

Environment Minister's letter to the waste sector on the impact of coronavirus

To those working in the waste sector,

As a nation we are undoubtedly going through one of the greatest health challenges we have faced in a generation, and I want to pay tribute to all of you who are working in such challenging times to protect the environment, local amenity and people's health – your work is vital.

The Government has taken some unprecedented steps; instructing people to stay at home, to protect our NHS and save lives. However, there are many key workers, like yourselves, who are crucial to the health of our country. I am writing to thank you for the vital service that you are delivering. To thank you for keeping waste moving. Maintaining the rates of black bag rubbish collection, working behind the scenes in recycling centres, treatment plants, energy recovery centres and disposal sites despite all the challenges that Coronavirus brings.

As a country we are all facing challenges and I know that you are feeling these too – staff absences, social distancing, a drop off in commercial waste and an increase in household waste. Some of you have had to take difficult decisions to furlough staff or close down your operations. But you have also responded, adapted and maintained an excellent level of service where you have been able which protects public health and is crucial in keeping our society and economy going.

I also appreciate the cooperative spirit with which you are approaching the situation in such testing times. I know you are looking at ways you can work together and have been an invaluable help to us in Government, feeding back important information on the impact of the outbreak. In Government we will continue to do whatever we can to help you. The Government has published guidance on personal protection equipment (PPE) and social distancing at work to provide reassurance for you so that when you're doing your job, you can do so safely.

We have also published guidance to help local authorities prioritise waste services. We know what an excellent and crucial job is being done to keep services running, but due to the impact of the outbreak we understand the additional pressures that you are facing. Our guidance provides advice on how services can be prioritised and underlines how critical black bag household waste collections are to protect people's health and the environment.

Workers in the waste sector may not get the headlines that other workers do during this challenging time, but I want you to know that you are not forgotten within Government. I am enormously grateful for all you are doing, and will continue to do, and proud of your commitment to the services you

provide.

Thank you.

Rebecca Pow MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment