

On behalf of the Home Office

Witness Statement of Louise Horton

Second WS

Dated: 12 June 2023

EVIDENCE FOR THE COVID 19 INQUIRY

MODULE 1

RESPONSE TO M1/HO/02 RULE 9 REQUEST TO THE HOME OFFICE

(5 May 2023)

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF LOUISE ELIZABETH HORTON

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1. I, **LOUISE ELIZABETH HORTON**, provide this statement as one of the Home Office's Corporate Witnesses and in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 5 May 2023 ("the **Rule 9 request**"). I confirm that I am duly authorised by the Home Office to provide evidence to assist the Covid-19 Inquiry ("**the Inquiry**").
2. The Rule 9 request is set out under three headings being 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015', 'UK Biological Security Strategy 2018' and 'Reflections on cross-UK Government activity'. The request indicates that a Rule 9 request has been made in the same terms to the Cabinet Office ("**CO**"), the

Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (“DEFRA”) and the Department of Health and Social Care (“DHSC”).

3. Within my statement I will provide summary timelines focused on particular aspects of the matters upon which information was sought in the Rule 9 Request. In addition, I will refer to underlying documents which are provided in the disclosure made to the Inquiry, using the production references.
4. I have provided documents from 2012 to 2019 that appear to be most relevant to the matters under consideration, to best assist the Inquiry. The searches of Home Office material undertaken concerning this Rule 9 Request identified c. 340,000 items of potential relevance from the specified time period. Therefore, it was necessary to apply some limitations to disclosure to ensure it was useful and manageable within the timescales requested by the Inquiry (which in turn reflect the limited time available to the Inquiry). I am satisfied that reasonable steps have been taken to ensure that the most relevant documents have been identified and provided. I confirm that the Home Office can provide any further specified material that may be of interest to the Inquiry if required.
5. I am satisfied that I am an appropriate witness to provide the factual information sought by the Rule 9 request on behalf of the Home Office. I am the Deputy Director responsible for the Home Office’s response to the Covid-19 Inquiry. In this role I am accountable for the searching and disclosure of material relevant to the Inquiry, and supporting preparation of corporate witness statements made on behalf of the Home Office and any individual witness statement requested from Home Office staff.
6. In my preparation of this witness statement, I have benefited from the assistance of colleagues in Homeland Security Group (who have knowledge of the Department’s involvement in the Biological Security Strategy throughout the period of interest to the Inquiry). Also, I have been able to draw on the knowledge of other members of the dedicated Home Office team formed to support the Covid-19 Inquiry, of which I am a part. The Home Office Inquiry team have conducted searches of Departmental records to support the recollections of colleagues. Accordingly, whilst I do not have direct personal knowledge of the UK Biological Security Strategy, I have provided evidence to assist the Inquiry with the entire period covered by the Rule 9 Request on the basis of the contemporaneous records and discussions with colleagues with the requisite knowledge.

7. Given the large volume of data, I have endeavoured to use my statement to provide a means to understand the central issues and the factual position at the relevant time, and to provide a guide to the most relevant documents relating to Departmental involvement in the UK Biological Security Strategy. The Home Office Chronology provides further detail on the role of the Home Office in supporting HMG planning for pandemics and the Department's responses to infectious disease outbreaks. The Department can provide any additional documentation specified in relation to specific events if the Inquiry wishes to explore any matter in more detail.

Statement Structure and Overview

8. In **Section One**, I provide a concise explanation of my understanding of the relationship between the **2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review ("NSS and SDSR")** and the **UK Biological Security Strategy 2018** (the "**2018 Biosecurity Strategy**" or "**UKBSS 2018**"). The outline chronology provides a high-level sequence of events prior to considering the detail.
9. **Section Two** concerns the **National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review**; it corresponds to questions 1 to 3 inclusive in the Rule 9 request (taking account of the position of the devolved administrations so far as possible per question 7).
10. **Section Three** concerns the development of the **UK Biological Security Strategy 2018**; it corresponds to questions 3 (in relation to the timing of publication of the 2018 Strategy), 4 and 5 in the Rule 9 request (taking account of the position of the devolved administrations so far as possible per question 7).
11. **Section Four** concerns the reflection sought by Question 6 of the Rule 9 request.

