



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

15th January 2021

Dear Constance,

RE: SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES DURING COVID-19.

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns regarding the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on people with disabilities and for bringing Scope's 'Disability Report' to my attention.

I understand that whilst the effects of this global pandemic have been felt by all, there are some sectors of our society that will have seen their livelihoods disproportionately affected. It troubles me that people with disabilities feel forgotten about during this crisis and it is absolutely essential that we must now do all we can to address this and change things for the better for good.

Guidance for the extremely clinically vulnerable has been updated to reflect both the tier system and national lockdown, and it aims to strike a better balance between providing practical steps to help keep people safe, while reducing some of the potentially harmful impacts on mental and social wellbeing that were associated with previous strict shielding requirements. It sets out the steps clinically extremely vulnerable people can take to protect themselves. People who have been shielding will still be able to receive priority slots for supermarket deliveries, as well as prescriptions, essential items and food you buy delivered by NHS Volunteer Responders.

Regarding welfare, the Government acted quickly to suspend all face-to-face assessments for health and disability-related benefits while also extending award periods, giving people peace of mind that their benefit payments would continue. I am encouraged that Ministers are protecting the health of individuals claiming these benefits, many of whom are likely to be at greater risk of severe Coronavirus symptoms owing to their pre-existing health conditions.

My view is that the measures in the *Coronavirus Act* are temporary and proportionate to the threat we face. It is important that they will only be used when strictly necessary and will only be in place for as long as required to respond to the public health emergency. Local authorities are still expected to do as much as they can to comply with their duties to meet needs during this period, and the legislation does not remove the duty of care towards an individual's risk of serious neglect or harm. Certainly, the legislation must not be used as cover for negating basic duties.

There are also opportunities for positive change. The way many of us work has, for example, changed. Normalising working from home and other adjustments is one way we can emerge from this into a world which better embraces people with disabilities.



As you point out, the *National Strategy for Disabled People* is a key opportunity to enact changes that really do make a difference to people with disabilities. There is exciting work underway between my colleagues in Government, disability charities and businesses to produce practical measures that will transform the daily lives of people with disabilities and ensure they can fully participate in society. The strategy will be ambitious and will support people with disabilities in all aspects and phases of life.

Indeed, the *National Strategy for Disabled People* will put fairness at the heart of Government, levelling-up opportunities for people with disabilities. Importantly, while it will build on evidence and data, it will also be based on insights from people's daily experiences. The strategy will include existing commitments, like the increase in special educational needs and disability funding and careers advice, as well as identifying areas where further improvement is required. I know my ministerial colleagues are keen to hear from as many experts as possible, including charities such as Scope, so I will ensure the information from this briefing is passed on.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**