



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dear Businesses in Washington and Sunderland West,

### **Open letter to non-essential businesses operating in Washington and Sunderland West during Covid-19 pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic is an uncertain time for everyone. People are anxious about their health, their finances and their jobs. We all have a part to play in not spreading the disease, ensuring our NHS is not overwhelmed and enabling the most vulnerable in society to be protected for at least 12 weeks.

I was therefore alarmed to receive so many emails from my constituents who have been told by their employer that they must still go to work, despite not being classed under the latest guidelines from the Government as a “key worker” or working for an “essential business”.

This comes after the Prime Minister’s address to the nation on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March which stated that: *“people will only be allowed to leave their home... travelling to and from work, but only where this is absolutely necessary and cannot be done from home.”*

I know that the Government’s current advice is vague and open to interpretation, but I urge you to consider the following before telling your employees to come into work:

- Can the work be done from home?
- Is your business operation absolutely necessary, are you classed as an “essential business”?
- Is it contributing towards the national effort to slow the spread of Covid-19?
- Does your business support the NHS in the response to Covid-19, or any of the critical sectors as outlined by the Government?
- What is worth more: the health of your employees and their family, or the short-term financial gain from your continued business operations?

If your concerns are about the future viability of your business, which is totally understandable as no one wants to see any businesses go under because of all this, then please email me and I will do all that I can to support you to get the financial support you need from what is now available from the Government.

I have had reports that there are a small number of businesses who seem to be prioritising profit or seeing an opportunity to cash in at this time when other competitors may have shut temporarily, over the health and wellbeing of their

employees. I would say to such businesses that I hope you will seriously think again and reconsider for the sake of yourselves, your employees, their families and yours, but also your reputation as a business and as an employer. Because when this is all over, and it will eventually be over, people will remember who did what, when we as a nation were up against the wall and any short-term gain at the moment may be very short lived in the long run.

Employers have a duty of care to protect their employees, and I am concerned about the number of businesses who are not doing so at this most crucial of times.

We need as many people as possible to stay home in order to save lives.

I want to support you and your employees at this most difficult time, which is why I am calling on the Government to make the guidance clearer for businesses when it comes to what should and should not be open, as I believe that this should not be determined by businesses themselves.

Where your business *is* considered essential during the Covid-19 pandemic and working from home is not possible, I ask you to ensure that everyone follows the Government's advice, particularly to stay 2 metres away from others at all times, and have sufficient hand washing facilities, and opportunities, to avoid spreading the virus.

I urge you also to make provisions for your employees who are deemed as "at-risk" or who may live with someone who is deemed "at-risk". These people will not be able to survive without any pay for 12 weeks as the current rate of Statutory Sick Pay is insufficient to live on for any sustained length of time.

Any of my constituents who are concerned about their finances at this time are invited to email me with their full name and postal address at [Sharon.hodgson.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:Sharon.hodgson.mp@parliament.uk) and I will do all that I can to assist them access any help or support they are entitled to.

We all have a part to play in ensuring our communities and fellow citizens are safe and I hope you will prioritise the health of yourself, your employees and everyone's families at this critical time.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon Hodgson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson MP**

Member of Parliament for Washington & Sunderland West Constituency  
Shadow Minister for Public Health