

Monday, 30 October 2023

(10.30 am)

LADY HALLETT: Good morning, everyone.

May I just start this week's hearings by saying this: there have been several press reports in the last few days, including this morning, suggesting that materials confidential to the Inquiry and the core participants have been shared with the media.

In consultation with Counsel to the Inquiry and core participants, it is for me to decide which witnesses to call, which documents to put into evidence and publish. I do so bearing in mind my obligations to fulfil my terms of reference fully, fairly, independently and openly.

I wish to remind all those involved in the Inquiry as core participants and witnesses of the need to maintain the confidentiality of the materials with which they have been provided unless and until they are used in the Inquiry proceedings. Fairness to witnesses and to those named in the documents requires that the materials are deployed and published in a logical order, and allowing the witness to whom the materials relate an appropriate opportunity to comment.

I have promised to conduct the Inquiry as openly as possible, and I am doing so, publishing large quantities

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- 1 **A.** It's Martin Alexander Baillie Reynolds.
 2 **Q.** Mr Reynolds, you were the former principal private
 3 secretary to the then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson,
 4 were you not?
 5 **A.** I was, yes.
 6 **Q.** You have provided a witness statement dated 22 May 2023,
 7 a copy of which is on the screen, and I think you have
 8 signed that statement with the usual declaration on
 9 the last page, page 23. Thank you for your assistance
 10 in providing that to us.
 11 You joined the civil service in the late 1990s, did
 12 you not?
 13 **A.** I did, yes.
 14 **Q.** I think you had worked before as a lawyer in a City law
 15 firm. Did you begin your civil service career at
 16 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?
 17 **A.** I did, yes.
 18 **Q.** Before December 2014 and January 2018 were you
 19 the principal private secretary, the PPS, to the then
 20 Foreign Secretary, initially Philip Hammond, and then,
 21 from July 2016, Boris Johnson?
 22 **A.** That is correct.
 23 **Q.** When Mr Johnson was appointed Prime Minister in
 24 July 2019, did he request you to return to London in
 25 order to be a private secretary or principal private

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of previously confidential information about decision-making during the pandemic on the Inquiry website. This material and these proceedings give the media much on which to report. It only assists those who, unlike the Inquiry which investigates independently, have an agenda to pursue for this material to be shared before the Inquiry has published it.

I am conscious that we'll start hearing from high profile and important witnesses in the coming days and there will be much understandable speculation about what these witnesses will say. I ask all core participants and witnesses with access to such material to continue to respect the terms on which it has been shared with them, so that we can all hear what they say at the same time and fully without gloss, partiality and in a proper context.

Thank you.

Mr Keith.

MR KEITH: My Lady, the first witness this morning is Martin Reynolds. Could he be sworn, please.

MR MARTIN REYNOLDS (sworn)

Questions from LEAD COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY

MR KEITH: Could you commence your evidence to this Inquiry, please, by giving us your full name.

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secretary to him?

- 1 **A.** Yes, he did.
 2 **Q.** Therefore did you work with him from July 2019 onwards?
 3 **A.** Yes, I did.
 4 **Q.** When did you become principal private secretary?
 5 **A.** I believe it was in either October or November of
 6 the same year.
 7 **Q.** Did you remain Mr Johnson's principal private secretary
 8 until mid-February 2022?
 9 **A.** That is correct, yes.
 10 **Q.** I'd like to start your evidence, Mr Reynolds, please,
 11 with some questions about the retention of emails and
 12 WhatsApps, given your role as the principal private
 13 secretary.
 14 Do you recall whether there was a policy in
 15 Downing Street in or around the first half of 2021
 16 concerning whether emails should be retained, how they
 17 should be accumulated, how they should be archived and
 18 so on?
 19 **A.** Yes, I believe that emails relating -- or non-ephemeral
 20 emails relating to decision-making processes were
 21 retained.
 22 **Q.** For the purposes of this Inquiry, were you therefore
 23 given access to emails which you sent and received in
 24 the course of your work in Downing Street which were
 25

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1 then put onto a laptop, allowing you to review them?
 2 **A.** That is correct, although I think -- because of
 3 the nature of the IT systems, I think I only mainly saw
 4 emails which I had sent, so I don't think I saw the full
 5 comprehensive set of emails.
 6 **Q.** In his witness statement, Mr Cummings -- and you're
 7 obviously aware who Mr Cummings is -- says that in
 8 the spring of 2020, so at some point after
 9 the commencement of the pandemic, he'd asked
 10 the Cabinet Office to ensure that Number 10 email
 11 accounts were saved for a future lessons learnt
 12 exercise. Do you recall anything about that and whether
 13 or not there was a debate about saving emails for
 14 a lessons learned exercise?
 15 **A.** I don't, but I believe emails were retained in
 16 the normal way under our normal policies.
 17 **Q.** Simon Case, who was Cabinet Secretary and remains
 18 Cabinet Secretary, says in his statement that in
 19 March 2021 a Number 10 policy on WhatsApps was
 20 established. Do you recall anything to do with such
 21 a policy?
 22 **A.** No, I don't.
 23 **Q.** As the principal private secretary, is that a matter
 24 with which you would have been concerned?
 25 **A.** I would have been aware of the policy statement, I'm

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1 **A.** I think certainly from my experience of the WhatsApps
 2 that I have seen, the vast majority of those WhatsApps
 3 were of an ephemeral nature and that decisions when they
 4 took place were taking place in the normal way and
 5 recorded in the normal way. And a lot of the WhatsApps
 6 you are seeing, it seems to me, are exchanges which
 7 people could have been doing previously by telephone or
 8 in corridors or things like that, they are now just
 9 recorded in WhatsApp, but are ephemeral in nature in
 10 the same way as if there was a conversation about
 11 a policy matter before people go into a substantive
 12 discussion, in the corridor, where someone might say
 13 something to me or to others. We're not necessarily
 14 recording all of that because it's ephemeral in nature,
 15 where where the decision takes place and the process
 16 leading to that decision are recorded in the normal way.
 17 **Q.** You're not suggesting, are you, that the vast majority
 18 of these Covid-related WhatsApps are irrelevant?
 19 **A.** No, I think they are relevant to the Covid Inquiry, but
 20 in terms of the decision-making process and
 21 the obligation on civil servants to record formally
 22 steps in the decision-making process, it's a bit
 23 different.
 24 **LADY HALLETT:** Sorry, I'm not following. Why aren't they
 25 part of the decision-making process?

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1 sure, but I cannot remember the substance, and I imagine
 2 our policy on WhatsApps, certainly throughout this
 3 period, was, in a sense, the same as our policy on other
 4 material, which was around retention of WhatsApps or
 5 messages which were important for the decision-making
 6 process, but not the ephemeral side of things.
 7 **Q.** Could you just go a little bit slower, please,
 8 Mr Reynolds, whilst you give evidence. It's very hard
 9 for our stenographer to keep up --
 10 **A.** Sorry.
 11 **Q.** -- with the speed of your evidence.
 12 So you say there was material relating to
 13 decision-making, and WhatsApp material relating to more
 14 ephemeral matters. What do you mean by that?
 15 **A.** I think in -- in this period I think there is
 16 a significant shift in the volume of WhatsApps which
 17 were used for discussions reflecting the shift to remote
 18 working and the pace of some of the activities going on
 19 with people in different locations. So certainly my
 20 experience was WhatsApp became more -- more extensive in
 21 its usage than certainly I had experienced previously.
 22 **Q.** But that is to do with the volume. What is this
 23 distinction that you draw between WhatsApps relating to
 24 decision-making and more "ephemeral" WhatsApps? What
 25 are ephemeral WhatsApps?

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1 **A.** Because in any -- I suppose in any decision there is all
 2 sorts of ephemeral discussions around a policy; not all
 3 of those discussions are recorded in full, even in
 4 the main meetings themselves.
 5 **MR KEITH:** But, Mr Reynolds, they are all relevant, are they
 6 not, to the state of mind of the sender and, indirectly,
 7 the recipient?
 8 **A.** Mm-hm.
 9 **Q.** They are all relevant to the debate about Covid and
 10 the decisions which were then being taken, are they not?
 11 **A.** That is correct, and that is why I retained all of my
 12 WhatsApps and I've -- I handed over my WhatsApps to
 13 the Inquiry in -- well, in full.
 14 **Q.** That presumably was because you were aware from a very
 15 early stage that your WhatsApps would be relevant to any
 16 Inquiry that might thereafter take place, as well as to,
 17 perhaps, lessons learned exercises, as well as providing
 18 a contemporaneous understanding of the thinking of
 19 the persons who sent and received WhatsApps?
 20 **A.** Correct, yes.
 21 **Q.** You were aware, were you not, that the WhatsApps from
 22 the core decision-makers and advisers would all become
 23 relevant in due course?
 24 **A.** Yes.
 25 **Q.** Could we have INQ000265619, page 68, please.

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1 This is a WhatsApp message between yourself and
2 Simon Case, the Cabinet Secretary, in December 2021, so
3 later this year, where, after a debate about the general
4 mood and the way in which matters are progressing,
5 particularly on the Omicron front, because this is
6 December 2021, towards the bottom of the page,
7 Simon Case:

8 "PM is mad if he doesn't think his WhatsApps will
9 become public via Covid inquiry -- but he was clearly
10 not in the mood for that discussion tonight! We'll have
11 that battle in the new year.

12 "Martin Reynolds [that is of course you]: Agree --
13 thanks for your help."

14 What was the battle about, Mr Reynolds?

15 **A.** I cannot recall, but I imagine that
16 the Prime Minister -- I'm afraid I can only -- I can
17 only speculate, but I imagine that he hadn't realised
18 that all of his WhatsApps would become public via the
19 Covid Inquiry.

20 **Q.** Because of course, as the then Prime Minister, his
21 WhatsApps would form a vital part of a full, transparent
22 examination of the decision-making at the time?

23 **A.** Yes.

24 **Q.** As yours would?

25 **A.** Yes.

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1 the extent or the time of an Inquiry?

2 **A.** I was involved in the discussions which
3 the Prime Minister had about the nature of an inquiry,
4 but I cannot, I don't think, comment on that particular
5 exchange.

6 **Q.** The then Prime Minister made an announcement to
7 Parliament on 12 May 2021. Could we have that, please,
8 on the screen, INQ000273904.

9 Then to the second page, please.

10 "Mr Speaker, with permission, I will update the
11 House on our response to Covid."

12 Then if you could scroll through, please, to
13 the next page:

14 "... the State has an obligation to examine its
15 actions as rigorously and candidly as possible and to
16 learn every lesson for the future, which is why I have
17 always said that when the time is right there should be
18 a full and independent Inquiry."

19 He announces, does he not, therefore,
20 the institution of that inquiry, and then, further down
21 the page, a reference to consulting with the devolved
22 administrations.

23 Then -- over one more page, please -- he refers to
24 "the exercise of identifying and disclosing all relevant
25 information", the burden that that will place on

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1 **Q.** Yes. When was it first understood in Number 10
2 Downing Street that there might be a public inquiry?

3 **A.** I'm afraid I cannot recall, but I think in certainly
4 the early stages I and others were not thinking in those
5 terms. Certainly in the very sort of pressured period
6 of early 2020 I don't think I was really reflecting on
7 whether there would be a public inquiry, I was much more
8 focused on dealing with the day-to-day challenges at
9 that time. So I would have thought it would be after
10 that, but how far after that, I cannot comment.

11 **Q.** You will know from the disclosure, Mr Reynolds, that
12 Sir Patrick Vallance's evening notes, his dairies, as
13 well as some other notebooks and emails disclosed to
14 the Inquiry show that the notion of there being a public
15 inquiry first appeared in the general discourse around
16 about the end of 2020, in the beginning of 2021. Does
17 that sound right to you?

18 **A.** That sounds entirely plausible.

19 **Q.** We have already seen an entry in the notes of
20 Sir Patrick Vallance in which he records
21 the Cabinet Secretary, Simon Case, as saying that any
22 inquiry "should go on for a decade or more [want]
23 someone like Saville to chair it and keep it going
24 forever", and that's dated 3 November 2020.

25 Did you take any part in debate about the nature or
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1 the participants, and then -- further down the page and
2 over the page -- he says this, in the bottom six
3 entries:

4 "... this Inquiry must be able to look at the events
5 of the last year in the cold light of day -- and
6 identify the key issues that will make a difference for
7 the future. Free to scrutinise every document ..."

8 As the principal private secretary, presumably you
9 had a hand in advising the Prime Minister and assisting
10 in the process by which the Prime Minister decided that
11 there would be a public inquiry and that it would be
12 announced in Parliament. Do you recall that process,
13 Mr Reynolds?

14 **A.** I think the process was actually on the basis of advice
15 from the Cabinet Office and discussions with
16 the Cabinet Office team, so I was present for that
17 discussion, or may well have been present for elements
18 of that discussion, but I was not responsible for
19 the advice and the process through which it came to that
20 conclusion.

21 **Q.** You knew, did you not, that the Prime Minister was
22 considering instituting a public inquiry, and that that
23 would be announced at Parliament?

24 **A.** Mm-hm.

25 **Q.** If yes, please --

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1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Yes. And presumably that process by which
3 the announcement was drafted and by which the decision
4 was made to have a public inquiry took a matter
5 of weeks? Presumably these decisions aren't just made
6 on the spot?

7 A. No, it was probably longer than weeks.

8 Q. So at least before April of that year, if this was
9 May 2021, at least a month?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. You were party to a WhatsApp group called "PM Updates",
12 were you not?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Could we have INQ000265631:
15 "PM Updates from Martin Reynolds phone."
16 It's a group that was formed on 16 November 2020,
17 was it not?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. "You created group 'PM Updates'."
20 Is "You" you, Martin Reynolds?

21 A. It is indeed, yes.

22 Q. At 20.17 on that day, you said:
23 "I have created a new group to focus on updates,
24 diary etc from the outer office."
25 I think in that group were the Prime Minister,

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1 look at, as it were, at an appropriate time each
2 evening, and it was done on a daily basis, but actually
3 the chain of record-keeping was all done through email
4 or hard copy and back out again. So essentially what
5 you're seeing here is the central bit in the process
6 where something goes to the Prime Minister by WhatsApp
7 and is sent back again. And so what I was doing there
8 was, as it were, acting as a way of transmitting that to
9 the Prime Minister. But in terms of the substance of
10 the decisions, some were fairly low level, and some were
11 quite mechanistic, as -- could be questions about who he
12 wanted to see or things like that.

13 Q. You're not suggesting that this WhatsApp group was
14 anything other than highly relevant to the information
15 that the Prime Minister was receiving? It deals with
16 matters such as Parliamentary business and the dealing
17 with the Covid pandemic, how the DHSC would respond,
18 Cabinet affairs, we can see from this page, shielding,
19 clinically extremely vulnerable, MPs. This was hugely
20 important information; you were telling the
21 Prime Minister daily, hourly, by minute, information he
22 needed to know.

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. And you're not suggesting that it replicated exactly
25 other written material, written emails or notes, you

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1 yourself, Cleo Watson, Stuart Glassborow, Henry Cook and
2 Dan Rosenfield, all the Prime Minister's closest
3 advisers?

4 A. Mm-hm.

5 Q. This was no doubt a hugely important WhatsApp group?

6 A. Erm, if I can explain the PM update system, that might
7 sort of give you a better sense of actually its
8 importance, which is that we had throughout most of this
9 time a system of updating, of giving the Prime Minister
10 updates on factual developments, on quick decisions he
11 might need to be taking, and that was done initially in
12 paper copy. The "PM Updates" group essentially
13 translated that paper copy into WhatsApp, but it
14 remained, unlike almost any other WhatsApp group,
15 basically on email and hard copy. So what you had was,
16 as it were, parallel structures where what I would do is
17 I was sent an email with the updates for the day on,
18 I would put it onto a WhatsApp, and send it to
19 the Prime Minister, and then I would take it back from
20 the Prime Minister and send an email out with his record
21 on it.

22 And so, unlike the other WhatsApp groups we have
23 been talking -- we will no doubt want to talk about, it
24 was actually a mechanistic way of delivering to
25 the Prime Minister unclassified material which he could

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1 wouldn't surely have just been replicating word for word
2 everything that was being sent by email?

3 A. I think I was certainly taking the responses from
4 the Prime Minister, which were typically very short, and
5 relaying them back into email, back out to the same --
6 to a wider circulation list.

7 Q. There is information in this WhatsApp group, which runs
8 to 115 pages, that is not elsewhere to be found in notes
9 in his red box, notes to the Prime Minister or emails,
10 is there?

11 A. I'm surprised by that. I think if we checked
12 the Number 10 record you would find that there are
13 emails coming in and out, since, as I say, the content
14 of the WhatsApps was all delivered to me by email and
15 I transferred it into a WhatsApp and sent it to
16 the Prime Minister and then back again.

17 Q. The general topics were, of course, the subject of
18 debate in email, face-to-face conversations as well as
19 multiple WhatsApp groups, but the detail was not
20 replicated elsewhere, you weren't cut and pasting other
21 documents into this WhatsApp group, were you?

22 A. I was, yes.

23 Q. In entirety?

24 A. Yes. And I was then responding by email. And that's
25 why it's different from the other WhatsApp groups I'm

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1 in, so you can see at least -- yes, I mean, I'm not
 2 typing these texts into the WhatsApp itself, I'm
 3 literally receiving it onto my phone, cutting and
 4 pasting it, sending it to the Prime Minister and then
 5 taking his response and sending it out again.

6 **Q.** Why would you need to cut and paste everything from
 7 an email into a separate WhatsApp group?

8 **A.** Well, I mean, in a sense it's something we had -- it's
 9 something actually I introduced with Philip Hammond.
 10 It's a way of distilling paperwork to a minister,
 11 reducing and boiling it down in a way which means it is
 12 readily comprehensible. So rather than lots and lots of
 13 separate box returns or billet-doux or whatever, what
 14 you do is you distill it into one document, normally of
 15 two or three sides, and then the minister can read
 16 through quite quickly every day a whole bunch of updates
 17 and other things so it can be updated in an efficient
 18 way. This is, as it were, an evolution of that which
 19 I think reflected the Prime Minister's desire to receive
 20 it on WhatsApp rather than in hard copy, so he could get
 21 that information and respond at whatever time was
 22 convenient for him, overnight or early in the morning or
 23 whenever it might be. So it's a bit different from
 24 a normal WhatsApp where I might be typing in a message.

25 **Q.** Well, let's have a look at page 16 and 17, pages 16 and
 17

1 I had been sent. Similarly, the ECB announcement,
 2 that's literally cut and pasted. So what -- essentially
 3 it's a transmission mechanism. It's different from most
 4 other WhatsApps. That isn't to say that some of
 5 the responses on there might have been typed in
 6 manually, but I would -- I mean, looking at this list,
 7 the vast majority, if not all, have been cut and pasted.

8 And there will be documents in Number 10 which will
 9 literally have "daily update 10 December" with all of
 10 these things in and there will be an email to me with
 11 it, an email out with it, where I explain
 12 the Prime Minister has noted all these issues.

13 **Q.** But not all of it, you would agree, Mr Reynolds? Some
 14 of the information appears only in these WhatsApp
 15 threads; correct?

16 **A.** I think some, possibly, but I would need to check it
 17 off. And I think the other thing I would say is it
 18 comes back to my point about ephemeral and
 19 non-ephemeral. What's actually been recorded here is
 20 the flow of update material in to the Prime Minister
 21 which is read out again by email.

22 **Q.** Mr Reynolds, all this material is directly relevant, is
 23 it not, to the management of the Covid pandemic, whether
 24 it's to do with his business in Parliament or in
 25 government or in Number 10 or Downing Street or how

1 17, which are good indications of the sort of
 2 information that you were providing. In the middle of
 3 the page:
 4 "Jenrick speaking to Starmer re Liverpool. Ben, Ed
 5 and I all think a good idea but just tba."
 6 To be advised, is it?

7 **A.** To be aware.

8 **Q.** To be aware.
 9 "Netanyahu asked for an urgent call re vaccines --
 10 we have declined ..."
 11 You then talk about the commercial evictions
 12 moratorium.
 13 Over the page, 17, vaccine deployment, Parliamentary
 14 affairs, information about the ECB.
 15 Are you saying all this was cut and pasted from
 16 other emails which you --

17 **A.** I would need to check the -- but I did not type all of
 18 those in as WhatsApps, no. No. Some of those emails --
 19 some of those messages, you are right, may have been
 20 things I'd added in, but if you look at the majority of
 21 that you're looking at, that is all stuff which has been
 22 cut and pasted, so, for example, on the screen:
 23 "The Cabinet Secretary has signed off the following
 24 agenda ..."
 25 That is literally cut and pasted from a document
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1 the government generally is responding, it's all to do
 2 with Covid, isn't it, the material that we have not
 3 redacted on the basis it's irrelevant and sensitive;
 4 correct?

5 **A.** Yes.

6 **Q.** Right. Could we have page 114, please. On 15 April of
 7 2021, so just a matter of a few weeks before Mr Johnson
 8 announced the public inquiry to Parliament, you turned
 9 on the disappearing message function in this WhatsApp
 10 group:
 11 "New messages will disappear from this chat 7 days
 12 after they're sent."
 13 If we look at the bottom of the page, August 2021,
 14 and then over the page to 115, it's obvious from
 15 the people who joined and left that the WhatsApp group
 16 continued.

17 **A.** Yes.

18 **Q.** Until you left on 20 March 2022. So you were plainly
 19 discussing Covid-related matters between the moment you
 20 turned the disappearing function on to March 2022, when
 21 you left; correct?

22 **A.** Yes.

23 **Q.** Why did you turn on the disappearing message function
 24 around the time that the Prime Minister announced
 25 a public inquiry into the Covid pandemic?

1 **A.** I cannot -- I can guess or I can speculate, but I cannot
 2 recall exactly why I did so. But, as I say, my
 3 explanation is this -- this WhatsApp group was very
 4 different from any other WhatsApp group on my phone, in
 5 that it was essentially funneling information in to
 6 the Prime Minister and out, and all of that was recorded
 7 separately in hard copy or in email form, including
 8 the Prime Minister's comments, so that flow of
 9 information of updating him on developments was recorded
 10 properly on our systems.

11 Now, I cannot -- I can speculate as to why I might
 12 have done it. As I said at the start, I have kept all
 13 my other WhatsApps for the relevant period and handed
 14 them over, so I don't believe it was intended to prevent
 15 the Inquiry from having sight of this. It could,
 16 for example, have been because I was worried of someone
 17 screenshotting or using some of the exchanges and
 18 leaking them.

19 **Q.** These were your closest colleagues and you had obviously
 20 been engaging with them in this WhatsApp group for many,
 21 many months, in fact from 16 November 2020 until
 22 April 2021; correct?

23 **A.** Yes, correct.

24 **Q.** There was no change in the Number 10 system whereby
 25 emails were being sent to the Prime Minister and notes

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1 the management of Number 10, as a corporate entity?

2 **A.** Correct. Would it be helpful if I just explained the
 3 different elements in Number 10 and tried to show how
 4 Number 10 worked in its sort of slightly strange hybrid
 5 political and civil service way?

6 **Q.** Would you mind terribly, Mr Reynolds, if I just asked
 7 the questions, and if you feel that there is evidence
 8 you wish to give about the role of 10 Downing Street
 9 then you can answer appropriately.

10 In Downing Street there were obviously a number of
 11 very important but different moving parts. There's
 12 yourself as the principal private secretary, there is
 13 the civil service element, there are other private
 14 secretaries.

15 **A.** Mm-hm.

16 **Q.** There is the Cabinet Secretary, who is of course, as it
 17 says on the tin, the secretary to the Cabinet, a member
 18 of the civil service. But also advisers to the
 19 Prime Minister who were not themselves civil servants;
 20 is that correct?

21 **A.** Correct.

22 **Q.** And, for example, they included Mr Dominic Cummings?

23 **A.** Correct.

24 **Q.** To what extent, Mr Reynolds, were you, as the head of
 25 the private office, as the principal private secretary,

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1 were being put into his red box, were there, around
 2 April?

3 **A.** No.

4 **Q.** So it wasn't that the system had changed requiring you
 5 to no longer engage in this WhatsApp communication, you
 6 just turned on the disappearing function?

7 **A.** Correct, but I didn't -- I mean, again, you know, I see
 8 what you're pushing at, but I didn't put disappearing
 9 function any of my other WhatsApps and it -- you know,
 10 the rationale for doing this is unclear to me and
 11 I cannot remember that far out, but as I say, the
 12 "PM Updates" WhatsApp group was based on a formal
 13 sort of flow of paperwork, and so, arguably, the -- all
 14 of that material is still available to the Inquiry.

15 **Q.** This WhatsApp group is not available because
 16 the disappearing function was turned on by you in
 17 April 2021?

18 **A.** Correct.

19 **Q.** Right.

20 Could we now then look, please, for a moment at
 21 the structure in Number 10 and your role as
 22 the principal private secretary.

23 You were in essence the director general of
 24 Downing Street, were you not? You were essentially the
 25 head of the private office and responsible for

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1 responsible for keeping the Prime Minister informed as
 2 to what was going on? Was it a function that you
 3 exclusively held or was it a function held alongside
 4 other civil servants, or was it a divided function, that
 5 is to say between the civil service and Mr Cummings and
 6 his group of advisers?

7 **A.** The role of the private office, which is a team of about
 8 20 people, it essentially manages the Prime Minister's
 9 day-to-day professional existence. So its role is to
 10 manage the flow of papers between the government machine
 11 and the Prime Minister, to organise the meetings which
 12 people are requesting and trying to put those in
 13 the diary at the right time, right, you know, period of
 14 time, and all of those sorts of issues. So it is a --
 15 it's a running the professional existence of
 16 the Prime Minister and the linking back into the
 17 government machine, both in the Cabinet Office, where
 18 the Cabinet Secretary is the lead official, and out into
 19 departments. So it is acting, as it were, as connective
 20 tissue between the government machine and the
 21 Prime Minister.

22 **Q.** Was there anybody higher than you in terms of civil
 23 service appointment? Did you answer to anybody,
 24 for example the Cabinet Secretary, or are you the senior
 25 official in Downing Street?

24

1 **A.** I am the senior DG in Downing Street, but
 2 the Cabinet Secretary is my line manager, and he -- in
 3 fact, both Mark Sedwill and Simon Case are in
 4 Downing Street the whole time, and so there is a -- it's
 5 a slightly fluid sort of interplay between
 6 the Cabinet Secretary and Downing Street.

7 **Q.** I think you attended all the important meetings in
 8 relation to those areas of policy for which you were
 9 primarily responsible. Is that because there were areas
 10 of policy that you particularly focused on as opposed to
 11 your other private secretaries, the other private
 12 secretaries in Downing Street?

13 **A.** I mean, I -- I didn't really have a core policy
 14 responsibility, so -- I mean, I think different private
 15 secretaries manage their relationship differently. Some
 16 principal private secretaries would have a policy
 17 responsibility, but I only dealt with, I suppose, as
 18 a core policy responsibility, some of the most sensitive
 19 intelligence issues which didn't go to other people.
 20 And you have a team of private secretaries who are
 21 covering each of the policy areas, and so for
 22 the purposes of Covid you have Imran Shafi, who I think
 23 you are seeing after me, and his role was covering
 24 the public services, so he would cover all the policy
 25 issues in his area, and would be the person who would

25

1 **A.** In reality, I think Stuart Glassborow and Imran Shafi
 2 were much more into the detail of exactly what was
 3 happening on Covid; and I was indeed present for many of
 4 the discussions, but that was to get a broad overview of
 5 what is going on. The decision-making processes,
 6 the detail of what is happening, was being tracked in
 7 much more detail by Stuart and Imran.

8 **Q.** You must have debated the vital decisions that were
 9 being taken in the course of the Covid pandemic with
 10 the Prime Minister and his closest advisers; you were
 11 his principal private secretary, were you not?

