



Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

020 7219 5777 - beiscom@parliament.uk - www.parliament.uk/beis - @CommonsBEIS

Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP

Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

1 Victoria Street, London

24 March 2020

Dear Alok,

I hope you are well. Please pass on the Committee's thanks to staff at the Department, who I know are working incredibly hard to support businesses and employees.

Yesterday evening, the Prime Minister announced that people are now only allowed to leave their homes for specific and limited purposes. One of these is "travelling to and from work, but only where this is absolutely necessary and cannot be done from home".

I welcome this announcement; such measures are imperative to reduce the spread of the virus and to protect lives and livelihoods.

This morning, I asked workers to contact my Committee if their employer was forcing them to continue going to work, or if they felt their employer was not offering enough coronavirus support.

In just a few hours, my Committee has received over 250 replies, from people working in sectors as diverse as furniture manufacturers, travel agents, estate agents, law firms, TV engineers and office-based staff. Examples include:

- "the solicitors are set up to work from home but are refusing to do so and support staff are being made to come into the office as they are being told they are key workers. Support staff have offered to work from home but have been told this isn't viable";
- "the estate agent and all the brands they own are still open for business as normal. The branches are closed to public but staff still going to work as normal and working in very close proximity to each other";
- "we make office furniture and the bosses will not close the factory [...] they have no social distance methods implemented at all its just 100s of workers all on the shop floor carrying on as normal";
- "I work for a manufacturing company who supply to the medical sector. We have a mixture of essential and non-essential staff and have been classed as key workers. However, Directors have insisted ALL staff are to stay in work, including office based staff, because they won't 'offer special treatment' and want to be fair to everyone";
- "I am a TV engineer and somehow my role has been classed as 'key' [...] on an average day, we visit around 7 homes per engineer to fit or service [...] TV, a luxury product not everyone is fortunate to own. We are usually in a customers home for an hour, sometimes more sometimes less. It is intrusive work really."

Those who contacted us raised concerns about working in an office even though they could easily work from home, a lack of social distancing at the workplace, using public transport to get to their work, living with vulnerable relatives, a policy of all staff being in the workplace when not all staff are essential workers, executives working from home whilst other staff are expected to be in the office, and job security should these concerns be raised with senior management.

It is clear that either the guidelines announced by the Government are insufficiently clear, or that employers are not following the rules.

I urge the Government to come forward with immediate clarification on which businesses are truly “essential” and are expected remain open and which should be sending their employees home. It would also be really helpful to businesses and employers for the Government to provide more specific guidance for workplaces on social distancing.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Rachel Reeves." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rachel Reeves MP

Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee