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UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SAM LISTER

I, Sam Lister, will say as follows: -

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0. Preface

- 0.1. I am the Director General for Strategy and Operations at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Sections 1 and 2 of this statement give a description of the department before 2020 and how it planned for potential emergencies such as pandemics. Section 3 of this statement focuses on the department's experience of the pandemic and the lessons drawn to prepare us better for a future pandemic. I make this statement pursuant to a Rule 9 request from the Inquiry dated 24 November 2022.
- 0.2. On 7 February 2023 the Prime Minister announced a machinery of government change which moved certain digital responsibilities from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to a new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). The department reverted to its previous name of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (which it held until July 2017 when Digital was added to reflect increased responsibilities in that sector) but retained the DCMS acronym, which it has had since 1997. Given that the department's responsibilities have changed several times under this acronym, references to DCMS should be understood in the context in which they are made. This will most often mean the department as it was prior to February 2023, and includes its digital remit; it will, less frequently, mean the pre-2017 department and, in cases where the statement is explicitly forward-looking, it will refer to the current department.
- 0.3. This statement is provided in response to the request from the Chair of the Inquiry for a witness statement covering the issues raised in the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 1 ("M1") of the Covid-19 Inquiry. M1 is concerned with the UK's preparedness for whole-system civil emergencies, including resourcing, the system of risk management and pandemic readiness.
- 0.4. As requested by the Chair of the Inquiry, this statement is focused on the period of time between 11 June 2009 and 21 January 2020. The contents of this statement relate primarily to matters that occurred within this date range, unless indicated otherwise.

- 0.5. Within this statement, “**key M1 functions**” refers to those functions which relate to: planning, preparedness, readiness and resilience in respect of general civil emergencies, whole system civil emergencies, high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics.
- 0.6. The “**key DCMS policy areas**” referred to in this statement are those which relate to:
1. information, disinformation, media and on social media;
 2. critical national infrastructure and data infrastructure;
 3. civil society; and
 4. any other policy areas over which DCMS bears responsibility and which relate to the key M1 functions.

Section 1: DCMS

A: Structures and specialist bodies concerned with the key M1 functions

- 1.1. There were a number of structures and entities within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS¹) that are concerned with key Module 1 (M1) functions. This section provides an overview of the principal structures and specialist bodies that were in the department and their operation.

Critical National Infrastructure

- 1.2. DCMS was the lead government department for the majority of the communications sector, which is part of the UK's Critical National Infrastructure. The sector includes telecommunications, the internet, broadcasting and postal services, with DCMS holding responsibility for all of these apart from postal services, which came under the then Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). Following the machinery of government changes² of February 2023, DCMS now has oversight of broadcast services.
- 1.3. DCMS held responsibility for the telecoms sector from when it was transferred from BEIS in 2011 until the creation of DSIT. Key UK telecoms include fixed line communications, mobile communications and internet service providers. As the lead government department for this area over the period requested by the Inquiry, DCMS led on security and resilience issues for telecoms, working with the industry to disseminate best practice and policy to enhance the sector's resilience. This was coordinated through the telecoms security and resilience team within DCMS, which led on all security and resilience work related to telecoms, internet and subsea fibre optic cables.
- 1.4. The broadcast sector broadly covers the operation of public broadcasting and distribution through radio and television programmes. DCMS has been

¹ Note paragraph 0.2. which outlines February 2023 changes to DCMS; some of these functions are now part of DSIT.

² A machinery of government change is a transfer of functions between ministers - either between ministers in charge of departments or other Cabinet Ministers, or between a minister and a non-departmental public body. Paragraph 0.2. notes the 7 February 2023 changes that impacted on DCMS.

responsible for media policy (including BBC policy) since the formation of the department, as the Department of National Heritage, in 1992. Responsibility for competition and policy issues relating to the media, broadcasting and digital sectors was also transferred to DCMS from BEIS in 2011. DCMS's responsibility for broadcasting security and resilience sits with the broadcast security and resilience team within DCMS.

- 1.5. As the lead department for broadcast-related Critical National Infrastructure, DCMS focuses its work on the BBC as it carries special responsibilities in the event of a national emergency, when Ministers may ask the broadcaster to distribute specific information to the public via its networks. The BBC's responsibilities, set out in its Charter and Agreement, include requirements to take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of the loss of, or a significant disruption to, the broadcast and distribution of BBC radio and television services. In 2016, as part of the last Charter Review, DCMS added a new clause to the BBC's agreement with the government about the broadcaster's responsibility to maintain the resilience of its networks and added specific requirements for the BBC in relation to cyber security preparedness.
- 1.6. Data infrastructure is not officially designated as a part of the UK's Critical National Infrastructure, but it was largely treated as such during the pandemic. This is a relatively new policy area within government; the data infrastructure security and resilience team was established within DCMS in March 2020 (outside the date range requested) and moved to DSIT in February 2023.

Information, disinformation, media and social media

- 1.7. His Majesty's Government (HMG) defines disinformation as the deliberate creation and dissemination of false and/or manipulated information that is intended to deceive and mislead audiences, either for the purposes of causing harm, or for political, personal or financial gain. Misinformation refers to inadvertently spreading false information.

- 1.8. DCMS led on the government's counter disinformation policy, the operational side of which was coordinated through the DCMS-based Counter Disinformation Unit (CDU). The CDU leads the operational implementation of the government's domestic counter disinformation policy. As part of the machinery of government changes in February 2023, this responsibility moved to DSIT.
- 1.9. The CDU brings together expertise from across government and works with a range of partners including social media platforms, civil society organisations and providers of monitoring and analysis services to produce the most comprehensive picture of disinformation and misinformation, and to address it. The CDU aims to reduce the potential impact of disinformation on UK democracy, society and economic and national security interests, in line with UK democratic values.
- 1.10. In January and February 2019, the CDU identified key stakeholders from across Whitehall to form the Counter Disinformation Cell (CDC). This structure was intended to provide the most comprehensive picture of the level, scope and impact of disinformation during times of heightened risk. Key departments in this cell alongside DCMS were the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Cabinet Office (CO) and Home Office (HO). The UK Intelligence Community was also involved.
- 1.11. DCMS stood up the CDC on 5 March 2020 in response to the acute disinformation risks emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic. The cell brought together government expertise and partners (including social media platforms, and from academia and civil society) to produce the most comprehensive picture of disinformation and misinformation, and to address it. More detail on the approach to countering disinformation can be found in a separate witness statement provided by Susannah Storey, who was Director General of the Digital and Media group within DCMS during the pandemic. Her statement addresses the questions asked by the Inquiry on 24 November 2022 about disinformation, and those raised in follow-up correspondence on 15 February 2023. My statement makes reference to disinformation at a high level when relevant to the overall approach of the department, but leaves the particulars requested by the

Inquiry to the disinformation-specific statement from Ms Storey.

Civil society

- 1.12. DCMS also leads on government policy relating to the voluntary and community sector and volunteering through its Civil Society and Youth (CSY) directorate (this was known as the Office for Civil Society prior to 2021; I refer to the CSY directorate throughout this statement for clarity and consistency). This function moved to DCMS in 2016 from the Cabinet Office. The CSY directorate is responsible for policy relating to charities, volunteering, social action, social enterprises, voluntary and community sector organisations and a range of functions including charity law, dormant asset legislation and the local authority statutory duty for youth services.
- 1.13. While the CSY directorate leads on overarching policy impacting on civil society and its ways of working, many other government departments interact directly with civil society organisations and mechanisms in the course of their work, including planning and preparation for emergencies. The directorate is able to support other departments' engagement where required.
- 1.14. The CSY directorate also sponsors the Charity Commission, which was instrumental in the work of recovery groups for the Grenfell and Manchester Arena disasters, as well as the establishment of the National Emergencies Trust and the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership.

Science and analysis

- 1.15. DCMS has focused in recent years on becoming a more analytically rigorous and data-driven department. The establishment of a science function and enhancement of our analytical capability has been a part of this coordinated effort.
- 1.16. The role of Chief Scientific Adviser in DCMS was introduced in January 2019, with Professor Tom Rodden appointed to the post. Prior to this, DCMS was a significantly smaller department and did not have a dedicated science advisory

function, although it established a science advisory council in 2015, which was intended to provide independent advice and met three to four times a year.

