

Managing pandemics presents government with difficult choices.



Sir Oliver Letwin was the Minister responsible for emergency preparedness and resilience.

He had many other ministerial responsibilities. His evidence is thoughtful and at times insightful.

Holding strategic reserves was expensive and subject to a lot of criticism if not used. Plans needed constant review and adaptation in a fast-moving world.

The pandemic plans in 2011 hardly shifted in the next decade.

[Sensible managers will create rolling reserves that constantly react and roll with day to day demands but that is bit too complicated a policy for some].

Whilst significantly involved in wider contingency policy development he was advised by officials that pandemic planning was well in hand and that he should concentrate on other risk areas such as flood defences, undersea cabling, and power.

He agreed with The Office of Budget Responsibility who said “While it may be difficult to predict when catastrophic risks will materialise, it is possible to anticipate their broad effects if they do. The risk of a global pandemic was

at the top of government risk registers for a decade before coronavirus arrived but attracted relatively little (and in hindsight far too little) attention from the economic community.”

He created a RED team to challenge questions rather than answers.

He would support a regional tier to coordinate local resilience forums and more simulation exercises for major risk areas.

He was not in favour of lead ministries. They should be team members rather than leaders,

George Osborne follows and sets out the involvement of the Treasury [not much] in pandemic preparedness.

No Treasury in the Western world had prepared for an extended lock down.

The size and range of Covid 19 had caught everybody by surprise.

The economic consequences were profound and presented really difficult choices to government.

How could they weigh up the respective weights of protecting the elderly

vulnerable and the education of an eight-year-old.

The Treasury needed to work out the cost to the economy, of a major lock down.

He had always given priority to health investment during his time as Chancellor, but Government was always about choices.

He describes the problems facing governments well, but it will be for the Inquiry to decide whether they got it right.

Dame Sally Davies next. Forthright and robust as ever.

She told Ministers on one occasion “It’s your right to overrule me but if you do I shall resign.”

She shared the leadership of the medical profession with the Presidents of the Royal Colleges. Her two primary roles were health protection and health improvement.

She agreed with the lockdown decisions, perhaps a week earlier, but wished she and the government had had a better understanding of the consequences particularly for health and education.

She was really sad about the impact the pandemic response had had on citizens lives.

The abolishment of Public Health England was in order

to get a better grip on responses to emergency situations. It was a political decision.

In her term of office, the Vaccine Network had been created to prepare for infections that did not have vaccines.

Funds were invested into Oxford to create a MERS vaccine that was the basis of the successful Oxford, Cambridge, AstraZeneca vaccine that “probably saved more lives across the world than any other”.

Directors of Public Health were a wonderful community of doctors or specialists in public health. However, once they were moved to local authorities their numbers were cut.

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