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Minutes

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CABINET

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held in the Locarno Suite in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office on

TUESDAY 1st September 2020
At 1000 AM

P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
First Secretary of State, and Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Minister for
the Cabinet Office

The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP
Lord Chancellor, and Secretary of State for Justice

The Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and
Industrial Strategy, Minister for COP26

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for International Trade, and
President of the Board of Trade, and Minister for
Women and Equalities

The Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and
Local Government

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Alister Jack MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon Simon Hart MP
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
Lord Privy Seal, and Leader of the House of Lords

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and
Sport

The Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
Secretary of State for International Development

The Rt Hon Amanda Milling MP
Minister without Portfolio (and Conservative Party Chair)

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Stephen Barclay MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

The Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP
Lord President of the Council, and Leader of the House of Commons

The Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Chief Whip)

The Rt Hon Suella Braverman QC MP
Attorney General

Professor Chris Whitty CB
Chief Medical Officer for England and the UK
(Item 3)

Sir Patrick Vallance
Government Chief Scientific Adviser
(Item 3)

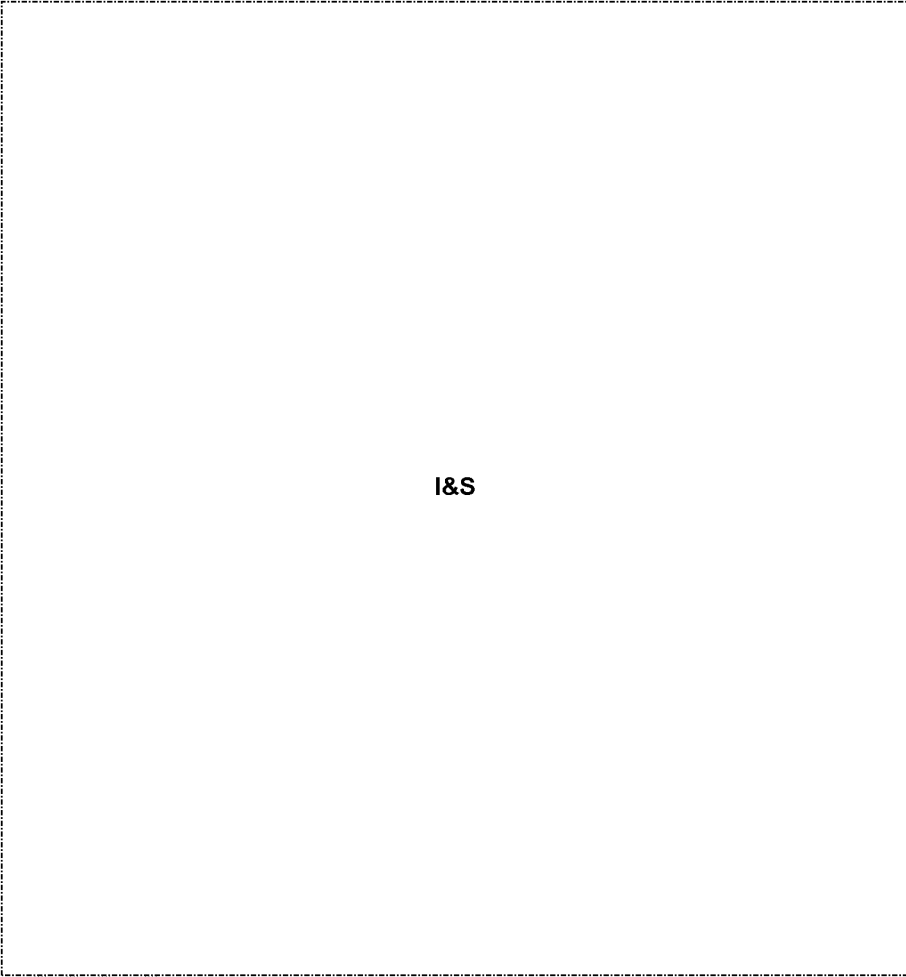
Secretariat

Sir Mark Sedwill

Name Redacted

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I&S

Covid-19 Update

THE PRIME MINISTER said that despite flat or declining rates of deaths and hospital admissions from coronavirus there was no room for complacency. The increase in cases in France, Spain and even Germany was a warning. There was no reason to believe that the UK would be an exception: our case levels were the same as France's infection levels a few weeks earlier. A national lockdown should not be reimposed and schools would not be instructed to close again; the UK had been locked down for longer than any other major country and this had done serious damage to its economy and the educational outcomes of its most disadvantaged children. The best way to avoid a national lockdown would be a successful test and trace system combined with strong local lockdowns when required. Since the spring, scientific progress on treatment for coronavirus meant that better outcomes were expected for those who became infected.

THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER said that opening schools, higher education and the economy would put pressure on 'R' (the reproduction rate of transmission), so the Government had to respond with a range of measures, including being clear on its messaging and enforcing regulations. There was no single thing that would resolve the situation, although good progress had been made with the test and trace system. The winter months would work to the Government's disadvantage as the virus would spread more easily, and more action might be required at that time.

THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR said that it was possible the UK was doing better than other major countries, but this was not an assumption that could be relied on. The simple message was that reducing contact with others reduced the spread of the virus. The recent experience in France and the US was that those aged between 20 and 30 caught the virus first, which had little immediate impact on hospital admissions. It was only after younger people had passed it to the older population that there was a rise in hospitalisation rates.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- e) it was not inevitable that the recent increase in coronavirus cases that had occurred in France and Spain would happen in the UK. The first line of defence was to ensure that people did the right thing on social distancing and their social contact was in line with the rules. The second line of defence would be the test and trace system, now operating at the capacity requested by the Government's scientific advisers, and local lockdowns, which had been praised by the World Health Organisation;
- f) early signs were that pupils were steadily returning to school and that this was being done in a calm, normal way. Parents were keen to share responsibility for childcare with teachers. There were high attendance rates in Leicestershire, although these were slightly lower in the city of Leicester;
- g) there was increasing evidence that city centres, especially London, would suffer long term scarring from the impact of lockdowns and people not returning to offices. The same pattern could be seen in New York, although this was less of an issue in some European capitals. The Government should lead by example, and show that it was confident that businesses and

public sector organisations could safely return their workforce to the office;

- h) the economy already faced serious difficulties as could be seen by the GDP and unemployment figures. Worse was likely to come. This would inevitably have an impact on the ability of the Government to fund public services. Further national lockdowns should not be necessary as the measures in place, including track and trace and improved hospital treatments, were better able to keep local outbreaks under control. There had been a large amount of funding given to the NHS to ensure that it was equipped to face a rise in cases, and avoid the prospect of a second national lockdown having to be imposed; and
- i) the Government should challenge itself as to whether its social distancing requirements were reasonable, and the extent to which it was right to tell people what to do, rather than provide information and leave them to make their own decisions.

Summing up, THE PRIME MINISTER said that clear, repeated messaging about social distancing requirements was important; it should be widely understood how many households could mix, both inside and outside. The slogan 'hands, face, space' should be used.

Continuing, THE PRIME MINISTER said that he did not believe there would not be an irreversible change to the way that people worked; the economy was dependent on the agglomeration of people and mass transit taking workers to city centres. The UK must return to this, but in a Covid-secure way. Work was ongoing to design tests to produce results within ten minutes so that those who were not infectious could continue to live and work without social distancing. In the meantime, the Cabinet should navigate the choppy waters ahead by showing confidence in the Government's plan.

The Cabinet:

- took note.

I&S

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