

From the website of our constituency MP, Victoria Prentis, 27 May

The background is the action of the Prime Minister's special adviser, Dominic Cummings. During lockdown, when we were all told to stay at home unless absolutely necessary, he drove his wife and child 260 miles from London to a family farm in order to self-isolate because he suspected he and his wife has Covid symptoms. He and his family later made a 30-mile trip to Barnard Castle to test his eyesight before driving back to London. His actions caused anger across the country by everyone who had followed the rule to the letter and had experienced great loss and hardship in doing so. They were considered instrumental in people flouting the lockdown rule – which was relaxed shortly afterwards, some said prematurely. The Prime Minister Boris Johnson was also widely criticised for refusing to sack his special adviser.

Over the past week I have received hundreds of emails regarding the actions of Dominic Cummings and his family, with the full range of views represented. I have tried to ascertain the facts about what has happened in the same way that many others have. I did not think it was helpful for me to comment before the matter had become clearer.

The past few months have been very difficult for everyone and really appalling for those who have been very ill or lost family members. We have all been struggling. Every family has given up a great deal to follow the lockdown rules. My father-in-law wasn't able to go to his brother's funeral; we could not celebrate my niece's first birthday as a family at the weekend, and I am desperate to visit my 97-year old Granny who lives alone and whose chair lift broke last week. Real sacrifices have been made by so many, particularly those who daily put themselves at risk in our frontline services.

Dominic Cummings is not someone I know. On 25 May, Dominic Cummings gave a full account of what he had done when he and his wife had suffered symptoms. Having had coronavirus myself back in March, I do know how unwell you feel even with average symptoms. I'm sure that it does not make for good decision making. It is clear that many of us would not have taken the same view of the rules as the Cummings family (and indeed did not at the time) but he gave a full explanation of his actions and the Police have decided they warranted no further action.

Given the public anger both locally and nationally I have of course shared my constituents' concerns with the whips. Ultimately whether or not he keeps his job is not a matter for me; it is a matter for the Prime Minister. He has clearly decided that at this moment of national crisis, he needs his adviser to remain in post, and that he is currently satisfied by his explanation.

What we must do is carry on with what we have done for the last few months; namely follow the guidelines to save lives. The numbers of infections and deaths are falling, and we now know that some of the rules will be relaxed over the next few weeks. Some children going back to school is a positive step in the right direction.

The details of Dominic Cummings's trip have dominated the media recently. I really think that we should re-focus our minds on working hard to beat this pandemic. I'm chairing the taskforce on feeding the vulnerable, which presents daily challenges. The community spirit which has been shown by so many is really heartening. I really hope we can think about that

and move forward in a positive way.

Yours,
Victoria

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