



PACAC (Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)

House of Commons · London SW1A 0AA
Tel 020 7219 3268 Email pacac@parliament.uk
Website www.parliament.uk/pacac

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
By email

27th November 2020

Dear Michael,

Data transparency and accountability; Covid 19

Thank you again for your continuing assistance with our inquiry into Covid 19 data and for your letter of 18th November. Your letter helpfully addressed some of our questions and we await a further response from the Department for Health and Social Care.

Yesterday, the Government announced which areas would go into which tiers but there is some uncertainty surrounding why some areas have been put into some tiers. Yesterday's announcement highlights how fundamentally important it is for the Government to be transparent about the data underpinning these decisions.

Witnesses to our inquiry have told us that transparency helps local leaders makes decisions, it builds public trust and confidence, and encourages better compliance with rules and guidelines.

The Government have outlined five "tests" underpinning tier decisions, which is a helpful step in improving the transparency of decision making.

The five tests you outline are:

- case detection rates in all age groups
- case detection rates in the over-60s
- the rate at which cases are rising or falling
- positivity rate (the number of positive cases detected as a percentage of tests taken)
- pressure on the NHS, including current and projected occupancy

It is, however, very hard to find data which explains how well local areas perform under these tests. The data, where it is available, is spread over multiple sources. When users of the Government website search for a postcode, the data they are given does not clearly link back to the 5 tests outlined. Sometimes areas even seem to be doing



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relatively well against indicators but are still in tiers two or three with no clear explanation.

1. Can you respond to this letter explaining where we can find data pertaining to each of the five tests at local area level?

Witnesses who gave evidence to our inquiry on 24th November have told us that data on Covid 19 is fragmented and the Government's priority should be integrating data sources into a clear surveillance system. This fragmentation is reflected by your letter of 18th November, which splits the response between yourself and DHSC. I have, therefore, copied the secretaries of state with responsibility for health and local government into this letter.

2. Can you explain the Governance of lockdown decisions? Who is producing the data; Who is responsible for integrating the data so that a single decision can be reached; and what role does the Cabinet Office play in co-ordinating?

3. Who should we hold to account for ensuring data underpinning lockdown decisions are transparent?

Further to this, on 22nd July the Prime Minister had given a written statement to the house announcing that:

"responsibility for government use of data has transferred from the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) to the Cabinet Office. DCMS will retain responsibility for data policy for the economy and society. This change will help ensure that government data is used most effectively to drive policy making and service delivery."

4. Can you provide any further details on this, including what elements of Government data have moved to the Cabinet Office?

5. Can you outline the split of responsibilities between Cabinet Office, DCMS, and individual departments? Can you explain how this announcement fits into the ongoing DCMS-led consultation on data?

6. Can you explain how this movement of responsibility impacts on the response to Covid 19?

Thank you again for your support with this inquiry. Can you provide an answer to question one before Wednesday 2nd December, and answers to the remaining queries before Friday 11th December.



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This letter has been copied to the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Wragg'.

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee