

# May 2020 NEWSLETTER



Linlithgow & East Falkirk Constituency

## Welcome

...to my Newsletter during these unique and historic times - both socially and politically. Parliament resumed on the 21st of April and those able to be present, due to Coronavirus restrictions, approved "hybrid proceedings" to take effect from the next day so that parliamentary representation could continue by means of technology. This enabled elected members to work from home and align with the government guidelines to "stay at home". Of course, as recent events have shown,  the UKG are out of step with the rest of the country, and some are too arrogant to think the rules applied to them.

## Westminster Update

### UK's Fiscal Response to Coronavirus

I welcomed the financial package that was put in place by Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to support employees, the self-employed and businesses in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. However, it was evident from the outset that there was no safety net for many who fell through the cracks of the various schemes. Those who had recently started a new job, for instance, were initially excluded from the Furlough Scheme if they hadn't been included on their employer's



PAYE payroll by the 28th of February. So, although the lockdown didn't happen until the 23rd of March, if you started at the beginning of March your employer couldn't claim for you. The eligibility date was extended to the 19th of March following concerns being raised, but it turned out to be false hope for those excluded as most folk were paid monthly and hadn't been notified to HMRC through a Real Time Information (RTI) submission. Additionally, the Self-Employed Income Scheme fell short for many in not accounting for those who earned dividends, who had recently started their business, or who, for various reasons, hadn't earned much in the past year. The SNP has repeatedly called for an emergency Universal Basic Income to be established to protect everyone's ability to survive and pay their household bills. Along with my colleagues, I am continuing to press for this as well as improvements to the existing schemes so that no one is left behind. However, with the UK Government accelerating the lifting of lockdown restrictions, I worry that the eligibility to qualify for the schemes will be narrowed, not broadened.

### #Cummingsgate

You really could not make up this debacle. The Press Conference held by Dominic Cummings on last week's Bank Holiday Monday was the most recent example of political theatre by the Tories and their entourage. How Boris thought this would be helpful merely compounded any doubts one might have already had on his lack of judgement and leadership. Moreover, it showed Cummings' unbelievable and absolute arrogance when he admitted he had no regrets, showed neither contrition nor humility, and didn't think he'd broken the rules that he wrote. People in Linlithgow and East Falkirk - and across the country - have made many sacrifices over these past few months by obeying the rules to stay at home, delay the spread of the virus and protect our NHS, while our Prime Minister's most senior adviser did what he felt. This scandal should have been dealt with by the swift acceptance of his resignation or dismissal, not allowed to distract from focused efforts to deal with the Coronavirus pandemic.

Meanwhile in Scotland, we have real leadership in our First Minister, as was evidenced when the Chief Medical Officer's resignation was accepted the day after it was discovered she had broken the rules. In the Coronavirus update that followed this, Nicola Sturgeon acknowledged the difficulties being faced by the Scottish Government were nothing compared to the difficulties being faced by those affected by Covid-19, and by the health and care staff treating them. Recent events has led her to say "Leadership is saying and doing the right thing even when it's tough for you..." Truly a tale of two governments.

## (In)Active in the constituency

### Gradual Easing of Lockdown Restrictions

The Scottish Government has published a route map setting out a gradual four phase approach to easing lockdown restrictions while still suppressing Covid-19; meaning the rate at which the virus reproduces (the R number) is below 1. It is not possible to put dates on different phases as timings must be driven by data and evidence.

<https://twitter.com/rosscolquhoun/status/126343551262355457/photo/1>

The current evidence shows Covid-19 is under control, with the number of cases declining, which enabled us to move to Phase 1 on the 29th of May. Here you can see what this looks like with some examples shown, like being allowed to travel up to 5 miles from our local communities, meet with another household outdoors providing physical distancing is maintained, and more children able to access childcare provision.

However, we must remember the virus has not gone away and there are things that will not change for a while, including the continuing need for physical distancing, which is harder for young children to understand so please be mindful of this.

Unlike England, our schools will not reopen until scientific advice tells us it is safe to do so. It is expected that this will happen on the 11th of August, which falls within Phase 3.

