



The PM on Hancock: 'totally fucking hopeless'

Some evidence re my and Hancock's testimony to MPs



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Jun 16 82 57

Detailed analysis of all Hancock said to MPs would take days. I'll focus today on just a few things to support what I told MPs and show that No10/Hancock have repeatedly lied about the failures last year.

No10 and Hancock are seeking to rewrite history:

1. They are trying to 'memory-hole' the original Q1 2020 debacle. The reality of the 'optimal single peak strategy' with herd immunity by September is in SAGE documents, COBR documents and was briefed by Hancock, CSA, CMO and No10 press office at the time and SAGE members explained it on TV. The reality is reflected in many emails/WhatsApps. Covid was the biggest crisis faced by Westminster since WWII. The No10/Hancock line now is as if No10 had said in summer 1940, 'yes, our appeasement plan A was a great success on Hitler as you can all see, we didn't need any Plan B, appeasement then fight them on the beaches was the original plan'.
2. Hancock is creating a new version of reality in which he came up with the idea to ramp up testing before 14 March, in an inspired and heroic move he announced his 100k target on 2 April to provide leadership, and this was responsible for the change in testing capacity. The reality: as part of the transition to Plan B No10 forced a new testing plan on Hancock, who was still operating under Plan A / herd immunity assumptions in the week of 16/3 according to which community testing was pointless (hence why it was briefly officially *stopped*); our plan was to build capacity on the scale of millions; the 100k then 1m target had already been set before he announced it; his behaviour in April distracted attention from testing in care homes and the PPE debacle. A public announcement was in principle definitely right but he did what he always did — he focused on the media and himself then lied.

Testing, like vaccines, was removed from his control in May because of his

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incompetence and dishonesty March-April. You can't understand what really happened on test-trace in the rest of the year without understanding what actually happened in March-April.

3. Hancock is creating a new version of reality in which the government really did 'throw a protective ring' around care homes. The reality: covid patients were sent untested from hospital to care homes and Hancock neglected care homes and testing throughout April partly because Hancock was trying to focus effort on his press conference at the end of April claiming success for his announcement on 2/4.
4. Hancock and No10 are creating a new version of reality in which: 'there was no shortage of PPE' and on 11 April Hancock removed procurement restrictions imposed by HMT. The reality... DHSC failed to plan for PPE demand and their procurement operation collapsed. They rejected chances to buy things because of sticking to the old rules. No10 insisted on removing these rules and HMT did remove their standard rules in March. Hancock told us PPE was 'all under control' in the week of 23 March. This meant further weeks were wasted instead of used to solve the problems. Hancock then sought to blame Simon Stevens, the Chancellor and the Cabinet Office for the PPE disaster in April. The Cabinet Secretary told the PM's office that Hancock's claims were false. The lack of PPE killed NHS and care home staff in March-May.
5. On the original 'plan', testing, PPE, procurement, care homes and more, Hancock gave a fictitious account to MPs last week and portrayed himself as a heroic figure who had been in agreement with the PM throughout the crisis. The PM has supported this fiction and ordered the No10 press office to support many arguments he knows are lies. At the time, the PM agreed with me and all serious people around No10 and the Cabinet Office — in his own words, Hancock's performance on critical issues was 'totally fucking hopeless' and he had to be removed from crucial decisions: PPE to Lord Deighton, vaccines to Bingham, ventilators to Agnew, testing to Harding.
6. Hancock has also given a fictitious account of what happened on masks but I'll leave that to another day.

Why is this important?

A. If No10 is prepared to lie so deeply and widely about such vital issues of life and death last year, it cannot be trusted now either on covid or any other crucial issue of war and peace.

B. Hancock continues to have direct responsibility for things like dealing with variants and care homes. Having such a Secretary of State in a key role is guaranteed disaster. It is urgent for public safety that he is removed.

C. The PM is trying to influence officials/advisers to support the re-writing of history and is encouraging ministers to give false accounts to Parliament.

D. The PM's defence of Hancock sends an unmistakeable signal across the system: a Secretary of State will be rewarded despite repeated incompetence and dishonesty and the government machine will seek to rewrite history in Orwellian fashion because the PM thinks it in his personal interests to do so. Any decent person in Westminster ought to be appalled by this behaviour.

E. The public inquiry cannot fix this. It will not start for years and it is designed to punt the tricky parts until after this PM has gone — unlike other PMs, this one has a clear plan to leave at the latest a couple of years after the next election, he wants to make money and have fun not 'go on and on'. So we either live with chronic dysfunction for another ~5 years or some force intervenes.

From the perspective of good government and ethics the Cabinet and MPs should intervene but this is unlikely while the polls have the Conservatives ~40%+ because our political system incentivises party loyalty over good government and ethics. Senior civil servants will wait for the polls to move before trying to 'push what is falling'. But the systemic incompetence surrounding the PM is such that his operation is programmed to unravel — he always does, No10's structure makes it impossible for anybody to govern properly, and he rejected the plan to change how No10 works. Just as I said 2017-19 'this No10 will unravel, some of us should prepare for what comes next' the same is true now. This No10 will unravel — it would already be unravelling if Starmer were not also useless. People need to prepare for what comes next. Preparations — planning, building tools, preparing a team and so on — made in 2018-spring 2019 proved vital July-December 2019.

I was wondering about the issue of publishing private WhatsApp messages.

1) No10 and Hancock are openly lying even about what was briefed on-the-record, so clearly nothing is beyond their attempted rewriting of history.

2) To further their lies, PM/Hancock are spinning distorted versions of my messages from internal WhatsApp groups to the PM's favoured stooges such as Playbook Wiki.

3) Hancock challenged me at the Select Committee to provide evidence and said my failure

to publish anything was 'telling' evidence that my account was false.

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4) The Select Committee has asked me to provide evidence and clearly what MPs see the public should also see — transparency on covid is crucial.

Clearly the government cannot *reasonably* complain about me publishing evidence. Given this I will publish some internal messages. There are many more I could publish but below and in future I will publish only ones that further the question of 'what went wrong and how do we learn'. I won't publish private messages just to embarrass the PM or others. My goal is to force the system to face reality and change, not to embarrass people for the sake of it.

Memory-hole for 'herd immunity'

Plan A was described in official documents as 'the optimal single peak strategy' with all descriptions and graphs tailing off by September when 'herd immunity' was attained.

This is why there was no serious border policy Jan-March. (The border policy remains a joke because the PM personally opposed repeated attempts by me and others to implement something based on the successful East Asian approach. This has contributed to the spread of the 'delta' variant and will continue to create unnecessary risks not just on covid.)

This is why community testing was *dropped* in March until the shift to Plan B reversed the decision.

This is why nobody started thinking seriously about an East Asian style test-trace plan until we shifted to Plan B (see my PM study whiteboard of 13/3 with 'crash program for testing' scribbled on, below). (Jeremy Hunt has wrongly inferred that this thinking did not happen until May — it started in March.)

This is why there was no serious vaccine plan — i.e spending billions on *concurrent* (rather than the normal *sequential*) creation/manufacturing/distribution etc — until after the switch to Plan B. I spoke to Vallance on 15 March about a 'Manhattan Project' for vaccines out of Hancock's grip but it was delayed by the chaotic shift from Plan A to lockdown then the PM's near-death. In April Vallance, the Cabinet Secretary and I told the PM to create the Vaccine Taskforce, sideline Hancock, and shift commercial support from DHSC to BEIS. He agreed, this happened, the Chancellor supplied the cash. On 10 May I told officials that the VTF needed a) a much bigger budget, b) a completely different approach to DHSC's, which had been mired in the usual processes, so it could develop concurrent plans, and c) that Bingham needed the authority to make financial decisions herself *without clearance from Hancock*.

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This is why even on the 18 March the crucial SAGE meeting did not even have a lockdown plan to discuss, as I texted No10 officials from inside SAGE: neither DHSC nor Cabinet Office had provided such a plan nor had they asked SAGE to model such a plan (No10 did this direct with Vallance/SAGE/SPI-M as we bodged together Plan B).

This is why Hancock said to me, still delusional about us being 'the best prepared country in the world' (this was *not* one of his lies, he really did believe this because he had not properly investigated the preparations), on 12 March (the day of 'chickenpox parties' / Dilyn's bad PR / Trump wanting us to bomb the Middle East): We're better prepared than other countries, Wuhan will see a second wave when they lift their lockdown. (Also on 16 March in COBR, Hancock tried to delay the announcement on household quarantine 'because the helpline isn't ready'. Sturgeon also supported this delay. I and others warned the PM in advance this would happen and he overruled them. Both of them have misled the public about this.)

This is why even on 18 March, a SAGE member emailed me, the Cabinet Secretary and Hancock's Permanent Secretary saying we would look back on SAGE discussions as 'a strange dream' because lockdown had not even been discussed: 'Literally all the models assume that there will be a full-blown epidemic, and its just a matter of how much it can be drawn out, compressed, or **the herd immunity directed to one section or another of the population**' because thinking was based on assumptions (no test-trace, population won't listen to tough rules, reinfection from abroad etc) and 'Once you take these assumptions for granted, **the only paths that exist are to achieve herd immunity**'. But, he rightly said, suppression *should* be considered partly because the imminent collapse of the NHS was so horrific and because 'prior models and assumptions are **WRONG** [emphasis in original]. We could do this, ie a total lockdown. We'll look back on it like a strange dream, but we could – and should – do it.'

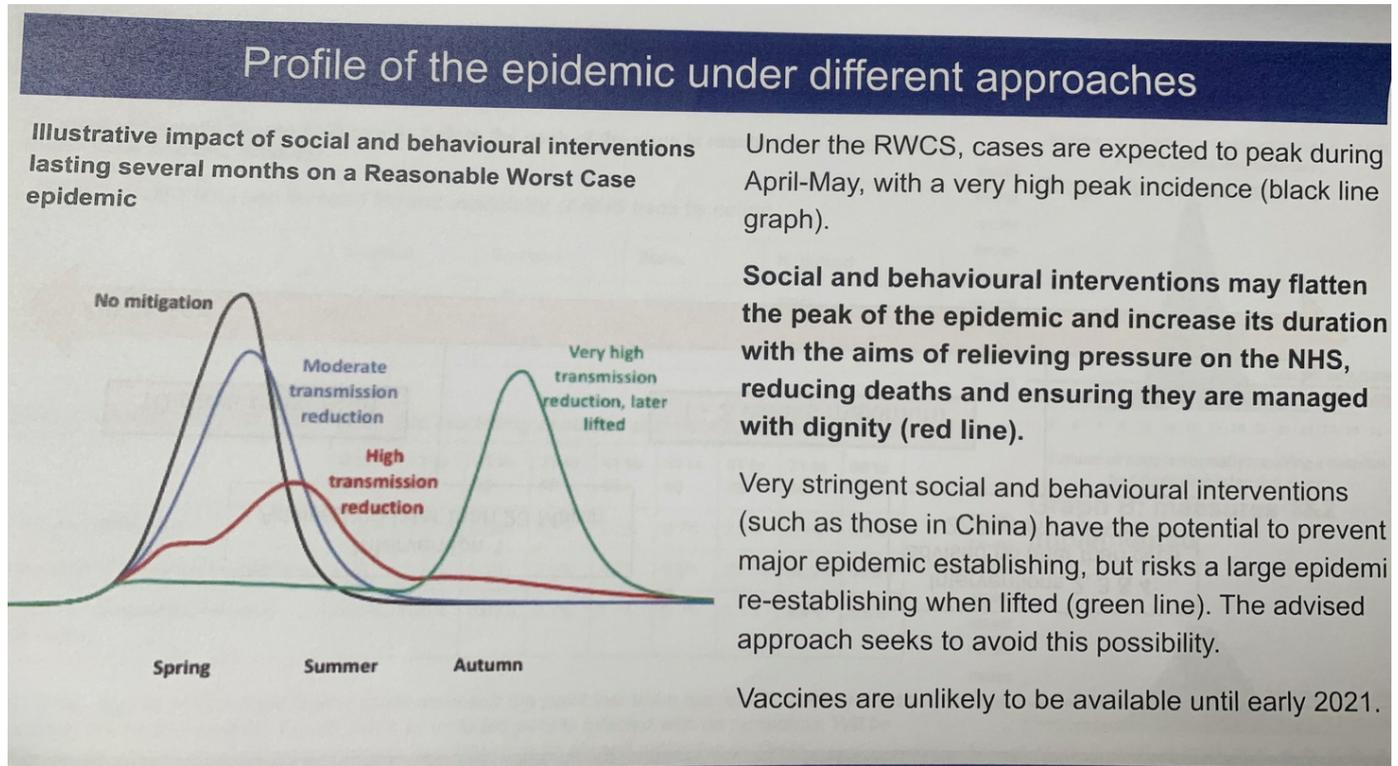
And the DHSC Permanent Secretary responsible for pandemic planning responded with the logic of Plan A: 'The virus will still exist in 3-4 weeks time and **won't we just start again with reinfection and re-spread?**' [bold added by me above] *Even on the afternoon of 18/3, after SAGE (mostly, not unanimously) were pushing for urgent lockdown at least in London), the apex of power in the DHSC was still operating under the assumptions of Plan A, i.e suppression was counter-productive. This is four days after I proposed Plan B to the PM in his study (noon, 14/3) and five days before 'stay at home'.*

