



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
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Our reference: MC2020/17797

William Wragg MP  
Chair, Public Administration and  
Constitutional Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
SW1A 0AA

18th November 2020

Thank you for your letter of 11 November. I will address each of your questions that fall under the remit of the Cabinet Office. The Department of Health and Social Care will respond to your remaining points separately.

The national measures for England will expire on 2 December, when we will seek to ease restrictions, going back to a tiered system on a local and regional basis according to the latest data and trends. Details will be set out closer to the time and MPs will be consulted ahead of a vote on the proposed way forward. The Government is continuing to engage with local authorities to ensure that their views are incorporated and that they are prepared.

Official forecasts for the UK economy are the responsibility of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). They will publish their next forecast on 25 November. The Bank of England published their latest economic forecast on 5 November, which included UK restrictions announced up to and including 31 October. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) publishes official economic data on a regular basis, including sectoral and regional information. All forecasters have found that standard modelling techniques have significant limitations in current circumstances: the unprecedented nature of the COVID restrictions means that there are no established statistical relationships, or previous data sets to draw on, and estimates therefore rely on behavioural assumptions. This means results are uncertain and have to be treated with considerable caution. The Treasury does not prepare economic forecasts. Nevertheless, policy advice to Ministers covers the economic context, including sectoral and regional dimensions, and draws on ONS data and official forecasts by the Bank of England and OBR, as well as external forecasts. In looking at the economic impact on particular sectors, we draw on information from relevant departments – for example the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

The Contain framework sets out how NHS Test and Trace works with local authorities, Public Health England (PHE) and the public to contain and manage local outbreaks. The framework can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/containing-and-managing-local-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreaks/covid-19-contain-framework-a-guide-for-local-decision-makers>.

The Government is committed to ensuring the right levels of intervention in the right places to manage outbreaks. A wide range of indicators are monitored to ensure constant situational awareness across England. Data on local virus prevalence is published with detailed information provided to local systems, providing an early-warning system to enable early, preventative action. Indicators fall into the following groups:

- PHE and NHS Test and Trace data – for example the number and rate of increase of positive cases and the number of outbreaks in an area.
- NHS activity – for example hospital admissions for COVID-19.
- Local context – drawing on liaison with Regional Health Leads, local partners and leaders, mobility and outbreak setting data. For example, where a move in the testing data can be explained by a single outbreak, we will tend to not increase the alert level if we are confident it will be contained.
- Additional indicators – where applicable, this may include increases in NHS 111 calls regarding COVID-19 like symptoms or mortality data.

**With every good wish,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Gove', followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that extends to the right.

**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
and Minister for the Cabinet Office**



# PACAC (Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)

House of Commons · London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office  
Sent by email

11<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Dear Michael,

## **Covid 19 data and local decision-making**

Last week the Committee heard from local government leaders in the second evidence session of our inquiry on *Data transparency and accountability: Covid 19*. The Committee plans to conclude the inquiry with a report which will make a series of recommendations to Government, but where issues are of immediate and pressing concerns I will write to you. This letter concerns plans for moving out of the current national (England-wide) lock down.

The lock down is due to end on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, and local government leaders raised concerns with the Committee about the route out of lock down. I'd be grateful if you could consider the following issues that were raised and if you could write to me by 18<sup>th</sup> November answering the following questions:

1. Will the Government further clarify the tier system so that it does not contain differences or concessions between local areas in the same tier, and is comprehensive enough that additional tiers are not required? This would help to provide some much-needed clarity and consistency for local areas.
2. Will the Government work with local leaders to put escalation and de-escalation frameworks in place for movement out of national lock down and between tiers?
3. When will the Government be able to confirm which tiers local areas will move into after the national lock down so areas can prepare?
4. Will the Government provide clarity on the indicators used to decide on which tier and area should be in? More broadly, will the Government consider a wider set of indicators including, for example, social factors, impact on livelihoods and wider health indicators?
5. The Committee was told that there is a two-week lag between local data being available and Government plans being announced in response to that data. With a clearer set of indicators in place, could local leaders move quickly to make local decisions, using the most up to date data?

6. The Committee heard that Government does not have (or did not share) any economic analysis of local lock down decisions with local Government officials. What economic analysis has been for local area lock downs, or how are you working with local areas to decide on tiers and economic support before changes are announced?
7. Finally, since the evidence session we have all received the very positive news that a vaccine trial has been successful, and the UK Government has ordered 40m doses (for 20m people). In the evidence session we heard about local issues with the roll out testing, including difficulties finding appropriate sites in some areas. Can you explain what you have learned from testing will be applied to the roll out of vaccinations and might prevent the repeat of problems we have seen with testing?

*Yours ever,*



**William Wragg MP**  
**Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee**