

Commonsense and rules

MPs and the government are flooded with calls wanting detailed answers to how people can live their lives under the new rules laid out in Parliament this week. This is understandable given the magnitude of the changes required.

The rules themselves are fairly general and broad. The aim of cutting back sharply on person to person contact is very clear. People should stay at home unless they need to go out to carry out important work that cannot be done from home, or to collect food and medicines or to undergo health care. There are not always detailed answers to what this means for any individual's life and circumstances. People are allowed to go out, and need to exercise their judgement of whether this should be done. If so they should do it in a way which minimises risks to themselves and others.

The police now have powers to require people to return home where they do not have a good reason, and to fine for non compliance. The police are keen to carry out their duties by consent, and would like us all to seek to implement the spirit of the rules without needing a strict fine and compliance approach by them. When I am asked difficult questions about what individuals should do I advise them to apply commonsense, to think whether the neighbours would agree they have a need to be out and about.

There are issues about what constitutes a family, what living together as a family means, and what to do about family members who have been travelling and staying away from home for a period. Many of these matters are judgements, where in a free society we look to the adults in the community to come to sensible decision for themselves in the light of the threat and the general requirements of society. The government does not have ready made answers to all the detailed questions because it has never drawn up a blueprint to tell everyone where they have to live, whether they may travel and whose work is essential. It sought to get people to make a big reduction in personal contact by advice, and has had to move to legal requirements as a large number of people ignored the advice. Let us hope now people respond well, to avoid the need for a tougher approach to policing and punishing offenders.

Meanwhile I have renewed my proposals to

1. Get income into the hands of the self employed who cannot now work
2. Get more home deliveries scheduled by food shops
3. Have more national and local government support for volunteering to help those in need of assistance thanks to their need to self isolate for 12 weeks.
4. Get faster and more helpful assistance with the employee cost scheme and the loan schemes for busienss.