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Minutes

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CABINET

Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held at 10 Downing Street

TUESDAY 7th December 2021
At 0930 AM

P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor, and
Secretary of State for Justice

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for the Foreign, Commonwealth
and Development Office, and Minister for Women
and Equalities

The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and
Communities; Minister for Intergovernmental
Relations

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

The Rt Hon Stephen Barclay MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Minister for
the Cabinet Office

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

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP
COP26 President

The Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State for Education

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs

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 Nadine Dorries 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 Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Minister without Portfolio (and Conservative Party Chair)

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Chief Whip)

The Rt Hon Simon Clarke 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 Suella Braverman QC MP
Attorney General

The Rt Hon Kit Malthouse MP
Minister of State (Minister for Crime and Policing)

The Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State (Minister for Higher and Further Education)

The Rt Hon Nigel Adams MP
Minister of State (Minister without Portfolio)

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
M Sweeney

Name Redacted

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The Cabinet:

- took note.

Covid-19 Response

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the data on Covid-19, particularly the new Omicron variant, was not encouraging. The doubling rate was high. There was much we did not yet know. There was some reason for guarded optimism: but any disease, however mild, that replicated that quickly and affected large numbers of people, would inevitably put pressure on the health system. This posed a significant problem. The answer must include keeping on with the vaccination booster programme, and jabs would be offered to all those over 18 years old by the end of January. But he would not be doing his job if he was not clear with Cabinet colleagues about the potential for numbers of infections to rise very fast. The Government should be encouraging people to be cautious and to manage risk as best they could.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE said that the Omicron strain was much more infectious than Delta, with a faster doubling time. It was widespread throughout the UK and case rates could even peak later that month. It was not inevitable that the NHS would become overwhelmed, but that was how it looked on some projections. Vaccination remained critical, and the UK was providing jabs as fast as any country in the world. But it would be impossible to administer a booster to every person within the next two weeks. The NHS was now stepping up its contingency plans.

THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER said that the Omicron variant was doubling roughly every three days, which would lead to big numbers very fast. It was not yet clear how severe the health effects on individuals would be, but it was clear from the modelling that they would have to be very substantially less severe than Delta to avoid unmanageable pressures on the NHS. The Government should consider acting now.

THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISER said that Covid growth was exponential, while the degree of severity was linear. Any gains from lower severity would quickly be overtaken by rapid exponential growth. At this stage it was clear that vaccines were much less effective at preventing infection from the Omicron variant, but they would hopefully reduce the severity of infection and offer protection against hospitalisation and death.