, The National Lottery Community Fund, Arts Council England, BBC Children in Need, London Marathon Trust, St James Place Foundation, DM Thomas Foundation, Ernest Cook, Fore Trust.

Check their websites for when they are planning to re-open (dates range from May to Autumn at the moment).

Other funders are **continuing as normal**, such as Garfield Weston, Tudor Trust and many others.

3. Financial support for employees

The following link is very useful to send round your staff team and explains what is available.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-guidance-for-employees>

Also note that employees can ask for a 3-month mortgage holiday.

Tenants – the government has introduced legislation that means landlords cannot evict tenants for up to 3 months. However, you can ask your landlord to also give you a payment holiday (if they are themselves having a payment holiday via their mortgage lender).

Self-employed people – can claim a taxable grant worth 80% of your trading profits up to a maximum of £2,500 per month for the next 3 months although this may be extended. See more information here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme>

4. Links to further support

Anxiety UK – help with mental health

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

A new dedicated web page offers easy access to a range of information, resources and support for helping individuals to deal with anxiety and supporting families with mental health during the coronavirus pandemic.

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/coronanxiety-support-resources/>

Civil Society – home working

www.civilsociety.co.uk

There are many ways in which you can begin to set up home-working now. This is a good resource on some of the options available that could support this.

<https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/voices/how-to-work-remotely-in-a-time-of-coronavirus.html>

HMRC Guidance for the Charity Sector

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-charity-sector#support-to-pay-charity-staff>

NCVO – advice and guidelines for charities

www.ncvo.org.uk

NCVO has published some excellent advice and guidelines covering all manner of issues from sick pay to insurance as well as practical help and tips around home working. It is well worth a read and will be updated regularly so a good page to come back to as needed.

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/coronavirus>

Youth Work Support – youth work during the COVID 19 pandemic

www.youthworksupport.co.uk

This website brings together relevant advice, guidance, support and tools for youth workers, young people and organisations during the COVID 19 pandemic. There are some excellent practical support tools to help consider some of the issues being thrown up for the sector and could be further developed/transferred over to different settings.

Stay positive and focused and reach out for help – we are all in the same boat!

Thanks to Gurpreet Sidhu at A5cend for her help in preparing this briefing paper for London Play.