May 2020



Thank you for contacting me about immigration, visas and the UK Border as the Coronavirus outbreak continues.

I would like to assure you that Ministers in the Home Office and across Government are working hard to ensure that the UK immigration and border system can continue to function effectively during the current outbreak.

I know that many constituents have raised the issue of checks at UK airports for citizens from countries also tackling the current Coronavirus outbreak. I have raised this issue with the Home Office and Ministers have confirmed that the procedures at the border strictly follow the very latest public health guidance and this has been the case from the beginning of the outbreak. I believe strongly in the need to follow the science and the guidance is clear that at this moment in time measures such as temperature checks at airports are not effective.

I can also confirm that the Home Office is working to ensure Border Force staff have all the relevant Personal Protective Equipment available to them. It is also good news that passengers at airports are being provided with information on symptoms and social distancing processes here in the UK. I am sure you agree that following this advice and guidance is the most important thing anyone can do to stop the spread of this disease, save lives and protect the NHS.

Those who arrive in the UK to establish their family life must do so on a basis that prevents burdens on the state and the wider taxpayer. It is a key principle that those who benefit from the state should contribute towards it.

As I understand it, those who have leave to remain in the UK on human rights grounds can apply to have their no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition removed if they would otherwise be destitute. Local authorities can also provide a safety net for those in a genuine need for care that does not solely arise from destitution. These include cases where there are community care needs, migrants with serious health issues or family cases.

The protection of public funds through NRPF is a standard condition applied to those staying in the UK with a temporary immigration status. Indefinite Leave to Remain is set as the general threshold for permitting migrants to access public funds.

These measures have been developed over many years and by successive Governments. I also welcome the fact that they are consistent with legislation in comparable countries and our position was approved by Parliament in primary legislation.

I very much welcome the fact that Coronavirus has been included in the list of infectious diseases. This means that anyone experiencing symptoms, irrespective of their immigration status will be treated free of charge. A dedicates Coronavirus immigration help-centre is available to provide assistance and this can be accessed by emailing:

 CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk.

As you will be aware the living conditions and the arrangements of migrants in France are of course a matter for the French Government. However, the UK accepts its responsibilities and I understand Ministers and officials meet regularly with their counterparts in France to work together on tackling illegal migration, as agreed under the Sandhurst Treaty framework. I welcome the fact that this includes UK support to the French asylum system to improve access by those migrants in a vulnerable position.

This is of course an unprecedented time and I know the Home Office is working hard to ensure people are not unfairly affected by circumstances beyond their control. The Government is keeping family immigration requirements under review and this includes the minimum income requirement. I have been assured that Ministers will make adjustments where it is necessary.

I understand that the Government has already introduced measures to support and help those with immigration status. If an individual is in the UK and their leave is expiring, their visa will be extended to the 31st May 2020 if they are unable to leave the UK due to travel restrictions or self-isolation relating to Coronavirus.

I am particularly pleased that the Government has taken action to ensure the immigration system does not unduly infringe the ability of the NHS to respond to the Coronavirus outbreak. Any doctor, nurse or paramedic working for the NHS will have their visa automatically extended by one year if it is due to expire before the 1st October 2020. I am pleased that family members with a visa due to expire before the 1st October 2020 will also have their visa extended.

The Government has made sure that the extension is free. Ministers are aware of the pressure NHS staff are under at the current time and therefore recognise the need to make this process as easy as possible. It is good news that those NHS staff do not need to apply for this extension, instead the Government will contact NHS employers to identify those staff eligible and will confirm if they have received an automatic extension.

I fully support the principle of the Immigration Health Surcharge. However, I was pleased to learn that the Government is reviewing the fee for NHS workers, in view of their extraordinary contribution during the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the end of March, the High Court ruled that the Government’s approach to detention and coronavirus was sensible and the appropriate precautionary measures were in place. The public rightly expect law and order to be maintained during the outbreak and it is important to remember that those currently in detention are foreign national offenders. Ministers have assured me that the Home Office will only detain people where it is necessary on a case by case basis and decisions are kept under constant review.

I understand that you may have concerns for the wellbeing of detainees and staff. The Home Office is following all the relevant guidance on coronavirus and have extensive plans in place including measures such as protective isolation. I am glad that appropriate personal protective equipment is available to contractor and healthcare staff when interacting with those detainees being held in isolation. As detainees arrive at immigration removal centres, they are medically assessed by a nurse within two hours of arrival and by a doctor with 24 hours.

Thank you again for contacting me.

Yours faithfully,

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP**

**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**