COBR documents on herd immunity

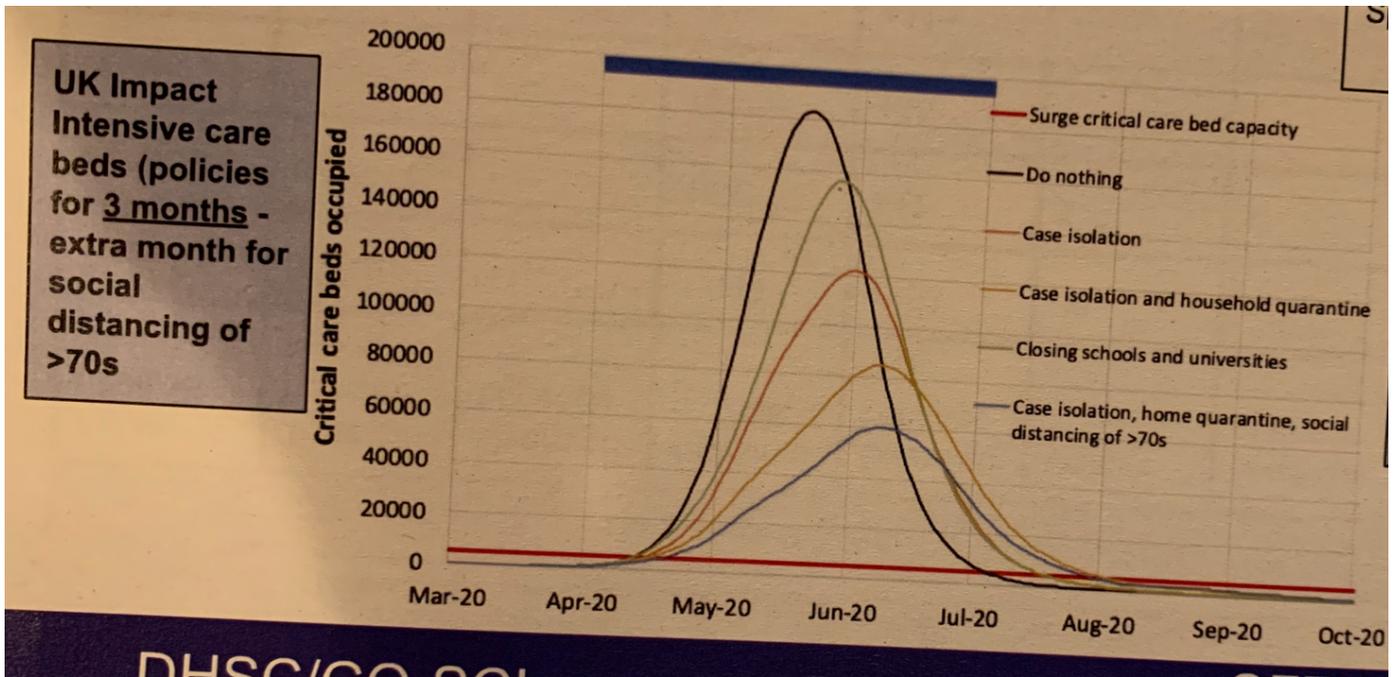
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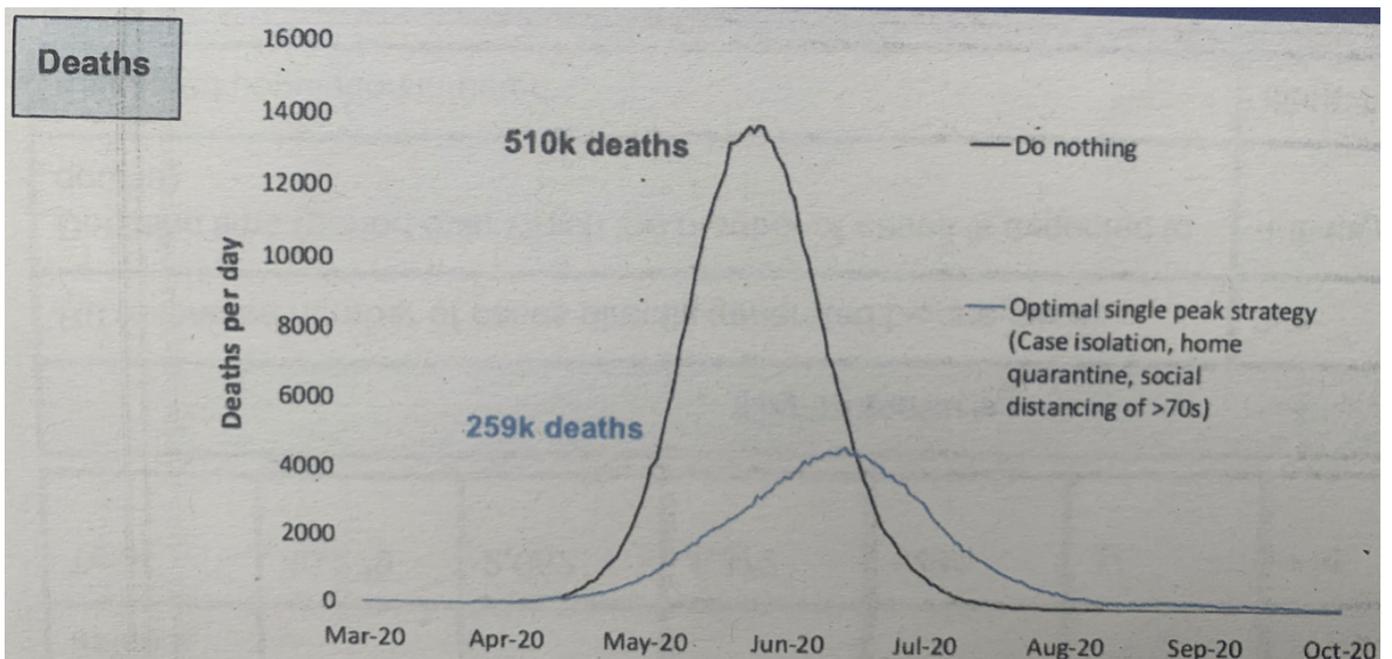
This COBR document (in multiple meetings in the week of 9/3 and 16/3) shows the logic of herd immunity by September: suppression means a disastrous second peak when the NHS is annually overstretched and the 'advised approach' (i.e. advised by DHSC/SAGE/Cabinet Office to No10) 'seeks to avoid this' by getting herd immunity by September.

