

RED POST

Labour in Totnes and South Devon

What's happening in our care homes?

At least two care homes in our constituency have been ravaged by the effects of coronavirus. Residents are being discharged from hospital still Covid-positive, no doubt to improve the headline figure for hospital deaths. Nationally 131 care workers have died from the disease, and the Care England boss says she does not know when full testing will be available. We may never know the true numbers, but every extra death in our care homes is a scandal.

What's happening in our schools?

Many local schools have been open throughout the crisis, with teachers supporting vulnerable children who can't isolate at home. But the demand for full re-opening has been met with concern from parents and teachers. The NEU has now published a list of five tests that we agree should be met before re-opening: much lower case numbers; a national plan for social distancing; full and regular testing in place; whole-school protocols; and special protection for vulnerable staff and students.



Make it safe to work!

We don't want to stay in lockdown a day longer. We want people to be able to go back to work, meet friends and colleagues, and earn a living. But not at the cost of their lives.

Despite having weeks longer to prepare for the coming crisis, the UK has had more deaths from Covid-19 than Spain, Italy or France. During lockdown, these governments have put systems in place to allow a safe return. But our Government has missed every target for doing that. Going out in public isn't safe without a full 'test, trace and isolate' strategy for new cases. Going to work isn't safe without clear guidelines for employers, based on best practice in each sector, and a secure supply of PPE for everyone who needs it. Community testing is non-existent, and advice about using public transport is confused. The Government's strategy has been to change its slogan, not to change the conditions that are killing people.

After ten years of running down NHS testing labs, public health services, and the Health and Safety Executive, the Tories are not willing to invest in those systems even now, when 50,000 people have died. Instead they tell us to stay 'alert', so we can be blamed if we get sick. We all suffer when the economy suffers. But we die when a lethal virus is not contained. Workers don't want to be 'heroes'. We want it to be safe to go to work.

What's happening in our hospitals?

Devon has one of the lowest rates of infections and deaths in the country. Still, 177 people have died in our hospitals, and many wards have been given over to sick and recovering cases. Scandalously, testing and PPE are still not fully available. Our web site has an in-depth report from Save Our Hospital Services.

Safe for all workers

Workers in retail, food delivery, construction, post and waste collection have kept these vital services going - often on low pay. They also need workplace risk assessments, testing and PPE.

Farming and food quality on the line

Anthony Mangnall, Conservative MP for Totnes and South Devon, has voted against an amendment to the Agriculture Bill *'requiring ... products imported into the United Kingdom to comply with World Trade Organisation safety rules and the United Kingdom's own standards'*.

We have always been told that Brexit will not mean lower food safety standards, or cheap, low-quality imports putting British farmers out of business. Six Tory MPs in the South West were so worried about these risks that they voted against the party whip to support the amendment.

But not Anthony. Clearly he cares less about our farmers and our food quality than he cares about getting on at Westminster.

Testing: the deadly fiasco



Reliable testing is key to getting the rate of infection down. But less than 1 in 1000 people in the UK have been tested. Health and care workers in our constituency say that testing has been shambolic, with appointments made hundreds of miles away, tests running out within hours, a two-week wait for results, and hospitals refusing to send staff to 'unsafe' commercial test sites.

What's gone wrong? A decade of cuts has decimated NHS labs and public health services. Test and trace was abandoned early in the outbreak when the system was overwhelmed. Then there was no strategy to make or buy test kits in the UK, leading to millions of useless kits being panic-bought from China, and tests being flown to the US for processing. Now the Tories are throwing money to their corporate donors instead of investing in the public systems we need. A contact tracing mobile app that has been scrapped already. Test centres run by accountants that produce more wrong results than right ones.

Every public health expert agrees we need community testing centres with local accountability, and local labs to deliver results quickly. But that would require a government that is willing to invest in public health and empower communities. A government that actually wants to keep its citizens alive.

Know your rights!

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires workplaces with five or more employees to do a Covid-19 risk assessment, in consultation with a union health and safety rep. Workers have the right to refuse to work where there is *'serious and imminent danger'* to them, their colleagues or members of the public. Workers in healthcare, libraries, construction and the post service have all taken unofficial action to demand better Covid protection. So join a union, and keep everyone safe!

Could you be a Labour candidate for Devon County Council?