

Time to review the lock down

I am sending this letter to Cabinet members.

Dear Colleague

It is time to review the lock down policy.

You will wish to have as your highest priority taking actions to reduce deaths from this disease. The evidence is abundant that the most at risk groups are the elderly and those with other medical conditions that makes them especially vulnerable to the severe form of the infection.

Policy should make it as easy as possible for all in the at risk groups to self isolate, to prevent infection Efforts need to be redoubled to ensure on line deliveries of food and other items to these households, and proper financial support for those in vulnerable categories who have lost jobs or income over it.

Your review takes place against the background of the good news that NHS capacity has been much increased and is well above current high levels of demand for care from CV 19 patients.

You need to take urgent action to save the economy. None of us have ever witnessed such a sharp contraction in economic activity, with an all too rapid surge in unemployment. There will also be far too many business failures if this carries on for much longer. You need to make sure this is the shortest lived downturn as well as the deepest.

This means a new policy of trying to get as many people and businesses as possible back to work, with sensible modifications to working arrangements to reduce risk of infection. It should be assumed that most businesses re open, with more home working and more remote technology use. Offices may want to have more people working from home to allow more space for each employee in the office. More business meetings should take place with remote technology even where people are in the same offices. Factories tend to use large amounts of machinery already, reducing the numbers of employees on line and usually allowing social distancing. Where they do not they may need additional automation. You could consider asking people to wear face masks when working with others.

It is urgent to start lifting restrictions. Many more people will lose their jobs if the lock down continues. Many self employed have no income from work. Many small businesses are struggling to pay their overheads with no revenue. There are limits to how much the state can substitute for the loss of income. If we go on like this large amounts of economic capacity will be permanently lost. An advanced society needs substantial amounts of work to be undertaken so we have the output of goods and services which sustains living standards. It is time to start to get the UK back to work, whilst protecting the vulnerable and reducing the risks of catching the disease for the rest of us

in sensible ways.