

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office  
Cabinet Office  
70 Whitehall  
London SW1A 2AS

6 March 2020

Dear Mr Gove,

I am writing on behalf of the News Media Association, the trade body representing news media organisations that publish around 1000 national, regional and local titles throughout the UK, read by 48 million adults a month, in print and online, in connection with the anticipated emergence of a novel coronavirus pandemic.

We are aware of the Cabinet Office's 2013 guidance *Preparing for Pandemic Influenza*, the Department of Health's *UK Influenza Preparedness Strategy 2011* and the *Coronavirus action plan* issued on Tuesday by the Department of Health & Social Care.

The news media play a vital role in maintaining the flow of news to the public, which is crucial to a healthy democracy. In addition, media outlets complement the health and social care system in cascading health advice to the public as a situation develops. They can publicise amendments to services, school closures, distribution arrangements for key medicines and business continuity plans, etc, making it available to the widest possible audience. The *UK Influenza Preparedness Strategy* provides that "*Regular press briefings, key websites and social media and other information channels will be used to reach a wide audience and to encourage responsible, informed reporting*" [para 5.12]. It points out that "*The media has a key role in informing and educating the public about the progress of the pandemic*" [para 7.18]. As a trusted source of quality news UK newspapers are well placed to counter misinformation, which is rife on social media.

I am writing to seek confirmation that news media outlets will be designated as an essential service in the event that restrictions are placed on movement in order to contain the coronavirus. There may be scope for them to be categorised as Category 2 Responders within the terms of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. Journalism requires reporters' mobility throughout the 24-hour news cycle, enabling accurate reporting based upon direct witness.

We understand that COVID-19 vaccines are currently in development, as is specific antiviral medication. We would urge that journalists and other media workers are made a priority group for treatment as and when it becomes available.

Steps need to be taken to minimise the impact of disruption on the supply chain and support its continuity. You may recall that arrangements were put in place at the time of the fuel protests in 2000 to designate the newspaper industry as eligible for priority supply of petrol, with the backing of the Home Office. Before that, newspapers were exempted from restrictions on electricity

consumption and the three-day week announced in December 1973. We trust that appropriate provisions to facilitate the flow of news to the public can be incorporated in emergency planning arrangements for the coronavirus.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

**Catherine Courtney**  
**Legal Advisor**  
**News Media Association**

**Cc: Claire Bradshaw, Katharine Hammond, Charlie Rowley, Josh Grimstone, Henry Newman**