



**LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL
LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
THE RT. HON. JACOB REES-MOGG, M.P.**



Ms Catherine McKinnell M.P.,
Chair of the Petitions Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Our Ref: JRM/SC216
1 June 2020

Dear Catherine,

Thank you for your letter of 20 May regarding arrangements to allow petitions to be debated when the House returns physically after the Whitsun recess.

At the outset, it is important to state that the government acknowledges the important part that petitions and debates on petitions play in, as you say, allowing people to scrutinise the government on their own terms. That is why, in the previous Parliament, the Government responded to 456 petitions and took part in 73 debates on individual petitions.

However, as you would no doubt agree, we are in extraordinary times. As I have set out to the House, the priority now is for Parliament to reconvene physically in accordance with government guidelines so that it can resume its vital work of scrutinising the government and passing legislation in a thorough and effective fashion. This is essential work and it has simply not been possible to carry it out properly under hybrid proceedings.

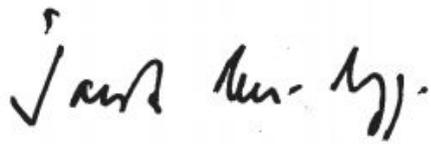
As you will be aware, I am continuing to work closely with the Speaker, the House of Commons Commission, the Procedure Committee and the House authorities to ensure that our return to a physical Parliament is safe and in line with government guidelines. Part of this work includes keeping a close eye on the number of House staff which will be needed on the Estate at any one time in order to facilitate proceedings. This means that hard decisions have to be made about how to best use Parliament's resources and which business ought to be prioritised. It is clear to me that the government's legislative agenda, which gained a democratic mandate at the 2019 General Election, must be a priority.

Nevertheless, I understand that a large backlog of petitions which have reached the signature threshold to be debated is now accumulating. I assure you that I will work with the Chief Whip to facilitate these debates as soon as resources, which are currently and inevitably constrained by social distancing regulations, allow.

I am copying this letter to the Speaker.

With every good wish,

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jack Newby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.