



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Cllr Ian Ward
Leader of the Council
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Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning

**Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local
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Dear Cllr Ward,

Thank you for your letter, dated 2nd April, regarding support required for Birmingham's COVID-19 response. The Secretary of State has asked me to reply on his behalf.

I recognise the work Birmingham City Council, and all Local Authorities in the West Midlands, are undertaking to protect our citizens during this unprecedented crisis. It is critical that all tiers of government continue to work together to provide the best possible response, in the face of ongoing and emerging pressures. I want to assure you that the Government recognises the challenges that Birmingham and the wider West Midlands and Warwickshire are experiencing.

With the support of my officials, I am in regular contact with the Chair of the Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG), Assistant Chief Constable Vanessa Jardine, who in turn is leading the multi-agency action across the region. I am grateful to her and colleagues who are participating so fully in our joint response. I very much encourage you to work collaboratively with your SCG in order to secure the best outcomes for the West Midlands. I am also pleased to inform you that further resources from MHCLG and the MoD have been assigned to the SCG to support its work.

Taking your points in turn:

With respect to food supplies, we continue to make progress with the delivery of food to the extremely vulnerable. We know that about 597,000 of the original verified list have now registered via the website or phone line.

We have delivered over 150 bulk deliveries of emergency supplies to Local Authorities and over 145,000 food packages direct to people's doorsteps. As of 7 April, we had 10,483 completed deliveries in the West Midlands.

We will be escalating our food supplies in the coming weeks and ensuring that those most in need will receive a food parcel within one week of requesting it.

We are working hard to ensure that those individuals who self-identified or have not been identified through national registers are contacted as soon as possible. We will be also be issuing further guidance and FAQs to you later this week.

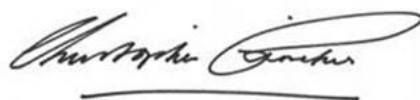
I understand your concerns regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). We are working closely with planners in SCGs to monitor levels of protective equipment and ensure key worker services have the supplies they need.

I have assurances from DHSC that a new distribution service will be operational in the very near future. This will enable local partners to place orders in addition to the existing supply routes. In the interim, we have worked with DHSC to secure two deliveries of PPE to SCGs to respond to their immediate need. The West Midlands received these two additional drops last week, with another drop to follow in short order. I welcome Assistant Chief Constable Jardine's leadership in ensuring agencies come together through the system of mutual aid where this is necessary.

I agree that social care workers play a vital role in looking after this country's most vulnerable citizens and must be protected during this crisis. We have published guidance which has been issued by Public Health England which sets out when PPE should be used. This guidance is based on the best scientific evidence and the World Health Organization has confirmed that it is consistent with what it recommends in circumstances of the highest risk of transmission.

Regarding testing, the Health Secretary has announced that England will aim for 100,000 tests every day across all testing streams by the end of April. A new testing facility is now online in Birmingham. This will initially be for NHS staff, but testing for other key services should become available as capacity increases. I note the opening of the West Midlands' Nightingale hospital, an important additional resource for the community during this emergency.

Finally, you also raise the issue of local government funding. We have previously announced an injection of £1.6bn of support for local authorities for COVID-19 pressures, and this was paid on Friday 27 March to help you get on with meeting the costs associated with the response to COVID-19. We are working with local authorities to develop an ongoing assessment of costs and will keep funding under review to ensure you have the resources needed to continue to deliver the essential services you are providing to the public at this difficult time.



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