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for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

Lord Gardiner of Kimble  
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29 June 2020

Dear Mr Casey,

Thank you for your letter of 6 April to the Secretary of State concerning financial support for veterinary businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area. I apologise for the delay in responding. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence due to COVID-19. Thank you for your understanding during this challenging time.

Shortly after writing, you are probably aware that on 9 April the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and British Veterinary Association (BVA) provided guidance which made it clear that veterinary practices may perform non-emergency services, according to resourcing, their own clinical judgement and subject to Government social distancing rules being followed. This advice will be kept under review and in line with Government announcements. The latest COVID-19 guidelines issued by the BVA for veterinary practices can be found here:

<https://www.bva.co.uk/media/3500/bva-updated-guidance-for-veterinary-practices-on-working-safely-during-covid-19-final-28-may-2020.pdf>

In your letter, you also asked about the Government furlough scheme being changed to offer more flexibility for veterinary practices. The Chancellor's statement of 29 May explains updates to the way the furlough scheme will operate, further details of which can be found below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-extends-self-employment-support-scheme-and-confirms-furlough-next-steps>

You also asked about changing the scheme for the self-employed as many vets did not benefit from Government financial support while providing only essential services. Those who are not eligible for the SEISS may still be eligible for other support. For example, the Bounce Back Loan Scheme will allow small businesses to benefit from a new fast-track finance scheme providing loans with a 100% government guarantee and can also access support via more generous universal and tax credit payments. However, since you wrote veterinary practices can offer a wider range of services, than just emergency/essential services.

Finally, I can confirm that there are no plans to extend Business Rate Relief support beyond the retail and hospitality sectors. However, as well as the Bounce back loan scheme veterinary practices should be able to access, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) or the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS), subject to eligibility criteria for each scheme.

Yours sincerely,  
John Gardiner