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Politics



Dominic Cummings and Covid-19 Committee - Part 2
BBC PARLIAMENT



What did Dominic Cummings say? As it happened

26 May 2021 01:00

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Dominic Cummings and Covid-19 Committee - Part 1

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Dominic Cummings and Covid-19 Committee - Part 3

BBC Parliament

'Tens of thousands who didn't Cummings'

BBC

Summary

The PM's former chief adviser faced questions about his time working in No 10 during the pandemic. He said by October 2020 he regarded Boris Johnson as "unfit" for the job of PM.

Mr Cummings said "senior ministers, senior officials, senior advisers like me, fell disastrously short." "Tens of thousands of people died, who didn't need to die," he claimed.

He also accused the PM of being like an out-of-control shopping trolley.

Mr Cummings said Health Secretary Matt Hancock should have been sacked for "15 or 20 things." He also said Mr Hancock insisted people would be tested before being sent into care homes - but weren't.

The ex-adviser said he was "extremely sorry" for visiting Barnard Castle last year.

Live Reporting

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Edited by Johanna Howitt



18:14 26 May

That's all from us



London's Evening Standard

We are going to close our coverage of today's revelations from Westminster.

The team on board with you were: Doug Faulkner, Hamish Mackay, Owen Amos, Paul Seddon, Richard Morris, and Sinead Wilson.

Thanks for following along with us - goodbye.



18:12 26 May

Who is Boris Johnson's former adviser?



Dominic Cummings, chief adviser to Minister Boris Johnson listens to the PM during a news conference in Downing Street in March 2020

The prime minister's former chief adviser, Dominic Cummings, is still a big name in Westminster, even though he's no longer at No 10.

The former Vote Leave campaign director helped Boris Johnson to a Conservative election victory in 2019, and then became the prime minister's chief adviser in Downing Street.

Always a figure of fascination in Westminster, he briefly became a household name last summer, when it emerged he had broken lockdown rules to travel from London to his parents' home in County Durham.

Despite intense pressure to resign, with the support of the prime minister, he managed to keep

Despite intense pressure to resign, with the support of the prime minister, he managed to keep his job – only to leave at the end of the year amid reports of infighting at No 10.

There has since been speculation that he is the source of several damaging stories about Mr Johnson, including the row about the funding of the refurbishment of the prime minister's Downing Street flat.

And now he has re-emerged on the political scene with damaging claims about the early handling of the pandemic.

[Read our full profile here.](#)



18:07 26 May

Key points from Dominic Cummings' evidence

After a marathon seven hours plus of evidence here's a summary of Dominic Cummings' most explosive claims:

- Cummings says "tens of thousands of people" died unnecessarily because ministers, officials and advisers fell "disastrously short" of the standards the public expects
- Lots of key people "were literally skiing" when the government should have been "on a war footing" in February 2020, he said
- He repeatedly attacked Matt Hancock, saying the Health Secretary "should have been fired for at least 15 to 20 things" and for "lying" in the "cabinet room" about the country's preparedness to deal with the pandemic
- He accused Hancock of using scientists as "shields" for government failings
- Cummings said there was a serious failure of leadership with frontline workers and civil servants like "lions led by donkeys"
- He claimed Boris Johnson had originally described the potential impact of the virus as a "scare story", likening it to "the new swine flu"
- He said the UK have should have locked down earlier in March and he "bitterly" regrets "not hitting the panic button earlier"
- He said at one point Downing Street was in chaos with distractions including the PM's girlfriend "going completely crackers" over stories in the press about her dog
- He said people were sent back in to care homes without testing - despite No 10 being told they would be. And he said there was no proper plan for shielding
- Cummings said the PM rejected the recommendation last September that there should be a second lockdown in England
- The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, did a "_____ the furlough scheme
- He said Boris Johnson is not fit to lead the country through the pandemic

- He said Boris Johnson is not fit to lead the country through the pandemic



18:02 26 May

Behavioural scientist says Cummings' claim on lockdowns is 'tosh'



Radio 4 PM

Stephen Reicher, Professor of Psychology at St Andrews University - who sits on the government's behaviour advisory group known as SPI-B - has been speaking to BBC Radio Four's PM programme

He said Cummings' committee appearance "was a magnificent piece of political theatre - a revenge tragedy, a knife in every back."

