



HOUSE OF LORDS

European Union Committee

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Rt Hon. John Whittingdale OBE MP
Minister of State for Media and Data
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

29 June 2020

Lord Bethell of Romford
Minister for Innovation
Department for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

Dear John and James,

C(2020)2296 : COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION on a common Union toolbox for the use of technology and data to combat and exit from the COVID-19 crisis, in particular concerning mobile applications and the use of anonymised mobility data

C(2020)2523 : COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION: Guidance on apps supporting the fight against COVID 19 pandemic in relation to data protection

Thank you for your letter of 1 June on the above files. The EU Services Sub-Committee considered the letter at its meeting on 11 June and decided to retain the file under examination.

We note that the Government has now changed its approach and will develop the app in line with the decentralised model recommended in the Commission's toolbox. The app will now also be based on Apple and Google's application programming interface (API). Is the Government seeking to make any changes to that API or make any bespoke amendments? If so, what are these proposals?

The Health Secretary originally set the target of 'mid-May' for the launch of the NHS COVID-19 track and trace app. However, the Government has not yet announced when the app will be made available despite the test and trace system coming into operation in England and Scotland on 28 May. When will the NHS app be launched? What is the Government's assessment of this delay's impact on the effectiveness of the test, track and trace system?

A number of European countries are already using track and trace apps. Recognising that there has not been sufficient time to make a proper diagnosis of the effectiveness of systems, what is the Government doing to learn from their experiences?

Your letter states that 'it may be necessary to make these apps interoperable in the future'. On 16 June, the EU member states agreed a set of technical specifications to ensure a safe exchange of information between national contact tracing apps.¹ Will the UK app be designed to meet the EU's technical specifications to ensure interoperability? In particular, what is the Government doing to ensure that the UK app will be effective as users travel within the common travel area with the Republic of Ireland?

We maintain an active interest in these files and would welcome the Government keeping the Committee updated about the development and implementation of the app.

We look forward to your response within 10 working days.

I am copying this letter to Baroness Harding, Chair of NHS Improvement; Sir William Cash MP, Chair of the Commons European Scrutiny Committee; Jessica Mulley, Clerk to the Commons Committee; Les Saunders, Cabinet Office, and Ellie Martin, Scrutiny Coordinator, Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Kinnoull', with a horizontal line underneath.

Lord Kinnoull
Chair of the European Union Committee

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1043