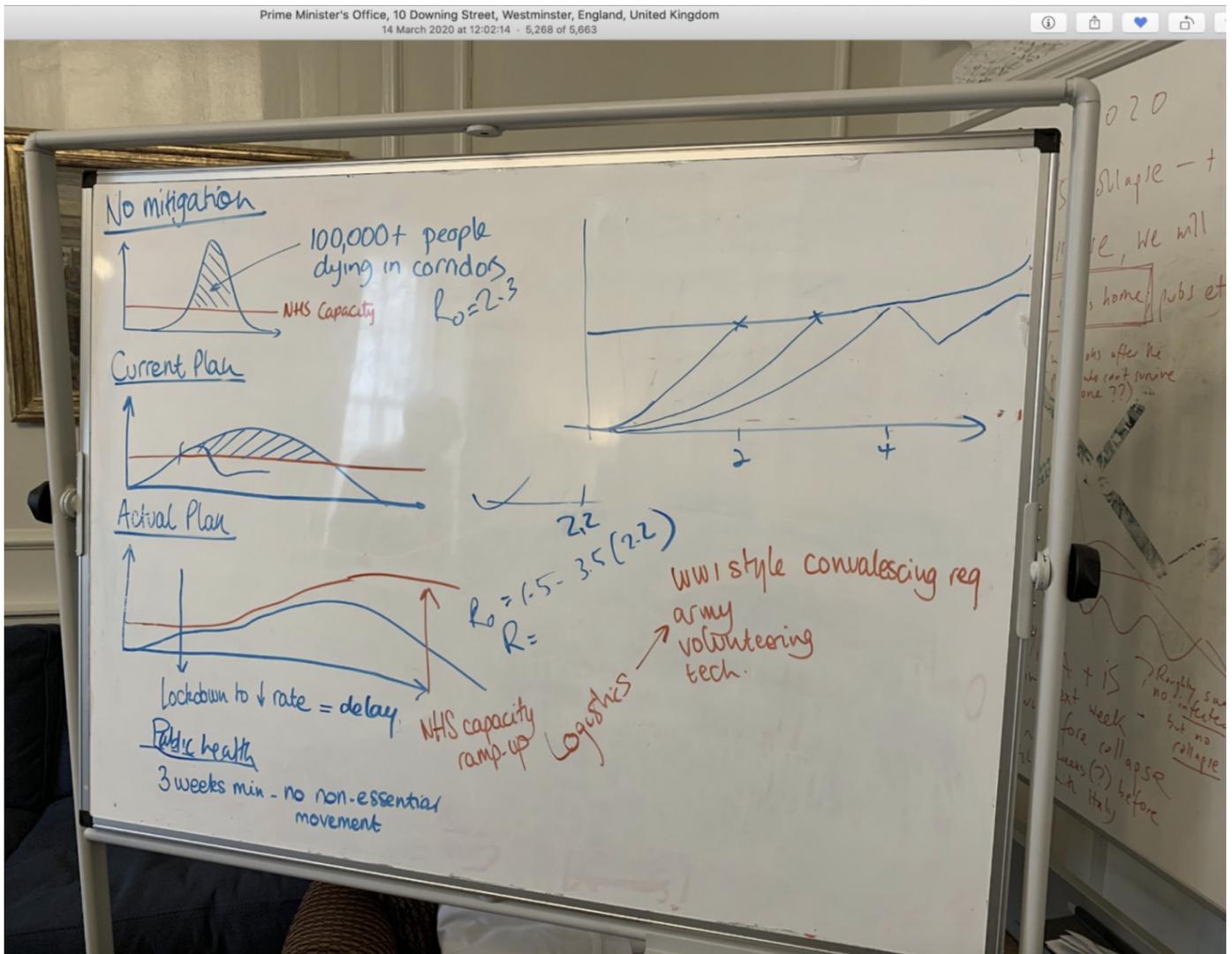


Another graph from the same mid-March COBR pack is here: N.B the red line is NHS ICU capacity, it appears to be lying almost on the x-axis because at ~5,000 it seems very near 0 when the y-axis stretches to 200,000. It shows the official Plan A as of 12-15 March involving at most the three actions which a) supposedly push the peak out into June (this thinking contributed to the lack of urgency before 16/3) but b) still totally overwhelmed ICU capacity. Note there is no line for a lockdown scenario because, *contra* Hancock's false claims to MPs last week, DHSC had not developed a plan for it nor asked SAGE to model it (as the Cabinet Secretary's reply to the email of 18 March above pointed out).



This graph from the same COBR pack shows the effect of Plan A's three interventions: ~250,000 dead after the 'optimal single peak strategy', with herd immunity by September. N.B this projection, awful as it was, was obviously *too optimistic* because it did not take into account that in this scenario *there would be no NHS for any other patients* for months until it was rebuilt. Versions of this graph were in many official documents in the week of 9/3 and 16/3. As we pointed out to the PM in the 'Goldblum' meeting on 14 March in his office, in this scenario many more than 250,000 would die and, I said, the public would march up Downing Street and lynch him. (We discovered in April that DHSC did not have plans to deal with the number of dead we were facing after switching to lockdown — never mind what would have happened if it had been x5-x10 worse.)





I told MPs how, literally as I was sketching the whiteboard above in the PM's study on 13 March in preparation for the meeting I planned the next day with the PM, the deputy Cabinet Secretary walked in and told us that DHSC clearly had no serious plan and was imploding. When asked last week by MPs re my testimony, Hancock said that the disproof of what I'd said was 'we had a plan, we published it on 3 March' and this plan discussed lockdowns. He is referring to the laughable contain-delay-mitigate 'plan' published on 3 March. This document was based on the logic that we would *not* do suppression. Obviously this embarrassingly awful document, which will be remembered as a case study in failure for decades to come, in no sense set out *what we actually did, as everybody can see*.

Journalists were briefed on the 'herd immunity' plan in the week of 9/3 by Hancock himself, by senior officials including the CSA and CMO, by the No10 press office, and SAGE members went on TV and radio explaining it.

On 13 March, as I was sketching the whiteboard above, the PM texted me, Hancock, Vallance and Whitty asking: *how do we win the herd immunity argument?* On 14th in his study, using those whiteboards, I told him: forget winning that argument, we have to switch to

Plan B.

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Hancock's claim that the 3/3 document disproves my claims is, as the evidence shows above, entirely untrue. As the evidence above shows, that 'plan' was sending us to catastrophe so we ditched it.

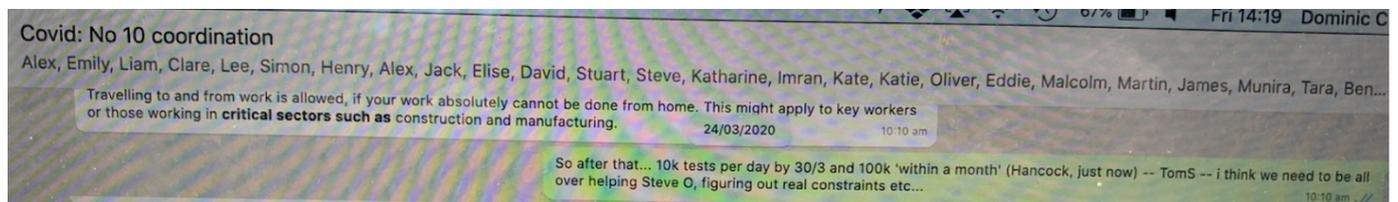
TESTING

As we sketched Plan B it was clear mass testing and test-trace would be crucial.

This was part of our discussions on Plan B 13-15 March in the PM's study.

No10 was very unhappy with what we heard from Hancock on testing before and after we started shifting to Plan B. I and others including the PM insisted on a much more radical scale-up than PHE/DHSC had considered and it was clear that PHE's senior management was totally unable to meet the challenge and Hancock had no plan to fix this. Obviously Plan A had been effectively 'do nothing' on community testing because the herd immunity plan had no place for it, hence it was officially stopped on 12 March and the concept of moving to 100k then 1 million did not exist before Plan B.