12 **A.** The closest decisions -- I mean, it seems to me on Covid
 13 you had world experts who were advising on how to handle
 14 issues. My job was to try to make sure that the civil
 15 service -- sorry, the private office machine was
 16 underpinning -- well, making sure that the decisions
 17 which needed to go to the Prime Minister, the meetings,
 18 and all the sort of arrangements around the processes,
 19 were there to enable the Prime Minister to get the best
 20 possible advice from the real experts on Covid and to
 21 hear from his ministers or other political advisers some
 22 of the political dynamics around those decisions. I was
 23 not -- if that is what you are suggesting -- there to
 24 give the Prime Minister advice on Covid, and would have
 25 felt very uncomfortable to be someone who was, as it

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1 be, as it were, managing the flow of papers in that
 2 area, managing updates, keeping the Prime Minister
 3 abreast of things. I had a slightly broader remit,
 4 where I was essentially leading the private office as
 5 a collective entity, managing the relationship with
 6 the Cabinet Office. I also did a number of sort of way
 7 more bespoke things like managing the relationship with
 8 the Palace, and I also oversaw the overall
 9 administration of the building, which in the Covid
 10 period becomes much more significant.

11 **Q.** Of course.

12 **A.** So I have a wider set of responsibilities. I look
 13 across the full set of policy issues, but the individual
 14 private secretaries, who are each extremely talented and
 15 tend to have a background in the issues they are working
 16 on, were the people who were leading the issue within
 17 Downing Street and basically acting as that connective
 18 tissue, even if I was then in some of the meetings.

19 **Q.** The material shows, Mr Reynolds, that you debated Covid
 20 at great length in the WhatsApp groups of which you were
 21 a member, that you attended a huge number of meetings
 22 with the Prime Minister in relation to Covid, you were
 23 privy to the debates before COBR, the debate in Cabinet
 24 about Covid; you essentially tracked what was going on,
 25 did you not?

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1 were, taking a position against the expert advice of
 2 Chris Whitty or Patrick Vallance or indeed the
 3 Cabinet Secretary or some of the other figures there.

4 So it's a very -- you know, you have a lot of key
 5 players who were providing advice to the Prime Minister.
 6 The role of the private office very often is around
 7 choreography and making sure the right people are there
 8 at the right time, managing the processes around
 9 the Prime Minister, so preparing for press conferences,
 10 preparing for Parliamentary statements. So it's the
 11 organisational underpinning for what is going on, but
 12 the actual advice to the Prime Minister came from
 13 others.

14 **Q.** You sent notes to the Prime Minister which were put into
 15 his red box concerning developments in relation to
 16 the Covid pandemic, did you not?

17 **A.** Correct.

18 **Q.** Did you send emails to the Prime Minister and others
 19 expressing your views as to what should be done about
 20 the many complex features of the Covid pandemic?

21 **A.** I don't recall. I mean, I don't recall giving advice on
 22 the substance of Covid. Now, the role of the private
 23 secretary is to enable the flow of information from
 24 the department or from the Cabinet Office or from other
 25 parts of the government system to the Prime Minister and

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1 out again, to make sure that that moves quickly and that
 2 to some extent there is an efficient process for
 3 managing that. In terms of expressing my views on
 4 Covid, I don't believe I did on a regular basis, and
 5 I certainly wouldn't have done so formally. I think
 6 what we are doing -- I mean, I imagine we'll want to
 7 come back to the different phases in the pandemic, but
 8 a lot of what I was doing certainly in the sort of
 9 crisis phase is making sure that the private secretaries
 10 are structured and able to pick up the various strands
 11 of activity coming out of meetings, to drive that
 12 through the system and to bring it back to
 13 the Prime Minister and to others for meetings.

14 **Q.** Imran Shafi, who was a private secretary, and you were
 15 his line manager, because you're the principal private
 16 secretary, he of course gave advice to
 17 the Prime Minister regularly, repeatedly, in relation to
 18 aspects of Covid?

19 **A.** He is regularly giving, exactly, steers, but I was not
 20 leading on Covid, I was not -- I was making sure that
 21 the overall machine and the processes were working, and
 22 I was not in the detail and so not able to give advice
 23 in the same way as Imran, or indeed Stuart.

24 **Q.** Stuart Glassborow?

25 **A.** Stuart Glassborow, yes.

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1 Is there any basis for that suggestion?

2 **A.** Well, I think if you look at the paperwork through from
 3 January, February, March, well, actually until late
 4 February, while there are clearly reports coming in
 5 identifying some of the risks and challenges around
 6 Covid, the tone of those communications, which I imagine
 7 we may want to come back to, was very much that
 8 the system was tracking this very carefully, the right
 9 processes were in place to manage that, and that whilst
 10 there were potentially large challenges ahead, that in
 11 a sense the plans and the preparations were broadly in
 12 place, and I think there was a sort of reassuring
 13 message coming up into Number 10 during that period.

14 Now, in terms of the Prime Minister's perspective,
 15 I think he is instinctively optimistic, but I also think
 16 that he instinctively believes that as a leader it's
 17 important to project confidence and ability to deal with
 18 things. But I think that the suggestion you're making
 19 is one which is shared not just, as it were, by
 20 the Prime Minister but across the centre of government
 21 more generally, that in a sense this was a worrying
 22 pandemic in China, it was being tracked quite closely,
 23 and the preparations were in place to deal with it if
 24 necessary.

25 **Q.** The secret's in the word "bias". The suggestion is that

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1 **Q.** You are aware that Mr Cummings in his statement to this
 2 Inquiry suggests that you were too deferential to
 3 the Prime Minister and shied away from confronting him
 4 with hard issues. What do you say to that?

5 **A.** I think -- well, I imagine as part of our evidence we'll
 6 come back to the departure arrangements for
 7 Mark Sedwill. I think on a number of occasions, where
 8 I felt it was necessary and I needed to step in, I gave
 9 the Prime Minister very clear advice when I disagreed
 10 with him. But those were on issues where I felt it was
 11 my role as the principal private secretary to step in
 12 and give that advice, and I can -- I can identify three
 13 or four such examples if that would be helpful.

14 **Q.** Your position is that those all related, however, to
 15 the organisational aspects of Number 10, to the role by
 16 which advice was given by others, how the system worked
 17 to support the Prime Minister, in essence?

18 **A.** Correct.

19 **Q.** Tell us, then, please, whether there is any basis to
 20 the suggestion, also made by Mr Cummings, that in
 21 February and March of 2020 there was an untoward degree
 22 of optimism bias on the part of the Prime Minister,
 23 a sense of, well, the worst is not going to happen, we
 24 may be overreacting here, it could be swine flu, there's
 25 nothing to see here or not too much to see here.

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1 there was a degree of optimism bias, that is to say that
 2 the sunny outlook adopted by the Prime Minister and
 3 perhaps by others in government was not justified by
 4 the developing reality, by the objective state of facts.

5 **A.** I think your Inquiry will be better able to verify that
 6 than I can.

7 **Q.** You were Mr Johnson's principal private secretary, you
 8 must have formed a view in February and March as to
 9 whether or not the government was getting on top of
 10 the problem with sufficient alacrity, sufficient speed
 11 and attention to detail?

12 **A.** I think -- well, from the paperwork certainly I have
 13 here at the end of February there is a note to
 14 the Prime Minister setting out, as it were,
 15 the assessment of the challenges that Covid presented,
 16 and that note is produced by a group of the most senior
 17 advisers on the issue, plus the director of the Civil
 18 Contingencies Secretariat, and that note I can see does
 19 seem to be pretty -- I wouldn't say reassuring, but
 20 gives the sense that the system is gripping the
 21 challenge in an appropriate way.

22 And I recognise that after that, and within about
 23 two or three weeks' period, the government is looking at
 24 very fundamental interventions, but I would just observe
 25 that many of those interventions were not highlighted or

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1 identified in the note at the end of February.
 2 So, I mean, I agree that, you know, with the benefit
 3 of hindsight, it does appear that we should have been
 4 far more vigorously looking and testing our arrangements
 5 for what was coming, and that would arguably have made
 6 a big difference when the crisis hit.

7 **Q.** You're referring to a note to the Prime Minister on
 8 20 February, and we'll come back to that in due course.

9 What about before the end of February, though,
 10 Mr Reynolds? And putting aside hindsight, it was
 11 apparent, wasn't it, by the middle of February, that
 12 there was sustained human-to-human transmission in
 13 the community in the United Kingdom; correct?

14 **A.** Correct.

15 **Q.** It was obvious because SAGE and -- through the CMO and
 16 the CSA, the government -- SAGE advised, and through
 17 the CMO and the CSA the government was aware, that
 18 the ability of the state to be able to control
 19 the spread of the virus was very much weakened, it was
 20 plain that there would be very real difficulties in
 21 controlling the spread of the virus; correct?

22 **A.** I defer to your judgement.

23 **Q.** Well ...

24 **A.** I mean, I haven't got the record in front of me, but --

25 **Q.** Do you recall that?

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1 February that the government machine, to paraphrase your
 2 evidence, proceeded to deal with this crisis, to deal
 3 with the problem, which was already then apparent?

4 **A.** Well, as I say, I mean, I think the -- you know,
 5 the evidence, from what you're saying, seems to suggest
 6 that we should have been assessing the situation
 7 differently and moving more quickly, but that certainly,
 8 from the -- from the -- as I say, from the note at
 9 the end of February, the overall sense was the relevant
 10 parts of government were already, as it were, looking
 11 over exactly what needed to be done in preparations, and
 12 the overall message was that, while there are some
 13 difficult decisions or there will be some difficult
 14 decisions to be taken, the government machine is
 15 prepared for that eventuality.

16 **Q.** You have a great deal of experience, of course, in the
 17 civil service with the management of government. It's
 18 what you do. To what extent was Mr Johnson's
 19 administration in January and February of 2020
 20 an inexperienced one or a new one or one that might,
 21 because of the novelty -- and of course the
 22 general election had only taken place a few months
 23 before -- that perhaps it was unable, structurally, to
 24 be able to cope with a crisis of this magnitude?

25 **A.** Well, I think it is fair to say that the dynamics in

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1 **A.** I recall the flow of information highlighting the --
 2 highlighting the growing problem of Covid. In terms of,
 3 you know, actually the assessment of what that means and
 4 what the reality means in terms of the UK Government
 5 response, that in a sense is not the responsibility of
 6 the PPS. That was -- you would expect advice to be
 7 coming in saying, as we found out two or three weeks
 8 later, that we're not prepared to deal with X, Y or Z
 9 and we need to address it very quickly.

10 **Q.** Mr Reynolds, you sat in on those meetings with
 11 the Prime Minister in middle, early, middle and late
 12 February, did you not?

13 **A.** Yes.

14 **Q.** You sent emails about Covid and received emails about
 15 Covid in the early, middle and late part of February,
 16 did you not?

17 **A.** Correct.

18 **Q.** So you must have formed a view as to what the level of
 19 the crisis was and whether or not in fact the absence of
 20 means to control the virus, the fact that it had already
 21 started to spread in the United Kingdom, presented
 22 the government with an alarming conundrum, with
 23 a terrible prospect; correct?

24 **A.** Correct.

25 **Q.** So why was it, to use your words, only at the end of

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1 January, February, March of 2020 were very different to
 2 the dynamics before the election. Obviously
 3 the majority was very different, but there had been
 4 a very big shift in overall focus pre-election on Brexit
 5 and the Brexit negotiations, and that had been
 6 pretty ... well, it had been the overriding focus of
 7 that entire period for three or four months, and that
 8 had been concluded, the election had happened, and it
 9 did feel like there was a significant, as it were,
 10 turning of the page because, with a majority of 80 or
 11 whatever it was, there was a sense that the government
 12 had a five or ten-year time horizon to look at and there
 13 was a really strong focus on the forward agenda.

14 So at the beginning of January there was an away day
 15 in Chequers, which I attended. There was some work
 16 around what I would view as being sort of completing
 17 Brexit, not masses, but it was around closing down
 18 the Department for Exiting the European Union. There
 19 were some very big decisions around HS2, big decisions
 20 around 5G and the roll-out of 5G technology across
 21 the UK. And so there was, as it were, a very different
 22 feel to Downing Street, a very different feel to
 23 the centre of government, as we were trying to get used
 24 to what this new political reality meant.

25 **Q.** And --

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1 **A.** If I may continue, the other thing I would say within
2 Downing Street specifically was we were getting used to
3 a slightly divergent internal politics, because it was
4 increasingly clear that the Prime Minister's and
5 Dominic Cummings' agendas were not overlapping, or were
6 overlapped in part but were quite different, and that,
7 in that period, meant that we were starting to try to
8 work out: what are the priorities, how do we deliver
9 this, and what are we -- you know, in a sense, what are
10 we trying to achieve as a collective? And that dynamic
11 I think was starting to become more prominent.

12 The other dynamic I would say during this period is
13 a sort of unease with some of the messaging and actions
14 taking place. So it was during this period that we were
15 talking about the appointment of various -- and I use
16 quotes here -- "weirdos and misfits" and bringing in
17 very different people into Downing Street, and we had
18 the case of Mr Sabisky, who you'll remember is an
19 adviser brought in who had unusual views on eugenics and
20 after three days he had -- he resigned.

21 There was a lot of work going on around a possible
22 reorganisation of Number 10, because we were considering
23 relocating the Prime Minister's office to a different
24 part of the building. So a lot of work was going on on
25 that. And there was, I think, quite a bit of unease in

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1 advice of his chief of staff, and that if you look at
2 many of the policy debates going on, he was looking to
3 other advisers within Number 10 to express their views,
4 and he liked, as it were, a multiplicity of different
5 arguments and advice which -- from which he could
6 choose. And I think a particularly important political
7 adviser in this context was Ed Lister, who would often
8 give a very different assessment or perspective on many
9 of the core issues reflecting his role -- or his
10 previous roles in local government and in -- and in
11 business.

12 So whilst you're right there is a sort of very clear
13 political direction, there are the two bits of confusion
14 I would add to that: one is that Dominic Cummings isn't,
15 like most previous chiefs of staff, always pursuing
16 the same agenda as the Prime Minister; and that
17 the Prime Minister himself is looking to hear divergent
18 views. And HS2 is a good example of that.

19 **Q.** All right, Mr Reynolds, I'm going to pull you back from
20 a debate about HS2.

21 My question asked you what the position was in
22 Downing Street in January and February. The dynamic
23 between Mr Cummings and the Prime Minister did not begin
24 to deteriorate until later in the year,
25 the reorganisation in particular the introduction of

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1 the civil service around, and excuse my language,
2 the so-called "shit list" of people who were thought to
3 be at risk in what was perceived to be a potentially
4 more muscular approach to the civil service.

5 So I think it is fair to say, in the period you're
6 talking about, there were quite a lot of other things
7 taking place which meant that quite a bit of senior
8 energy and attention was focusing on other things --

9 **Q.** I'm just going to pause you there, please, Mr Reynolds,
10 that's a very long answer.

11 The dynamic between Mr Cummings and
12 the Prime Minister, of course, changed during the course
13 of the year, did it not, and in the end Mr Cummings left
14 at the end of 2020? But that dynamic, was that a major
15 feature of any instability in Downing Street in that
16 early period, January/February, which is what I'm
17 concerned about?

18 **A.** I think the dynamic -- I mean, there is an unusual
19 dynamic around Dominic Cummings, in that in many ways,
20 in my view, he was the most empowered chief of staff
21 Downing Street has seen, and was the person whose writ
22 ruled and was able to drive things through the machine
23 in a way I suspect few other chiefs of staff have done.

24 But what I would also say is that the Prime Minister
25 at the time did not work exclusively on the basis of

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1 a new director general, a permanent secretary in
2 Number 10 and the setting up of Covid-S and Covid-O and
3 Lord Sedwill's departure was all later in the year,
4 predominantly from May onwards, and the other matters of
5 which you've spoken, with the exception of Mr Cummings'
6 appeal for "weirdos and misfits" were all later in the
7 year.

8 I want to ask you: what was the state of play, the
9 ability of Number 10 to function efficiently in
10 February, when these momentous decisions had to be --
11 started to be taken?

12 **A.** I mean, I think it's what I'm saying, we were in
13 a process of bedding into a new reality, and whilst --
14 I mean, you're right that the relationship between
15 Dominic Cummings and the Prime Minister was very good at
16 this stage, but I do think it's relevant as to how he
17 operates even when the relationship is very good, and
18 the -- as it were, the approach which relies on multiple
19 sources of debate and information, and the fact that you
20 have a misalignment between the Prime Minister and
21 the chief of staff in terms of what they're trying to
22 achieve.

23 **Q.** But it wasn't just Mr Cummings, was it, Mr Reynolds?
24 I mean, it's not -- are you suggesting that any lack of
25 efficiency or efficacy in Downing Street was solely the

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1 responsibility of Mr Cummings and --

2 **A.** Not at all, no, and I wouldn't wish to be suggesting

3 that at all, but what I'm trying to suggest is that in

4 this period we're getting used to a different type of

5 working arrangement to what we were experiencing, as it

6 were, before the general election. And I'm not saying

7 that -- you know, I'm not looking to, as it were, to

8 blame or -- I'm just trying to give a sense of a bedding

9 down of a new operation where people are trying to work

10 out how this new reality works, what the priorities are,

11 how we manage the different personalities and all of

12 those sorts of things, and I think it does have

13 an impact into the mood and the nature of Number 10 at

14 this early period.

15 **Q.** You are aware, of course, that Sir Patrick Vallance, who

16 played an extraordinarily important part in the response

17 to the pandemic and was the liaison, of course, along

18 with Professor Sir Chris Whitty, between SAGE and

19 the government, has described the position in Number 10.

20 On one occasion, on 5 April, he says:

21 "No 10 chaos as usual ..."

22 In June his notes refer to the fact that:

23 "... no one in no 10 or [the Cabinet Office] had

24 really read or taken time to understand the science

25 advice ..."

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1 **Q.** If I may venture to speak for my Lady, we will be

2 getting there, Mr Reynolds.

3 **A.** Fine, okay.

4 **Q.** The Cabinet Office, it is plain, formed an absolutely

5 crucial part of the government's response, because

6 the crisis machinery geographically, institutionally is

7 within the Cabinet Office, and plainly there has to be

8 the closest of working relationships between

9 the Cabinet Office and Number 10 in order to respond

10 properly to a crisis; would you agree?

11 **A.** Correct.

12 **Q.** There is evidence, both from Mr Alex Thomas, who gave

13 evidence to this Inquiry, and from Mr Cummings'

14 statement, and of course we'll be hearing from him

15 tomorrow, that the Cabinet Office had huge numbers of

16 unnecessary staff. It was bloated, he says,

17 particularly at senior level, with poor responsibility,

18 there was a lack of clarity around the decision-making

19 processes, it couldn't drive priorities or fix problems

20 with departments, that in essence it failed to be able

21 to drive the crisis machinery forward, again in those

22 crucial early months; would you agree?

23 **A.** In a sense, Mr Keith, that's the same -- the same point

24 I would make about the shift from -- I mean, it seems to

25 me you've got a period, probably January/February, where

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1 He says it's:

2 "Quite extraordinary."

3 And he remarks, albeit later in the year, that

4 Simon Case, the Cabinet Secretary, had reported to him

5 that "No 10 [was] at war with itself".

6 Would you agree that there was an unusual degree of

7 chaos, dysfunctionality, lack of efficiency, in

8 Number 10 during those early important months?

9 **A.** I think -- I think that in the early months there is

10 a bedding down of a new working arrangement. So if

11 we're talking about January, February and probably

12 the early bit of March, we are, in my view, bedding down

13 new arrangements, the -- but the flow of information

14 into Number 10, which you will no doubt hear from

15 Imran Shafi and others, the actual work process and so

16 forth are, I think, managing in the normal way.

17 **Q.** All right.

18 **A.** What I would like, if I may, at some point, my Lady, is

19 just to talk you through what happens when we go into

20 crisis, because I notice that the comment you ascribe to

21 Patrick Vallance was in early April, and I think it's

22 important, as I'm sure you do -- but it might be helpful

23 to you if I explain what happens when an organisation

24 like Downing Street -- or at least when the government

25 goes into crisis and how that impacts on our operations.

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1 it's normal activity, as it were, and you have a --

2 crisis machinery are tracking a crisis in China, and

3 they are feeding that information into Number 10, and

4 that is, as it were, the process under way at that

5 stage. And as you've highlighted, you can argue, and

6 I think I would agree, that we were not sufficiently

7 quick at identifying the scale of the problem and of

8 road testing the plans and preparations we had in place.

9 But I think that is a different question to what then

10 happens when we shift into crisis, and I think some of

11 the criticisms you're alleging of the Cabinet Office

12 are -- relate really to that period when we go into

13 crisis.

14 **Q.** But they are systemic issues, are they not? And whether

15 or not there is a -- whether or not it's appropriate to

16 divide up a chronology or a reaction or a response by

17 way of evidence gathering stage, response stage, do

18 something stage, what is suggested by Mr Cummings and

19 others is that the system in the Cabinet Office was not

20 working well, its staffing levels and organisation were

21 inefficient, it was unable systemically to be able to

22 drive priorities or solve problems between lead

23 government departments -- other government departments,

24 it was incapable functionally of responding well to

25 a crisis. That is the suggestion. Do you agree?

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- 1 **A.** I think there are organisational challenges in -- within
 2 the Cabinet Office and I do think that there are many
 3 things which could have been done differently, but
 4 I think -- again, I think the real challenge for
 5 the Cabinet Office at this stage, in my view, is that it
 6 didn't have the plans and processes in place to move
 7 from the early stage through to the crisis stage and
 8 manage it in the way a normal crisis would be managed.
 9 And of course the flip side of that is the scale of
 10 Covid is so big that if you put a -- if you have a very
 11 big pandemic, once in a generation crisis, and you don't
 12 have the right plans in place, then of course
 13 the machinery starts to find it very, very difficult to
 14 function. But I think your underlying question is: are
 15 there, on top of that, additional inefficiencies in the
 16 Cabinet Office? And the answer is yes.
- 17 **Q.** Mr Reynolds, I'd invite you to speak plainly, if I may
 18 be so bold. If the plans and processes were not there
 19 within the department that is responsible for crisis
 20 machinery, if it's not good enough, the way in which it
 21 responded, if there were many challenges,
 22 organisationally, then the Cabinet Office essentially
 23 failed to do what it was required to do in the face of
 24 the pandemic?
- 25 **A.** I think it goes -- I mean, in terms of the plans and
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- 1 for anyone -- it's high friction, low trust ... low
 2 performance", that there was "institutional friction"
 3 between Number 10 and the Cabinet Office, and, to use
 4 Mr Johnson's words, the Cabinet Secretary was "miles off
 5 pace".
- 6 Those were all problems that continued after
 7 February/March, did they not?
- 8 **A.** I would almost, with the greatest of -- I would almost
 9 flip that. The problems become very manifest in
 10 March/April, because essentially a government machine
 11 which is configured for certain types of crisis is
 12 confronting a crisis of a magnitude larger, and
 13 the processes at the departmental level, at the -- and
 14 at the Cabinet Office level are inadequate to deal with
 15 them. So the challenges in the crisis response become
 16 much more evident at that stage.
- 17 **Q.** So the failures, if that is what my Lady concludes they
 18 were, were manifest across the board because there was
 19 a failure of the government departments to produce plans
 20 and to get on top of the problems for which they were
 21 responsible, and a failure by the Cabinet Office to
 22 manage the crisis at the core of government?
- 23 **A.** Yes, that is why I do wonder whether it might be helpful
 24 to set out how I think a crisis works and how
 25 the different strands fit together.
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- 1 procedures, it's why, in a sense, I think it is worth
 2 looking at the whole crisis response. It seems to me
 3 the plans and procedures were not in place at
 4 the departmental level. It seems to me you have to look
 5 at every single level of crisis planning. In a normal
 6 crisis the department is the department which leads
 7 the crisis and the plans were manifestly not
 8 sufficiently developed at the departmental level. That
 9 then leads into the Cabinet Office level, where I agree
 10 with you that there are not the sufficient plans and
 11 processes in place. And so at every level, I agree with
 12 you, there are -- there are challenges.
- 13 **Q.** The other government departments failed perhaps in other
 14 different ways, but the Cabinet Office, whose prime
 15 responsibility is to broker between departments, to
 16 pursue the whole-government approach, to operate the
 17 crisis machinery, failed to get on top of this problem,
 18 did it not?
- 19 **A.** Correct.
- 20 **Q.** Right. And the problems with the Cabinet Office
 21 continued, did they not, after February/March, because,
 22 as you know, again, very well, WhatsApps between
 23 Mr Cummings and Mr Johnson, and emails in fact between
 24 you and Helen MacNamara and Tom Shinner and others make
 25 absolutely plain that the Cabinet Office "doesn't work
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- 1 **Q.** Forgive me, I'm going to show you your own emails just
 2 in a moment, Mr Reynolds. You'll have to restrain
 3 yourself until we see them.
- 4 The very experienced civil servant, Helen MacNamara,
 5 who of course you know, has said in her statement that
 6 there were collective concerns that wrong people were in
 7 the room and so the Prime Minister was not being given
 8 sufficiently expert policy advice. Would you agree?
- 9 **A.** Yes, at times.
- 10 **Q.** Were there concerns between Number 10 and
 11 the Cabinet Office regarding the clarity about who was
 12 leading in which areas?
- 13 **A.** Yes.
- 14 **Q.** Was it clear that structures across government were
 15 struggling to cope with the demands that they faced,
 16 both inside the Cabinet Office and across the centre of
 17 government?
- 18 **A.** Yes.
- 19 **Q.** So we may be clear, then, Mr Reynolds, that was
 20 the position, structurally, within Number 10 and
 21 the Cabinet Office, on the cusp of the pandemic and when
 22 you all collectively first became aware of the problem
 23 emanating from China?
- 24 **A.** I'm not sure in terms of the timing of that. I think,
 25 as I say, there is a difference between the period
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1 before the crisis and the shift into crisis where
2 the situation gets dramatically worse. So some of
3 the elements you may be talking about, about
4 participation in meetings and so forth, may well be
5 correct throughout the January/February period. But
6 where the machine really struggles is when we shift into
7 full crisis mode, where the fact we haven't got, as it
8 were, plans means that the -- and, you know, I can talk
9 you through some of the responses, but the situation
10 becomes extremely complicated and very high friction
11 indeed, and that clearly makes management of the crisis
12 very difficult.

13 **Q.** Are you essentially saying the machine was poor
14 structurally, but it became even worse as the weeks
15 passed?
16 **A.** I think that the machine was not properly prepared for
17 the scale of the crisis it was about to face, and that
18 whereas the machine would have been prepared to deal
19 with the sort of crises it had dealt with previously --
20 and if you look at, I don't know -- you know, I'm from
21 the Foreign Office, so if you a look at an evacuation
22 from Afghanistan or from Lebanon or -- those sorts of,
23 as it were, segmented crises, which involve a relatively
24 small number of government departments, the machine is
25 equipped to deal with that, and I think it deals with it

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1 a media report, or at least a monitoring of media:
2 "Two people have been admitted to the
3 Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow ..."

4 Then if we can scroll back out, we can see that you
5 received an email saying:

6 "Given this I think we should def go ahead and with
7 the Cobr.

8 "Martin [that's you] -- do you want to check with
9 PM? Or would you like me to do a quick note."

10 You then replied saying:

11 "Thanks. Let me know and I'll get back to cvs."

12 **A.** Erm --

13 **Q.** Sorry, that's an email to you, not from you.

14 "Thanks. Let me know and I'll get back to cvs."

15 Then further up the page you say:

16 "He is content with it."

17 **A.** Fine.

18 **Q.** So this is an example of you being informed of
19 an important event in relation to the Covid crisis on
20 23 January. The Prime Minister didn't chair that COBR,
21 the Secretary of State at the Department of Health and
22 Social Care, Matt Hancock MP, did. But it was
23 the Prime Minister's view that there should be a COBR.

24 **A.** Correct.

25 **Q.** Can you recall why the Prime Minister himself didn't

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1 relatively efficiently, even if there are always bound
2 to be ways you can improve it. The difference in this
3 case is, rather than a segmented crisis which is
4 covering four or five different government departments,
5 you've got a whole-of-government crisis, which means
6 every government department is dealing with a major
7 departmental set of issues for which many of them were
8 not properly prepared. That then feeds into
9 a Cabinet Office set of structures which were not
10 designed to manage a whole-of-government crisis in that
11 nature, and that is what I think you're seeing in early
12 March through to, indeed, the piece of work that
13 Helen MacNamara and I produced, I think it was in May.

14 **MR KEITH:** It was.

