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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 & Development Office on

Tuesday 3rd November 2020
At 0930 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, 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 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 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 2)

Sir Patrick Vallance
Government Chief Scientific Adviser
(Item 2)

Secretariat

S Case
H MacNamara
M Sweeney
Name Redacted
J Cowan

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I&S

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Covid-19 Response

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the unbelievably hard decision to implement new national measures would throttle colleagues' natural conservative instincts. But there was no option: the Government had to act to protect lives. The maths was irrefutable. 2 December was a hard

deadline to end the measures: the Government would use every second to get mass testing working to avoid further lockdowns and find a way out of coronavirus. People would not wear another set of restrictions like the ones that had just been announced: it was going to be hard enough to ensure compliance with those. But he was confident that once again the British public would rise to the challenge.

Continuing, THE PRIME MINISTER said that he had desperately wanted the regional approach to work, and there had been a good chance that it would have done. Unfortunately, the case numbers had been too high to maintain this approach, but the basic logic was unchanged: drive 'R' (the reproduction rate of transmission) below one to buy enough time for innovative testing technology to be rolled out. The testing pilot in the great city of Liverpool might show the potential to roll the programme out across the UK; the entire country of Slovakia had just been tested. The trouble was that people were not self-isolating and the Government had to be more persuasive to get this to work. The immediacy of each result from the new testing technology would help. People were likely to behave differently if they knew categorically that they were infectious. There were tens of millions of this type of testing kits that were being manufactured in the UK each day. By spring it could make a real difference. That had always been the plan. However, the Government's scientific and medical advisers would no doubt advise caution. It was important not to over-promise.

THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER said that it was right to be cautious but he hoped to be able to share in the Prime Minister's optimism by the middle of December.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- c) it was right that MPs should be at work to keep Parliament going;
- d) people were ignoring rules so the Government had to think of innovative ways to enforce them, including restricting people's ability to use their cars to travel; and
- e) use of language on enforcement was important. Moving away from fixed penalty notices would require the court system to have a role. The Government needed to get the balance right to avoid being ineffectively authoritarian.

Responding, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that public expectation should be managed so people's hopes did not get ahead of what could be delivered. The new testing technologies were an exciting part of the solution. But the public understood that there was no silver bullet that would bring coronavirus to an end. By 2 December, 'R' needed to be below one. Much of the heavy lifting had already been done as the measures already in place had reduced 'R' from its natural rate of 2.5-3 to around 1.2. This was cause for optimism. He hoped that another lockdown would not be required after 2 December.

Summing up, THE PRIME MINISTER said that he would put a check on his natural optimism, but the mixture of treatment, vaccine and testing meant that there would be a way out. He did not want to go back to a set of national measures after 2 December, at almost any cost.

The Cabinet:

- took note.

I&S

Irrelevant & Sensitive