

Annex B: Letter from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall
London SW1A 2AS

Our reference: MC2020/14649 October 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I had planned to use Friday's COVID-19 Operations Committee (COVID-O) to discuss an ambitious package of interventions to tackle the disproportionate immediate health impacts (transmission and mortality) from COVID-19 on certain groups. As departments have not been able to meet the required ambition, I have taken the difficult decision to pull this Friday's discussion.

It will not now be possible to announce an ambitious package of interventions in the Minister for Equalities' oral statement, scheduled for next week, in which she will announce publication of her first quarterly report on progress to address the disparities highlighted by the Public Health England review. This is a terrible missed opportunity.

You will remember the hard-hitting data COVID-O discussed on 24 September, and the package of measures we agreed. When the Prime Minister saw the data and the agreed package, he gave the clear steer that the package of measures was not good enough, and urgent work was needed to develop a much more ambitious package of measures that could, truly, turn the tide on and avoid a replication of the disproportionate impacts seen in the first wave. He was clear that he is particularly concerned about improving immediate health outcomes for ethnic minorities.

Following this, Emran Mian, Senior Responsible Officer for Disproportionately Impacted Groups across Whitehall issued a clear commission to all your departments, asking you to consider what more could be done on this issue. I am deeply disappointed in the responses from your departments. Several departments have not responded to the commission; other returns lack ambition. I will remind colleagues of the facts.

- Black and Asian ethnic groups have recorded higher case rates throughout the pandemic, and Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi communities continue to record particularly high death rates.
- Eight out of the ten occupations with the highest death rates among men have higher than average proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) representation.
- Seroprevalence data shows that the larger the household size the greater likelihood of inhabitants testing positive for COVID-19 antibodies.
- 59.2% of those who have died from COVID-19 have been disabled