

Calling on the Government to **#RaiseTheBar**

Campaign Update #3

It has been some time since we gave you an update on the Raise The Bar campaign and I am delighted that so many of you have been enquiring as to the next steps. It demonstrates that, like us, you have the passion and commitment to see this through.

The #RaiseTheBar campaign continues on as we ask Government to increase the business rates threshold from £51,000 to £150,000 to allow retail, hospitality and leisure businesses across England and Wales a fighting chance of survival. The risk to businesses becomes more and more acute as many struggling with mounting debts, no income and lack of financial support at a time when they so desperately need it.

For many, the next milestone fast approaches with the rent quarter due on 24th June 2020 with many businesses unable to defer or negotiate their rents and therefore facing stark decisions as to how and if they can survive.

Much of our focus over the past three weeks has been on discussing the campaign with decision makers. As Government receives numerous asks alongside ours, the ability to push our envelope closer can seem tough at times and is unquestionably fraught with frustration.

We have, since our last update issued two letters to Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Alok Sharma MP addressing the need for the Government to Raise The Bar. We have had discussions with his department, with Labour front bench and many of you have received updates from your MPs.

We now need to re-engage and we need your help to do that.

The furlough scheme

The recent announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer offers unparalleled support for the workforce of our economy, staving off the threat of redundancies to the levels witnessed in America by continuing to cover a percentage of their wages until October 2020.

Undoubtedly it is a positive and welcome scheme. However, all of the good work can be undone if the balance between the employee market and the businesses which employ them is not restored.

By under representing the financial support available for small and medium sized businesses in these sectors through a low and under representative threshold of £51,000, the Government is in danger of pushing businesses to the brink of the abyss and in turn leaving businesses with no choice but to make serious decisions regarding their future operation which leading to redundancies and even closure. In which case, all of the positive work of the Job Retention Scheme would have been short-lived, leaving the country, long term in a far worse position.

Rent Quarter

As with many businesses the next rent quarter is fast approaching on 24th June 2020. Many have been unable to renegotiate rent deferrals or discounts and are now facing the worrying prospect of having to find the necessary funds to keep the business alive.

Yes, it is true, the Bounce Back Loans are a way to access finance. But let's be clear, it is a loan and not a grant. It still has to be paid back at some point and is a further financial burden businesses have been forced to take on simply because of a lack of grant support.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was quoted that a recession is inevitable even if it has not officially been confirmed.

The attention turns to the level of businesses that will leave our high streets for good and whether some of that could have been prevented with the right type of support. What is clear, Raising the Bar would address some of the need that is so desperately being sought out.

Reopening

A lot of the attention is obviously focused towards the reopening of towns and cities across England and Wales, the logistical arrangements required to deliver against social distancing and more so, as businesses start to consider reopening, how they might employ these new measures.

It is a massive challenge for any business and the viability of being able to open under social distancing measures has been called into question, especially in relation to the hospitality and leisure sectors. The question on everyone's lips is how much will it cost an average business to open up under these guidelines and is it viable without any additional financial support in place.

Politics...

We are a democracy and as such, we have a voice. A voice, in this case which is nationwide and loud and much of that is down to you!

The discussions we are having with politicians and with Government departments will intensify over the next few weeks as we aim to push the ask further into Government when the need becomes even more acute.

With new partners joining the campaign including the City of London Corporation, British Pub Confederation and more recently the National Hair and Beauty Federation, the Raise The Bar Campaign will continue to represent our businesses through the media and more privately, through our politicians.

Our supporter base continues to go from strength to strength as our online petition <https://bit.ly/2xJ61fB> exceeds over 14,000 signatures. Theoretically, the petition has now reached a point whereby the Government will need to respond formally. We will be pressing this matter further as we discuss with politicians from across the divide the need for action.

In the coming days, you will receive further updates from the team at Raise The Bar focusing on some of the three key challenges ahead for business as we see them.

As ever, we need you to do what you do best and mobilise your business community, engage your MPs and local politicians and present to your local media.

In 6 weeks, we have achieved a great deal together. Now it is time to articulate the argument further for change and the challenges businesses face.