

Later today, the Prime Minister will announce the long awaited 'roadmap' for exiting lockdown. Unfortunately, the Government's response to the threat of the COVID virus has been characterised by the misalignment of policy, strategy, planning, and activity. This is not simply the fault of the Johnson administration as it is a recurring theme in Whitehall; the hallmarks of this problem are also to be seen in the management of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, the financial crisis, and BREXIT.

The announcement is the first formal framing of the approach since June last year. What should the recovery plan include? Here are eleven things that we will be looking for later to day...

1. IT SHOULD BE STRATEGY

There is a difference between policy, strategy, and planning; they are at different levels of detail and have different horizons. The UK government has difficulty turning policy into strategy and managing implementation. It must do better.

2. A CLEAR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Over the last year the Government has moved between a number of strategic objectives and 'big ideas' from 'Protect the NHS' to 'Save Lives'. All close to each other but subtly different and driving slightly different lines of activity. The current 'strategy' appears to be 'vaccinate and wait' - not good enough. There should be no room for the 'zero COVID' debate or surprise at mutations a year into the crisis. Whatever it is, the Objective should be clear, consistent, and communicable.

3. GO BACK TO BASICS

Efforts should be strengthened to encourage the public to understand and 'own' the responsibility for basic mitigation measures. Keep distance, keep covered, keep sanitised. Reduce complicated regulation to the absolute minimum and concentrate on the basics.

4. TEST, TRACK, AND TRACE

The 3T programme has been woeful. A critical characteristic of a successful strategy is to understand changes in the environment as it is implemented. Our current data is reactive, based on cases, deaths, and the 'R number'. 3T must be fit for purpose.

5. IDENTIFY SPECIFIC TREATMENT PLANS

There must be well defined management plans for critical areas of society such as schools, public transport, hospitality, sport and entertainment. There are measures between closing everything or opening it.

6. INCREASE NATIONAL RESILIENCE

The NHS has been found wanting in that it has insufficient resilience to cope with enduring pressure. National resources have not been engaged coherently, effectively, or efficiently.

7. INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

We will not reduce the risk to the UK unless the risk is reduced everywhere. The level of international engagement and support – even communication – has been woeful so far.

8. ADDRESS THE FULL SPECTRUM OF RISK

The enormous risks to our economy and social structures that we have allowed to develop unchecked whilst addressing the risks to our health cannot continue to be tolerated. Comprehensive treatment plans are required across the spectrum.

9. UNIFY THE NATION

COVID has been allowed to become politicised, particularly by advocates of Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish independence. The recovery plan must stress the importance and advantages of national cohesion and inter-dependence.

10. STRATEGY MUST BE MANAGED

Policy left to be implemented by government departments without binding strategy and management becomes unfocused and diluted. Whitehall must find a way of developing and managing strategy in order to achieve policy objectives.

11. PREPARE FOR THE NEXT ONE

Finally, there must be a process of identifying lessons from the last year, and putting measures in place to enhance preparedness to cope with similar crises in future.