



HM Treasury, 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

6 July 2020

Mel Stride MP
Chair, Treasury Select Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mel,

RESPONSES TO CORRESPONDENCE FROM MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Thank you for your letter of 11 June regarding HM Treasury's responses to correspondence from Members of Parliament (MPs).

I would like to assure you that we recognise the importance of correspondence with MPs. In 2019, the Treasury replied to 90% of the 4,284 enquiries from MPs within 15 working days. I know the Department shares my view that every MP should receive a timely, accurate and informative reply to their queries. I also want to assure you that the Treasury is doing its utmost to get this issue back on track in the face of an unprecedented increase in the volume of correspondence received in the COVID-19 outbreak.

Since March, the Treasury has received over 18,000 items of correspondence from MPs in addition to 29,000 items of correspondence from the public. The weekly rate of incoming correspondence is currently five times the level the Treasury would usually receive. The volume has also exceeded the total amount of correspondence received by the Treasury during the global financial crisis in 2008. In addition, the Treasury has received the most correspondence of all Government departments leading on coronavirus pandemic. For example, the Department of Health and Social Care has received just over 13,800 enquires from MPs.

Replying to this amount of correspondence while delivering targeted action to protect millions of jobs and livelihoods is a significant challenge for a department of around 1,500 staff. However, the Treasury's Executive Management Board, myself and my ministerial team were engaged early on to meet this challenge.

The Treasury brought in additional external staff to its central correspondence team which has tripled in size. To help MPs reply to their constituents as quickly as possible, detailed Dear Colleague letters have occasionally been issued providing updates on changes to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. On rare occasions, when MPs have said those replies have not fully covered the issue raised,

the Treasury has provided an additional reply covering any outstanding points as soon as possible.

So far, the Treasury has replied to 8,000 items of correspondence from MPs. While there is still some way to go before the outstanding volume is reduced, we expect most correspondence to be replied to within 15 working days again by the end of July.

MPs can also help the Treasury return to a more normal correspondence service. A large proportion of the correspondence received by the Treasury asks what help is available and calls for extensions to the schemes supporting business, people's jobs and incomes. We have not been able to help every single person in exactly the way that they would have liked even with the enormous support in place. Our wide-ranging support package is still one of the most comprehensive in the world – with generous income support schemes, billions paid in loans and grants, tax deferrals and more than £6.5bn injected into the welfare safety net.

If MPs use the material at www.gov.uk/coronavirus to help their constituents identify the help available to them, it will mean the Treasury can reply more quickly to concerns not covered already. It will also ease the pressure and enable us to develop new measures to grow the economy, to back business, to boost skills, and help people thrive in the new post COVID-19 world.

I understand the frustration MPs feel, and I assure the committee that we are and will continue to do everything we can to respond to queries as quickly and fully as possible.



RISHI SUNAK