

Covid-19: Business Funds With Michael Weedon

Cast List

Steven Bruce

SB

Michael Weedon

MW

SB: And you are now with us in the studio for a special one off lunchtime broadcast, hopefully designed to help you cope with the potential threat that coronavirus poses to your business. I'm joined by Michael Weedon who is the regional policy advisor for the Federation of Small Businesses. He's also spent 30 years as a deputy chief executive of the British Independent Retailers Association and he is a small business owner himself. Michael, we're not going to shake hands because that's not done these days but it's great to have you here. I'm delighted you could come in at such short notice to help reassure the osteopaths and chiropractors who are suffering the same fears and worries that every other small business owner is. I suppose we ought to set their expectations first didn't we? We don't have any great solutions for the financial problems that may be faced by so many people.

MW: Oh, how I wish we did. Because of the uncertainty around what is happening and what's going to happen, nobody has all of the answers at the moment and I think the government themselves are developing their plans as they go along as things change. As governments around the world are doing.

SB: Indeed.

MW: What we can do is give what little sound pointers that we can find which are of use to small businesses. We represent businesses across the economy and there are 5.8 million small businesses. It's more than 99% of all businesses are small businesses. 4.8 million of those are self employed people so they're really very significant and they are in a extremely difficult position with this because we're aware, I'm aware, I have a small business it's actually limited and it employs me. But if no money is coming in the front end of the business, I still have money going out the back end of the business. We have questions which doubtless will come to about things like insurance, support from the government, support in terms of what banks can do and so forth. And a basic flow of information about how do I deal with customers? How do I deal with clients? Should I deal with clients?

SB: And some of-

MW: Before you known though, the real issue which I think we're going to need to come back to at the end of this is the big unknown is how long it's going to go on because that will determine how important some of these things are. My apologies carry on.

SB: No, no mine for interrupting. You were saying before we went on air, you were talking about a lot of statistics about the importance of small businesses in the British economy, which of course emphasizes that small businesses like osteopaths and chiropractors they are important to government. So therefore government is presumably very concerned to keep those businesses functioning as best it can. What came over the budget last week? Anything of interest or of use to us do you think?

MW: Anything yes, not absolutely everything that we were hoping for and I strongly suspect we will be revisiting this with government. Small businesses are quite easy for the government to not understand properly. They know they're there, they're a bit like the dark matter or possibly the dark energy in the universe. They kind of can infer that it's there but not being able to see it as such. The only way the government's really clear on where self employed particularly stand within the economy is when they look at HMRC figures for an employment and tax and so forth.

We did see some moves and very briefly we saw that it became easier for people to claim employment and support allowance. Now this is something probably most people have never heard of. It's only available to the self employed at the point of which they are self isolating or sick. So effectively sick. So this is not something that a

business can draw on because for example, your clients have cancelled and you have no money coming in.

SB: What if the government tells you have to close your business and you mustn't have clients coming in?

MW: Then you would have to apply as way understand it for the employment and support allowance, The ESA and I think it's quite useful. If you search on the gov UK site for ESA and specifically for employment and support allowance you can find out how to do that. It's a complex process, it's a lengthy process but that's actually of course important for businesses where the person running the business, the same thing is already in a position where they're possibly or probably themselves ill and having to deal with that. So that's actually going to be a minority at the moment.

Not to underplay the significance of this because we know the potential disruption it can afford. But if you actually look at the numbers in the population who are currently have been actually identified as cases where they have the particular virus, it's just under one in 48,000 people. So it's still a large number and it's very worrying and growing fast, but actually when you look around yourselves, I live in a town where the population of 24,000. On average, I wouldn't expect to see one case in that town of that size or another one added onto it.

SB: So one of the problems we have with that is and my audience being almost entirely medical will immediately raise this, actually the numbers you quoted are dependent on us identifying the people who've got the virus and we aren't testing so we don't know. So there must be more people than 48,000 who has the virus-

MW: There must be, they can't be less than and if we're certain Yes, that's right.

SB: So given that we've got this unknown extent of the virus in the country at the moment, what we do know is the number of people dying, that doesn't help us either. But I do know that we have members of the Academy of Physical Medicine who are self isolating. What's the extent of the ESA, the employment support allowance that they could expect? How much could they get?

MW: In terms of money provide you meet the conditions it's 73.10 pounds a week or if you're self employed and under 25, it's 57.90 pounds a week.

SB: So it's about the cost of one and a half appointments in your clinic which is not going to pay the rent as it?

MW: It's not intended to pay the rent, but it does get us onto I think a wider issue, which is that we're seeing in lots of different types of business clients particularly cancelling. We're seeing it obviously in a large scale with airlines and travel companies, but I was driving down here today listening to you and yours was on Radio 4 with a message from somebody who runs quite a simple thing, but it's a wedding photographer and he's had three cancellations. I personally have had three cancellations of paying speaking engagements in the last two weeks as well. So actually the significance of this for many businesses and I've already given you the numbers for how many there are is to be blunt, what happens if the cash dries up at the front end of your business? Yet we still of course have the outgoings at the other end.

You may have rent, you may have rates, you may have service charges, despite being self employed you may have staff yourself. I mean significant numbers for example of sole traders in shops also employ the person who is actually the trading entity.

SB: And many of our members will have receptionists or perhaps even cleaning staff who are employed.

MW: Yeah. So it seems to us that we believe that one of the reasons that this will need to be revisited is that cash is going to be absolutely vital to the question of the health of the economy in the face of this health crisis regarding the virus itself. On the day of the budget, the bank of England did announce the freeing up of a lot of credit for business loans particularly for small businesses. But that's not quite the same thing, a formal loan is not quite the same thing as a cash lifeline for business. I was talking to one of our members yesterday, one of parts of his business is in automotive sport and he's been working on a contract for a company in Italy.

Half the cash up front, which is good it's a quarter of a million pound contract. The rest on completion on delivery in Italy, can't get anything into Italy. So went to his two banks, both high street banks which he works with regularly to ask for a 25,000 pound loan basically a float to get him through. Without any discussion both said no. So actually this availability of cash is going to be I mean it's sounds almost mercenary really to be talking about, but the reality is in any business that needs cash flowing through it that is the oxygen really I guess. People say lifeline, but it's really the oxygen of businesses and that's going to need to be addressed.

Now we have seen definitive action in the past, in times of crisis by central banks particularly. So in the 2008 crash, massive amounts of capital were released to shore up bank's balance sheets. In this case, you're not looking at massive releases of capital, but we are looking I

think at we will expect to see some consideration about large supplies of cash into the economy just to keep things flowing.

SB: And speaking as a non-economist and somebody who's decided to avoid economics most of his life, I don't know what that means. Releasing cash into the economy, that doesn't mean sending money to my bank account does it? So how does it-

MW: Why not? It could well mean something like that, getting cash into your company when you don't have reserves. Maybe it's an overdraft, maybe it is as somebody suggested this morning, a lump sum from your bank through the government to tide you over. Repayable later, this is not giveaway money forever. Because the thing that closes more businesses down than anything else as the last step, there's usually other things going on, is a cashflow crisis. And that's one thing we can't afford because it has knock on effects across the economy. Every little business that can't pay another little business for one fair or particular service or product then slows down that whole chain.

So actually I think there's every possibility we will be looking at the release of real cash through the banking system into the business economy. If you think about it people are panic buying and so forth, they can only panic by for so long as long as they either have the cash or they have a line of credit maybe on a credit card or whatever in order to be able to do it. And it's while that's flowing, everything works and the economy continues to work. Some would say not perfectly, but it does continue to work. But turning off that cash tap seems to us very threatening to the key element here, which is about the health of the economy. I mean your people are health professionals we're talking here about health crisis, the health of the economy's just as important in that respect.

SB: There'll be some resentment I imagine amongst people who are not earning money. So small businesses, self employed people not earning money while banks sit behind their frosted windows or whatever they might be still demanding mortgage repayments and loan repayments and otherwise. I heard something on the Radio 4 this morning about the possibility of mortgage holidays for people. Is that likely do you think? Because clearly you can't pay them if you haven't got any customers coming through the door.

MW: I'll go back to the issue I raised, which is that how long this goes on for is the key thing. The longer it goes on, I think the more likely it would be that mortgage holidays will be important. One of the things that came out of the budget by the way, returning to that subject was the clear availability through HMRC of a thing called time to pay which gives you the similar kind of control over cash flow. So people are

paying VAT, they're paying PAYE, they'll be paying corporation tax and other things. It's another case where the government can stand behind its tax agency here and help businesses of all types and individuals with their flow of cash because once they run out, they've run out. Now actually not paying it out the other end of the business can help make it less of a problem if less is coming in the front end of the business.

So that's the second thing we saw on that particular day help through the HMRC. But when you look up how people spend money in their businesses it's going to be rent with the landlord, it's going to be a mortgage, it might be a loan on a vehicle or on some equipment and so forth. There's lots of bits of money go out unaccounted. For example, I pay an the accountant once a month I pay for various other things regularly. If I stopped the money coming in at the front, it's still going out to the back. So yes, depending on the significance of this and how long it goes on those two sort of the strength of it and its extent. I think we're very well could be in a position where the government will have to support the loan companies, the mortgage companies to do this. They won't be able to do it on their own. But under those circumstances you can see how these things would need to be brought to play.

SB: Well you can understand the reluctance of people to loan money to people who might well not survive this particular crisis.

MW: No, but that's one of the reasons why we would have to say that the important role of the government in that sense is in guaranteeing things. We've seen that before so if government can say okay bank we stand behind you and we will guarantee this then that's one of the ways in which governments can help make sure that economies carry on working.

SB: Okay. You mentioned PAYE a little while ago. PAYE itself of course is a small percentage of the overall cost of staff. Now when an osteopathic or chiropractic practice runs out of cash and has to say to it's receptionist don't come in tomorrow because we haven't got any work for you, we can't pay you for your work. How is the government going to help us manage that problem? We don't want to sack people, but on the other hand if we've got no money we can't pay them.

MW: I think the answer is with nips and tucks at the moment. One of the things which came out of the budget as well was that the government removed the minimum income floor from universal credit, which is particularly something which affects those who need the cash to help their family life, keep their family lives going. Normally there will be a minimum limit between that you would need to reach in order to

trigger that. They've removed that temporarily to make it easier for people to get access to that cash.

SB: Well universal credit has a reputation for being extraordinarily difficult to access anyway, doesn't it?

MW: It has. Well this should make it slightly easier than extraordinarily difficult to access so it's a welcome move. We're not knocking any of these things and the government is trying to do the things it can, and it has control over some things that is one of them. And we will be pleased to see now that they are trying, but we suspect they will need to try harder.

SB: We have a few questions that have come in already. They all seem to be anonymous, which I'm not surprised about to be honest. Someone's asking about fiscal stimulus. Is the Federation of Small Businesses able to lobby the UK governments to introduced this fiscal stimulus just as the USA did two days ago according to a live White House briefing? To make it clear, to me the Federation of Small Businesses is quite a powerful organization in influencing government generally as organizations go.

MW: Yeah. The Federation of Small Businesses I'm a volunteer for it, so I have my own business but I get involved because I think it's important and I know that small businesses are more than 99% of the businesses in the economy. Somebody has to speak up for them so I'm very happy to do that kind of thing. But one of the reasons I particularly like this because there are other associations, is that it's the biggest and it really gets the government's attention. So it, we have a staff in London of 45 I think we speak directly to the government all the time.

We represent independent business views straight to them. So yeah, we speak to the treasury face to face. We speak to all departments of government face to face about these things because small businesses themselves can't turn up at a ministry in Whitehall and say, we really need this to assist us. So we carry that message to them and yeah, I mean we will be making representations to try and get the government to use all the leavers it can to make sure that a difficulty at the moment it doesn't turn into an economic crisis as well as a health problem.

SB: Just out of curiosity, what does the FSB do directly for its members at the time of crisis like this? I mean, is there help provided through the FSB?

MW: The first thing it does and one thing it's really strong on is it provides information to businesses. And what's I think characteristic of what

we're seeing at the moment is the FSB is providing information. If you want to go and find out what we say about the COVID-19 crisis go to the fsb.org.uk. There on the front page first item, you will find the help we're giving and advice we're giving. It's free to anyone, you don't have to be a member to get in, is not sitting behind a pay wall. Because we're aware that especially when it's small businesses, just knowing what you need to know is one of the most difficult problems. And you don't know what you don't know is the other problem as well.

So the first thing we provide is information and it's changing every day. It's changing by the hour so if people go to the fsb.org.uk website, they will find our current thoughts, our current pointers to advice and our current latest news. As a large organization, I mean it's the biggest business organization in terms of membership in the country we actually do other things. So one of them is because we aggregate demand, we have our own insurance brokerage for example. So we provide help and support for businesses which is really practical. One of the reasons I joined in the first place was because setting up a business I needed business insurance of a couple of different types.

