

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

RESTRICTED HANDLING

SCN(21)13th Conclusions

SCOTTISH CABINET

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD IN ST ANDREW'S HOUSE, EDINBURGH
AT 9.30 AM ON TUESDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present:	Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP	First Minister
	John Swinney MSP	Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (*)
	Keith Brown MSP	Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans
	Kate Forbes MSP	Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (*)
	Mairi Gougeon MSP	Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands
	Michael Matheson MSP	Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (*)
	Rt Hon Angus Robertson MSP	Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture
	Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP	Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (*)
In Attendance:	Leslie Evans	Permanent Secretary
	LPP	LPP
	George Adam MSP	Minister for Parliamentary Business
	Ben Macpherson MSP	Minister for Social Security and Local Government
	Kevin Stewart MSP	Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care
	Dr Gregor Smith	Chief Medical Officer (*)
	Ken Thomson	DG Constitution and External Affairs (*)
	Penelope Cooper	Director, Covid Co-ordination (*)
	James Hynd	Director for Cabinet
	LPP	LPP
	Dominic Munro	Director, Exit Strategy (*)
	Michelle Rennie	First Minister's Principal Private Secretary (*)
	Alan Johnston	Deputy Director, Covid Co-ordination (*)
	Marion McCormack	Deputy Director, Covid Ready Society (*)
	Lisa McGuinness	Permanent Secretary's Principal Private Secretary (*)
	Elizabeth Sadler	Deputy Director, Covid Ready Society (*)
	Leanne Dobson	Special Adviser (*)
	Liz Lloyd	Special Adviser (*)
	Colin McAllister	Special Adviser
	Callum McCaig	Special Adviser (*)
	Stuart Nicolson	Special Adviser (*)
	Anne Aitken	Head of Portfolio Management Division (*)
	Elise Black	Deputy Head, Finance Programme Management (*)
		PS/First Minister
		Assistant Head of News (*)
		First Minister's Official Spokesperson (*)
		FM Covid Briefing Unit (*)
		Head of the First Minister's Policy and Delivery Unit (*)
		Cabinet Secretariat

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9. The highest rates of increase had been seen among 12- to 13-year olds and 14- to 15-year olds, while there had been some plateauing among both 16- to 17-year olds and 20- to 39-year olds, and a reduction among 18- to 19-year olds.

10. Seven-day case rates continued to escalate to around 792 per 100,000, compared with 692 a week earlier. However, the doubling time had extended from seven to nine days over the previous week and was expected to continue to lengthen, reflecting a deceleration in the rate of growth in case numbers.

11. Since the previous day, some 16 further deaths had been registered within 28 days of a positive test for COVID-19, and the total number of deaths using this measure since the start of the pandemic now stood at 8,181 (compared with the previous week's figure of 8,118). Seven of those who had died were over 80, six between 60 and 79, two between 40 and 59, and one between 20 and 39 years old.

12. Hospital admissions continued to rise, especially among the over 60s, and numbers in Intensive Care Units were also increasing. Even if new cases were to slow, pressures on the NHS might be expected to increase for some time yet, reflecting the time lag between infection and hospitalisation.

13. In discussion the following points were made:

(a) The situation now was not quite as difficult as had been feared ten days or so previously (when ten thousand cases per day had appeared to be in prospect). However, even if the rise in case numbers was beginning to reach a plateau, this still represented an elevated level of daily infection that would continue to place real pressure on the NHS;

(b) It was not yet clear what new measures or developments might emerge (other than increasing immunity levels from either vaccination or past infection) that might put further brakes on rising case numbers;

(c) NHS Boards were heading towards the upper end of available bed capacity, and the situation remained tough. Although it did not appear that the re-imposition of restrictions was currently warranted, it would be important not become complacent over coming weeks, and a continuing high state of vigilance would be essential.

Covid-19: Review and Response (Paper SCN(21)33)

14. Mr Swinney introduced paper SCN(21)33 which provided Cabinet with a review of the current situation and recommended that a proportionate approach still favoured emphasis on the current set of 'baseline' measures, rather than the re-imposition of further significant restrictions.

15. The context remained serious and challenging, but not as acute as might have been feared a week previously. There was, however, still enormous fragility in the system, with high levels of infection and consequent hospitalisation.