

## Module 2 Summary of Evidence of Simon Case

Cabinet Secretary, and head of the civil service having replaced Lord Sedwill, as Cabinet Secretary on 9th September 2020.

He came into the Cabinet Office from 6th April 2020 and shortly established and led a taskforce on Covid-19 including work on the non-shielding vulnerable.

I Identified 39 WhatsApp strings that I was in that were relevant. I've submitted 30 to the Inquiry, but 9 were lost in the process of transferring them to hand over to the Inquiry. I can only apologise for that. It's entirely my error.

Those 9 other strings have been obtained through other participants.

Patrick Vallance Diary records you as saying you wanted the Chair of this inquiry to be someone like Lord Saville who would keep it going forever.

I don't remember saying that. Chris Whitty and Patrick Vallance were concerned that an Inquiry would start during the pandemic and make life difficult for them to keep doing what they needed.

It felt that decision taking was inefficient and more difficult than it had to be. Did it actually lead to decisions being delayed as a result of those behaviours? I'm not sure it did. I think it made it inefficient and sometimes ineffective in things. But did we lock down later or unlock later because of behaviours? I'm not sure that we did.

It was definitely dysfunctional but if anything, it was too dynamic, it was difficult to settle on a course of action and be sure that the course of action would be consistent. I regret the messages about trolleying and flip flopping and expressing myself in that way. I didn't know the PM beforehand and didn't know how he took decisions. After 2021 I got into the rhythm of it. His style is very much wanting the debate to play out in front of him. Competition for ideas and views, I think is really how he made decisions. He'd really want to test and see.

I don't think I really understood how difficult, at quite a deep ideological level the Prime Minister found the mass locking up of the population, the harms, he was always really thinking, particularly focusing about children and education, the damage as he saw it that was being done to society through those big decisions on the lockdowns. I don't think I understood at the time in a way that I do now, quite how personally difficult that was for him, as well as the style.

I was the one who had to take what the PM and his ministerial team had decided and go and tell other members of the Covid Taskforce. I had to tell the rest of Whitehall, talk to Simon Stevens at the NHS and say "This is the direction we're going and this is what we've got to do." So I found it incredibly frustrating that we had a decision that I could safely share with my colleagues and plan on that basis, but then the

next day a different decision is made. That was really difficult. I was frustrated and wish a decision had been taken on day one and stuck to.

I can't say why work was not done on non-shielded vulnerable people before I arrived. I don't know what discussions took place before lockdown.

I think the really difficult thing was that in particular there were very bad relationships between Mr Cummings, Lord Lister, Martin Reynolds, and Stuart Glassborow. Those were all the people who actually sat outside the Prime Minister's office. In Number 10, that group would have been seen as the top of the shop and the relationships between Mr Cummings and the other three were poor, and that did not help at all.

The structural relationship or the mechanism for dealing with the Devolved Administrations was not put into place. That didn't happen. Boris Johnson had a real aversion to sitting around a table with the First Ministers. He delegated much of it to Michael Gove. Matt Hancock as the Health Secretary had regular contact with the health ministers of the other nations and Chris Whitty did with the four nation CMOs, which I think was a real engine room for us.

It was a tussle in my view, to get the right people in the room when I first started. I think, there's material where I'm saying, "We've got to get Matt Hancock into the room, he's the Health Secretary, he needs to be there at these meetings" and other people were saying they didn't want him there.

The relationship between the Prime Minister and Chancellor is one of the most important relationships in government and can make or break a government. Johnson and Sunak had a good relationship. Pretty candid relationship. I don't think it afforded the Chancellor an unfair advantage over other elements in decision making. Chris Whitty, Patrick Vallance and Rishi Sunak as Chancellor were the most important voices for Boris Johnson during the Covid period.

WhatsApp from Simon Case to the PM: "it can't always be you agreeing with Rishi"

The Chancellors job is to put forward the economic case, that is at the core of the Chancellor's job. The Prime Minister's job is to balance that with a lot of other considerations. So, I think that message is me saying to the Prime Minister: you do the job of Prime Minister and he'll do the job of Chancellor.

I wasn't there before lockdown, but it appears that there was no real debate about the economic and social consequences of a lockdown, because it was public health issue and the absolute need to prevent the NHS from collapsing and the need to bring the R rate down, that won the day.

My assessment is that in relation to the first lockdown the clear danger presented by Covid-19 and lack of understanding about the virus meant the imperative felt incredibly clear to those who were there. I wasn't there so I suspect there was a lot more debate than my characterisation suggests.

WhatsApp messages between Simon Case and Mark Sedwill on 22nd May in which Simon Case refers to Mark Sedwill having suggested that Sir Patrick Vallance and Sir Chris Whitty be excluded from a meeting with the Prime Minister at which the easing, of restrictions was to be discussed. Simon Case said "*Your call about not including Patrick and Chris was genius, it removed that dynamic*".

The Prime Minister had already had many, many discussions with Chris and Patrick about it, and sometimes, if there were too many people in the room putting forward competing views, it would be difficult to get to a decision that would stick. It was not skewing the advice being given to the PM as he had already had that advice. It was about getting the Chancellor on board with the proposals that Chris and Patrick had suggested. Mark's view was it's easier to get these things agreed with the Chancellor, i.e. things he may not like, if the Prime Minister is the one proposing it rather than Chris and Patrick are proposing it.

### Autumn 2020

We were prisoners of our own mentality of being desperate to avoid another lockdown. All these attempts to come up with other solutions. The debate was there, we just couldn't bring it to a solution or get an agreement to do something, we were just desperate to avoid lockdown. Now you wonder how on earth did we make that mistake. At the time it felt like reasonable attempt after reasonable attempt to avoid that second lockdown, because it was so damaging. We just couldn't get the clarity of thought that was probably needed.

I thought the tiering would work. I know Chris Whitty and Patrick Vallance were very concerned about it. Could tiering have worked if we'd started earlier at a higher level? Possibly it could have done. It's another of those 'what if' moments. The high incidence through late summer and autumn was the underlying current that we were swimming against.

By end of October, the Government had left itself with no option but to impose a lockdown. My instinct is that an earlier, harsher lockdown could have avoided a later, longer lockdown but I haven't seen the data to support that.

I think the second lockdown should have been imposed 2 weeks earlier. The evening before the Prime Minister announced the lockdown it felt like we were back here because the State had failed. We had tried, I think at every stage to act with the best of intentions to find the right balance to avoid these harms, but we just didn't come up with the right answer. It was a very dark day.