

EVIDENCE OF DOMINIC CUMMINGS, REPLY TO INQUIRY REQUEST, 11/11/22

Sorry for the delay. As I explained I was quite ill and am still not fully recovered but I've done my best over the past few days...

I have had no access to my No10 email account since I left.

The only emails I have are therefore ones sent by/to/CCd from my gmail for one reason or another. (No10 email often dodgy.) I've cut and pasted these without editing BUT in the process of copying some formatting has changed. I haven't tried to alter it back so some look a little odd. There's also a couple of screenshots of official emails I took at the time, to remind myself later. I inquired and was assured that the normal auto deletion process had been turned OFF and my emails over covid period would all be kept. I hope this happened.

Given you're trying to avoid being 'overwhelmed' by documents and that you have looked through my twitter account and blog, I have NOT re-sent things I've posted there unless I think they are very important and I want to double-check you have clocked them.

I particularly recommend that you speak to Imran Shafi, PS to PM on health/NHS. He was in a unique position and in my opinion may have had the single deepest perspective on the No10 response to the covid crisis (at least while I was there). He took huge amounts of written notes including at meetings that were 'informal', you won't easily find in the PM's diary etc. He was trusted and seen as highly able by my political team (and crucial outsiders who came to help) in a way that some officials in No10 were not so we also brought him into lots of things. And he was an official so was in all-official meetings where there were no ministers/spads.

I also particularly recommend you speak to Tom Shinner. He had been an official then left. I called him over weekend of 14-15 March and persuaded him to come to No10. He also will have a unique perspective as he was in many meetings that other No10 staff were not and he was trusted by my team and he organised bringing in many people from outside to plug critical holes. And he worked in the summer on how to fix No10/CABOFF after the disaster. In my opinion he played a crucial role in turning things around March-summer and saved many lives. Me bringing him in was resented by some senior No10/CABOFF officials who knew they would be under extreme scrutiny because of the collapse.

I've added random things I've found in a long section at the end, some in public domain some not.

Since I went through things 18 months ago to give evidence to MPs, I've bought a house and moved lots of things to other places as part of the chaos of a move, changed phones etc. I've got a feeling there are some physical documents I haven't found in London in the last week. But I'm also confident that **all important things I have access to are in this doc and the attachments** and that if things have gone missing they are things like generic Covid dashboard documents of which dozens of people will have them and will be on the official systems.

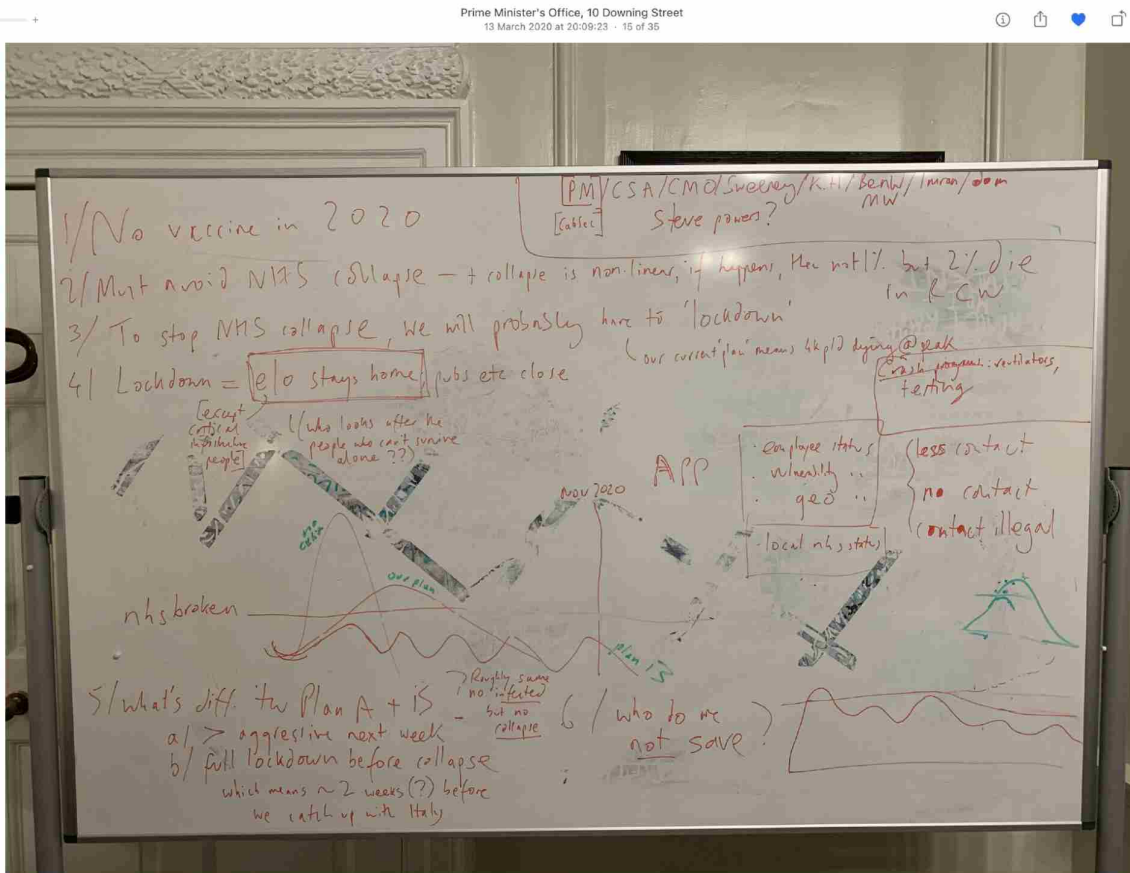
Going through your letter in its order...