15 My Lady, is that a convenient moment?

16 **LADY HALLETT:** Certainly. I shall return at midday.

17 (11.43 am)

(A short break)

19 (12.00 pm)

20 **LADY HALLETT:** Mr Keith.

21 **MR KEITH:** On 23 January, Mr Reynolds, there was an email
22 chain to which you were party, INQ000136729, which
23 concerned reports that I think two people had been
24 admitted to hospital in Glasgow with suspected
25 coronavirus. We will see at the bottom of the page

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1 decide to chair the COBR?

2 **A.** No, I cannot.

3 **Q.** There is guidance for COBR as to whether or not it
4 should be the Prime Minister who chairs it or

5 the Secretary of State for a lead government department,
6 or indeed an official. Is that not something that
7 the principal private secretary would debate with
8 the Prime Minister?

9 **A.** Normally I would rely on the advice of
10 the Cabinet Secretary or the NSA on the -- on the person
11 to be chairing an event. So normally the request would
12 come in to me saying "We recommend this", I would check
13 with the political team whether they agreed or
14 disagreed, and I would put that advice to
15 the Prime Minister.

16 **Q.** But here the Prime Minister told you he thought there
17 should be a COBR?

18 **A.** Yes.

19 **Q.** So presumably as part of that conversation you would
20 have discussed who should chair the COBR?

21 **A.** Well, I might have just simply said to him,
22 "Prime Minister, there's a recommendation that
23 Matt Hancock chairs the COBR, given XYZ has happened,
24 are you content with that?" And I think, you know,
25 the speed with which that information is relayed

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1 suggests to me it was that type of exchange.

2 **Q.** If you had discussed with the Prime Minister whether
3 there should be a COBR, to what extent did you seek to
4 inform yourself about events on the world stage
5 concerning the spread of the virus by that point,
6 23 January?

7 **A.** I would have -- I would have assumed and relied on
8 the fact that Imran and others were tracking this very
9 closely. In fact in this case I think -- and I haven't
10 got the document up any more but I believe the email
11 seems to have come from the foreign affairs assistant
12 private secretary and I would have --

13 **Q.** Well, it's been deleted.

14 **A.** Oh, has it?

15 **Q.** That's sensitive and irrelevant. But in any event,
16 that's the part of the government it came from?

17 **A.** Yeah.

18 **Q.** But, Mr Reynolds, you understood that there was
19 an incipient crisis concerning -- or at least a risk
20 that a viral pandemic would reach the United Kingdom, it
21 required a COBR to be instituted --

22 **A.** Yes.

23 **Q.** -- you debated with the Prime Minister whether there
24 should be one, and perhaps whether it should be him or
25 somebody else who chaired it. Were you aware by that

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1 a self-sustaining virus transmitted human to human? Did
2 you ask? Did you know?

3 **A.** I -- as I say, I think my picture of events at that
4 stage would have been incomplete. The advice coming in
5 would give a very clear sense of what was deemed
6 sensible and appropriate in response to the situation at
7 the time, and I can challenge that or I can second-guess
8 it if I have a very strong view, but in this situation
9 I -- it looks from the email chain as I simply relayed
10 the request and suggestion and checked it with
11 the Prime Minister.

12 **Q.** Did you take any steps yourself in advance of speaking
13 to the Prime Minister to inform yourself about other
14 aspects of the virus, its fatality rate, how it was
15 spreading, whether it would spread to
16 the United Kingdom, what the consequences might be? Or
17 did you just relay the administrative request for
18 a COBR?

19 **A.** I think that -- I mean, that is a lot of the -- within
20 the government there are people who are doing all of the
21 things you are talking about, and they're producing
22 advice into Downing Street as to what the appropriate
23 response is. Now, I can -- I can second-guess or
24 contradict what's coming in, but actually in this type
25 of situation if a request comes in of this nature from

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1 date, 23 January, of the number of deaths outside China
2 or the extent to which the virus had spread and
3 therefore to what extent COBR should urgently be looking
4 at this issue?

5 **A.** I'm sure I was aware of some elements of that. In terms
6 of who actually chairs a meeting, I mean, I would
7 certainly be involved in that consideration, but
8 normally the recommendation would be coming in from
9 the relevant part of Cabinet Office, and potentially the
10 Cabinet Secretary, as I say, and they would be giving
11 a steer as to what they felt was appropriate at the
12 time, given their assessment of what was going on. Now,
13 I can disagree with that and I can argue for something
14 different or I could argue against a COBR entirely, but
15 the people who are actually making the assessment there
16 will tend to be the Cabinet Office people dealing with
17 the situation and who have a much better and more
18 comprehensive assessment of what is happening than I do.
19 I will talk to the political advisers and they may give
20 a case for why it makes sense for the Prime Minister to
21 chair the meeting. But in many cases you can have quite
22 a significant international or other crisis being
23 chaired by a Cabinet Minister.

24 **Q.** When you talked to them, did you ask them or did you
25 debate to what extent this new novel virus was already

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1 the private secretary who is tracking that issue and
2 probably, and again I haven't seen the document, the
3 other private secretary who is looking at the issue from
4 a domestic preparedness perspective, if they're all
5 broadly in agreement I would normally check with the
6 political team that they agreed in terms of the
7 political salience, and relay that request to the
8 Prime Minister.

9 **Q.** Mr Reynolds, as the principal private secretary to the
10 Prime Minister, did you not think it formed part of your
11 functions to educate yourself on what the position was,
12 what the risks that were emerging here were, and take
13 part in this debate?

14 **A.** Erm, well, I think the -- I think -- as I say, the
15 nature of a private office is the flow of information
16 between the machinery in to the Prime Minister, and yes,
17 on a range of issues I can challenge and test and do all
18 of that sort of thing, and it's certainly perfectly
19 possible for me to have done -- done so in this
20 situation. But it's not self-evident to me that having
21 the Health Secretary chair a COBR on this issue was
22 an inappropriate response to the challenge at that time.
23 I don't know what other pressures there were, I don't
24 know what other advice there was. But that I think is,
25 you know, from what I can see, that advice seems

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1 reasonable and proportionate.

2 **Q.** I have not suggested that it was inappropriate for
3 Matt Hancock to chair the COBR. My question was: why
4 didn't you ask some basic questions about what this
5 issue was concerning this emerging viral pandemic?

6 **A.** Well, from the email chain it's impossible for me to
7 confirm whether I did or didn't ask those questions.

8 **Q.** Well, let's have INQ000056226, please, which is minutes
9 from a COBR on 29 January.

10 We can see the ministers who attended on the first
11 page. It was chaired by the "Rt Hon Matt Hancock,
12 Secretary of State for Health and Social Care".

13 The second page, please.

14 My Lady will see that a number of ministers from
15 the devolved administrations dialled in. That goes to
16 a question that you asked a few weeks ago.

17 Then amongst the officials we can see an unnamed or
18 at least deleted official from Number 10, but
19 the permanent secretary from the DHSC, the CMO, the GCSA
20 and so on and so forth, so a number of officials.

21 Over the page, some officials dialled in, including
22 the CMO for the Welsh Government and the CMO for
23 Northern Ireland Executive.

24 Then if we could go to page 5, please, the current
25 situation update demonstrates that the chair invited

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1 14 February. Do you recall?

2 **A.** Well, I think the regular updates would have been
3 provided by either the foreign affairs assistant private
4 secretary or Imran Shafi.

5 **Q.** All right. Well, let's have a very quick look at how
6 the Prime Minister was informed about the outcome of
7 this meeting.

8 INQ000136734.

9 It's an email from the private office support team
10 to you and to a number of other officials, but including
11 the Prime Minister, referring to a box return. What is
12 a box return?

13 **A.** It's -- it is the -- it's the amendment
14 the Prime Minister will make to the document.

15 **Q.** So --

16 **A.** So my guess would be that the duty clerks or PM post,
17 which is essential by the same thing, will have cut and
18 pasted the note from PM onwards and put it on a card,
19 and attached here -- I can't see what is attached, but
20 my guess would be that --

21 **Q.** A note?

22 **A.** -- there will be a note back with the Prime Minister's
23 manuscript comments on it or just simply acknowledging
24 it.

25 **Q.** Right. INQ000136737, please.

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1 the CMO and Public Health England to update
2 the committee, COBR, on the global situation. The GCSA
3 gave a read-out of a meeting of SAGE.

4 Then at 3:

5 "The CMO said that the UK planning assumptions were
6 based on the reasonable worst case scenario. There were
7 two scenarios to be considered. The first was that the
8 spread was confined within China, the second was that
9 the spread was not limited to China and there would be
10 a pandemic like scenario ... The second scenario was
11 plausible but it may take weeks to months."

12 Then in 4, the reasonable worst-case scenario was
13 said to be similar to that for pandemic influenza:

14 "... there was a 10% likelihood of the [reasonable
15 worst-case scenario] happening, but this figure had not
16 been agreed by SAGE."

17 Do you recall being given the product of this COBR
18 meeting, Mr Reynolds? Do you recall yourself taking
19 part in any debate thereafter about the import of this
20 minute to the effect that there was a 10% likelihood of
21 the reasonable worst-case scenario coming to pass?

22 **A.** No.

23 **Q.** You were, though, responsible, were you not, for
24 providing regular updates to the Prime Minister after
25 this meeting? So, I think, from 28 January through to

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1 "PM,
2 "A brief update on Coronavirus and evacuations of
3 British nationals ..."

4 The note appears -- and it's dated 30 January, it
5 appears to be concerned exclusively with
6 the repatriation of United Kingdom nationals from
7 the Hubei Province or at least China; correct?

8 **A.** Yes.

9 **Q.** So as you recall it, at the end of January, what the
10 government was focusing on, certainly insofar as
11 the Prime Minister was concerned, was the position in
12 China and the repatriation of UK nationals?

13 **A.** Yes, although if I may, I mean --

14 **Q.** Please.

15 **A.** -- the person who has produced this note is the Foreign
16 Affairs private secretary, so we also have a private
17 secretary. Imran Shafi, who is I believe, at this
18 stage, as it were, working in tandem with the Foreign
19 Affairs private secretary to make sure that we're
20 tracking the domestic implications, and that's why
21 I assume this note is focused on the international
22 dimension. But you're right that this is -- at that
23 stage we are focused on the international dimension.

24 **Q.** INQ000136732. There is a read-out from, I think,
25 a meeting from the Prime Minister in which he expresses

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1 his view that -- or rather he's advised that he should
2 spend more time with his ministers discussing these
3 issues.

4 If you could scroll in on the top half of the page,
5 please, there is an email from you on 31 January at
6 11.25:

7 "Mark, many thanks for this -- I understand that
8 Matt Hancock is keen to proceed with this but that we
9 will cover Coronavirus at the start of the meeting ...
10 It also helps deliver on the PM's strong desire ... to
11 be spending more time discussing the issues with his
12 ministers."

13 So you debated with the Prime Minister, presumably,
14 what was happening, the fact that there were COBRs being
15 instituted, and that there was an incipient crisis
16 coming?

17 **A.** Either I would have been doing so, as I say, or one of
18 the private secretaries, who may well have been talking
19 to the Prime Minister at this period, but here I think
20 the question was whether -- whether we want to proceed
21 with a meeting on health, which I think we agreed to do
22 so.

23 **Q.** In your evidence earlier, Mr Reynolds, you gave, if
24 I may say so, the distinct impression that you processed
25 papers, you made sure the system was working to provide

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1 "A SAGE meeting ... held [on] ... 3 February. [It]
2 focused on ... future travel advice ..."

3 There was a reference then to a "cross government
4 meeting to discuss plans for a possible ministerial
5 table-top exercise", and then the CCS would "chair
6 a cross government meeting to test preparedness of
7 excess deaths policy and plans", and there would be
8 another COBR.

9 To what extent were you sighted on the decisions to
10 have a ministerial tabletop exercise, a cross-government
11 meeting and so on?

12 **A.** I doubt I was involved. I mean, I think a lot of this
13 looks like the normal crisis response being co-ordinated
14 at the Cabinet Office level with all sorts of activities
15 taking place. I am copied in and so -- I assume I'm
16 copied in, although I haven't got the list, but
17 the officials which will be tracking this most closely
18 will be the foreign affairs private secretary and
19 Imran Shafi. And that -- I suppose what I'm trying to
20 say is during this initial phase the machinery is
21 running things and the private secretary is moving back
22 and forth relaying information up and transmitting
23 sort of guidance down. That is sort of what's happening
24 here. And I think -- so it's possible that they had
25 views on some of these elements, but I certainly would

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1 the Prime Minister with material, with information and
2 so on. This email from you would appear to indicate
3 that you spoke to the key players about what was
4 happening, that the issues which were arising were
5 debated with you.

6 **A.** I didn't say I was -- no, I think what I'm trying to say
7 was I'm not someone who is giving, as it were, strong
8 advice on how to respond to the Covid pandemic. I am
9 present in meetings and I'm aware, as we can see from
10 this text, that the Prime Minister is keen to spend more
11 time discussing this issue with his ministers.

12 Now, how he expressed that to me, whether that was
13 in a small group or in a meeting or whatever, I cannot
14 recall.

15 **Q.** INQ000136733, please, is an update from the Civil
16 Contingencies Secretariat dated 3 February. We're
17 aware, of course, of what the CCS is, the Civil
18 Contingencies Secretariat, but it provides an update on
19 the outbreak of novel coronavirus. If we can just
20 scroll through 1 and 2, it's largely concerned with
21 British nationals in China, repatriation and
22 communications.

23 Then at the bottom of that page, second page:
24 "Cross-Government Meetings."

25 There was:

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1 not have been involved, I don't think.

2 **Q.** At INQ000136740, there is an email dated 8 February
3 containing an update for the Prime Minister from,
4 indeed, Imran Shafi. So dealing with the health part,
5 if you like, of the private secretary system:

6 "A further update on developments regarding
7 Coronavirus."

8 There is a reference to the Princess Diamond cruise
9 ship. On the domestic side emergency regulations will
10 be laid.

11 If you could scroll back out, we will see that you
12 were one of the persons copied in to the email from
13 Imran Shafi, because it goes to Edward Lister,
14 Dominic Cummings, yourself, Stuart Glassborow and
15 another unnamed person in Number 10.

16 Did you take any view as to whether or not, within
17 this part of the private secretary system, the health
18 part of it, sufficient attention was being paid to not
19 just the repatriation of individuals and to
20 the Princess Diamond cruise ship, but on the risks of
21 the virus coming to the United Kingdom?

22 **A.** Well, if I can just start on the process, every --

23 **Q.** No --

24 **A.** -- every piece of paper which goes in to the
25 Prime Minister will be copied to --

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1 Q. You?

2 A. -- the copy. So I will see absolutely everything.

3 Q. I see.

4 A. And to some extent my confidence on reflecting on
5 whether I need to be doing any further action will
6 depend on my confidence on the private secretaries, and
7 I was confident that if they felt there was a problem
8 they would have told me, and if they felt the machinery
9 wasn't delivering. But I don't -- I don't recall
10 whether I had conversations with Imran or indeed
11 the foreign affairs private secretary at this stage
12 about whether we were sufficiently prepared.

13 Q. Forgive me, what was the point of emailing you in,
14 copying you into this abundance of correspondence if
15 your position was "It's not my bag, this isn't part of
16 my responsibility, I'm not going to engage in it"?

17 A. No, I think what you've got is a funnel of work coming
18 through. So it's -- it's almost how the private
19 secretaries work. There is a massive amount of
20 information going to the Prime Minister on a whole range
21 of sensitive issues and each private secretary is
22 running, as it were, the issues they're leading on,
23 they're very experienced in it, and particularly
24 you know, if you've got one of the senior private
25 secretaries like Imran leading on it, that private

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1 things. And you're right that I could and clearly, with
2 the benefit of hindsight, should have focused a lot more
3 of my energy on just tracking coronavirus, but that
4 really isn't the nature of -- it isn't the fundamental
5 nature of the private office role, which is trying to
6 manage, as it were, an operation, and sitting on top of
7 another operation which is doing far more detailed
8 analysis of, you know, the scale of the problems we're
9 facing, the state of our preparedness and things like
10 that.

11 Q. May we take it from that, therefore, that although there
12 were scientific papers being prepared around this time,
13 and put before SAGE, and another committee called
14 SPI-M-O, to the effect that the overall case fatality
15 rate was 1% and that the feasibility of controlling
16 the virus was very low indeed, that sort of information
17 didn't come your way?

18 A. I wouldn't have been -- I don't recall -- proactively
19 seeking out papers on this to read. I would have relied
20 on briefings from Imran or maybe Stuart or the assistant
21 private secretary, and relied on them to be tracking
22 things. But even that information, the people who
23 should really be processing that were the health experts
24 and the people in Cabinet Office. The private
25 secretaries are not running the Covid crisis response,

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1 secretary will be the person who is managing the private
2 secretarial role on that issue.

3 I have, as it were, got an overview of everything
4 everybody's doing, as has Stuart, and yes, we can pick
5 up things if we feel that balls are being dropped, but
6 actually it's more that this is a sort of information
7 flow in between the system and the Prime Minister.

8 And, as I say, in a sort of standard crisis
9 situation the private secretaries sit on top of
10 a machine which is doing all the analysis and doing all
11 the assessments of what needs to be done, and it is
12 essentially putting -- ensuring there's a -- regular
13 updates to the Prime Minister and regular information
14 from the Prime Minister down again.

15 Q. Mr Reynolds, what could have been more important in
16 terms of the obligation on you to pick things up than
17 being informed of the early part of a fatal viral
18 epidemic?

19 A. Well, I think in a sense it probably misunderstands
20 the nature of my role. The nature of my role is to
21 manage the organisation of the operation around
22 the Prime Minister and to ensure he's getting a good
23 service from the private secretaries in terms of being
24 updated on what is going on, being asked for decisions,
25 being consulted on things. It's all that side of

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1 although, as I say, when we come back to the crisis
2 period I'll say their role slightly changes.

3 Q. The matter was debated in Cabinet on 14 February, and
4 there was a debate about whether or not
5 the United Kingdom should plan for the reasonable
6 worst-case scenario. Did you know that?

7 A. I was -- I would probably have been in Cabinet.

8 Q. Right.

9 Then around about 24 February, in an email chain to
10 which I think you may have been party, Mr Shafi says:
11 "I'd like to start exposing the [Prime Minister] to
12 the potential decisions he might have to take ..."

13 So this comes back to your evidence to the effect
14 that Mr Shafi would be responsible primarily for guiding
15 the Prime Minister as to what might need to be done and
16 for informing him.

17 Could we have INQ000146563.

18 You were copied in on this. This is an email from,
19 at the top of the page, the director of the Civil
20 Contingencies Secretariat:
21 "Just to add -- we're working at the moment on
22 a whole sequence of decisions that would be needed in
23 the event that we concluded a pandemic was the most
24 likely scenarios which should also be useful in exposing
25 some of those concrete points ..."

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1 Then towards the bottom of the page we can see the
 2 email from Mr Shafi saying:
 3 "I'd like to start exposing the PM to the potential
 4 decisions ..."
 5 When you read this email, Mr Reynolds, did you ask
 6 yourself: why do we need to wait to see whether
 7 a pandemic is the most likely scenario before we start
 8 taking practical steps to control the spread of
 9 the virus?
 10 **A.** Erm, I can't recall whether I did. I think what I will
 11 have done was taken two things from this. One is that
 12 across government the relevant people, in the form of
 13 Katharine Hammond but also copied into the email chain
 14 seem to be Chris Whitty, the Government Chief Scientific
 15 Adviser, Patrick Vallance, and various others, I would
 16 have taken reassurance from the fact that the work is
 17 under way across government to prepare for what could be
 18 a reasonable worst-case scenario. And Imran is asking
 19 me if they can brief the Prime Minister on this, and
 20 I seem to recollect we briefed the Prime Minister the
 21 following day. So I'm taking it as a serious issue
 22 which needed the attention of the Prime Minister, but
 23 I'm not second-guessing the preparedness or the concerns
 24 or the understanding, as it were, of the experts leading
 25 on this issue, notably Katharine Hammond and the core

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1 **A.** Fine.
 2 **Q.** There were no emails. There were no notes put in his
 3 red box. You don't appear to have been in touch with
 4 him about coronavirus, or anybody else?
 5 **A.** I can't -- I cannot recall --
 6 **Q.** Why --
 7 **A.** -- why and whether there was any urgent business to
 8 transact over that period with the Prime Minister.
 9 **Q.** Was it half term, Mr Reynolds?
 10 **A.** Erm, I -- I'm happy to accept it was half term, if that
 11 is your -- you'll know more than me.
 12 **Q.** Mr Reynolds, do you or do you not know that February
 13 half term fell around that period in February of 2020?
 14 **A.** Erm --
 15 **Q.** Did you know that?
 16 **A.** I didn't when you asked me, but it makes sense when you
 17 now clarify it in that way.
 18 **Q.** To what extent as the principal private secretary do you
 19 ask yourself: we've got COBR meetings, we've got Cabinet
 20 meetings, we've got emails about a viral pandemic coming
 21 our way -- why is nothing being done in terms of keeping
 22 the Prime Minister in the loop for those ten days?
 23 **A.** And I probably should have done so. Equally, I think
 24 there are many others who would have -- who would
 25 normally have said, "We just need to keep the

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1 scientific health people.
 2 **Q.** The material shows that there were no box notes, notes
 3 for the Prime Minister sent to him between 14 February
 4 and the 24th, at least in relation to coronavirus.
 5 There were no COBRs dealing at least with coronavirus
 6 during that time, there was no Cabinet, and we're unable
 7 to see much by way of emails to the Prime Minister
 8 during that ten-day period.
 9 As the principal private secretary, can you venture
 10 a suggestion as to why that might have been?
 11 **A.** Well, I think decisions on COBRs would have been -- as
 12 I say, it would have been a question for the people
 13 working on COBRs in Cabinet Office to make a decision
 14 and make a recommendation.
 15 **Q.** I'm very sorry is to interrupt, Mr Reynolds. The
 16 question was very clear. There were no communications
 17 by email, by COBR, by box notes with the Prime Minister
 18 during that ten-day period on coronavirus. Why do you
 19 think that might have been?
 20 **A.** Can I clarify the COBR communication? I don't
 21 understand --
 22 **Q.** Well, there was no COBR meeting and therefore nothing to
 23 put to the Prime Minister --
 24 **A.** Oh, okay.
 25 **Q.** -- as a result of a COBR meeting.

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1 Prime Minister updated, can we update him with X, Y
 2 or Z".
 3 **Q.** Before the end of half term SPI-M-O had confirmed
 4 sustained transmission, SAGE had noted that Public
 5 Health England could only cope with five coronavirus
 6 cases per week, and of course the United Kingdom became
 7 aware of lockdowns in ten municipalities in Italy. When
 8 you heard of the fact that a lockdown had begun in
 9 Italy, what was your reaction?
 10 **A.** I think we were very concerned, and I seem to recall
 11 that Imran Shafi was -- asked Katharine Hammond as to
 12 how we would respond in a similar situation in the UK.
 13 **Q.** Did you say, "We have a major problem here, we've got to
 14 get in touch with the Prime Minister, we must raise
 15 the issue of whether or not there are urgent steps we
 16 are required to take straightaway"?
 17 **A.** No.
 18 **Q.** On 25 February, following half term, there was a meeting
 19 between the Prime Minister, the Health Secretary,
 20 the Foreign Secretary, the CMO, the CSA and others,
 21 where the issue of borders, amongst other issues, were
 22 discussed.
 23 INQ000136745.
 24 At the bottom of the page, "Domestic preparedness",
 25 the Civil Contingencies Secretariat was asked to provide

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1 a four to five-page note for the Prime Minister,
 2 signed off by a number of people, including the Civil
 3 Contingencies Secretariat, that:
 4 "... highlights the most significant choices should
 5 a pandemic occur in the [United Kingdom]."
 6 Could we please have this put to the Prime Minister
 7 by 11 am on Friday so that he could read over
 8 the weekend.
 9 So a few days hence, three or four days hence.
 10 You were copied in on this email correspondence, we
 11 can see your name at the top of the page. Did you
 12 address with anybody the issue of whether or not these
 13 steps, concerned with communications, repatriation,
 14 international taskforce, and asking the CCS for a paper,
 15 would be enough?
 16 **A.** No, but, I mean, the actions seemed to have come out of
 17 a meeting with the Health Secretary, the Chief Medical
 18 Officer, the Chief Scientific Adviser and others, and
 19 I would have thought they would have been better placed
 20 than me to make that judgement.
 21 **Q.** On the 27th the Prime Minister stated that he was keen
 22 to step up activity on Covid.
 23 Could we have, please, INQ000136747.
 24 An email went to Stuart Glassborow, yourself and the
 25 private office support team for the Prime Minister,

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1 **A.** Erm ... Well, I think that he had a range of other
 2 advisers who would have been saying -- you know, I mean,
 3 again, as I say, it sort of seems a slightly -- it's
 4 a mischaracterisation of my role that I'm there to, as
 5 it were, second-guess the advice of the medical, health,
 6 crisis and other advisers going to him, and it seems to
 7 me that what we see from -- has been happening is he is
 8 getting good advice on that. So I'm pretty reassured by
 9 the fact that Imran's talking -- sorry, Stuart is
 10 talking it through with him, and indeed that -- in
 11 the previous slide you had the key advisers talking to
 12 the Prime Minister and walking him through
 13 the challenges he might face.
 14 **Q.** Well, no, they asked for a paper to be provided
 15 three days hence as to what options he might face.
 16 **A.** And that is walking him through the options he's got.
 17 **Q.** No, the paper hadn't yet been prepared, Mr Reynolds, had
 18 it?
 19 **A.** Fine, okay. But I mean -- but I suppose my point is he
 20 is speaking to the people who are the experts in how to
 21 handle a pandemic and -- and the state of the pandemic
 22 at that stage, and they're producing further advice, and
 23 that is getting to him very quickly, and he is
 24 responding to Stuart or Imran or others as to how he
 25 wants to handle it. So he's aware of the growing

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1 called POST. At the bottom of the page we can see
 2 an email, it's addressed in fact to the PM.
 3 If we could go over the page, it came after
 4 an earlier email, again copied to you:
 5 "Thanks Stuart -- will do.
 6 "Imran -- let's discuss."
 7 And an email at the bottom of the page from
 8 Stuart Glassborow:
 9 "In [the] margins of another meeting PM just said
 10 he's keen to really step up activity on Coronavirus --
 11 I think both in sense of what we are doing and how that
 12 is presented. More frequent Cobras, that sort of thing.
 13 PM leading them."
 14 It was developing into a national crisis, was it
 15 not, Mr Reynolds?
 16 **A.** Mm-hm.
 17 **Q.** Was that an issue or were these issues which by
 18 27 February you were discussing with the Prime Minister?
 19 **A.** Well, I think we all -- I assume those discussions would
 20 have been happening. Stuart is my deputy and so what
 21 he's saying will have been -- you know, will have been
 22 important and directive for people. So what he seems to
 23 be saying here is very sensible.
 24 **Q.** As his PPS why had you not already asked him to step up
 25 activity on coronavirus?

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1 situation too. So it feels to me as if actually there
 2 isn't that much of a disconnect between what the senior
 3 Covid advisers are saying and what the Prime Minister is
 4 believing.
 5 **Q.** What was his reaction at this stage, the beginning of
 6 March, to what he was being told?
 7 **A.** I -- I think you would have to ask Imran or Stuart as to
 8 the reaction to that. I can't -- beyond what I've got
 9 in front of me, I cannot recall.
 10 **Q.** This is fast developing into the largest crisis
 11 the United Kingdom has faced possibly since the Second
 12 World War. Did you discuss with him what his general
 13 view was and what should be done or how we should
 14 respond?
 15 **A.** I think he was having -- I mean, as we saw previously,
 16 he's having meetings with ministers, senior advisers on
 17 this, and those are, I'm sure, the content of
 18 the discussions going on.
 19 **Q.** Did he think it was a big deal?
 20 **A.** Yes. I mean -- well, from the papers I can recall, at
 21 every -- every time he's asked to deal with something
 22 he deals with it very quickly, and at various points
 23 he's saying, "I'm always happy to do more". So
 24 the impression I get is he is reassured by the fact that
 25 the machine is actually working on these issues and he

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1 is offering to do more. But equally, the Prime Minister
2 doesn't always have to do everything personally and can
3 delegate to ministers, can delegate to machinery, and --
4 if -- if there is a sense that everything is under
5 control.

6 **Q.** Did he think or express a view to you along the lines
7 that this pandemic, if it turned into a pandemic, wasn't
8 a big deal, it might be like swine flu, and that his
9 greatest concern was talking the economy into a slump?

10 **A.** I can't remember words to that effect, but I can -- I do
11 believe that he was concerned that if we -- if we
12 reacted in a -- in certain ways we could actually
13 generate a sense of panic and concern which would be
14 counterproductive.

15 **Q.** You don't appear to have been engaged or rather you were
16 engaged less than you had been hitherto between 2 and
17 10 March. There is very little by way of emails to and
18 from your email account.

19 By 10 March, 11 March -- so the week ending in
20 Friday 13 March -- do you recall whether or not your
21 understanding of the pandemic, its sustained
22 transmission in the United Kingdom, the now evident lack
23 of control and the number of deaths which had started,
24 being brought to your attention?

25 **A.** I think that was the week when there were real problems

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1 in that I cannot recall.

2 **Q.** Since you have expressed a view on the possible
3 lateness, do you accept that there was indeed
4 an untoward delay of weeks between the middle of
5 February and Friday 13 March, during which time
6 the virus has of course reached the United Kingdom, has
7 spread, is out of control, and, relatively speaking,
8 little has been done?

9 **A.** I agree. I think the problem, or at least the thing
10 which we didn't do and should have done, had we had, as
11 it were, more notice, was to actually properly test our
12 plans. So the challenge from my perspective would be
13 that for a period of a month we had been assuming
14 a certain number of things, including that plans were in
15 place, whereas if you had had a month to prepare I think
16 it would have been possible to deal with some of the
17 issues which we then confronted in a slightly more
18 orderly way.

19 **LADY HALLETT:** Plans for what?

20 **A.** Plans for dealing with the crisis. I mean, I think --

21 **LADY HALLETT:** What do you mean? Committee structures,
22 working -- what do you mean?

23 **A.** I think -- I think both. I mean, I think that it comes
24 back to my sort of explanation of how a crisis works, is
25 you need the departments to be ready to deal with

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1 emerging in Lombardy and people were all realising that
2 the nature of the pandemic is far more significant than
3 we had anticipated, and I think it was at the end of
4 that week that there was a session in
5 the Prime Minister's office, without the Prime Minister,
6 with Dominic Cummings and Helen MacNamara, trying to
7 revisit -- I mean, I believe that's the timing but -- if
8 that is the case --

9 **Q.** That is.

10 **A.** So I think, in a sense, everyone is starting to see
11 what's happening in Italy, northern Italy from memory,
12 and everyone knows that the health system in northern
13 Italy is actually very sophisticated and good, and we
14 are seeing it failing to respond to the crisis in a way
15 which is very striking. And so I think that is
16 certainly part of the reason: actually seeing what is
17 happening. I believe also, and I don't think I was
18 directly involved myself, some of those looking at
19 the modelling and some of the thinking behind this are
20 starting to realise that that may not be quite as robust
21 as we'd anticipated. And I think people are also
22 starting to think through whether our plans were in
23 an appropriate place.

24 So it's -- I agree it's happening quite late, but
25 that is what's happening, I believe, that week. My role

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1 the issues they're confronting.

2 And so, for example if -- you know, again speaking
3 about the department I know best, the Foreign Office
4 knows how to deal with an evacuation, and so in Covid
5 actually its job is relatively straightforward, it has
6 all of these very large-scale and complicated -- but it
7 has a playbook for dealing with what it's going to have
8 to deal with.

9 And I think some of the other government departments
10 are properly prepared for what they're going to have to
11 deal with and perform pretty well, and the obvious ones
12 I guess would be the Treasury and DWP, and -- but if you
13 look round, as it were, all the government departments,
14 my impression, and I have to say it's only
15 an impression, is that they were not crisis ready. And
16 that meant -- crisis ready in two things: one is they
17 didn't have a playbook; and the second is they hadn't
18 really thought through how they're going to deliver that
19 playbook.

20 And I would view -- I mean, when we talk about
21 plans, I don't -- I think a pandemic as complex and
22 challenging as Covid, you can't have a sort of
23 meticulously organised plan, but you need to know, it
24 seems to me, the parameters of what you're trying to
25 achieve and what your strategic direction is. And

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1 I think the fact that -- my impression -- again, it's
 2 a very impressionistic thing, from the centre -- that
 3 none of that was really -- well, not all of that was in
 4 place meant that you're playing catch-up in a large
 5 number of different areas. And then if you look into
 6 the centre and how the centre performs, if you look at
 7 how a centre normally operates in a crisis, it's
 8 essentially there to give strategic direction and to
 9 broker compromises between departments.

10 The problem when you haven't got plans at the outer
 11 ring is that you are then expecting the centre to come
 12 up with strategic direction and broker all these
 13 different things at the same time, and so you've got far
 14 too much being overloaded into the centre when actually
 15 in an ideal world some of those decisions and
 16 preparations would already have been in place and you
 17 would be able to take some of that stress off
 18 the system.

19 **LADY HALLETT:** But you were suggesting, I thought, that
 20 the centre wasn't prepared either.

21 **A.** No, and I think that's the flip side, is -- in a sense
 22 what happens in a normal crisis is you have
 23 a co-ordinating function between, let's say, four or
 24 five departments. So if you talk about an evacuation
 25 you would have four or five departments going into

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1 ministerial groups who will look at different segments
 2 of the circle", as it were. And that has a sort of
 3 logic and coherence to it. But the problem with having
 4 four separate committees is they almost certainly
 5 involve the same people for every government department,
 6 so you're quadrupling the amount of co-ordination going
 7 on, and the interdependencies are very hard to manage,
 8 so you can't operate, as it were, as one single
 9 committee, you have to say, "Well, we can do this, but
 10 we'd like to think what X committee thinks over there",
 11 and so you haven't got the co-ordinating function which
 12 you need for a crisis of this scale.

13 And so I think those two mean that you have a mixed
 14 performance at the departmental level,
 15 the Cabinet Office machine starts to gum up very
 16 seriously -- and if you're happy I can continue and
 17 continue to explain.

18 **LADY HALLETT:** Sorry, I think it's quite a long answer
 19 really.

20 **A.** Sorry.

21 **LADY HALLETT:** I think Mr Keith will get you back on track.

22 **MR KEITH:** Mr Reynolds.

23 **A.** Yeah, sorry.

24 **Q.** Please may we put aside the administrative explanation
 25 of how systems of government work. The reality at

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1 crisis, so they've got crisis centres about as big as
 2 this room, with 80 to 100 people in there. They're
 3 working through the practical arrangements for dealing
 4 with that crisis. And you have that in four or five
 5 different departments. And you will have
 6 the Cabinet Office, as it were, acting as the department
 7 which brings it all together in the overall strategy but
 8 also is sorting out differences between departments
 9 which are almost inevitable in any crisis. So, I don't
 10 know, for an example deployment of a military asset in
 11 support of an evacuation might be something you'd need
 12 to discuss at a Cabinet Office level. And you've got
 13 your structures in place for, as it were, a normal
 14 crisis. The problem here is if you view it as a segment
 15 of a circle, that's one segment, and that can be quite
 16 a big crisis, and even in a big crisis the pressure into
 17 Number 10 is quite limited, so you would have two or
 18 three private secretaries probably working it.

19 What you've got with Covid is you've got a full
 20 circle of crisis, every single department is basically
 21 in a crisis, and therefore co-ordinating that at
 22 the centre is immensely challenging. And what happens,
 23 my sort of assessment of that, is quite logically at
 24 the time the team involved say, "Well, okay, this is
 25 four times as big as a normal crisis, we'll have four

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1 the beginning of March, after four or five weeks of
 2 warnings, was it became apparent that there was no plan
 3 in the form of the NHS or the DHSC for dealing with
 4 a coronavirus pandemic; yes or no?

5 **A.** I'm not sure I can -- I think the plan wasn't
 6 sophisticated enough to deal with the crisis it was
 7 facing. I don't think I can answer whether there was no
 8 plan, because --

9 **Q.** There was no plan for coronavirus, was there,
 10 Mr Reynolds? You know there wasn't. You know that as
 11 a matter of strategy there had never been any debate
 12 about a coronavirus. The United Kingdom strategy was
 13 based expressly upon a pandemic influenza. Do you agree
 14 there was no plan for coronavirus?

15 **A.** I'm not sufficiently expert --

16 **Q.** All right.

17 **A.** -- to say whether the plans which were pre-existing were
 18 replicable for the nature of the crisis we're doing and
 19 to what extent.

20 **Q.** In Number 10, there was an appreciation at the beginning
 21 of March that there were no plans to bring together
 22 the activities of the other government departments; yes
 23 or no?

24 **A.** Well, we had the existing structures and they were
 25 inadequate for what we were dealing with --

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1 Q. Did you have plans to deal with the crisis which had
2 broken upon the United Kingdom Government in the first
3 week in March?

4 A. Well, I mean, as I say, there is a standard set of
5 protocols which are actually Cabinet Office protocols
6 for dealing with crisis. Where I agree with you is they
7 were inadequate to deal with the crisis which we were
8 confronted with.

9 Q. And the Cabinet Office failed in its prime obligation of
10 coordinating the position, including other government
11 departments, to ensure that there were plans and
12 a proper strategy in place; correct?

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. And Number 10 failed to get on top of the Cabinet Office
15 and to ensure that there were plans before that time;
16 correct?

17 A. Actually, on the email traffic I saw, Dominic Cummings,
18 to his credit, was asking to see the plans about a week
19 or ten days previously.

20 Q. And what was the answer, Mr Reynolds?

21 A. I -- I don't know, I'd have to ask Imran.

22 Q. You know that he asked repeatedly for plans and there
23 were none, as far as he could tell. You're nodding. Is
24 that a yes or --

25 A. I'm acknowledging that's what you're saying. As I say,
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1 grossly deficient?

2 A. I agree.

3 Q. Right.

4 A. I agree.

5 Q. Then on Friday 13 March, Helen MacNamara,
6 Dominic Cummings, Ben Warner and some others who were
7 increasingly concerned about what the data were
8 showing -- putting aside modelling, the infection
9 fatality rate, which had been known for weeks, the
10 hospitalisation rate, which had been known for weeks,
11 indicated that the NHS would be overwhelmed; correct?

12 A. Mm-hm.

13 Q. You attended that meeting with Mr Cummings and Mr Warner
14 and Ms MacNamara, did you not?

15 A. At least in part, I believe.

16 Q. Do you recall the outcome of that meeting?

17 A. Well, the outcome I think was a series of meetings
18 the following day with the Prime Minister and others.

19 Q. Did you say to your colleagues: how could we possibly
20 have dropped the ball in this way? How could we
21 possibly not have seen that with an infection fatality
22 rate of 1% and no means of controlling the virus,
23 overwhelming of the NHS was inevitable?

24 A. I think everyone would have felt that at that time.
25 I mean, that evening, when the scale of the issues

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1 I think you would need to check with both
2 Dominic Cummings and Imran and others.

3 Q. What did you make of the plans for quarantining, for
4 shielding, for scaled-up test and trace and potentially
5 lockdown that you looked at in the course of these days
6 in early March in Number 10?

7 A. I wasn't reviewing the plans but what I would say is it
8 was very clear once the crisis started the plans were
9 inadequate, to the extent they existed. And so what
10 essentially is happening in that early period of
11 the early crisis is everybody is having to operate
12 without a proper playbook.

13 Q. Do you mean a plan by "playbook"?

14 A. Yes, I think -- but I think there is a difference
15 between a playbook and a plan, in the sense that
16 a playbook gives you the framework to operate, and
17 I suppose maybe it's a point for me rather than -- you
18 know, maybe it's to -- but I think -- given the nature
19 of Covid, it seems to me to have a fully worked up plan
20 across every single eventuality is unlikely to be as
21 successful as targeting the key areas and making sure
22 you have really clear plans in place in those specific
23 areas.

24 Q. Regardless of whether it's a playbook or a rulebook or
25 a plan or anything, whatever there was, Mr Reynolds, was
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1 confronting us looked enormous, I think everyone will
2 have been thinking: how did we get to this position?

3 Q. But you had known for days, if not weeks, how many beds
4 there are in the NHS, had you not?

5 A. Again, I think I would look back at -- you know,
6 you have very serious and senior experts in the NHS, in
7 the Cabinet Office and all of those things, all of those
8 different parts of government, and the points you're
9 making are equally valid to them. I agree I could have
10 identified the issues myself, but fundamentally the fact
11 we'd got into that position is a result of a systemic
12 failure and a failure of the people who are really
13 tracking the situation most closely.

14 Q. Are you suggesting that it was other people's fault --

15 A. No, I'm suggesting there are other people for who -- who
16 it was actually the focus of their efforts and energies,
17 and my job as the principal private secretary was to
18 make sure that the overall operation of Downing Street
19 was supporting the Prime Minister and ensuring he got
20 the right balance of advice. And during this period he
21 was getting support from a range of private secretaries
22 linking into the machine but also having regular contact
23 with the experts.

24 And on the following day he's got Helen MacNamara
25 and, you know, others walking him through the issues as

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1 identified.

2 **Q.** There was a general understanding that much more
3 stringent measures were required, and of course more
4 stringent measures were put in place at the beginning of
5 the following week; correct?

6 **A.** Yes.

7 **Q.** Mr Cummings and others say that during the course of
8 that week, however, the Prime Minister oscillated
9 between going further and pursuing a lockdown, which had
10 by that stage already come up for debate, or relying
11 upon the less stringent measures which had already been
12 put into place. Were you aware of that oscillation?

13 **A.** I imagine so, yes.

14 **Q.** Well, you couldn't have forgotten, Mr Reynolds, could
15 you?

16 **A.** Yes, that's what I'm saying, yes.

17 **Q.** So you do remember?

18 **A.** Yes.

19 **Q.** When the Prime Minister said to you one day, "I'm going
20 to go for the lockdown because of the crisis in
21 the NHS", and then the next day he backed and veered and
22 said, "I'm not sure about this", what did you say?

23 **A.** I'm not advising him on how to respond to the Covid
24 pandemic. He has got advice from a whole range of other
25 leading experts on how to manage, and he's confronting

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1 Evgeny Lebedev, and on the following page, page 69,
2 please, he took further time to meet with him, although
3 I now can't see -- yes.

4 **A.** Yeah, it is --

5 **Q.** 17.56, private meeting with Evgeny Lebedev, and
6 Ben Gascoigne and Lee Cain.
7 Was that to do with Covid, Mr Reynolds, do you know?

8 **A.** I don't.

9 **Q.** Do you know what it was about?

10 **A.** I don't. I wasn't present in it. There's no civil
11 servant present, so ...

12 **Q.** Do you have access to the Prime Minister's diary?

13 **A.** Yes.

14 **Q.** Did you know he was seeing Mr Lebedev?

15 **A.** I would have done, yes.

16 **Q.** Did you ask him what he was seeing him about?

17 **A.** I wouldn't normally -- if it was a non-civil service
18 meeting, I wouldn't normally ask him for the contents of
19 his discussions, so in that meeting he is being
20 accompanied both by the director of comms and
21 a political secretary, both of whom are political.

22 **Q.** At the height of the crisis he goes for a private
23 meeting with, I think, Lord Lebedev. Did you not ask
24 him, "Why are you spending time on this, Prime Minister?
25 We've got rather more urgent matters to deal with"?

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1 a very, very difficult decision. I don't think it's my
2 job to tell him what the answer is in a given situation.
3 My job is to make sure he gets the right advice so he
4 can reach the appropriate decision.

5 **Q.** But unless you tell him what that advice is, where it's
6 coming from, what its cogency is, whether it's good
7 advice, how can he rely upon his principal private
8 secretary to guide him through this nightmare scenario?

9 **A.** I'm not -- with the greatest of respect, I'm not sure
10 I'm the person who's guiding him through.

11 **Q.** All right.

12 **A.** I'm making sure he's working with the key advisers, be
13 it Chris Whitty or Patrick Vallance or whoever it might
14 be, that the flow of information is appropriate and that
15 he is getting the necessary support he needs from Imran
16 or from Stuart Glassborow or whoever else, but in this
17 period I'm not his primary adviser on Covid.

18 **Q.** Did you know what he was doing day to day?

19 **A.** Yes.

20 **Q.** Could we have INQ000226185, please, page 68. This is
21 an extract from the Prime Minister's diary.
22 On the Wednesday evening, so at the height of the
23 ten-day crisis between the change in strategy on
24 Friday 13 March, and the imposition of lockdown on
25 Monday, 23 March, at 19.42 he had a phone call with

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1 **A.** I can't recall whether I did or didn't, but ultimately,
2 I mean, it's for the Prime Minister to decide his use of
3 time, and if he decided that was important, it's for him
4 to decide. I may have said, "Are you sure you want to
5 do this?", but -- or indeed others may have done
6 the same.

7 **Q.** The lockdown was of course imposed. Shortly after, on
8 27 March, the Prime Minister contracted Covid. Your
9 witness statement makes plain that a number of people
10 became infected in Downing Street. The physical layout,
11 the rabbit warren nature of the building, no doubt
12 contributed to that.
13 What impact did the illness of the Prime Minister
14 and a number of other senior officials have on
15 the ability of the government to respond to the crisis?

16 **A.** I think operationally -- and actually I would also add
17 that a number of senior officials in Cabinet Office were
18 also ill, and I think the rotation of staff through --
19 as it were, through different teams over this period
20 made it complicated.
21 I mean, I think that and the shift to remote working
22 meant that managing the crisis was far harder than it
23 would have been otherwise. In terms of
24 the Prime Minister's illness, my recollection is he was
25 ill after the lockdown had been announced and after

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1 a lot of the key decisions had been taken, so I don't
 2 think it had such a dramatic impact, although I guess it
 3 is possible to suggest that had he not been ill, we
 4 would have started moving forward with some of
 5 the activities around reorganisation and so forth
 6 slightly sooner. But it's very hard to predict. And
 7 actually the period with Dominic Raab, as it were,
 8 deputising for him, it seemed to me we worked pretty
 9 effectively and got a lot of stuff done.

10 **Q.** You say in your statement that Mr Raab had a "different
 11 working style from the Prime Minister". What did you
 12 mean by that?

13 **A.** The nature of a private office is you need to --

14 **Q.** Just could you please answer the question. What were
 15 the differences in working style of the Prime Minister
 16 and Dominic Raab?

17 **A.** Well, the -- Dominic Raab liked a very structured
 18 private office operation, with very clear preparations
 19 on, you know, meeting agendas, very structured
 20 existence, everything delivered to him very early in
 21 the morning, I think 6 o'clock in the morning, and it
 22 was a very different operation to what I suppose I would
 23 describe as a slightly more fluid arrangement with
 24 the Prime Minister.

25 **Q.** What is a "slightly more fluid arrangement",

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1 regarded as the mayor in the Jaws film, shutting
 2 the beaches, and then within hours or days he would take
 3 a contrary position. And this was noted by Mr Cummings,
 4 Mr Case, Sir Patrick Vallance and others.

5 Did you notice that?

6 **A.** I think it's -- it's fair to say that the Prime Minister
 7 did, as it were, blow hot and cold on some issues.

8 **Q.** On the most vital issues which his government faced?

9 **A.** Yes, but also the most difficult choices the country was
 10 facing, which -- both of which had very difficult
 11 consequences.

12 **MR KEITH:** My Lady, is that a convenient moment?

13 **LADY HALLETT:** It is. How much longer do you think?

14 **MR KEITH:** We're not there yet, but not a lot longer is,
 15 I'm afraid to say, the most I can say at this moment.

16 **LADY HALLETT:** I'm sorry we have to ask you to come back
 17 this afternoon, Mr Reynolds.

18 I shall return at 2 o'clock.

19 (1.01 pm)

(The short adjournment)

21 (2.00 pm)

22 **LADY HALLETT:** Yes, Mr Keith.

23 **MR KEITH:** Before lunch, Mr Reynolds, you were giving
 24 evidence about the nature of the intensely difficult
 25 decisions that were before the Prime Minister, and I was

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1 Mr Reynolds?

2 **A.** Well, with the Prime Minister it was possible to adapt
 3 much more easily to changes during the day. So if you
 4 had information coming in and you needed to change
 5 the diary or amend, you needed someone to go into his
 6 office for five minutes to talk him through something,
 7 he was much more amenable to that type of flexibility
 8 than Dominic Raab, who wanted a much more structured
 9 existence where he knew from the outset of the day
 10 exactly what meetings he was going into, what papers he
 11 needed to read, and all of that. Which -- and both
 12 approaches have their benefits and challenges in
 13 a crisis, where things are moving quite quickly.

14 **Q.** Were they the same in terms of their consistency to
 15 approach -- of approach to decision-making, making
 16 decisions and sticking to them?

17 **A.** I think they're very different people, and I think
 18 that -- you know, I was working for Dominic Raab
 19 essentially for three weeks, so it's -- it's hard to
 20 compare and contrast.

21 **Q.** There is a great deal of material from WhatsApps,
 22 Mr Cummings' statement, Patrick Vallance's dairies,
 23 WhatsApps, showing that following his return from his
 24 illness the Prime Minister again oscillated in terms of
 25 what should be done. He wondered whether he should be

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1 asking you about the changes of strategic direction
 2 which appear to be apparent both in the week leading up
 3 to the lockdown of 23 March but also in the period
 4 between April and September, when the system had opened
 5 up again.

6 I just want you, please, to look at a number of
 7 observations made by Mr Cummings and Mr Case and
 8 Sir Patrick Vallance about the changes in strategic
 9 direction and ask you whether you broadly agree with
 10 what they say.

11 You'll appreciate that, with the WhatsApps, as you
 12 rightly pointed out this morning, it's difficult
 13 sometimes to see whether or not there is a degree of
 14 hyperbole or exaggeration.

15 So starting with Mr Cummings, INQ000048313, and
 16 a letter from him to this Inquiry at page 52. At the
 17 bottom:

18 "I would appreciate your help in getting him back to
 19 some sense. He does seem to just want to declare that
 20 we are over Covid and that it is going to just all be
 21 fine. He says he wants to get everything open in the
 22 Autumn and end social distancing. This is in danger of
 23 becoming Trump/Bolsonaro level mad and dangerous."

24 Page 53, Simon Case responds, if you could scroll in
 25 a little bit further, please:

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1 "At every stage of masks we in the United Kingdom
2 have been slow ..."

3 And I think we may have -- I'm afraid I can't read
4 that. Thank you.

5 A long message about masks.

6 Then if you could scroll back out, please, I think
7 at the bottom of the page -- yes, that's the one:

8 "After this morning's FT driven performance by BJ
9 [Boris Johnson] I am at end of my tether. He changes
10 strategic direction every day ... today we were in
11 'let it rip' mode cos the UK is pathetic, needs a cold
12 shower ... He cannot lead and we cannot support him in
13 leading with this approach. The team captain cannot
14 change the call on the big plays every day. The team
15 can't deliver anything under these circumstances.
16 A weak team ... definitely cannot succeed in these
17 [circumstances]. IT HAS TO STOP! Decide and set
18 direction -- deliver -- explain. Gov't isn't actually
19 that hard, but this guy is really making it impossible."

20 Then the response from Mr Cummings:

21 "Am ... getting ... despairing messages from people
22 in [meetings] ... [he's careering] around on whatsapp as
23 usual creating chaos and undermining everybody."

24 These are WhatsApps, of course, between two of his
25 most senior advisers -- well, his Cabinet Secretary and

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1 Page 56, at the bottom of the page, at the bottom of
2 the WhatsApp screenshot:

3 "We look like a terrible, tragic joke ... that
4 decision was needed weeks ago. I cannot cope with
5 this."

6 And then a trolley emoji.

7 Sir Patrick Vallance, document INQ000273901,
8 page 584:

9 "PM ... Simon Case taking 1 day at a time. PM is
10 simply not consistent (as he wasn't at the beginning).

11 121.

12 "The ridiculous flip-flopping is getting worse --
13 maybe as he recovers?"

14 13 July.

15 28 July, page 101 -- I'm not sure that's the right
16 reference. In any event, 178. 14 September:

17 "Simon Case from a couple of days ago --
18 '[Prime Minister] not exactly a consistent
19 interlocutor'."

20 19 September, page 188:

21 "He is all over the place and completely
22 inconsistent. You can see why it was so difficult to
23 get agreement to lockdown 1st time."

24 Page 252.

25 "we have a weak indecisive [Prime Minister]."

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1 his chief adviser. Do you agree with those sentiments?

2 Was that what was happening at this time?

3 **A.** I think it's -- thank you, I think it's as I said before

4 lunch, that he does -- he did in this period face

5 difficult decisions and blew, as it were, hot and cold

6 on some of them, and that did make it difficult at times

7 for the machine to know which direction it should be

8 moving in.

9 **Q.** 54.

10 "This is embarrassing."

11 That's Lee Cain, and this is a WhatsApp group

12 between Simon Case, Lee Cain and Dominic Cummings.

13 "By the weekend ..."

14 Says Dominic Cummings:

15 "... he'll be saying '6 is untenable a total

16 disaster we've got to get everybody back to work!'"

17 "Yes."

18 "Full [trolley] mode."

19 And then:

20 "it didn't take till weekend!"

21 Simon Case:

22 "Spectacular today ..."

23 And he's obviously mimicking Mr Johnson:

24 "... we want to open up the economy ASAP, forget the
25 bloody virus."

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1 In the face of a viral pandemic, if those views are
2 right, that was a deeply unfortunate position to be in,
3 was it not?

4 **A.** Er, yes.

5 **Q.** You took steps in May of 2020 to recommend significant
6 changes to the operation at the heart of government?

7 **A.** Mm-hm.

8 **Q.** Lord Sedwill, Mark Sedwill, the Cabinet Secretary, had
9 sent a note to the Prime Minister dated 10 May, called
10 "C19 Campaign Next Phase", INQ000136756, in which he
11 points out there in paragraph 1:

12 "... we should reflect now on how well the state
13 coped with the initial phases as we prepare for the
14 next."

15 Page 2, paragraphs 3 to 6, he sets out the problems
16 with the government in relation to health and care,
17 essentially Public Health England, the DHSC,
18 the fragmented social care system not being able to bear
19 the weight.

20 Page 4, paragraphs 12 to 14, he makes suggestions
21 about how meetings should be held. He suggests
22 something called the ministerial implementation groups.
23 And essentially trying to set clearer lines of
24 ministerial and official accountability.

25 Was that report sent because there was a general

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1 understanding that the system was not working,
2 fundamentally, and required significant reform?
3 **A.** Yes, I think by that stage in the pandemic we all
4 recognised that the way we had gone into it and the way
5 we had managed the challenges had been suboptimal, and
6 this is an opportunity at this stage to try and, as it
7 were, reconfigure.

8 **Q.** You co-signed a report about two weeks later, together
9 with Helen MacNamara, did you not?

10 **A.** Yes.

11 **Q.** INQ000136755.

12 This report has already been seen in evidence, but
13 your signature -- or your name appears at the end of it,
14 together with Helen MacNamara.

15 It addresses in very trenchant terms, does it not,
16 how meetings aren't working, how people aren't
17 disciplined, there's a bad culture, a culture of chaos,
18 people are exhausted and stressed, people are at war
19 with themselves, Number 10 is at war with someone.

20 And if we could go over the page --

21 **LADY HALLETT:** Could you remind me of the date of this,
22 please?

23 **MR KEITH:** Yes. We think, my Lady, that this first draft
24 was before 17 May, because that's when the final draft
25 was prepared.

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1 you're trying to work out how to deal with them, you
2 bring in people and you appoint them to take them on.

3 In Downing Street, Dominic Cummings did pretty much
4 the same thing, and so he brought in Tom Shinner. He
5 brought in a lot of data people, dealing with some of
6 the problems we were identifying then, but creating
7 a very high level of complexity. And the Prime Minister
8 himself had a very similar sort of reaction, which he --
9 when he lost confidence in the government system, he
10 reached for different people, Lord Deighton or
11 Kate Bingham or whoever -- Lady Bingham, or whoever it
12 might be.