- 1.17. The DCMS Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) provides scientific and technical leadership within the department, gives direct advice to ministers and officials, and oversees the use of research, evidence and external expertise. The CSA's office did not take part in any pandemic planning related exercises, as these predated the introduction of this role. However, the CSA took part, when requested, in other emergency preparedness exercises conducted by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and the Government Office for Science (GO-Science).
- 1.18. Our department's CSA works with other departmental Chief Scientific Advisers, led by the Government Chief Scientific Adviser in GO-Science, to ensure a joint approach to key government policies.
- 1.19. One of the key responsibilities of the DCMS CSA's office is external engagement and promoting links with the science and research community. This is to ensure that the department is aware of and can quickly make use of research knowledge and that it actively promotes activity in areas of research interest to the department.
- 1.20. DCMS also houses a central analysis team, made up of economists, operational researchers, statisticians, social researchers and data scientists. DCMS operates a 'hub and spoke' model for its analysis function, with the central analysis team as the hub and multiple 'spoke' analysis teams embedded within policy directorates in DCMS. The central analysis team and spoke analysis teams work closely with DCMS policy officers to ensure that evidence is at the heart of DCMS's policy making process, including by assessing policy options, ensuring expected impacts and outcomes are clearly articulated, and using monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate impact, adjust policies in flight and learn lessons for future policies.

- 1.21. Its position within DCMS also allows the central analysis team to work on cross-cutting or reactive issues, on an ad hoc basis. While this work may concern key M1 functions, the central analysis team did not centrally procure or produce analysis or advice relating to areas such as pandemic preparedness or whole system emergencies prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.22. DCMS's analytical leadership team was formed in May 2018 and its Evidence and Analysis Board in early March 2020. These bodies gave leadership and direction to the work of both the central and spoke analysis teams, but did not discuss key M1 functions, including emergency planning, during the relevant date range.
- 1.23. DCMS has continued to strengthen its focus on evidence-based policy processes, including with the appointment of the department's first Director of Analysis in August 2021. The Chief Scientific Adviser's office and central analysis team work closely together to increase access to research and evidence and to embed the use of science and evidence in the culture of the department. More information can be found in section 3 of this statement.

Public bodies

- 1.24. DCMS works with a large number of public bodies. This stood at 47 before the machinery of government change in February 2023, and is now 42, the most of any government department. These range from national museums and nationwide funders to major regulators and small advisory bodies. Engagement with all our public bodies is primarily through senior civil servants and working-level sponsors. They are responsible for ensuring there is appropriate financial oversight, risk management, governance and accountability, and that our public bodies are fully informed on government policy and direction. Our oversight mechanisms include quarterly meetings with the Chairs/Chief Executive Officers of the public bodies, regular meetings with functional directors (for example, human resources or finance) and quarterly partnership meetings (a governance meeting between the arm's-length body and its DCMS sponsorship

team).

- 1.25. None of DCMS's public bodies has a principal role in pandemic preparedness for the government. Risk management forms part of our regular engagement and all public bodies are expected to have business continuity plans in place. At the onset of the pandemic, in early March 2020, we conducted a review of ALB business continuity plans to assess their readiness. Specific guidance was issued within DCMS in June 2020 to require the senior DCMS sponsor (a senior civil servant at director or deputy director grade) to check such plans are in place, in order to ensure the organisation they sponsor is resilient to potential emergency scenarios. This guidance has been reissued since, with the latest version circulated in June 2022.

B: Inter-organisational processes and cooperation

- 1.26. DCMS cooperates with a number of organisations, both inside and outside of government, in relation to key M1 functions. We have identified and described the mechanisms, systems and processes by which DCMS engages with these bodies in turn below³.

Across UK government

Critical National Infrastructure

- 1.27. The Cabinet Office (CO) is responsible for cross-government coordination of crisis management and resilience planning, coordinated through the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS).⁴
- 1.28. DCMS works with the CCS in relation to DCMS's Critical National Infrastructure sectors. The CCS began commissioning annual 'sector resilience plans' from Critical National Infrastructure teams across government in 2010. These became Sector Security and Resilience Plans in 2016 and aid central government understanding of preparedness and priorities across sectors that have a role in

³ Paragraphs 1.32- 1.66

⁴ The Civil Contingencies Secretariat existed during the relevant date range but has since been reorganised

the UK's Critical National Infrastructure.

