

# Home Affairs Committee

Committee Office House of Commons London SW1A 0AA  
Tel +44 (0)20 7219 2049 Email [homeaffcom@parliament.uk](mailto:homeaffcom@parliament.uk)  
Website [www.parliament.uk/homeaffcom](http://www.parliament.uk/homeaffcom)

From the Committee Chair

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

29 May 2020

Dear Home Secretary,

Thank you for giving evidence to us on 29 April. During our discussion you committed to provide further information on various points: these are summarised below, together with some additional questions to which the Committee would welcome answers.

## **Measures at the border**

- 1) You told the Committee that the publication of scientific advice relating to measures at the border was “not for me to publish” and that SAGE was “publishing data and scientific advice” (Q323). The Chief Scientific Adviser told the Health and Social Care Committee on 5 May, however, that while he wanted to continue to publish the “inputs to SAGE” (the scientific evidence), SAGE was not able to publish “the output from SAGE to Ministers” (the scientific advice). Please can you clarify who has responsibility for the publication of the advice given to Ministers on border issues?
- 2) You stated to the Committee that the advice the Government was taking from SAGE and Public Health England would be published. Please confirm that, in addition to the publication of the scientific evidence considered by SAGE on 23 March, the Government intends to publish the advice given by SAGE and Public Health England to ministers relating to measures at the border (Qq328-329).
- 3) Professor John Aston told the Science and Technology Committee that specific scientific advice had been provided for the decision on 13 March to lift the previous guidance on self-isolation at the border. Please can you provide us with the scientific evidence, scientific analysis and scientific advice you received from SAGE or others on that decision. Please can you also provide the date on which scientific evidence and advice relating to measures at the border will be published (Q329).

4) Please can you also provide us with the most recent scientific analysis, evidence and scientific advice you have received from SAGE or others behind the announcement on 22 May of new self-isolation requirements at the border due to come into place on 8 June.

### **Asylum support**

5) Please provide the Committee with current data relating to the time taken to process applications for support under s4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Q370): what was the average processing time for s4 applications made to the Home Office between 1 January and 29 February 2020; and between 1 March and 30 April 2020?

6) Please also answer the following questions:

(i) What assessment has the Home Office made of the increased living costs for people receiving s4 and s95 support during this crisis, and the need for an uplift in asylum support rates?

(ii) Has there been an increase in applications for s4 support since 23 March and, if so, can that be quantified? Have you made any changes to the application process or evidence required in order to speed the process up and simplify it?

(iii) What assessment has the Government made of the impact of No Recourse to Public Funds rules on the public health response to coronavirus and on the ability of individuals with NRPF visa conditions to access accommodation?

As indicated by me at Q380, we would be grateful if you would also answer the following questions:

### **Domestic abuse**

7) What progress has been made in relation to securing alternative accommodation such as temporary hotel and hostel accommodation, since the announcement on 11 April?

### **Policing**

8) Members of Parliament continue to hear worrying reports about incidents in which police officers are spat or coughed at by those who then claim to have Covid-19 – in West Yorkshire alone, there are around 16 incidents every week – and equally concerning reports that there is a post-code lottery as to whether officers are able to access 'reassurance testing'. Since such officers are not symptomatic, they are not always able to access the testing they need to determine whether they have been infected before returning home to their families at the end of a shift. Border Force staff have reported similar experiences. Can you assure us that the Home Office is working with the Department of Health and Social Care to establish best practise for this type of testing and make it available across the UK?

9) While the National Police Chief's Council has asked employers signed up to the voluntary Employer Supported Policing Scheme to extend their existing commitment during the Covid-19 pandemic, some special constables have reported difficulties in being released for duty. Does the Home Office plan to put special constables on the same footing as other emergency services volunteers and if not, why not?

### **Fraud**

10) Members of Parliament are aware of many reports from official sources such as the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, and from constituents, that criminals are exploiting the uncertainty and vulnerability brought about by Covid-19 to defraud and scam people. What is the Home Office doing to tackle this criminal activity?

(i) What is the Home Office doing for victims of online acquisitive crimes at this time?

(ii) What work has the Home Office done to identify new approaches being used by fraudsters to target the vulnerable during this period? What measures are being put in place to prevent such approaches being successful?

(iii) Action Fraud are seeing significant increases in reports of fraud at present. Please provide data relating to:-

- the number of fraud victims supported;
- the number of organised criminal gangs operating frauds which have been disrupted; and
- the number of arrests for Covid-19 related fraud since 1 February 2020.

How is the Home Office monitoring the work of Action Fraud and what steps has it taken to improve outcomes for victims of fraud during this period?

I would be grateful for your response by Friday 12 June.

Yours sincerely



**Yvette Cooper MP**