

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE



CABINET SECRETARY

From: Mark Sedwill

Date: 13/03/20

PRIME MINISTER

COVID-19: NEXT PHASE

1. We need to step up a gear; and make sure we have resilient structures in place for managing through the long haul. A pandemic of this scale is no longer solely a health crisis; the challenge will be to get through the next six months without damaging public confidence in the Government and institutions they trust like the NHS.
2. In times like this people need to know that the Government has their back and is competent, compassionate and calm. It's frightening for people and they need reassurance that they are being looked after.
3. You have brilliantly managed public messaging and decision making in this first phase. We need to be more disciplined in supporting you in the next as we shift from a health response to a whole of Government effort. Given the likely strain on the NHS; and that the critical measure (both actual and perceived) is the fewest unnecessary deaths DHSC need to focus on preparing the NHS and Social Care system to respond to the bow wave of cases. Other Government departments now need to lean in: SoS BEIS on support for business; MHCLG on supporting local government; Foreign Sec on coordinating our international response; and CDL on ensuring that the rest of the public sector is ready to deal with the pressure that will be placed on public services.

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4. We need a new rhythm of meetings to support you. This has to be genuinely resilient; both so that the pace can be sustained over many months and to the inevitable absences of key people. Based on what has worked before we should:

a) move to a daily, smaller meeting chaired by you. This would be your 9:00 meeting with a small group of Ministers and key advisers. A similar set up to how we ran XS last autumn. We will hold a pre-meet for this meeting at 8:15am every day of the supporting cast so that at 9am you and your core team of Ministers are able to take decisions on the basis of advice. We will also use part of this meeting to discuss how we communicate your decisions.

b) to prepare for that I will chair a meeting at 3:30pm the day before to go through what decisions we need to make the following day and prepare papers and commission any further work.

c) the scientific advisers will continue to provide their advice into all of these meetings.

5. To support this we will need a series of sub groups so you can task your Ministers to solve specific problems. We don't have to over-prescribe these now but it would be sensible to set up three subgroups to:

- coordinate our international effort (Foreign Sec).
- focus on the business response (Chancellor/SoS BEIS). This would cover engagement with business, gather business intelligence and implementation of the announcements this week. This group would not touch on macroeconomic issues - these would be dealt with between you and the Chancellor and Governor as necessary.
- ensure that public services are ready to deal with the pandemic (CDL). It would make sense for this to be run from COBR, and for it to also pick up immediate tactical issues (such as repatriation) and coordination of planning to manage deaths.

6. SoS DHSC should get all the support and help he needs in managing the NHS response. He will come to the 9am meetings and - as now - the Cabinet Office can provide extra support and resilience to the department as needed.

7. You will also need to decide how you want to involve the Devolved Administrations. Instead of inviting them to your daily 9am meetings, I propose continuing to including them in COBR as public service delivery is where their

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main challenges will be. I would also recommend a regular meeting with First Ministers, either chaired by you or CDL, to update them on the response.

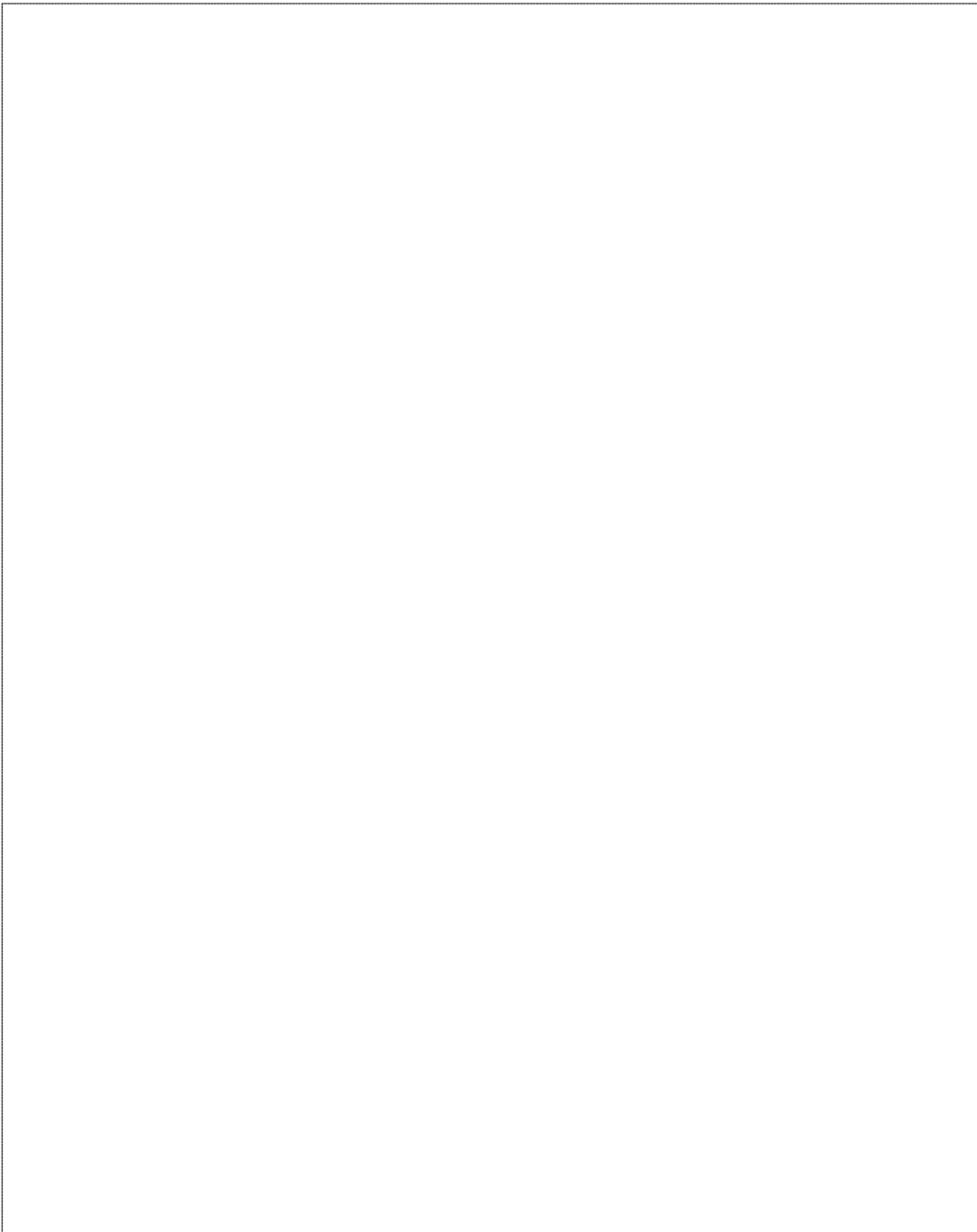
8. The Cabinet Secretariat will make sure these sub groups are coordinated and feed into your 9am. The cast list for your meetings should include these key SoSs along with the CX. If you agree to this new structure we will spend the weekend preparing it and go live on Monday.

9. Beyond coronavirus, we need to ensure that critical government programmes are protected. We are contingency planning for the operation of government and Parliament, including supporting ministers with underlying health conditions. We will continue to run Cabinet - even if remotely - but it is unlikely that all Cabinet Committee business will be able to take place for the duration of this period. We will update you further on this and seek your steers on prioritisation when needed.

MARK SEDWILL

PRIME MINISTER'S COMMENTS:

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cc: Helen MacNamara Ed Lister Cleo Watson
Martin Reynolds Dominic Cummings Lee Cain
Stuart Glassborow Mark Sweeney Ben Gascoigne
Katharine Hammond Imran Shafi