Stay Calm and project confidence

The Chief Economic advisor from the Treasury tells the Inquiry that Economists had entered the pandemic without a model that would help them predict the consequences of dealing with a major pandemic.

Lockdowns and circuit breakers could not be economically modelled.

The Treasury had advised the Chancellor to "push back strongly" on the circuit breaker proposal. The Treasury had an observer at SAGE meetings.

The Treasury had been criticised for not consulting SAGE about the "Eat Out To Help Out" policy but later evidence showed that the idea had been discussed at meetings involving medical advisors and Cabinet members.

The personal private secretary to the PM is quizzed about relationships within Downing Street, he is discreet and loyal to his former boss.

A SPAD next, who was asked 'how bad is it going to get?'

The answer was that it depended on two key numbers, the R number and the fatality rate. Using these data suggested that 56% of the population would be infected, the gross fatality rate would double and the NHS would be overwhelmed.

Patrick Vallance had agreed to his attendance at SAGE in order that he could understand better the basis for the scientific advice.

The government had to shift its strategy as the pandemic proceeded.

Should there have been an economic SAGE to provide data and advice about pandemic response ?

Treasury vetoed this idea. It was their job to offer economic advice



A witness who in the words of Lady Hallet been careful with his answers.

The following day another permanent secretary, [I did not realise we had so many!] Simon Ridley who had supported the Health Ministerial Implementation Group.

His early work had been on shielding which was extraordinarily complex because of all the agencies involved.

The was no pandemic plan for social care and the government had been slow to react to data that showed that 20% of the infections had their roots in the hospital system as did 10% of the deaths.

Freeing up space in hospitals had primacy over primary and social care. The creation of a Covid Task Force has improved efficiency and reduced overlap and duplication. The PM and Chancellor had been reluctant to put tiers

and circuit breakers in place but when they agreed to proceed complicated negotiations ensured with local mayors.

They did not last and a second lockdown became inevitable.

Lord Lister another senior advisor had been Cumming's opposite number within Downing Street on international and economic affairs. They had desks next to each other outside the PM's office.

He had worked with Boris when he had been Mayor of London.

He shared the view in the early days that the health risks had to be balanced with the economic damage lockdowns would produce.

There had been talk about herd immunity and the dangers of an overreaction. The PM had volunteered to take a Covid injection.

In the early days Covid was not seen as a serious threat.

Everybody including the PM and the Chancellor were always searching for the right balance between health and the economy. He thought the links with the devolved administration had been good at an official level but Scottish politicians in particular always wanted to be different.

The atmosphere in Downing Street had been tense. Cummings was not easy.

Lord Sedwill a former Cabinet Secretary, head of the civil service and former Ambassador to Afghanistan confirms that Cummings had been a problem.

He had worked closely with the PM throughout the pandemic and had to remind him from time to time to consult Cabinet colleagues as well as his small team of advisers.

He was always concerned that the numbers kept changing although the Cabinet was focused on the reasonable worst case scenario of 800.000 deaths.

He had worried about the PM's stamina after his illness but not his judgement.

The PM had an "optimism bias" in the early days and the truth was that the UK was ill prepared for a pandemic of the scale that presented.

His job was to stay calm and project confidence and make sure that the government machine kept ministers fully informed and implemented their decision.

He was Cabinet Secretary to the UK governments and worked hard to keep devolved governments informed and involved.

He accepted the possibility that if measures to control the virus had been instigated earlier then they had the lockdown might had been reduced in scale and intensity.

He doubted whether it could have been completely avoided. In fact the lockdown had worked in the sense that it brought the R number down below 1,

We hear about Stalinist segmentation. "*The virus kills the old and the sick, the lockdown hits the young and the healthy*".

He had talked to the PM about the performance of Matt Hancock

overpromising, overconfident, over assured and advised that he be replaced.

He agreed to leave his post after a series of conversations with the PM. It was time for change,

There was he explained only so much lightning a lightening conductor could take.

We finish the day with the Minister for the Disabled. There was no plan,

Why did English press conferences have no BSL signer?

Pritti Patel and a police chief are questioned about policing a pandemic and lock downs. Answers came with great difficulty,

For the next pandemic the UK needs a “ready to go” set of regulations and laws.

Next session is all about vaccines.