SECTION ONE: Summary

12. This corporate witness statement refers to the development and governance of three related, but separate, strategies between 2012 and 2020:
 - I. National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review: Begun in late 2012 and published in 2015

- II. (Internal to Government) UK Biological Security Strategy (“**ItG UKBSS**”): Begun in 2013 and approved in 2015
- III. (Public-facing) UK Biological Security Strategy: Published in 2018.

13. The Home Office’s role in the NSS and SDSR 2015 process concerned the areas that fell within its policy remit – principally, national security and counter-terrorism, organised crime, and border security. The NSS and SDSR 2015 committed to the publication of a public-facing UK Biological Security Strategy, based on the internal to government UKBSS.

14. The Home Office co-ordinated the development of the cross-government internal to government UKBSS. This internal to government strategy aimed to provide the framework within which government departments and agencies would work to manage the risks posed by significant outbreaks of disease, whether these were natural, accidental or deliberately occurring. The ItG UKBSS was approved by ministers in 2015.

15. The Home Office co-ordinated the drafting of the public facing UKBSS 2018. This public document set out, for the first time in a single document, how the UK intended to deal with significant disease threats to humans, animals, environment and plant, and the less likely risk of accidental or deliberate use to cause disease. It outlined the multi-faceted biosecurity aims and activities undertaken by various departments and specialist agencies.

16. The high-level chronology below outlines the key dates in the evolution of the strategies referred to in this statement.

Outline Chronology

| Date | Activity |
|----------------|--|
| December 2012 | National Security Adviser seeks departmental views, in writing via the National Security Council (Officials), on preparatory work ahead of the next refresh of the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2015. |
| June 2013 | Cross-government workshops on ItG UK Biological Security Strategy development begin, led by HO. |
| September 2013 | National Security Council (Science and Technology) considers progress on the ItG UK Biological Security Strategy. |

| Date | Activity |
|---------------|--|
| December 2013 | National Security Council (Science and Technology) considers ItG UK Biological Security Strategy. |
| March 2014 | HO provides verbal update to National Security Council (Science and Technology) on ItG UK Biological Security Strategy. |
| June 2014 | National Security Adviser informed that the HO co-ordinated ItG UK Biological Security Strategy . |
| November 2014 | National Security Council (THRC) (Officials) considers the draft ItG UK Biological Security Strategy. |
| December 2014 | Write Round seeking endorsement of the ItG UK Biological Security Strategy issued. |
| January 2015 | ItG UK Biological Security Strategy agreed by Write Round. |
| November 2015 | National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 published with commitment to publish public facing UK Biological Security Strategy (UKBSS 2018). |
| August 2016 | Review of the ItG UK Biological Security Strategy, for the purposes of publication, completes. |
| July 2018 | Public facing UK Biological Security Strategy (UKBSS 2018) published. |
| December 2018 | (Initial) Biological Security Strategy Governance Board held. |

SECTION TWO: NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC DEFENCE AND SECURITY REVIEW

17. The 2015 National Security Strategy (“**NSS**”) and Strategic Defence and Security Review (“**SDSR**”) outlined the UK Government’s vision for a secure and prosperous United Kingdom, with global reach and influence.

18. The strategy set out the following aims:

- i. To strengthen our Armed Forces and our security and intelligence agencies so that they remain world-leading.
- ii. To further enhance our position as the world’s leading soft power promoting our values and interests globally.

- iii. To invest more in our current alliances including NATO, build stronger relationships with growing powers, and work to bring past adversaries in from the cold.
 - iv. To strengthen our domestic resilience and law enforcement capabilities against global challenges.
19. The strategic priorities for 2015 – 2020 were to:
- i. Tackle terrorism head-on at home and abroad in a tough and comprehensive way, counter extremism and challenge the poisonous ideologies that feed it. Remain a world leader in cyber security. Deter state-based threats. Respond to crises rapidly and effectively and build resilience at home and abroad.
 - ii. Help strengthen the rules-based international order and its institutions, encouraging reform to enable further participation of growing powers. Work with our partners to reduce conflict, and to promote stability, good governance and human rights.
 - iii. Promote our prosperity, expanding our economic relationship with growing powers such as India and China, helping to build global prosperity, investing in innovation and skills, and supporting UK defence and security exports.
20. On 5 December 2012, the National Security Adviser (“**NSA**”) sought departmental views, in writing via the National Security Council (Officials), on preparatory work ahead of the next refresh of the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2015.
21. On 13 December 2012, the Home Office acting Permanent Secretary, Helen Kilpatrick, replied to the NSA outlining agreement, in principle, to work beginning on the 2015 strategy. The Home Office agreed to the proposal that the National Security Strategy Network should drive the work, supported by a small central team and reporting to the National Security Council (Officials).¹
22. In preparing a draft response to the NSA, Home Office officials advised the acting Permanent Secretary on scope questions relating to national security and counter-

¹ INQ000204018.

terrorism, organised crime, and border security for consideration during the review.² Officials did not provide advice on policy matters, for example pandemic planning, outside the remit of the Home Office.

