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From the Permanent Secretary

**CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER  
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH**

**STANDING UP THE COVID OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

1. As we move out of the crisis phase on COVID, and focus on avoiding a second peak whilst charting our recovery, the Prime Minister has reflected on how best to govern both our forward strategy and the work required to deliver it. To that end, he has decided to move to a twin committee structure: one chaired by him on the strategy, attended by you (as well as the Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary, and the Business Secretary); another, chaired by CDL and with you providing the core membership, on delivery. This approach is deliberately modelled on the successful XS/XO committee structure the Government has used to oversee Brexit strategy and operations.
2. We are planning a first meeting of the delivery committee tomorrow, with the aim of running through a 'state of the nation' overview of our key delivery challenges, and discussing how the committee can be used, in particular by DHSC and HMT, to get departments to deliver for you in the weeks ahead. In advance of that meeting, I wanted to set out a few thoughts as to how you might seek to operate.
3. First, moving away from the split remits of the MIGs and creating a single forum for oversight of all our COVID delivery work should free departments from multiple overlapping reporting requirements. Your leadership will help to identify and tackle issues that cut across different programmes, so that Government is working coherently. Following tomorrow's short, inaugural meeting my team will pull together a forward plan, and I have asked Simon Ridley to ensure that we establish the right links at official level with your teams so that this is not done by my team in a silo. But we will of course want to be relatively agile in what we bring to the committee and when, and we may also want on occasion to take stock of progress overall with just the core membership.

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4. Second, we must be more disciplined with Ministers' and indeed officials' time. I am strongly of the view that fewer meetings would be much preferable to the daily rhythm we adopted for understandable reasons at the height of the crisis response; your time is precious, and you should be confident that each meeting will have been properly prepared. We should be surfacing to this committee only those issues that genuinely require your attention, with decisions to be made or problems to unblock, allowing you and your colleagues to spend more time driving forward activity within departments.
5. Third, the committee should provide a valuable vehicle through which to bind the Devolved Administrations more closely in those areas where we want to take a UK-wide approach, and indeed to remain aligned and informed where we are content to see divergence. Meetings without representatives from the Devolved Administrations should probably be the exception not the rule - and given the seniority of the committee's membership, and its overarching remit, I would suggest that on occasion we seek attendance from the First Ministers.
6. Finally, we will of course need to have a feedback loop between the operations committee and the strategy one - at times escalating an issue for a discussion with the PM, and at others ensuring a decision taken at the strategy committee translates rapidly into real-world activity. On present plans, the Prime Minister intends to chair the initial COVID strategy committee on Wednesday next week.
7. I hope the above thoughts are helpful, and I look forward to joining your first discussion tomorrow.

PD

SIMON CASE

28 May 2020