



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
Westminster
London
SW1H 9NA

30 March 2020

Dear Thérèse

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. We are extremely grateful that your Department was able to provide a representative to answer our questions, but I'm sure you will understand that there was not time to ask all of the questions that members of the public would like to be answered.

I am therefore writing to ask you to respond to the following questions, which came through most strongly from our public engagement:

Mind, the mental health charity, have asked how, in light of the suspension of benefits reassessments, the DWP intends to make sure people relying on the similar processes of appeals and assessments for new claims don't go without the money they need to live?

Mind have also asked how the DWP plan to adjust the process for new benefits claims for the current situation, where many people can't have face to face contact or support, access medical evidence, and may struggle to collate and send other evidence in the timeframe currently allowed?

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