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84. OPSS supports Local Authorities across the UK at their ports and borders to enhance their capacity and capability to take action to detect, deter and disrupt trade in unsafe and non-compliant goods.
85. Competition Policy levers e.g., Block Exemption Orders, and Public Policy Exclusion Orders would enable greater collaboration and co-ordination between businesses by exempting them from prohibitions under competition law.
86. Public Interest Interventions would enable Ministers to intervene and approve, or block, merger transactions which fall under specific criteria. These would enable greater Government control over specific transactions, enabling faster consolidation if required.
87. All of these could be delivered via secondary legislation. Sector teams provide expert knowledge and a feedback loop with business.

*Covid Examples / Interventions:*

88. OPSS Produced daily / weekly Situation Reports as required.
89. OPSS introduced regulatory easements designed to facilitate the production and supply of essential Covid related PPE. To support the easements, OPSS wrote to key stakeholders and issued guidance for businesses.
90. OPSS also facilitated coordination between the key regulators initiating a Regulatory Coordination Cell.
91. OPSS initiated Operation Safeguard - a risk based, and intelligence led enforcement operation at UK ports that provided support to local authority Trading Standards teams dealing with non-compliant PPE.
92. Competition law exclusion orders relating to coronavirus (COVID-19) - GOV.UK
93. A new PII was created relating to responding to public health emergencies (enterprise-act-2002-guidance-merger.pdf)

**Grants**

94. The protracted nature of a pandemic response may mean that grant delivery starts relatively soon during a response and continues throughout including through the recovery phase. The Grant Delivery Directorate (GDD) owns capabilities which have been used for Covid 19 and during flooding recovery and has connections with MHCLG and Local Authorities. They possess the required specialist expertise for the development of new schemes, overseeing delivery of schemes full lifecycle & providing guidance on application requirements, due diligence, monitoring to ensure outcomes are met, reconciliation, assurance, and recovery of HMG funds as necessary, thereby ensuring DBT meets all Cabinet Office Grant functional standards.
95. The GDD works closely with the Government Grant Management Function (GGMF) within Cabinet Office to remain compliant with GOVS15 Functional Standard for Grants and the Grants Functional Blueprint. It is likely that GDD will require specialist resource to be surged in to deal with increased demand. Key ministerial direction will be needed on the risk appetite for schemes in order to balance the trade-off between speed and assurance (for example on the levels of fraud which are acceptable). Monitoring and assurance checks will also be required to ensure that grants are having the desired impact and to inform any amendments.
96. Local authorities have the local knowledge on businesses in their area and are therefore likely to remain a critical delivery partner in the business support element of any future pandemic response. S31 Local Government Act 2003 vires provides the mechanism for such delivery. Grants & Loans Analysis Team created the Project Birch toolkit analysis toolkit to quickly appraise mixture of emergency grant and loan support for significant

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struggling businesses. Enabled BCR calcs for economic case to determine potential max grant size. This is a legacy product.

*Covid Examples / Interventions:*

97. 8 grant schemes were administered by local authorities across England operating at different times between March 2020 and March 2022 in response to national and local restrictions, to support businesses with their non-wage costs and safeguard their survival.
98. Initial schemes reached a broad mix of sectors, whilst later schemes were more focused on the industries that were most disrupted.
99. £22.6bn in grants was paid to an estimated 1.4 million businesses.
100. DBT published an evaluation report in October 2024 on Gov.UK. The report by Ipsos UK, Steer Economic Development, and George Barrett incorporates a process, impact, and economic evaluation of these schemes. Local Authority COVID-19 Business Support Grants: evaluation report - GOV.UK

**Business Growth Directorate (specifically the SME Finance and British Business Bank)**

101. During a pandemic it is likely a reduction in trading impacting companies' finances and cash flow, meaning a greater need to borrow at the same time as lenders/investors would ordinarily be less likely to be willing to lend. Therefore, a large-scale programme to encourage lending/investing would likely be needed to stave off large scale insolvencies amongst businesses. This would likely be the case both during response and recovery.
102. This will be led through the Business Growth Directorate (specifically the SME Finance and British Business Bank).
103. In designing any loan scheme, the team would ensure that they minimise any losses from the scheme and potential for fraud, which are likely to be higher than usual due to tight turnaround on setting up such a scheme. This could be done through requiring that borrower checks are done or sharing data with or between lenders to allow identification of fraudulent applications such as applying when the borrower has already received a loan. For any fraud and irregularities that are detected, Counter Fraud team would deploy various tools to identify, and maximise recovery of, irregular payments or funds obtained through fraud. These would cover things such as data analytics, a post-claims assurance process and regular audits, and working with enforcement partners to make recoveries against serious fraud.

*Covid Examples / Interventions:*

Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs)

104. The Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs) was launched in May 2020 and was introduced to help smaller businesses impacted by coronavirus. It aimed to assist businesses to borrow between £2,000 up to 25% of a business' turnover, and the maximum amount available was £50,000.
105. The Government covered any interest payable in the first 12 months through a Business Interruption Payment to the lender, and lender benefited from a 100% government-backed guarantee.