

FOURTH WRITTEN STATEMENT OF BORIS JOHNSON

The public health officials all seemed phlegmatic, and we were sending PPE to China – surely an encouraging sign that we had everything under control?

22. I remember that I was told that we had an excellent system for testing and tracing contacts although I cannot now recall who said this – I think I was told it many times by many people. I think it is likely that Yvonne Doyle or someone else from PHE gave me this information, but I do not recall a specific conversation. The information was not something that I second-guessed: as Prime Minister, you have to trust your government, civil servants and advisers. I knew that we had poured £34 billion into the NHS, and I remember hearing that PHE had developed a diagnostic test in early 2020. As an example of a document that gave me this reassuring message about our preparedness (though not about the likely scale of the disease), on 28 February 2020, the Director of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat sent me a briefing note prepared in consultation with the CMO and GCSA on the UK's preparedness. This came alongside a full draft action plan from DHSC. The note said that our *'[p]reparations are well underway'* and *'[w]e continue to be ready to deal with UK cases during the containment phase and are getting ready to deal with many more if the outbreak escalates'* [BJO4/009 - INQ000146569]. It continued, *'[o]ur NHS has tried-and-tested systems to quickly identify and isolate those who may have Covid-19. Large isolation facilities have been established to comfortably and safely house those returning from Wuhan and the Diamond Princess cruise ship...'* [see: pages 1-3, paragraphs 1, 12 and 13].

23. This was not the only reason for my understanding that we were in a good place. I have seen that Matt Hancock messaged Dominic Cummings on 25 January 2020 saying, *'We have full plans up to & including pandemic levels regularly prepped and refreshed. The CMO is an epidemiologist by background. We are stress testing again now. It is in our top tier risk register...'* [BJO4/010 - INQ000129180]. While I cannot recall whether either of them expressly gave me this information, the fact that we had full plans prepared and refreshed was certainly something that had been conveyed to me repeatedly in early 2020. I did not see the full plans, nor would I have expected to at that stage.

24. I cannot now say the moment when I realised that our diagnostic capacity was inadequate to what would be required. I remember feeling taken aback during my trip to Colindale on 1 March 2020 and that is probably a key moment where I felt that the scales fell from my eyes. I remember that the people I spoke to