

COVID-19 (M) (19)

CABINET OFFICE BRIEFING ROOMS

COVID-19 (M) (19)

**Held via teleconference, and
Chaired from the Cabinet Room, 10 Downing Street
On Monday 12 October 2020 at 1030**

Record Of Attendees

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson
Prime Minister
In the CHAIR

Officials present

Simon Case
Cabinet Secretary

Simon Ridley
Cabinet Office

Imran Shafi
No10

Name Redacted
No10

Chris Whitty
Chief Medical Officer

Sir Patrick Vallance
Government Chief Scientific Advisor

Ed Lister
No10 Private office

Natasha Grant
Civil Contingencies Secretariat
Deputy Director

Name Redacted
Civil Contingencies Secretariat
Recorder of Actions

Name Redacted
Civil Contingencies Secretariat
COBR Liaison Officer & CCS Ops

Kate Josephs
Cabinet office

Roger Hargreaves
CCS Director

Attendance via Video Teleconference

The Rt Hon Dominic Raab
First Secretary of State and
Secretary of State for Foreign,
Commonwealth and Development Affairs

The Rt Hon Simon Hart
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma
Secretary of State for Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister, Scotland
Food

Arlene Foster MLA
First Minister, Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak
The Chancellor of the Exchequer,
Her Majesty's Treasury

Mark Drakeford AM
First Minister, Wales

The Rt Hon Michael Gove
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
and Minister for the Cabinet Office

Robert Jenrick
Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities and Local Government

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Michelle O'Neil MLA
Deputy First Minister, Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of
State for Justice

The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Priti Patel
Secretary of State for the Home Office

The Rt Hon Alister Jack
Minister of State for Scotland Office

The Rt Hon George Eustice
Secretary of State for the Environment,
& Rural Affairs

Madeleine Alessandri CMG
Permanent Secretary for the Northern
Ireland Office

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson
Secretary of State for Education

OFFICIALS - Attendance via Video Teleconference

James Slack
PM Official Spokesperson

Name Redacted

Civil Contingencies Secretariat
Taker of the Minutes

Name Redacted

Civil Contingencies Secretariat
Taker of the Minutes

Name Redacted

Civil Contingencies Secretariat

Baroness Dido Harding
Test and Trace

Stephen Mcglade
NI Government SpAd

Name Redacted

PS to PM

Ken Thomson
Director General Scotland

Dr Frank Atherton
Welsh Government

Name Redacted

Scotland Office

Martin Hewitt
NPCC

Neil Couling
DWP

Jack Doyle
No 10

Emma Payne
C19 Taskforce

Claire Pimm
Co Comms

Jane Runeckles
Welsh Government SpAd

Philip Weir
NI SpAd

Michael Mcbride
NI CMO

Reg Kilpatrick
Welsh Government

Name Redacted

Joint Biosecurity Center

Gregor Smith
CMO Scotland

Dr Chris Jones
DCMO Wales

Angela Perfect
Border Force

Mayor Steve Rotherham
Liverpool city Region

Henry Cook
SPaD

David Rogers
Scottish Government

The Cabinet office circulated the following papers to inform the Committee's discussion:

1. 2020-10-12 COBR: COVID-19 CRIP 30 - FINAL
2. 2020-10-12 COBR: Local Covid Alert Levels and Annex - FINAL

