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Minutes

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CABINET

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held by video conference on

TUESDAY 20th July 2021
At 0930 AM

P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

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

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department

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

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

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP
President of COP26

The Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and
Industrial Strategy

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for International Trade, and
President of the Board of Trade, and Minister for
Women and Equalities

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

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and
Local Government

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport

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The Rt Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Alister Jack MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon Simon Hart MP
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
Lord Privy Seal, and Leader of the House of Lords

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and
Sport

The Rt Hon Lord Frost of Allenton CMG
Minister of State for the Cabinet Office

The Rt Hon Amanda Milling MP
Minister without Portfolio (and Conservative Party Chair)

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Stephen Barclay MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

The Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP
Lord President of the Council, and Leader of the House of Commons

The Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Chief Whip)

The Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP
Attorney General

Professor Chris Whitty CB
Chief Medical Officer for England and the UK
(Item 4)

Sir Patrick Vallance
Government Chief Scientific Adviser
(Item 4)

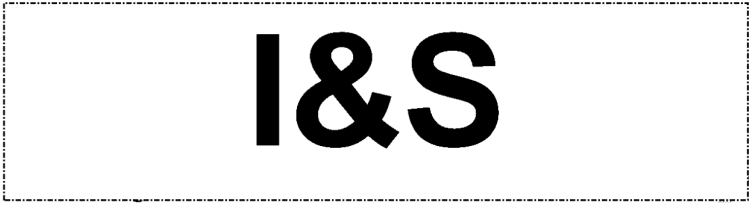
Secretariat

S Case
M Sweeney
J Cowan

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The Cabinet:

- took note.

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Covid-19 Response

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he had given a press conference the previous day which had caused a fluttering in the dovecotes. He did not think that vaccine passports would be needed for pubs, but nightclubs were a different matter as had been clear from the experience of other countries. The country was currently opening up while case rates, hospitalisations and deaths were sadly on the rise, but this was the position the Government had expected to be in when it published its Covid-19 Response - Spring 2021 (Roadmap). The Government had to grip the handlebars while travelling over this bumpy stretch of road. Despite people's upset over increasing numbers of people being asked to self isolate by NHS Test and Trace, this policy was the last line of defence to slow the spread of the disease and it needed to be maintained. The Government would stick with the policy until new arrangements began on 16 August. The Government must show fortitude, continence and discipline.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that case rates were rising and were expected to reach more than 100,000 cases a day in August due to the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant. Hospitalisations and deaths were rising at a lower rate due to the impact of vaccination and NHS modelling currently showed that the system would cope. The Government would keep the pressure on hospitals under close review. It was essential that the NHS was not overwhelmed, so self-isolation should stay in place as the last line of defence against the spread of the virus. The border regime remained necessary to protect against variants. The guidance on opening up the economy was cautious and more young people needed to be encouraged to take the vaccine: there were three million young adults aged between 18 and 30 years of age who had not yet had their first vaccine dose.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- c) many younger people were indifferent, rather than hesitant, to the vaccine. Signalling that vaccination might be required to travel abroad or attend large events should boost numbers coming forward. France had seen a surge in vaccinations after announcing new requirements to access hospitality;

- d) the idea of requiring covid certification to participate in activities was heavy handed and un-British;
- e) children should be vaccinated. The UK had been a world leader in its vaccination programme but was being overtaken by countries like France, Italy, Canada and the US who had all taken the decision to vaccinate those over twelve years of age. It was unclear why the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) were taking so long to come to a decision on whether to immunise at least some groups of children against the virus, particularly given the spread of the virus among those aged 16 and 17; and
- f) if the vaccine was more dangerous to children than the risk of letting the disease run its natural course, then the Government did not have the moral right to insist children were vaccinated for a wider societal benefit. Only an individual could make this choice for themselves. Missing school due to infection was not sufficient reason to administer a vaccine with a potentially greater health risk to an individual child than the illness itself.

Responding, THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER said that he would defend the professional judgement of the JCVI. He, with the other UK Chief Medical Officers, had written to the Chair of the Committee that week asking for them to press ahead faster on the question of vaccinating children. There was a fairly binary choice before them: whether it was safer to vaccinate children or safer to let them be infected. Only if these were equal should public health considerations come into the equation. There was nervousness about pressing ahead if it was unclear that the vaccines were safe for children. The question was even more urgent in Scotland where children would be returning to school sooner.

Summing up, THE PRIME MINISTER said that as cases were going up quickly among the young there was a lot of interest among Cabinet and the public on the question of vaccinating children. It was a huge issue as children would be returning to schools in September with the potential impact of more lost learning. It was unclear why other countries had taken a decision and the UK had not: greater understanding was needed of why other countries had reached the decision to press ahead with vaccination for children, the factors they had taken into account and how they had set out the case to the public. This issue needed to be considered by Ministers soon to decide how to address this potential weakness in the country's armour.

The Cabinet:

- took note.