Re 3. WhatsApp groups you requested

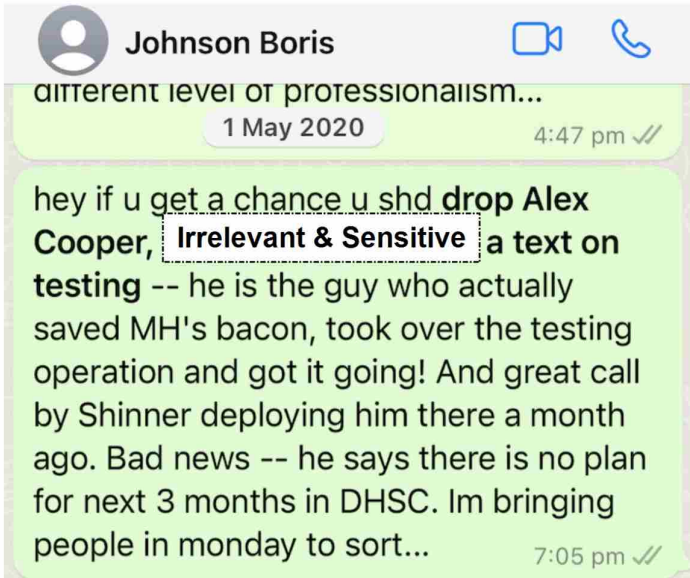
This refers to the screenshot of the whiteboard in the PM's office I scribbled with Ben Warner and Imran on the evening of Fri 13/3, which I posted on the internet and showed pictures of to the Committee.

Connected is the screenshot of the whiteboard from the next day (14th) done by Marc Warner for the crucial meeting with the PM in his office which I also posted on the internet.

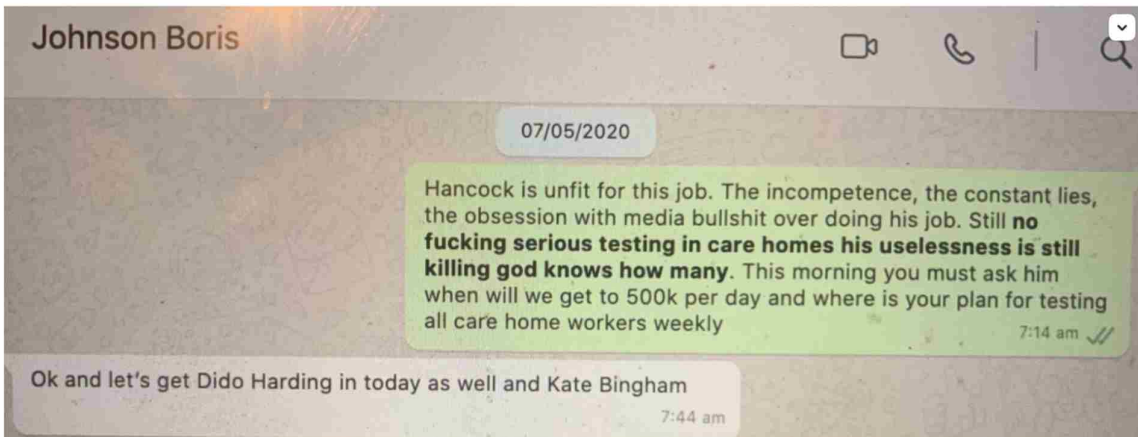
Screenshots of both below, I've left the caption from iPhotos so you can see original timestamp:



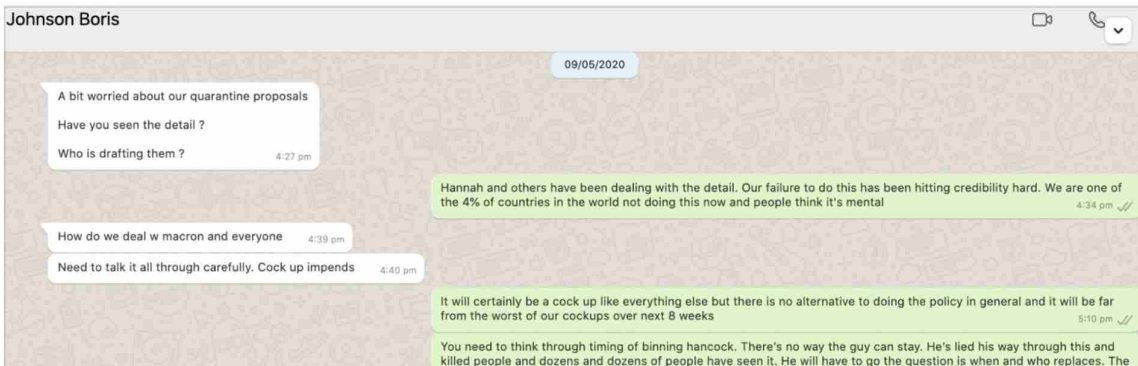
You can see the one above (13/3) against the wall the next day (14/3).






7/5



9/5






 Johnson Boris  

12 Mar 2020

We got big problems coming. CABOFF is terrifyingly shit, no plans, totally behind pace, me and Warners and lee/slacky are having to drive and direct. Mark is out to lunch -- hasn't a scooby what's going on and his own officials know he doesn't. We must announce TODAY -- not next week -- 'if feel ill with cold/flu stay home'. Some CABOFF want delay cos haven't done the work and don't work weekends. We must force the pace today. we are looking at 100-500 thousand deaths between optimistic / pessimistic scenarios. 1918 was 250k for comparison

7:48 am ✓✓

 Johnson Boris  

12 Mar 2020

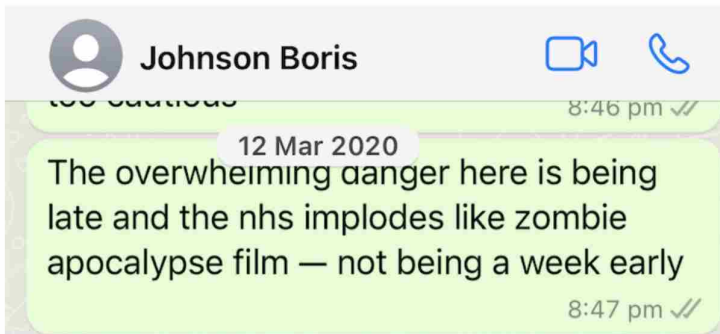
You need to chair daily meetings in the Cabinet room -- not COBRA -- on this from tomorrow. im going to tell the system this

11:04 am ✓✓

NOT with the DAs on the fuckign phone all the time either so people can't tell you the truth

11:04 am ✓✓

Irrelevant & Sensitive



5h IVE ATTACHED FILES WITH EMAIL EXCHANGES BETWEEN ME-GOWERS/HASSABIS WHICH WAS VERY IMPORTANT. BOTH SAID - AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE NOW. Some others pasted below.

Me-gowers 14/3

tim

sorry not been in touch but since i saw you ive been swamped by corona.
would you help us?

the problem is extreme and there are some extreme government problems not suitable for discussion on email.

i dont have any specific role for you but if you could just come to london for 90-120 mins twice per week or be on the end of a phone this would be v useful.

e.g attending SAGE mtngs and listening to the modelling and providing challenge.

we urgently need people like you to help.

we have maybe 2 weeks to make decisions that could make difference between thousands dying/not.

we need to integrate skills like yours with great policy people, operational people etc plus teams to smash barriers to effective action.

if you cd spend 5-10 hours per week for ~16 weeks then we wd be extremely grateful and you cd save lots of lives

sorry for haste of this eemail, im trusting you not to forward and risk mayhem with media

dom

Gowers/me 14/3

Dear Dominic,

I'm ready to help if I can, but I'm ahead of the curve as far as social-distancing measures are concerned, so would very much prefer the end-of-phone option to the appearing-in-person option. (I think and hope that this will soon be standard anyway.)

Incidentally, while my initial reaction was to think that the current UK policy was sensible, I have changed my mind, and I now think that we should move urgently to extreme containment measures. Because of the urgency, and because I think I can express myself better in writing than in conversation, I have dashed off a few pages setting out why I have come to this conclusion. I am happy for you to share them with anyone you want. The arguments are likely to be familiar, but perhaps it helps to have them set out the way I have done it. If they are wrong (which is possible), I would like to know what I'm missing. Also, if there are parts of the document that you find unclear, please let me know and I'll rewrite them.

When you say that we have two weeks to make decisions, my own view (as I explain in the document) is that some major decisions should be made straight away — a two-week delay just multiplies the adverse consequences by a factor of 10-ish.

Because I've written the attached file quickly, I may at some point send an updated/improved version.

Best wishes,

Tim

Me/gowers 15/3

Thanks tim, i basically agree.

We cannot do herd immunity in the crude way media discussing without NHS collapse.

We must avoid NHS collapse at all costs.

We will have to move rapidly to extreme measures to buy time to increase NHS capacity, work on drugs etc.

The only question is how fast to move through levels of extreme action.

Proper social isolation for vulnerable groups will kill many of them -- our advice is starting this now would kill more than it would save -- but of course we must review constantly and try to time for when it will save more of these groups than it kills.

To complicate further London may be 4 weeks ahead of northern Scotland.

I am copying this to a few people working for me -- they are all scientists by background, physics/data science, epidemiology... Ben is no10, Marc is helping NHS with data, tech, dashboards etc but he is also talking to Vallance/Whitty re the science/policy.

It would be great if you could review stuff coming out of SAGE etc for us. Ben will keep you in the loop and you can feed back to him.

You cd Skype etc.

There are clearly many great people in SAGE/government science network but the more of the smartest people we can get looking the better...

d

Gowers/me 15/3

Dear Dominic,

If you could send me details about "our advice is starting this now would kill more than it would save" I'd be very grateful, as I don't at the moment understand how that can be the case. I can explain my reasoning, but probably better to see the advice first, as the reasoning would almost certainly change once I've seen it and properly appreciated all the various factors.

As for reviewing stuff coming out of SAGE, I'm absolutely ready to do that to the best of my ability, so do send on anything you'd like looked at.

Best wishes,

Tim

Me/gowers 16/3

Think overtaken by events.

We announcing new wave of measures in a few hours and telling over 70s etc to prepare for 12 weeks isolation from weekend, get ready now etc.

And general big advance on social distancing for all now, 14 day quarantine for households etc.

London cd be near lockdown in a week.

Singapore has not closed schools and this is one thing we are leaving for near last given disruption to NHS workers etc.

Ben -- please send Tim all stuff from SAGE -- Tim, Vallance is going to make SAGE stuff public, please dont share things publicly yourself outside this process or media chaos, ok?

Gowers/me 16/3

I'm very glad to hear this. The only thing that worries me slightly is what you say about schools. I understand the point you are making, but would it not be a good idea to tell parents (such as me) for whom it is not a significant problem to keep their children at home to do so? That wouldn't catch everyone, but it would reduce the numbers without compromising the NHS etc. But perhaps that's what you're going to say anyway.

Best wishes, Tim

Vallance/Whitty? Or show just the first three paragraphs to someone in government? If some of the scientists play the I'm-an-epidemiologist card, then you should ask the following question:

What is the calculation that shows that it's better to delay countermeasures, and does it take into account when those measures will have to end?

I'd be very surprised if anyone has one — certainly, nothing like it was mentioned at the meeting I attended. If, contrary to expectation, there is some calculation that supposedly justifies delay, then it's critically important that it be properly evaluated, a task I am ready to do at a moment's notice, but that would require someone to set it out for me.

I hear from Demis that someone at the SAGE meeting has tested positive. I hope you are remaining healthy, partly for your sake and partly for the sake of the huge number of people you might be able to spare.

Best wishes,

Tim

5i

Stuff I have is in the groups I've sent you.

E.g me to group, 1/3 re reasonable people asking re Singapore — East Asian experience was NEVER taken seriously enough in Whitehall ('they're not democracies' and similar blindspots).

5j CabSec and Hancock, 'candour, grip, slippery'



Plan: following up/down cycles of more/less extreme social distancing, etc

Critical goal: stop nhs collapse in next 1-2 weeks

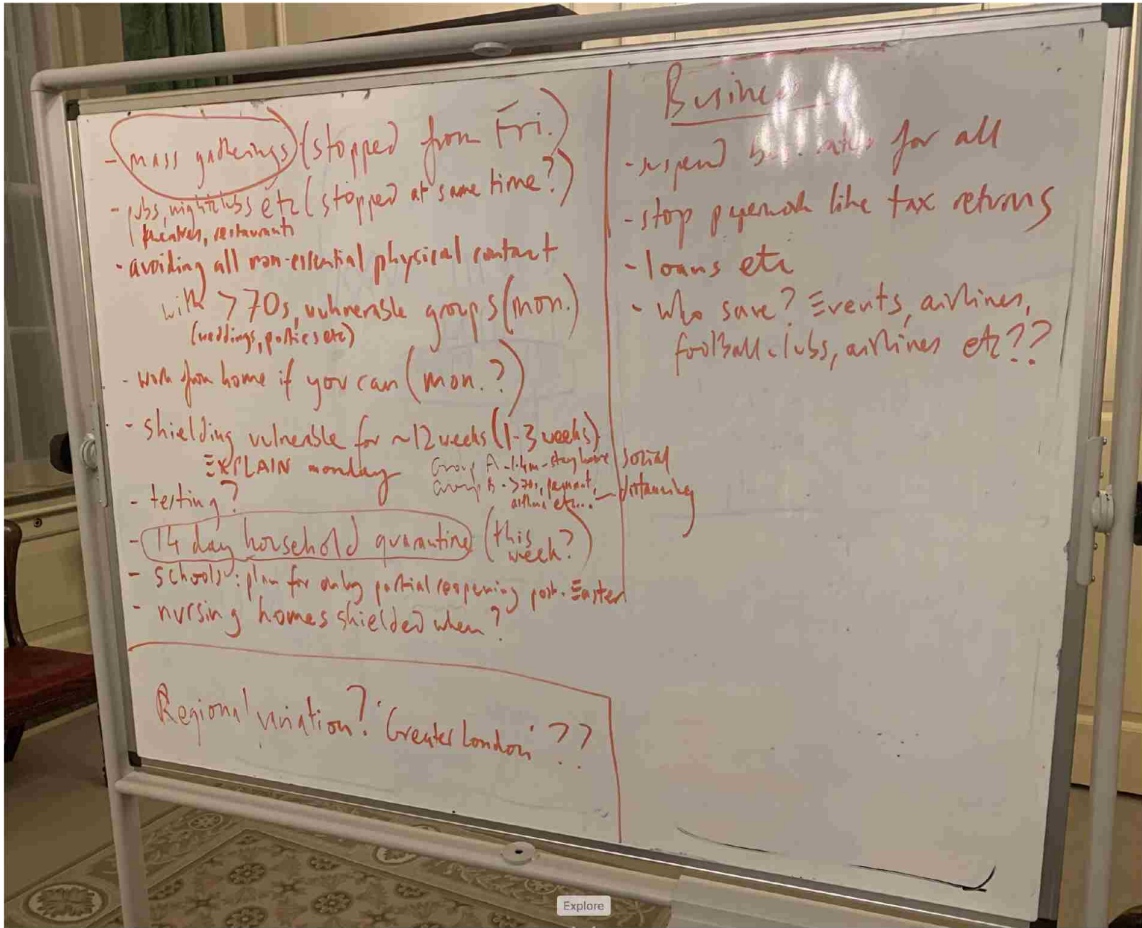
TECH. (beds, ventilators, drug sets)

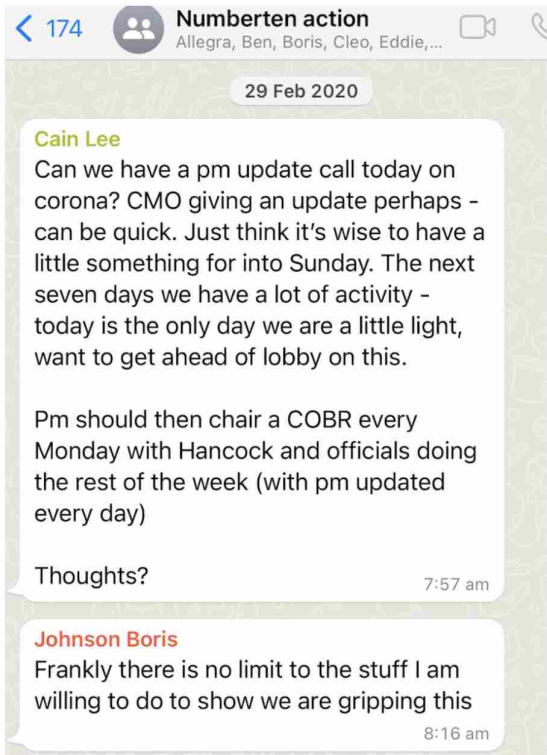
nhs capacity

	Cases	% hospital	Free beds
now	50k	2,500	?
1 week			
2 weeks			
3 weeks			
?	300k	40k	nhs broken ~10k?

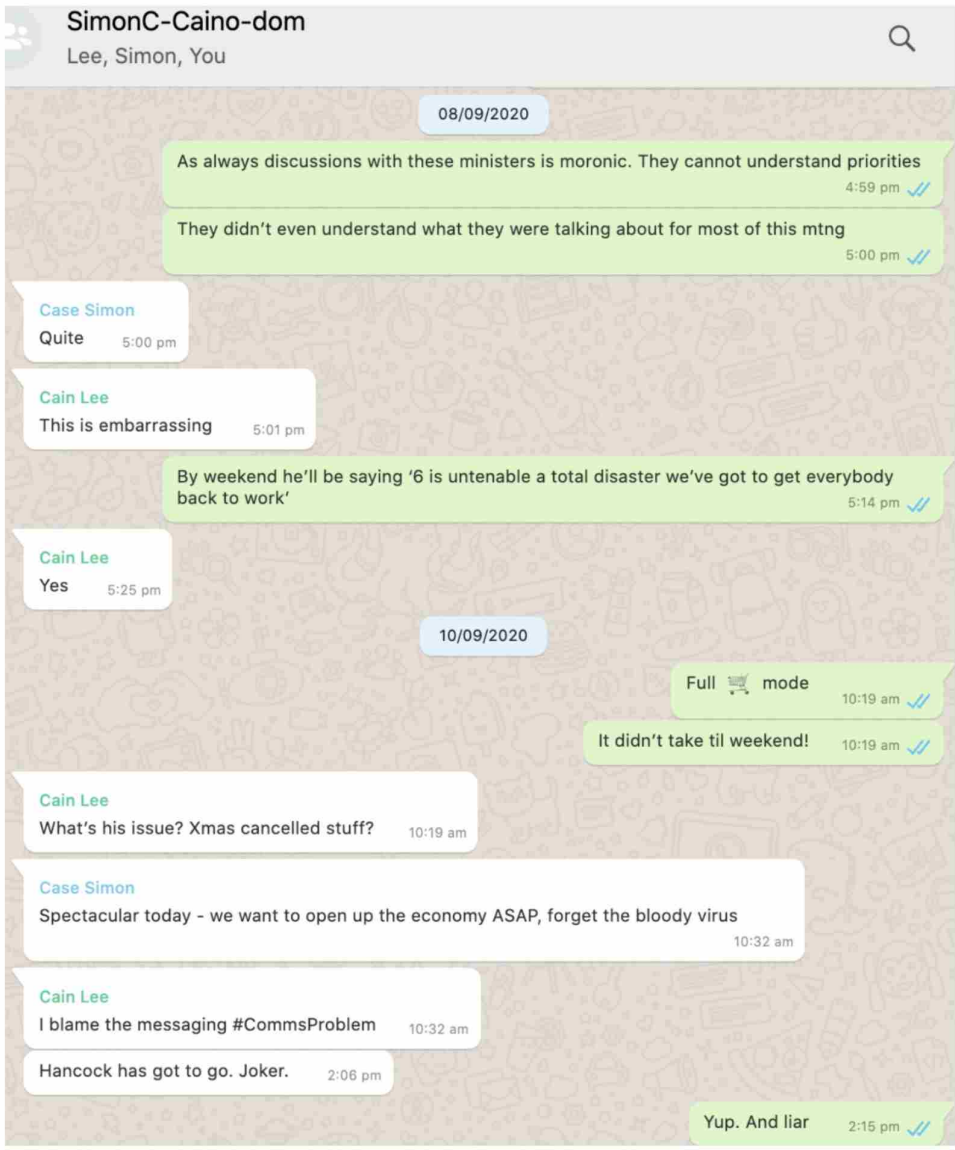
We are moving through levels of defence up to full lockdown to slow spread, reverse growth before nhs is overwhelmed, + give time to research drugs etc... We must prepare to have rolling cycles of more radical action, relaxing, ramp up etc...

Explore

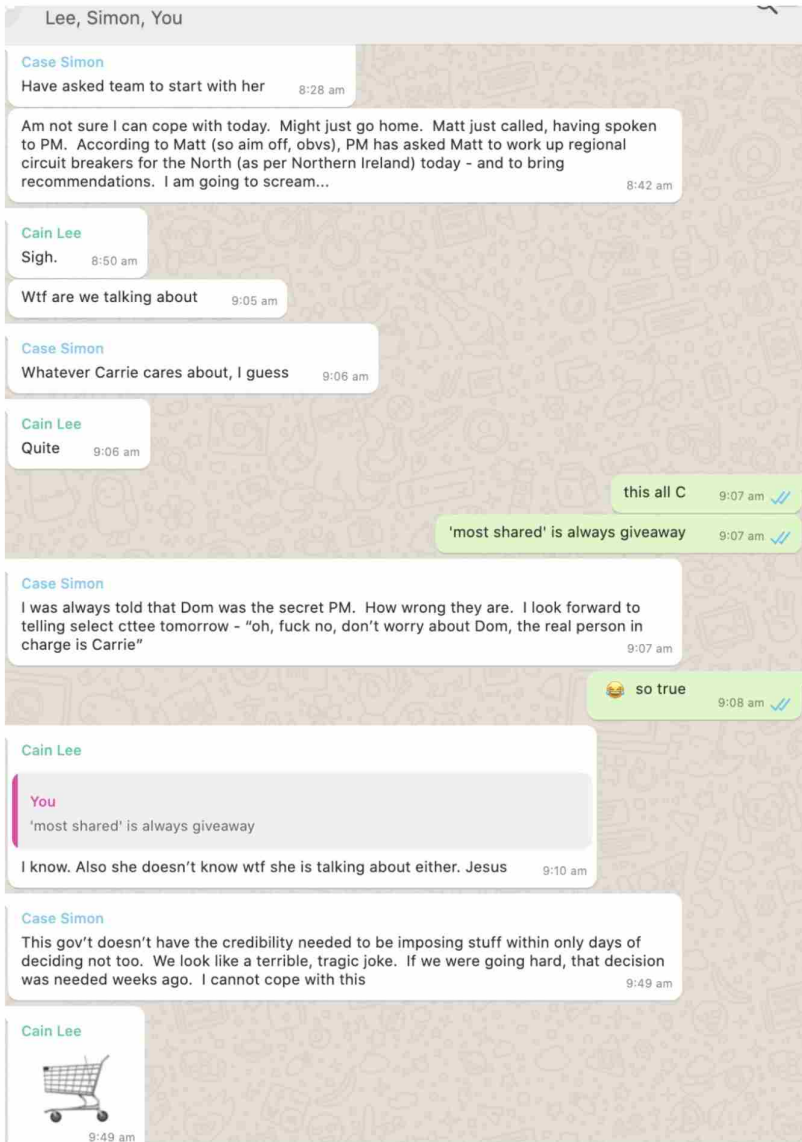




No10 action 15/3



Me/Cain/Case/PM, 10/9



An email I sent on the problems of the No10/CabOff set up that is relevant to the inquiry, 13/7 (it was copied to PM but he never engaged seriously)

From: Dominic Cummings <DCummings@no10.gov.uk> on behalf of Dominic Cummings <DCummings@no10.gov.uk>
Date: Monday, 13 July 2020 at 09:41
To: Simon Case <SCase@no10.gov.uk>, Helen MacNamara <helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>, Tom Shinner <TShinner@no10.gov.uk>, Martin Reynolds <MReynolds@no10.gov.uk>
Cc: Alex Chisholm <alex.chisholm@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>, Munira Mirza <MMirza@no10.gov.uk>, Lee Cain <LCain@no10.gov.uk>
Subject: Low friction hi performance secretariat/no10 etc

My thoughts from many discussions and observation of last year plus talking through with TomS what he's found in all his discussions and concluded – thought wd be useful to summarise what I think for different people whove had different conversations. Many of these elements were

discussed in Jan ironically in context of preparing for serious events but then covid struck. If we'd had something like this, the disaster wd have been much better handled.

Current CABOFF doesn't work for anyone – it's high friction, low trust, and obv many good parts but overall low performance. From PermSecs to lower ranks, nobody I've spoken to across whitehall thinks it works well. And covid shone an unforgiving light on parts including CCS etc.

Plus the PO cannot possibly do all the work that needs to be done viz tracking priorities etc – again as everybody involved has agreed. This has to be done somewhere so the question is where?

A 'normal/reasonable' approach wd be – recreate something like EDS and try to make it at least as good as it used to be then add on something like a PMDU and upgrade for current conditions – data, cloud etc. Then coordinate in usual way between PO/PU/PMDU/EDS...

Problem... Even if all these units have good leadership, friction is built into the system including institutional friction between no10 and CABOFF.

This friction has been very damaging. The PM wants it gone to the max extent possible.

1. PM and PO will move over to CABOFF in August, ready for 1st week of Sep.
2. We will set up a new 'situation centre' / 'seeing room'. An upgraded version of COBR that cd be used for a covid style disaster. COBR and CCS failed in multiple ways (I wont go into all this or why here). Further, other interesting work, including classified war planning I've been briefed on, also concludes that the centre as now set up cannot cope with a serious international incident. It shd be a room where PM, CABSEC, NSA are all close to and can be there in a minute or so. Data feeds from across system. Media incoming. Systems to display complex information, dashboards etc. My view is we shd use this for relatively low level stuff (nutter blows and knives 3 people) so that the people manning it learn and are ready for more serious stuff. It shouldn't sit there waiting for next covid like event. The first version shd be built quite fast, there are some advanced technologies that will take longer to integrate. Tom Drew is looking at this. This is quite a self-contained project though obviously has implications for lots of Whitehall. My view is the room shd be very deliberately 'bare', concrete walls etc – looks more like a tech startup than the current COBR room -- so people feel they can

clear the director/DG cannot solve the problem, then it goes to the Perm Sec and says – this critical leader is failing in our opinion. Hopefully this is resolved. If the permSec cannot/won't – then it is escalated to the CABSEC and No10PermSec... This wd provide a formal mechanism with clear standards to address poor performance on critical priorities.

8. PO stays largely the same. Only major exception is we are adding the new analytical/data science team as a core capability – this is not a 'for Boris' thing, it is a permanent change in the resource available to future PMs. It should not be a spad-only thing as it is now. These job ads are out and we will get this done asap.
9. PU remains an entity – Munira will have mtngs with 'the PU' – but it will be distributed across the room rather than in its own room.

This new system is more complex and requires even better management than the traditional system. It is easy to cockup and create chaos. BUT the prize for making it work is truly a smaller, elite, focused low-friction-high-performance centre.

- It essentially eliminates institutional friction between no10/CABOFF. Turf wars and blame games can't easily happen because everyone is in the same place.
- If there are problems with, say, CAB approval, the person in core secretariat can talk to a spad 10 metres away who can quickly solve or escalate.
- The visible co-heads of this will be official X and Munira, both there. Spads and officials work side by side, jumbled up. Nobody worries re 'can spads tell officials what to do' (as in the press office now).
- Responsibility and authority will be brought together as happens in successful places – now the institutions across Whitehall embody the opposite principle. Dozens can say no and slow things down, almost nobody can say Yes and know it just happens, including even the CABSEC and PM.
- Failure will be visible – hiding will be very hard. If the centre fails on domestic stuff, then it's failing in that room – or with the PM -- and everyone knows it. Now everyone blames everyone else. If spads are the problem, it will be clear to all including other spads.
- Everything will speed up. Now Munira has been here a year and hasn't a clue who to speak to in CABOFF to solve a problem – and neither do people in PO or in the CABOFF itself!
- 'This policy doesn't work' will be spotted earlier in the process and duff ideas weeded out faster.

- It will be able to deploy expert problem-solvers into departments to figure out the real problem.
- It will cut down a constant source of complaints now – that the CABOFF, PU and PO are all constantly asking for too much stuff, often the same overlapping requests etc – that drives departments mad.
- The PM will be able to walk into this room, know who to speak to, know where crucial decisions are made, find out ‘what’s happening on 40 hospitals, 20k police, net0’ etc on a screen on the wall.
- It will help the PM and other senior people see across the whole system. What are true priorities, how are they progressing etc – basic questions that are now invisible will be visible here, literally on the walls.
- It will be much clearer what the CABOFF is NOT doing. More broadly, many things now in CABOFF shd be stopped/handed to others so it is really only doing the things it should and can’t be done better elsewhere. Everybody complains of ‘bloat’ in CABOFF.
- The horrific copy list culture now – which Ive complained about repeatedly to zero effect – will go, replaced by conversations and modern tools.
- By being in one place you force it to stay small and truly elite. The lesson of all attempts at ‘Skunkworks’ style elite projects is the ONLY way to maintain quality is to restrict size in a ruthless way that outside generally regards as ‘extreme’ (and the guy who actually did Skunkworks codified this as a founding principle in the note he wrote).

There are lots of details but this basic concept has been explained to the PM and he likes it. He knows he will be able to talk to frosty and his team on foreign stuff and he can walk into this place on domestic stuff and know who is in charge of what.

TomS and SimonC shd finalise job descriptions for key roles. We shd start hiring processes now – and make them snappy. The official in charge in this room is a DG level job. It needs someone who can argue policy and run a great team and lead project management work. This is a very demanding job. It should be someone who commits to May 2024 and understands it will place extreme demands on life – **if youre looking for work life balance, DO NOT APPLY.**

We shd explain this to the existing people ASAP. Rumours are flying. Sooner the better.

The PM will explain this to the prospective new CABSEC – it's pointless them taking the job if they hate/disagree. If they don't like it, then they wont be CABSEC and we'll get someone else.

Im obviously open to discussing all sorts of details but **Im not open to unravelling the basic principles of this**. We've experienced disaster. The PM has said sort it out. Tom has spent the last month talking to lots of people. We know the core of what we want to do. The PM is happy with this concept and has said 'do it as fast as possible'.

We are still a low performing entity while dealing with next phase of covid and economic horror. We CANNOT sit around having lots of meetings, studies, reviews etc. We need to hire some core people get them in a room and start building this now so that by last week of August this room exists and the bare bones at least are working. We cannot start creating some 'board' and write powerpoint slides for months then have listening exercises and discuss diversity training etc.

So we need a timetable for key actions and crack on...

If we don't then the shambles will continue with disastrous consequences – including collapse of confidence that Whitehall can fix itself.

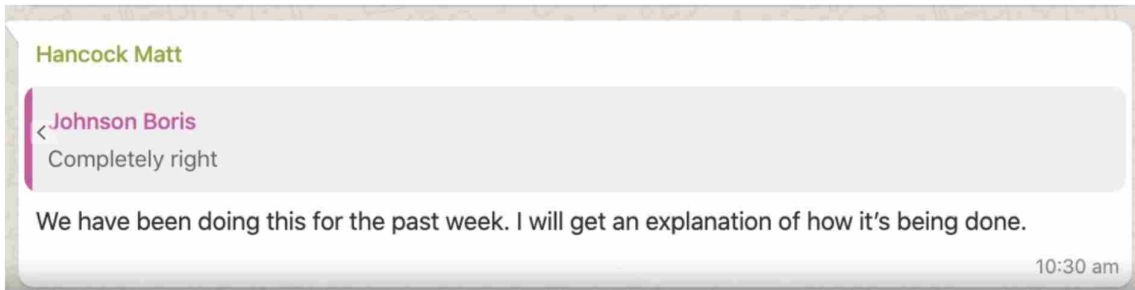
There are also obviously connections to wider ideas of CS reform...

Simon and Tom shd informally scout out possible key people for this now.

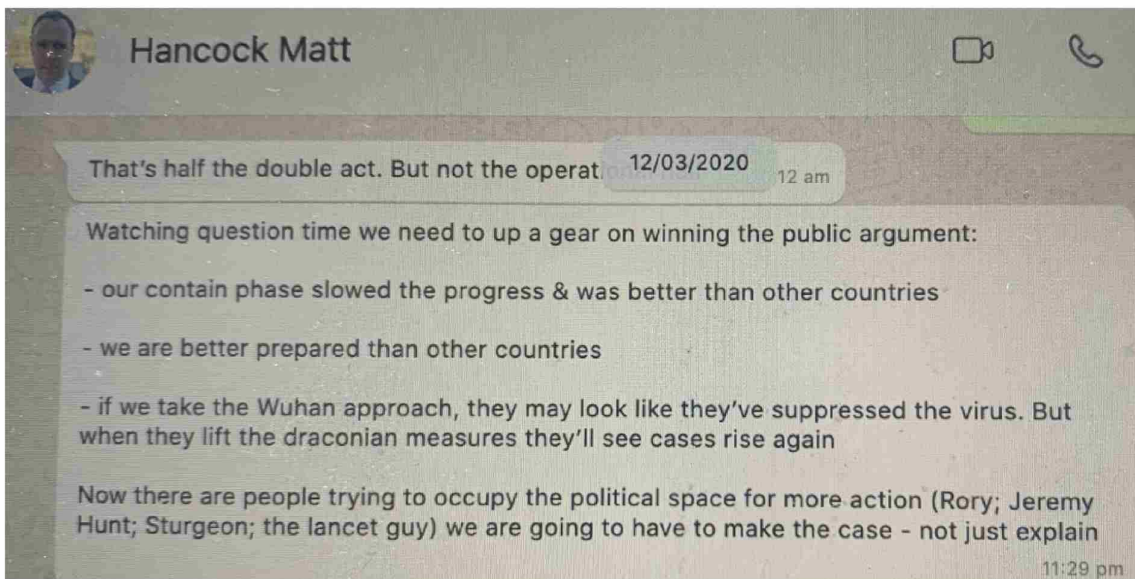
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An email I sent on testing, 6/10 (copied to PM)

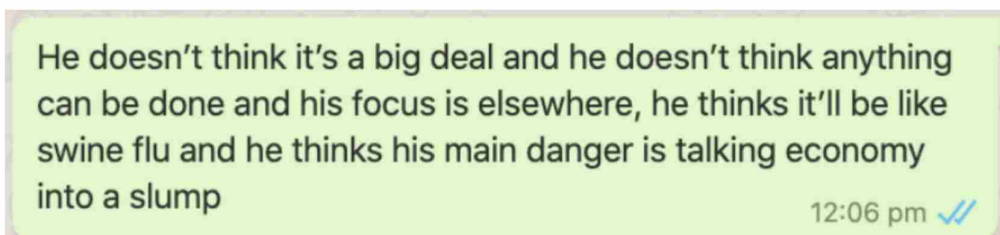
From: Dominic Cummings <DCummings@no10.gov.uk>
Date: Tuesday, 6 October 2020 at 08:58
To: Kate Josephs <kate.josephs@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>, Oliver Munn <oliver.munn@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>
Cc: Imran Shafi <IShafi@no10.gov.uk>, Oliver Ilott <oliver.ilott@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>, James Phillips <JPhillips@no10.gov.uk>, Catherine Cutts <CCutts@no10.gov.uk>, Ben Warner <BWarner@no10.gov.uk>, William Warr <WWarr@no10.gov.uk>, Simon Case <SCase@no10.gov.uk>, "Ridley, Simon - CO (OFF-SEN)" <Simon.ridley@cabinetoffice.gov.uk>, "Webb, Michael -HMT"



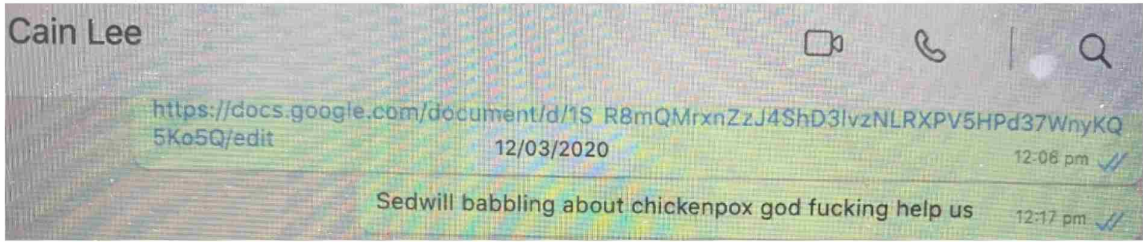
Hancock 12/3 - NB assumption suppression just means it comes back, and we have to keep making 'the case', i.e Plan A.



ME/CAIN, 3/3 summarising my sense of PM



Me/Cain, 12/3 just after 'chickenpox parties' meeting



Marc Warner texted me 7/3: 'The decision to NOT try to stop the epidemic with harsh measures is a huge call... My spidey sense was tingling when I was asking Patrick about it. — Im going to dig around the logic etc...'