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Dear Kath,

ORAL QUESTIONS - WEDNESDAY 19 JULY

Thank you for your contribution to the question on Wednesday 19 July about the implementation of the business rate reliefs announced at the Budget. I agreed to write to confirm the position with regard to the possibility of end year flexibility in the £300m discretionary relief scheme. I can confirm that there are no plans to allow end year flexibility with regard to this year's allocations. Local authorities should therefore continue to press ahead with implementing their schemes as soon as possible.

I share your concern that this funding should be made available to eligible businesses as quickly as possible. I should like to clarify my answer about the timing of changes to the software systems used to operate the business rates billing systems in local authorities. Following discussions with the local government finance minister, Marcus Jones MP, software suppliers have committed to providing the necessary software changes to local authority IT systems by 21 August. It is the Government's clear expectation that local authorities will act promptly to carry out the necessary re-billing of businesses who are due the relief under their locally-determined schemes. We will of course continue to monitor progress of these schemes.

LORD BOURNE OF ABERYSTWYTH