



Northern Liberal Network
360 Cemetery Road
Sheffield
S11 8FT

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London, SW1A 2AA

17th October 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

We are Liberal Democrats from across the North, calling on the government to take urgent action to support people, communities and businesses across the North.

Millions of people across the north have been living under local restrictions for months. They have borne it with fortitude, but infection rates are still rising. Now the government threatens months of further restrictions, without the support needed to underpin it. This risks a death by a thousand cuts for our hospitality and creative sectors – and the jobs that depend on them.

The north of England hosts dynamic businesses, a rich arts sector, world-leading universities and some of the country's most popular national parks. But we are too often overlooked by a London-centric government. We are proud of our communities and stand ready to work cross-party to deliver the support they need to work together to defeat the virus.

Clearly, with case numbers and hospital admissions rising rapidly, urgent action is needed. But the government's own analysis makes clear that even Tier 3 may not be enough. And if local lockdowns without additional support were effective, areas like Greater Manchester and the North East, where restrictions have been in place for months, would not be in this position. We need to do better than the same failed strategy.

Regardless of whether regional or national lockdown strategies are pursued we are calling on the government to act rapidly and constructively with local political leaders who are grounded in communities – not act by fiat from Whitehall – to put in place the support we need to sustain a lockdown and come out of it better placed to defeat the virus.

These actions should include:

1. Urgent funding for local action on test and trace. The central system is an expensive failure. Local government has the capacity to help – but not the funding. A rapid infusion of funding to enable local scale-up could be transformative for our fight against the virus, and justify the pain caused by a second lockdown.
2. Support to enable people to self-isolate. Fewer people across the North can work from home, which may be one reason why the initial lockdown was less effective. That means that support is more urgently needed for those who cannot work while self-isolating.
3. Extension of the furlough scheme to save jobs and support people and communities. While borrowing costs next to nothing, the Chancellor is choosing to leave workers without a salary and forcing viable enterprises out of business. This is a heartless political choice whose effects will last years. He must expand furlough support urgently until June 2021.
4. Protect people living in care. People living in care were appallingly let down in the first weeks of this crisis. We must not make the same mistake again. Government must guarantee that all discharges from hospitals into care homes take place only following a negative Covid test. Staff and residents must be able to access regular testing, with results within 24 hours, and the same must apply to people being supported to live independently, as well as those visiting loved ones in care homes.
5. Support to children and young people. Government must support schools to stay open, whilst also ensuring they have resources to provide online learning. This means getting laptops and internet access to pupils from low income households. They must extend free school meals and vouchers to ensure every child in poverty can access them, even when schools are closed. They must reach a fair deal for university students who are being charged for accommodation they do not want to use, and ensure that actions to tackle outbreaks in the student community consider the rights and needs of both students and local residents.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Gordon, Chair, Northern Liberal Network

Cllr Lisa Smart, Vice-Chair, Northern Liberal Network and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Lord Dick Newby, Baron Newby of Rothwell, Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords

Tim Farron MP, Member of Parliament for Westmorland and Lonsdale

Cllr Keith Aspden, Leader, City of York Council

Cllr Giles Archibald, Leader, South Lakeland District Council

Cllr Karen King, Deputy Leader, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council

Cllr Howard Sykes, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council and Leader of the Liberal Democrat group at the Local Government Association

Lord Stunell of Hazel Grove

Lord Scriven of Hunters Bar in the City of Sheffield and former Leader of Sheffield City Council

Cllr Mark Hunter, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Cllr Shaffaq Mohammed, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Sheffield City Council

Cllr Hannah Kitching, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Cllr James Baker, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council

Cllr Mike Ross, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Hull City Council

Cllr Tom Gordon, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

Cllr John Lawson, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Kirklees Metropolitan Council

Cllr Nick Cott, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Newcastle City Council

Cllr David Minchella, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Cllr John Potter, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Preston Borough Council

Cllr David Nolan, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Cllr Stewart Golton, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Leeds City Council and West Yorkshire Mayoral Candidate for the Liberal Democrats

Cllr Richard Kemp, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Liverpool City Council

Cllr Niall Hodson, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Sunderland City Council

Cllr Jeanette Sunderland, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Bradford City Council

Cllr Roger Hayes, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council

Cllr Andy Kelly, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council

Cllr Pat Marsh, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Harrogate Borough Council

Cllr Geoff Webber, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on North Yorkshire County Council

Judith Rogerson, Parliamentary Spokesperson for Harrogate and Knaresborough

Cllr Glyn Nightingale, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council

Cllr Jonathan Wallace, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Gateshead Metropolitan Council

Cllr Virginia Taylor, Leader of Eden Council

Cllr John Leech, Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Manchester City Council