# Lord Vallance exposes Boris Johnson’s preference for punitive Covid-19 enforcement over financial support



Boris Johnson's leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic has been the subject of intense scrutiny, with former chief scientific adviser Lord Patrick Vallance offering a damning overview of the government’s misguided decision-making during the inquiry. Vallance's testimony has exposed the alarming reality of Johnson's preference for a more "ruthless" and "authoritarian" enforcement strategy, particularly against those who failed to self-isolate. This reflects a concerning trend within the government to impose punitive measures rather than providing the essential financial support that would encourage compliance.

During a session dedicated to evaluating test, trace, and quarantine policies, Vallance revealed diary entries chronicling discussions with Johnson and key aides like Dominic Cummings and Simon Case. These entries highlight a troubling tendency within Downing Street toward enforcement over incentivisation. “The instinct of this crew is to go for more enforcement and punitive measures,” he stated, pointing to a stark failure to embrace the value of voluntary compliance through positive incentives. This discrepancy illustrates a glaring gap between scientific advice and the government’s ineffective policies.

Johnson's inclination for stricter measures is chillingly captured in Vallance's diaries. In a particularly revealing entry from September 2020, Johnson called for “a lot more punishments and a lot more closing down.” This erratic decision-making, described by Vallance as "bipolar," highlighted internal conflicts within the government, as factions clashed over the best way to manage the rising Covid-19 cases.

The inquiry also illuminated the detrimental consequences of Johnson's heavy-handed approach. On 28 September 2020, the government mandated that individuals testing positive for Covid or contacted by the test-and-trace service self-isolate, imposing a slew of punitive fines that aimed to ensure compliance. While Vallance acknowledged some necessity for such measures, he warned that if isolation enforcement faltered, the entire testing operation's efficacy would collapse—a reckless disregard for public trust and behavior.

In contrast to Johnson's authoritarian tactics, the former health secretary, Matt Hancock, stressed the significance of maintaining robust testing capabilities for future pandemics. He cautioned that dismantling the testing infrastructure built during 2020 threatens the UK's ability to respond effectively to new health crises. Hancock's call for swift resource scaling underscores the naive inadequacy of their preparations during the prior outbreak.

Moreover, Vallance's comments reveal a concerning trend in government policy: the cherry-picking of data from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE). This manipulation of scientific advice is not just unethical but detrimental to public confidence during a health crisis. Ethical governance must prioritize transparent and independent scientific guidance rather than misleading rhetoric.

Throughout this inquiry, Vallance presents a disturbing picture of a government caught between authoritarian enforcement and the need for genuine public cooperation. As the Labour government settles into its role, the lessons from this inquiry serve as a critical reminder of how not to handle a crisis—highlighting the need for sound decision-making that genuinely supports public health.

The revelations from Vallance’s diaries expose the significant failures of Johnson’s administration during the pandemic. As the inquiry unfolds, it emphasizes the necessity for transparent, science-driven policymaking that truly aims to protect public health against future threats. The time is ripe for true reform that prioritizes the well-being of citizens over draconian measures and mismanagement.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y82pll0epo> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/10/03/downing-street-pandemic-covid-vallance/> - Sir Patrick Vallance, the UK's former chief scientific adviser, kept diaries during the pandemic in which he described Boris Johnson's decision-making as 'bipolar'. Vallance noted Johnson's inconsistency, stating, 'One minute do more, next do nothing.' He also highlighted internal conflicts within Downing Street, mentioning factions involving Michael Gove and Carrie Johnson. Additionally, Vallance accused ministers of 'cherry-picking' information from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) to support their decisions, particularly regarding the two-metre social distancing rule.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/03/boris-johnsons-decision-making-was-bipolar-during-covid-says-top-adviser> - In his diaries, Sir Patrick Vallance described Boris Johnson's decision-making during the pandemic as 'bipolar', citing instances of inconsistency and flip-flopping. Vallance also noted internal conflicts within Downing Street, with factions involving Michael Gove and Carrie Johnson. He expressed concern that ministers were 'cherry-picking' information from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) to support their decisions, particularly regarding the two-metre social distancing rule.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-67125230> - Sir Patrick Vallance's diaries, written during the pandemic, revealed his concerns about the government's handling of scientific advice. Vallance noted instances where ministers appeared to 'cherry-pick' information from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) to support their decisions, particularly regarding the two-metre social distancing rule. He also expressed worries about the government's 'following the science' mantra, suggesting that scientists were being used as 'human shields'.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/01/boris-johnson-wanted-massive-fines-for-lockdown-breaches-covid-inquiry-hears> - During the Covid inquiry, Sir Patrick Vallance revealed that Boris Johnson advocated for 'massive fines' for individuals breaching lockdown rules. Vallance recounted discussions where Johnson emphasized the need for stricter enforcement, stating, 'We need a lot more punishments and a lot more closing down.' He also noted Johnson's focus on imposing fines, with the Prime Minister ending a meeting with 'Massive fines, massive fines.'
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-67472669> - Sir Patrick Vallance's diaries, written during the pandemic, provided insights into the government's decision-making process. Vallance expressed concerns about the government's 'following the science' mantra, suggesting that scientists were being used as 'human shields'. He also noted instances where ministers appeared to 'cherry-pick' information from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) to support their decisions, particularly regarding the two-metre social distancing rule.
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/health/coronavirus/covid-inquiry-uk-boris-johnson-bamboozled-by-coronavirus-graphics-sir-patrick-vallance-says-4416317> - Sir Patrick Vallance, the UK's former chief scientific adviser, described Boris Johnson as being 'bamboozled' by coronavirus graphics during the pandemic. Vallance noted that Johnson appeared overwhelmed, with his head in his hands, and questioned the effectiveness of the UK's response to the virus. He also mentioned that Johnson was 'looking glum' and expressed doubts about the government's approach to managing the pandemic.