**Political view by Sir David Amess, MP for Southend West**

What is happening to our country and the world right now is quite surreal. Nearly all of us are shaken to the core as to the rapid way this crisis we find ourselves in has unfolded. Perhaps most frustrating of all is the fact that the enemy which we and the rest of the world are united in defeating, is to all intents and purposes invisible -the Coronavirus. What is quite shocking is the speed at which this national emergency has hit us all. It was really only at the start of the year that we heard serious reports of the Coronavirus emerging in China with many fatalities. Nevertheless, it seemed remote and unlikely to affect us, how wrong we were. In no time at all this pandemic has spread throughout the world, with alarming reports of people found to have the virus increasing daily, together with a sharp rise in fatalities.

The Government has found itself in the challenging position of having the responsibility of putting in place arrangements to protect the nation, without causing widespread panic and alarm. The British spirit in most parts has risen to the challenge. While many of us are able to follow the Government advice and stay inside, our key workers such as NHS staff working at Southend Hospital, care home workers, pharmacists, refuse workers, cleaners, supermarket staff, postal workers, delivery drivers and of course teachers and our emergency services, are working hard on the frontline to provide the network of services essential to enable our community to function.

This is not just a national crisis, it is a world crisis, and when the worst has passed, we will undoubtedly be determined to find out the truth of how it all happened. However, for the moment, all efforts should be directed towards stopping the virus spreading and saving as many lives as possible. The Government is following carefully proven scientific advice, which in essence is, if at all possible, stay at home to halt the spread of the disease, protect our NHS and save lives. I am deeply moved by so many local people who, regardless of their circumstances, have offered to do all they can to help the most vulnerable members of our society. None of us are invincible and this pandemic could affect any of us, it is a question of if it does strike, to what degree. We must all support each other and listen to the recommended guidance, particularly in regard to social distancing.

My Westminster operation has now moved to Iveagh Hall at 67 Leigh Road. My team are working remotely, and we are linking up daily via video conferencing. I assure everyone that all phone calls, emails and letters are being dealt with as quickly as possible. We are currently inundated with questions which cover every single facet of our lives that have been affected by this national emergency. I have access, together with my Parliamentary colleagues, to an MPs hotline on each and every issue which has thus far been brought to my attention and I and my team will do our best to provide an answer to all these queries as quickly as we can. For the moment, I am suspending my regular face to face surgery, instead providing the opportunity for people to approach me with any issues they may have via phone or Skype. For more details on my virtual surgeries please visit my website.

I and my fellow Parliamentarians are participating in ongoing conference calls with the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Chief Constable of Essex and the Chief Fire Officer. We are raising issues brought to our attention and are being reassured as to how these essential/emergency services are operating throughout the crisis. They are appropriately resourced to meet the challenges which we are facing. We also recently took part in a video conference call with those who are responsible for health service provision throughout Essex. We were briefed as to the situation in the areas that we represent, how they are prepared as the crisis unfolds and what plans they have in place to ensure that beds are available and that they have the staff and the personal protective equipment that they will need. We continue to be in regular contact with health service providers and with those people who are running our care homes. All these people have been told to let me know immediately if there should be a problem in supply of any equipment which they need.

I very much understand the enormous anxiety which we all feel in what are unchartered waters, battling against an invisible enemy. I wish everyone who has been struck down by this virus, including the Prime Minister, a speedy recovery. In order to keep people’s spirits up during this period of self-isolation, I am currently organising a virtual concert to take place on VE Day, Friday 8th May. ‘Southend Salutes its Veterans: A VE Day Concert’ will be streamed live so anyone who wants to can tune in from their homes. Further details, including how you can access the concert, will be made available on my website and my Twitter page shortly. I have no doubt that with our strong local community spirit, not just in Southend, but throughout the whole of our country, we of all nations will overcome the challenges which we are now facing.

Key Contacts:

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**Local Helplines**

If friends and family aren't nearby or able to help and you have no local support, please call:

**Southend Coronavirus Action Helpline**: 01702 212497

The Council is offering a range of help and advice to local residents and businesses:

**Southend-on-Sea Borough Council**: [www.southend.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.southend.gov.uk/coronavirus)

For practical advice on a range of issues contact:

**Southend Citizens Advice Bureau:** 01702 456352 and 01702 456354 and [southendinfo@citizensadvicesouthend.org.uk](mailto:southendinfo@citizensadvicesouthend.org.uk)

If the local Southend services cannot help please contact:

**Essex Welfare Service:** 0300 303 9988 and [provide.essewelfareservice@nhs.net](mailto:provide.essewelfareservice@nhs.net)

**To volunteer:**

Southend Coronavirus Action Group: <https://consult.southend.gov.uk/Project/4026>

Hospital:[erica.white@southend.nhs.uk](mailto:erica.white@southend.nhs.uk).

**Government hotlines:**

Business support and ventilators: 0300 456 3565

HMRC: 0800 015 9559

Universal Credit: 0800 328 5644

School closures: 0800 046 8687

**Medical and Government Guidelines**

Up-to-date advice can also be found at www.gov.uk/coronavirus and [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19)

If you think you have coronavirus symptoms you should visit 111.nhs.uk/covid-19

**In a medical emergency dial 999**

**Footnote:**

I want to pay my own fulsome tribute to the late Michael Guy Senior. He was not only a true champion of the area in which we live, he also encapsulated all the qualities which I most admire; kind, generous, wise and blessed with an endearing sense of humour. He was a giant in his field within the newspaper industry. Through hard work and determination, he made the Leigh Times an inspirational, independent, local newspaper and it is his gift to us today that whilst other prints have faded, the Leigh Times Group continues to shine brightly. We will miss Michael terribly and I extend my deepest sympathy to his wife, children and grandchildren.

**Sir David Amess MP**