



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
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30 March 2020

Dear Oliver

I am writing because of the enormous public interest in coronavirus, which has resulted in more than fifty e-petitions on coronavirus being published to date, signed by over two million people. We are receiving hundreds of petitions on coronavirus on a daily basis, which show there is a lot of anxiety and concern about the support available to people affected by the outbreak, and the Government's response to the outbreak.

Following the large number of petitions on coronavirus we asked the people who had signed these petitions what questions they most wanted answers to. On Wednesday we held an evidence session with representatives from the Department for Health and Social Care, the Department for Education, and the Department for Work and Pensions, putting many of these questions to Ministers and the Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

This was an extremely useful session, but the public also suggested a number of questions which are the responsibility of other Departments, including yours. I am therefore writing to ask you to respond to the following questions, which came through most strongly from our public engagement:

Now more than ever the work on online harms is vital to the wellbeing of the UK, what extra steps are you undertaking to take in this area to fight disinformation and other harms in regards to this outbreak?

What public awareness campaigns are the Government running to keep the public informed about the latest advice? Which channels are you using for this?

Given the constantly evolving nature of the current situation, I would be grateful if you could provide a response to the above by Friday 3 April, so we can make these available to the public as quickly as possible.

I hope we will be able to continue the dialogue as the situation progresses and particularly as the usual parliamentary mechanisms for raising these issues have become more restricted. This might involve further sessions with Ministers and officials, and asking your Department to provide updated answers to the public's latest questions at regular intervals.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Catherine' in a cursive script.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee