

Dear Constituent

The government has decided to continue the lock down for another three weeks. They are afraid that an early relaxation would allow the virus to spread more rapidly again, losing some or all the gains seen in fewer patients going to hospital in recent days.

In response to past representations by myself and others the government is now doing more work on a timetable for getting more people back to work. It is unfortunate there may be no early arrival of a vaccine to protect the population in large numbers, nor even an early medical agreement on a treatment which makes it much more likely patients with severe cases on Covid 19 survive. For that reason we need to plan to live with the virus whilst still being able to run our economy at a reasonable level of output with more people in jobs and more companies generating revenue than today.

I have suggested to the government that a back to work plan should encompass new ways of working with better protection for employees. Office based businesses could encourage much more homeworking, with limited numbers of staff in the main office observing social distancing. Factories and warehouses need to operate at levels that do not require staff to be close together, with additional automation where necessary. Any business staff in touch with the public should be given protective screens or personal protective clothing suitable to the risk level.

We should continue to give strong advice to at risk groups to stay at home, and do more to support them with remote technology to ensure deliveries and safe social contact. The protection of care homes needs more work. I supported moves to ensure all patients to be discharged from hospitals back to care homes should be tested. We need to avoid introducing the virus into a home through the return of a patient. I am pleased the government has now promised to do this.

Yesterday saw the Furlough scheme to subsidise employment which I have long championed open for claims. It is vital as many jobs as possible are saved by this means, to keep them in being until their employers can re open and afford the wages again. The self employed package still excludes some groups who deserve support and is still on the low side so I am asking the Treasury to look again at it.

Let us hope the positive trends in cases and deaths continues as a reward for the sacrifice many are making. On the latest figures too many people are still dying, but our death rate in relation to total population is still well below Belgium, Spain and Italy who have suffered particularly badly. The next few days are important. If the rate of death and of new patients to hospital continues to decline we should be able to start to relax controls. In the meantime I am conscious there are pressing needs like getting more dentists to work on emergency treatment, and tackling some of the backlog of medical appointments that were cancelled or delayed to make way for Covid 19 patients.

I would like to say another big thank you to all of you who have volunteered to help in so many ways. Some are delivering food parcels, some tackling loneliness of those staying at home alone, some are making protective clothing. I also wish to thank all who are going to work to care for people, to treat people in hospital, to provide us with food and to keep basic services and deliveries going.

Yours sincerely

John Redwood