

NOTE OF CABINET CALL, 26 NOVEMBER 2020

THE PRIME MINISTER said that later that day, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care would tell the House of Commons that the national restrictions would be gone, to be replaced by a localised, tiered system. There would be considerable changes in all tiers: non-essential retail, places of worship, gyms, and personal care businesses would be allowed to open. There would be a return to the 'rule of six' outdoors. But the incidence of Covid-19 (coronavirus) was still quite high, perhaps as much as one in 85 people across the country, compared to one in 1,000 people in the summer. There was pressure to avoid a third national lockdown in the New Year as it would be paralysing for the economy. To avoid this hit on the economy and business at the wrong moment, there would be a system of tough tiers, the use of mass testing, and the deployment of a vaccine. This would get the UK through to the spring.

Continuing, THE PRIME MINISTER said that the tiers needed to be tough and he was afraid to say that they were. Some areas would come out of the national lockdown in a higher tier than they had been in when the lockdown started. This might feel unfair, but colleagues should stress the risk that things would otherwise deteriorate. The tiers would be reviewed after 14 days with areas being moved into a lower tier if the numbers justified that. There was a route for this to happen: the Government had procured hundreds of millions of fast turn-around coronavirus tests. These would help to drive down 'R' (the reproductive rate of transmission) by isolating people testing positive and liberating those testing negative. The proof that this worked could be seen in Liverpool (where mass testing had been a success), which would exit the national lockdown in tier two, whereas Manchester (where local leaders had taken longer to agree to go into tier three) would remain in tier three as cases were still high.

Concluding, THE PRIME MINISTER said that if people followed the rules and guidance and used mass testing then areas would move out of tier three. There was real hope on the horizon. This must not be described as effectively another four month lockdown. It was not because there was a lot more freedom allowed. Progress would be made by the end of March when a significant proportion of the population could be vaccinated.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that what had happened in Liverpool proved that mass testing worked. Case numbers had reduced by two-thirds over the previous two weeks, despite the fact that over 200,000 people had been tested so asymptomatic cases would show up in the numbers. It was a tribute to how the people and leaders of Liverpool had worked together.

Continuing, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that tier three was designed to get case rates falling rather than the previous tier three which had merely tried to keep them stable. Tier two was designed to keep case numbers flat. And tier one was for areas where case numbers were really low.

Continuing, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that large swathes of the North of England would be in tier three as despite the number of coronavirus cases starting to come down, case numbers were still elevated and there was significant pressure on the NHS. Areas such as Cumbria and North