

Rishi Sunak's Omicron support package 'doesn't touch the sides'

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has been criticised for not doing enough to support businesses hit by the Omicron Covid variant.

The director of a South West chamber of commerce said the [financial package announced by Mr Sunak](#) wouldn't "touch the sides" for many businesses struggling in the wake of rising cases.

One-off grants of up to 6,000 are being made available per premises for businesses in the affected sectors in England. The Treasury expects that funding will be administered by local authorities and will be available in the coming weeks.

But Ian Mean, Business West director for Gloucestershire, has said the grants will not be enough to support embattled businesses.

"The [grants] will go nowhere when you consider the loss of bookings in many of our restaurants and pubs," he said.

"Time is of the essence here as it looks as though these new grants will be distributed by local councils – many of which will be off until January 5, potentially delaying the payments.

"We have previously seen a lag of many weeks before councils get the money from government so this must be speeded up this time to give some of our businesses the chance of survival."

The Government also intends to use taxpayers' cash to cover the cost of statutory sick pay for Covid-related absences for firms with fewer than 250 employees.

And the Treasury said cultural organisations in England could expect to access another £30m in funding during the winter via the culture recovery fund.



Ian Mean, Business West Gloucestershire director
(Image: Will Pascall UK)

Businesses across the UK have seen takings plummet as Christmas bookings are cancelled amid the new variant, and there remains much uncertainty about what will happen in the New Year.

Mr Mean said if more restrictions are announced after Christmas, the industries affected may need furlough help – and a business rates holiday.

“It’s obviously great news that there will be no new Covid restrictions imposed by the government before Christmas, but if as suggested, they will come in straight afterwards many of

our hospitality businesses will be in deep trouble,” he added.

There were 4,421 confirmed Omicron cases in the South West on Tuesday (December 21) – up 1,075 from the last reported data.

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