- 1.29. Engagement with the CCS is typically via governance meetings and working groups to manage cross-cutting and specific issues. Co-operation is established by the annual Sector Security and Resilience Plan, which sets out the priority work for DCMS in the broadcast sector - and prior to the machinery of government changes of February 2023, in telecom sectors - in terms of security and resilience.
- 1.30. CO also chaired the Risk Assessment Steering Board, which was attended by the deputy director of the telecoms security and resilience team (who also provided representation for the broadcast security and resilience team in these meetings). This board was disbanded in early 2023 to be replaced by the Risk and Capabilities Steering Group. Following the machinery of government change, DCMS will now be represented at this new board by the Deputy Director of Radio, Advertising and Press. The telecoms security and resilience team will also continue to be at this board for DSIT, and represented by the relevant deputy director. This board oversees the production of the National Security Risk Assessment; this process has changed over the years and CO is best placed to explain how and why it has evolved. The National Security Risk Assessment is a confidential document within which there are some risks that are assigned to DCMS relating to telecoms (which have transferred to DSIT).
- 1.31. DCMS also had a role on the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board, which was co-chaired by CO and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). The main function of this entity was to assist members in enhancing and ensuring preparedness for pandemic influenza by exploring the immediate health-led response to a pandemic. Prior to Covid-19, DCMS was represented on this board by the Deputy Director for Telecoms Security and Resilience (in line with the approach that, in any pandemic scenario, the immediate focus would be on ensuring the continued functioning of Critical National Infrastructure). Our involvement focused on ensuring that our Critical National Infrastructure sectors had plans in place to continue functioning in a pandemic and explaining these

plans, where necessary, to the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board.⁵ Aside from this, DCMS did not play a substantial role on the board and largely used it as a means of keeping in touch with cross-government thinking on the risks of pandemic flu.

- 1.32. There were a number of other committees and groups operating during the relevant period that sought to deal with significant, cross-cutting risks and with which the telecoms and broadcast teams engaged.
- a. The Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies Committee was a National Security Council sub-committee of which DCMS's Secretary of State was a member. It held collective responsibility for oversight and direction for UK infrastructure security and resilience. It was disbanded in 2020.
 - b. Ministers were supported by the Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies Officials Committee, which helped prepare an annual assessment of vulnerability and preparedness against a variety of risks. A DCMS director or deputy director attended these officials-level committee meetings.
 - c. The Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies Officials Committee was in turn supported by the Infrastructure Resilience and Security Working Group, which was attended by officials at Grade 6 or Grade 7 level.
 - d. The Power Resilience Steering Board and the Power Resilience Implementation Programme Group brought together teams from across government to consider the impacts of a national power outage on Critical National Infrastructure and develop contingency plans. These ceased operating in 2018 due to pressures around preparations for a possible

⁵ Post Covid-19, the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board (PFRB) has evolved into the Pandemic Diseases Capability Board (PDCB), which is seeking to look beyond pandemic flu to enhance preparedness for a wider range of pandemic disease scenarios. The PDCB came into existence in 2022, with the latest membership refresh taking place in September of that year. DCMS is currently represented at the PDCB by the Head of the Incident Response Team. The Deputy Director for Telecoms Security and Resilience also attended while this function was a part of DCMS; we understand that DSIT is still considering who will attend this board.

No-Deal Brexit. This was replaced by Project YARROW in May 2021.

- e. Project YARROW was established to take a broader approach to power resilience and the risk of a national power outage, expanding to think beyond purely Critical National Infrastructure impacts.
- 1.33. DCMS was also a part of the Flood Project Board, which was established to implement the recommendations of the National Flood Resilience Review (2016). The telecoms security and resilience team was represented at these meetings as the review recommended work and investment across Critical National Infrastructure sectors to improve resilience to flooding. The recommendations were considered to be implemented and we believe the board was wound down in 2019.