13 So you have a situation during the crisis, because
14 everything was so pressured, you have created
15 a complexity and a series of competing structures which
16 means that actually by this stage the government machine
17 is facing serious problems.

18 And this piece of work by Helen MacNamara and I was
19 designed to shine a light on that and to try to enable
20 us to press reset and get ourselves better placed for
21 the next phase of Covid. And I suppose what it's doing
22 is looking at working practices, shifting the committee
23 structure away from MIGs to a Covid-O, Covid-S, creating
24 a new Covid unit rather than a whole group of separate
25 different entities, as it were, headed by DGs.

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1 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you.

2 **MR KEITH:** We don't have a date for this particular
3 document.

4 Does that chronology sound right to you?

5 **A.** That sounds right, yes.

6 **Q.** The report showed, did it not, dysfunctionality, lack of
7 discipline, chaos, and a significant degree of misogyny?

8 **A.** I agree.

9 **Q.** Women were talked over, people shouted at each other,
10 there were too many people in meetings.

11 Did you talk the Prime Minister through this report?

12 **A.** Yes, I believe I did. If I may --

13 **Q.** Please.

14 **A.** -- give a little more background in terms of the report.

15 As I -- I think I said earlier in terms of
16 the crisis response, we weren't ready for the crisis and
17 so we ended up having to respond in a way which was very
18 ad hoc at every single level, and what we did as part of
19 that process is, I suppose, we created structures which
20 were extremely complicated and brought in people at
21 every level to deal with immediate problems. So if you
22 look at the Cabinet Office, Mark Sedwill brought in
23 a very large number of directors general, the most
24 senior people, to deal with problems. And in a sense
25 entirely logically. If you have so many problems and

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1 Underpinning the Covid unit was a proper analytical unit
2 and delivery unit. And then trying to get people out of
3 Number 10.

4 One of the challenges we faced in Number 10 at this
5 phase of the crisis was everybody -- because in a sense
6 the crisis structures hadn't worked in
7 the Cabinet Office, everything had gravitated to
8 Number 10. So by this stage in the crisis you had far
9 too much activity in Number 10, far too many people, and
10 far too little clarity as to who exactly is responsible
11 for what.

12 So this report is really designed to try to press
13 a reset and is very, very stark in the challenges we're
14 facing, because that's the best way Helen and I thought
15 to get people to really acknowledge that we needed
16 a different approach.

17 **Q.** The outcome of this review, Mr Reynolds, was, as you
18 say, that there was a difference in the -- a change in
19 the methodology, so Covid-S and Covid-O were instituted,
20 there was a Covid Taskforce, but much of your report and
21 Helen MacNamara's report was about discipline, wasn't
22 it? It was about people talking over each other,
23 macho behaviour, misogyny, rudeness, people taking
24 charge in meetings, not listening to others. None of
25 that was going to be changed by a change in

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1 the committee structure. What was done in terms of
2 the personnel and the disciplinary problem that was
3 apparent?

4 **A.** Well, I think some of the changes in structure were
5 going to help with that, with respect, because what it's
6 about is getting people out of Downing Street.

7 I mean, part of the challenge in the Covid crisis is
8 normally -- in a normal crisis situation you have, as it
9 were, decision-making structures outside Number 10 and
10 you have a limited number of people moving back and
11 forth into Number 10 to talk through the Prime Minister.

12 What was happening --

13 **LADY HALLETT:** Just slow down. I should have asked you to
14 many hours ago.

15 **A.** Sorry.

16 With ...

17 **LADY HALLETT:** Sorry, I interrupted you.

18 You have a limited number of people moving back and
19 forth into Number 10 to talk through the Prime Minister
20 what was happening.

21 **A.** So what happens in Covid is a lot of the activity
22 actually moves into Number 10, and that injects
23 tremendous stress into the organisation, and the number
24 of people there are much greater. So part of the
25 solution to this is to actually go back to, as it were,

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1 post -- Mark Sedwill left his post around about 15 May
2 but stayed on until the autumn, but the rest of
3 the personnel remained the same, did they not?

4 **A.** Yes. And I think -- but I think also, as I say, you
5 know, if we wanted to drive that change all the senior
6 leaders needed to sit down together and actually talk it
7 through.

8 I think in terms of the diversity, and this is not
9 the primary driver of this, but had someone like
10 Helen MacNamara been appointed into the role as
11 permanent sec Covid, I think that would have both sent
12 a very powerful signal but I think it would have helped
13 change some of that dimension, although I recognise that
14 to drive fundamental change you need everybody to come
15 in behind it.

16 **Q.** But there wasn't a meeting, was there, at which
17 everybody sat down and thrashed out the problems that
18 were there --

19 **A.** No.

20 **Q.** -- in terms of personnel? You had recommended
21 Helen MacNamara as a candidate for permanent secretary
22 but that didn't happen?

23 **A.** No.

24 **Q.** And Lord Sedwill, Mark Sedwill, had a meeting with
25 the Prime Minister, as a result of which you became

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1 more traditional, more normal ways of working.

2 The other thing, and the reason I wanted to discuss
3 it with the Prime Minister, Dominic Cummings, Cabinet
4 Secretary and Helen MacNamara, is you needed the top
5 team of senior figures to agree this is a genuine
6 problem and to drive that change. That's not something
7 that I as PPS can drive, you need to get collective
8 buy-in. And the challenge we faced then is, in a sense,
9 because there were interpersonal issues which emerged at
10 that stage, it became very difficult to have that
11 conversation.

12 **MR KEITH:** Was there a notable reduction in the misogyny,
13 the superhero culture, the interpersonal problems
14 thereafter?

15 **A.** I think the -- there was a significant change in
16 the reduction of directors general in the building, and
17 that reduced the superhero culture to an extent we're
18 talking about, yes. I think in terms of the diversity
19 of decision-making, in terms of the treatment of women,
20 I agree, I think that remained an ongoing cultural issue
21 which I think we could have done more to address.

22 **Q.** Because the personnel did not fundamentally change other
23 than Mr Case came on board and became, I think,
24 a director general, or a permanent secretary, in
25 Number 10 or the Cabinet Office, Lord Sedwill left his

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1 aware, from a subsequent debriefing, that essentially
2 the Prime Minister had lost confidence in him; is that
3 correct?

4 **A.** Correct.

5 **Q.** Could we have INQ000265620, page 2.

6 These are WhatsApp messages between you and
7 Mark Sedwill, dated 15 May. In the middle of the
8 page -- I'm sorry, I've lost my bearings, if you could
9 scroll back out.

10 About a third of the way down the page,

11 Mark Sedwill:

12 "[Working from home]. And will be on a train ...

13 I don't want another conversation about myself before
14 the weekend. Any news on that?"

15 You:

16 "That is what I suspect he wants to discuss so shall
17 I say you are willing to discuss on Monday."

18 Him:

19 "I presume from this that sense is not prevailing."

20 Mark Sedwill:

21 "If he's going to try to scapegoat me he can do so
22 face to face."

23 What was the sense that Mark Sedwill said was not
24 prevailing?

25 **A.** I assume that was about going back on the suggestion

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1 that he might move on from his role.

2 **Q.** What happened was at that meeting essentially he was

3 sacked, he was told that the Prime Minister had no

4 confidence in him, and he would leave in the autumn.

5 **A.** I don't think it was that clear. I think the -- I mean,

6 I think you'd have to speak to the Prime Minister and

7 Mark Sedwill as to exactly what was discussed in that

8 meeting. And that's why in my witness statement I talk

9 about losing confidence. But I think the detail and

10 the precise -- precise meanings were unclear and that's

11 why I had a meeting with the Prime Minister to try to

12 dissuade him of this course but also to try to

13 understand exactly what the plan was.

14 **Q.** Were you able to understand what the plan was meant to

15 be and what it was the Prime Minister had meant to have

16 in his mind?

17 **A.** Well, I think the outcome -- at least -- I mean, again,

18 of my meeting with the Prime Minister on, I think it was

19 the Thursday or the Friday of that week, was that

20 Simon Case was to come in as the permanent secretary for

21 Covid, that Mark Sedwill would move on at some point in

22 the autumn, and that there would also be a new NSA

23 appointed, so you would un -- this was a double-hatted

24 role under Mark Sedwill, so you would create a new NSA

25 role over that period too.

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1 it's still on the front pages tomorrow."

2 Martin Reynolds:

3 "It is bound to be."

4 Mark Sedwill:

5 "Yes. But how? PM has put his own and Govt

6 credibility on the line. People are genuinely angry.

7 This isn't just a bubble story."

8 Were you discussing the Barnard Castle affair and

9 Mr Cummings and the press conference which he held in

10 the event on 25 May in the rose garden in

11 Downing Street?

12 **A.** Is it the 25th or 24th? Sorry, I'm confused.

13 **Q.** I think the press conference is on the 25th, but you and

14 Mark Sedwill are talking about a conversation somebody

15 has had with Cummings about whether or not he had

16 breached the guidance. But it is all to do, is it not,

17 with Mr Cummings' drive to Barnard Castle on

18 Easter Sunday, 12 April 2020?

19 **A.** I agree. I just -- I wonder whether on the 24th there

20 was actually a press conference with the Prime Minister,

21 so in a sense on the 24th we're talking about

22 the Prime Minister's press conference --

23 **Q.** Ah, it might already have emerged at that press

24 conference the day before?

25 **A.** Yeah, I think -- I think that's what -- I think, sorry,

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1 **Q.** Just pause there. NSA, do you mean national security --

2 **A.** National security adviser, sorry.

3 **Q.** All right. Why does Mark Sedwill say in the WhatsApp to

4 you, "If he's going to try to scapegoat me he can do so

5 face to face"? What do you understand that reference to

6 "scapegoat" to mean?

7 **A.** I mean, I believe, you know, he was concerned that

8 he was being blamed for the shortcomings of the first

9 phase of Covid and felt, as a result, that that would

10 be, as it were, scapegoating.

11 **Q.** All right.

12 Now, Barnard Castle, please, and events in

13 Downing Street.

14 Could we have, please, INQ000265620 on the screen,

15 page 4. These are WhatsApps between you and

16 Mark Sedwill on 4 May 2020. If I can find the right

17 passage ...

18 In the middle of the page, at 16.50, Mark Sedwill

19 says:

20 "Difficult for them if they're asked if he breached

21 the guidance."

22 You, about an hour later:

23 "Seemed to go OK."

24 Mark Sedwill:

25 "Not sure how well outside the bubble. Let's see if

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1 that's why I'm slightly confused, because I think there

2 were two events: one is the press conference and then

3 there is Dominic Cummings' statement in the rose garden.

4 **Q.** Right.

5 Now, in Sir Patrick Vallance's dairies for 25 May,

6 INQ000273901, page 67, he says that he and

7 Professor Sir Chris Whitty were asked to do the press

8 conference, so that may be a reference to

9 the Prime Ministerial press conference, and he says,

10 INQ000273901, page 67:

11 "CW [Chris Whitty] and I very reluctant to do the

12 press conference. It is highly political and will be

13 focused on [Dominic Cummings]. PM seems very bullish

14 and wants to have everything released sooner and more

15 extremely than we would. Wants to divert from the

16 [Dominic Cummings] fiasco (caught have gone to Durham --

17 clearly against the rules). All very worrying. Cabinet

18 all upbeat and 'breezy confidence' -- incredibly

19 alarming."

20 In his dairies, Sir Patrick suggests that you along

21 with others, to use his word, strong-armed him and

22 Sir Chris Whitty to attend the press conference. Did

23 you?

24 **A.** I think the first thing I should say on this is I spoke

25 to the Prime Minister at the time and questioned whether

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1 it was sensible for him to support Dominic Cummings in
2 the way he was doing. So I had a private conversation
3 with him, I believe, and then I did speak to, I think,
4 Patrick Vallance and Chris Whitty and suggest that they
5 might -- you know, that it was important for public
6 confidence for them to appear alongside
7 the Prime Minister at this press conference. I don't
8 view that as strong-arming.

9 I -- then I think it was actually Chris Whitty said
10 to me and explained why it was inappropriate for him to
11 stand alongside the Prime Minister while he was
12 justifying this behaviour. And since I agreed with his
13 analysis, and obviously deferred to his analysis, I then
14 backed off. But I don't believe I was strong-arming him
15 in that sense.

16 **Q.** Could we have page 583:

17 "The apparatchiks tried to strong arm us
18 (Lee [Cain], James ..."

19 James Bowler, perhaps?

20 **A.** James Slack, if I were to guess.

21 **Q.** James, sorry?

22 **A.** James Slack, I would guess.

23 **Q.** James Slack.

24 "... and even Martin his PPS)."

25 **A.** Fine. But, I mean, I think that's still -- in terms of
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1 the sending of that email and the events which ensued
2 were again deeply damaging to trust in the government
3 and damaging to public compliance?

4 **A.** Well, I would -- I mean, I think I would first like to
5 say how deeply sorry I am for my part in those events,
6 and for the email message which went out that day, and
7 I would like to apologise unreservedly to the families
8 of all those who suffered during Covid for all
9 the distress caused.

10 In terms of the coverage of this event in
11 the garden, it actually broke into the news about
12 15 months later, so while I totally accept (a) that
13 I was totally wrong in the way I sent the email round
14 and for the event, I think the impact on public
15 confidence, although obviously now, in terms of public
16 confidence more generally, it has a serious impact, in
17 terms of the pandemic at that time it was less -- it had
18 less impact.

19 **Q.** Mr Reynolds, the news broke of these goings on in
20 Downing Street in December 2021, whilst we were still in
21 the middle of the pandemic, were we not?

22 **A.** Yes.

23 **Q.** Right.

24 Then on 12 June, you sent messages by WhatsApp to
25 Lee Cain.

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1 my perception in terms of what I was doing is I was
2 suggesting to him. I'm not sure that I would describe
3 that as strong-arming. And certainly my impression
4 I have to say is that both Patrick Vallance and
5 Chris Whitty are more than capable of telling me when
6 they disagree with what I'm suggesting.

7 **Q.** The apparent -- I say apparent because the police have
8 not at any time spoken formally to Mr Cummings about it,
9 and no steps have been taken in relation to
10 the allegation, but the apparent breach of the rules by
11 him was extremely damaging, was it not?

12 **A.** Yes.

13 **Q.** It was obvious to you and everybody else in
14 Downing Street how important observance to the rules
15 was, setting an example was of prime importance?

16 **A.** Yes.

17 **Q.** On 20 May, so around this time, you sent an email about
18 how nice it would be to "make the most of this lovely
19 weather and have some socially distanced drinks in the
20 garden this evening ... bring your own booze". I don't
21 intend to ask you whether you received a fixed penalty
22 notice, you may or may not have done, and it's not fair
23 to invite you to say whether you did, and it forms no
24 part of this Inquiry to rule on or determine liability,
25 civilly or criminally. But do you accept that

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1 Could we have INQ000265621.

2 In the middle of the page, Lee Cain:

3 "I'm not sure it works at all to be honest, which
4 would be shame. I don't see how we can have some kind
5 of party though."

6 Martin Reynolds:

7 "So you are saying nothing for her?"

8 "I think it's your decision my friend, not [mine]!
9 But it obviously comes with rather substantial comms
10 risks!"

11 Then later, at the end of June, there are further
12 WhatsApps in relation to another event in the garden.

13 So the first matter, the first issue which I've put
14 to you, which is the bring your own booze event in
15 the garden was not a solitary event, was it?

16 **A.** No.

17 **Q.** No.

18 **A.** And I apologise unreservedly again for these events.

19 **Q.** And you realise, of course, that for the public whose
20 loved ones were dying in their droves, this caused
21 incredible offence and added to their immeasurable pain?

22 **A.** Yes. And, as I say, I'm deeply sorry for that.

23 **MR KEITH:** I have no further questions.

24 **LADY HALLETT:** I don't think there are any Rule 10
25 questions.

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1 **MR KEITH:** My Lady, it may be there is one area that I have
2 failed to explore in relation to which we've indicated
3 that CTI would ask a question.

4 Did, Mr Reynolds, the Prime Minister make
5 disparaging remarks about the existence or severity of
6 Long Covid to your understanding, to your knowledge?

7 **A.** I'm afraid I can't remember or recall.

8 **MR KEITH:** Those are all the questions then.

9 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you very much, Mr Reynolds.

10 **THE WITNESS:** Thank you.

11 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you.

12 **(The witness withdrew)**

13 **MR KEITH:** My Lady, the next witness is Imran Shafi.

14 **MR IMRAN SHAFI (affirmed)**

15 **Questions from LEAD COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY**

16 **MR KEITH:** Could you give the Inquiry, please, your full
17 name.

18 **A.** Imran Faisal Shafi.

19 **Q.** Mr Shafi, you have been good enough to provide
20 a statement at INQ000215035, which you signed as being
21 true on 13 June 2023. I hesitate because I can't see
22 page 38, but I think we can see the date on the top
23 right-hand corner -- there we are, 19 June 2023. So
24 thank you for your assistance in providing that
25 statement.

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1 **Q.** Yes.

2 **A.** The Department for Education, the Department for Work
3 and Pensions, and the Department for Culture, Media and
4 Sport.

5 **Q.** In that role, was it part of your functions to deal with
6 the Prime Minister?

7 **A.** Yes.

8 **Q.** Submit written advice?

9 **A.** On behalf of others, yes.

10 **Q.** Relay his comments or decisions to others for action?

11 **A.** Yes.

12 **Q.** Arrange and attend meetings with him?

13 **A.** Yes.

14 **Q.** It's apparent from the material that much of the heavy
15 lifting is done in advance of meetings with
16 the Prime Minister?

17 **A.** Yes.

18 **Q.** Conclusions are drafted, information is conveyed,
19 the general steer or course of what is to be decided is
20 laid out for him or her to decide what need to be done?

21 **A.** That's often the case, yes.

22 **Q.** That's not?

23 **A.** That's often the case, yes.

24 **Q.** Often the case?

25 **A.** Yes.

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1 You were the private secretary to
2 the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, for public services;
3 is that correct?

4 **A.** That is correct.

5 **Q.** And you were so from March 2018, from which we deduce
6 that you must have been a private secretary before
7 Mr Johnson became Prime Minister, to March of 2021, so
8 approximately a year after the pandemic started?

9 **A.** That's correct.

10 **Q.** I think before that you had been a management consultant
11 at McKinsey, and you had also worked for some time in
12 the Treasury as a policy adviser?

13 **A.** Yes.

14 **Q.** We've just been hearing evidence about the role of
15 private secretaries, and it may be that you've seen
16 the evidence from Martin Reynolds, Mr Shafi, whilst you
17 were waiting. You were responsible as a private
18 secretary for a particular portfolio. What portfolio
19 was that?

20 **A.** It changed during my time at Number 10. When
21 the pandemic started my portfolio was everything to do
22 with the Department of Health, everything to do with
23 the Department for Education, everything --

24 **Q.** I'm going to ask you just to go a bit slower, please.

25 **A.** Sorry. Everything to do with the Department of Health.

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1 **Q.** How well did the system of private secretaries work, in
2 your opinion, in terms of putting the right information
3 in front of the Prime Minister, providing for clear
4 lines of accountability, and for providing that the best
5 decisions were reached on the information available?

6 **A.** I think overall, broadly, well. There are obviously
7 through the pandemic many times where the whole system
8 was under huge stress, but in general I think the system
9 works.

10 **Q.** To what extent was Mr Reynolds concerned in
11 the substantive issues in relation to your portfolio
12 areas, so public services, health, education and so on?

13 **A.** In normal times, very little, because a lot of the areas
14 that I worked on had quite a strong public spending
15 angle, and so rather than Martin Reynolds being the --
16 sort of my supervisor on that, Stuart Glassborow, who
17 was the deputy principal private secretary, who was more
18 connected to the Treasury, was closer to the work that
19 I was doing.

20 **Q.** And in abnormal times?

21 **A.** In the early periods of Covid, you've heard from Martin
22 about the role that he played in the early days.

23 **Q.** Was he engaged, perhaps to a lesser extent but engaged
24 nevertheless, in the substantive debate that was going
25 on about Covid and commenced, as far as the private

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1 secretaries appeared to be concerned, late January
 2 onwards?
 3 **A.** I think so.
 4 **Q.** You must recall so?
 5 **A.** Yes. Yes. But "substantively" sort of stretches in
 6 terms of how --
 7 **Q.** All right.
 8 **A.** -- how far that goes.
 9 **Q.** My Lady, the Cabinet Office disclosed to us very late on
 10 Friday or at the end of last week a WhatsApp group
 11 thread between Mr Case, Simon Case, and Mr Shafi, and
 12 because of the shortness of time we've not been able to
 13 disclose that document to the core participants or
 14 indeed, I think, the witness. I'm therefore going to
 15 read out the relevant part.

16 On 13 September 2000(sic), so the same year, at
 17 12.30, Simon Case WhatsApped you to say:

18 "This is all a bit of a farce to be honest. I'm not
 19 sure why we don't just operate a normal private office
 20 system which involved the lead private secretary
 21 engaging the boss on an issue on behalf of everyone."

22 So in light of that WhatsApp, were there times in
 23 the course of the first year of the pandemic where
 24 the system of information coming up to the boss,
 25 the Prime Minister, from the private secretary did not

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1 I want to ask you, therefore, what do you make --
 2 what did you make of the fact that there were so many
 3 communications being made by WhatsApp?
 4 **A.** I think given the need to move at speed with a lot of
 5 people working from home, it played an important role in
 6 having quick communication. Again, I've only just had
 7 the chance to review that thread. I think, again,
 8 the point there is there were lots and lots of people
 9 making comments about policy who might not necessarily
 10 have been that close to the policy making, but were part
 11 of the wider Number 10 machine, and who were raising
 12 questions about the approach. And I think, again, you'd
 13 need to check with the Cabinet Secretary what his
 14 meaning was, but if I was going to guess it would be: we
 15 don't want to keep on opening up debates once we've
 16 closed them down.
 17 **Q.** Would you agree that there are very real problems with
 18 any kind of use of WhatsApp for the purposes of
 19 governance?
 20 **A.** I think there are long-term lessons to be learnt about
 21 how we use electronic messaging, yes.
 22 **Q.** There are issues concerning transparency, of course?
 23 **A.** Yes.
 24 **Q.** Things are said in the heat of the moment which may
 25 simply not be true or accurate or reflect the course of

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1 work terribly well?
 2 **A.** So I've just had a chance to look at that exchange this
 3 morning. I think that is a reference to some questions
 4 that the Prime Minister was asking, and
 5 the Prime Minister put those questions on a WhatsApp
 6 group with a certain number of individuals -- I wasn't
 7 on that group -- with individuals. I think -- although
 8 you'd need to check with the Cabinet Secretary what his
 9 meaning was, but I think his meaning is: I wish that
 10 the Prime Minister was asking the lead person the
 11 question rather than this other group.
 12 **Q.** But it's the Cabinet Secretary who describes the private
 13 secretary system as all a bit of a farce: Why don't we
 14 have a normal private office system?
 15 So --
 16 **A.** Again, I don't have the exchange in front of me --
 17 **Q.** All right.
 18 **A.** -- but I think what he's describing as a farce is the
 19 way questions are being asked.
 20 **Q.** In the same WhatsApp group, in July, so two months
 21 before, at 11.03 on 31 July, on a related issue
 22 Simon Case says:
 23 "These No 10 WhatsApp groups make everyone get more
 24 wound up, not less."
 25 And you reply "Yes".

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1 the debate?
 2 **A.** Yes, in the same way that people might have comments in
 3 normal times outside of meetings which aren't recorded.
 4 **Q.** But they're a good indication, are they not, of
 5 the state of mind perhaps of the interlocutor?
 6 **A.** They can be.
 7 **Q.** Were there quite complicated management lines in
 8 Number 10? So you've got, obviously,
 9 the Cabinet Secretary, you've got the civil service
 10 structure, you've got the advisers, you've got private
 11 secretaries, the principal private secretary, it seems
 12 to have made for quite a complex system of advice giving
 13 to the Prime Minister; would you agree?
 14 **A.** It is not a completely hierarchical organisation in
 15 the way that other organisations might be. So, for
 16 instance, in the army, you know, everybody reports up to
 17 one person --
 18 **Q.** Mr Shafi, you must go slower.
 19 **A.** Sorry.
 20 **Q.** So in the army, everyone reports up?
 21 **A.** You said there might be more clear hierarchy in other
 22 organisations. In Number 10, because there is a mix of
 23 political staff and civil service staff, the hierarchy
 24 isn't always as clear.
 25 **Q.** Perhaps it's the nature of the field, high politics,

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1 high governance, the material may suggest that there
2 were a number of competing power sources in
3 Downing Street, personality clashes, and we can see, and
4 you're aware of it, from Helen MacNamara and
5 Martin Reynolds' report, a high degree of
6 dysfunctionality in terms of dealing with
7 the Prime Minister; would you agree?

8 **A.** Yes.

9 **Q.** None of that lent itself well to the best sort of
10 decision-making, did it?

11 **A.** No.

12 **Q.** When in late January and February Downing Street
13 generally first became aware of the problem of
14 the repatriation of UK nationals from China and
15 the emergence of the virus, what was the general
16 response on the part of the Prime Minister? Was it
17 a big deal? Was it something to be watched out for?
18 Was it to be dismissed like swine flu? What was the
19 position?

20 **A.** I don't think he thought it was a big deal at that time.
21 He had a briefing with the Chief Medical Officer on
22 4 February, I believe, where some of the potential
23 implications were set out. So I would characterise it
24 as something to keep an eye out on, but also he clearly
25 and repeatedly stressed the need to avoid overreaction,

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1 "China has a major outbreak but brings it under
2 control ... cases [are] seeded ..."

3 That is to say there are infections in small numbers
4 to other countries. But it doesn't take off.

5 "The other ..."

6 At 2, at the bottom of the page:

7 "... is the opposite end of the risk scale and is
8 our reasonable worst case scenario for which plans are
9 also being developed. With R [reproduction rate] of
10 2-3 ..."

11 So one person infects two to three people in
12 an unimmunised population:

13 "... mortality of maybe 2% ... a doubling time of
14 ... maybe 3-5 days and an incubation period of mean
15 5 [days] this could within the next few weeks become
16 widespread and turn into a significant pandemic
17 relatively quickly."

18 Then he addresses who would be most affected: older
19 people or those with pre-existing health conditions.

20 And essentially he says to Number 10 there is, to use
21 his wonderful words:

22 "... a difficult dichotomous decision in that the
23 economic consequences of overcalling can be substantial,
24 but the mortality and social consequences of
25 under-calling are even more substantial."

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1 which appears through various meetings in that time.

2 **Q.** So there was an email string on 29 January --
3 INQ000146557 -- and we'll start with page 1.

4 We can see from the top of the page that
5 Sir Patrick Vallance emails Number 10 with minutes of
6 a SAGE meeting which had taken place on 28 January in
7 relation to which Sir Chris Whitty had prepared
8 a summary; is that correct?

9 **A.** Yes.

10 **Q.** At the bottom of the page we can see that summary where
11 Sir Chris is addressing a member of Downing Street,
12 William Warr. Is a he private secretary?

13 **A.** He was a special adviser.

14 **Q.** "Dear Will

15 "Sorry for the delay I have been back to back.
16 I am ccing Patrick Vallance, and some of the key people
17 here so they are aware of what I've sent. This is
18 written informally for you ... but can be turned into
19 a more formal note for Ministers ..."

20 So he is telling Downing Street what his take is on
21 the SAGE meeting.

22 "We are working on 4 scenarios, but in practice only
23 2 are probably worth considering for planning at this
24 point."

25 Number 1 is:

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1 I want to ask you, therefore, what did your team,
2 you're responsible for this portfolio area as a private
3 secretary, and the Prime Minister make of this warning?
4 Was it something that caused you to think a great deal
5 more carefully about whether or not the reasonable
6 worst-case scenario might ensue or did you take from
7 this that there was a risk in overreaction? Was it
8 something that wasn't going to go away and you
9 absolutely had to be on top of this to make sure that
10 you knew what might happen? What was the response
11 generally in Number 10?

12 **A.** I think I read this as a very serious email and
13 something that required due attention. That's part of
14 the reason why we got the Chief Medical Officer to brief
15 the Prime Minister on this issue a few days later.

16 **Q.** There was a note put into his prime ministerial box, was
17 there not, on 30 January, INQ000136737.

18 "Prime Minister,

19 "A brief update on coronavirus and evacuations of
20 British nationals and dependents from Hubei."

21 You say -- or rather it is said at the bottom:

22 "A COBR ministerial meeting chaired by Matt Hancock
23 will take place tomorrow."

24 The material around this time, Mr Shafi, appears to
25 focus on the evacuation, the repatriation of

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1 UK nationals, as opposed to addressing in detail
2 the likelihood of the risk that the virus would spread
3 to the United Kingdom in an uncontrolled way.

4 Why was that focus on repatriation?

5 **A.** It's a good question. I think, erm -- firstly, I think
6 the meeting with the Prime Minister on 4 February does
7 talk about a potential chance of the reasonable
8 worst-case scenario. I think it's about 10% the CMO
9 said.

10 **Q.** Yes.

11 **A.** But I think you're right that a lot of the focus at
12 the centre was, "How do we make sure that this doesn't
13 come to the UK" or "We can contain it", rather than
14 getting into the difficult measures that you might have
15 to take should you fail to contain.

16 **Q.** INQ000136733 is that update from the Civil Contingencies
17 Secretariat on 3 February, where a situation update is
18 given on the outbreak of novel coronavirus, Wuhan novel
19 coronavirus, how many tests have been concluded, how
20 many tests are positive, and so on and so forth.

21 Then, over the page, British nationals in China,
22 communications, and then this: cross-government
23 meetings, clear references to a SAGE meeting, the fact
24 of a CCS cross-government meeting, further ad hoc
25 cross-government officials' meetings, CCS chairing

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1 the NHS.

2 To what extent had the coronavirus issue made its
3 way to the centre of government concern or government
4 action in the first week in February?

5 **A.** It had, but probably not to the extent that it ought to
6 have had. So --

7 **Q.** Just pause there. Why not to the extent that it ought
8 to have done?

9 **A.** So I think this meeting is a good example of that. So
10 it was a meeting with the Health Secretary and
11 the Prime Minister. It had reached Number 10 because
12 the first part of that meeting was focused on
13 coronavirus, but then the rest of the meeting,
14 the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary wanted to
15 discuss progress on building 40 hospitals or recruiting
16 50,000 nurses or the other manifesto commitments that
17 were very important to the government.

18 **Q.** To what extent should Number 10 have stepped in and said
19 to the DHSC, "Forget the NHS and long-term objectives,
20 we want to know what you're doing about coronavirus", as
21 opposed to the DHSC saying to Number 10, "Forget talking
22 about NHS objectives, we've got a serious problem here
23 relating to coronavirus"?

24 **A.** I don't think we're the experts on that, so we need to
25 be guided by the department to tell us what

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1 a cross-government meeting, and then a COBR for
2 ministers on 5 February.

3 So it looks as if, Mr Shafi, when the warning was
4 received, a lot was done in terms of setting up
5 the meetings, the structures, the debate; would you
6 agree?

7 **A.** How do you mean by the debate?

8 **Q.** The novel coronavirus, it's apparent that it's in China,
9 it's beginning to leak (there have been cases outside
10 China), and because of the information that's been
11 received in the heart of the UK Government, these SAGE
12 meetings, CCS meetings, COBR meetings are all beginning
13 to be held; is that a fair summary?

14 **A.** Yes.

15 **Q.** On 4 February, there was a DHSC departmental meeting,
16 INQ000146558, and this letter from Downing Street to,
17 I think, a private secretary in the DHSC, said:

18 "The Prime Minister met your Secretary of State ...
19 colleagues from the centre for his first DHSC
20 Departmental Performance meeting ...

21 "We began with a short update on coronavirus ... the
22 Prime Minister stressed the need to continue to explain
23 our stance to maintain public confidence ..."

24 Then there is a debate about travel restrictions,
25 and then the letter goes on to deal with objectives for

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1 the important issues are.

2 **Q.** There were -- it's obvious that coronavirus as an issue
3 was put before the Prime Minister repeatedly in
4 February.

5 We can have perhaps INQ000136739, which is
6 an extract from his diary for, if we can go forward,
7 14 February -- no, I think I've got the wrong reference.
8 Friday 14 February, there is between 10.00 and 10.45, or
9 there should be, an entry for a coronavirus meeting.

10 The matter was discussed repeatedly in COBR
11 meetings, was it not?

12 **A.** Yes.

13 **Q.** So there are a series of COBR meetings chaired by
14 Mr Hancock MP beginning on 24 February(sic) and
15 a further four meetings, 29 January, 5 February,
16 18 February and 26 February; is that correct?

17 **A.** Yes.

18 **Q.** The first one on 24 January is at INQ00056214. Page 1
19 shows us who was present. Page 2 shows us that from
20 Number 10 you attended, the bottom right-hand corner.

21 Page 3, at paragraph 2 -- it will be over one more
22 page I think then -- information is given in paragraph 2
23 about the number of confirmed cases, confirmed deaths:

24 "... the true number was likely higher with
25 modelling indicating between 1,000 and 10,000 cases.

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1 There was no clear evidence of sustained transmission
 2 ... outside of Wuhan."
 3 What did Number 10 make of the fact that the CMO had
 4 reported there was no clear evidence of sustained
 5 transmission as opposed to saying there was no sustained
 6 transmission?
 7 **A.** I don't think we appreciated that nuance at the time.
 8 And I think throughout February there wasn't a clear
 9 call on whether there was sustained community
 10 transmission in the UK, for instance.
 11 **Q.** Was Number 10 aware of this issue, of course, and
 12 the need to ensure that they understood whether there
 13 was sustained transmission?
 14 **A.** I think, yes, we were -- we knew that at the point at
 15 which in the UK we could evidence sustained community
 16 transmission it was very likely that contain approaches
 17 would fail.
 18 **Q.** And you began to understand that there was sustained
 19 transmission and that control would likely fail during
 20 the course of middle to late February?
 21 **A.** I think more late than middle.
 22 **Q.** But well before, of course, the change of strategy on
 23 13 March, about which of course -- to which we'll come.
 24 **A.** Yes.
 25 **Q.** It was understood, wasn't it, that there was sustained
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1 months".
 2 It obviously didn't take months. When did you begin
 3 to realise that it would be sooner than had been
 4 foretold at that 29 January meeting of COBR?
 5 **A.** I think the outbreak in Italy was a big wake-up call to
 6 everybody.
 7 **Q.** So the last week of February?
 8 **A.** Yes.
 9 **Q.** 21 February?
 10 **A.** Around then, 21st/22nd.
 11 **Q.** On 5 February, another COBR took place.
 12 INQ000056215.
 13 If we go to page 2, we can see the official
 14 attendees. For Number 10, you attended, along with
 15 Sir Ed Lister, as he then was; correct?
 16 **A.** Yes.
 17 **Q.** Page 3, we can see the CMOs attended.
 18 Page 5, "Current Situation Update". More
 19 information about incubation period, latent period.
 20 Paragraph 3, the Minister of State of the Foreign and
 21 Commonwealth Office gives an update.
 22 4, the permanent secretary for the Department of
 23 Health and Social Care, Sir Christopher Wormald, talks
 24 about arrangements for isolation.
 25 If you could scroll back out, please. Thank you.
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1 transmission and that if the virus got a grip, got
 2 a hold in the United Kingdom, there was no effective
 3 means of controlling it thereafter?
 4 **A.** There were means to mitigate, and the plan through late
 5 February and early March was to mitigate the epidemic
 6 rather than suppress.
 7 **Q.** But that wasn't the question. Was it understood that
 8 there was no means of controlling the virus, stopping it
 9 from spreading throughout the community?
 10 **A.** Yes, yes, I think that's right.
 11 **Q.** All right.
 12 That was, you say, mid, more late --
 13 **A.** I think more late rather than mid.
 14 **Q.** All right. On 29 January, COBR -- INQ000056226 -- you
 15 weren't, I think, an attendee at this COBR. If we go to
 16 the second page, a person whose name has been redacted
 17 attended on behalf of Number 10.
 18 If you go to page 3, we can see a number of chief
 19 medical officers dialled in. If we go to page 5,
 20 the CMO and the CSA updated the meeting. Paragraph 3:
 21 "... UK planning assumptions were based on the
 22 reasonable worst case scenario. There were two
 23 scenarios to be considered."
 24 The second one, which was that there would be
 25 a pandemic, was "plausible but it may take weeks to
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1 Then at 6:
 2 "The Chair invited the CMO to summarise the latest
 3 scientific advice on limiting the transmission of the
 4 novel coronavirus into the UK. The CMO said that the
 5 latest advice from ... (SAGE) estimated that if the UK
 6 reduced imported infections by 50 per cent, it was
 7 expected that the onset of any epidemic in the UK would
 8 be delayed by about five days; if this was increased to
 9 75 per cent it would be delayed by ten days; to
 10 90 per cent 15 days and 95 per cent plus delayed for
 11 potentially a month."
 12 Number 10 understood, therefore, from 5 February
 13 that restrictions on borders would have to be very, very
 14 stringent indeed in order to be able to delay the spread
 15 of the virus, and even then it would only buy
 16 a limited amount of time?
 17 **A.** Correct.
 18 **Q.** Number 10 also understood from as early as 5 February
 19 that once the virus breached our borders and couldn't be
 20 controlled by a sophisticated test and trace system, it
 21 would then be rampant in the community?
 22 **A.** No, I think there's a difference between breaching
 23 the borders and sustained community transmission. So
 24 you could have people visiting from Wuhan or their
 25 families having infections in the UK; I think that's
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1 different from sustained person-to-person transmission
 2 in the UK.
 3 **Q.** So what did you find out when you asked: well, how many
 4 cases of inbound travellers can we manage and check,
 5 trace, contact, to make sure that it doesn't get a hold
 6 in the community?
 7 **A.** Erm, I don't recall that specific discussion.
 8 **Q.** You were told, were you not, in late February that
 9 Public Health England could only manage five coronavirus
 10 cases a week with all the contacts that those five cases
 11 would give rise to?
 12 **A.** Could well have been, yes.
 13 **Q.** So what was your reaction when you realised that you
 14 couldn't stop the virus coming in for any length of
 15 time, and there were very, very distinct limits on
 16 the amount of index cases that could be tested, traced,
 17 contacted, isolated?
 18 **A.** I think, from late February, increasing concern as to
 19 how the UK would manage this pandemic.
 20 **Q.** What was the solution?
 21 **A.** I'm not the expert on the solution, but I sought to
 22 press the system to provide updates and proposals to
 23 the Prime Minister on what they thought the system --
 24 what they thought the solution ought to be.
 25 **Q.** On 18 February, COBR sat again.

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1 required."
 2 Presumably this COBR was reported back to you as
 3 being the private secretary in charge of this portfolio
 4 in Downing Street?
 5 **A.** There were two private secretaries working on the issue,
 6 so I think the redacted name is the other private
 7 secretary, but yes, we probably would have discussed --
 8 **Q.** [name redacted]
 9 **A.** Yes.
 10 **Q.** Right.
 11 Did you therefore understand from this minute and
 12 the director of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat
 13 that, as at 18 February, work had yet to be done to
 14 create a clear plan of activity? Whatever that means.
 15 **A.** It's a fair reading of the minute, I think. Well,
 16 I mean, you'd have to ask the person who actually said
 17 the comment, but I suspect what they meant was some work
 18 had been done and a lot more work was yet to do.
 19 **Q.** Mr Cummings, the Inquiry is aware, called for plans to
 20 be provided to Downing Street.
 21 **A.** Yes.
 22 **Q.** You're aware of that?
 23 **A.** Yes.
 24 **Q.** In fact, he made repeated requests. It became apparent,
 25 didn't it, that there was no clear plan setting out how

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1 INQ000056227.
 2 Page 1, we can see 18 February, and the ministerial
 3 attendees.
 4 Page 2, from Number 10, Ed Lister, again.
 5 Then over the page, page 3, CMOs.
 6 Page 5, paragraph 2:
 7 "... the CMO updated on the global risk ... the risk
 8 to Japan was primarily from domestic transmission. Both
 9 escalation to a global pandemic, and the isolation of
 10 the majority of cases to China remained realistic
 11 possibilities."
 12 Then if you could scroll back out, please, I think
 13 over the page, there are references to planning for
 14 legislation:
 15 "The CHAIR said that any Bill would only be employed
 16 in a Reasonable Worst Case Scenario ..."
 17 Then over the page, "Planning for a Reasonable Worst
 18 Case Scenario (RWCS) - next phase":
 19 "The DIRECTOR OF THE CIVIL CONTINGENCIES SECRETARIAT
 20 [Katharine Hammond] said that there was work to be done
 21 to create a clear plan of activity (across the UK
 22 Government) from the moment of sustained transmission to
 23 its estimated peak, which was likely to be a period of
 24 three months. That a detailed agenda of decisions and
 25 actions required over a period of twelve weeks was

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1 the government might respond to a viral pandemic with
 2 these characteristics?
 3 **A.** I agree with that. I think there are two parts to it.
 4 There's the strategic plan of: is this something that we
 5 can mitigate whilst protecting the NHS or do we need to
 6 suppress? And then there's the question of operational
 7 plans, of do we have enough PPE, do we have enough
 8 ventilators, what's -- how are we doing hospital
 9 discharge?
 10 So I think on both of those areas the plans could
 11 have been more detailed. But -- so saying there is
 12 a single plan, there are lots of facets to that,
 13 I think.
 14 **Q.** All right.
 15 Let's have a look at the strategy first. In your
 16 statement, you say that the initial approach, the broad
 17 approach, envisaged what is called or what was called
 18 a one-peak strategy?
 19 **A.** Yes.
 20 **Q.** So that we can understand what was meant by this, is
 21 this the position: viruses go in waves, and the danger
 22 of suppressing a first wave, pushing it down so that
 23 the reproduction rate is lower than 1, so as to stop
 24 exponential growth, is that it recoils back up as soon
 25 as the suppression has lifted; correct?

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1 **A.** Correct.

2 **Q.** When it does so, because you've suppressed the first
3 wave, the virus hasn't been allowed to spread widely, so
4 people haven't become infected by and large and
5 therefore they haven't got immunity?

6 **A.** Correct.

7 **Q.** So the thinking was this: if the first wave is just
8 reduced rather than suppressed, so mitigated, then
9 because the overall size of the first wave of
10 the epidemic is reduced, fewer people will become ill or
11 die?

12 **A.** Correct -- or at any given point in time.

13 **Q.** A byproduct of that approach, the mitigation approach,
14 is because you're not suppressing the wave completely,
15 large numbers of the population will become infected?

16 **A.** Yes.

17 **Q.** Is that what herd immunity was thought to mean?

18 **A.** I would add a final point to that, which -- yes to all
19 of that, and then a final point, which is: at a certain
20 proportion of the population -- and I'm not
21 an epidemiologist, so this is just my understanding --
22 at a certain point of the population being infected
23 there are not enough new people for the virus to infect,
24 and that's sort of the technical herd immunity --

25 **Q.** Yes. Herd immunity can either take place when

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1 the Cabinet Office, SAGE, SPI-M, spend so much time
2 worrying about the strategic issue: shall we suppress
3 and risk a spring back, an uncoiling of the spring, or
4 shall we mitigate? As opposed to asking itself
5 the question: whichever way you cut it, the loss of life
6 and illness is going to be massive and we must take
7 steps to deal with that?

8 **A.** So I don't think there was a proper discussion in
9 February about suppress or mitigate. I think
10 the system, Number 10 included, defaulted into accepting
11 that the pandemic flu pan approach, which is more of
12 a mitigate approach rather than a suppress approach, was
13 the right way forward. In hindsight there should have
14 been advice with different options presented to
15 ministers on: you can go this way and the costs and
16 benefits are as such, and you can go this way, the costs
17 and benefits are as such.

18 And even at a point where lots of things were
19 uncertain, I think, given that some other countries took
20 an alternative approach, I think it's a reasonable
21 question to ask why we didn't frame the choice in that
22 way to ministers.

23 **Q.** In essence, give them practical options: this is
24 the problem, we are going to be overrun, what can be
25 done to control it or to regain control or to deal with

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1 the population is sufficiently vaccinated --

2 **A.** Yes.

3 **Q.** -- or it's become sufficiently infected that the virus
4 has got nowhere else to go in terms of infecting new
5 people?

6 **A.** Yes.

7 **Q.** Correct.

8 So, and obviously there is an issue about herd
9 immunity, because herd immunity denotes that large
10 numbers of people may still become infected and may die;
11 correct?

12 **A.** Yes, in a one-peak strategy, many people will die.

13 **Q.** And the healthcare system may still be overrun?

14 **A.** Yes.

15 **Q.** And some people may not be immune or get immunity, may
16 be reinfected.

17 **A.** Yes, we didn't know what the longevity of immunity was
18 at that point.

19 **Q.** Right.

20 There are other issues, aren't there, about how
21 effective it is, or how possible it is to hermetically
22 seal parts of the population anyway whilst you allow the
23 virus to continue its approach through the rest?

24 **A.** Yeah.

25 **Q.** Why, Mr Shafi, did the government, so Number 10,

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1 the death and illness? As opposed to this doctrinal or
2 strategic debate?

3 **A.** So I don't think there was a strategic debate.

4 **Q.** There are many, many emails, WhatsApps, from
5 the Prime Minister saying, "Have we won the argument on
6 herd immunity? Is it suppression or mitigation?
7 Reports" --

8 **A.** But that's in the middle of March. So what I'm saying
9 is I don't think there was that strategic debate in
10 February.

11 **Q.** My mistake. There was a debate in March, it just wasn't
12 in February?

13 **A.** Yes.

14 **Q.** Why, when the virus, it was plain, had already come to
15 these shores at the beginning of March, was time spent
16 on this doctrinal or strategic debate, which of course
17 culminates in a realisation on 13 March, "We're doomed"?

18 **A.** I think large parts of the system thought there was
19 no alternative to the current plan in the first week of
20 March.

21 **Q.** No alternative to ...?

22 **A.** The current plan, the plan to mitigate.

23 **Q.** Was time spent debating reasonable worst-case scenario,
24 mitigation, suppression, herd immunity, behavioural
25 fatigue? Because governments like plans, they want to

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1 be able to say "This is our plan, this is our strategy,
2 this is what we're doing".

3 **A.** Erm ... I think people genuinely thought in the system
4 as a whole, the Department of Health and
5 the Cabinet Office, in the first week of March, that
6 the plan as published on 3 March was the correct
7 approach.

8 **Q.** Is that the action plan --

9 **A.** Yes.

10 **Q.** -- contain, delay --

11 **A.** Yes.

12 **Q.** Do you accept that, as it happened, control had already
13 been lost by 3 March?

14 **A.** When you look at the facts now, yes.

15 **Q.** Yes. But that was just an action plan, although
16 described by some of your colleagues as a communication
17 paper, which said, "This is what we'll do, we'll control
18 it and then if we can't control it we'll delay it, and
19 if we can't delay it we'll mitigate the consequences"?
20 Why was this debate about mitigation or suppression
21 still going on?

22 **A.** Because delay means mitigate, and so the plan as set out
23 on the 3rd is a mitigation plan, and everything in
24 the language is about delaying the peak. Suppression
25 brings forward and curtails the peak. So the approach

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1 even with mitigation, and how many beds were available,
2 that I think it became clear to people in Number 10,
3 including me, just how unprotected the NHS would be and
4 just how many people would die under a mitigation
5 approach.

6 **Q.** As at that COBR on 18 February, the COBR we've just
7 looked at, there is a debate about a draft Bill,
8 a corona --

9 **LADY HALLETT:** Are you moving on to a different topic?

10 **MR KEITH:** Yes, my Lady, by all means.

11 **LADY HALLETT:** Sorry, we have to break.
12 For those who were planning to attend or listen in
13 or watch for Lee Cain, I think we've decided we can't
14 reach him today, sadly.

15 **MR KEITH:** My Lady, yes.

16 **LADY HALLETT:** Very well.
17 Just so everyone knows, Mr Cain will be called
18 tomorrow?

19 **MR KEITH:** Tomorrow morning.

20 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you.
21 Sorry about this, we have to take a break every so
22 often. I shall return at half past.

23 **(3.17 pm)**

24 **(A short break)**

25 **(3.30 pm)**

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1 was very much the delay approach until it was shifted.

2 **Q.** Let me put it bluntly to you: a great deal of time and
3 energy appears to have been devoted to drawing up
4 the action plan, talking about delay and mitigation and
5 suppression and, in the event, behavioural fatigue and
6 herd immunity, whilst all the time it was known that
7 the infection fatality rate was 1%, the hospitalisation
8 rate was 6%, and you knew there was no means of
9 controlling the virus's entry into the United Kingdom.
10 Why was the focus not on that stark reality, rather than
11 debating the whys and wherefores of herd immunity?

12 **A.** I think that's a very good question, and I think it's
13 one to put to the senior experts on the pandemic.
14 I think one of the things that we were missing in
15 the early parts of March was just even a simple, "Here
16 is the path of the infection and here is NHS capacity",
17 and putting those two lines together. Now, you could
18 say you should have been able to just work that out with
19 a pen and paper, and when you reflect back you probably
20 should have.

21 **Q.** You didn't need models to know --

22 **A.** Exactly.

23 **Q.** -- that the NHS would be overrun.

24 **A.** But it was only once we started to see just how stark
25 the gap was between the likely path of the pandemic,

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1 **LADY HALLETT:** Mr Keith.

2 **MR KEITH:** Mr Shafi, we were looking at the COBR minutes of
3 18 February, and I'd shown you really only part of it,
4 but it was the observation from the director of
5 the Civil Contingencies Secretariat to the effect that
6 there was work to be done to create a clear plan of
7 activity.
8 That COBR focuses on a number of issues:
9 repatriation, which is still an ongoing issue; a draft
10 Bill dealing with the legality of forcing people to
11 isolate if they have been picked up on the border as
12 having Covid; the testing of local resilience fora,
13 forums; and there is also a reference to a ministerial
14 exercise, a tabletop exercise which was due to take
15 place.
16 Can you think why COBR was focused on those
17 particular issues rather than getting to grips with
18 the likelihood of spread and the absence of control
19 measures?

20 **A.** I don't know. I think one of the reflections that
21 I have is that there was a very -- focus on
22 the immediate and now rather than what's going to happen
23 in a month's time, which arguably there ought to have
24 been of. And secondly, I think the lead department
25 model has many strengths, one of the challenges of

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1 the lead department model is that issues that sit very
 2 squarely within that department don't often get surfaced
 3 in sort of wide ministerial meetings as much as they
 4 might have, say, if the chair of COBR had been from
 5 central government.

6 **Q.** So a couple of points from that. The Inquiry has heard
 7 evidence that COBR is best designed to deal with
 8 immediate acute crises rather than trying to plan for
 9 a long-running crisis requiring it to look further into
 10 the future; would you agree with that?

11 **A.** Yes.

12 **Q.** Secondly, in relation to the lead government department
 13 model, this was a cross-government whole-government
 14 crisis, but because the DHSC was in the driving seat
 15 practically, to a large extent, as the lead government
 16 department, other parts of government, including
 17 the Cabinet Office in particular, had less control over
 18 what the DHSC was doing and less visibility over what it
 19 was thinking?

20 **A.** I think that's right, yeah.

21 **Q.** All right. Because there was no debate at that COBR
 22 about the possibility of control measures, test and
 23 trace, PPE, non-pharmaceutical interventions or what
 24 the impact might be on the hospital and care sector,
 25 none of the areas which we now know were at the heart of

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1 capacity, and the recognition that the UK had far too
 2 little testing capacity and we needed to scale that up.
 3 That's slightly separate from coming up with a new test
 4 and trace system that could be used for the rest of
 5 the year, which is I think something that could have
 6 been done -- we could have paid -- put more focus onto
 7 that in the early stage, if we'd thought suppression was
 8 a viable strategy at that point.

9 **LADY HALLETT:** Can I just ask a question? I'm sorry to
 10 interrupt, Mr Keith.

11 You agreed with Mr Keith that there hadn't been
 12 a focus on the aspects he put to you, PPE, ventilators
 13 and the like, but they're all aspects that might come
 14 within the remit of DHSC, so that's not -- if there was
 15 a failing there, that can't be attributed to the lead
 16 government department model, because they were all
 17 matters or most of them were matters that would come
 18 within the remit of Health, weren't they?

19 **A.** Yes, so they do come within the remit of Health.
 20 I guess my question is: was there appropriate scrutiny
 21 from the centre as to the depth and robustness of those
 22 plans? If you look in March, the Prime Minister was
 23 having to spend quite a lot of his own time doing
 24 manufacturing calls to arms for ventilators and trying
 25 to, like, inspire people to create PPE. I think

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1 the response are debated at all, are they?

2 **A.** Yes, I think I would break that down into two parts.
 3 There is the things that we needed to work on as part of
 4 any strategy, so a mitigate strategy as well as
 5 suppress, so things like PPE, ventilators, are relevant
 6 on all of those issues.

7 In terms of, you know, setting up a test and trace
 8 system, that becomes a lot more relevant in a suppress
 9 scenario, where you need an effective test and trace
 10 system to help you come out of the suppression, so when
 11 you lift the measures you don't just create a second
 12 wave.

13 So it's perhaps natural, once we'd gone down
 14 the mitigate approach, that you don't spend as much time
 15 on that, but I can't explain why COBR didn't spend lots
 16 of time on issues like PPE and ventilators in February.

17 **Q.** Just on test and trace, are you saying that one of
 18 the reasons why there was inadequate focus on scaling up
 19 a test, trace, contact, isolate system was because it
 20 was thought at the heart of government: well, if we're
 21 going to mitigate, we're just going to reduce the top
 22 level of the viral spread, squash the sombrero, but let
 23 the virus run otherwise, we don't need to test and trace
 24 people?

25 **A.** I think there was a significant focus on testing

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1 a reasonable question that I would have is: could we
 2 have deployed the centre earlier to help solve some of
 3 these enormous problems?

4 **MR KEITH:** Just to finish test and trace, test and trace is
 5 not very effective for flu, is it, because you show
 6 symptoms when you become infected and you don't need,
 7 therefore, to be tested? But you had to have, did you
 8 not, test and trace for coronavirus, whether it was
 9 mitigation or suppression, because it's the only way of
 10 knowing how far the virus has spread in your population?

11 **A.** Erm ... I ... potentially, although again I'm not
 12 an expert on this issue, so this is just me thinking it
 13 through, I suspect there was a feeling that by the time
 14 the first wave had worked through the population, we
 15 wouldn't have been able to scale up sufficient tests in
 16 time to sort of respond to that need. So in that
 17 strategy we would be slightly blind as to sort of like
 18 the true state of the virus in March/April.

19 **Q.** So you're saying it was a strategy of failure? We don't
 20 need to have a test and trace because we're going to
 21 suppress the virus, or we're going to mitigate it, in
 22 which case we'll allow half the population to be
 23 infected anyway?

24 **A.** No, what I was saying was if you're going to suppress
 25 the virus you do need test and trace, because it's

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1 an important part of the arsenal as you come out of
 2 suppression.
 3 **Q.** To stop the uncoiling of the spring --
 4 **A.** Yes.
 5 **Q.** -- you'd need to be able to --
 6 **A.** Yeah.
 7 **Q.** -- test it out of --
 8 **A.** Yeah.
 9 **Q.** -- operation?
 10 **A.** And that was a large part of the debate in May, in terms
 11 of how low had we got incidence and would that be
 12 sufficiently low in order to allow test and trace to
 13 work effectively.
 14 **Q.** But the suppression/mitigation dichotomy debate was
 15 resolved around about 13/14 March: when you realised
 16 the NHS would be overwhelmed you had to suppress. So
 17 why wasn't test and trace ramped up at that stage?
 18 **A.** I think there were a number of people, including within
 19 Number 10, who were pushing for that. I don't know
 20 the answer to why it wasn't.
 21 **Q.** But you know that it didn't happen. There was no
 22 ramping up, was there, in March or April?
 23 **A.** I think there was a push to ramp up testing capacity.
 24 Whether there was an equal focus on pushing up the wider
 25 infrastructure around it, I'm less clear on.

