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Minutes

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COVID-19 OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Covid-19 Operations Committee
held by video conference on

Tuesday 27th July 2021
At 17:00 PM

P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

ALSO PRESENT

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

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

The Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP
Paymaster General

The Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP
Minister of State (Minister for Housing)

The Rt Hon John Whittingdale OBE MP
Minister of State (Minister for Media and Data)

Kevin Foster MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Future Borders and Immigration)

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Nadhim Zahawi MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment)

The Rt Hon Lord Benyon
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity)

Dr Thomas Waite
Director of Health Protection, Joint Biosecurity Centre, Department of Health and Social Care

Dr Jenny Harries OBE
Chief Executive, UK Health Security Agency

Ruth Milton FFPH
Deputy Head, Public Health Advice, Guidance & Expertise, Public Health England

Clara Swinson
Director General, Global Health, Department of Health and Social Care

Professor Dame Angela Mclean
Chief Scientific Medical Adviser, Ministry of Defence

Simon Ridley
Director General for Strategy, COVID-19 Taskforce

Roger Hargreaves
Director, Civil Contingencies Secretariat

Claire Pimm
Director, National Resilience Communications, Cabinet Office

Secretariat

S Agrawal

NR

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CONTENTS

Item	Subject	Page
1.	Summer high prevalence response and upcoming risks	1

Summer high prevalence response and upcoming risks

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER said that in the previous week the Committee had looked at the risks present in a high prevalence world. The biggest risk related to food supply and infrastructure. Work had been undertaken to further mitigate this risk by deploying the Daily Contact Testing regime and introducing changes to self-isolation. The changes had been broadly welcomed by those who were benefitting. The Government was operating against a backdrop of falling cases but there was still a need to be cautious as the impact of moving to step four of the roadmap was unknown. There were a range of other high prevalence risks which needed to be discussed that day.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- a) NHS pressures presented both demand and supply challenges. There had been a resurgence of demand on urgent and emergency care pathways which were at 110 percent compared to that point in previous years as individuals had held back but were now coming forward for care. More individuals were going through urgent and emergency routes as primary care routes were unable to operate fully. There were further pressures from increasing admissions to hospital and on clearing the backlog of electives. There were significant pressures on the ambulance services. The Department for Health and Social Care had put in a request with the Ministry of Defence for military assistance;
- b) the NHS workforce was very stretched and absence levels were at the highest rates. Productivity was lower because of the infection control measures in place. The pressures were very localised with the North East and North West most impacted;
- c) there was record demand for testing. Although case numbers had fallen in the previous days the future direction was not known. Travel over summer and the Daily Contact Testing regime would also create further demand. The Department for Health and Social Care had plans to increase testing capacity for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, HM Treasury confirmed that approval had been given for the procurement of further PCR tests;
- d) the time taken to process symptomatic testing should be prioritised for critical service workers. Allowing the use of home testing would help relieve pressure should absentee levels reach critical levels if there was limited space for a test site at the work premises;