23. The Home Office's role in developing the UK Biological Security Strategy, referenced at paragraph 4.131 of the *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*, and published in 2018, is outlined in Section Three below.
24. Departmental records show that the Home Office reported progress on the SDSR to the Cabinet Office SDSR Implementation Board. A new NSC sub-Committee was established specifically to oversee and drive implementation of SDSR 2015. The committee was chaired by the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. In August 2016, the Prime Minister appointed the Home Secretary to chair the Committee.³

SECTION THREE: UK BIOLOGICAL SECURITY STRATEGY 2018

Internal to Government Biological Security Strategy and Biological Security Policy Ownership

25. The 2015 National Security Strategy (“**NSS**”) and Strategic Defence and Security Review (“**SDSR**”) committed to the publication of a new national Biological Security Strategy (“**UKBSS**”). This commitment built on work in 2013 - 2014 to develop an internal-to-government biological security strategy. The ItG UKBSS was approved by Ministers, by Write Round, in January 2015.⁴
26. The internal to government strategy was intended to allow Government to: i) better coordinate current and future activity; ii) more effectively and efficiently commission and fund research; iii) identify synergies between departments; iv) more readily apply lessons identified from outbreaks; and v) develop a more effective national response to any future UK and / or global biological incident.⁵
27. The internal to government strategy coordinated work already taking place across government, including MoD led overseas programmes on BioSecurity, Home Office work

² INQ000204017.

³ [national security strategy strategic defence security review annual report 2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/544443/national_security_strategy_strategic_defence_security_review_annual_report_2016.pdf) ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/publishing-service))

⁴ INQ000204070.

⁵ INQ000204036, INQ000204035.

on denying access to substances of concern, and Cabinet Office and Department of Health planning for mitigating significant biological incidents.⁶

28. The internal to government strategy outlined that national policy for mitigating biological risks was set by five departments and (where appropriate) their devolved equivalents.

These departments and their responsibilities were summarised as below:

- i. The **Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs** which had priorities related to safeguarding plant and animal health by minimising risks and increasing preparedness for disease outbreaks.
- ii. The **Department of Health** (with Public Health England) which provided both monitoring and surveillance; and planning and capabilities for responding to outbreaks of disease, including high-impact outbreaks.
- iii. The **Foreign and Commonwealth Office** which led on efforts to maintain the international legal prohibition on biological weapons and to reduce the overseas proliferation of expertise and material of concern.
- iv. The **Home Office** (as set out in CONTEST) which was responsible for reducing the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism.⁷
- v. The **Ministry of Defence** which developed and maintained a range of capabilities in order to manage and reduce the risk to the UK, and its overseas interests, from all biological threats (natural, accidental and deliberate attack).

29. The strategy additionally identified the roles of other government / public sector organisations in relation to biological security, namely:

- i. **Cabinet Office:** Policy co-ordination
- ii. **Department for Transport** (for example): As owners of potential targets of a malicious attack
- iii. **Local Authorities / Emergency Services:** As suppliers of aspects of the response
- iv. **Intelligence, assessment, security and law enforcement organisations:** To identify, monitor and disrupt threats,

⁶ INQ000204034.

⁷ The aim of the CONTEST strategy is to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism. [CONTEST: the United Kingdom's strategy for countering terrorism \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/421117/contest-strategy.pdf)

- v. **Scientific organisations** including: Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (“Dstl”), Public Health England (“PHE”), the Food and Environment Research Agency (“FERA”), Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (“AHVLA”) and research agencies: to amongst other things, track developing risks and develop counter-measures.⁸

Governance and Workstreams

30. The internal to government strategy was delivered by a cross-government group, working ultimately to the Ministerial National Security Council (“NSC”) (Threats, Hazards, Risks and Contingencies) (“THRC”). The National Security Council (Security and Technology) (Officials) also provided regular consideration of the strategy.⁹
31. Beneath the NSC (THRC) a lower level of governance was provided through a Delivery Board which consisted of the Senior Responsible Owner (“SRO”) from the identified lead departments for the strategy’s seven workstreams (see below), as well as representatives from DEFRA, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (“BIS”) and Department for International Development (“DFID”). Delivery Board members were at Director level. SROs were supported by a Delivery Manager (usually at Deputy Director level). The Home Office served as chair / coordinator for the strategy.
32. The development of the internal to government strategy was organised around seven cross-government workstreams, each comprising key objectives. Each workstream was coordinated by a SRO from an identified lead Department, who was accountable for progress on work against the objective. The workstreams, objectives, and lead departments were as follows¹⁰:

| Workstream | Aim | Lead Department |
|------------|---|-----------------|
| Assess | To ensure that we have sufficient understanding of the variety of biological risks and threats that we face, drawing on the range of available health and intelligence sources. | Home Office |

⁸ INQ000204022.

⁹ For example: INQ000204021; INQ000204025.

¹⁰ INQ000204035.

| Workstream | Aim | Lead Department |
|------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Influence | To coordinate work to reduce the factors that drive the development or emergence of biological risks. | Foreign and Commonwealth Office |
| Safeguard | To protect hazardous biological materials, technologies and expertise and work to ensure their movement around the world happens responsibly. | Ministry of Defence |
| Detect | To ensure that we are able to rapidly and reliably identify that a biological incident is occurring or has occurred | Ministry of Defence |
| Mitigate | To ensure that if an incident occurs, we have access to appropriate countermeasures and recovery options to reduce its impact (including its economic impact) as much as is practical. | Department of Health |
| Analyse | To ensure that we have the capability to identify the nature and source of harmful biological material. | Ministry of Defence |
| Remove | To ensure the UK has the capability to disrupt and destroy biological weapons and associated technology when necessary. | Ministry of Defence |

33. The Mitigate workstream, led by the Department of Health, encompassed pandemic planning and preparedness.
34. The Home Office led the Assess workstream through the Department's Office of Security and Counter-Terrorism ("OSCT"). The objectives of the Assess workstream were as follows:
- i. More inclusive information sharing (where operational sensitivities allow), and better links between health/veterinary & security/defence communities.
 - ii. Ensuring we have access to the analytical capabilities required for the assessment of current threats & identification of future threats (*link to Analyse*).
 - iii. Review of the National Risk Assessment Biological risks to ensure that the range of Biological agents and scenarios are sufficiently covered.

- iv. Better coordination on 'dual use research of concern' ("**DURC**") – understanding where future threats may emerge (*link to Safeguard*).
 - v. Coordination across HMG about which biological materials are of concern.¹¹
35. To support the Assess workstream, the Home Office convened and chaired the Assess Working Group. The Terms of Reference for the Assess Working Group state that it met quarterly and membership consisted of appropriate representation from DEFRA, DH, MOD, GoScience, BIS, and the Devolved Administrations.¹²

Approvals and Subsequent Review for Publication

36. Departmental records show that the Chief Scientific Advisor was informed on 30 June 2014 that the Home Office would be submitting the internal to government strategy to NSC(THRC) in July 2014.¹³
37. On 6 November 2014, the NSC (THRC) committee discussed the internal to government strategy.¹⁴ The minutes of the meeting record that clearance of the strategy would be taken forward through a bespoke Deputy National Security Adviser-chaired official level meeting of NSC (THRC). Departmental records show that clearance was instead sought by Ministerial Write Round, following the cancellation of the intended NSC (THRC).¹⁵
38. In January 2015 the ItG UKBSS was approved by Ministers, by Write Round, who asked that the Strategy be reviewed periodically. The Government Chief Scientific Advisor suggested that a public version of the strategy be developed.¹⁶ With Ministerial endorsement, officials worked to ensure that the strategy's key areas of focus were reflected in SDSR 2015 (see **Section Two**). The SDSR recognised many of these areas of focus, specifically the growing challenges of both Global Health Security and the potential for deliberate biological attacks to become more likely over the longer term. In response, the SDSR committed to 'publish a national bio-security strategy in 2016, addressing the threat of natural disease outbreaks, as well as the less likely threat of biological materials being used in a deliberate attack'.

¹¹ INQ000204069.

¹² INQ000204057.

¹³ INQ000204034.

¹⁴ INQ000204042.

¹⁵ INQ000204037.

¹⁶ INQ000204046.

