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Minutes

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COVID-19 STRATEGY MINISTERIAL GROUP

Minutes of a Meeting of Covid-19 Strategy Ministerial Group
held at Number 10, Downing Street on

FRIDAY 24th April 2020
At 0945 AM

P R E S E N T

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

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 and Minister
for the Cabinet Office

The Rt Hon Matthew Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

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

The Rt Hon Stephen Barclay MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

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ALSO PRESENT

Sir Mark Sedwill
Cabinet Secretary

Simon Case
SRO Non-Shielded Vulnerable, Cabinet Office

Dominic Cummings
Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister

Sir Edward Lister
Chief Strategic Advisor to the Prime Minister

Tom Shinner
Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister

Oliver Lewis
Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister

NR

Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister

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Beth Armstrong
Special Adviser to the Foreign Secretary

Scott McPherson
SRO Volunteering, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Secretariat

J Glover
M Jones

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Non-Shielded Vulnerable

THE FOREIGN SECRETARY AND FIRST SECRETARY OF STATE said that it was important that the Government provided support to the most vulnerable, regardless of whether they were in the shielded population, and asked SIMON CASE to give more detail on the Cabinet Office's Non-Shielded Vulnerable programme, and which sectors of the population were covered by this programme, and its risks.

SIMON CASE, CABINET OFFICE said that Non-Shielded Vulnerable was a term that referred to people who had increased or new vulnerabilities as a result of Covid-19, but were not in the clinically vulnerable group that were part of the existing shielding programme. Three large cohorts of vulnerable individuals could be identified from the existing evidence. The first major cohort was individuals with unmet financial needs, regardless of whether still in work. This cohort was not included in the NSV programme as there were existing programmes, including through the Department for Work and Pensions, to meet the needs of this cohort. The second major cohort was individuals who could not access food. Some individuals were not able to purchase food due to unmet financial needs, but others were unable to access food for other reasons, for example they were temporarily isolating due to symptoms or choosing to isolate if they felt vulnerable, and did not have access to friends and family to do shopping. The third major cohort was individuals who were finding isolation extremely challenging with regard to their mental health. Finally, there were a number of smaller vulnerable cohorts that required equally careful consideration. These included people at risk of domestic abuse, and those in receipt of Personal Independence Payments or Disability Living Allowances who were not clinically vulnerable, but who were reliant on care within the home.

Continuing, SIMON CASE, CABINET OFFICE said that the three areas where there was the highest risk of the Government failing to meet the needs of Non-Shielded Vulnerable individuals were: food provision; domestic abuse, where the risk was acute; and people with disabilities requiring care in the home. On food provision, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was that day starting a pilot with local authorities to address the issue.

Continuing, SIMON CASE, CABINET OFFICE said that the majority of individuals would self-identify as Non-Shielded Vulnerable. The quality of existing referral pathways was variable as it was a local function, and depended on the capacity of local authorities. In addition, some referrals would go to the voluntary sector rather than the Government. In order to provide assurance that support was being provided to those individuals most in need the Government would need to reach out proactively to those individuals.

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now signed up to the NHS Volunteer Responder scheme. The Voluntary and Communities Sector Emergency Partnership (VCSEP) coordination cell had now brought together 337,00 volunteers. The challenge was now to effectively identify demand and match this to supply. The Cabinet Office should work to ensure that those who had volunteered through the Good Sam app but were not required by the NHS could be deployed to support Non-Shielded Vulnerable. There was also work ongoing in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to consider which existing charities could draw down on the volunteer pool identified through the Good Sam app.

- d) There were implications for the long-term relationship between the Government and vulnerable individuals that needed to be considered further. A return to real growth could be expected in the next year or two, but individuals would continue to find themselves more economically vulnerable as the crisis continued. HM Treasury needed to continue to work with the Department for Work and Pensions to consider what changes, if any, needed to be made to the welfare state in to support the public during this time. This was particularly important as other aspects of state provision, for example free school meals or even the provision of a school environment, were not being delivered as expected in the current circumstances. There was rightly a limit to the breadth of the welfare state, but a granular picture of where help was being provided to vulnerable individuals, and where support was more 'hands-off' was required.
- e) The welfare system was not designed to be generous, but was working as a safety net. The development of new benefits systems would be a major challenge. The peak of payments due out under the current benefits systems had not yet been reached, and was due in a few weeks' time.
- f) Vulnerable children were a cohort that could face vulnerabilities in a number of different ways. There needed to be further consideration given to those children currently in Pupil Referral Units, and to those involved with gangs. Families may also be struggling to provide effective parenting despite good intentions. There was an opportunity to work with schools and local services to consider whether DBS-cleared volunteers on the Good Sam app could be used to support families with tasks such as shopping and basic reading skills. This would provide support to vulnerable children in a way that the state would not typically have the resource to do.
- g) The latest data available on the victims of domestic abuse was revealing the scale of the problem. Helplines had received a

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