

Witness Name: Sir John  
Manzoni

Statement No: 1

Exhibits: [JM/1 – JM/27]

Dated: 14<sup>th</sup> April 2023

## **UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF SIR JOHN MANZONI**

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I, Sir John Manzoni, will state as follows:

#### **SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION**

1. I make this statement in response to the Inquiry's Rule 9 Request for evidence dated 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023.
2. This witness statement has been drafted with the assistance of the Government Legal Department and Pinsent Masons LLP. Due to the size of the Cabinet Office and the diversity of its operations, it is not possible for one individual to comment from personal experience on all of the issues identified for the purposes of Module 1 and in the Rule 9 Request.
3. This witness statement focuses on my role(s) and responsibilities in relation to Module 1 of the Covid-19 Inquiry which is examining the UK's emergency preparedness, resilience and planning for a pandemic between 11<sup>th</sup> June 2009 and 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020.
4. It should be borne in mind that due to the passage of time, and given that I have not worked for the Cabinet Office since April 2020, I am heavily reliant, in the preparation of this statement, on documentation which has been made available to me, including access to my personal mailbox and Outlook calendar/diary.

5. This witness statement should be read in conjunction with other Module 1 statements which have been prepared to assist the Inquiry, and specifically those of Mr Roger Hargreaves, Director of the COBR Unit, and Mr Alex Chisholm, Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office (my successor), both of whom have provided detailed and helpful overviews of: (i) the Cabinet Office's structures, role, people and processes; and (ii) the Cabinet Office's role in resilience and preparedness in the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic insofar as are relevant to the matters and period covered by the Inquiry's request (2009-2020).

## **SECTION 2: MY BACKGROUND & EXPERIENCE**

6. I am currently a Non-Executive Director of Diageo plc and KBR, Inc. I am also a Chairman for SSE plc and Atomic Weapons Establishment.
7. During the relevant period (July 2015-January 2020), I fulfilled two roles, namely as Chief Executive of the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office.
8. I was appointed as the first Chief Executive of the Civil Service from 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014, and from 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2015, I was appointed as Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office. I remained in both positions concurrently until April 2020. I will discuss both of these roles (and my responsibilities) in more detail, below.
9. Prior to taking on these roles, I was Head of the Major Projects Authority from February 2014. Before that, I worked in the private sector in many senior roles. I was the President and Chief Executive Officer of Canadian oil and gas company, Talisman Energy Inc, Chief Executive, Refining & Marketing for BP plc, Chief Executive, Gas and Power for BP plc and a Non-Executive Director at SABMiller plc.

## **SECTION 3: MY CABINET OFFICE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

10. As stated above, during the relevant period (2015-2020), I fulfilled two roles concurrently, namely Chief Executive of the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office. I remained in both positions until April 2020.

11. The Chief Executive role was new, having been introduced for the first time in 2014, and thus, my responsibilities necessarily evolved over time. In essence, I defined my role as building executional capability across government, as well as overseeing administrative and commercial performance. This included, amongst other things, improving commercial decisions made by government departments, the recruitment of new civil servants and training, maintaining and optimising government-owned property, overseeing and assisting government major projects, setting cross government standards for fraud prevention, government shared services, government security, leading digital reforms across government, and government communications.
12. As Chief Executive of the Civil Service, I progressively established a cross government functional structure. I appointed all of the government functional leads, as well as establishing the functional structures which they lead, which continue to exist today. As Chief Executive, I led this cross government functional structure.
13. In terms of who reported to who, this is best illustrated by reference to the organisational charts, which are exhibited (JM/1 - INQ000146668). In essence, those individuals below Cabinet Secretary reported to Cabinet Secretary, and those below Chief Executive/Permanent Secretary of Cabinet Office reported to me.
14. As an example, the November 2017 organisational chart shows all of the various cross government functions. It should be noted that Rupert McNeil (and those below him, including Gareth Rhys Williams, Alex Aitken, Martina Hunt, Campbell McCafferty) and in the boxes to the right of those individuals all reported to me as Chief Executive. In addition, the Cabinet Office Corporate Services functions (marked in lighter blue) including Director of Communications, Finance Director, HR Director, Government Legal, and Chief Operating Officer for IT, Estates and Security, reported to me as Permanent Secretary of Cabinet Office. Philip Rycroft and Charles Farr (and those individuals below them) all reported to the Cabinet Secretary and Head of Civil Service, Sir Jeremy Heywood. The same is true for the later iterations of the organisational charts. For further details, please see the organisational charts exhibited hereto.

15. My role as Permanent Secretary of Cabinet Office included, amongst other things, making sure the domestic activities of the Cabinet Office were working properly, negotiating the budget with HMT and allocating it between different parts of the Cabinet Office, chairing the Cabinet Office Executive Committee (which principally related to the domestic activities of Cabinet Office) and creating the Cabinet Office Single Departmental Plan ("SDP"). A copy of the Cabinet Office SDP for the period from 2015 to 2020 is annexed hereto (**JM/2 - INQ000146645**).
16. I also introduced SDPs for other government departments which were an attempt to join up the outputs of departments with the inputs they had available; in other words, to help them prioritise and plan their activities within the resources available to them from HMT. Examples of such plans are exhibited to this statement (**JM/3 - INQ000146659, JM/4 - INQ000146642 and JM/5 - INQ000146643**). Some of those plans necessarily include reference to pandemic risk and preparedness planning, for example, the SDP created by the Department of Health. It should be noted that whilst I provided guidance (or coaching) in how to create the SDPs, the ownership, and drafting, of the SDP's was with each department.
17. The policy making teams in the Cabinet Office reported to the Cabinet Secretary. Thus, in my role as Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office, I had less involvement in relation to policy matters, including in relation to cross government emergency planning and resilience. The Secretariats, including the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS), reported directly to the Cabinet Secretary and I was not involved in policy formulation in this area.

#### **SECTION 4: MY ROLE IN RESPECT OF RESILIENCE, PREPAREDNESS AND CIVIL EMERGENCY RISK PLANNING**

18. I note that in his corporate statement, Mr Hargreaves has dealt comprehensively with the role of the Cabinet Office in respect of preparedness, resilience and civil emergency risk planning. So as to avoid unnecessary duplication, and in the interests of brevity, I defer to Mr Hargreaves' statement in this regard.
19. As explained above, the teams responsible for drafting cross government policy in respect of emergency preparedness and pandemic planning, reported to the Cabinet Secretary and so I was not directly involved in discussions and decisions regarding those issues. However, I was involved in some of the aspects of the

commercial execution of the plans, which I explain below.

20. As part of the functional structure of government, we implemented various standards/controls in each function. This included setting commercial standards for procurement. It was in this capacity that I saw various contracts for pandemic planning. In essence, there needed to be approval for contract lets, and, in my role as Chief Executive, I was asked to approve some of the pandemic planning contracts (**JM/6 - INQ000146655 and JM/7 - INQ000146654**).
21. To illustrate, during the period in question, requests were made by the Department of Health for approval of large spends including extensions of the National Pandemic Flu Service: (i) 111 NHS phone service, and (ii) managed contact centre services which I approved. I note that a request for spending in respect of influenza vaccinations was also approved by the Minister for Implementation, Oliver Dowden (**JM/8 - INQ000146660, JM/9 - INQ000146656, JM/10 - INQ000146657, JM/11 - INQ000146658, JM/12 - INQ000146663, JM/13 - INQ000146661 and JM/14 - INQ000146667**). I have also seen emails where I approved stockpiling of contingency stocks related to pandemic plans.
22. Mr Hargreaves, at paragraph 9.134 of his corporate statement, refers to the CCS's yearly budgets in the relevant period, which shows that their budget increased steadily through the period I was Permanent Secretary of Cabinet Office (from £8 million in 2014/15 to £21 million in 2019/20). This likely reflected, in part, the increased focus on emergency planning across government over the period. I would have been required to agree the budget and its justification every year as part of the Cabinet Office budget process.
23. In my role as Chief Executive and Permanent Secretary, I had occasional meetings with the Directors of the CCS (**JM/15 - INQ000146646 and JM/16 - INQ000146647**). However, with regards to pandemic preparedness and planning, as I was not involved with the CCS in a line management capacity, these meetings were more about "touching base" and general awareness.
24. As part of my role as Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office I also oversaw the updating of the Cabinet Office Business Continuity ("BC") and Continuity of Crisis Management ("CoCM") Plans. These plans were designed to ensure, amongst other things, that the Cabinet Office was prepared to respond to an emergency,

disaster or significant event, such as a terrorist attack or a pandemic.