And actually the best way to get hold of that knowing that there was kind of managed quality of what was behind it was to join an association, which sort of blind though, it was representing my interests and doing best for me as a small business and provided these aggregative benefits as well. So legal advice is a good part of this as well. So there's a legal advice line behind this and that's something that businesses can find useful so that's part of the membership-

SB: Those are general membership benefits aren't they? Rather than advice specifically because of the COVID situation.

MW: Yeah, but we get asked a lot of specific questions. So if people are talking about contracts and things like that, we have that advice available. Members can go to advisors and get specific questions asked. It's not just a blanket thing, this is what a contract looks like for example. You can get real questions asked through there. And I think that's very valuable because as a small business, I can't afford an HR department, I can't afford some in house lawyers but actually I get them with that and I'm happy to pay the fairly small amount I do every year to get access to all of that.

SB: Yeah indeed. And the reason that we joined long before I set the Academy of Physical Medicine was because actually we got free banking through the co-op as well, which was a significant saving over

most of the other offers we had. So more questions here. Optimistic question of course that loans need to be repaid. Is there any chance of what is currently called helicopter money that you don't have to pay back? I've never heard it called it-

MW: I can't answer for the government on whether there's any chance of helicop... I've never heard of it called helicopter money that's quite interesting. So I see, so you just drop in. It seems, I don't know, unlikely on the face of it. Because ultimately of course the money that the governments have is our money. It's money we pay in taxes or which it borrows on that-

SB: Well I suppose the other solution is that they could give you a helicopter money and then recover it in taxes or those people who recovered best would pay more percent in theory.

MW: And once again we come back to time because if you have to repay money, you really need now to stay in business but you don't have to pay it back quickly. So the longer that can be drawn out and handled the better I would have thought.

SB: Okay. I don't know how familiar you are with the measures that had been taken in other countries I would imagine that lots of businesses are saying, "Well, what's the worst that could happen to us?" And one of the questions that's come in is to ask whether the government can physically tell us to close our businesses. Technically of course they could but.

MW: I don't know actually there is legislation being prepared at the moment to give government further powers. One of the things which they have actually been saying is that they can't tell you not to have an event apart I suppose from critical health grounds or public order or something like that. But I don't think it's a power that the government reserves. I suspect we'll see an extension of that this week with legislation, which I guess is coming before the house over the next couple of days to make it easier for them to do that. To say, this class of premises must close for X time that of course will trigger further problems for all the businesses operating with that.

So for example, we've seen in other countries pubs being closed for example. And that gives the pub a new problem, now all of a sudden it's got no drinkers at all. And interesting to see some of the creative things actually that businesses are already doing about this. If you want to see some of the positive things, my local pub I live just at the top end of Northamptonshire right on the border actually. I can see the border it's at the end of my road, it's the river Welland. Is the local pub got a message out through social media that if people wanted

meals, which they would otherwise have come to they will deliver around the village. And actually you have to hope some positive things come out of all this.

It might be that we all travel less and make more use of video conferencing, for example. It might be that small businesses which haven't really engage with delivery to their local area might try it out. And it's actually when something like this happens people are forced just to try something a little bit new. So large numbers of people have apparently signed up for the first time to delivery services from supermarkets. In fact, some supermarkets are now not taking any new customers, but actually it's interesting that over the years the amount of food we buy online weighs more in percentage terms than other products such as clothing and footwear and things like that. Because we've been in that habit of going shopping once a week or stocking up once a day or whatever.

But a lot of people are trying this out now for the first time and it's going to be fascinating to see in the longterm how that changes people's habits because it's that first step which leads to a change of habit. But of course we may all revert to the way it was when all of this has gone by and everything's happy and sound again.

SB: But it is an opportunity too for medical practices such as ours because a certain amount of health advice can be given by video conference or by telephone. And we've started to offer that in my own clinic and I suspect lots of others have around the country as well. But it's definitely worth exploring isn't it? It's not the conventional way of delivering what we do, but we have to try and think not only how do we continue to earn money, but how do we continue to serve our purpose. Which is keeping people healthy and fit and out of pain.

