



Dear Colleagues,

2020-3 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Life as we knew it has been turned upside-down. We are currently unable to socialise in the same ways as previously we have all too often taken for granted.

Nevertheless, democratic government continues and we in the Conservative Policy Forum want to play our part to encourage and support one another, to help hold our communities together and to contribute to the wise leadership of our country.

Therefore, since the May elections have been cancelled, we want to encourage CPF Members in every constituency to discuss their response to the coronavirus pandemic. Further, since we can no longer meet in groups, we want to encourage all CPF Groups to host online discussions and, as usual, to report back centrally.

This consultation paper consists of the discussion brief and questions. We have also produced a separate guide, "How to set up and host CPF Meetings on Zoom". Groups may, of course, choose to use other video conferencing software with which they may already be familiar. Our CPF Digital Officer, Katrina, can be reached via katrina@conservativepolicyforum.com if you need assistance in hosting or running online discussions.

More so than usual, many in our communities will be worried, concerned or lonely at this time. Please use the opportunity of this discussion to reach out to friends and neighbours in your constituency. Let people know that you are interested in *them* and want to understand *their* perspective.

Please send your responses to the paper via the online Forum on our website or by sending to CPF.Papers@conservatives.com the associated response form published alongside this paper on the CPF website. The deadline for submitting your response is 10th May. At present, we still aim to publish our next discussion paper on 11th May, on the environment and animal welfare.

A summary of responses to this discussion paper will be sent to the Prime Minister's Policy Unit, Party Chairman and CPF Chairman within a month of the closing date for submissions. We look forward to hearing your ideas as we continue to unleash the country's potential.

Please stay safe, everybody, and keep heeding all the latest government advice. Together, we will get through this.

The CPF Team

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Introduction¹

"The coronavirus outbreak is the biggest public health emergency in a generation. It calls for dramatic action, at home and abroad, of the kind not normally seen in peacetime. Our goal is clear. The over-riding objective is to protect life."
(Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP)²

COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect the lungs and airways. It is caused by a virus called coronavirus. We are all instructed to:

Stay at home

We must stay at home, only leaving for the following very limited purposes:

- Shopping for basic necessities, as infrequently as possible.
- One form of exercise a day – for example, a run, walk or cycle – alone or with members of our immediate household.
- Any medical need, to provide care or to help a vulnerable person.
- Travelling to and from work, but only where this absolutely cannot be done from home.

These four reasons are exceptions - even when doing these activities, each of us should be minimising time spent outside of the home and ensuring we are two metres apart from anyone outside of our household.

Protect the NHS

We must stay at home to protect the NHS:

- The NHS only has a limited number of doctors, nurses and specialist equipment.
- The government is working around the clock to increase NHS capacity.
- The more people who get sick, the harder it is for the NHS to cope.
- We must slow the spread of the disease so that fewer people are sick at any one time.

Save lives

We must stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives:

- Police will disperse gatherings of more than two people in public, excluding people we live with.
- Police will issue fines to anyone who does not comply with these rules.
- Police will close all shops that are not essential, as well as playgrounds and places of worship.

Recent government action

The government knows people are deeply worried about the Coronavirus and the impact it will have on their jobs, their incomes and their ability to provide for their families. It has committed to supporting the British people – whatever it takes. At the time that this discussion briefing was published, action taken has included:

- Protected **commercial tenants** by ensuring that, if they cannot pay their rent because of coronavirus, they will not be evicted. These measures, included in the

emergency **Coronavirus Bill** currently going through Parliament, will mean no business will be forced out of their premises if they miss a payment in the next three months.