He added: "It was useful that he confirmed from the inside what we know on the outside - we know they delayed in March too long to lockdown, we know they didn't put a test and trace system in place, we know they didn't control borders - all problems that are still going on".

"I found it more problematic when he began to attribute blame or say who said what or did what.

Reicher says "it is absolutely untrue" that behaviour scientists said people would not tolerate lockdowns.

"In fact, when the idea of behavioural fatigue came out, SPI-B said 'this is nonsense' - you can see it in the minutes of the 12 March - Sage said it the next day.

"600 behaviour scientists came out and said 'this is complete tosh', we don't recognise that idea".



18:01 26 May

Truss defends 'excellent colleague' Matt Hancock

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss has defended her cabinet colleague Matt Hancock following Dominic Cummings' testimony.

At an online event hosted by POLITICO, she said she hasn't "had time to look at it yet," but added: "I'm not going to engage with the false claims that have been made today".

"Matt Hancock is an excellent colleague who has done a very good job in what has been a very tough global pandemic," she added.



17:22 26 May

Testimony shows government to blame for Covid deaths, say campaigners

The campaign group Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice has [**tweeted its response**](#) to Dominic Cummings' select committee appearance.

It says his evidence showed "the government's combination of grotesque chaos and uncaring flippancy is directly responsible for many of our loved ones not being with us today - and the refusal to have an urgent statutory inquiry risks others joining them".

"The government's statutory inquiry now has to start immediately, and include regular interim reporting".



17:22 26 May

Cummings' departing shot



Dominic Cummings leaves the Houses of Parliament after giving evidence to the joint session of the Health, and Science and Technology committees.



17:07 26 May

Hancock 'absolutely rejects' Cummings claims - spokesman

A spokesman for Matt Hancock has just issued a statement in response to Dominic Cummings's appearance:

“At all times throughout this pandemic the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and everyone in the Department for Health and Social Care has worked incredibly hard in unprecedented circumstances to protect the NHS and save lives.

“We absolutely reject Mr. Cummings's claims about the health secretary.

“The health secretary will continue to work closely with the prime minister to deliver the vaccine rollout, tackle the risks posed by variants and support the NHS and social care sector to recover from this pandemic.”



Mr Hancock is expected to host a press conference in Downing Street tomorrow.



17:01 26 May

Labour calls for Hancock to address MPs tomorrow

Labour's shadow health secretary Jonathan Ashworth has said he will ask Matt Hancock to come to the Commons tomorrow to answer MPs' questions in the wake of Cumming's committee appearance today.

Report



16:56 26 May

Five things Dominic Cummings told MPs

Dominic Cummings has been speaking to MPs about the UK government's handling of Covid-19.

The PM's former chief adviser said Boris Johnson had initially dismissed Covid as a "scare story" and the UK had been too slow to lock down.

At PMQs earlier Boris Johnson hit back at some of the allegations, insisting that the government's priority had always been to "save lives".

Here are our five takeaways from the session:



Dominic Cummings: Five things he told MPs about Covid response



16:50 26 May

Cummings' jawdropping claims



Nick Eardley
Political correspondent

The last few hours have been extraordinary.

But there are two remarks that really stand out for me.

Firstly, the claim that tens of thousands of people died who didn't need to.

That is a damning conclusion for a man who was around the table when the big decisions were made.

It is an allegation the government is likely to face intense pressure over in the coming days and week.

Secondly, Dominic Cummings' claim that he believed by October 2020 that Boris Johnson was not fit to be prime minister, because he had refused to implement a second lockdown earlier.

Cummings says he only stayed in his Downing Street job to try and limit the damage.

The fact Boris Johnson's top adviser believed he shouldn't be in Downing Street is quite remarkable.



16:46 26 May

Cummings session ends

After just over seven hours - with a couple of loo breaks - Dominic Cummings' time in front of MPs has ended.

Jeremy Hunt, who chairs the health select committee, says its joint inquiry with the science committee will continue in two weeks' time, when they will be hearing from Health Secretary Matt Hancock.



