



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

9 July 2020

THE PRIME MINISTER

Dear Liz,

Thank you for your letter of 29 April, on behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Disability, calling for a disability-inclusive COVID-19 response.

I entirely agree. I recognise fully the concern that many disabled people will be experiencing during this challenging time. I can assure you that the Government has been committed to supporting disabled people throughout, and indeed after, the pandemic. Your letter raises a number of important issues.

Turning firstly to accessible communications, ensuring that public information on COVID-19 is accessible and reaches as many people as possible is vital. We have made sure that important health guidance is available in alternative formats, including Easy Read, British Sign Language (BSL) and Audio, and we have welcomed the many partnerships, including with disability organisations, that have helped to get critical messages and advice across. We established BSL interpretation at the daily No10 press conference via the BBC News channel and iPlayer and, since 21 May, this has been available to all broadcasters and to No10, for use on government social channels.

I know that social distancing and self-isolation, though essential in our response, have increased the risk of loneliness and mental health issues, particularly for disabled people. That is why we launched a new major plan to tackle loneliness and social isolation, including guidance on how people can support themselves and others safely. The Government is also working closely with local authorities, retailers and charities, to ensure that disabled people, including those who are unable to comply with social distancing, continue to have access to food, medicines and essential goods.

The Government published guidance setting out how local authorities can use the new Care Act easements, created under the Coronavirus Act 2020, to ensure the best possible care for people in our society during this exceptional period. This makes clear the importance of accessible communication for service users and carers.

The option for Care Act easements have been necessary in the exceptional circumstances that local authorities and front line workers have faced. But it remains clear that local authorities should do everything they can to continue to meet their existing duties prior to the Coronavirus Act provisions coming into force. We have also been clear that these measures are temporary. The Secretary of State will keep them under review and terminate them, on expert clinical and social care advice, as soon as possible.

I absolutely agree that additional funding, training, guidance and PPE are all vital. Public Health England has provided tailored guidance on the use of PPE in care homes and domiciliary care settings, including advice on how to provide support to people with learning disabilities and/or autism. Alongside this, we recently announced an additional £600 million Infection Control Fund for Adult Social Care to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in care homes as part of a wider support package.

The Cabinet Office Disability Unit is working with disability stakeholders and across government to ensure that the needs of disabled people are fully considered as we develop our response. We are clear that consideration of equality impacts must be integral in all key policy decisions.

Our resolve to ensuring that disabled people can play a full role in society is steadfast and unchanged, with a manifesto commitment to publish a National Strategy for Disabled People. The Strategy's significance is even greater as we rebuild the UK's economy and society after COVID-19, and I am determined that now, more than ever, it must be the most ambitious and transformative endeavour for disabled people in a generation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Cameron', written in a cursive style.

Dr Lisa Cameron MP