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First Minister of Scotland



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T: I&S

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
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23 September 2020

Dear Boris

This week marks a pivotal moment in our collective response to Covid-19 as further measures have been introduced in each part of the UK.

While there are some differences in the approaches that have been taken, it has been helpful to discuss next steps from the perspective of all four nations and identify areas where a broadly consistent approach can be taken. I appreciated our conversation on Monday and the discussion at COBR on Tuesday.

The collective agreement yesterday of the four nations to drive Covid transmission to the lowest possible level and keep it there was particularly welcome. However, I am sure you will agree that we must all now act in a manner that can achieve that objective.

While all four governments announced new restrictions yesterday, there is clearly a significant strand of scientific opinion to the effect that bringing R back below 1 and the virus back under control will require measures beyond those which any of us have so far announced. In my view, there is considerable force in that opinion. It is also the case - and we know this from our experience earlier in the year - that acting quickly and decisively against this virus is essential. In other words, if we believe further action will be required, there is nothing to be gained - and potentially much to be lost, including lives - from delay.

Therefore, I am writing to request further and urgent four nations discussions on three inter-related questions

Firstly, based on our most recent data, what further actions do we consider might be necessary and is it possible to reach early four nations agreement on introducing them?

Second, given that further restrictions will inevitably have an economic impact, what support is required for affected sectors?

And third, if it is not possible to reach a four nations agreement on further restrictions with associated support, what arrangements can be put in place to ensure that devolved administrations are not constrained in making what we judge to be essential public health decisions because we lack the financial flexibility to provide support to affected sectors or individuals?

At present the ability of the Scottish Government, and I believe the other devolved administrations, to take the action we consider is required, for example on hospitality, is curtailed by our lack of levers to deliver that necessary economic support.

I appreciate that there are no easy answers to any of this, but the scale and urgency of the situation we face demands that we work together to find solutions.

The Scottish Government has made suggestions in recent weeks and months about economic support - for example, the extension of furlough, which we hope to hear positive news on tomorrow from the Chancellor - and areas of additional fiscal flexibility for the devolved administrations.

We would be keen to discuss these and any other suggestions further - and in the urgent context of each of us being able to take the decisions necessary to bring Covid back under control as quickly as possible.

I would be grateful to hear from you in very early course. And I would be happy to have a call with you or Michael Gove to discuss in more detail how we might progress these discussions with the urgency they demand.

Personal Data

NICOLA STURGEON