MW: I mean, I'm in no way have any kind of medical expertise or even a great deal of knowledge frankly, but just dealing for example with something say a GP. I remember a number of years ago I said to my GP, "Why do you let people send you emails?" And he said, "Ah, because they use it and I spend all day answering this." But actually anyone who's had a video conference rather than traveling for several hours to go to a meeting knows it's a good use of your time, as long as you have the facilities to do it. And a lot of what is involved with dealing with people when they have health problems is talking to them and finding things out. Really just through conversation they will tell you to some extent what's wrong given the right questions and so forth.

And it's a good use of your time and it's safe at the moment in the sense that very difficult to get infected with anything dangerous via

video conference. But I personally have been using video conferencing for a number of reasons for a number of years one of the ones I've used it for is to do with loneliness. I have an aged aunt who's 50 miles away and actually we use Amazon service itself and we talk face to face. And actually it makes a bigger difference on her than talking to her sister a hundred miles away on a telephone to actually talk to someone face to face. Funnily enough, one of our big lobbying points with FSB is we'd like to see the country wired up with fiber in terms of communications.

Because for both for businesses and individuals, we see huge benefits for that. And of course the better the quality of communications we have, the more we can do with that kind of thing. If every premise is in this country, every house and every office had fiber rather than just sort of a telephone type copper broadband, we could make much more use of the kind of thing you're talking about, higher quality conversations and so forth. And it really would be helpful at the moment.

SB: I mean it's a good time to promote, to continuing to progress that pressure on-

MW: It is. I mean there was a mention of it in the budget, there was some more money coming for this in the budget. We reckon that it should be treated as an important element of infrastructure in the same way that the government made a great commitment in it's advance to what it sees as being valuable, which is HS2. I personally think that the fiber in the ground could be just as valuable without the traveling part of it. And under these circumstances, all of a sudden it looks like a really good idea.

SB: Someone's asked a question about the business interruption scheme. Is it going to be finite? And so therefore, on a first come first serve basis, would you imagine or is it likely to continue for all of those who need access to it?

MW: I suspect it will be finite, but I would suspect it will be finite in the sense of limiting the supports to individual businesses rather than the number of businesses. Say you're next in line, but we've run out of cash that is less likely to happen. What we'll see-

SB: But you had some, you can't anymore is likely?

MW: That's more likely I would have thought. Yes, that's right.

SB: Yeah. And we've got a name for this and Robert Hopkins has asked business grants, the Councillor apparently announced on the budget that a 3000 pound grant will be available to all small businesses that

are in receipt of business rate relief. How was that going to be accessed do you know? Will it be paid automatically or will it need to be reapplied for?

MW: This debate about how automatic it will be I personally can see no reason why councils who will have to issue the money because they're the ones who take the rates in. I personally believe that they know which premises are getting the benefit of small business rate relief already, so this is not new data that they need to pull together. As long as the central government gets the money to local authorities quickly, I can see no reason why there should be a problem with the mechanism of this flowing. In the past where they've changed the rules we've seen a problem. So, for example, last year when the retail relief for rateable values of up to 51,000 came in, it was a real challenge for local authorities and their systems because it only applied to independence.

It only applied to retailers and some related types of business so you had to pick out the ones which it fitted. So for example, any larger organization even with a few branches where the state aid could have added up to I think it was 200,000 euros worth, could not have it. So that was a really difficult problem and it took some time, despite the fact that it was underwritten by the government, so the money was available. It took some time for that act to actually work its way through. The 3000 pounds I would expect to be pretty automatic because if you're getting small business rate relief now, you should be in line for the 3000 pounds. That's my expectation.

SB: And the keyword in the question was that it's a grant, it's not a loan. It's not something that needs to be repaid back.

MW: No it is a grant, it's a straightforward grant. That's right.

SB: Which should be very encouraging to a lot of businesses. And the understanding is again, it's hardly the saviour because it'll probably covers most people's rent perhaps for a month but-

MW: Well on the basis that every little helps we can't knock that. It was a striking part of the budget. As you've said, it's a grant and it's not a loan. 3000 pounds straight into the bank for a small business could be the difference at the moment between survival and not as a business. So we welcome this completely.

SB: Yeah. Good. Another anonymous question universal credit. Does universal credit taking into account your partner's income? Or is it just based on yourself being low income or out of work?

MW: I don't know.

SB: No, idea?

MW: I have to admit I just don't know the answer to that. Sorry.

SB: Right. And again, it's curious, isn't it though? Because it's one of those questions that you would never ask yourself until faced through the potential of having to claim the thing. So we will try and find the answer to that question, but we can't at the moment. It struck me that I'm sure I recall from the so called lockdown in Italy that actually what the government there said was that people couldn't leave their houses unless they had self certify that they were going to collect food or possibly for medical appointments and whether osteopathy and chiropractic would fall into that category I don't know. Is that a measure you think could be adopted here?

MW: I don't see any sign of it yet.

SB: It's large gatherings they seem to be focusing on isn't it?

MW: Well, in a way it's relatively small gatherings, it's numbers of people in confined spaces as much as anything else. Most of the large gathering impact has been by say football clubs and so forth and their associations saying we're just not doing this. We're not getting large numbers of people together. I think that is one of the things that's likely to change over the coming weeks. Because the government will be changing its tactics as the experts, and I'm pleased to see by the way that there is a new found respect for experts. Years ago I remember a government figure saying we've had enough of experts, well welcome back experts as far as I'm concerned.

I have to say I've got to look for some of the good things coming out of this. It is good to see a new found respect for experts. We know that they're the only ones who know what is going on and what needs to be done and it's good to see the government listening to them as well. And having experts standing next to prime ministers talking about these things. Experts of course will differ, they will have different views on the best way of handling various things but I'd much rather be listening to their expert differences than inexpert differences.

SB: Yeah. Well, I mentioned this question because Anna who asked will be disappointed if it doesn't come up and she says, "What would the GP do? Can we be confident that the GP will actually contact the patient?" A, I think that's out of your area of expertise, but also I'm not quite sure I understand what's meant by that. So perhaps we can get some clarification on that one that will be helpful. And please keep the questions coming in we've got 10 minutes left and I

appreciate that there's an extraordinary number of people online at the moment watching this. If you are new to the service then use the chat box, get the questions coming in because we have a limited amount of time left.

MW: Can I add something in here?

SB: Yeah.

MW: I mean the word which kept occurring to me while I was coming down here, it's about health. I mean this subject is about health, the Coronavirus is about health. I've been talking about the financial health of businesses and so forth. One of our big issues with the FSB a major campaign is actually about mental health and small businesses. Running a small business is of itself quite isolating and quite often a bit lonely, I've done it for a long time and it's sometimes hard. Actually at a point where people are finding for example, that clients maybe are not visiting them or they're not interacting with other people. Let's say for example they come to premises to provide their services and so forth. One of the key things is the value of keeping in contact with your peers and talking about what's going on. They're going to learn more about how other people are experiencing this and there is some value in just knowing what's happening to other people as well.

SB: Indeed yeah. So it's one of the reasons we're doing this is because people are getting very frustrated and very concerned because they find it difficult to access information. An anonymous question there so many of, can we ask our reception staff to take unpaid leave if we have to close given that they've probably got an employment contract?

MW: The answer is look at your employment contract. That's always going to be the controlling fact between these things. I would in that sense defer to whatever the advice would come through FSB on that because they do talk about employment contracts.

SB: Do they? Where do we find that on the webpage that you mentioned? Is that going to be part of the free advice as being available to anyone who goes on?

MW: It won't go into individual contracts so that's something which actually people will pick up from their membership and they will contact us.

SB: Okay. We at APM we are members so if we find it out we'll let you know.

MW: Yeah do that.

SB: Don't let the FSB know I said that. Business rates relief I've been asked about, will clinics paying business rates be eligible for business rate relief? It seems this is only aimed at shops and businesses, not in the D1 category which is health care.

MW: Yeah and it's a point we've made the government as well, it's relatively restricted in what it applies to. The government has tried to do what it thinks it needs to do, which is to concentrate on areas of the major public concern, which is the ones in front of us the little shops we can't miss them. We interact with them all the time, you just see them. There are other areas of the economy where we think this certainly should be the case, it can be widened and I suspect the government will look at it again. Whether we'll have another budget before the next planned on in November I don't know, but I strongly suspect we'll see budget lets in the meantime. Because there will be changing circumstances will require tactical flexibility on the government's part. But yeah, it's certainly true that within an FSB membership we cover the whole small business landscape.

