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THE CABINET OFFICE
LONDON SW1A 2AS

From the Cabinet Secretary

Heads of Departments

16 March 2020

COVID-19: THE NEXT PHASE

As you are aware, the Government has announced new measures today as we enter a critical phase in seeking to delay and reduce the transmission of the virus, and to protect our most vulnerable citizens. To ensure that the entire national response is coherent, focused and agile, the Prime Minister has decided to establish new structures to lead the Government's key lines of operation.

The Prime Minister will continue to chair regular UK COBR(M) meetings to take the strategic decisions and review overall progress in the campaign to contain, delay and mitigate C-19. He will also take a daily meeting of key ministers and officials to monitor progress and refine the measures agreed by COBR. Cabinet will be updated regularly. To support COBR and lead the various lines of operation, there will be four new Ministerial Implementation Groups:

- Healthcare: Chair - Matt Hancock (Health Secretary). Secretariat - Simon Ridley. This group will focus on NHS preparedness, notably ensuring capacity in the critical care system for those worst affected, the medical and social package of support for those to whom we will be providing the new shielding regime;

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- General Public Sector: Chair - Michael Gove (CDL). Secretariat - Jess Glover. This group will focus on preparedness across the rest of the public sector and critical national infrastructure;
- Economic: Chair - Rishi Sunak (Chancellor). Secretariat - Jonathan Black. This group will focus on the economic and business impact and response, including supply chain resilience. It will also coordinate the roundtables with key sectors to be chaired by relevant Secretaries of State;
- International: Chair - Dominic Raab (Foreign Secretary). Secretariat - David Quarrey. This group will focus on international coordination through the G7, G20 and other mechanisms, including like-minded groups, and the UK five-point plan.

These Implementation Groups will be supported by the Cabinet Secretariat, with alternates available to provide resilience for the lead DGs mentioned above. I will take a daily official meeting to prepare for the groups chaired by Ministers and the Prime Minister and to ensure that the programmes are properly aligned and on track. Mark Sweeney will continue to have the overall lead in the Cabinet Secretariat and, supported by CCS and a new PMO, will provide the Secretariat support for the Prime Minister and the meetings he takes. Full terms of reference will be circulated separately. The structure is set out in **Annex A**.

All departments should now make the C-19 campaign their main effort alongside essential operational business, such as the provision of frontline service to the public. Your business continuity plans should be able to deliver both at 70-80% capacity during this period, and will now have to be adjusted for the new measures, notably social distancing, which will also affect departmental capacity.

Secretaries of State and Permanent Secretaries should review the remaining capacity against the departmental priorities identified in the recent letters from the Head of the No10 Policy Unit and recommend what should be postponed or reprioritised for the duration of the C-19 campaign. We will then review these at the centre so that, if necessary, we can shift resources between departments

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either to provide resilience for the C-19 campaign and essential business or to provide additional capacity for the Government's other top priorities. Please submit these returns by the end of the week to the C-19 Secretariat at

[c-19.secretariat](#)

Irrelevant & Sensitive

As I mentioned, as a big employer, the Civil Service must exemplify the new measures. We already offer flexible working to many of our staff but, of course, there are many functions, particularly those on the frontline, which require staff to be present. So, like other organisations, departments should apply the new guidance to their own circumstances. Please liaise with the central HR team.

This is a challenging period for the whole country, for the Government, for the Civil Service and for all of us as citizens. There will be setbacks. But I am confident that the campaign to contain, delay and mitigate Covid-19, to protect the public, and to ensure that we have the capacity across our systems to support those most at risk is in good shape. Thank you for your leadership in this collective effort.

Copies of this letter also go to the private offices of Cabinet Ministers.

PD

MARK SEDWILL

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Annex A: Diagram

Governance Structure