The First Minister made it clear when she made her statement, Covid-19

Lockdown: Next Steps, that it is necessary for any steps to be gradual and incremental, and matched with rigorous and on-going monitoring of the virus to mitigate risks as far as possible. It is also important that the impact of measures in one phase are assessed before moving to another.

Importantly, this first phase is in conjunction with the rollout of "Test and Protect" to quickly identify Coronavirus cases so that action can be taken to break the chains of transmission. It will also see the safe restart of NHS services covering primary and community services, including mental health, and the reopening of waste and recycling services. Some outdoor work will also resume, for example horticulture and landscaping, and outdoor retail outlets such as garden centres will gradually reopen. The Scottish Government will set out detailed guidance for key sectors of the economy on the changes they must make to ensure employees and customers are safe. Those who are, or know someone who is, shielding please have just a little bit more patience. We know these 175,000 are at the greatest risk and need to be extra careful, so tailored new guidance will be issued ahead of the 18th of June.

## Links between Parliament and the constituency

### Transport Question

Several constituents have contacted me about the different travel regulations now in place in Scotland and England due to the relaxed lockdown south of the border. This has caused confusion both for employees of cross-border travel operators and those requiring assisted travelling. On the 12th of May I took the opportunity to highlight this to the UK Government and asked about discussions between the Governments to ensure that the regulations can be effectively enforced on cross border rail services. To his credit Grant Shapps, the Secretary of State for Transport, gave a positive answer about working with the other governments. Of course, only time will tell what

impact the somewhat confused relaxation of lockdown in England, and the consequent increased journeys and social interaction, will have on the spread of the virus.

I have also written to Michael Matheson, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, to ask what measures will be put in place to ensure that guidance is shared with transport providers to support blind and partially sighted people when movement restrictions are eased but social distancing measures remain in place. The Scottish Government has already published its Transport Transition Plan, setting out what the different phases in easing the lockdown restrictions in Scotland will mean for travel and transport.



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### Scottish Government COVID-19 Routemap

Scottish Government  
Rigorous no-h-ho.gov.scot

Lockdown	Phase 1	Lockdown	Phase 1
Lockdown restrictions:	As with previous phase but with the following changes:	Lockdown restrictions:	As with previous phase but with the following changes:
Seeing family	Strict physical distancing and hygiene measures. Contact should be within own household only. No public gatherings except for meetings of two people permitted. Self-isolation/household isolation if displaying symptoms. Shielding of very high risk individuals.	More outdoor activity permitted – such as being able to sit in the park, as long as physically distanced. Meeting up with other people in small numbers, including in gardens, but with physical distancing required	Schools and childcare services closed. Measures in place to support home learning and to provide outreach services to vulnerable children.
Getting around	Stay at home with essential travel only, staying in local area. Active travel including walking and cycling in local area for daily exercise. Public transport operating with limited service and capacity with physical distancing.	Consistent with the reopening of workplaces set out in this phase, where physical distancing is not possible businesses and organisations are encouraged to manage travel demands through staggered start times and flexible working patterns. Passengers recommended to wear face coverings, only to travel for essential purposes and to avoid bus routes/periods.	Schools, childcare and other educational settings
Working or running a business	Closure of non-essential workplaces. Social distancing requirements for essential businesses. Remote working is the default position.	Remote working remains the default position for those who can. For those workplaces that are reopening, employers should encourage staggered start times and flexible working. Non-essential outdoor workplaces with physical distancing in place relevant guidance agreed. Construction – Phases 0-2 of industry restart plan can now be implemented. Industry to consult government before progressing to phase 2. Preparing for the safe reopening of the housing market. Workplaces resuming in later phases can undertake preparatory work on physical distancing and hygiene measures.	Shopping for necessities, with distancing measures. Closure of non-essential retail, libraries and some indoor public spaces. Closure and restriction of businesses selling food or drink. Closure of outdoor markets.
		Sport, culture and leisure activities	Daily (unlimited) exercise. Closure of entertainment premises and leisure facilities. Closure of playgrounds. Closure of holiday accommodation.

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