Twitter Thread by Gavin Kelly



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Given events over recent days (weeks, months) a few quick thoughts on policy & comms during a crisis.
Caveat: this may all seem elementary to some.
Tone: offered with due humility (based on hard Whitehall failures, as well as some relative successes).

1) Communicate contingency, don't cloak it. Every big policy decision will be dependent on events HMG can't control. Pretending otherwise will hurt you. Offering false optimism / certainty generates corrosive public cynicism not hope.

2) Go early, go big. When the risks of (in)action are asymmetric then err on the side of swift, aggressive measures that can be unwound in the event they aren't needed. Don't play catch-up with something contagious (virus, bank runs). Never assume things can't get worse.

3) Work across the aisle. Crises mean co-operating with those you don't agree with - whether in devolved govts, cities, unions or other parties. At some point you'll need them. This can be frustrating. Suck it up. Never burn trust by looking partisan when lives/jobs are at stake

4) Sequencing & co-ordination *really* matter. The public will accept painful measures arising from a new mutant strain. But will punish mistakes due to Whitehall ineptness (eg. lack of sync between economic support & restrictions). Never forget: UK = complex multi-national state

5) Explain your reasoning. Then do it again. Not just to the public but also councils, professional groups, unions etc. Doesn't mean proceeding by consensus (people will disagree, speed is essential). But be open to argument & feedback. Never appear arbitrary / capricious.

6) Highlight, rather than hide, key data. Don't over-claim on progress. Do own the shortcomings data exposes, even if acutely uncomfortable. Far better than the public doubting key statistics or relying on unreliable metrics that fuel mistrust.

7) Set a steady crisis-rhythm & keep up with events. Regular explanation, availability and openness helps foster public reassurance. So does regular use of genuine experts (thanks @CMO_England). Media vacuums, evasiveness and boosterism, don't.

As I say, this is offered in humility. Governing through a 'normal' crisis is really hard, never mind one on this scale.

But that doesn’t mean many mistakes couldn’t have been avoided.