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CABINET

STATE OF THE UNION

PAPER BY THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER

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The scale of the challenge

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- d. Perceptions of the Government's and the devolved administrations' **response to COVID-19** reflect wider challenges in microcosm. In Scotland, only 27% of people think that the UK Government is putting in place the right measures to protect the UK from COVID-19, but 70% of respondents believe the Scottish Government is putting in place the right measures to protect Scotland. In Wales, these figures are 29% to 65%, and in Northern Ireland 36% to 61%.

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- d. **We need to change perceptions of our response to COVID-19.** There is a real opportunity to outline how being part of the Union has significantly reduced the hardship faced by individuals and businesses across the UK, and will continue to do so. But as outlined in paragraph two, satisfaction with the UK Government response to COVID-19 in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is low. Building on the work of the Treasury, we need to generate further, tangible examples of where we have acted in the interests of citizens across all four nations, and all departments should review their COVID-19 response to identify examples that could be utilised in future communications.

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Conclusions

17. Absent COVID-19, I am firmly of the view that the risk to the Union would be the greatest challenge this Government needed to confront – and unfortunately it is in no way lessened by the parallel demands of the epidemic and our economic recovery. In the lead up to May next year, and throughout this Parliament, protecting and strengthening the Union must be a cornerstone of all that we do. This paper therefore asks Cabinet to agree the need to act, to endorse the strategic approach described in paragraph six, and to take forward the specific actions detailed above and summarised at **Annex A**.