25. From the documentation, I can see that in August 2015 there was a full audit of Business Continuity and in late 2016 the Government Internal Audit Agency carried out a follow up of this audit. Following the audit, in or around February 2017, the Cabinet Office Business Continuity Plan was revised (**JM/17 - INQ000146644**).
26. The Cabinet Office BCP was subject to review throughout 2017-18 as part of a three-phase plan. At around the same time, CoCM arrangements were introduced. CoCM planning relies upon all departments ensuring that they have effective Business Continuity & Crisis Management plans enabling them to dovetail with wider cross-government arrangements.
27. Lesley Hume, Chief Operating Officer, and John Stubley, CO Departmental Security Officer & Senior Information Risk Officer, carried out work in respect of Cabinet Office BCP and CoCM arrangements. Lesley Hume and John Stubley presented an update in respect of their progress to the Executive Committee ("ExCo") meeting which I chaired on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2017 (**JM/18 - INQ000146648, JM/19 - INQ000146649, JM/20 - INQ000146650, JM/21 - INQ000146651, JM/22 - INQ000146652 and JM/23 - INQ000146653**). John Stubley provided further BC updates in 2018 (**JM/24 - INQ000146662**).
28. Mike Parsons, Chief Operating Officer (Lesley Hume's successor), chaired Cabinet Office Operations Committee ("OpCo") meetings on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2018 and 19<sup>th</sup> February 2019 (**JM/25 - INQ000146664 and JM/26 - INQ000146666**) whereby updates as to the Cabinet Office's progress with regards BC were provided by Kazi Dinsmore. Mike Parsons also provided further updates in respect of BC in April 2019 (at the COARC meeting) and in June 2019 (**JM/27 - INQ000146665**).
29. As Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office I was involved in approving the Cabinet Office BCP, but I was not involved in the drafting of the same.

**SECTION 5: WHAT WAS DONE CORRECTLY & WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE BETTER?**

30. Mr Hargreaves' corporate statement provides a fulsome account of the various government structures and the responsibilities of each department with respect to preparedness, including how they interact and how actions are delegated through the various central, departmental and local structures.
31. The COBR mechanisms within government, in my view, work well. The composition of the meetings, including the chair, are flexible and are set up in a way which best suits the situation. Government as a whole understands COBR and responds when called to do so. This includes local government, as necessary.
32. The CCS carries out exercises and practice periodically, as well as outlining the policy and mechanisms for meeting civil contingencies. However, reading Mr Hargreaves' corporate statement reminds me that whilst the mechanisms are outlined very clearly, and comprehensively, the practical application of the different layers of regional/local and central government, and how they interact "in the heat of the moment", and whether they are all as clear as Mr Hargreaves would wish, is doubtful.
33. The CCS hold a very clear methodology for management of situations, but I am less clear that the same mechanisms are fully understood throughout all levels of local and regional government. To some degree, however, once COBR is initiated in a situation, and the right people are called to the COBR table, they will structure the arrangements below them appropriately. However, I worry that the carefully articulated accountability structures in the centre are less clear further away from the centre.
34. Another area which should always be under review and improvement is in respect of information flow. Information in a crisis is critical, and government usually does a reasonable job in the end, but again, it always takes time to structure the information required and begin to utilise it constructively in the crisis. When COVID-19 emerged it benefited from some of the work we did in relation to "Brexit" in terms of information dashboards. However, it may be beneficial to think through the information requirements ahead of time (for example, in preparation for a

pandemic) and to create systems and strategies before it is needed. I personally do not think that this was fully in place before COVID-19 emerged.

**STATEMENT OF TRUTH**

I confirm that the contents of this witness statement are true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed:

**Personal Data**

Print name:

**Personal Data**

Dated:

18-4-23