COVID-19**Item 1: Situation report**

1. The CHAIR welcomed the committee to the meeting and thanked the METRO MAYOR OF LIVERPOOL CITY REGION for attending. The CHAIR said that the R rate was between 1.2 and 1.5 and pinpointed areas where transmission was of particular concern, including Nottingham and Londonderry/Derry. The CHAIR said a full lockdown would interrupt education again, and would be very economically damaging. The alternate option of letting the disease spread would result in many thousands dying prematurely. A middle-ground course of action, led locally, was required to reduce transmissions of COVID-19 and that its success was critically dependent upon the cooperation of the public. The CHAIR acknowledged the package of support developed by Merseyside to reduce infections within Liverpool.
2. The CHAIR invited the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to give an update. The CMO said that the rates of COVID-19 amongst the over 60 years old, particularly within Merseyside, were going up and would result in increased hospitalisations and deaths. The CMO continued that COVID-19 was displacing other health conditions which was increasing the burden of disease amongst non-COVID-19 conditions. The CMO concluded that implementing baseline 'Tier Three' restrictions would not reduce the R-rate to below 1 and compliance with more stringent measures would be required to successfully reduce the virus.
3. The CHAIR said that he agreed on the importance of driving down the R number and reminded attendees that if previous measures had not been taken, then the situation would be much worse. The CHAIR continued that the overall goal was to drive the R rate below 1 and concluded that doing so was dependent upon strong local leadership.
4. The CHAIR invited the Chancellor of the Exchequer to provide an update on the new economic support packages that would support individual income, businesses, and Local Authorities. The CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER said that the new job support scheme would provide individuals with up to two-thirds of their usual income in the event of lost employment due to COVID-19. Businesses that had to close due to COVID-19 would also be supported with cash grants which will be available at a higher value and at a greater frequency at a maximum of £3,000 per month, paid fortnightly to cover fixed costs. The Barnett implications of this would be calculated for the Devolved Administrations. That funding would also be available to support Local Authorities' capacity to use Test and Trace and for the enforcement of restrictions. He concluded that this package of support would commence on 1 November 2020. It was not possible to mitigate every single negative impact but these packages should cushion them.
5. The CHAIR invited the Head of Test and Trace to comment on the latest position of the test and trace programme. Responding, the HEAD OF TEST AND TRACE said that a locally led and nationally supported system of testing and tracing was required to successfully respond to the COVID-19 crisis. In the previous week 100 local authorities contributed to the Test and Trace programme and that it would go live in Liverpool that day. That local authorities were helping determine the location of testing sites and had been provided support to open new test sites. There had been a slight dip in testing capacity over the preceding few days but that the

last three weeks had seen an increase overall, that laboratories were still on track to reach the goal of 100,000 tests a day by the end of October. She concluded that the committee should analyse testing statistics as an overall trend, as opposed to focusing on day to day statistics, for an accurate picture of testing capacity due to the scale of the logistics operation.

Item 2: Local COVID-19 alert levels

6. Introducing the item the DIRECTOR GENERAL, COVID-19 TASKFORCE said that a simple and consistent approach to infection control must be taken and that interventions would be aligned with three distinct tiers of MEDIUM (Tier One), HIGH (Tier Two) and VERY HIGH (Tier Three). Areas would move into each of these levels depending on an assessment by the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC). This approach was intended to create clear and consistent messaging which would make it easier for people to comply with measures. It would support local and national government by allowing greater access to national Test and Trace data and local intelligence. Overall the aim was to strike the right balance between suppressing the virus and managing the impact on local and regional economies. That the JBC would decide upon which local areas would be categorised as MEDIUM, HIGH or VERY HIGH.
7. Responding, the CMO said that the baseline measures presented in Tier Three were minimum-level interventions and local areas would need to decide which further measures could be implemented to more effectively reduce infection.
8. The CHAIR said that the success of Tier Three interventions hinged upon local and national leadership, as well as clear messaging and enforcement. The CHAIR asked the METRO MAYOR OF LIVERPOOL CITY REGION and the Devolved Administrations for their views on the measures.
9. The METRO MAYOR OF LIVERPOOL CITY REGION said that the overall goal was to reduce infection rates and relieve pressure upon hospital beds. Measures to reduce infection included improved local capacity to use Test and Trace data. Enforcement remained a challenge for local authorities and that simplified legislation would support enforcement. He concluded that the hospitality sector in Liverpool would be impacted greatly by the new measures and asked that further consideration was given to how to support these workers.
10. The FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND said that the previous week's decision by the Scottish Government to implement new restrictions was an attempt to 'get ahead'. Case numbers per 100,000 people in Scotland were lower than other areas of the UK, therefore, it was a preventative approach aimed at avoiding the need for further measures. A strategic framework for measures to tackle COVID-19 was being developed in Scotland and that further analysis of England's tiered approach was required to ensure maximum alignment. Tier Three measures represented the bare minimum required for effective infection control, particularly for the hospitality sector. Decisions regarding the tiers in different parts of the UK needed to remain with each government, and the consequential financial support should still flow, even if England did not agree with the decision. She added that all administrations must be consulted before any major decisions are made. The financial support package was welcomed but did not go far enough and she asked for a discretionary fund to be made available for Devolved Administrations and local authorities to draw on to top up support

when needed. She concluded that the primary constraint on testing capacity in Scotland was testing turnaround time and that every effort should be taken to reduce turnaround times.

11. The FIRST MINISTER OF WALES requested further information on the metrics used to determine the assignment of an area to a specific tier. That this would be essential to understand the rationale for varying tiers especially in the context of Wales proximity to Liverpool which had been determined as Tier Three. He asked if a COBR would be held to discuss 'circuit-breakers', which the SAGE papers had regularly advised on. He was disappointed that travel restrictions from parts of England to Wales remained subject only to guidance as opposed to enforceable restrictions. The ability for cross-border travel between areas of England with high infection levels and Wales left people situated within medium and low areas of infection in Wales susceptible to increased risk.
12. Responding the CHAIR thanked the FIRST MINISTER OF WALES and said that he understood the concerns, but regulations would be challenging to enforce and existing guidance clearly stated that people should not be moving to areas of low-infection.
13. The FIRST MINISTER OF NORTHERN IRELAND said that Londonderry/Derry had the highest rate of incidence in the UK and hospital admissions were rising. The Government of Northern Ireland was currently considering when and where to implement measures. The FIRST MINISTER OF NORTHERN IRELAND asked the following questions:
 - Whether it is possible to reduce R-level below 1 without interfering with education?
 - Whether financial support for testing would only be available for areas which sit within Tier 3?
14. The DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER OF NORTHERN IRELAND said that the situation had deteriorated. That the highest levels of alert could not satisfy what was trying to be achieved, that immediate action was required and that a tiered system would be needed for Northern Ireland in the next few days. The proposed financial support package may not be sufficient enough to support individuals whose employment had been adversely affected by COVID-19. Economic intervention was key to allowing these decisions to be taken, so further consideration would be welcomed.
15. The CHAIR said the process for moving between tiers involved complex decision making and that the Cabinet Office would discuss the conditions and processes for areas to move between the tiers with the Devolved Administrations.
16. The CHAIR said that the issue of circuit breakers and the ability to keep schools open were particular points of interest. The CHAIR continued that success was heavily subject to individuals' behaviour and that the challenge lay in successfully encouraging a tired and frustrated population to absorb new messages.
17. The CMO said that protecting education was best for young generations in both the immediate and long term, and therefore further restrictions would have to be managed to ensure that this was possible. SAGE had performed modeling on this subject with results indicating that primary schools seemed to have less of an impact on transmission.

18. The GCSA, said that the impact of lockdowns, and the impact of doing nothing were known, but the impact of interventions between them was not known. However, while the granularity of effects were not yet known, it was clear a baseline Tier Three approach would not reduce the R rate to an acceptable level. A circuit-breaker approach, a hard period of intervention for a limited time period, such as 3 weeks, was an option that SAGE had considered, it could reduce the R rate to below 1 and would allow for a period of reduced infections to follow. He concluded another positive of circuit breakers was that they could be planned for but that final decisions would be dependent upon strategic aims.
19. The CHAIR said that the financial support on offer was more generous than parts of Europe and the rest of the world and invited the Chancellor of the Exchequer to provide further detail. The CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER said that it was a difficult situation for everybody and that it was important that financial packages of support were long-term focused and economically sustainable, that the new interventions would last at least six months. The support offered by the UK Government compared favorably to other economies and that significant resources had been invested in strengthening the welfare system. The scale of the Government's economic response had been significant and included billions of pounds that had been invested into the Test and Trace system, NHS resilience, supporting the UK transport network, and skills development to help people find new opportunities. Local authorities had received £4 billion of extra funding. Hospitality had been the most impacted sector but had also received the most support, including through the elimination of business rates over the next twelve months, the provision of cash grants, 'Eat out to help out' initiative and reduction of VAT tax.
20. Summing up the CHAIR reaffirmed the need to work with local leaders, as well as the need for tougher measures, increased collaboration, heightened enforcement and transparent communication to ensure the public understood the message, as only changes in behaviour that would stop the spread. The CHAIR said that things would get better as science continued to improve but that challenges would still remain.

ANNEX 1 - ACTIONS

COBR COVID-19 (M) (20) (19)
CABINET OFFICE BRIEFING ROOMS

COVID-19 (M) (20) (19)

**To be held in The Cabinet Room, 10 Downing Street
On Monday 12th October 2020 at 10:30**

ACTIONS

1. The CABINET OFFICE to discuss the conditions and processes for areas to move between the tiers with the Devolved Administrations.
2. SAGE to circulate the modelling of the impacts of education on R.

**12 October 2020
Cabinet Office**