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From the Private Secretary

21 September 2020

Dear NR

The Prime Minister spoke to First Ministers of each of the Devolved Authorities, separately, on 21 September.

With each the Prime Minister set out that he would be chairing a COBR meeting the following day, and suggested a joint statement following it.

#### **NORTHERN IRELAND**

The First Minister confirmed that she and the deputy First Minister (dFM) would attend COBR. She said that restrictions that currently applied in Belfast and Ballymena would probably need to be extended across the Province. They were not very invasive and would be a first step. She hoped that COBR could discuss the future of the furlough scheme and the Barnett consequences of self-isolation payments. This would allow the Northern Ireland Executive to plan for the future. The dFM agreed.

The Prime Minister said that the disease could only be controlled by public behaviour and that would be influenced by public messaging by government. Officials would try to have the answers she had asked for in time for COBR. The tougher we could be now, the more trouble we would save ourselves in future. The young did not understand that by not complying, they were damaging their own economic prospects.

## WALES

The First Minister confirmed that he would attend COBR. There were worrying patches of the disease in the South East of Wales, but elsewhere the figures were going down. Pre-emptive, decisive action was needed to stop the concentration spreading, as it had in March. He was in favour of a joint statement after COBR, but did not want to lose Wales's message that people should stay local and only leave home to work if they had to. The fewer people each person met, the less risk they posed to themselves and others. He hoped a UK-wide agreement on pub closing times could be reached. He was particularly worried about "wet" pubs, which served no food, where much of the problem seemed to be. The intelligence he was receiving from environmental health officers suggested that employers had done a good job in preparing workplaces physically to be Covid safe. However, in many places employees were not acting as they should and employers seemed reluctant to oblige them to.

The Prime Minister agreed that we needed an approach that fitted the whole country. An agreement on pub closing times would be ideal. He did not want to close the hospitality sector but changes were needed. The First Minister was right about workplaces. More "mandation" was needed. It should probably be a legal obligation, not guidance.

## SCOTLAND

The First Minister confirmed that she would attend COBR. Doubling time for Covid seemed to be between seven and nine days in Scotland. Hospital admissions were not yet as high as in England but were going up. Cases had been focussed on the Central Belt but were now widespread across mainland Scotland. She hoped for a four-nation aligned package that would bring the "R" number below 1. She asked that London share its thinking with Scottish Government officials in advance of COBR to allow them to work jointly overnight. It made a joint approach much more likely. She thought that further restrictions on hospitality and household gatherings were probably needed across Scotland, with the possible exception of Orkney and Shetland, and the Western Isles. She hoped that COBR could also discuss how to manage the economic implications of any further measures and that she and the Prime Minister could co-ordinate their respective Parliamentary statements the following day.

The Prime Minister said that officials would share our proposals and would be in constant communication. We needed a package that gave the best chance of limiting the disease with the minimum economic pain. The Chancellor would be able to speak to that at COBR, but might need a few days to work it through completely. While there might be different inflections of policy in different parts of the UK, he was aiming for the most closely aligned package possible. He would speak to Parliament following COBR.

I am copying this letter to Martin Reynolds, Stuart Glassborow, Henry Cook, Ed Lister, John Bew, Imran Shafi, Luke Graham and Nadine McNally, (No.10); the Cabinet Secretary, Mark Sweeney, Kate Josephs, Simon Ridley and Emma Payne (Cabinet Office); Elizabeth Perelman (HM Treasury); Alex Fishlock (Office of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster); Ciarán Hayes (NIO); Victoria Jones (Scotland Office); and Lottie Cattle (Wales Office).

*Yours sincerely*

Personal Data

**WILLIAM GELLING**

NR

Cabinet Office