

Lock down rules

I have had many emails about the lock down over the last few weeks. Some have written to me to complain about their neighbours, alleging they have broken the law or the guidance. Others have written asking me to endorse a particular interpretation of the rules or guidance so they can do something they wish to do. Some have written seeking clarification without revealing their plans. More recently some have written complaining about Mr Cummings conduct, and a lesser number have written in supporting Mr Cummings.

I have sought to answer all of these consistently by explaining that MPs have no special powers to authorise conduct or to prosecute it. The aim of the law and advice is to limit the spread of the virus. Everyone has to exercise commonsense and remember the aim is to protect others from the virus. I have not rushed to judge others as they make their decisions about how to do this. I have favoured a light touch to policing, which requires consent. Only where someone breaks the rules with ill intent has it been right to prosecute. That has been the case of the tiny minority who have deliberately breathed or spat into the faces of police and others to threaten or harm them. Many people have made choices or judgements that others would not have made, but each person's circumstances are a bit different.

I did not condemn Stephen Kinnock when he travelled to see his father for his birthday, nor call for his sacking from the Labour front bench for a clear breach of the rules. Constituents have pointed out they would love to visit their parents but did not do so as they thought it wrong. I suggested a tolerant approach.

I understand the anger of some over Mr Cummings. I believe him when he says he did not go to see his parents and kept his distance from them as he did want to give them the disease. He is widely criticised for the journey to Barnard's Castle though no one apparently came close to him and his family.

It has been clear for some days that the Prime Minister has investigated his actions and intends to keep him. His view is we must move on, tackling the next stage of defeating the virus and trying to rescue the economy. There are going to be more difficult judgements for people as we enter the world of Test and Trace, where co-operation of all is important to success. I am seeking more clarification of what the advice means by close recent contact.