Information, disinformation, media and social media

- 1.34. The DCMS disinformation policy team worked with a number of partners across government in 2019 to develop a disinformation crisis plan and the creation of the cross-Whitehall Counter Disinformation Cell. Further detail is provided in Susannah Storey's statement, including on the specific work with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) on mis and disinformation around vaccines.

Civil society

- 1.35. Where other government departments identify a risk that could benefit from the involvement of voluntary and community sector or volunteering capabilities, the Civil Society and Youth directorate may broker engagement where needed, in liaison with CO via the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS). This has been the case throughout the time that the CSY directorate (and its predecessor) has been a part of DCMS.
- 1.36. The CSY directorate's working relationships with CCS and other government departments on resilience and emergency response responsibilities were strengthened in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire and the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017. DCMS also worked with CCS on helping to strengthen

communities' resilience, partnering with voluntary and community sector capabilities, and supporting the continued integration of the sector into emergency planning, as outlined in a briefing note from September 2018 [SL1 INQ000102741]. The work was taken forward through the 'Communities Prepared' national group, which was convened and led by CO and CCS. The CSY directorate attended on an ad hoc basis and DHSC were also part of this group.

- 1.37. DHSC has also engaged with the voluntary and community sector, with a focus on voluntary and community sector support to social care in a pandemic scenario. This was first raised during Exercise Cygnus in 2016, when DHSC engaged DCMS on this. An introduction was made to the relevant leads in the CSY directorate (at the time called the Office for Civil Society), and discussions began in early 2018 on what could be done and whether work already underway was relevant. DCMS officials signposted DHSC officials to NHS England's voluntary partnerships team, the ambulance service volunteering programme and colleagues in CCS to take this forward, and the department was not involved further.

Entities in DCMS M1 sectors

Critical National Infrastructure

- 1.38. DCMS's primary mechanism for engaging with private entities within the telecoms sector was the Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group. This is an industry-led forum focused on telecoms resilience and response. The Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group meets quarterly and has a series of sub-groups that work on cross-sector resilience and response issues.
- 1.39. Prior to the February 2023 machinery of government changes, DCMS provided the secretariat for the Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group and helped to coordinate its work in testing the most appropriate responses to a range of different risks. This work is carried out through a number

of working groups that report to a plenary session held each quarter. An annual work plan provides the foundation for this. This responsibility now sits with DSIT.

- 1.40. Through this forum, DCMS could disseminate best practice and policy advice about the government's resilience priorities: for example, flu pandemic planning, or security policy to the telecoms industry.
- 1.41. The Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group has developed the industry process for dealing with emergencies impacting on service provision for telecoms. The Group also manages the National Emergency Plan for telecommunications, which sets out processes for handling emergencies and how to deal with priority customers and services [SL/2 INQ000102801]. The telecoms industry response to an emergency is known as the National Emergency Alert for Telecoms (NEAT) - part of the National Emergency Plan. The NEAT involves a conference call convened when telecoms providers become aware of a problem or potential problem that may affect services. All key UK telecoms companies, including fixed, mobile, internet and other service providers, together with relevant government departments, are represented on this call. The Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group's annual exercise (EMPEX - Emergency Planning Exercise) ensures the NEAT is tested using a realistic scenario.
- 1.42. The telecoms security and resilience team and the broadcast security and resilience team also engaged extensively across government and industry on matters relating to security and resilience. Principally:
 - a) The broadcast security and resilience team engaged directly with broadcast network operators on security, business continuity and resilience issues. These operators are also members of the Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group, which is a mechanism for highlighting cross-government security and resilience priorities.
 - b) The telecoms security and resilience team engaged directly with industry outside the formal Electronic Communications Resilience and Response

Group mechanisms. Where appropriate, and on specific security policies, the team engaged with business continuity and resilience representatives of individual companies. The team engaged with individual company's government affairs teams as well as trade bodies on a bilateral and multilateral basis.

- c) Both teams engaged with the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure and the National Cyber Security Centre as part of their security work, as well as the National Security Secretariat on specific policy issues.
- d) The focus of our engagement across government would change depending on the risk under consideration. For example, issues of personnel security would come under the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure; those relating to subsea cables would be discussed with CO, Ministry of Defence (MoD) and FCDO.

Media, social media, and the wider information sectors

- 1.43. DCMS engaged with a range of partners in research and academia, civil society organisations, think tanks, social media platforms and international organisations to combat online harm spread by disinformation and reduce risk to public health and safety. More detail on this is provided in Susannah Storey's statement.

Civil society

- 1.44. The CSY directorate has an established practice of regular civil society stakeholder engagement, which has been maintained since it joined DCMS in 2016. This includes regular meetings between CSY officials and civil society stakeholders, as well as ministers meeting stakeholders individually and hosting roundtable discussions. The CSY directorate also regularly engages with the voluntary and community sector via a newsletter, which is used to disseminate information and share updates from DCMS and, where appropriate, other government departments. This has sometimes included relevant public health

messaging. For example, during the pandemic, the Cabinet Office's stakeholder toolkit was regularly pushed out across the sector for cascade to communities.

- 1.45. In 2018, DCMS sought to cooperate more closely with the voluntary and community sector and began working with the Charity Commission and partners on developing the voluntary and community sector's capability to respond to major incidents. This included awarding funding through the NESTA Innovation Fund to a number of schemes aimed at mobilising communities in emergencies and increasing resilience in the voluntary and community sector. Between March 2018 and March 2020, a total of £257,000 was awarded to the British Red Cross (Community and Voluntary Sector Resilience Project), North Yorkshire Council (Ready for Anything Project) and Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire (Blue Lights Brigade).
- 1.46. DCMS also sought to improve its engagement with the voluntary and community sector. The primary mechanism for achieving this was the provision of start-up funding for the National Emergencies Trust (NET), which was launched in November 2019. The NET was set up as a charity to coordinate fundraising and distribution of funds in the event of a domestic disaster or emergency, including major terrorist incidents. In the event of such an incident, the NET collaborates with charities and other bodies to raise and distribute money and support those affected. The NET went on to launch the Coronavirus Appeal in March 2020.
- 1.47. In November 2018, proposals were made by leading voluntary and community sector-based resilience and emergency response organisations to establish the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership, which would coordinate offers of support for charities responding to emergencies. While this work was not initially funded by DCMS, the engagement meant the groundwork for this process was in place for DCMS to approve a revised proposal submitted in 2020, once the pandemic had begun. More detail on the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership funding can be found at paragraph 3.66 of this statement.

The devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

- 1.48. In respect of the devolved nations, the telecoms and broadcast sectors are reserved matters. We are aware that the administrations of the devolved nations are members of the Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group, and that historically the Scottish government has attended these industry-led meetings.
- 1.49. Civil society and disinformation are devolved policy matters. The CSY directorate and the Counter Disinformation Unit were not in contact with devolved administrations in a formal way, meaning there were not regular meetings or joint work programmes. There were occasional, ad hoc interactions where updates on work and approaches were shared during the relevant period.

Local and regional entities, including local authorities and local resilience fora

- 1.50. In general, DCMS does not work directly with local resilience fora - to minimise the burdens on these organisations, their link into government is via the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). DCMS would check with DLUHC before directly engaging with them via the Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group. As regards DCMS areas of interest, it is more efficient from an operational point of view for local resilience fora to engage directly with other local organisations, e.g. local media, rather than through the department.
- 1.51. The telecoms security and resilience team has informally worked with Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group to improve engagement with local resilience fora especially those linked to power resilience and with implications for telecoms.
- 1.52. DCMS funding has also helped to strengthen connections with local resilience fora regarding the mobilising of local volunteers and engaging local voluntary and community sector capabilities in emergencies including the funding packages noted in paragraph 1.59.

C: Decision-making bodies and individuals within DCMS with responsibility for the key M1 functions

Overview of decision-making bodies and individuals within DCMS

- 1.53. The Secretary of State is the individual who has final responsibility for all policy decisions, including those on key M1 functions. Decisions will be based on advice from officials and some policy responsibilities are devolved to junior ministers (but these areas will differ depending on who the Secretary of State is and priorities across government). Operational structures of DCMS are the responsibility of the Permanent Secretary. Operational structures need to take into account the policy aims of the Secretary of State to ensure the department can deliver them.
- 1.54. The Permanent Secretary supports the Secretary of State and is accountable to Parliament. There are currently two directors general reporting to the Permanent Secretary. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were also two, with a third interim director general post created on 17th March 2020 to support the department's Covid-19 work on volunteering and the charities sector. This role was time-limited. In July 2020 a third permanent director general role was introduced as the department continued to expand rapidly in size. DCMS continued to have three directors general until the recent machinery of government change, when it reverted back to two. Under the current organisation, I (Sam Lister) am the Director General for the Strategy and Operations group, within which sits functions including the Chief Scientific Adviser's office, the central analysis team, business continuity and security teams, human resources, IT services and the incident response team, as well as governance teams responsible for the smooth running of departmental governance processes. Emma Squire and Nicola Hower (who job share) are the acting Directors General for the Culture, Sport and Civil Society Group, within which sits the CSY directorate [SL3 INQ000102745]; Susannah Storey was the Director General for the Digital and Media group, within which sat telecoms, broadcast and disinformation policy. Following the machinery of government change, the Digital part of the group moved to DSIT, while Media, within which

sits broadcast policy, has remained in DCMS.

- 1.55. As the most senior civil servant in the department, the Permanent Secretary is ultimately responsible for all policy advice and organisational decisions taken in relation to the key M1 functions (i.e. those relating to planning, preparedness, readiness and resilience in respect of general civil emergencies, whole system civil emergencies, high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics), although much of the day-to-day responsibility is delegated to the directors general. The Permanent Secretary is the Accounting Officer for DCMS and responsible for the day-to-day running of the department, including the budget.
- 1.56. DCMS is supported by a Departmental Board (in previous years referred to as the Ministerial Board), which brings together ministerial and civil service leaders with senior non-executives from outside of government. It has an advisory rather than a decision-making role, and provides advice and challenge to DCMS and its ministers on strategic and operational issues. The board is chaired by the Secretary of State, and its members include the ministerial team, non-executive board members, the Permanent Secretary, Directors General and the Finance Director. The schedule of meetings for this board is determined by the Secretary of State; it currently meets twice a year, and has met quarterly in the past.
- 1.57. The Audit and Risk Committee has remained constant throughout the period and reports to and advises the Departmental Board on governance, risk management and control. It provides constructive challenges to DCMS's governance, risk management and financial controls. It also provides assurance of the financial report and accounts. Membership comprises the lead non-executive board member and two independent members (one of whom chairs the Audit and Risk Committee). It is also attended by the Permanent Secretary, Directors General, Finance Director, National Audit Office and the Government Internal Audit Agency officials.
- 1.58. The Executive Board provides day-to-day leadership of the department, overseeing delivery of ministers' objectives and reviewing budgets across the

department. It is chaired by the Permanent Secretary and membership comprises the Directors General, Director of Corporate Strategy, Director of Finance and Director of People and Workplace. The DCMS Legal Director is also invited to attend. The Executive Board is supported in its decision-making by a Shadow Board with representation of all grades below Senior Civil Servant level 2.

- 1.59. There are a number of sub-committees that report to the Executive Board on various issues and, over the years, these have grown, fallen away or been merged as circumstances dictate. For example, at the beginning of the 2010-11 financial year there were three sub-committees (the Corporate, Policy and Investment Committees) while at the beginning of 2019-20 there were nine (the People Board; Knowledge, Information Management and IT Committee; Major Programmes Committee; Finance Committee; Research and Evidence Board; Arm's-length Bodies Risk and Governance Board; Spending Review Steering Committee; EU Exit and Trade Board and EU Exit No-deal Board). During 2019-20 significant changes were made to the department's board and committee structure to increase the robustness and efficacy of governance, and by the beginning of 2020-21 the Executive Board had four sub-committees (Finance Committee; Major Programmes Committee; Performance, Assurance and Risk Committee; and People and Operations Committee). An overview of how the governance structure in DCMS has changed from 2010 to 2022 has been submitted to the Inquiry [SL4 INQ000102746].
- 1.60. The names of individuals holding key roles in DCMS within the relevant date range have already been shared with the Inquiry on 13 January, in the form of tables listing all senior civil servants in relevant posts since 2010.

