

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS LONDON SW1A 0AA

December 2020

Dear Constituent

Thank you for your email about the return to Tier restrictions.

I was delighted to learn that, thanks to the hard work of people across England, the national restrictions can end as planned on Wednesday 2nd December. The Government's new Winter Plan, which outlines a return to the tiered system of regional measures, is backed by an additional £7 billion for NHS Test and Trace to support increased testing, including community testing and ongoing improvements to tracing.

At every stage of our fight against the COVID virus we have had to strike a fine balance between saving lives and minimising the devastating impact that restrictions have on our economy. It is because of the sense and fortitude of my constituents in Darlington, we were able to avert a catastrophe in our town, forming a human shield around the most vulnerable in our town and our exceptional health and care workers.

I never imagined that my role as your Member of Parliament would see the demands on the health of our community thrown in into stark contrast with our desire for freedoms and the demands of our hospitality industry. I know our fantastic hospitality venues have worked so hard to be COVID secure.

No Government would ever wish to curtail freedoms in the way that was necessary this year, and I certainly wish that we were not in this position. I am therefore glad that the new restrictions ensure that schools, universities and places of worship are staying open, shops can serve their customers, construction workers can go to building sites, and the vast majority of Darlington's economy can continue moving forwards.

I fully understand that many of my constituents were unhappy that while Darlington entered Tier 3 restrictions, London remained in Tier 2. The data available to us at the time the Tiers were announced showed that sadly the case rate per 100,000 people remained substantially higher across the Tees Valley when compared to most of London's boroughs. Indeed Havering was the only area of London with a higher per 100,000 rate than a Tees Local Authority. However, as you may be aware that while data in the Tees Valley is showing improvement, London is experiencing a rise in case numbers and infection rates.

Member of Parliament for Darlington

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The decision to which area fell into which area was based upon five criteria which are:

- Case detection rates in all age groups
- Case detection rates in the over 60s
- The rate at which cases are rising or falling
- Positivity rate (the number of positive cases detected as a percentage of total tests)
- Pressure on local NHS services

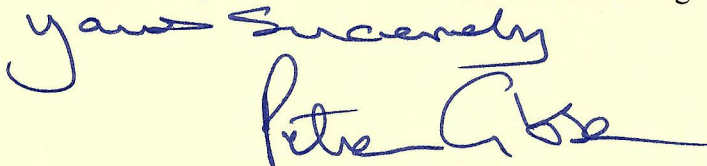
I understand that lockdowns and other restrictions have caused enormous stress and disruption to people's lives. I also understand that lockdowns do cause other side effects and we must be mindful of these when considering policy options. I know that Ministers agree and are working hard to consider all possibilities before putting forward comprehensive measures where necessary. While these measures are necessary now, I look forward to the review of the situation on 16 December where I will be pushing for us to get out of Tier 3.

In the meantime, I welcome that new rapid turnaround tests, which can help to identify and isolate people who do not have symptoms but are unintentionally spreading the virus, can also be used to identify people who do not have the virus. This means that, in due course, it should be possible to offer people who test negative the prospect of greater freedoms.

I would like to reassure you that all the measures put in place to respond to this outbreak, are proportionate to the threat we face. It is important that they will only be used when strictly necessary, and will only be in place for as long as required to respond to the situation. We now have vaccines being rolled out across the country, and I am proud that vaccinations for the most vulnerable began today at James Cook Hospital.

After six months of restrictions and uncertainty, I would have wished that we were in a position to ease restrictions further. Unfortunately, it is vital that we act now to protect the vulnerable so that their future and our future is not jeopardised as we experience the second wave of this pandemic.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours sincerely


PETER GIBSON MP