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Chair, Public Administration and  
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House of Commons  
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Dear William,

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee's inquiry into 'Data Transparency and Accountability: COVID-19' on 4 February. Further to my commitment at the session, I write to you to provide detail on the following points:

- a) An outline of the evidence underpinning the decisions to close hospitality and non-essential retail in tier 4 and to introduce the 10pm curfew for venues;
- b) Evidence on whether these measures have been effective in reducing household mixing;
- c) An overview of how central government communicates its announcements on new restrictions to local public health bodies; local authorities; and Local Resilience Forums to ensure LAs are receiving the information they need; and
- d) The figures on citizens' compliance with lockdowns, to inform government's understanding of the levels of compliance with rules and regulations, alongside our research on non-compliance.

**A) The closure of hospitality and non-essential retail in tier 4 and the 10pm curfew**

In relation to this query, I refer you to evidence already provided by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to the Science and Technology Select Committee on 16 October when that Committee posed the same question:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3107/documents/29076/default/>.

Although COVID-secure measures can mitigate the risk of transmission in different settings, they are unlikely to eliminate that risk completely. The new, more transmissible variant VOC 202012/01, first detected in the South East of England last year, combined with a very high prevalence of the virus, provided multiple opportunities for it to spread when different households mix. The government has drawn on evidence from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) to inform its decisions regarding the measures taken to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Indoor settings carry higher risks, due to the close proximity of people,

poor ventilation and greater exposure. The risk of transmission stems from environmental and behavioural factors: higher risk contacts are those that are close, prolonged, indoors, face-to-face, in poorly ventilated and/or crowded spaces, or involve “loud” activities. These are all prevalent in the hospitality sector (but not unique to it). The disinhibitory effects of alcohol are likely to exacerbate difficulties with social distancing.<sup>1</sup>

As cases continued to rise across the country, the government introduced further restrictions to reduce the risk of transmission from household mixing. The government balanced reducing the R number, with minimising the impact on people’s lives and livelihoods. We have seen in the UK that it has generally only been possible to get R consistently below 1 in places where there have been substantial restrictions on hospitality. SAGE analysis of tiers, firebreaks and other interventions across the UK found that epidemics shrunk in every area subject to Tier 3/3+ in England or with national restrictions in Northern Ireland. All other interventions were followed by a more mixed picture.<sup>2</sup>

### **B) Effectiveness of reducing household mixing**

SAGE advised that to reduce transmission, it is essential to reinforce the core principles of a hierarchy of control measures to reduce physical transmission through the environment by all routes, one of which is to reduce social contacts.<sup>3</sup>

Though the mean number of contacts increased after the easing of the November restrictions, it did reduce across the Christmas period (after the introduction of tier 4) to similar levels seen during November.<sup>4</sup> Fewer people were meeting with others either in public or in private in December, in Great Britain, compared to when the October tiers were in place. In October an average of 18.5% of people were meeting with others in private households, and 21% were meeting in a public space. This reduced to 8.8% of people meeting with others in private households, and 17% meeting in a public space across all tiers in December.<sup>5</sup>

Over Christmas and New Year specifically, a lower percentage of adults in Great Britain (14%) reported meeting up with others in a public place in Tier 4 compared with Tier 3 (18%) and Tier 2 (19%). Similar proportions were meeting in a personal space: 14% in Tier 4, and 13% in Tiers 2 and 3.<sup>6</sup>

In November the government reviewed the impact of the 10pm curfew measure and subsequently made adjustments to the regulations, including the introduction of ‘last orders’ at 10pm, to facilitate staggered departure from venues and therefore reduce pressure on public transport.

### **C) Announcing new restrictions to local public health bodies; local authorities; and Local Resilience Forums**

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) continues to lead a significant and regular engagement with councils and local government sector bodies including the Local Government Association during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Local Government Secretary and the Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government host regular

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<sup>1</sup> Policy paper [Transmission risk in the hospitality sector](#), 27 November 2020

<sup>2</sup> Policy paper [Transmission risk in the hospitality sector](#), 27 November 2020

<sup>3</sup> [Mitigations to Reduce Transmission of the new variant SARS-CoV-2 virus SAGE-EMG, SPI-B, Transmission Group](#), 23 December 2020

<sup>4</sup> [Comix Report Week 41](#), Report for SPI-M-O and SAGE, 14 January 2021

<sup>5</sup> [ONS OPN](#) (Averages calculated from 7-Oct to 3-Jan)

<sup>6</sup> [ONS OPN](#), 8 January 2021

teleconferences for local government leaders and chief executives, with other Ministers from across Government also present to answer questions.

Each week, an interactive online briefing is hosted to provide communication teams from local government and other local public sector organisations with campaign and policy updates, the latest insights from audience polling, COVID-19 data and lessons from the previous seven days. These sessions are also used to share new resources and communications materials and take soundings on any additional resources which are needed.

Data on the virus' spread is shared with Local Authorities to inform local outbreak planning, so that teams across the country can quickly and effectively respond, working with the national government when necessary. All councils in England now have the ability to access testing data down to individual and postcode level. Public Health England shares this data as soon as it has been quality assured, on top of the data dashboards which have been shared with local authorities since 11 June 2020. Central government will continue to work constructively with local councils to protect the public and save lives.

#### **D) Compliance with lockdowns and the research done to understand non-compliance.**

Polling by the Office for National Statistics suggests compliance with the current national restrictions remains high across Great Britain: 89% of adults reported always or often washing their hands after returning home from a public place, 94% using a face covering when outside of their home, and 93% avoiding physical contact when outside their home. 57% of adults are staying at home or only leaving for work, exercise, essential shopping or medical needs, higher than in the previous lockdown in November 2020<sup>7</sup> (Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, 27-31 January 2021). The proportion of adults working from home and people meeting up in personal places is now at similar levels to the end of the Spring 2020 lockdown<sup>8</sup> (Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, up to February 2021). 90% of adults continued to report always or often maintaining social distancing when meeting up with people outside of their support bubbles<sup>9</sup> (Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, 27-31 January 2021).

Understanding compliance, attitudes, behaviours and the barriers and motivators to behavioural change have been central to the Government's COVID-19 campaign strategy since the start of the pandemic. We have adapted our cross-channel communications based on the latest research. For example, using simple language and rhyming mnemonics ('Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives', 'Hands, Face, Space') to group behaviours into core ideas helps to build and sustain awareness and behaviours. Econometric modelling undertaken as part of our research programme has also enabled us to prove a link between paid-for communication and increased understanding and compliance with social distancing behaviours over time. Paid-for communication has also supported the introduction of new behaviours to supplement established messages, for example improving ventilation or 'Let fresh air in'.

Our cross-government COVID-19 campaigns have reached 95% of adults on average 17 times per week. Communication is and will continue to be a fundamental part of the Government's response to the pandemic.

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<sup>7</sup> [ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey](#), 27-31 January 2021

<sup>8</sup> [ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey](#), up to February 2021

<sup>9</sup> [ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey](#), 27-31 January 2021

Again, I am grateful for the opportunity to give evidence and hope this response provides additional clarity. I am sure we will continue this dialogue more broadly as our response to the pandemic develops.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Mordaunt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP**  
**PAYMASTER GENERAL**