



Baroness Vere of Norbiton
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minister House
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12 January 2021

Dear Baroness Vere,

I am writing in response to your letter of 23 December about the approach of the DVLA to coronavirus security in the workplace.

I appreciate the information you provided on the measures that you understand the DVLA is taking, however I am continuing to receive a number of representations from the PCS trade union and indeed from individual workers which provide a contrasting view.

The concerns for staff welfare are numerous and varied, but a consistent view is emerging that staff are being unnecessarily and avoidably exposed to risk and that the actions across the DVLA estate in Swansea are not sufficient to keep the workplace safe.

In broad terms, three common themes have been surfaced through the reports that I have received:

- (i) The proportion of staff expected to physically attend the workplace in relation to those working from home.
- (ii) Transportation issues and related Covid transmission risks.
- (iii) The efficacy and rigour of the DVLA's approach to risk assessment and reasonable measures.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

PCS has indicated to me that the proportion of DVLA staff being required to physically attend the workplace is high in a context where those who can work from home, should work from home. Out of a total staff complement of 3,500 workers in Wales across the Contact Centre, Main Site and Ty-Felin site, more than half (around 1,800 workers) are being expected to physically attend work as opposed to work from home. By way of comparison, I am advised that just 250 workers were physically attending the three sites listed above during the early phase of the pandemic.

I understand local management have proposed an approach which would have the effect of reducing the number of staff attending the workplace at any one time (though not an overall reduction of the total number of staff expected to attend the workplace). I appreciate these proposals are being considered by the trade union and could lead to a position where no more than 600 staff are in attendance across the three sites at any one time, but that this would be achieved at the expense of longer working hours and regular weekend working. Given the seriousness of the situation and the transmissibility of the new variant, I suggest there is a strong rationale for a broadly similar approach to that taken during the early period of the pandemic.

The volume of staff expected to physically attend the workplace also presents a risk in the context of transportation. I understand there are severe capacity issues on the staff bus service and this lack of capacity is leaving workers with little option other than to take alternative options, some of which carry an increased risk of infection and transmission.

Finally, I have received numerous concerns about inconsistencies with the standard of cleaning and hygiene measures, the quality of the ventilation and insufficient social distancing in stairwells and other high 'traffic' areas. I am keen to stress the importance of revisiting the risk assessment in the light of the new variant on the virus and that it fully takes into account the circumstances at each site, involves the trade unions and is shared with the workforce.

The pandemic has reached a significant point. We continue to have very high levels of coronavirus circulating in our communities and the NHS is under sustained pressure. The new variant of the virus is an added and unwelcome threat that has the potential to spread wherever people meet. In this context, I urge you to reconsider the approach the DVLA is taking and ensure that the health and safety of the workforce is made the overriding priority through working with the trade unions and the workforce to help keep Wales safe.

I am copying this letter to the Julie Lennard (Chief Executive Officer, DVLA), Andrew Lloyd (PCS National Officer) and Tonia Antoniazzi MP.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD