

Novel Coronavirus Outbreak (M) (4)

CABINET OFFICE BRIEFING ROOMS

Novel Coronavirus Outbreak (M) (4)

Meeting on Tuesday, 18th February 2020

Irrelevant & Sensitive

70 Whitehall at 15:00

MINUTES

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
In the CHAIR

The Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
Secretary of State for International Development

Edward Argar MP
Minister of State at the Department of Health
and Social Care

The Rt Hon Stephen Barclay MP
Chief Secretary to Her Majesty's Treasury

Lucy Frazer MP
Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards at the
Department for Education

The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith
Minister of State at the Department for
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Foreign
and Commonwealth Office and the Department
for International Development

Nigel Adams MP
Minister of State for Asia at the Foreign and
Commonwealth Office

James Heappey MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the
Ministry of Defence

The Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP
The Paymaster General at the Cabinet Office

Mims Davies MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the
Department for Work and Pensions

Nadhim Zahawi MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial
Strategy

DIALLED IN

Clare Haughey MSP
Scottish Government

Mark Drakeford AM
First Minister of Wales

Robin Swann MLA
Northern Ireland Assembly

OFFICIALS

Sir Chris Wormald
Permanent Secretary, DHSC

Katharine Hammond
Director, Civil Contingencies Secretariat

Professor Chris Whitty,
Government Chief Medical Officer

Keith Willett
NHS England

Sir Patrick Vallance
Government Chief Scientific Adviser

Stephen Groves
NHS England EPRR

Emma Reed
Director, Department of Health and Social Care

Yvonne Doyle
Director, Public Health England

Jennifer Anderson
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Julia Longbottom
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Charlotte Watts
Department for International Development

Andy Shields
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and
Sport

Gareth Davies
Department for Transport

Emma Moore
Border Force

Jillian Kaye
Ministry for Housing, Community and Local
Government

Major General Charles Stickland
Ministry of Defence

Max Blain
Head of News, Department of Health and Social
Care Communications

Alex Aiken
Director, Government Communications

Name Redacted

Ed Lister

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OFFICIALS DIALLED IN

Dr Catherine Calderwood
Chief Medical Officer (Scotland)

Dr Frank Atherton
Chief Medical Officer (Wales)

Dr Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer (Northern Ireland)

Jonathan McAdams
Northern Ireland Office

SECRETARIAT

Zonia Cavanagh

NR

The Cabinet Office circulated the following papers to inform the Committee's discussion:

1. 2020-02-18 COBR Novel Coronavirus (M)(20)(04) CRIP 11 - FINAL
2. 2020-02-18 COBR Novel Coronavirus (M)(20)(04) Paper_ Collective agreement for COVID19 legislative policy - FINAL

Novel Coronavirus Outbreak

Item 1: Current Situation Update

1. The CHAIR invited the Government Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to update on the global situation and the latest UK risk assessment. The CMO said that the regional epidemic in Hubei province and China more widely was reducing in intensity. However, he said that there was increased risk there as people return to schools and workplaces.
2. Continuing, the CMO updated on the global risk, particularly countries where there was a risk of onward transmission, highlighting Japan and other South Eastern Asian countries. The risk to Japan was primarily from domestic transmission. Both escalation to a global pandemic, and isolation of the majority of cases to China remained realistic possibilities.
3. The CMO said that in the UK there were nine positive cases confirmed, and almost 5,000 tests returned as negative by the NHS. There were eight workplace sites where employees had reported symptoms, along with several cases of self-isolation. A member of the Rural Payments Agency staff was presently aboard the Diamond Princess.
4. The CHAIR invited the Minister of State for Asia at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to update on the plan to repatriate UK nationals from the Diamond Princess cruise ship. THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR ASIA AT THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE said that they had concerns about preparations for a flight that Wednesday, given difficulties determining a landing time with Japan. That the best case scenario would now be a Thursday repatriation, but Friday remained a possibility. That a Friday repatriation would not be acceptable.
5. Continuing, THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR ASIA AT THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE said that:
 - Communications had been opened with British Nationals as to whether they would choose to be repatriated to the UK, given that approximately 60 per cent live in Hong Kong. The intent would then be to quarantine those repatriated, for 14 days, and Arrowe Park has been identified as the quarantine site.
 - There were concerns about protection of Foreign and Commonwealth Office consular staff, noting that other nations had sent teams of infection specialists to repatriate their citizens.
 - There was a possibility for EU nationals, particularly Irish nationals, to join the flight.
 - Japanese authorities had stated that passengers had served a 14 day quarantine on the ship, and would be free to depart for onward travel on disembarkation. The UK government position was that quarantine had not been served at sea. This therefore raised the question of what action should be taken at the border, should these individuals return independently.
 - There were challenges with using NHS staff to support the repatriation and the use of Ministry of Defence aeromedical personnel remained the preferred option. Whilst the Ministry of Defence would have medical staff on the flight, it was not for them to

coordinate the operation on the ship, the preferred option for the screening of passengers was to use specialist contractors.

6. Responding the CHAIR said that previous repatriation flights had worked acceptably in Wuhan, but there remained risks to the operationalisation of this repatriation.
7. In discussion the following points were made:
 - The significance of securing a departure window in advance of boarding the plane.
 - That a manifest of passengers on the Diamond Princess should be shared with Border Force in case individuals decided to make their own way back to the UK.
 - A request for the CMO to provide advice on the appropriate level of isolation for those returning.
 - The need to finalise the plan for managing the arrival of Diamond Princess passengers in the UK, who had not been repatriated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. That the CMO should make the decision on the level of isolation required for these individuals.
 - There remained an existing process whereby a pilot reports the presence of sick passengers aboard, an hour in advance of landing. In that event, Border Force staff would liaise with the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England.
 - The Foreign and Commonwealth Office were attempting to speak with every British National onboard the ship.
8. Summing up the CHAIR said that communications with the ship were complicated.
9. The CHAIR said that there were increases in cases in Japan, and that several national nil returns (for example some African countries, Indonesia) appeared improbable.
10. The CHAIR invited the Secretary of State for International Development to provide updates on the international response. The SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT said that their department had established an international taskforce on COVID-19 and suggested that it would be useful for the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England to join that group. It was also reported that £5 million had been contributed by the UK to the WHO COVID-19 fund. The WHO was seeking to raise a total of £60 million.

Item 2: Legislation

11. The CHAIR said that any Bill would only be employed in a Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS). It was not for this committee to decide whether to legislate.
12. In discussion the CHAIR made the following points:
 - With reference to the two scenarios described by the CMO (containment of the virus in China or global pandemic), the legislation was relevant and applicable to a global pandemic.
 - If the UK Government wanted to be in a position to use the legislation in the event of a global pandemic then it needed to be discussed and moved forward now.

- The legislation should be ready to go through both Houses of Parliament by the time a decision is made whether legislation is required.
13. The CHAIR introduced the Legislative Policy paper and maximalist list of possible provisions, emphasising the significance that any Bill covered all four nations of the UK.
14. In discussion the following points were made:
- The Bill was referred to as 'COVID-19', but there remained a question of whether it should apply more generically to any pandemic.
 - Concern about scope creep based on the provisions presented.
 - The importance of the public being adequately persuaded that such provisions were necessary.
 - That provision with respect to staff ratios and school standards was included in the Bill but required further development.
15. Responding, the CHAIR said that all departments should work at pace if the Bill was to be developed promptly. Policy decisions were imminently required, so that drafting could begin.
16. Summing up the CHAIR urged care in developing legislative positions. He said that they should not be extended beyond core ministerial groups and agencies, and stated that there should be no external engagement without Ministerial consent.

Item 3: Planning for a Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS) – next phase

17. The CHAIR invited the Director of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat to give an update on planning for the RWCS. The DIRECTOR OF THE CIVIL CONTINGENCIES SECRETARIAT said that there was work to be done to create a clear plan of activity (across the UK Government) from the moment of sustained transmission to its estimated peak, which was likely to be a period of three months. That a detailed agenda of decisions and actions required over a period of twelve weeks was required.
18. In discussion, the following points were made:
- The further from central government, the more difficult it would be to create detailed plans, particularly in the social care and voluntary sectors. Therefore information should be shared to undertake proper planning but there remained a risk that some of this information could reach the media.
 - The need for preparatory work with the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector's response would be important.
 - Welsh response structures had been heavily tested recently with flooding and were as ready as they could be.
 - That the Northern Ireland Executive Strategic Civil Contingencies Group meeting on 19 February would discuss the response to a potential pandemic.
 - 38 English Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) had been asked to review their reasonable worst case scenario pandemic influenza plans and report back to the Ministry for