

Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP

Member of Parliament for Camberwell and Peckham
Mother of the House of Commons

Coronavirus Crisis Parliamentary Report 6

17th September 2020

HM Government

NHS

WASH HANDS

COVER FACE

MAKE SPACE

Keep on protecting each other



House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA
0207 219 4218

harriet.harman.mp@parliament.uk
www.harrietharman.org.uk
[@harrietharman](https://twitter.com/harrietharman)

This is my sixth report during the COVID crisis in which I:

- share with you how I'm seeking to go about my work as MP during this coronavirus crisis,
- hear from you if you agree with how I'm approaching things and
- what further issues you think I should be addressing.

I, and my office team, continue to help constituents and to raise issues with the government or with agencies if they do not appear to have them on their agenda. Where they are aware of problems but appear to be taking too long to solve them I am pressuring government to act more speedily.

I continue to support the public health guidance issued by Public Health England.

Harriet Harman

Government must urgently fix the COVID testing fiasco



Harriet Harman ✓ @HarrietHarman · 14 Sep

Woman in Peckham with sick 3yo directed for #covidtest to ABERDEEN or INVERNESS! Clearly not poss so family isolating, 5yo missing school & parents can't work. Ludicrous!! Govt must urgently fix testing shambles @MattHancock @didoharding #CovidTesting



Aberdeen Airport (drive in only)
(406.2 miles away)

Aberdeen International Airport, Dyce
Aberdeen
AB21 7GQ

31 slots available in the next 5 days.

I am being contacted by a growing number of people in Camberwell and Peckham who tell me they are unwell with COVID systems, but when they log onto the government's online testing system are told that there are no COVID tests available, or are told to go to the "nearest COVID testing site" - over 500 miles away - in Scotland!



Inverness (drive in only) (447.8 miles away)

University of Highlands and Islands
Inverness
IV2 5NA

50 slots available in the next 5 days.

It is unacceptable that 6 months after the pandemic started we are still without a proper functioning test and trace programme due to this government's incompetence.

The government says this is due to increasing demand. But having spent all summer telling employees to go back to work and reopening schools there was obviously going to be increased demand on the system as social distancing eases. They should have anticipated this and used the summer to ensure the system was fit for purpose.

But now because of the government's failure to plan properly there are increasing numbers of teachers and pupils not in school. In hospitals, operations are cancelled while NHS staff are stuck in limbo waiting for tests. Hundreds of ill people every day are being told there are no tests.

We all want to avoid spreading the virus and avoid further restrictions or another national lockdown. The government needs to get a grip on the test and trace system, and fast.

Finally children are going back to school

It's so important that all parents send their children back to school this September after months of missing their friends and schooling. It's been so hard for parents as well as children during the COVID lockdown. Over the coming weeks I'm speaking to the headteachers at schools in Camberwell and Peckham to thank them and the school staff who have worked tirelessly so their pupils continued to learn in the lockdown and who've now made preparations to ensure a safe return to school.

But the government's mishandling of schools has made it so much harder. They have bungled the A-Level and GCSE results, dithered over when and how children should go back to school and failed to properly engage with and consult teachers.

In March the government rightly closed all schools and colleges in England to try and halt the spread of COVID and so exams were cancelled. Ofqual, the examinations regulator, was tasked by the Government with devising a system for giving students grades without exams. The method chosen and agreed by the government was based on centre assessed grades (CAGs), pupil rankings and an algorithm based results partly on how schools had performed in past years. This discriminated against high achieving students in schools which had not had good results in the past, holding back students who'd worked hard and done well.

On 13 August when students were told their grades 40% of them were horrified to find they had been given lower grades than their teachers had predicted. It is terrible that the algorithm disproportionately hit children in low-income families and Black and Ethnic minority people and thereby breached the laws against discrimination.

I received dozens of heart-rending emails from A-Level students in Southwark given marks lower than their predicted grades, who lost out on their university places or apprenticeships – their future taken from them. One student in Peckham lost her place at King's College London after being downgraded by 4 grades. With support from Sacred Heart School Kings reversed their decision, but only after 10 days of acute stress for the student, their family and their teachers.

On Monday 17 August, following a weekend of protests by students, the Government backed down and announced students' grades for A-levels and GCSEs would be based on their teachers' predictions or their awarded grades, whichever was higher.

Even after the Government U-turn, some students still missed out on their university place as they'd been reallocated to other students. One of many Camberwell students missed out on her first choice university by one grade. She and her school are still waiting to hear back about her appeal. I have offered to support her however I can.

The Education Secretary's claim to have only become aware of the issues around the algorithm after results day does not hold when the Education Select Committee had raised serious concerns as early as June.

Labour are now pressing the government to push next year's A-level and GCSE exams back from May to July to give students more time to catch up and to avoid more

VIEW FROM WESTMINSTER: PUSH NEXT YEAR'S GCSE AND A LEVEL EXAMS BACK TO JUNE TO HELP STUDENTS LEFT BEHIND IN LOCKDOWN

KATHERINE JOHNSTON 03 September 2020 [COMMENT](#)
'Young people's futures cannot be held back by government incompetence'



chaos. The students starting Year 11 and 13 in September 2020 have a mountain to climb having missed months of schooling. Young people's futures cannot be held back by government incompetence. It's so important that the government starts to make clear plans now so they don't repeat the exam grade fiasco.

As pupils return to school it will be clear just how much some have lost out by not having proper computer equipment and access to broadband or whose home circumstances make it difficult for them to have kept up with school work. The government must direct policy and money to helping those students catch up so that we tackle the widening "attainment gap". We must protect children's education and not allow a growth in inequality to be another legacy of COVID.

Chancellor must extend furlough scheme past October to protect jobs

We are now 6 long months into the COVID crisis with many workplaces still shut. Since the crisis began in March over 22,300 people in Camberwell and Peckham have been laid off work and paid through the Government's furlough scheme, and over 5,500 self-employed people who can't work have got payments from the Government's scheme.

Though this has been a lifeline for those who've got the payments I am increasingly concerned about what will happen when the scheme changes as employers start having to contribute to the pay of their furloughed employees, and when the furlough scheme is cut off at the end of October.

Because some people are working full time, some can work but on fewer hours and some can't work at all, the government shouldn't use a one-size-fits-all approach to winding down the Job Retention and Self-employed Support Scheme. While some businesses can now return to normal many including the hospitality, tourism are still closed, or operating at reduced capacity because of social distancing measures.

The problem is that this October, if there will be a cliff edge there will be thousands of jobs at risk and the money the government has already spent to protect jobs will have been in vain.

I fear especially for the self-employed and freelancers in the creative industries which have yet to be re-opened but who's payments from the government are coming to an end.

The government says the public finances can't afford to extend the schemes, but if you look around the world many countries are finding the money and acting flexibly to give support where it's needed. For example this month Germany announced it is extending its furlough scheme for another year. France will extend for 6 months after October. And in Spain the Government is considering extending its job retention programme until at least the end of the year. We need to see that here, at least for those sectors and regions that are still very much affected by the crisis.

Instead of giving every employer a bonus for taking back any furloughed staff until January 2020, it would be better if that public money was targeted to those sectors and self-employed people which are particularly struggling.

Young people have been hit particularly hard. Under 25s are twice as likely to have been furloughed or made redundant. Currently 1 in 4 under 25s are furloughed and at risk of long-term unemployment. So it is especially important that young people are guaranteed training and jobs. I along with 60 MPs have written to the Prime Minister urging him to introduce income and training guarantees to support the one million young people who face unemployment.

Childcare is another gaping hole in the Chancellor's plans to encourage people back to work. Nurseries and childminders are essential to enable parents to go back to work and to ensure that inequality between children does not widen yet further. I continue to press the Chancellor to create a special Nurseries Fund so nurseries can re-open safely and can survive despite reduced numbers of children and therefore income coming in. I know from Southwark's nursery managers that many are on the brink of collapse and in urgent need of financial support. The UK's economic recovery won't happen if parents can't get back to work because of the loss of thousands of childcare places.

Labour are urging the UK Government to make the financial support schemes more targeted rather than just ending them. We need a bridge between the end of furlough and a proper job creation programme that also adequately addresses childcare to prevent record rates of unemployment that could widen inequality and scar the country for generations.

Thank you to outgoing Council Leader, Cllr Peter John MBE, for his decade of dedication to Southwark residents

As Southwark's MPs Helen Hayes, Neil Coyle and I want to convey our gratitude for Peter's decade of delivery and for leading the council through some extraordinary times. Peter became Leader of the Council in 2010 and immediately faced unprecedented cuts from the new Coalition Government, whilst at the same time facing a dramatic rise in demand for help from people and organisations across our community as a result of the Government's policies. Peter has more than risen to the challenges, including most recently staying in post to help manage our borough through the unique, painful circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic and the additional pressure it has brought.



Peter's ambition for our borough has never been diminished by the challenging period in which he has led. The new houses, jobs and apprenticeships are some of the policies most closely associated with his vision for Southwark. But equally the support for disadvantaged young people to get to university, the free swim and gym policy, the new libraries, the free healthy primary school meals, the London Living Wage for all council staff, and the largest council housebuilding programme in the country, are all just as much Peter's positive legacy for Southwark. As a Labour family, we are proud of Peter's service to our community and to all the people in the borough who have benefitted from his leadership of the Council. Thank you Peter. And all the best to Cllr Kieron Williams for his future work in this role, in such tough times. I forward to working with him.

Constituency problems – update

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to bring many new problems to people in Camberwell and Peckham and make many pre-existing problems worse. So there continues to be an increase in the number of constituents seeking my help. Those who already had financial problems are finding that the COVID-19 crisis only makes them worse. My casework team continue to deal with pre-existing problems as well as the new COVID-19 problems. I have taken action on behalf of **3,198** constituents from 1st March – 31st August.

So far since the start of 2020, I have recouped **£63,516** for constituents who have requested my assistance. This includes underpaid benefit payments, Coronavirus business grants for local business owners, waived HMRC penalties and compensation for errors and delays from housing associations and the Home Office.

Case summaries:

1. A lone parent who became unemployed due to COVID-19 contacted me as they needed assistance with their housing situation after their children were placed in their care. They were currently homeless, staying in a friend's living room and awaiting a homelessness assessment with Southwark Council. I wrote to the council and asked that their application be expedited.
2. A woman from Peckham Rye contacted me as an alarm going off at a local reservoir had been disturbing residents for several weeks. She said she had contacted both Southwark Council and Thames Water to ask for the alarm to be turned off but had received no response. I wrote to Southwark Council and received a response soon after, stating that the alarm was coming from a mast located on land rented out by Thames Water. They had spoken to the company and they would ensure the alarm was deactivated as soon as possible.
3. A Nunhead woman contacted me because she had been informed by Southwark Council that after the death of her husband she would have to vacate her home. I wrote urgently to Southwark Council and asked that the tenancy be assigned to my constituent as soon as possible to ensure she would not be made homeless.
4. A nurse living in Nunhead wrote to me as she had applied to the Home Office to extend her visa, as part of the free scheme for NHS workers during the Covid-19 pandemic but had not yet received a decision. I wrote to UK Visas and Immigration to ask that the case be expedited.
5. A constituent wrote to me on behalf of a local grassroots children's football club regarding funding options available to them. The club was experiencing financial difficulties due to a sponsor dropping out. I wrote to the relevant Cabinet Members at Southwark Council to ask if they were aware of any funding that would be available to the club.
6. A man from Peckham Rye who was a victim of a hit and run contacted me regarding the police investigation. He said that 12 days after reporting the

crime he still had not received a Crime Reference Number or any contact from the police. I wrote urgently to the police to ask for an update.