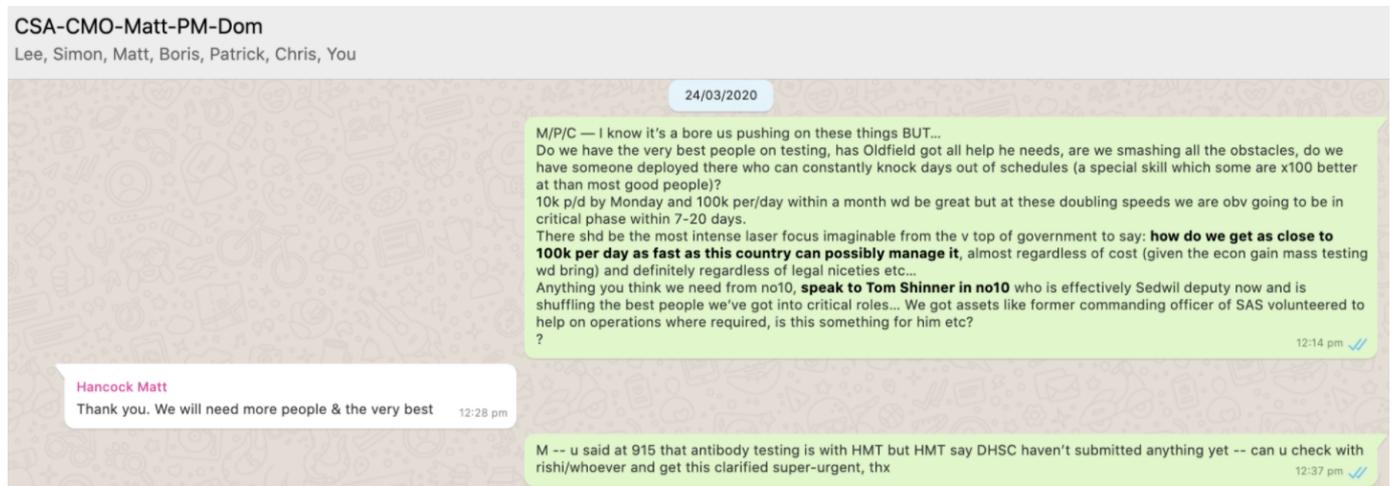
In the morning meeting on 24 March I and others quizzed a very slippery Hancock on progress with testing to see where he was after which I sent this to a No10 group:



Steve O = Oldfield. TomS = Shinner. I'd asked Tom to ditch his job and join No10 over the crucial weekend of 14-15 March. He started on Monday 16th. He had worked on 'no deal' Brexit etc for two years and had huge knowledge of Whitehall systems and great people who could be shuffled into critical roles. He played an enormous part in recovering from the collapse of No10 in March and built an entirely new team — effectively a joint No10-Cabinet Office team — in March-July which evolved into the 'covid taskforce' there now. **Before this there was no effective central entity to manage the crisis — as I told MPs, the Civil Contingencies Unit collapsed in March and had to be rebuilt with new skills and tools.** (He also did a very valuable review of the whole 'delivery' mechanism of No10/Cabinet Office, which I will explore another time.) Shinner worked with officials in DHSC and elsewhere and recruited a new team including Alex Cooper to speed everything up.

So Hancock had told the morning meeting on 24th: 10k by Monday 30/3, 100k 'within a month' of 24/3.

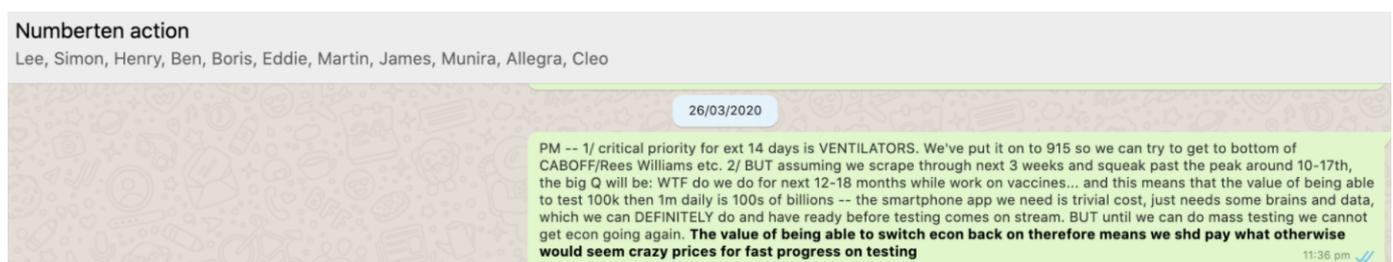
Two hours later I texted a PM group (NB. the people displayed on this group shows Simon Case who was NOT on this group at the time):



I'd pushed, did not have confidence in what I was hearing, it had been suggested I should stop pushing, I did not, 'let's take it off line' kept echoing enragingly around the Cabinet room, there was still nothing like the sense of urgency the public had a right to expect, including urgent replacing of some critical people and strengthening of teams.

You can see the trace of a classic Hancock-ism in my second message. Under pressure at the morning meeting, Hancock had done what he did so often: blame others, often HMT. As usual, it turned out that the delay was *not* with HMT but Hancock had misled the morning meeting and wrongly sought to blame others for delays. This was a recurrent pattern and in April got so bad some ministers threatened to stop attending meetings until Hancock was fired (see below).

On Thursday 26 March I sent this to a different No10 group (similarly neither Case nor Stratton were actually on this group then):

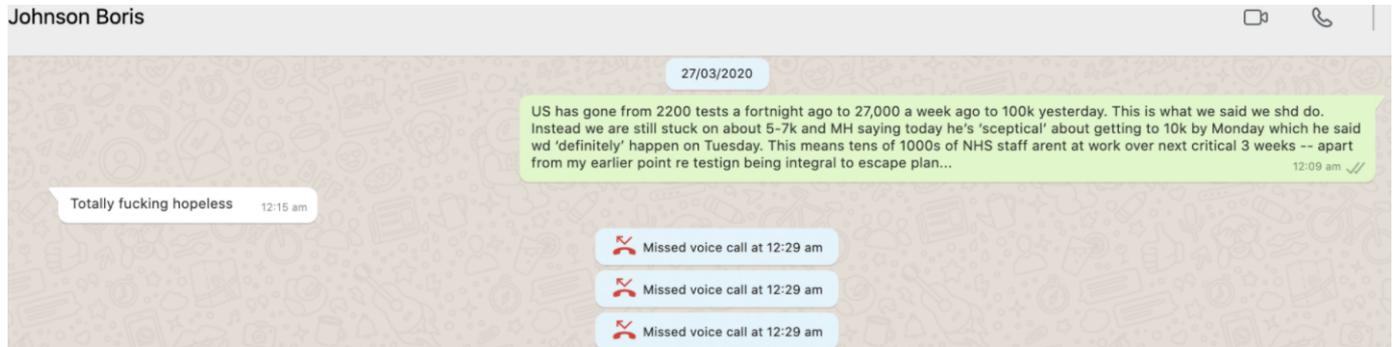


Like with *concurrent* vaccine development, much of the system had still not adapted to a world in which the cost of economic disruption was so high that spending billions on testing was a *huge return on investment*. I was pushing for the system to plan on the scale of a million per day. Tragically this did not become possible until the end of the year because of a

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further Whitehall debacle in which the people who knew how to do this were blocked for ~3-4 months by 'business as usual' thinking (see below). (The debacle of the first app is a story for another day.)

At 2339 on 26 March (minutes before he tested positive), after further information had come to No10 showing a) testing plans were a shambles, b) Hancock had misled us all again, I texted the PM:



(The missed calls are the PM calling me to say he'd tested positive and I couldn't find my phone buzzing, we spoke minutes later.)

This shows the usual Hancock pattern. Having assured us 'I'm totally on it I'm driving the team' blah, on 24th we'll 'definitely' be on 10k by Monday, then he's 'sceptical', discussions with officials reveal Hancock had told us nonsense again about actual testing trajectory, he'd told us that he then Bethell then Oldfield then another official were in charge of it (all of which was nonsense that showed *nobody was properly in charge of it*), and all this while we're facing the wave breaking over the NHS and care homes which could not test staff or patients. This pattern repeated: big talk in front of the PM, brief nonsense to the media, fail to deliver, and the rest of the system's planning disrupted because nobody could rely on what he said in the Cabinet room because *he would say anything he thought would get him through the meeting*.

Remember, when a SoS says things like 'we'll definitely do X by Y' in the Cabinet room, others plan on this basis -- until they learn 'this guy always talks nonsense'. His constant assurance of fake numbers to colleagues meant their plans were constantly disrupted. His dishonesty had destructive effects.

As the PM said of Hancock's performance on testing so far, 'totally fucking hopeless'.

This was obviously true but although the PM whinged to me and others, he would *never* say to him, despite dozens of requests from two Cabinet Secretaries, me and other ministers and officials: stop this routine or you're fired, your behaviour is undermining the whole

effort, you must tell the truth in these meetings and not treat them like you do the media. For his

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'fucking hopeless' performance on testing in March alone, Hancock should have been replaced — and worse was to come.

Hancock's story to MPs last week

The Select Committee unfortunately muddied the waters and helped Hancock muddy them when it interviewed him. Hancock told MPs that I had attacked (in my testimony to MPs) the 100k target. Hancock is not only lying about what happened last spring, he's lying about my actual words to MPs in May 2021. Greg Clark unfortunately seems to have got confused and echoed Hancock's claim. Between them they suggested I had opposed and undermined the target at the time, even though anybody can see on YouTube I actually stressed the opposite of what they both claimed last week and as you can see from the above, this is the *opposite of the truth*. I was pushing the system on testing weeks *before* Hancock's announcement and to build a system for 1m per day.

After the above exchange with the PM, he tested positive and everything got even more chaotic.

In this chaos Hancock blurted out the already-in-place 100k target to the media on 2 April. His fundamental nature is to grab the media spotlight and with the PM and me in bed he had a great chance.

To MPs last week, Hancock presented his announcement as a heroic act — testing wasn't developing fast enough, he had taken 'personal executive charge' on 17 March, 'I took personal responsibility, I set the target of 100k, I had to put myself on the line', his heroism turned things around etc.

The problem with Hancock's announcement was not the 'ambition' nor announcing the change of plan on testing.

- 1) The announcement on 2/4 had not been prepared, he just blurted it without proper planning and discussion.
- 2) It was done without agreeing a broader plan for how the capacity would be used and the different demands. In particular **care homes were appallingly neglected** in April, the crucial month (see below).
- 3) We should have been building capacity in April focused on saving lives immediately and building secure foundations for the months ahead beyond 100k to 1 million. Done properly

this would have meant not just ramping up the existing testing technologies — the gold

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standard PCR — but also rapidly developing capabilities for a) LAMP and lateral flow (the tests that give results in minutes not days), b) developing a system to incentivise new technologies then scale them, which could make testing cheaper, faster, easier and so on. (a) and (b) were neglected in April and were not properly gripped until September). We also needed antibody tests (have you had it) which were also neglected.

A big problem in the crucial April month with testing in general, care homes in particular, and PPE/procurement was that many people complained that Hancock was distorting priorities across the system so that *he could hold a successful press conference at the end of April* and say on TV 'I've met this goal' and give his nauseating spiel about how he's not really a hero, it's a team effort... It was a classic case of how MPs optimise for media coverage but in this case it was during the critical period of a disaster in which he was failing on multiple fronts.

This is why I and others were so angry (including the PM sometimes). For crystal clarity..

Should there have been a 100k target? Obviously — and not 100k but on the scale of millions.

Should it have been made public? Obviously — it should have been public long *before* 2 April.

Was Hancock's 2/4 announcement then wrenching Whitehall to focus on his press conference the right way to do it? Obviously not — it compounded the care home disaster and PPE disaster in April.

Did Hancock give an honest account of what happened on testing to MPs last week? Obviously not.

Also bear in mind: Hancock's appalling prioritisation of gaming the lobby worked to a large extent 2020-1. When you will do anything for tomorrow's papers, this earns you favours that are repaid when you fail. This sort of deep incentive problem is central to Westminster's performance.

Hancock, procurement, care homes

After I returned to work on 13 April, it became clear that a) Hancock's assurance about testing people before moving them from hospital to care home had not been and was not happening and *there was still no plan to do so* weeks after he'd assured us in the Cabinet

room, as he had on testing and PPE, that 'everything is under control', b) everything to do

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with care homes was extremely bad and the CSA and CMO were ringing alarm bells daily with No10, and warning us that neither DHSC nor PHE could cope in general or viz care homes in particular, c) everything to do with Hancock and procurement was a disaster, particularly the PPE situation.

We'd already had a nightmare with Hancock on ventilators. This message was from me to the PM the morning of 27 March. Just after we'd announced he had covid the morning covid meeting in the Cabinet room saw officials tell us that **DHSC had turned down ventilators at this critical point because prices had been marked up.**



As he had the night before viz testing, the PM accurately summed up the situation: **‘It’s Hancock. He has been hopeless.’**

The issue of officials turning down buying opportunities because of increased prices was a huge problem that recurred on subject after subject. The global crisis meant supply chains were disrupted and prices exploded. But Whitehall was still trying to use their normal EU-based procurement system and ‘value for money’ rules. This guaranteed crazy decisions, shortages and unnecessary deaths. (This is partly why I insisted on ARIA, the new science and technology funding agency, being excluded from normal Whitehall procurement rules, ‘value for money’ rules and so on — they are absolutely hostile to high-speed-high-performance execution.)

I had been trying to fix this on issue after issue since earlier in March. To MPs last week, Hancock claimed that a) he decided to change the procurement rules that constrained DHSC (‘I requested the cap was removed’), b) he went to the Chancellor about it because there was still a Treasury ‘cap’ on 11 April.

FALSE. 1) This is an accidental admission of uselessness — *if* you believe Hancock’s own account, he did not act on this issue until 11 April, weeks after it should have been dealt with! (No MP pointed this out.) 2) In fact, I and others in No10 had already acted on this in March, because of repeated insane meetings. In April, the Cabinet Secretary checked the paperwork (see below) and confirmed that the ‘cap’ on DHSC had been removed in March, as No10 had insisted. So last week Hancock was both accidentally admitting being so useless he did not act until 11 April *and* misleading MPs about what actually happened, *and*

blaming HMT (still!) for delays in mid-April when the Chancellor had sorted this out weeks earlier. *Hancock's story to MPs is a lie that if true would show again he was useless.*

The day before my text on 27th, in another meeting in the Cabinet room (the last such meeting with the PM/me/Hancock/Cabinet Secretary present until the PM returned to work), Hancock had told us all 'don't worry about PPE we've got it all sorted'. This turned out to be total fiction. If he'd admitted the facts then instead of his usual bluffing we would have saved more lives in April including NHS staff lives.

When I had a separate meeting with officials on PPE supplies, I heard the following terrible news, flatly contradicting Hancock: *we won't get most of our PPE deliveries until long after the April peak.*

Me: Why?

Official: That's how long it takes to ship.

Me [extreme sinking feeling]: What do you mean 'ship', surely we're flying everything now?

Official: No, that's against the [procurement] rules, we ship everything because it's much cheaper.

Me (close to the most angry/appalled I was in 18 months): After this meeting, call the airlines, tell them we're hiring their planes, their entire business is dead so you'll be able to get a great deal, get officials figuring out where the nearest airfields are in China to the factories with our stuff, then fly the planes to those airfields, collect our stuff, fly it back, and tell everybody we're flying stuff in an emergency not shipping it...

Official: Umm, will you get the Private Office to put that in writing. [A standard comment in such meetings.]

Me: Yes the PM will take full legal responsibility.

Even three weeks later after I'd returned to work, much of the system had still not shifted to a wartime mentality on procurement. Orders had to go through multiple processes inside DHSC and the Cabinet Office delaying things such that often we lost the order while officials emailed each other for days.

On 15 April, we agreed with Hancock to develop emergency domestic manufacturing of PPE because of the combination of our extreme shortage and supply closing down from around the world in the global scramble. Shinner also helped get Lord Deighton (who was

thought to have done a good job on the Olympics) to help on PPE.

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On 20 April, Hancock faced intense pressure. Under Raab, the meetings were less pleasant for everybody but much more productive because unlike the PM a) Raab can chair meetings properly instead of telling rambling stories and jokes, b) he let good officials actually question people so we started to get to the truth, unlike the PM who as soon as things get 'a bit embarrassing' does the whole 'let's take it offline' shtick before shouting 'forward to victory', doing a thumbs-up and pegging it out of the room before anybody can disagree.

It was clear that, contra his assurance in the Cabinet room on 26/3, PPE was *not* 'sorted' — it was a disaster. He informed us that a) PPE contracts had been turned down by officials because in trying to obey 'the rules' they'd demanded a *25% discount on PPE amid a massive global shortage*; b) this was the fault of the Treasury which had failed to change the rules; c) he admitted he did not have the right skills in place to solve the PPE problem; d) we had only just agreed that Ambassadors could buy PPE without clearance from London. In the discussion Raab pointed out to him that DHSC never gave him PPE asks of foreign leaders for his calls, why not given the emergency?

I said there was no excuse for officials turning down PPE on the basis of price markups — the PM and I had said clearly weeks earlier that those rules were binned. Obviously I suspected Hancock's attempt to blame HMT was nonsense. So did the Cabinet Secretary who was very worried and investigated. He told me later that day: a) Hancock was wrong, officials had not been demanding a 25% discount (but it was telling Hancock believed his own department was doing something so crazy!); b) but, almost as bad, they had been rejecting PPE that had a 25% markup despite the fact that the PM and I had said repeatedly in March that *all such rules should be torn up and cases judged on their merits by people who knew how to buy*; c) the Treasury was not to blame, DHSC had been given the authority to make emergency purchases since March; d) he, the Cabinet Secretary, was investigating why we were refusing a 25% PPE markup when we had NHS staff wearing bin bags and dying for lack of PPE; e) it was only in the last week (!!) that DHSC had set up a 24/7 payments system for procurement with Asia — imagine if NHS staff wearing bin bags had realised that DHSC had not even set up a round-the-clock system at this point, imagine the rage in No10 when we discovered this, exacerbated by people telling us that Hancock was focused on his press conference at the end of the month.

The Cabinet Secretary added that he did not have confidence in Hancock's 'grip' or honesty in Cabinet room meetings, neither did other officials and ministers, and this was damaging our response. I strongly agreed. (Our conversation was reinforced in written exchanges.)

On 21 April I told the Cabinet Secretary that we had to 'divvy up' Hancock's job to deal with the problem: the vaccine requirements for manufacturing and distribution was a

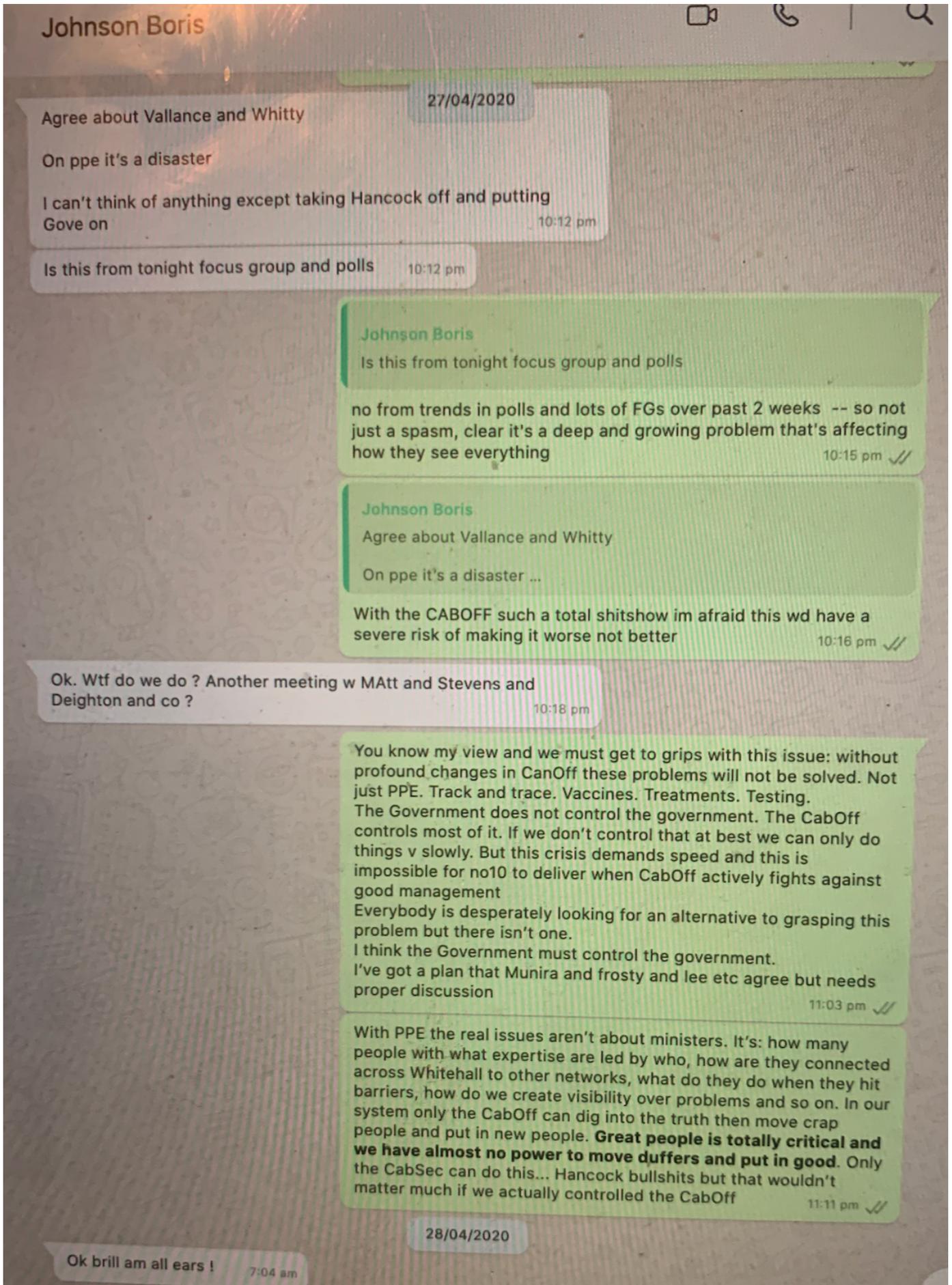
This site uses cookies. To find out more, read our privacy policy  Close and so on. He agreed and we

agreed he would write a machinery-of-government note for the PM on how to divvy up Hancock's job to different people. He also said that his investigations had shown that DHSC had not rung alarm bells on PPE early enough, had dodged responsibility then 'covered their tracks' when pushed.

