



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maria Caulfield MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy*

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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

13 July 2023

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 June on behalf of a number of your constituents about abortion.

I am grateful to you for raising your constituents' concerns.

Under the Abortion Act 1967, women have access to safe, legal and regulated abortion services on the NHS, which now includes taking both abortion pills at home at up to ten weeks' gestation.

The doctor terminating the pregnancy must be of the opinion, formed in good faith, that the pregnancy is not beyond ten weeks. This opinion is formed following a consultation with the woman concerned. Women should be given the choice to have either an in-person consultation or a virtual consultation. However, if a woman is not sure of her gestation, or if the doctor is concerned about health issues, she will be asked to attend a clinic. We have been clear that abortion providers should not move to a digital-by-default approach.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has published abortion care best practice guidance, which sets out that pregnancy duration can be assessed from the first day of the last menstrual period (LMP). Most women can determine the duration of their pregnancy with reasonable accuracy by LMP alone. The guidance also sets out that routine pre-abortion ultrasound scanning is unnecessary but, if available, should be used if there is clinically relevant uncertainty about the duration of the pregnancy.

The Government has a duty to ensure that the provisions of the Abortion Act are properly applied. Currently, there are no plans to review or repeal legislation on abortion in England and Wales.

Parliament decides the circumstances under which abortion can legally be undertaken, including gestational time limits. It would be for Parliament to decide whether to make any changes to the law on abortion. As with other matters of conscience, abortion is an issue on which the Government adopts a neutral stance and allows members to vote according to their moral, ethical or religious beliefs.

I would like to assure your constituents that the department continues to work with NHS England, the Care Quality Commission and abortion providers to ensure that all women

have safe and timely access to abortion services, including telemedicine abortion services.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maria'.

MARIA CAULFIELD MP