7. Several concerned residents living in the same block contacted me because their Housing Association had hired an external parking enforcement company to patrol the road outside the block. Despite showing parking permits, some of them had wrongly received Penalty Charge Notices. They contacted their Housing Association but had received no response. I wrote to the Housing Association asking them to look into this urgently.
8. A Nunhead man contacted me as he had been trying since January 2020 to get repairs carried out to his property after a leak. He had been in contact with his Housing Association, Habinteg, but the repairs had still not been carried out. I wrote to Habinteg and received a response soon after stating that the repairs had been scheduled and my constituent had been offered £100 as a goodwill payment.
9. A Camberwell resident contacted me complaining of anti-social behaviour in Burgess Park. He said the police are often called up to three times a night due to noise which sometimes includes parties into the early hours with sound systems. Despite an increased police presence, the situation had not improved. I wrote to Southwark Council and the Police and received responses stating that they were working together to address the anti-social behaviour.
10. A lone mother living in Camberwell wrote to me for help with outstanding repairs issues in her home. She informed me that she was waiting for Southwark Council to deal with her heating and the damage caused by a leak. I wrote to Southwark Council who agreed to carry out the repairs and gave her a compensation payment of £350.

I have received **6,795** emails from constituents on policy issues from 1st March to 31st August, the majority relating to COVID-19. Issues raised since my fifth COVID-19 report on 14th July:

- Problems getting timely COVID-19 tests close to home. I am taking this up with Dido Harding, Head of the government's test and trace programme, and Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.
- Demand government come clean about PPE procurement and publish all the contracts.
- Call on the government to extend the furlough and self-employment income support schemes past October to protect jobs and avoid a cliff edge.
- 3/4 million jobs are at risk in the Night-Time economy - please support the campaign to save the industry from collapse.
- Support the 'Build Back Better' campaign to ensure we learn from the pandemic and seize the opportunity to build our society back better.
- Demand government give local services and councils more money.
- Ask Foreign Secretary to step up UK action to help girls around the world who are facing increased risk of missing out on education due to COVID-19.
- Oppose Tory cuts to free travel for under-18s in London.
- Support the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Bill.

Three quarters of Black people say they don't feel their human rights are equally protected

The Joint Committee on Human Rights, which I chair, has undertaken the largest ever polling exercise of its kind in the UK to ask black people whether they feel their human rights are equally protected in this country. The research was undertaken by black polling company Clearview Research and is part of our ongoing #BlackLivesMatter inquiry.

Three quarters of black people in the UK told us they do not feel the state protects their human rights equally and two thirds of black people said they feel the NHS does not protect their right to life equally.

Worryingly that negative view of the health service is shared by the majority of black people of almost all ages, and is held especially strongly by black women.

The results pose a major challenge to the health service, and senior figures should not sweep them under the carpet.

The state has a duty to protect life and not to discriminate. They have a duty to protect the lives of black and non-black people equally.

These findings are stark, especially as so many black people work in the NHS yet still feel that it does not value their lives equally. The fact that this is most strongly felt by black women perhaps reflects women's greater role in caring for children and older relatives.

A succession of reports in recent years have looked into, and found, structural racial inequalities in our institutions, from the Home Office treatment of the Windrush Generation to David Lammy's 2017 report on the disproportionately high numbers of black people in the Youth Justice System. The Joint Committee on Human Rights has taken evidence from the authors of those reports on the racism which affects black people's human rights, including the right to life, right to a fair trial, right to not be detained without justification and right to family life. And the JCHR will be insisting that the Government make the change that is necessary. Specifically, the Committee is looking at:

- The over-representation of black people in prison and deaths in police custody;
- The Windrush scandal;
- The under registration of black people on the Electoral Registration;
- The greater likelihood of black mothers to die in childbirth.

In our first evidence session we heard powerful evidence from David Lammy MP, Baroness Doreen Lawrence OBE, Lord Simon Woolley, Director of Operation Black Vote and HMI Wendy Williams, author of the Windrush report.

HARRIET HARMAN HIGHLIGHTS STAGGERING MATERNAL DEATH RATES AMONG BLACK WOMEN IN RACISM INQUIRY

KATHERINE JOHNSTON 05 August 2020 **HEALTH** **COMMUNITY**
Black women are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than white women



Our second evidence session was with Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, chief midwifery officer for England, and the Chair of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, David Isaac. We are looking into the shocking racial disparity in the number of mothers who die during pregnancy or childbirth. Black mothers are 5 times more likely to die than white mothers. Yet shockingly the NHS don't even have a target to cut this glaring racial disparity and to protect black women.

 **UK Parliament Human Rights Committee** @HumanRight... · 20 Jul
1/2 @HarrietHarman asks why Black women have a 5X greater risk of dying in pregnancy than white women
@TeamCMidO says certain health conditions are more likely to be found in Black women which can contribute to inequity experienced by Black women when accessing maternal services



Unbelievably we heard that the EHRC which is the public body with the responsibility for tackling racial inequality does not even have a single black commissioner on its board! We are urging the Government to sort this immediately.

 **Ayesha Hazarika** @ayeshahazarika · 12 Sep
6pm Discussion around findings about how black people view their human rights in the UK commissioned by the joint Lords & Commons committee on human rights with @HarrietHarman @ppvernon @KennyImafidon
6:30pm US elections with @brianklaas & @tomdelbeccaro
Hope you can join us!

You can watch our evidence session back [here](#).



We will shortly be reporting and proposing action the government and public authorities like the police and NHS must undertake to make change.

Listen to my BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour interview [here](#) and on Times Radio [here](#) from 2 hours 6 minutes 53 seconds in.

Opposing government abandonment of laws to protect human rights

I was very concerned by reports this week that the Government is planning to scrap major provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, including laws which protect the rights of migrants and asylum seekers in the UK.

The Human Rights Committee, which I chair, will be launching an urgent inquiry into this threat to human rights. I have written to the Justice Secretary asking him to set out the government's plans and proposed timetable for this, and to commit to proper parliamentary scrutiny of these proposals.

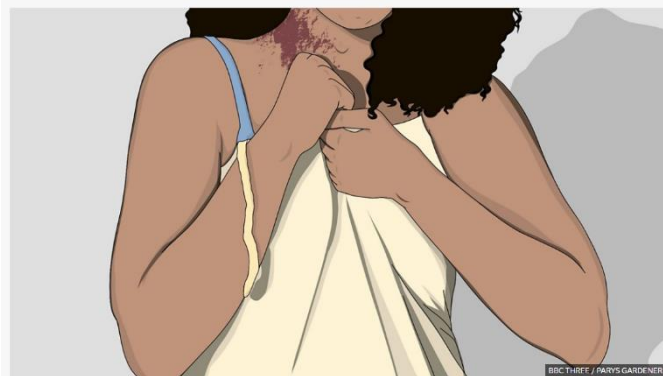


UK Parliament Human Rights Committee @HumanRig... · 14 Sep
Briefing to @Telegraph reports Government planning "opt out of major parts of European human rights laws". @HumanRightsCtte and @HarrietHarman will be seeking further clarification from @RobertBuckland @MojGovUK

'Rough sex defence' is banned as government adds new clause to the Domestic Abuse Bill

At last the law is about to be changed so men can no longer blame women for their own deaths, but what is important is that it is now rigorously enforced by the Police and Crown Prosecution Service. I'm seeking a meeting with the Director of Public Prosecutions because they'll need to issue new guidance for cases going forward and monitor how the new law is operating. I think they should look back at past cases where there's evidence the CPS have accepted the "rough sex gone wrong defence" and therefore not prosecuted.

Rape is such a serious crime, a violation of a woman both physically and mentally, it is important defendants are brought to justice.



'The police said it wasn't rape it was rough sex'

Watch me on ITV's Loose Women [here](#).

Read our BBC feature on this [here](#).

We must unite to end the oppression of Uyghur people

I have written to the Chinese Ambassador to the UK, Liu Xiaoming, with 134 cross-party MPs & Peers to express our horror and absolute condemnation of the oppression of the Uyghur people. When the world is presented with overwhelming evidence of severe human rights abuses, nobody can turn a blind eye.

We will keep up the pressure. Read our letter [here](#).

Make proxy voting permanent, says Commons Procedure Committee:

The Procedure Committee has completed its [review of the pilot of my proxy voting for baby leave scheme](#). I welcome the Committee's recommendation to the government to bring forward a change in Parliament's Standing Orders to make #Babyleave permanent and to continue proxy arrangements for public health reasons throughout the pandemic.

I am urging the government to respond quickly and implements their recommendations.



Procedure Committee @CommonsProcCom · 10 Sep

#proxyvoting #babyleave

committees.parliament.uk/publications/2...

@HarrietHarman @profsarahchilds @CentenaryAction @MariaMillerUK

"We recommend that the House make permanent arrangements for proxy voting for parental absence."

Read our report

PROCEDURE COMMITTEE



Working differently!

I and my staff team are continuing to work remotely until the guidance changes. I remain enormously grateful to Clare Gosbee, Rachel Smethers, Chloe Wright, Papa Okyere-Asiedu and Rachel Wilbur, who are diligently continuing to help my constituents, supporting my work as an MP and as chair of the Human Rights Committee. I am also grateful to Bea Forrester who has temporarily rejoined the team to work remotely as a caseworker. They have overcome technology issues and made their homes into their offices to continue their work.



Coronavirus Help and Support

Southwark Council:

- [General information on Coronavirus](#)
- [Covid-19: What can you do to help](#)
- [Financial support for residents](#)
- [Food access](#)
- [Coronavirus housing advice](#)
- [Covid-19: Support and information for businesses and employers](#)
- [Southwark COVID-19 community grants](#)
- [Voluntary sector help and advice on Coronavirus](#)
- [Impact on council services](#)
- [Advice on potential coronavirus related scams](#)

Bereavement support:

- The government has published a [bereavement support leaflet](#) to help those who have lost a loved one. The leaflet shares information to help bereaved families, friends, or next of kin make important decisions during this national emergency, sets out what to expect next, and signposts the extra help and support that is available.

Citizens Advice – Benefit advice:

- <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/coronavirus-check-what-benefits-you-can-get/>

Government business advice:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>
- Government's Business Support Helpline on 0300 456 3565, Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm.

HMRC:

- [helpline for businesses and self-employed people who are concerned about their tax](#) due to COVID-19.
- 08000 241222, Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm.

Domestic violence help and support:

- [Solace Women's Aid](#) - Advice Line - 0808 802 5565
- Monday - Friday 10am - 4pm. Additional 6pm - 8pm on Tuesdays.
- Email: advice@solacewomensaid.org

Legal advice

- [Southwark Law Centre](#)
- [Citizens Advice Southwark](#) has resumed drop-in sessions from 9.30 am to 4.00 pm 5 days a week at:
 - Peckham - 97 Peckham High Street, SE15 5RS
 - Bermondsey - 8 Market Place, Southwark Park Road, SE16 3UQ
 - Walworth - 6-8 Westmoreland Road, Walworth, SE17 2AY



Let me know your views on Coronavirus issues at harriet.harman.mp@parliament.uk