

C-19 Response
End of Phase 1 Review

Helen MacNamara & Martin Reynolds
May 2020

1. Brief

The brief was to do a short piece of work to identify how to best serve the PM during the next phase of the Covid pandemic; in particular how to improve the support provided by No 10 & the Cabinet Office. We spoke to 45+ people over 3 days; predominantly people working closely in No 10 and the CO secretariat but we also had perspective from departments. Work on the question of wider implications for the structure and operation of Government has been commissioned.

2. Summary of findings

2. The consensus about what to fix was deafening; as was the collective desire to make it work better. Those interviewed thought that we weren't using PM meetings well: too many without sufficient time to properly prepare; decisions don't stick; and there were too many people in the room and not enough discipline about who is contributing on what. The current Cabinet Office team is too big to be effective & roles and responsibilities in the CO and No 10 and between the two are not clear. There hasn't been enough grip in the CO; e.g. the failure to set up the analytical function; the various plans not being drawn together and not enough scrutiny or refereeing to create a factual position or following up of actions. And these problems were not surfaced sufficiently. No 10 is strong but not pulling in the same direction and sometimes the system has got flooded with un-prioritised demands. The culture isn't getting the best from people: lots of people think they have been parachuted in to save the day and there have been some poor leadership behaviours. There is a particular issue with junior women being talked over or ignored. There is not enough trust and teamwork.

3. There was agreement that people had worked very hard in extremely challenging circumstances; especially given how many people were off sick at various times. The general view that the substantial position on lockdown wouldn't have been much different given where we started from; but that we should organise ourselves to do better from now on. The most serious issues