

# Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

22 May 2020

Dear Home Secretary,

## **Urgent visa issues during the Coronavirus pandemic**

The Home Affairs Committee has discussed recent Government announcements and some of the remaining urgent visa issues during the pandemic.

We wholeheartedly welcome the announcement that the Government intends to make all health and care workers exempt from the Immigration Health Surcharge and look forward to seeing the full details in due course.

The Home Affairs Committee also strongly supports the Government's decision to award indefinite leave to remain to the family members of health and care staff who have tragically died as a result of Covid-19, which we raised with you in a letter of 12 May.

We would be grateful for your urgent consideration of these further outstanding issues.

## **General visa extensions due to international travel restrictions**

In March you announced that individuals whose leave to remain in the UK expires between 24 January 2020 and 31 May 2020 could apply to have their visas extended if they were unable to leave the UK because of issues relating to Covid-19. The announcement said that these extensions would last until 31 May 2020 but would be "kept under regular review in case further extensions are needed".

Those visa extensions were very welcome. However that deadline is now approaching, and many visa holders remain unable to make planned departures from the UK because of ongoing international travel restrictions.

We therefore urge the Home Office to extend the period during which people will be eligible for visa extensions for a further two months to 31 July 2020 so that people whose visas are due to expire before this date can obtain a fee-free extension to this date, and people who have already applied for visa extensions can have these extended to 31 July.

We would also ask the Government to consider whether automatic extension might be the best solution.

#### Visa extensions for frontline health and care workers

Whilst the lifting of the surcharge and the expansion of the bereavement scheme are very welcome, we would also urge you to look again at the issue we have previously raised with you of the one-year visa extension. As you will be aware there is still a remaining disparity between NHS health workers on the one hand and care workers and support staff like porters and cleaners on the other.

Following the announcement on 31 March that doctors, nurses and paramedics whose visas were due to expire before 1 October will automatically have their visas extended, free of charge, for one year, we wrote to you on 14 April urging you to include frontline workers in social care and on 4 and 12 May to ask about the inclusion of other NHS frontline employees like porters and cleaners.

Given that the Government is currently addressing other issues around the surcharge and the family bereavement arrangements, we would therefore urge you to look again at the enormous contribution frontline workers across the health and care sector have made to this country during the Coronavirus crisis. It is important that care workers and lower paid NHS staff are not faced with burdensome and costly visa processes on top of the strain of keeping people safe and providing vital services at this time.

In view of the continued pressure on care home workers and the urgent public interest in these issues I would be grateful for your swift response

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvette Cooper', written in a cursive style.

**Yvette Cooper MP**