

Message

From: State, Secretary [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=CAA665FDC4494224AC1A9E4CB1B06FD4-PVE58P]
Sent: 26/03/2020 4:16:59 PM
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Subject: [Readout] Call with Ken Skates, 26/03/20 [OFFICIAL SENSITIVE]

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE - COMMERCIAL

Hi all,

SoS just got off the line from his first now-weekly call with Ken Skates (KS). Please see below for readout.

BEGINS

Introduction and General UKG/WG Divergence

- KS begins by outlining a continued commitment to collaborative working; that now is not the time for 'political opportunism'. He states his intention to support UKG.
- SoS thanks KS for this, but says there have been some occasions where WG has decided to do things differently without immediate clarity as to what differences have been pursued.
 - SoS raises diversion on business rates and definitions of key workers, particularly in cross-border areas. These can *look* like political opportunism, even though, there are likely valid reasons for divergence.
- KS says WG doesn't want to diverge unless necessary.
 - Business Rates: WG Ministers thought the £100m dividend from excluding businesses with rateable value about £500,000 could be better used for the self-employed and charities. He agrees there should be clearer communication on reasons behind divergence.
 - Volunteers Scheme: KS suspects many in border areas are trying to register to volunteer in England, and he would rather a UK-wide system were agreed, and welcomes being part of a national system.
- SoS welcomes this, and says he believes Vaughan Gething's officials are engaging with the developers of the app being used by NHS England for volunteers. Also raises having spoken to local authorities about this yesterday.
 - Some LAs have already set up their own volunteer networks, but there will always be divergence.
- SoS asks whether language can be agreed between the governments on how announcements are communicated - he says the devolution settlement will likely be scrutinised post-covid-19.
 - SoS doesn't want to give the impression, for example, that larger businesses are more welcome in England than Wales, given the business rates announcement.
- SoS says he expects an announcement on self-employed assistance this evening. He outlines the difficulty of drawing an equitable distinction between self-employed activity that is and isn't affected by covid-19.

PPE and Health Equipment

- SoS raises PPE, which was a recurring theme in local authority calls yesterday, and asks for KS's update.
 - KS says the social care sector has voiced similar concerns. Vaughan Gething gave a press conference yesterday, and WG is trying to source as much as possible but they are in competition with all other parts of the world.
 - KS says there is increasing news on innovation within Welsh business community re: producing equipment and/or importing internationally. This is requiring close collaboration with business leaders.
- SoS says he just spoke to Dr. Rhys Thomas, who has created a new ventilator device. KS has also spoken with him, and is working with BEIS on this project.
 - KS denounced that Plaid Cymru released a press release on this project, which resulted in a day lost to high-security intervention at the hospital where Dr. Thomas works.
 - KS says production will begin soon on Dr. Thomas's ventilator, but there will be a need for careful comms around this to prevent products being poached internationally. **Are we aware of this story/product?**