

# Prime Minister Sunak given kid gloves treatment by official UK COVID Inquiry

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Prime Minister Rishi Sunak gave evidence to the UK COVID Inquiry on Monday, refusing to take any responsibility for those who died at the height of the pandemic when he served as chancellor to Boris Johnson.

Like Johnson in his two days of testimony last week, Sunak began with an apology to the families who lost loved ones and “all those who suffered in the various different ways throughout the pandemic as a result of the actions that were taken.”

With this out of the way, Sunak was also as unrepentant as Johnson in defending murderous policies that led to over 233,000 deaths in the UK and left almost 2 million suffering the debilitating effects of Long COVID.

Evidence heard from witnesses and testimony presented in written form has already confirmed Sunak as a political criminal, who was if anything even more vociferous than Johnson in opposing lockdowns and basic public safety policies.

Sunak was the author of the Eat Out to Help Out scheme, launched in the summer months of 2020 without any official scientific backing, offering discounted food and drink to encourage people into cafes, pubs, bars, restaurants and town centres. The policy was proven in several studies to have aided the spread of COVID when no vaccine was available.

In a WhatsApp exchange seen by the inquiry, this led then Chief Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Defence Professor Dame Angela McLean to refer to Sunak as “Dr Death the chancellor.” This year McLean was appointed Government Chief Scientific Adviser, succeeding Sir Patrick Vallance who held the position in the first years of the pandemic.

In November, an extract from Vallance’s diary read to the inquiry described a heated exchange between Johnson and his chief adviser Dominic Cummings over whether to impose stricter lockdown measures in October 2020. Johnson refused, telling Cummings he was for “letting it all rip” and that those who would die from contracting COVID were already elderly and had “had a good innings.”

Vallance wrote in the same entry, “DC [Dominic

Cummings] says ‘Rishi [Sunak] thinks just let people die and that’s OK.’”

In another session, a separate January 2021 extract from his diaries was read. This recorded that Johnson was keen to end the remaining limited tier system of public health lockdown restrictions in place, and to end lockdown entirely. Dermot Keating, a counsel to the inquiry, read out, “There is an entry... at a meeting on 25 January 2021, the PM [prime minister] is recorded saying he wants Tier 3 [by] 1 March, Tier 2 [by] 1 April, Tier 1 [by] 1 May and nothing by September.

“And he [Johnson] ends it by saying the team must bring in the pro-death squad from HMT’ [HM Treasury].”

In a limited probing of his role during his evidence sessions, Johnson still faced a few testing questions. Sunak, as the sitting prime minister, was given an easy ride over his five hours at the inquiry. Having denied in parliament last month that he had said to Cummings it was okay for people to die, Sunak was not even asked about the statement under oath.

The prime minister defended his Eat Out to Help Out scheme, which when in operation was referred to by then government Chief Medical Officer Sir Chris Whitty as “Eat Out to Help Out the Virus”. Sunak was able to declare that he was only taking government policy to its logical conclusion, referring to the scheme as a “micro policy”. The government had already agreed at the time to start reopening shops and “This was a very reasonable, sensible policy intervention to help safeguard those jobs in that safe reopening.”

About the hardest it got for Sunak was when Hugo Keith KC put it to him that he was “violently opposed to a lockdown.” Sunak replied, “I think that’s not a fair characterization of my position.” Numerous times Sunak said he didn’t recall pieces of evidence Inquiry counsel put before him, prompting audible sighs from bereaved families in the audience.

Sunak has not presented the Inquiry with a single WhatsApp message from the period being discussed. Asked

why he replied, without challenge, “I’ve changed my phone multiple times over the past few years, and as that has happened the messages have not come across.”

In October, according to *The Sun*, Sunak’s old phone number that the government had told the Inquiry was no longer operational was leaked online. A prank caller is believed to have heard the phone ringing and a voicemail recording for Sunak. This too was never raised with him.

This is despite Sunak stating that, as the pandemic swept Britain, there was “enormous anxiety” in the Treasury over not being able to sell a gilt to raise money on the financial markets. This was of greater concern than scientific projections that between 500,000 and 800,000 people could die without a lockdown being in place.

In summer 2022, when Sunak was running for the position of Tory leader following Johnson’s resignation, he and the eventual winner Liz Truss both declared that they would never oversee a lockdown again. As part of his campaign, the *Spectator* Tory House magazine produced a puff piece headlined, “The lockdown files: Rishi Sunak on what we weren’t told”. It revealed that Sunak’s main concern was always the impact of life-saving lockdowns on the economy, with him cited as saying, “I wasn’t allowed to talk about the trade-off”. He complained, “The script was: ‘oh, there’s no trade-off, because doing this for our health is good for the economy.’”

The article noted that with the population having already seen horrific images from China and Italy of people unable to breathe due to COVID and dying: “One of Sunak’s big concerns was about the fear messaging, which his Treasury team worried could have long-lasting effects. ‘In every brief, we tried to say: let’s stop the “fear” narrative. It was always wrong from the beginning. I constantly said it was wrong.’ “The posters showing COVID patients on ventilators, he said, were the worst.”

The *Spectator* denounced the claimed evolution of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (*SAGE*) from “a sprawling group of scientific advisers, into a committee that had the power to decide whether the country would lock down or not. There was no socioeconomic equivalent to Sage; no forum where other questions would be asked.”

Sunak was so distrustful of any science-based advice that the Treasury sent a mole in to monitor what was being said, with the aim of promoting any voices sceptical about lockdowns. The *Spectator* cited Sunak: “The Sage people didn’t realise for a very long time that there was a Treasury person on all their calls... She was great because it meant that she was sitting there, listening to their discussions.”

By December 2021, Sunak was all but ignoring SAGE and “was taking soundings of his own—including academics at Stanford University, where he went to business school, and

his former colleagues in the world of finance who had started to do some Covid modelling.”

Sunak all but threatened to resign from the government if Johnson agreed to any further lockdowns. The article revealed, “He [Sunak] flew back early from a trip to California. By this time JP Morgan’s lockdown analysis [which played down the danger of further deaths] was being emailed around among cabinet ministers like a samizdat paper, and they were ready to rebel. Sunak met Johnson. ‘I just told him it’s not right: we shouldn’t do this.’ He did not threaten to resign if there was another lockdown, ‘but I used the closest formulation of words that I could’ to imply that threat. Sunak then rang around other ministers and compared notes.”

The kid gloves treatment of Dr. Death ended with Inquiry Chairwoman Baroness Hallett saying as the session ended, “Thank you very much, Prime Minister. I appreciate that—I doubt there’s ever an easy time for you to come along here to give evidence.” Referencing tomorrow’s vote on Sunak’s Rwanda immigration policy, with the most right-wing sections of the Tory Party threatening to rebel and demanding harsher measures, Hallett commiserated, “Appreciate it’s difficult this particular week and thank you for your help.”

Johnson and Sunak would have been unable to unleash their social murder policy had it not been for the Labour Party, first under its nominally “left” leader Jeremy Corbyn, and from April 2020 under Sir Keir Starmer, both of whom pledged to “constructively” support the government’s COVID response “in the national interest”.

The trade union bureaucracy also played a critical role in defending the profit interests of the capitalist class. At the height of the pandemic in September 2020, Sunak met at 11 Downing Street with the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress Frances O’Grady, and Dame Carolyn Julie Fairbairn, Director General of the Confederation of British Industry. Their discussions centred on fully reopening the economy and the TUC’s pledge to manage “the mass return to work.”



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