- Announced **Emergency Measures Agreements**, so we can make sure our railways stay open. These agreements will suspend the normal franchise agreements and transfer all revenue and cost risk to the Government. This will last for an initial period of 6 months, with options for further extension or earlier cancellation as agreed.
- Ramped up delivery of **Personal Protective Equipment** to our frontline medical staff so they are fully equipped to tackle Coronavirus. From this week, the army will offer its support, with service personnel helping to deliver and distribute urgent PPE supplies, and delivery times are being extended into evenings and weekends where necessary.
- Unveiled a major new package of measures to **protect up to 1.5 million people in England who are the most vulnerable** – enabling them to shield themselves and stay at home. The people who are at the highest risk of being hospitalised should they contract the virus will be contacted by their GP practice or specialist shortly with detailed advice. In the first instance they will receive a letter this week and, where mobile number is known, the NHS will also send frequent text messages shortly to those in this group.
- Set out a **Plan for People’s Jobs and Incomes** to protect jobs, offer more generous support to those without jobs, strengthen the safety net for the self-employed and help people to stay in their homes. This includes helping pay people’s wages through the **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme** – offering grants to employers who promise to retain their staff, covering most of the cost of paying people’s wages.
- Announced that **cafes, pubs and restaurants must close**.
- Called on 65,000 **former nurses and doctors to re-join the NHS** to help tackle Covid-19 and save lives. 7,563 clinicians signed up to return to the NHS in the first few days of our call.
- **Relaxed competition laws** to allow supermarkets to work together to ensure that everyone has access to food and essential supplies when they need them. Food retailers will now be able to share data on their stock levels, cooperate to keep stores open and share staff, distribution depots and delivery vehicles. This will help keep shops open and staffed and better able to meet high demand.
- Made it easier for workers to obtain an **isolation note**, which can be used as evidence for their employer if they have to take more than 7 days off work. Workers can now obtain an isolation note through the NHS website and NHS 111 online, and then emailed to the user
- **Published the scientific evidence** underpinning the Government’s advice and approach, so that people can understand why the Government is making the decisions that it is.
- Introduced **new emergency measures with the energy industry** to keep gas and electricity flowing, looking after vulnerable customers who may be in financial difficulty due to Covid-19. Any household in financial distress will be supported by their supplier so that their energy does not get cut off.
- **Closed schools** for the vast majority of children until further notice. This will mean there will be far fewer children in schools and that will help us to slow the spread of the disease.
- Introduced emergency legislation including measures to **protect renters**, so that no one gets evicted if they cannot pay their rent. Emergency legislation will be taken

forward so that landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict tenants for at least a three-month period

- **Increasing our testing capacity** to 25,000 hospital patients a day as soon as possible. The Prime Minister and Health Secretary promised industry leaders that they would be given whatever support they need to help government increase testing capabilities across the country.
- Announced an unprecedented package of **Government-backed loans and support for business**.
- Introduced a **three-month mortgage holiday for those in difficulty** due to coronavirus, so that people will not have to pay a penny towards their mortgage while they get back on their feet. We are extending the three-month mortgage holiday to landlords whose tenants are experiencing financial difficulty due to coronavirus.
- Announced a **temporary relaxation of planning rules** so that pubs and restaurants can operate as hot food takeaways to serve people having to stay at home.
- Spoken to leading manufacturing businesses to call on them to help the UK step up **production of vital medical equipment**, ensuring our NHS has it what needs to provide care to patients.
- The Prime Minister released a joint statement with the other leaders of **G7 nations**, committing to coordinating the global health response to coronavirus, and continuing to protect jobs, restore confidence and encourage science and research cooperation.
- Reaffirmed our commitment to **giving councils the support they need** to contribute to the national effort, including giving them more flexibility to focus their resources on the response to coronavirus.

Questions for discussion

1. The pandemic has brought many local communities closer together, with more people volunteering to help their neighbours in new ways. Can you identify positive examples of changes made in your area that others might like to adopt or adapt?
2. Are there any groups of individuals whose needs or concerns you think the government has yet to address adequately?
3. When do you think current restrictions might be lifted and how could government boost the economy once they are lifted?
4. In what ways do you hope society will be better once the pandemic has passed?
5. Is there any other observation you would like to make?

¹ Cover photo: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in January 2020 shows the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV). (CDC via AP)

² *Health Secretary Matt Hancock's Sunday Telegraph Op-Ed*, Department of Health and Social Care, 15 March 2020, [link](#)