At this time NHS staff were screaming for PPE. The dashboard daily meetings showed we were running out of critical items such as gowns. Reports flooded in of hospitals having run out or on the brink of running out and begging for supplies. Hancock caused further chaos by repeated briefing to the media about how new loads were flying in, bluffing his way through meeting after meeting — his whole routine.

Hancock's story to MPs last week was: 'there was no PPE shortage', I was leading a great team effort, the PM was totally supportive of me etc.

What did the PM himself actually think about this at the time? This exchange was 27 April.



'On PPE it's a disaster. I can't think of anything except taking Hancock off and putting Gove on.' (Ps. the reference to PV and CW was re a Cabinet presentation, not PPE.)

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So Hancock's account to MPs re PPE last week was fiction.

You can also see my rushed message re the core problem (CanOff=CabOff typo=Cabinet Office): No10 is only nominally in charge of much of the government, the Cabinet Office actually exercises real power over many things, ministers are nominally 'responsible' but they don't actually have the power to run things because they can't pick the team — the first essential of any serious management. The Cabinet Office built by Heywood was totally unable to cope with this crisis because it did not have the right sort of people with the right skills in key jobs and could not rapidly fire/promote/move people and act with determined authority — it could undermine departments and No10 and slow things down, and sometimes improve things, but it could not itself act as a proper executive authority but *neither could No10 and, obviously, neither could DHSC which was overwhelmed.*

At this point, months after it had started, there was still no analytical function in the Cabinet Office to figure out covid policy. One day around then, having been told repeatedly there was a 'new unit' in the Cabinet Office but having failed to see any trace of improvement, I walked around 70 Whitehall in search of this team. It turned out to be a Potemkin team. There was a room. There were a couple of people in it. But the analytical team was not there. Where are they? 'In CLG.' When I got the official on zoom who was supposed to be leading it, he said: 'There is no analytical capability [in the Cabinet Office]. **My unit does not actually exist.**' (I will write separately about this crucial issue.)

Did things improve? No.

On 15 April No10 was told that a lot of testing capacity was being wasted (not used) because DHSC had left in place rules that were limiting those eligible for tests, despite care homes screaming. In response I said that the rules should be changed 'immediately' and this be communicated immediately to Hancock, which it was by a No10 official minutes later. The care homes nightmare continued. It was clear that Hancock's claims on this, as on other things, were false.

On 3 May, the PM's private office told DHSC that we needed an urgent meeting the next day to discuss testing and care homes. I wrote to the PM: '**I think we are negligently killing the most vulnerable who we are supposed to be shielding and I am extremely worried about it**' and we must force DHSC to put all the details on the table. The PM agreed and we dug into DHSC plans and Hancock's claims.

On 4 May the PPE situation was so bad that it was agreed in No10 that we could not possibly claim to have passed the 'PPE test' for reopening.

On 7 May after we'd dug into the care home situation, I concluded to the PM that Hancock's failures and dishonesty made him unfit for his job, that there was still no serious testing in care homes and this was killing people.

The PM agreed but still he would not act.

Hancock: 'everybody got the treatment they needed'

Hancock repeated to MPs his claim from summer 2020 that 'everybody got the treatment they needed.'

This is false, he knows it's false, the PM knows it's false, families of the dead know it's false, the CSA and CMO know it's false.

Vallance and Whitty briefed me, the PM, Hancock and assorted officials around the Cabinet table on NHS data last summer. They said explicitly: the data shows that death rates spiked sharply upwards around the April peak, roughly doubling, *because patients did not get the treatment they needed because the NHS was under so much pressure*. MPs should demand this data and a briefing from PV/CW to explain it.

This was discussed a few times with the PM because a) it was relevant to the error made in the original planning — i.e the original graphs did not take into account that deaths would be higher than the simplistic calculations predicted because once the NHS was overwhelmed a lot more people would die than if they could get ICU treatment, and b) this was relevant to the threat of a second 2020 wave: if the NHS got close to capacity again then we should assume that, like the first wave, ICU care would be rationed. This obviously did happen again December-January because of the PM's failure to act soon enough.

There is so much more that could be said but this is long enough for now...

A few simple questions to ask the PM

Given his failures on testing, care homes and PPE why did you keep in post a Secretary of State you described yourself as 'totally fucking hopeless' and how many more people died as a result of your failure to remove him?

Why is No10 lying, including to Parliament, about the fact that the original plan was 'herd immunity by September' and had to be abandoned?

When did Patrick Vallance brief you on NHS data showing that the death rate at the first April peak was much higher than before/after the peak and do you now agree with Hancock that every patient got the treatment they needed?

Do you now agree with Hancock that there was no shortage of PPE or do you agree with yourself in April 2020 that PPE supply was 'a disaster' that required moving Hancock?

How many people died in care homes because of what you called the 'disaster' on PPE and what you called Hancock's 'totally fucking hopeless' performance on testing in March?

When will the SoS come to the House and correct his many false statements to MPs?

I will continue to explore what happened and how the system should change.

I have rejected all media offers of large payments for documents etc and, as with this evidence, all further evidence on covid will be made freely available to the public.

Some other things I write will be subscription only.

If you think this is useful **PLEASE SUBSCRIBE**, share, encourage others to signup etc.

This will help me push for an immediate, open and fast inquiry into covid and help me get some help.

Much of what I wrote 2013-19 about Westminster explains the dynamics behind the surface phenomena like Hancock incompetence.

[See here for more and some more background on how I will use this substack...](#)

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Zubayr Jun 17

(former) A level politics student here - I must say, I'm interested (and impressed 😊) at how you've essentially become the sole opposition to the executive/legislature, with the lacking leadership from Boris, Starmer and frankly the rest of them. I'd personally attribute it to your (somewhat) more principled stance and emphasis on transparency, but you will probably know better than me.

Just a few questions:

- 1) Are you planning to hold the government to account over issues unrelated to COVID in the future? Or is your political involvement going to end with the inquiry?
- 2) With regards to the cabinet - was there anyone else within the system who also shared your opinions on Hancock's failures/Boris's incompetency? If so, was it a select few or a sentiment prevalent from the top to bottom?
- 3) What suggestions would you have so such a disaster doesn't occur again? Although as far as I know it'd largely be relying on convention, how could procedures which ensure everything goes smoothly in the case of another emergency be enforced and implemented? At the moment, the waters still seem to be quite muddy.

Thanks Dom!

♥ 1 Reply

1 reply by Dominic Cummings



Edward Haigh Writes Edward's Newsletter · Jun 17

You mentioned that the app would be a 'trivial cost that just requires brains and data', however it took 6 months from that text to release one and it cost £40mn (based on news articles I've seen, please correct if I'm wrong). Considering the hard bit was built by Google and Apple, why did this take so long/cost so much? Harder to do than expected? Incompetence? Considering it still has issues - you can't check out of a place so you're there till close - I wouldn't be surprised if this contract went to Hancocks mates again.

♥ 3 Reply

4 replies by Dominic Cummings and others

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