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1 the UK."
 2 On that occasion, on this -- in this COBR on
 3 26 February, if we just scroll forward we can see that
 4 COBR was concerned with "Health advice for travellers
 5 and schools", "International response". Under "HMG
 6 preparedness", even though the reasonable worst-case
 7 planning assumption looked close to becoming
 8 the reasonable planning assumption, a debate took place
 9 on the Covid-19 legislative policy, excess death
 10 management, and there is a recognition there that, on
 11 the reasonable worst-case scenario for pandemic
 12 influenza, 800,000 deaths, being the reasonable
 13 worst-case scenario, would greatly exceed ordinary
 14 capacity.
 15 So there all the links are joined up, are they not?
 16 There is human-to-human sustained transmission in Italy,
 17 where lockdowns have been imposed. There are links to
 18 the United Kingdom. It's coming, there's no means of
 19 control. Excess deaths under the reasonable worst-case
 20 scenario -- which is now looking more and more like it's
 21 going to be the outcome -- is 800,000. And the debate
 22 focuses on excess death management and legislative
 23 policies?

24 **A.** Yeah, so I think on the previous page it said it's still
 25 unsure whether -- if it will come to the UK in great

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1 **Q.** Community testing was stopped on 12 March, was it not?
 2 **A.** Yes, and I think my understanding of that is that that
 3 was a function of just a lack of tests --
 4 **Q.** There weren't enough to go round?
 5 **A.** Yes.
 6 **Q.** They had to be preserved for hospitals?
 7 **A.** Yes.
 8 **Q.** So there was no community testing?
 9 **A.** Yes.
 10 **Q.** And until May it never restarted, did it?
 11 **A.** I don't know.
 12 **Q.** No.
 13 COBR, on 26 February, INQ000056216, at page 5, the
 14 Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Sir
 15 Jonathan Van-Tam, says:
 16 "... official data from China shows that case
 17 numbers continued to increase. Internationally case
 18 numbers in South Korea, Iran and Italy highlighted clear
 19 person to person transmission ..."
 20 Including in Italy. And of course in Italy by this
 21 stage, the 26th, there had been a lockdown of
 22 ten municipalities and near collapse of its healthcare
 23 structure in the Lombardy area.
 24 "Sustained human to human transmission in Italy --
 25 which receives a high number of travellers to and from

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1 scale, so I think there was still a level of uncertainty
 2 there. But I think you're absolutely right that
 3 alarm bells should have been ringing at this point that
 4 had -- did we have the detailed plans in place to
 5 sort of respond to this were it to come into the UK.
 6 And as you say, the medical advice was that it was
 7 becoming increasingly likely that it was going to be
 8 a pandemic. And that's one of the things that I was
 9 trying to push to get sort of more detailed plans for
 10 the Prime Minister on, what happens in that scenario.
 11 **Q.** And you personally do push, I make that absolutely
 12 plain, but the government as a whole was in
 13 the position, was it not, in which the alarm bells were
 14 not being rung loudly enough, there were no real plans,
 15 it was bogged down in a doctrinal debate about
 16 suppression and mitigation, and there was no focus on
 17 what would happen?
 18 **A.** I think there was too much focus on excess death
 19 management and not enough focus on preventing those
 20 deaths in the first place.
 21 **Q.** Quite.

22 In an email or a WhatsApp with Simon Case on
 23 18 September 2020, you say or rather Mr Case says and
 24 you agreed:

25 "The fetishisation of COBR is so tiresome."

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1 What did you mean by that?

2 **A.** I can't recall exactly, but I think probably by that
3 point we had a much more sophisticated approach of
4 engaging with local government. I think this is
5 a response to a request from the Mayor of London for
6 a COBR. I think the point was probably there are
7 quicker ways of taking action rather than having to call
8 a big formal COBR meeting. If we need to take action in
9 a local area, we could do that through other fora,
10 direct conversations with the Health Secretary,
11 et cetera.

12 **Q.** So, generally speaking, COBR continued long after
13 the crisis had become chronic rather than acute?

14 **A.** It did, but at much more infrequent --

15 **Q.** At a slower rate?

16 **A.** At a slower rate, yes.

17 **Q.** And it was an important forum because it allowed
18 the devolved administrations to participate?

19 **A.** Correct.

20 **Q.** On 24 February, INQ000146563, you sent an email to
21 Sir Patrick Vallance, Katharine Hammond,
22 Martin Reynolds, Ed Lister, Stuart Glassborow and others
23 in which you said:
24 "... I'd like to start exposing the [Prime Minister]
25 to the potential decisions he might have to take in
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1 was sustained human-to-human transmission, no means of
2 control, it was spreading, and there would be no debate
3 on measures?

4 **A.** Yes, I mean -- again, I mean, the Deputy CMO says "if
5 there is transmission", and Katharine's email here says,
6 "in the event that we concluded a pandemic was the most
7 likely scenario". So at this point the system hadn't
8 said that was the most likely scenario, but what I was
9 concerned about was: were that to be the most likely
10 scenario, what are the interventions that we would want
11 to bring in? What does it actually mean for real people
12 in terms of individual isolation, household isolation,
13 what became known as shielding? Had we done the
14 detailed work to really both work out all the kinks in
15 those approaches and then think about how we explain
16 that to the public?

17 **Q.** There were cases in the United Kingdom by 24 February.

18 **A.** Yeah, so I'm not denying that there weren't cases,
19 I think what I'm saying is that the ...

20 **Q.** May I assist?

21 **A.** -- advice wasn't that that was going to be a --
22 definitely turn into a pandemic in the UK at that point.

23 **Q.** Although there were cases in the United Kingdom --

24 **A.** Yep.

25 **Q.** -- and the government was aware of the explosion of
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1 short order on this ..."

2 So you're raising the alarm through your email, are
3 you not? We can see the reference in the bottom half of
4 the page, your email on 24 February.

5 At the top of the page, Ms Hammond, the director of
6 the CCS, responds in this way:
7 "... we're working at the moment on a whole sequence
8 of decisions that would be needed in the event that we
9 concluded a pandemic was the most likely scenario which
10 should be also be useful in exposing some of those
11 concrete points ... It's taken a few different
12 approaches to get what we need but there are workshops
13 running today and tomorrow to bring it together."

14 What did you make of that response?

15 **A.** I don't remember my exact emotions at the time. I think
16 this is all part of a wider growing concern within
17 Number 10 as to whether the plans were detailed enough
18 to take the UK through March and April.

19 **Q.** Bluntly, the CCS is saying, "We're working at the moment
20 on a whole sequence of decisions, we're trying to draw
21 something up, we're going to plan something for you in
22 Number 10"?

23 **A.** That's what the email looks like, yes.

24 **Q.** Right. But you were saying -- because of course you
25 were aware of what was occurring in COBR -- that there
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1 the virus in northern Italy --

2 **A.** Yeah.

3 **Q.** -- and the fact that lockdowns had been deployed, and
4 that people were dying and the healthcare system was
5 likely to be overrun there, there was a degree,
6 systemically, in the heart of the government, a degree
7 of optimism bias that "It's not coming here, this virus
8 won't come to our shores or, if it does, using the
9 methods that we don't have to control it, it won't go
10 any further"; is that the nub of it?

11 **A.** I'm -- because I'm not an epidemiologist, I don't want
12 to, like, give a firm view on one --

13 **Q.** You --

14 **A.** -- or the other.

15 **Q.** You sent this email, Mr Shafi:
16 "... I'd like to start exposing the PM to
17 the potential decisions he might have to take ..."

18 Did you seriously doubt that the virus was going to
19 come, and to come and overwhelm the United Kingdom?

20 **A.** I think at that point I thought there's a strong enough
21 chance that it might come that we need to be very much
22 further ahead in terms of the detailed planning that we
23 have in that case.

24 **Q.** Because you were aware of the precautionary principle,
25 which is if there is a reasonable chance of this fatal
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1 viral pandemic reaching us, we'd better be ready, we'd
 2 better take precautions?
 3 **A.** Yes.
 4 **Q.** All right. But, generally speaking, insufficient
 5 precautions had been taken by the United Kingdom
 6 Government by this stage?
 7 **A.** I think ... at this point I don't think I knew that for
 8 sure. All the detailed work might have been happening
 9 elsewhere and we just hadn't seen it, and the question
 10 was: can we bring some of that detail to the
 11 Prime Minister? I think it was in the course of asking
 12 for the detail and then not seeing a huge amount of
 13 detail, that's when I think --
 14 **Q.** The penny dropped?
 15 **A.** -- myself and colleagues in Number 10 sort of realised
 16 that maybe the detail of the planning wasn't as deep as
 17 others had thought, and I think that those are the
 18 comments that Helen MacNamara and Mark Sweeney also
 19 sort of refer to in, sort of, later in March.
 20 **Q.** We're going to look at the meeting on 25 February after
 21 the half term in a moment. It's clear that there were
 22 a number of emails and minutes and notes sent to
 23 Mr Johnson in the first half of February, but there was
 24 no COBR from 18 February to 26 February, no Cabinet
 25 meeting on coronavirus between the 14th and the week of
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1 people. I think that's something you'd need to ask him.
 2 I think, in hindsight I think it's unfortunate that we
 3 didn't spend every day in February focused on all the
 4 detailed operational plans.
 5 **Q.** On 25 February there was a meeting, an important
 6 meeting, INQ000146565, in which reference is made to
 7 the domestic preparedness, at the bottom of the page,
 8 and the CCS was asked to provide a four to five-page
 9 note for the PM.
 10 Was that a note that was asked for immediately, or
 11 did a further few days elapse before the CCS was
 12 obligated to provide a note on options?
 13 **A.** I think the note hadn't been drafted at that point, so
 14 whenever you're in private office there's always
 15 a balance between getting a note quickly and getting
 16 a good note, and you need to give people a little bit of
 17 time to write it and then, as you can see, we requested
 18 that it was cleared through a number of different
 19 people. If you ask for something immediately, it won't
 20 be as high quality as if you give people a couple of
 21 days to put something together.
 22 **Q.** But a further three to four days elapsed, and then he
 23 would read that note over the weekend, and then we would
 24 be in another week?
 25 **A.** Yes, although this was off the back of a conversation
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1 the 25th, it doesn't appear as if indeed there were any
 2 emails or any notes to the Prime Minister between 14 and
 3 24 February concerning this fatal viral epidemic. Why
 4 was that?
 5 **A.** I don't know for sure, I mean, the Prime Minister was on
 6 leave for a part of that time. If there had been
 7 anything that was urgent and the Cabinet Office or the
 8 Department of Health had flagged to us as critical that
 9 we inform the Prime Minister, in my job as a private
 10 secretary I would of course have forwarded it on to the
 11 Prime Minister, but I don't think I received anything in
 12 that period flagged in that way.
 13 **Q.** COBR had been sitting regularly, SAGE, SPI-M, SPI-B, all
 14 these scientific committees, you were asking everyone
 15 for plans, the penny had dropped.
 16 **A.** So I was asking for plans on the 23rd, sort of
 17 immediately after seeing what had happened in Italy, and
 18 that was I believe for a morning discussion with the
 19 Prime Minister the next day.
 20 **Q.** Do you accept that, given that this was a crisis -- or
 21 we were on the edge of a crisis -- concerning a fatal
 22 viral pandemic, that the lack of communication with the
 23 Prime Minister for those ten days, a bare month before
 24 the lockdown, was in hindsight rather unfortunate?
 25 **A.** I don't know what conversations he had with other
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1 here on the 25th with all of the key people, as far as
 2 I can see, in terms of the attendance of the meeting.
 3 So the PM would have had an update in this meeting.
 4 I think the sense would have been: he needs a further
 5 update, which is why the note was requested, and then
 6 a few days elapsed before that further update is
 7 provided.
 8 **Q.** But that 25 February was, I think, a Monday or
 9 a Tuesday?
 10 **A.** I can't remember.
 11 **Q.** He wasn't going to get the note til Friday, he was going
 12 to review it over the weekend, we would then be
 13 a further week further forward, and of course that was
 14 the beginning of March.
 15 **A.** My understanding is that there were -- I can't remember
 16 exactly the dates, but there were further calls the
 17 following weekend.
 18 **Q.** On 28 February a briefing was circulated by the CCS, the
 19 Civil Contingencies Secretariat. INQ000146569, page 1.
 20 You can see in the top right-hand corner you wrote:
 21 "[Prime Minister], this is a short update paper on
 22 domestic plans on coronavirus. Attached is the full
 23 action plan ..."
 24 Was that action plan what became the action plan of
 25 2 March --
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1 A. Yes.

2 Q. -- contain, delay, mitigate?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. "... Matt [Matt Hancock] wants to publish on Tuesday
5 [and] which COBRA will review Monday."
6 So that's Monday 1 March, or Tuesday 2 March
7 I suppose?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. If you could scroll back out, you can see that the CCS
10 say in the first paragraph:
11 "Covid-19 looks increasingly likely to become
12 a global pandemic, although this is not yet certain."
13 In paragraph 2:
14 "Based on existing assumptions for a severe pandemic
15 flu outbreak, in a reasonable worst case scenario about
16 half of the UK's population would become ill ... and up
17 to 520,000 people could die ... [but this] advice is to
18 use these numbers for planning -- they are not
19 a prediction ..."
20 But the COBR meeting the week before had shown that
21 the reasonable worst-case scenario was increasingly
22 likely to be the scenario, was it not?

23 A. Increasingly likely but not -- not probable, is my
24 reading of those minutes. But again, this note was
25 agreed between CCS, the Chief Medical Officer and the

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1 at the time.

2 Q. Following the meeting, INQ000136750, you wrote around
3 with an update on coronavirus at the bottom of the page,
4 the CMO and the Health Secretary gave a general update.
5 And then over the page:
6 "We need a major ramp-up of [other government
7 department] activity on domestic preparedness ...
8 "The PM agreed with ... an action plan ..."
9 So the primary decision made by the Prime Minister
10 was to agree the action plan, that document, "contain,
11 delay", which was then published the following week;
12 correct?

13 A. It looks like it, yes.

14 Q. And he agreed the need for early emergency legislation?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Where was the decision-making in relation to control
17 measures, or quarantining, or self-isolation, or
18 analysis of the spread of the virus, or how far it had
19 extended into the United Kingdom?

20 A. As I said earlier, I think we should have been looking
21 at those issues at that time, and we weren't.

22 Q. You kept a notebook with your thoughts and your
23 recollections, but in large part a contemporaneous note
24 of some of the meetings that you attended.
25 INQ000146636, page 21. At the top of that page it

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1 Chief Scientific Adviser and the Health Secretary, so
2 this was their joint assessment of the situation, and
3 I think you need to ask them on the precise wording of
4 this.

5 Q. If there was no realistic control, if the virus was
6 coming and it had a 1% fatality rate, infection fatality
7 rate, these numbers weren't just numbers for planning;
8 the reasonable worst-case scenario envisaged these
9 numbers of deaths, did they not?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. In paragraph 3, the CCS said:
12 "Preparations are well underway, COBR is meeting
13 regularly and our best scientists are advising on when
14 this step ... will be needed."
15 Paragraphs 7 and 9. 7:
16 "Our strategy is to protect lives, maintain normal
17 life, limit economic and social impacts ... we are
18 preparing for the reasonable worst case scenario."
19 And 9:
20 "We need to strike a balance between taking
21 precautionary steps and overreacting."
22 To what extent did you think that the appeal to or
23 the appeal against overreacting was a valid point to
24 make on that day, 28 February?

25 A. In hindsight, a lot less valid than it might have seemed

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1 says:
2 "PM [meeting] 28/"
3 Which we think is 28 February?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. "PM -- what's the strategy.
6 "- when are we going to take big decisions, of what
7 evidence.
8 "- biggest damage done by overreaction."
9 So in that meeting, Mr Shafi, was the primary
10 concern, "This virus is coming, it's going to kill and
11 maim" or "We mustn't overreact"?

12 A. A bit of both.

13 Q. If you could scroll back out, there was a reference --
14 there is a reference to the Prime Minister being
15 "sceptical that our interventions will do anything".
16 I think it's probably on the next page. No, it's on
17 this page. If you could scroll in the bottom fifth,
18 thank you:
19 "PM -- sceptical that our interventions will do
20 anything."
21 What was that a reference to?

22 A. I can't remember for sure. I think this was perhaps
23 more around the hand washing campaign and the other
24 sort of very non-intrusive measures that had been put in
25 place and promoted at that time.

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1 Q. So where is the debate that further more stringent
2 measures might be required?
3 A. Again, it's not here.
4 Q. On 4 March, INQ000056158, a paper was circulated called
5 "Potential impact of behavioural and social
6 interventions on [an] ... epidemic". So during this
7 week, so the week that the coronavirus action paper was
8 published, the action plan, on the Monday or
9 the Tuesday, the 2nd or the 3rd, this potential impact
10 of social interventions paper was published. And did
11 this -- who did this come from?

12 A. I'm not sure. It looks at the bottom like it's from the
13 SAGE secretariat, but it may have gone from them, from
14 the Department of Health, or the Cabinet Office.
15 I don't know.
16 Q. Now, in paragraph 2, there are these words:
17 "SAGE has not provided a recommendation of which
18 interventions or package of interventions ...
19 that Government may choose to apply. Any decision must
20 consider the impacts these interventions may have on
21 society, on individuals, the workforce and businesses,
22 and the operation of Government and public services."

23 Were you surprised in Number 10, as the private
24 secretary with responsibility for this area, that
25 the government had not received a recommendation from
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1 to a lockdown now two weeks prior, there was no debate,
2 was there, at this stage about the possible need for
3 lockdown?

4 A. So I think if you look a little bit further on this in
5 document, social distancing is one of the measures
6 that's looked at.

7 Q. Yes, page 5.

8 A. What's -- on reading this document in the last week,
9 what I found interesting was social distancing there
10 just implies a 25% reduction in workforce contacts.
11 Non-essential retail is not closed, there's no
12 stay-at-home measure. So even social distancing, as
13 referenced here, I don't think was the lockdown that we
14 ended up with on 23 March. I think this is more akin to
15 the 16 March measure that we took.

16 Q. There was no debate of a mandatory style stay-at-home
17 order of whole-society isolation?

18 A. I think this goes back to our earlier conversation
19 about: was there a debate about mitigation versus
20 suppression? And because the approach in the UK was
21 very much along one of those tracks, it was judged that
22 the actions taken in other countries weren't appropriate
23 in the UK.

24 Q. Was there debate in Downing Street, perhaps with the CMO
25 and CSA, about the need for timing, so that if the

1 SAGE as to what you should do?

2 (Pause)

3 A. I think at this point -- what date was this again,
4 sorry?

5 Q. This is 4 March.

6 A. 4 March. I think at this point everybody had a sense of
7 the sort of three lead interventions of individual
8 isolation, household isolation and shielding, cocooning,
9 being sort of the lead measures that we would consider.
10 So I think there was a broad sense from the Department
11 of Health that was the recommended approach.

12 So I think it's correct that, you know, SAGE can't
13 consider the impacts on society, on individuals, the
14 workforce and business; that's for government to provide
15 an overall assessment on, because there are lots and
16 lots of different harms of all these measures. Some of
17 them are Covid harms, and some of them are non-Covid.

18 Q. That's the second part of the equation, if you like,
19 what might be the social or economic consequences of
20 an intervention. But SAGE was not even recommending
21 an epidemiological intervention, was it?

22 A. Erm ... I think at this point it was trying to
23 articulate what the impact of each intervention would be
24 rather than say "Do this one over that one".

25 Q. Even though the Lombardy area of Italy had been subject
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1 government were to apply the most stringent measures,
2 because they can't easily be undone and they can have
3 significant consequences, they shouldn't be applied too
4 soon?

5 A. There was very significant debate about that, yes.

6 Q. And to what extent was there push-back, if any, from
7 Number 10, saying, "Well, if the NHS is going to be
8 overrun, if the deaths and the illnesses are on this
9 magnitude, the reasonable worst-case scenario magnitude,
10 we can't wait"?

11 A. So, again I think that goes back to the overall
12 strategy. In a mitigate scenario, timing becomes really
13 important because you do want to time it along with
14 a peak. In a suppress scenario -- and if you look at
15 the debates in the autumn and the sort of reflections of
16 the Chief Scientific Adviser that it's always better to
17 go early, that was not the advice in the spring, but
18 I think that was a lesson that was learnt over the --
19 over the course of the year.

20 Q. Your notebook of a meeting on 11 March at a pre-briefing
21 says, or records the Prime Minister as saying, "People
22 won't sustain a long period of seclusion, every week of
23 seclusion will damage people, we need to delay seclusion
24 to align with peak".

25 A. Yes.

- 1 **Q.** So by September it was realised that to save lives, to
2 prevent collapse, you need to go and you need to go
3 early?
4 **A.** Yes.
5 **Q.** In that first ten days of March, as part of this
6 doctrinal debate about mitigation and suppression, time
7 was spent arguing about whether or not going early would
8 be an effective measure.
9 **A.** I don't think that was a debate. I think that was --
10 **Q.** It was just assumed?
11 **A.** -- that was assumed, that was the plan.
12 **Q.** All right.
13 Analysis began to emerge from 9 March that the NHS
14 would not be able to manage the level of demand;
15 correct?
16 **A.** Yes.
17 **Q.** And I think you received a note from the DHSC on
18 9 March, INQ000146571. Those two charts at the bottom
19 of the page -- on the basis of 81% infected, with no
20 mitigation -- showed that the number of people normally
21 requiring a hospital bed or intensive care massively
22 exceeded capacity.
23 **A.** Yes.
24 **Q.** Was any more needed to raise the alarm?
25 **A.** In hindsight, no.

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- 1 would be excessively -- it would be exceeded. Slides
2 were given to the Prime Minister showing how, even if
3 all the current measures which were contemplated were
4 imposed, there would still be a massive shortfall of
5 hundreds of thousands of beds; yes?
6 **A.** Yes.
7 **Q.** And then on Friday 13 March there was
8 a Prime Ministerial meeting. The Prime Minister wanted
9 to see scientists out there developing an action plan,
10 "get it going this weekend", this is from your note of
11 that meeting, and there was still a debate about herd
12 immunity, wasn't there?
13 **A.** Yes.
14 **Q.** On that Friday night, there was a meeting between
15 Mr Cummings, Mr Warner, Mr Glassborow, yourself and
16 Helen MacNamara --
17 **A.** Yes.
18 **Q.** -- correct? And that is the meeting at which
19 Mr Cummings puts up his whiteboard, INQ000196060, which
20 says:
21 "To stop the NHS collapse, we will probably have to
22 'lockdown'.
23 If we could scroll in, we'll remind ourselves,
24 number 2:
25 "Must avoid NHS collapse [and] collapse is

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- 1 **Q.** But did the government pull the alarm cord on 9 March?
2 **A.** It did not.
3 **Q.** You yourself said in an email following this chart,
4 following this document:
5 "Should we put this into COBR for Thursday? It's
6 frightening that even if we pull all levers we are still
7 overwhelmed."
8 **A.** Yes.
9 **Q.** So you knew, and you told others, that given the death
10 rate, given the hospitalisation rate, whatever you did,
11 the system would be overwhelmed on the current plan for
12 mitigation and for the limited measures which were being
13 debated?
14 **A.** Yes, I think this was the time at which I was becoming
15 increasingly concerned about the approach that we were
16 taking. It's then another thing, as a relatively junior
17 official, to question the entire approach that we've
18 been taking, and so this was a thing that I continued to
19 think about and debate with others in Number 10 over the
20 next coming days, ahead of the whiteboard strategy
21 meeting on the 13th.
22 **Q.** There was a meeting in Downing Street with Lord Stevens
23 of the NHS on 12 March --
24 **A.** Yes.
25 **Q.** -- where this issue about demand was debated and how it

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- 1 non-linear. If happens, not 1% but 2% [will] die
2 in [reasonable case] ..."
3 It's meant to be reasonable worst-case scenario,
4 but:
5 "... [reasonable case worst].
6 "3. To stop NHS collapse, we will probably have to
7 'lockdown'.
8 This led to a meeting on Saturday 14 March attended
9 by the Prime Minister, the Chief Scientific Adviser, the
10 CMO and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and
11 there was a debate, was there not, about what needed to
12 be done?
13 **A.** So this didn't actually lead to that meeting because
14 that meeting had already been in the diary --
15 **Q.** Ah, right.
16 **A.** -- before we had this. Because this session was very
17 late at night on the 13th. The meeting with all the
18 other ministers was on the 14th. So we had a debate
19 about whether to scrap that meeting and then have
20 a private internal conversation with the Prime Minister
21 first, or go ahead with that meeting and then do
22 an internal session. So we decided, given the plans
23 were already in place for that discussion, to proceed
24 with that conversation on the morning of the 14th, but
25 that wasn't a direct consequence of the meeting on the

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1 13th.

2 **Q.** After the meeting, you itemised a list of things to be
3 done?

4 **A.** Yes.

5 **Q.** INQ000136751. You can see at the bottom of the page:
6 "We require a cross-Government signed-off package on
7 shielding the vulnerable and elderly by Wednesday
8 lunchtime ..."

9 You need more information about who the vulnerable
10 groups are, you need advice, the Prime Minister wanted
11 advice on what we do on mass gatherings.

12 Mass gatherings had not yet been prohibited, had
13 they?

14 **A.** No.

15 **Q.** "How we could implement further social distancing ...
16 "The near-finalised approach on household isolation
17 for announcement by Monday ..."

18 Despite the meeting with Mr Cummings on Friday
19 night, and despite the recognition that the NHS would
20 be overwhelmed if there was to be no lockdown, the
21 government at this meeting on Saturday 14 March did not
22 decide to impose a lockdown, did it?

23 **A.** No.

24 **Q.** In your notebook, INQ000146636, at page 64, your
25 notebook shows that one of the matters being discussed

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1 Ben Warner?

2 **A.** Yeah.

3 **Q.** "... need plan to lock down London on Saturday."
4 And then this:
5 "MG."
6 Who is that?

7 **A.** Michael Gove.

8 **Q.** "... why not tomorrow?"
9 Over the page, at the top of the page, the next
10 page:
11 "[Dom Cummings] -- tell the media today -- SAGE for
12 the ..."
13 Work, week?

14 **A.** SAGE thinks we're further than we thought.

15 **Q.** Oh, "further"?

16 **A.** It's a new situation, accelerating through the plan,
17 where this is going over the next seven days.

18 **Q.** "Gove: Go now!"
19 Exclamation mark, underlined. He said it with some
20 degree of force, did he not?

21 **A.** He did.

22 **Q.** But the meeting did not decide that there should be
23 a lockdown, let alone for London, and what was imposed
24 the following week was a further ratcheting up of
25 the social distancing mitigation measures?

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1 was the possibility of planning -- or the need to plan
2 for a lockdown in London, because London was ahead of
3 the epidemiological curve, was it not?

4 **A.** I can't -- oh, yeah, right at the bottom. Yes.

5 **Q.** So probably about a third of the way up the page, or
6 a quarter of the way up the page.

7 **A.** Yeah.

8 **Q.** "... need to do in next 72 hours to avoid NHS lockdown."
9 Who is that?

10 **A.** That's Dom.

11 **Q.** "Matt [Hancock] -- explain plan into Sunday.
12 "... everyone should stop unnecessary social
13 activity."
14 So they're at odds as to what should be done.
15 PM Johnson, "PMJ"?

16 **A.** Sorry, that's "PM" and a squiggle, just to --

17 **Q.** Oh, it's just a squiggle.

18 **A.** -- to mark ...

19 **Q.** "... Government must define vulnerable. We are on war
20 footing now. We need detail of what mean ..."

21 **A.** "... what mean by social distancing."

22 **Q.** "... what mean by social distancing."
23 Then if you could scroll back out. So if you could
24 go back one page, I was just going to read out the
25 bottom of the page.

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1 **A.** So if you look back at the whiteboard, that wasn't
2 necessarily saying "Immediately on Monday move to
3 the 23 March position", it was to say: we need to bring
4 in all of the measures we have been discussing ASAP, and
5 then lockdown probably within a week. And ministers
6 obviously wanted to impose the minimum amount of
7 restrictions consistent with getting the virus under
8 control, because all of the restrictions have horrible
9 effects too.

10 I think the advice from SAGE, from 16 to 18 March,
11 was that the measures including the school closures, if
12 properly implemented, should be enough and I think
13 ministers probably took -- were hoping that the measures
14 from the 16th to the 18th would be enough, and ...

15 **Q.** In the event they were not?

16 **A.** In the end, they decided they couldn't take the risk
17 that they were not. I think we don't actually know for
18 sure because there was a lot of behavioural change at
19 the time, and I think the issue was: by the time we
20 worked out whether they would be enough or not, it would
21 have been too late, because we'd only have lagging
22 indicators, sort of hospital admissions and deaths, so
23 we wouldn't know if we'd done enough until it was too
24 late.

25 **Q.** The precautionary principle?

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- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. But during the course of the week there was a debate
3 about the need to plan for a London lockdown?
- 4 A. Yeah.
- 5 Q. There was an agreement that an announcement would be
6 made between the Prime Minister and the Mayor of London?
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. But that press conference was called off, was it not?
- 9 A. It was.
- 10 Q. It became apparent that even if a lockdown were called
11 for, the arrangements for shielding were not yet
12 sufficiently developed?
- 13 A. They weren't on that week of the 15th, no.
- 14 Q. By the end of that week, the Prime Minister was still
15 taking the view, was he not, that the measures
16 announced, if properly implemented, would be enough?
- 17 A. I don't think that was the Prime Minister. I think that
18 was the scientific advice that he was getting.
- 19 Q. What was the Prime Minister's view?
- 20 A. I don't think he'd have his own independent view of the
21 impact of the measures. I think he -- that was ... at
22 every stage I think he was hopeful that each measure
23 would be effective, and if you read the minutes of SAGE
24 through that week, they don't say that the measures of
25 16 March are not enough.

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- 1 with a lockdown in terms of --
- 2 Q. There was a --
- 3 A. -- non-Covid health, sort of people -- deprivation,
4 education, all of these sort of incredibly important
5 issues, alongside the incredibly important issues of
6 protecting people from Covid.
- 7 Q. And the no less important issue of death and harm?
- 8 A. Yes, and I think -- I can't remember exactly when the
9 Chief Medical Officer started to sort of categorise it,
10 but he has quite a clear way of sort of demonstrating
11 how death and harm can be caused through lots of
12 different routes, of which direct Covid deaths is just
13 one of those routes that you need to worry about.
- 14 Q. On 19 and 20 March, the Prime Minister met the
15 Chancellor of the Exchequer on at least two occasions.
16 Perhaps they were meetings or phone calls, but ...
- 17 A. Probably. I don't have the full record.
- 18 Q. Could we have INQ000146636, please. This is your diary,
19 your notebook, at page 92, halfway down the page we can
20 see "CX bilat". Is that a reference to a bilateral
21 meeting between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of
22 the Exchequer?
- 23 A. It is, yes.
- 24 Q. In quotes:
- 25 "... 'we're killing the patient to tackle

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- 1 Q. The Prime Minister actively resisted, did he not,
2 a decision to impose a lockdown? He didn't want
3 a lockdown?
- 4 A. He definitely didn't want a lockdown, no.
- 5 Q. And even though the evidence was mounting that the NHS
6 would be overwhelmed, it's what you had been debating
7 for a week or ten days, against hope -- or in hope
8 against expectation, perhaps -- it was thought these
9 measures, the measures of 16 March, would do the trick,
10 they would suffice?
- 11 A. That was the advice that the Prime Minister was getting
12 from the scientific community, if the measures were
13 properly implemented, and the "if" is the key element
14 there, and through the course of that week we got
15 increasing amounts of data on the level of reduction in
16 social contact, for instance, and the realisation that
17 the measures weren't enough, because there wasn't
18 sufficient population change to be sure that we would
19 bring R below 1.
- 20 Q. The Prime Minister didn't want a lockdown because he
21 believed, at least in part, that the consequences would
22 be so damaging that, given that large numbers of people
23 would die anyway, there was no point?
- 24 A. I don't recognise that. I think he was extremely
25 concerned about the other harms that would be caused

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- 1 the tumour'.
- 2 "- large ppl ..."
- 3 Numbers of people?
- 4 A. Yeah.
- 5 Q. "... who will die -- why are we destroying [everything]
6 for people who will die anyway soon."
- 7 A. I think that says "economy". Sorry, it's my own
8 handwriting.
- 9 Q. Sorry, "[destroy] the economy for people who will die
10 anyway soon."
- 11 Mr Shafi, who said those words?
- 12 A. I can't say for sure. I think it was the former
13 Prime Minister.
- 14 Q. And people in hospital, the elderly or the infirm or the
15 ill, were described as "bed blockers"?
- 16 A. I think that was a term that was also widely used in
17 DHSC and the NHS of people who didn't need to be in
18 hospital.
- 19 Q. The Prime Minister did not decide to proceed with
20 a London-specific lockdown; the press conference, as
21 you've said, was cancelled; and there matters remained
22 until over the weekend he became concerned,
23 the Prime Minister became concerned by reports of
24 continued social mixing.
- 25 A. No, so I think he didn't proceed with the London

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1 lockdown. Again, lockdown at that point wasn't
 2 necessarily like the stay-at-home message that we ended
 3 up with on the 23rd. There were two reasons why I think
 4 he didn't go for the London measures. The first was:
 5 would there be confusion between London and the rest of
 6 the country? And the second was: the following day the
 7 Treasury was preparing an exceptional support package
 8 for the economy, and it was felt that it was better to
 9 go nationally rather than regionally, and also to
 10 announce the economic package that we were providing to
 11 businesses and people at the same time as closing down
 12 hospitality, clubs, bars, restaurants. And so I think
 13 that was done before the weekend.

14 **Q.** In your statement, you accept that it's reasonable to
 15 ask whether, knowing what the government knew at the
 16 time, the full lockdown could or should have been
 17 announced ahead of 23 March. And you agree, do you not,
 18 that there were very real -- as is obvious --
 19 difficulties faced by the government? The costs of the
 20 lockdown were of course enormous, and understood to be
 21 so; there was a genuine scientific debate about whether
 22 the measures of 16 March would suffice; and SAGE had
 23 itself not called for, not called clearly for,
 24 a lockdown.

25 But why, Mr Shafi, were the insights,
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1 a lockdown or] ... overreaction ... it is possible to
 2 see how this collective mindset emerged."

3 **A.** I think I'm referring there to the mindset that the only
 4 approach was mitigation rather than more draconian
 5 measures, and that wasn't really challenged in February
 6 in the way that I think, in hindsight, it ought to have
 7 been.

8 **Q.** Now just some final questions, please.

9 In relation to care homes, the issue of care homes
 10 and the care home sector and the impact on the
 11 care sector is for another day and another module, but
 12 could you just please tell us: to what degree was
 13 Number 10 involved in the discussions about discharge
 14 plans from the hospital sector to the care sector and on
 15 concerns that may have been raised at the time about the
 16 impact? Was it something that was the focus of specific
 17 debate in Number 10, or was this a DHSC/COBR issue?

18 **A.** So I -- as of sort of the second half, second third of
 19 March, my responsibilities were split out across
 20 a number of people. So I wasn't looking at the
 21 care homes issue post, I think, sort of 20 March.
 22 Before then, I believe it was raised in the meeting with
 23 Simon Stevens on 12 March, but very much in the sense of
 24 we needed to have generous discharge packages to allow
 25 people to move from hospital into care homes. The
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1 the understanding of that week, or maybe the week
 2 before, the week of 2 March onwards -- that control had
 3 been lost, that there would be a massive effect on the
 4 NHS, that nothing short of a lockdown would suffice --
 5 why was that understanding, that insight not understood
 6 earlier?

7 **A.** I think I understood it. I think a lot -- quite a few
 8 people understood it. It took it a while to get through
 9 the system.

10 **Q.** You referred to a collective mindset. What did you mean
 11 by that?

12 **A.** Could you ... could you give a bit more context to --

13 **Q.** Yes, of course. Paragraph 99 of your statement:
 14 "... it is possible to see how this collective
 15 mindset emerged."
 16 This is in the context of:
 17 "... I am sure Ministers across the whole of
 18 Government would have wanted to spend more [time] ...
 19 stress-testing implementation plans ... ramping up
 20 testing capabilities ... preparing more detailed
 21 plans ..."
 22 The action plan was published.
 23 "... it [just was] felt that the ... tools that the
 24 Government had developed would suffice. The scientific
 25 advice did not demur ... Given the [consequences of
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1 question of the risk of infections going from hospitals
 2 to care homes wasn't really discussed at that meeting.

3 **Q.** Then -- and I'm conscious of the time and also that this
 4 is an issue which, of course, has been put and will
 5 continue to be put to other witnesses -- the
 6 consideration of the circuit breaker in September 2020.
 7 Your own notes describe the Eat Out to Help Out
 8 scheme, in the words of somebody else, as "Eat out to
 9 help out the virus". I think the Chief Medical Officer
 10 described the Eat Out to Help Out scheme to you as "Eat
 11 out to help out the virus"; is that right?

12 **A.** That's correct.

13 **Q.** There was obviously a high level of concern in
 14 government at the beginning of September as to the rise
 15 in the infection rate?

16 **A.** Yes.

17 **Q.** And a number of documents were prepared, a Covid-19
 18 winter strategy document, there was a meeting on
 19 20 September with the Prime Minister, a further meeting
 20 on 7 October and 8 October, a strategy meeting in
 21 Chequers on 25 October. But in general terms, although
 22 SAGE had recommended positively for more stringent
 23 action to be taken from September onwards, the
 24 Prime Minister resisted implementing the full effect of
 25 what was being suggested; there was a tier system, no
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1 circuit breaker, and then finally a belated lockdown.
 2 Is that a fair summary?
 3 **A.** Yes.
 4 **Q.** The Prime Minister decided that there had to be
 5 a lockdown eventually at the end of October, he received
 6 an advice from the Covid-19 Taskforce dated 28 October
 7 which made plain that the situation had continued to
 8 deteriorate; correct?
 9 **A.** Yes, if that's what the advice says, yeah.
 10 **Q.** But, as your statement recognises, the rise in
 11 infections and the risk to the NHS had in fact followed
 12 more or less the trajectory that the Chief Medical
 13 Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser had warned
 14 about since at least 21 September 2020?
 15 **A.** Yes.
 16 **Q.** And there was a general understanding, was there not,
 17 that local restrictions would be unlikely to work but
 18 were worth trying, but it quickly became apparent that
 19 they weren't working?
 20 **A.** Where do you get the reference that they were unlikely
 21 to work?
 22 **Q.** From the chronology, from the imposition in October of
 23 the tier system and the fact that --
 24 **A.** So, but in September there was a debate about whether
 25 they could work or not. I think the -- what October
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1 the Prime Minister understood the differences -- that is
 2 what is called, I think, a leading question -- did you
 3 ever get the impression that the PM understood
 4 the differences between how lockdowns and social
 5 distancing restrictions impact adults and children?
 6 **A.** I think he did understand that, yes.
 7 **LADY HALLETT:** Right. Well, I have been asked to take
 8 a short break, so I shall just rise for three or
 9 four minutes and we will definitely -- just so those who
 10 are asking questions know, we will definitely finish
 11 by 5.10, and we will complete your evidence this
 12 afternoon.
 13 Thank you.
 14 **(4.33 pm)**
 15 **(A short break)**
 16 **(4.37 pm)**
 17 **LADY HALLETT:** Right, I think it's Ms Gowman. Where is she?
 18 There you are.
 19 **Questions from MS GOWMAN**
 20 **MS GOWMAN:** Thank you, my Lady. I'm here.
 21 **LADY HALLETT:** The usual place.
 22 **MS GOWMAN:** Thank you.
 23 Mr Shafi, I ask questions on behalf of Covid
 24 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru. My questions
 25 centre on the UK Government's engagement with
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1 teaches us is that they didn't work --
 2 **Q.** They didn't work, precisely.
 3 **A.** -- to the effect that they should do, but that doesn't
 4 mean that they couldn't have been made to work in
 5 September.
 6 **Q.** But they were allowed to continue not working for the
 7 whole of October until the lockdown decision was made at
 8 the end?
 9 **A.** Yes.
 10 **MR KEITH:** Thank you very much.
 11 My Lady, there are a significant number of Rule 10
 12 questions. I think there is one question which we
 13 indicated I would ask. May I put that question, with
 14 your permission?
 15 In your statement, you say that one of the things
 16 that struck you was that how in the end
 17 the Prime Minister was often the only person in
 18 a position to balance the health, economic and other
 19 dimensions of pandemic decisions. You recall that I put
 20 to you that segment from the SAGE minutes, or at least
 21 the segment from COBR where SAGE openly recognised that
 22 over and above the epidemiological issues there are
 23 the health, economic and other dimensions of pandemic
 24 decisions.
 25 Did you ever get the impression that
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1 the devolved administrations, and in particular
 2 the Welsh Government.
 3 At paragraph 95 onwards of your statement, you
 4 discuss the Coronavirus Bill, and at paragraph 97 you
 5 state that the Prime Minister expressed that "it was
 6 important the Devolved Administrations were fully bound
 7 in with this", this being the Coronavirus Bill.
 8 What engagement had there been with the devolved
 9 administrations in respect of drafting and approval of
 10 the Bill?
 11 **A.** I don't know, because I think that would have largely
 12 been led out of either the Department of Health or
 13 the CCS. I wasn't that involved in that, sorry.
 14 **Q.** It may be that you can assist with the next question.
 15 Why do you think it was so important for the
 16 Prime Minister that the devolved administrations were
 17 fully bound in the approach to the Coronavirus Bill?
 18 **A.** I think ... you probably need to ask him about the
 19 specifics. If I was guessing, I think there were two --
 20 two reasons. The first is that there were some very
 21 contentious and exceptional measures in this, and so
 22 I think it was important to have as common an approach
 23 as possible on -- in terms of, sort of, like, the
 24 political handling. And secondly, he very much wanted
 25 as much as possible to have a single UK approach through
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1 the pandemic.

2 **Q.** By "contentious measures", do you perceive that
3 the Prime Minister felt that the devolved
4 administrations, if not buying into the united front,
5 may have seen the Bill as an attempt to water down their
6 own respective powers?

7 **A.** I don't think that was the angle that he was coming at,
8 but again I think you'd need to check with him.

9 **Q.** Can we pull up exhibit number INQ000146574, please.
10 This is a Covid-19 emergency legislation advice note
11 dated 9 March which discusses the Coronavirus Bill, and
12 if we turn to page number 5, we see the Prime Minister's
13 comments on the advice note. We can see comment
14 number 1 states:
15 "Make sure ...
16 Then in capitals:
17 "... STURGEON [and] DAs [which I take to mean
18 devolved administrations] stay locked in."
19 As far as you're aware, was there a concern held by
20 the Prime Minister that the devolved administrations
21 would not stay locked in?

22 **A.** What date was this again?

23 **Q.** So 9 March, as I understand it.

24 **A.** I think the implication of that comment is that, yes, he
25 was concerned. I think a reading of some of the COBR
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1 leading on the draft legislation, but it would have been
2 in either of those two bodies, and they're both copied
3 in on this email.

4 **Q.** Moving on to the next and final area of questioning,
5 this relates to the UK Government's engagement with
6 devolved administrations, in particular
7 the Welsh Government, more generally as the pandemic
8 progressed.
9 What was the nature of the communication and
10 co-ordination between the UK Government, in particular
11 the Prime Minister, and the devolved administrations,
12 particularly the Welsh Government?

13 **A.** Erm, I think he ... I don't know the full extent of his
14 conversations, because I know he spoke to people,
15 the First Ministers of the devolved administrations
16 regularly. I wasn't the lead responsible official for
17 that. He would certainly have engaged with them at COBR
18 meetings where he and they were present, and
19 Michael Gove, as the Chancellor of the Duchy of
20 Lancaster, was also responsible for a significant amount
21 of engagement with the devolved administrations.

22 **Q.** Just unpicking that a little bit, if I may, who would
23 have been the person responsible for arranging
24 the Prime Minister's diary in respect of engagements
25 with the First Ministers of the other devolved
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1 discussions around that time also -- around issues like
2 mass gatherings, there was a slightly different emphasis
3 from different parts of the UK on the approach there.
4 So I think that might have been in his mind.

5 **Q.** With that in mind, what steps were taken to ensure that
6 the devolved administrations were bound in with the
7 approach, as far as you're aware?

8 **A.** I don't know. I think my involvement in this was to
9 feed that back to the team, who I assume spoke to their
10 counterparts in the four nations, and obviously this was
11 something that was continually discussed at COBRs.

12 **Q.** If we can pull up INQ000146570, this is an email dated
13 10 March 2020 that you sent indicating that
14 the Prime Minister agreed with the proposed approach,
15 ie the Coronavirus Bill, and had commented:
16 "We must make sure that the DAs are closely bound in
17 on this."
18 And at the bottom of that email we can see that you
19 state:
20 "I'm sure that both of these are already in hand but
21 good to reiterate those messages."
22 Who did you think was taking forward those actions?

23 **A.** Again, I think it would be some combination of
24 the Cabinet Office and the Department of Health.
25 I can't remember exactly what was responsible for
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1 administrations?

2 **A.** I don't know, sorry.

3 **Q.** And insofar as the meetings are concerned, you've said
4 in response to my question that there were regular
5 meetings between the Prime Minister and the
6 First Ministers for the devolved administrations; are
7 you aware that certainly Mark Drakeford raised concerns
8 that there was in fact an absence of regular meetings
9 between the Prime Minister and the First Ministers for
10 the devolved administrations?

11 **A.** So, as I said, I assumed there would be. I'm not sure
12 exactly how many meetings there were. I wasn't aware of
13 that comment, but if that's something that the
14 First Minister felt, then that's an important point.

15 **Q.** And you assumed that there would have been because
16 that's something that should have happened?

17 **A.** I think, both through Covid and other means, politicians
18 are talking all the time.

19 **Q.** And similarly you've referred to COBR, but you also said
20 in your evidence earlier that those COBR meetings became
21 less frequent as the pandemic progressed; is that fair?

22 **A.** That's fair.

23 **Q.** And so as a mechanism for there to be dialogue between
24 the UK Government and the devolved administrations, that
25 was also reduced as the pandemic went on?
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- 1 **A.** Erm, there were other fora set up, including the sort of
2 meetings with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
3 to have that engagement. Those fora didn't really exist
4 in the early days. So I don't think there was
5 a lessening of overall engagement, it was just through
6 slightly different avenues.
- 7 **Q.** The meetings with Mr Gove, the Chancellor, were those
8 meetings that were specifically requested by the
9 devolved administrations or prompted by
10 the UK Government?
- 11 **A.** I wasn't involved in arranging those meetings, so ...
- 12 **LADY HALLETT:** I think you've moved beyond the permitted
13 questioning, Ms Gowman, I think probably with this
14 witness. Maybe these questions are better directed to
15 another witness.
- 16 **MS GOWMAN:** Yes, certainly. My Lady, I only asked them in
17 response to --
- 18 **MR KEITH:** I appreciate that.
- 19 **MS GOWMAN:** -- the witness's answer, but I appreciate that
20 it does go beyond the scope of my original questions.
21 It may be, Mr Shafi, that you can't assist with my
22 final question, but insofar as intergovernmental
23 communication is concerned, between central government
24 and the devolved administrations, do you think that
25 there are any lessons that can be learnt moving forward?

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- 1 was that many young people were being hospitalised with
2 coronavirus or suffered from Long Covid."
- 3 Then on 25 October 2020, at a meeting with
4 the Prime Minister, you noted in your diary, "Long Covid
5 is important," at page 4. We don't need to go to that.
- 6 The first question is: why was the risk of
7 a significant number of young people suffering from
8 Long Covid not confirmed as a reasonable policy
9 consideration by January 2021, given that
10 the Prime Minister had been advised that it was a policy
11 consideration back in October 2020?
- 12 **A.** I think it was, part of the way that the Chief Medical
13 Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser thought about
14 these issues and sort of the impacts and harms of ...
15 of Long Covid. I certainly knew people who were
16 suffering from it and it was something that I took very
17 seriously. I think it is a matter of record, and
18 I think something that the Inquiry's already revealed,
19 is that the then Prime Minister was more sceptical than
20 most about the existence of Long Covid as a ... as
21 an actual thing.
- 22 **Q.** So does it flow from that that there was a reason why
23 you did not commission advice on Long Covid for
24 the Prime Minister before January 2021 connected to
25 the Prime Minister's scepticism?

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- 1 **A.** I think just stressing the importance of ongoing
2 conversation and discussion, especially on issues where
3 different parts of the UK have the legal right to take
4 different approaches.
- 5 **MS GOWMAN:** Thank you, Mr Shafi. I have no further
6 questions.
7 Thank you, my Lady.
- 8 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you, Ms Gowman.
9 Mr Metzger.
- 10 **Questions from MR METZER KC**
- 11 **MR METZER:** Thank you, my Lady.
12 Mr Shafi, I ask a small and indeed reduced number of
13 questions on behalf of the Long Covid groups.
14 Please can we put up INQ000146628.
15 In the note dated 15 January 2021, you advised
16 the Prime Minister on the choices ahead. I think we
17 can see that at page 2, second paragraph. You referred
18 to the long-term after-effects on younger people, and
19 said you were getting objective clinical advice from
20 Chris Whitty on the extent to which Long Covid is
21 a reasonable policy consideration; yes?
- 22 **A.** That's correct.
- 23 **Q.** Back on 13 October 2020, Sir Patrick had advised
24 the Prime Minister and Cabinet these words:
25 "Another argument against shielding only the elderly

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- 1 **A.** I think I would have expected any advice to come up
2 through the overall Covid Taskforce approach of looking
3 at all of the various issues around measures, and that
4 would have been one part of that consideration. I put
5 a reference to it in this note, largely to sort of try
6 to raise awareness again of the issue, and to try to
7 create space for the Chief Medical Officer to further
8 advise the PM.
- 9 **Q.** Thank you.
10 On 21 Oct -- sorry, can we put up a different
11 INQ000072835, please.
12 Chris Whitty had prepared a written note on
13 Long Covid, which was discussed in an email exchange on
14 18 February 2021 between you and the DHSC, suggesting
15 that Mr Whitty thought a verbal update was better and
16 would try to raise it in a meeting in the next weeks or
17 add it to the agenda. We can see that from that
18 exchange.
19 Can you help, please: why was the Prime Minister not
20 provided the written note before this exchange?
- 21 **A.** So a written note was drafted, as you can see at the end
22 of that email, it was drafted I think by the Office of
23 the CMO rather than the CMO himself. I think
24 the judgement that both the CMO and I reached was that
25 because we were aware that this was something that

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1 the PM was sceptical about, the method of communication
2 to him might be more powerful if it's a direct
3 conversation with the Chief Medical Officer rather than
4 a note from an anonymous bureaucrat.

5 **Q.** I see. So did Mr Whitty explain why a verbal briefing
6 was better?

7 **A.** I think the PM held the CMO in the highest of regards,
8 and I think for difficult messages or when you're
9 telling somebody something that they might not want to
10 hear, a verbal discussion is sometimes better than
11 a written discussion.

12 **Q.** Right. So you had anticipated that this would not go
13 down well, you and Mr Whitty?

14 **A.** I judged the note as drafted risked getting a reaction
15 from the Prime Minister that wouldn't be helpful.

16 **Q.** Thank you.

17 Last question: do you know why the suggestion that
18 Mr Whitty had of a verbal briefing did not happen?

19 **A.** So I don't know whether it did happen or not. I know
20 that it didn't happen in any of the formal meetings that
21 we had, because I think there's an email from me
22 a little bit later on saying, "We didn't get the chance
23 to have this conversation". But the Prime Minister and
24 the Chief Medical Officer spoke all the time separately
25 without me being there. I don't know whether they

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1 your notebook.

2 So that's INQ000146636, and it's page 18, please.
3 Page 18, please. Thank you very much. Just at the top
4 there, if we could zoom into the top two lines, please.
5 Thank you.

6 This is an entry that I think, giving you some
7 context, Mr Shafi, we can date between 7 February --
8 which is noted on page 12 -- and 28 February, which
9 Mr Keith has already been to with you, on page 21, where
10 he discussed with you the overreaction point. So it's
11 somewhere in February, just to locate you in time.

12 It says, I think:

13 "Trade-off -- short sharp peak good [for] economy."

14 **A.** Yeah.

15 **Q.** "long flat ... good for health system."

16 **A.** Yes.

17 **Q.** Have I got that right?

18 **A.** Yes.

19 **Q.** Thank you.

20 Does this note of a discussion indicate, using
21 the words "trade off", that there was a government view
22 at that stage that the interests of the health system
23 were in some way in opposition to that of the economy?

24 **A.** I can't remember who said this. It's just me jotting
25 down comments made in a meeting. I don't think that was

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1 covered this, and I think that would be something you'd
2 want to ask them, whether that conversation happened.

3 **Q.** Yes. I just want to press you a little bit, because
4 the Prime Minister says in his witness statement
5 he received a note on 1 June 2021 from Mr Whitty on
6 Long Covid, which was -- that note was dated
7 31 May 2021, which appears to be a different note to
8 the one first signed back in February.

9 **A.** Yes, so I left Number 10 in March 2021, so I don't know
10 to what extent there were verbal conversations between
11 then and May/June. I think that's something you'd
12 probably need to pick up with the Chief Medical Officer
13 or the PM.

14 **Q.** Would you agree it looks unlikely that the verbal
15 briefing took place?

16 **A.** I don't know.

17 **MR METZER:** Thank you very much indeed.

18 Thank you, my Lady.

19 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you, Mr Metzger.

20 Ms Morris.

21 Questions from MS MORRIS KC

22 **MS MORRIS:** Thank you, my Lady.

23 Mr Shafi, I ask questions on behalf of the Covid
24 Bereaved Families for Justice UK.

25 I'd like to ask you, please, about another entry in
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1 an overall government view, it was just probably
2 the view of someone just thinking about the issues.

3 **Q.** Would you agree it's a quite binary presentation of
4 those two things, using the words "trade off"?

5 **A.** I mean, the way it's written down, yes. Although
6 I think even when it says "long flat", I think that's
7 the mitigation approach rather than the suppress
8 approach. So even that is sort of contained within what
9 the actual trade-offs were.

10 **Q.** Understood. Was there a sense at this time that there
11 was this presentation of the economy on one side and
12 public health on the other? Was that prevalent within
13 Number 10 discussions?

14 **A.** I don't think so.

15 **Q.** Was there, by contrast, any appreciation for a more
16 nuanced and complex interrelationship between the two,
17 so in particular the reality that without good public
18 health there is no prospects of a strong economy?

19 **A.** I think that became increasingly part of the thinking
20 around March --

21 **Q.** Okay.

22 **A.** -- and into the autumn.

23 **Q.** But before March, so in February, which is when we're
24 looking at --

25 **A.** Yeah.

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1 Q. -- is it more likely, do you think, that there was this
2 kind of binary trade-off mindset?
3 A. No, because I don't think it was seen in that way. If
4 you look at some of the economic impacts from the --
5 estimated economic impacts from Covid in late February,
6 early March, the GDP impact is a lot smaller than what
7 it actually came out to be. I don't think people quite
8 realised what the potential economic impacts would be in
9 February.
10 Q. Was any independent advice sought or obtained by
11 the government in respect of the potential economic
12 aspects of the pandemic and interventions such as
13 lockdown and NPIs?
14 A. There was -- when advice was put to the Prime Minister
15 in March, and COBR, there was always, I believe, some
16 assessment of the economic impact of measures in that --
17 in that advice.
18 Q. Separate from the Treasury advice, was there anything
19 outside Treasury advice?
20 A. I don't know, I think you'd need to ask the Treasury
21 that.
22 MS MORRIS: All right, thank you, that's helpful.
23 Thank you, Mr Shafi.
24 Thank you, my Lady.
25 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much, Ms Morris.

1 Anything further, Mr Keith?
2 MR KEITH: No, thank you, my Lady.
3 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Shafi, I'm
4 very grateful to you. I think you were here this
5 morning, thinking you might be called this morning, so
6 thank you very much for your patience with us.
7 Thank you for all your help.
8 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
9 (The witness withdrew)
10 LADY HALLETT: Right. 10 o'clock tomorrow.
11 MR KEITH: Thank you.
12 (5.00 pm)
13 (The hearing adjourned until 10 am
14 on Tuesday, 31 October 2023)
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