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Minutes

COPY NO

COVID-19 STRATEGY MINISTERIAL GROUP

Minutes of a Meeting of Covid-19 Strategy Ministerial Group
held at Number 10, Downing Street on

Wednesday 18th March 2020
At 0915 AM

PRESENT

Secretary of State for Education

ALSO PRESENT

Jonathan Slater
Permanent Secretary to the Department for Education

Secretariat

Sir Mark Sedwill
Emma Payne
S Shannon

Commented [1]: this minute is based off these notes:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1V-eZ5n4zrFqGPz1cElXoFWKrdGhOI7RBhLHZ_wsSfy8/edit

Commented [2]: is there a fuller account somewhere?
there is missing info on attendees and attribution of
discussion points.

Commented [3]: unknown

Commented [4]: Found in an email sent 19:10, 17
March, from Clare B to attendees. Likely attendees, but
not confirmed:

In person
PM
Matt Hancock
Michael Gove
Mark Sedwill
Dominic Cummings
Cleo Watson
Martin Reynolds
Stuart Glassborow
One of Chris Whitty, CMO or Patrick Vallance, GCSA or
deputies. The others dial in.
One of Imran Shafi or **Name Redacted**. The other dials
in.
Lee Cain
One of Mark Sweeney or Jonathan Black. The other
dials in.
Secretariat, CO
Tom Shinner

The Chancellor and Foreign Secretary have a standing
invite to dial in.

Commented [5]: Confirmed in email in sent folder, Tue,
17 Mar, 21:48, following in attendance:

SoS Education, Perm Sec DfE
SoS MHCLG, Perm Sec MHCLG
CEO NHS (Simon Stevens)

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COVID-19 Dashboard

THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER said that the latest data in the dashboard showed a 30% increase in overnight Covid-19 cases and deaths as a result of the virus. He said that the data lagged behind slightly but that the trend was likely to be accurate and that there would be a two week lag before the measures already taken would have an impact.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- a) XXXX

Commented [6]: were there any further points raised, perhaps by CCS?

The Cabinet Committee:

- took note

Schools - closure or other options, free school meals, exams

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION said that the Government should announce that schools should close this Friday. Many schools had already closed and this was expected to increase in the coming days. He said that Unions had expressed concerns and there was an expectation that teaching staff would refuse to come into work if closures were not announced by the government. He said that the government should aim to repurpose schools to provide childcare for key workers and for children in need or at risk. It would be important to send this clear message to the public.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) The preliminary view was that the science showed that closing schools would reduce the epidemic curve. There was confidence that even with some children still attending school, the measure would be effective. The final scientific view would be issued by SAGE later that day. (Patrick Vallance)
- b) Economic analysis suggests that taking this measure on schools would double the economic impact of COVID, with a 20% peak to trough. The result would be worse than the financial crisis and the government is considering measures to support people. (Rishi Sunak)
- c) The Free School Meal proposals should be ready in time for announcement, and provision would need to be made for special schools, where children were particularly vulnerable. (Jonathan Slater)

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- d) Clear public messaging on which key workers would be in scope would be vital. Rapid work will be needed to define this category, building on the list drawn up for pandemic flu. (xx)
- e) If schools were to close, options for addressing the important issue of exams need to be worked up and discussed at a further meeting. (Gavin Williamson)
- f) Public messaging would need to be clear that it was safe for children while at school, but that children should not interact with grandparents over 70 years old if possible, in line with social distancing guidance. (Patrick Vallance/Chris Whitty)

Commented [7]: unknown

Commented [8]: unknown

The Cabinet Committee:
- took note

NHS capacity and resilience THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF NHS ENGLAND said that NHS resilience work had begun, including on assertive discharge from hospitals into the community, with an estimated 16,000 people to be released in 21 days. The plan also included deferring non-urgent surgery, repurposing theatres and retraining anaesthetists to use ventilators.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- a) There was a four pronged government approach to testing: 1) ramping up testing numbers; 2) . This would be announced to the public shortly. (Matt Hancock)
- b) There had been a positive response on the 'call to arms' for manufacturers to build ventilators. (Matt Hancock)
- c) Supply of Personal Protective Equipment would become a problem and there would need to be a big national effort to meet demand. There had been instances of international hoarding of this equipment. (Matt Hancock)

Commented [9]: the note doesn't contain these. Please can you advise?

Commented [10]: from the published testing strategy

Commented [11]: there are five pillars in the testing strategy - do you mean these?

The Cabinet Committee:
- took note

London forward plan THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT said that the outbreak in London was more advanced in comparison to the rest of the country. There was concern that the Local Resilience Fora were not able to cope. Work

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was needed to work up the options available to support them and model the economic impacts. There was a London Exercise taking place that day on the practicalities of the options for measures bespoke to London. There was a discussion on these issues planned for a meeting the following day.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that options for pubs were a key issue to consider in the discussion the following day.

Daily Communications
Narrative and Press
Conference

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT
COMMUNICATIONS said that

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comms

The Cabinet Committee:
- took note

Other business

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the Chancellor deserved thanks for his brilliant measures announced the previous day. He said that, at the right moment, the Queen could be asked to communicate the plan to the nation.