

Sir Mark Sedwill
Cabinet Secretary
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12 June 2020

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your letter of 28 May setting out arrangements for two new Cabinet committees to oversee the next phase of the Covid response and confirming that the Ministerial Implementation Group structure had been stood down.

The four nations approach to tackling Covid -19 has helped co-ordinate the response across the UK in a way that has allowed the development of common, and where necessary, distinctive approaches in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in a way that reflects our respective devolution settlements.

Since your letter, our teams have been trying to establish how the UKG intends to support engagement through the next phase of the response. We understand that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster intends to continue to hold regular calls with our First Ministers (and deputy First Minister in the case of Northern Ireland) and that the Health and BEIS led 4 nations Ministerial meetings will continue. Engagement will also continue to be supported by a cross UK director level forum. It would also be helpful to learn more about whether further meetings of COBR (M) are likely to take place. We understand that consideration is also being given to the frequency and rhythm of SAGE meetings – again it would be helpful to know more about what is intended.

We welcome the intention to continue calls between CDL and our respective heads of Government. However, if these calls are to provide a forum for strategic discussion and decision making then it will be important to consider their frequency and the support arrangements to ensure that there is a shared approach to identifying issues for discussion to ensure that they continue to be effective in this next phase.

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As you know, the Covid – 19 operations committee to be chaired by Mr Gove will include consideration of a number of devolved issues. We understand that the intention may be to invite our Ministers to attend meetings where the UKG considers their participation to be relevant. However given that its remit also includes responsibility for ‘providing assurance of UK-wide implementation across key lines of operation’ it is hard to see how that can properly achieved without the full involvement of our Ministers. There is a risk that failing to properly involve the devolved administrations will lead to confusion and undermine decision making.

It would be helpful if our senior teams could meet to develop and reach agreement on arrangements for continued engagement to ensure that those arrangements meet the needs of each administration – at present there is a risk that these arrangements are being developed unilaterally.

It is essential that arrangements for this next phase build on the good levels of engagement which have been an important aspect of our response to the pandemic so far.

A copy of this letter goes to Lucy Smith, Ken Thomson, NR and Des Clifford.

Best wishes,

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