We have members doing all sorts of things. One of the fascinating things about being involved actually, I get to go to our networking meetings of which there are hundreds around the country. Not at the moment, but generally there are is to find out what the weird and wonderful and fantastic and original businesses which people are running. So when we lobby on something like this, we would obviously in the first instance be concentrating on the areas of main public concern as much as anything else because that's what moves governments. But yeah, there is a danger that the less seen areas can be ignored by government and what I would say to businesses is talk to us because we can talk to the government about it.

SB: Somebody asked another question about the 3000 pound grants. Asking whether there's any timescale on when it's going to be available now. And you mentioned it, because you did say this earlier on, you'd expect it to be paid automatically, but you don't know. And I presume therefore we don't know when they're likely to start coughing up money.

MW: The expectation is it's quick but it will depend on the I think 350 different authorities nationally, which actually administer business rates-

SB: And we know how efficient they are?

MW: They vary. Some are fantastically efficient and we'll get on with this immediately. Others might for example, because of the way their systems work find it more of a challenge. The one thing we're not expecting is that there'll be any delay in the money getting from central government to local government. So I mean another thing that local government got in the budget was the creation of a half billion pound fund for economically vulnerable people, some of whom will be self employed as well. Now how that half billion pound gets and is allocated from the government to those local authorities and then out to where it needs to be is something we need to yet see how that's going to work. It sounded well, I'm sure it is because it's a big number, like a very important part of support. But in practice in life, the devil is in the detail. It's how it works out and we won't know it until it actually starts happening.

SB: Sure. We've got and this is quite a cross the question that's come in here.

MW: Oh dear.

SB: Well it sounds this way the way it's been put to me. Again, no name for it but the person has said online shopping habits and video conferencing are not beneficial suggestions to how I stopped my business going under. What do I do to keep my business afloat from now? And I don't know if they're an osteopath or a chiropractor, but it makes little difference. And we did say at the beginning, didn't we? There's no magic wand in this, we're trying to let everybody know what is available. So perhaps the good news for those who didn't know is the 3000 pound grant, which should come around at some point. There is the possibility that there will be deferment of payment of PAYE and income tax. And I doubt that many people that are subject to VAT and all those things, but any other great suggestions of how a healthcare business like an osteopath or a chiropractor would keep afloat?

MW: What I was talking about earlier was that the fact with any kind of business you're balancing the money going out in the money coming in. I think liquidity at the front of businesses through banks from central government is going to be a key element in that. I can't see that that can be otherwise because otherwise too many small businesses will find their income stopping and I am seeing that and it's happened to me to some extent and will happen to others. Whether it's a chiropractor business or whatever, in that sense the business of running a business is the same.

It is about that money coming in. I strongly suspect we will see further moves on that. A glib answer to everything? I haven't got one. We are

trying to reflect what we learn from the government day by day as that changes day by day as well. It's a huge challenge to small businesses, it's keeping me up awake at night challenge with 4.8 million self employed, 5.8 million small businesses. They are all to one extent or another facing the question which your questioner asks there, how do I make sure I've got the money to run the business? If I had a glib answer for that, I would be applying it everywhere. It's bits and bobs at the moment.

SB: What we've got going on here at APM and it's actually, it's a very good opportunity for all of the people watching to share their ideas about how we go about keeping our businesses afloat because we're all in that same boat. And there is no magic wand to this, but great brains can come up with some great solutions. Somebody has asked me following off what I said about telephone appointments, telehealth appointments what fee structure do we put on that? I can't answer that question, I'd have to put that to my fellow clinic co-director who is very busy at the moment handling your questions. So she's not in a position to give to put that out but we'll try and get something out to you and tell you how we expect those telehealth appointments to go and how much we think we can charge for them.

Michael, we've come to the end of our scheduled time and I'm conscious that people here are keen to get back to where and what they can after their lunch break. I hope you find some benefit from what we've had today. No magic wand as I've said now for the third time, the idea was to help you get access to some information. Michael has already pointed out that the fsb.org website will give you free information up to date and constantly updated information about how businesses are affected by this and how they can benefit from whatever's coming out of government. I'd urge you to go there and perhaps later on when economic times get easier, it might be worth joining the FSB because there are all sorts of benefits, legal other advice and a free banking with the co-op all that sort of stuff which can be helpful to you. Grateful to Michael for coming and thank you very much. And it was short notice, I know you were on Radio BBC in Leicester earlier this morning-

MW: I was.

SB: Your dotting from place to place and thank you for your time, your expertise.