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Minutes

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CABINET

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

TUESDAY 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021  
At 0930 AM

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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 Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP  
President of COP26

The Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP  
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and  
Industrial Strategy

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 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 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 Lord Frost of Allenton CMG  
Minister of State for the Cabinet Office

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 Michael Ellis QC MP  
Attorney General

Sir Patrick Vallance  
Government Chief Scientific Adviser  
(Item 5)

Professor Jonathan Van-Tam MBE  
Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England and the UK  
(Item 5)

Secretariat

S Case  
M Sweeney  
J Cowan

**Name Redacted**

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I&S

#### Covid-19 Response

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that current cases of Covid-19 (coronavirus) were very low. The number of deaths per day were averaging at around nine which was comparatively very good news. However, everyone was acutely aware of the risks posed by the variant strain B.1.617.2 (the India variant) and its prevalence in particular areas such as Bolton and Blackburn. The majority of those in hospital had been offered the vaccine but had not taken up the offer, and this message was being used to encourage uptake of the vaccine in these areas. Sharp increases (from low levels) were now being seen elsewhere in the country, such as Bedford, Hounslow and Sefton, and the same surge testing and extra vaccination capacity would be rolled out in these areas. Good use was being made of surveillance techniques, such as waste water monitoring and individual hospital admissions, to keep a careful eye on the prevalence of the variant and its impact. The tools of mass testing and vaccination were available, so the Government should be able to avoid the actions it had been forced to take the previous autumn. The vaccine was working to prevent hospitalisation and deaths, but the impact of the

vaccines on transmission of the India variant was not yet clear. This variant was more transmissible than previous variants: it now made up the majority of new cases in the UK and was expected to become the dominant strain. There had been reporting in the media that the Government should have moved more rapidly to put India on the 'red list' of countries with the toughest level of quarantine requirements. In reality the Government had put India on this list before others, such as Germany and Canada, and before the India variant had been formally classified as a variant of concern. This variant underlined the importance of caution on international travel policy, while being able to open up the economy domestically.

THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISER said that the India variant was more transmissible and was replacing the previous Kent variant. The vaccine had successfully broken the link between infection and hospitalisation for previous variants, and it looked like this remained the case with the India variant as well. However, the impact of the vaccine on transmission of the India variant was still unclear.

THE GOVERNMENT'S DEPUTY CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER said that scientifically they were more confident that two doses of the vaccine could interrupt transmission, rather than one. It would be a few more days, while modellers and mathematicians looked at the latest data, to be certain of this.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that it was not yet clear how high and strong the UK's defences were against the wave of this incoming variant. The signs were positive, but until the Government could be more sure that the country would not be overwhelmed the overall approach should continue to be cautious. While there was some worrying data the UK was sticking to its roadmap and suggestions to the contrary in the media should be ignored. The position would be clearer within a few weeks.

The Cabinet:

- took note.