Dear Prime Minister,

Following your recent election victory, I am looking forward to working constructively with your Government to address the huge challenges facing general practice and our health service. In light of your election commitments to safeguard and support the NHS, I wish to reiterate the case for general practice, which has been rightly cited by your Secretary of State for Health and Social Care as ‘the bedrock of the NHS’.

General practice is the first point of contact with our health service for over a million of patients every day, helping to alleviate pressures across the rest of the NHS, particularly hospitals and other secondary care services. However, GPs find themselves under intense pressure, facing rising workloads that are causing many to burn out and leave the profession altogether. Retaining our GPs, and better supporting them to care for their patients, must be an initial priority for your Government and is essential if GPs are able to continue to provide safe and personalised care in the community.

It is clear that our NHS is facing an urgent workforce crisis. In general practice, we are more than 6000 fully qualified FTE GPs short in England, based on the previous Conservative government’s targets for 2020/21. In September 2015 there were 29,403 fully qualified FTE GPs in England, yet by September 2019 there were 28,315 FTE GPs working in England. These figures highlight the urgent action that must be taken to tackle the workforce shortages in general practice by recruiting additional GPs, and ensuring that experienced GPs remain in the profession, delivering frontline patient care. It is therefore welcome that your manifesto committed to delivering an additional 6000 FTE GPs by 2024/5, and we look forward to working with your Government to achieve these targets.

Investing in general practice is investing in the entire NHS, which is why it is so essential that GPs and their teams get the support they need to offer patients better access to primary care services and longer consultations with those that need them. We have long called for at least 11% of the NHS budget to be spent on frontline general practice, and we will continue to make the case for increased funding to primary care. We were reassured that your election manifesto made no reference to the introduction of arbitrary ‘targets’ for access to GP services that would only prioritise want over need and increase pressure on our family doctor service when it is already stretched to its limits. Patients shouldn’t have to wait three weeks to see their GP and GPs want to offer more consultations, but we are working at – and in many cases, more than – full capacity. This is leading to dedicated GPs burning out, and in some cases leaving the profession earlier than they planned to. We have more GPs in training than ever before, but when more are leaving general practice than entering it, we are fighting a losing battle.
I look forward to working with your Government to address these challenges, now and in the coming years.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Professor Martin Marshall
Chair of Council