

The role of Parliament in the crisis

I am uneasy that I cannot go to Parliament and raise there the issues and problems that concern my constituents. I appreciate this is the normal time for an Easter recess, but these are not normal times. My case load, email box and website are even more active than usual. There is heightened awareness of government given the large increase in powers and the direct effects it is having on all our lives. I of course take things up by email, phone and letter, as Ministers are working.

I am seeking reassurances today that Parliament will be allowed back after the recess as planned. I understand we will need to continue adapting the work pattern to offer more protection to those involved, assuming the social segregation measures are still in place. The Speaker set out some changes which helped before the recess and more might be possible, to limit the number in the chamber at any time, but to ensure that public questions and arguments can still be put. Maybe there can be a temporary use of remote technology, so Parliament can have its version of the daily Number 10 press conferences with MPs asking the questions and making the points to the Ministers on duty.

This should be a time to demonstrate the importance of single member constituency representation at Westminster. Each of us receive many practical pieces of advice and difficult cases that reveal cracks or imperfections in the rules and government programmes. These need to be put to government Ministers by MPs who are used to speaking truth to power and who know the Ministers well and how they might respond.

I would like strengthened accountability during this recess. The Cabinet office does allow a daily call to put issues, but it would be good to have a recess written question facility to all departments and virtual Ministerial statements with questions from MPs when the government is making important announcements.

I am raising these issues with the Speaker.