

C-19 Response
End of Phase 1 Review

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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

raised were around decisions taken by Ministers being undone between meetings (e.g. on schools when the CX and SoS DfE had ruled out an option that was presented back) and it being too difficult to call out when an incorrect factual position was presented at the 9:15. The most difficult of these had been discovering that DHSC weren't on top of something as described.

3. Recommendations

Quick Administrative Fixes

1. Need to clearly set out respective roles of No 10 Private Office; Policy Unit; Delivery team; CO secretariat; CO C-19 function; political team (who is responsible for what).
2. Commissions from No 10 should be channelled via Private Office rather than from multiple teams. Work needs to be commissioned with achievable time frames.
4. There needs to be greater discipline around meetings: fewer and better prepared.
 - i) Clarity on purpose: what's the objective of the meeting
 - ii) Better preparation – administrative (good papers where right people have had chance to input; circulated in time) and substantial (work has been tested by team)
 - iii) include experts rather than multiple commentators/synthesizers (“far too many people operating at level one of the detail”). Make conscious choices about how we are spending people's time.
5. Stand down MIGs and use normal Cabinet governance where necessary (but CDL should still carry on having the meetings he's having if they're useful). Re-impose secretariat discipline of meetings being the last resort

(preference for exec decision making; then collective agreement if needed but by correspondence; then meeting if absolutely necessary and only if that meeting can take a decision that sticks).

6. Brigading 18 programmes into Cabinet Secretary's 5 themes with Ministerial oversight and one set of assurance to hold people to account.

Structural changes

7. Set up a new PMDU in No 10 (to replace PMIU in CO). Tom Shinner has been commissioned to provide options. His team is this nascent function.
8. Create NHS futures Unit to cement NHS improvements made during C-19 response and identify the blueprint for change over the rest of the Parliament.
9. Create a C-19 unit in CO with right resources (particularly strategic analytical capability) and leadership.
10. Smaller & more focussed secretariat; clear and confident about its purpose working in support of PM.

Ways of working

11. More listening - and creating space for people to speak. Genuine sense of partnership & collective leadership (invested in each other's success and the success of the team)
12. Direct & straightforward with each other: open about disagreement. Calling out bad behaviours: e.g. crowding the ball - showboating in meetings - belittling others contributions.
13. Get some rest: exhausted people don't take good decisions. No one is too busy to lead well.

4. Next Steps

The quick fixes are being implemented bar the standing down of the MIGs (need to advise PM and agree on replacement to manage Ministerial concerns). Work to set up the PMDU is underway; as is the re-focussing of the secretariat. Work is also underway on the design of the C-19 unit.

Annexes:

- i) Current structures
- ii) Proposed changes

