

Ministers meet to continue work on tackling winter pressures

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Kit Malthouse has led a meeting of ministers and officials from across government to drive forward preparatory work for tackling pressures this winter.

The meeting follows work over recent weeks to identify key pressure points that will affect the public, including the global rise in energy prices, the cost of living and pressures on the NHS.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has been chairing these meetings throughout the summer to discuss the key operational decisions that can be made to reduce these risks once a new administration is in place.

Ministers and officials have discussed priority areas, such as health, energy, cost of living, supply chain disruption, labour market shortages, and industrial action, that have the potential to compound together over the coming 18 months.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Kit Malthouse said:

My chief priority has been to make sure that we are prepared for the significant challenges we expect to face this autumn and winter, and I have held regular meetings to make sure departments maintain pace and grip on this essential work now, and in the coming months, as this will be a marathon not a sprint.

The cost of living, driven in part by higher energy prices, is biting for individuals, families and businesses, and the NHS is already under pressure – and that's ahead of the flu season. These risks have potentially severe impacts, stacking up on the most vulnerable people in society, and it is vital that we develop robust plans urgently to mitigate their impact and come up with solutions.

I've tasked departments with identifying the key operational decisions that should be taken without delay across priority risks such as health, energy, cost of living, supply chain disruption, labour market shortages, and industrial action, that have the potential to compound together. They will also map out the key moments over the next 18 months where specific groups of society may be significantly impacted, including the clinically vulnerable, socially and economically deprived, the elderly, the young, and the disabled, and produce further options so that decisions can be made quickly once a new administration is in place.

Over the coming weeks, the Cabinet Office will work with the Department for

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to continue ensuring that gas and electricity system operators have the right tools to respond to fluctuations in supply and demand. Work is also underway with key international partners to monitor and share information on energy supply and demand.

The Treasury and BEIS will also prepare options for the new administration on possible energy market interventions to lower prices, bringing down bills and helping manage overall supply.

Today's meeting included ministers and officials from HM Treasury, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Transport, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

The meeting also builds upon the work already in train ahead of the new administration next week, and the increase of the energy price cap. This work includes:

- Allocating £37 billion of help for households, including the £400 discount on energy bills this winter, and £1,200 of direct support to help with the cost of living
- The Department of Health and Social Care and the UK Health Security Agency are further developing their plans for health resilience, including to boost the NHS and Adult Social Care workforce, including a new taskforce for international recruitment
- The Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy is continuing to strengthen its contingency plans for winter energy security – Equinor and Centrica recently signed a major agreement to shore up Britain's gas supply over the next three winters, adding around one billion cubic metres of gas per year to our supply

The meeting also follows the recent announcement by Kit Malthouse reforming emergency planning and response in the Cabinet Office. A National Resilience Framework Team in the Planning and Analysis Secretariat will take a deeper look at the government's approach to risk and how it is mitigated, as well as collecting and analysing live data to improve future responses to emergencies. While the Cabinet Office's COBR Unit will continue to oversee preparedness and response to emergencies and other moments of acute pressure which might arise this winter.