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Minutes

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CABINET

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held by video conference on

SUNDAY 22nd November 2020
At 1700 PM

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, Commonwealth and Development 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 Simon Hart MP
Secretary of State for Wales

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

The Rt Hon Alister Jack MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

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

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

Sir Patrick Vallance
Government Chief Scientific Adviser

Secretariat

S Case
H MacNamara

Name Redacted

the UK Government to do something, so care should be taken when briefing the media on the plans for Christmas.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER said that he welcomed the change to a system of localised tiers. The loosening of restrictions should not be oversold. The new arrangements would allow for minimal economic activity to resume, but they were only baby steps and would still be problematic for many businesses, especially those in areas that had been subject to tougher restrictions for longer. Some businesses were facing a three month lockdown which was the same as earlier that year. It may still be the right decision, but Cabinet Ministers should be cognisant of the implications of the decisions they were taking. HM Treasury had offered all the support that it could, including extending the Job Retention (furlough) Scheme, fully funded, until the end of March 2021 and providing grants of up to £3,000 for businesses to be able to cover their rent. The Government could not get into the habit of giving out more cash each time it put more restrictions in place. It was costing a fortune and not sustainable for the country's finances.

Continuing, THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER said that consideration should be given to the return of students to universities in January. It would involve a difficult conversation, but lessons had to be learned from what had happened in September. On mass testing, he welcomed the evolution of the proposal from that considered by the Covid-19 Operations Committee the previous day. There would be a standard formula for financial support to local areas depending on which tier they were in. It would be up to local leaders whether they wanted to spend this money on mass testing.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- a) the Cabinet approved the return to a localised, tiered system as set out in the paper. It was a sensible and balanced approach;
- b) for the first time, the Prime Minister would be able to set out a plan to get to the light at the end of the tunnel;
- c) businesses would appreciate the knowledge of when life would be back to normal, even if it was months from now, so they could confidently start investing in preparations, make contractual commitments and sell tickets;
- d) strong buy-in from local leaders was essential, as had been seen in Liverpool. It would be useful to understand the extent to