16:43 26 May

Others could have done my job better - Cummings

HoC

Health committee chair Jeremy Hunt asks Dominic Cummings if he thinks he did his job in a "fit and proper" way last year.

Cummings says it is "inarguable" that there are many other people who could have done his job better.

Science committee chair Greg Clark says people can deal with most things with the benefit of hindsight.

Cummings replies the lesson of everything that's happened over the past year is the importance of "openness".

He says he took the view that he should attend Sage meetings in February because his "sense"

was that there wasn't a proper set of channels for information between Sage, the Department for Health and No 10.



16:38 26 May

Whitehall culture held back response, says Cummings

HoC

Asked what lessons should be learned from the crisis, Cummings says there should be more transparency over advice given to ministers and more competition for roles in the Civil Service.

He also says the pandemic posed an "obvious question" about who is "actually in charge of things" within the system of government.

Confusion over responsibility proved "completely fatal" in situations like the pandemic, he says.

He says there is a "culture" within Whitehall that encourages officials to "keep their head down" and where there is an effort not to "embarrass" people.



16:33 26 May

Cummings: Government needed to 'whack' Covid hard and 'immediately'

Science Committee Chair Greg Clark a [redacted] of Covid variants were being discussed in September.

Cummings says he knew of variants in September, and if he knew about it then others would have too.

"I had specific warnings... from scientists who had been repeatedly proved right" on the possibility of Covid variants, he states.

"The government is still not acting properly, we still don't have a proper border policy," he warns.

Cummings says "as soon as you make the decision that you have to lock down" then the decision needs to be enacted "today".

He says this is what the data team was saying to the prime minister in September.

He says the PM was "enraged" when in September it looked like cases had risen again.

Cummings says he was of the view that "you need to whack [Covid] hard" immediately.



16:27 26 May

Cummings: PM not fit to get country through pandemic

HoC

Labour's Sarah Owen asks Cummings if he thinks Boris Johnson "is a fit and proper person to get us through this pandemic"?

Cummings replies with one word - "no".



16:23 26 May

Did the chancellor provide evidence Eat Out To Help Out would be safe?

Labour's Sarah Owen asks if the chancellor provided scientific evidence for the safety of his scheme, Eat Out To Help Out.

Cummings says he didn't have too much involvement in the scheme, he adds "there were powerful voices in the Treasury" who were complaining about the economic damage of lockdowns, but the chancellor "never tried to stop [lockdowns] happening".

He says the chancellor was "at his wit's end about the shopping trolley," referring to his earlier comments describing the prime minister as a "shopping trolley" who went from one side to the other.

Sarah Owen says it is striking that his testimony today has been praising of Rishi Sunak, she asks if he is aiming for a future job in a Sunak administration.

Cummings says most people in Westminster and Whitehall probably think - and his wife would agree - that "the less they see of me, the better".



16:23 26 May

Cabinet not consulted ahead of second lockdown decision - Cummings

Cummings says there were no "meaningful" discussions within the cabinet ahead of the second lockdown, although he says he didn't attend cabinet in 2020.

"I was in the meeting when it was actually decided, it was just the prime minister, cabinet secretary, [Patrick] Vallance, [Chris] Whitty and other officials there arguing this stuff out - and it was the prime minister's decision," he adds.

"There may have been a cabinet meeting, but that was just for show, not as a relevant part of the decision-making process".



16:22 26 May

Cummings challenged to publish evidence Hancock lied

Throughout today's session Dominic Cummings has repeatedly accused Health Secretary Matt Hancock of lying.

Chair of the Science committee Greg Clark says it is important that he should provide evidence of his claims.

Cummings says he would be "happy" to discuss how to provide" it and explain what happened.

Greg Clark notes that the health secretary will give evidence to the committee himself in two weeks.



16:12 26 May

Cummings defends Covid tier system

Cummings is asked whether the government acted quickly enough to raise the Covid tier system in areas where there was an increase in cases.

He says the whole point of tiering was to shift away from a world where you had no real data or testing and so were forced to take a national approach.

The tier system was the result of a more targeted approach, he says.

He says this was the right approach to take and that's how other successful countries have done it.

But he says "like lots of things the thinking was done too late" and he says operationally, things were not done properly.



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