39. To deliver the SDSR commitment, the cross-government Director level Delivery Board which oversaw the implementation of the internal to government Biological Security Strategy agreed that it was necessary to review the Strategy ahead of publication. The purpose of the review was to:
- i. Help shape an eventual public strategy;
 - ii. Deliver against the condition in the original Ministerial endorsement;
 - iii. Review progress under the Strategy to date;
 - iv. Acknowledge that the biological landscape has evolved significantly since the Strategy was originally written – this has included increased public attention (and expectation) around biological crises such as Ebola, an evolving threat picture, and growth of HMG’s ‘global health’ ambitions.¹⁷
40. The review was co-ordinated by the Home Office and circulated to Members of the Biological Security Strategy Delivery Board in August 2016. The review identified a series of strengths and areas for further development, including in governance, funding, and resourcing.¹⁸
41. The public facing UKBSS was scheduled to be published in 2016, following the completion of the work as planned. Departmental records show that the Home Secretary was briefed that publication was subsequently delayed because of the EU Referendum, the 2017 General Election including the pre-election period, and national security related priorities.¹⁹
42. The delay to the publication of the public facing UKBSS had no impact on the work of the Home Office in supporting cross-government pandemic planning and preparedness. My first statement and the **Mod 1 Home Office Chronology** outlines the work of the Department from 2006 to 2020 in preparing and responding to infectious diseases.

¹⁷ INQ000204051.

¹⁸ INQ000204050, INQ000204051.

¹⁹ INQ000204070; [Conduct guidance for 8 June 2017 general election: written ministerial statement - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statements/2017/06/08-conduct-guidance)

Purpose and Scope of Published UK Biological Security Strategy 2018

43. The purpose of the published UKBSS 2018 was to outline the UK government's actions in the UK and overseas to protect UK citizens and British interests from the risk of a significant disease outbreak, regardless of the source.²⁰
44. The UKBSS 2018 identified a set of related national and international programmes, strategies and future work programmes. It stated that the UKBSS 2018 did not intend to duplicate or to replace the work in the related strategies but, instead, its purpose was to provide an overarching narrative of how the cross-government work fitted together. These related strategies and initiatives included:
- i. The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review
 - ii. The Global Health Security and UK Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy
 - iii. The counter terrorism strategy CONTEST
 - iv. The National Counter-Proliferation Strategy to 2020
 - v. The UK Influenza Preparedness Strategy
 - vi. The Strategy for UK Life Sciences
 - vii. The vision and high level strategy for UK Animal and Plant Health Research to 2020 and Beyond
45. The published UKBSS 2018 was structured into two parts: i) Context, ii) Response, including implementation. Section one of the strategy defines "biological security" as the term used "to cover the protection of the UK and UK interests from biological risks (particularly significant disease outbreaks) whether these arise naturally, or through the less likely event of an accidental release of hazardous biological material from laboratory facilities, or a deliberate biological attack. These risks could affect humans, animals or plants."
46. Section two of the published UKBSS 2018 described the four pillars of the UK's response to biological risk as follows:
- i. **Understand** the biological risks we face today and could face in the future.
 - ii. **Prevent** biological risks from emerging (where possible) or from threatening the UK and UK interests.

²⁰ [national security strategy strategic defence security review annual report 2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534222/national_security_strategy_strategic_defence_security_review_annual_report_2016.pdf)
([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk))

- iii. **Detect**, characterise and report biological risks when they do emerge as early and reliably as possible.
 - iv. **Respond** to biological risks that have reached the UK or UK interests to lessen their impact and to enable a rapid return to business as usual.²¹
47. Annex A of the UKBSS 2018 listed departmental roles and responsibilities in relation to the strategy. The Home Office's responsibilities were stated in relation to UK homeland security and the counter terrorism CONTEST strategy which includes work to protect against the highest impact terrorist risks – including those involving a biological weapon.²²

