

John Howell MP writes...

A few weeks ago, Ministers were working flat out to bring forward measures to try to keep us all safe with the onset of COVID-19 in the UK. The initial raft of measures was a blunt instrument which had to be refined to meet ever more detailed concerns that had fallen through the net. The Chancellor acknowledged that, in the end, there may be some people we would not be able to help, so many and varied are the circumstances of people across our country.

There has been a general cross-Party consensus on the actions of the Government as the Prime Minister has worked to keep an open dialogue.

Now the challenge is to chart our recovery strategy, and this will be much harder than setting out the survival measures. I know that people are either afraid or frustrated; some people feel both. The Government is working hard to be guided by the science but inevitably there are conflicting scientific reports. Across the world there are different studies and variations in demographics, cultures and health which must be considered when interpreting findings.

We now have the benefit of hindsight on which we can build. As we try to move forward there are those who would prefer us to slow down and those who would like us to speed up. There are those fearful for their physical health, their mental health, their livelihoods and so much more. No strategy is going to satisfy everyone.

The Prime Minister has set out a general direction of travel, and the precautions that we will take. As before it will take time to refine the details and help us all to return to our new normal. The experience has inevitably led to questions about our previous ways of doing things, in our national life and in our personal lives. There will be debates about how we can learn from the experience, there may be permanent changes.

Technology has been invaluable in helping us through. It has enabled us to maintain contact with our family and friends, in education and in business. It has helped in Parliament to find new ways to hold the Government to account and to pursue enquiries. But we are social beings and the one thing so many people tell me they long for is the opportunity to meet face to face again.

As we move forward together, I hope that we can show a generosity of understanding.

If you have an issue that you would like to raise with me please email john.howell.mp@parliament.uk or write to House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or my constituency office PO Box 84, Watlington, OX49 5XD.