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Sent: Tue, 17 Aug 2021 10:41:14 +0000
To: Covid Exit Strategy Team
Subject: FW: Official - Sensitive -: COVID-19: Strategic Approach
Attachments: COVID-19 - Strategic Framework - initial draft.docx

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Sent: 19 October 2020 21:38
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Subject: RE: COVID-19: Strategic Approach

PS/FM, PS/DFM, PS/Cabinet Secretaries, PS/Lord Advocate

Please find attached a draft of the COVID-19: Strategic Framework document as per paragraph 6 in the email below.

Please note that this is being developed at pace and there is more to do (sharpening language, adding graphics etc) ahead of publication later this week. It reflects contributions from colleagues across the organisation, for which we are very grateful. There are a number of placeholders in areas that require further development.

The document does not yet contain the 'levels' table. This will be included in a Cabinet paper to be issued tomorrow (Tuesday).

Thanks,

Dominic Munro

Director: Exit Strategy

I&S

[See recipients listed above]

[See recipients listed above]

[See recipients listed above]

Subject: COVID-19: Strategic Approach

PS/First Minister –

COVID-19: STRATEGIC APPROACH

Purpose and priority

1. Further to my email of 17 October (19:57), this note provides a further update on work in hand, and seeks the First Minister’s agreement to a decision-making sequence for the coming week. It would be helpful to have feedback on the decision-making sequence in the course of tomorrow, Monday.

Levels-based approach

2. The First Minister has confirmed in the course of today that she is content for work to continue on a levels-based approach. She commented that, as we start to apply such an approach, we will get arguments – and no doubt be tempted ourselves – to pick and mix between levels. The First Minister thinks we need to be clear at the outset that we want to avoid that, as it adds to complexity and undermines compliance.
3. In the light of that and other feedback yesterday and today, we are developing an option with five levels:
 - **Baseline:** the closest to normality possible before we can move to phase 4, equivalent to phase 3 of the route-map, but described in terms of what it allows (and restricts) rather through the “phase 3” shorthand;
 - **Level 1:** in broad terms, the position before the current “reset” restrictions;
 - **Level 2:** broadly where areas outside the central belt are until 26 October;
 - **Level 3:** broadly where the central belt is until 26 October;
 - **Level 3+:** akin to a full lockdown; though with the stated aim of avoiding if at all possible a return to the strictest form of lockdown.
4. This articulation aligns with the UKG levels. Levels 1, 2 and 3 are equivalent to the UKG’s “Medium”, “High” and “Very High”, and with the same numbering. Level 3+ above reflects the view of many, including its own advisers, that UKG’s basic level 3 is insufficient.
5. We are preparing more detailed advice on this and other options, to support decision-making as described below, and will circulate this early in the coming week.

Draft Strategic Framework

6. Work on this document has progressed on this over the weekend. The drafting team will shortly seek initial feedback on a working draft from a limited circulation, prior to full circulation early in the coming week, as described below. This will enable us to identify and prioritise areas where further substantive input is required from colleagues.

implementation of the levels-based approach

7. The First Minister has noted today that, while the decisions on the strategic approach and work on the draft publication are important, the bigger and potentially more controversial decisions in the coming week will be what levels to apply to each part of country.
8. She has asked for assessments of the state of the epidemic and of any early signs of the impact of the reset measures in the early part of the coming week, to inform these decisions. We are commissioning these assessments from PHS and other analysts and advisers. The First Minister has asked for this process to include a Cabinet meeting, probably on Wednesday rather than Tuesday (see below).
9. Looking ahead to these decisions, the First Minister indicated that she is not yet persuaded that it will be safe to allow the reset measures to lapse on Monday 26 October for the whole of Scotland; and the CMO has indicated informally that he agrees. This remains subject to further assessment and decision-making in the coming week.
10. We are therefore preparing advice on five options beyond the “do nothing” option of allowing the regulations to lapse. These are intended to inform, but not constrain, decision-taking in the coming week. They are expressed here in terms of the levels described above; but both the levels and the options remain subject to further consideration.
 - **Option A:** maintain the current restrictions for a further period, which in terms of levels would mean the central belt remaining in level 3, and the rest of the country remaining in level 2 (this option is discussed further below).
 - **Option B:** as A but with the island authorities possibly moving to level 1.
 - **Option C:** as A but with additional areas moving to level 3.
 - **Option D:** the whole country moving to level 3, with the possible exception of the islands.
 - **Option E:** the whole country – or part of it – moving to level 3+, akin to the full circuit-breaker Wales appears to be contemplating.
11. As indicated in my note of yesterday, if the outcome of decision-making in the early part of this week was Option A – a decision which requires to be taken in light of the assessments described above, and only if the evidence supports it – it would be possible to:
 - a. roll forward the existing regulations, explaining the necessity for doing so;
 - b. engage opposition parties, local government and others in the course of this week, as planned, on the strategic framework and the levels-based approach;
 - c. publish the strategic framework in the coming week, as planned;
 - d. put the framework to a debate and vote on Wednesday 28 October;
 - e. thereafter move from the current restrictions to the new levels, on the basis of the state of the epidemic at that time, including through further engagement with opposition parties, local government and others.
12. This handling would combine a further period for the reset measures to reduce transmission with more time to engage with Parliament, local government, business and other interests and the wider public, with the aim of securing support for the levels approach and compliance with its requirements, on its introduction.

Decision-making

13. In the light of the First Minister’s feedback, we propose this sequence for decision-making:

- a. Sunday into Monday: initial feedback on the draft publication.
- b. Monday: preparation and submission of “state of the epidemic” and other supporting analysis and advice, and a further draft of the publication; work on necessary regulations.
- c. Tuesday morning: confirmation of options / decisions to put to Cabinet, which we suggest be done through a strategic (“gold”) discussion for the First Minister with a “four harms” group of Cabinet Secretaries, chief advisers and lead officials.
- d. Tuesday afternoon: engagement with opposition parties, local government, and others.
- e. Tuesday evening: a note to Cabinet in the light of Tuesday morning’s discussion.
- f. Wednesday: Cabinet consideration; final decisions.
- g. Thursday: finalisation of texts for publication
- h. Friday: publication of the strategic approach and any regulations coming into force on 26 October.
- i. Monday 26 October, 6 am: any necessary new regulations come into force
- j. Wednesday 28 October: debate and vote in Parliament

14. Note that this sequence should be able to accommodate any of Options A to E above. We will confirm the practical arrangements and deadlines as soon as possible.

Other work in hand

15. We will provide a further update tomorrow, Monday, on the other work in hand, referred to at paragraph 13 of my note of last night.

Conclusion

16. I invite you to:

- a. note this update
- b. seek the First Minister’s views on the decision-making sequence set out at paragraphs 13-14.

K

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