

ACTION

DOMESTIC PRIORITIES & COVID-19

Date: 23 March 2020

From: Munira Mirza, Patrick Curry

Deadline: 24 March 2020

1. Over the last ten days the response to C-19 has become the Government's over-riding priority. We have been rapidly re-prioritising work across No 10 to support the cross-government effort and to ensure we have resilience across the team. All staff in the Policy Unit have been allocated to work on C-19 projects, acting as 'point people' in No 10 to help support, deliver and scrutinise departments' plans
2. Whitehall Departments are also rapidly re-prioritising their work. This is essential – some parts of the system (e.g. DHSC, DWP, HMRC) are already under severe pressure. We're still working through the detail of what this means for our other priorities – the Cabinet Secretary's team are collating an overview this week. But we think overall our approach should be to:
 - a. Maintain focus on operationally critical decisions (for example, counter-terrorism and prisons capacity). We understand you will shortly be announcing a delay to the Spending Review (and the Integrated Strategic Review) which will free up capacity. You should be aware that the Implementation Period timetable also drives a large volume of business-critical work both for the government and the private sector this year (for example, delivery of exit legislation, the immigration system, a new subsidy control regime, contingency planning and implementation of new arrangements for customs, borders, etc). You've been clear you want to continue with this and it will be factored into the prioritisation.
 - b. Pause or slow down work on new policy development across other priority areas, with a view to returning to these ahead of a Spending Review and Budget in the autumn that would set the tone for the recovery. In the meantime, we'll seek to keep up some momentum on developing the *underlying thinking* on reforms which remain important for the medium-term regardless of C-19 (e.g. infrastructure, R&D, planning reform, skills) – so we can hit the ground running when we return to them.
 - c. Moving to lighter-touch implementation tracking of our most important commitments (e.g. 50k nurses, 40 hospitals, 20k police officers, our transport programme) – so that we can have early sight of issues emerging, while ensuring that the relevant departments are focused on C-19. We should also review these targets, especially for the NHS, as a result of Covid.
3. Beyond this, it's clear that the crisis will have far-reaching implications for our medium-term economic, domestic and international policy programme. Beyond managing and mitigating the impacts of the crisis, we should be looking to ensure the UK emerges from C-19 *stronger rather than weaker*. There will be considerable

Yes

change to how businesses and public services around the world operate and innovate under these stress conditions – we must capture the lessons. To get this work going (while protecting capacity in Whitehall for crisis management), we propose to set up a small team in the Policy Unit to begin scoping a ‘recovery plan’: working through the key questions that the crisis raises for our ~~medium-term~~ economic, domestic and international agenda, and identifying the immediate opportunities to lay the groundwork for this. This would draw on input from John Bew’s Integrated Review team on international policy; the joint No 10/11 economic unit; and from the wider PU domestic team – and provide a focal point for cross-government work. We’ll get you a first round of advice and ideas later this week.

- 4. **Do you have any initial steers on this proposed approach?** We’ll keep you updated.

Personal Data

MUNIRA MIRZA & PATRICK CURRY

PRIME MINISTER'S COMMENTS:

- ① We must definitely HARVEST ideas for how the experience of Corona is going to change Govt and society. Somebody should be trying to capture these NOW - and begin to fabricate a list
- ② I am MOST UNHAPPY about the idea of sending some signed round which had the electoral promises have now been forgotten. On the contrary we must make it our mission to DEFEAT CORONA and to deliver on our promises - the people's promises (AND to disengage Ireland etc.)
- ③ We should be talking full time about recovery and what it means, and in what timescale we are going to deliver. It must be a PEOPLE'S RECOVERY that UNITES and levels up.

Irrelevant & Sensitive

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cc: Mark Sedwill
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