Governance Post Publication

48. On 12 December 2018, the initial Biological Security Strategy Governance Board was held. The Terms of Reference for the board stated that it would meet every six months and report annually to the NSC(THRC). The Chair was to rotate between the Home Office, DEFRA, and DHSC.²³ Membership consisted of Director level representation from DHSC, DEFRA, Cabinet Office, Home Office, DFID, MOD, BEIS, Food Standards Agency, FCO, Office of Life Science, and the Devolved Administrations.
49. The Terms of Reference for the Board stated that it owned, and co-ordinated the delivery of eleven cross-departmental commitments in the Biological Security Strategy by:
- i. Bringing together all interested departments and agencies to ensure mutual visibility and co-ordination of key strategic issues.
 - ii. Owning and monitoring the progress of the 11 cross-cutting commitments. It will do this through progress reporting at meetings and will evaluate delivery against objectives and challenges identified by the Board. This will be further supported by a Biological Security Strategy Officials Working Group.
 - iii. Influencing the direction of key cross-cutting work to mitigate biological risks.
50. The Terms of Reference do not indicate any structural or operational relationship with the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Programme (“PIPP”) Board, the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board (“PFRB”). The UKBSS 2018 was an umbrella strategy that presented

²¹ [ES639459 CCS204 CCS0817779820-5 Biological Security Strategy.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

²² [CONTEST 3.0 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

²³ INQ000204064.

in one place the biological security related work being undertaken across government to help ensure that other cross government strategies, such as those in counterproliferation, or in pandemic preparedness, did not cut across each other and were mutually supporting. Departments continued to own and be responsible for the governance and delivery of their workstreams.

51. A Biological Security Strategy Working Group was also established and met for the first time in February 2019. Membership mirrored the Governance Board arrangements. By December 2019, the group had met seven times. Papers for the working group on 12 December 2019 included an assessment of progress against the Biological Security Strategy's eleven commitments.²⁴ As with the Governance Board, the intention was for the Chair to rotate between the Home Office, Defra, and DHSC.
52. Rotation of the chairs of both governance tiers in autumn 2019 was not possible because DHSC and Defra were dealing with other competing priorities. The Home Office agreed to continue until 1st April 2020. The Security Minister directed at the time that the strategy would need to be overhauled in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, with greater focus on human health.
53. The UKBSS 2018 stated that the governance board would report to the THRC Subcommittee of the NSC through the Home Office Security Minister. The Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies Committee (THRC), a subcommittee of the NSC, was disbanded in July 2019 as part of a wider consolidation of Cabinet sub-Committees. After the abolition of the THRC subcommittee, governance moved to the NSC. When the THRC disbanded, advice to the Security Minister shifted to focus on reporting to the NSC.

Refresh of UK Biological Security Strategy: Responsibilities

54. The three departments that signed the UKBSS in 2018 reflected the three main areas it covered: human health, animal and plant health, and accidental and deliberate release. As a result of the pandemic, it was determined that a refresh of the strategy should be coordinated by the Cabinet Office, which had supported the THRC Subcommittee of the NSC and have a unique position at the centre of government ideal for coordinating and driving forward a cross-cutting strategy such as the UKBSS 2018 which requires a whole government response.

²⁴ INQ000204065.

SECTION FOUR: CROSS GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY

55. The Cabinet Manual sets out the internal rules and procedures under which the Government operates. The manual states that Cabinet is the ultimate decision-making body of government, and that the Cabinet system of government is based on the principle of collective responsibility.²⁵
56. As outlined in the manual, Cabinet committees help ensure that government business is processed more effectively by relieving pressure on Cabinet. The manual identifies that proposals on subject matters which affect more than one department are expected to require consideration by a Cabinet committee. Cross-cutting strategies or policies are therefore discussed and agreed by an appropriate Cabinet committee. Governance of cross-cutting strategy implementation, including consideration of responsibilities, duplication of work or inconsistencies in approach, is managed through the appropriate Cabinet committee with support from the relevant official committee.
57. The Cabinet Office-owned guidance on the Lead Government Department model sets out the roles and responsibilities for departments in planning, responding, and recovering from emergencies. Generally, the Lead Government Department for a specific set of contingencies is that which has day-to-day policy oversight of the sector(s) of the national infrastructure that may be affected in an emergency.
58. In line with Cabinet Office guidance on the role and responsibilities of the Lead Government Department, all government departments should understand their specific roles in relation to planning, response, and recovery from Emergencies.
59. The Home Office is not the Lead Government Department for pandemic planning generally, or the Covid-19 pandemic specifically, and is not placed to provide evidence with regards to the effectiveness of the Lead Government Department model for the matters under consideration by the Inquiry.

²⁵ [The Cabinet Manual \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61222/cabinet-manual.pdf)

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

I am content for this witness statement to form part of the evidence before the UK Covid-19 Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.

Signed:

Personal Data

Louise Elizabeth Horton

Dated: 12 June 2023