D: Readiness and preparation of DCMS in practice

- 1.61. This section outlines how, in practice, DCMS prepared its key M1 functions for emergency situations, including in relation to arranged exercises and tests.

Critical National Infrastructure

- 1.62. A 2013 Intelligence and Security Committee report resulted in a review by the National Security Advisor, Kim Darroch, which recommended a programme of activity and increased resources focused on telecoms security and resilience. That programme of activity resulted in a greater focus on a range of security and resilience risks and vulnerabilities, in the telecoms sector which was driven by a mix of departmental and cross-government priorities [SL5 INQ000102747; SL6 INQ000102748]. A further review followed in March 2015 [SL/7 INQ000102803].
- 1.63. On 21 February 2017, the ministerial National Security Council commissioned a programme of work to deliver improved plans and capabilities to manage the wider consequences of an influenza pandemic. The aim was to ensure that lead departments were confident that their critical sectors had adequate resilience to anticipated levels of employee absence during a pandemic. The programme was coordinated by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS). In 2017-18 the broadcast security and resilience and telecoms security and resilience teams in DCMS worked on the programme, engaging with the Critical National Infrastructure operators in their respective sectors. The work looked at the reasonable worst-case scenario for staff absence rates, which was based on planning assumptions developed by GO-Science.
- 1.64. In December 2017, DCMS broadcast and telecoms officials attended a CCS-led challenge panel which included officials from DHSC and GO-Science to review the DCMS draft statement of preparedness, which was borne out of the above programme. The maturity of plans within the sectors reassured those in attendance that broadcast and telecoms would be able to withstand such a scenario (it should be noted that the plans are the property of the independent organisations and DCMS is not in a position to share them). Following the panel, DCMS submitted to CO on 2 February 2018 a final statement of preparedness for pandemic flu covering the telecoms, broadcast and internet sectors. This statement concluded that:

“The main impact of a pandemic would centre on the engineering workforce employed by the industry but for the most part telecoms networks and services do not require manual intervention in order to continue operating, with field engineering manpower primarily required to effect repairs and changes to sites (such as installing new connections) ... Key planned mitigations include: re-deployment of available staff; home working; and re-prioritisation of operational activities, including a focus on essential repairs and postponing routine maintenance work. ... In conclusion, work over recent months with industry has confirmed that although pandemic flu is not a major risk for the sector, the level of sector planning and awareness has been evident. Both DCMS and industry have considered the work on pandemic planning to have been a useful exercise, demonstrating that business continuity planning in the sector takes account of the revised Planning Assumptions and is appropriately robust.” [SL8 INQ000102804] [P6].

- 1.65. As outlined above, the levels of staff absences in the GO-Science planning assumptions were considered to be manageable by the sector. In terms of deploying available staff, the Critical National Infrastructure operators had options to prioritise service delivery and reduce less urgent work.
- 1.66. Aside from the annual National Emergency Alert for Telecoms exercise, outlined above⁶, the telecoms security and resilience team also participated in an internal tabletop cyber exercise called Laudable Tavern in October 2018 [SL/8 INQ000102805]. The team also attended a cross-Whitehall tabletop exercise concerning a subsea cable outage, and it also runs annual tabletop exercises with industry, through the Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group, called EMPEX (Emergency Planning Exercise)⁷. The exercises test the National Emergency Plan for Telecoms, the National Emergency Alert for Telecom, and the effectiveness of cross-industry working and mutual aid plans. Since 2017 exercises have been run on Cyber (2017), Space Weather (2018) and Fuel Supply (2019). The objectives and details of the work are set out in our

⁶ At paragraph 1.51.

⁷ The annual exercises pre-date 2017, but records are not available

sector security and resilience plans. The drivers for this have been Downing Street or CO (for example, cyber security assurance), or DCMS priorities (such as natural hazards).

- 1.67. The Chief Scientific Adviser also took part in a tabletop exercise organised by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), Exercise Obscure Dawn, on 16 January 2020. The exercise topic was the failure of the national electricity transmission system, resulting in a power failure across Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales). This was a cross-government exercise intended to improve the preparedness of the system as a whole rather than DCMS specifically.
- 1.68. The telecoms security and resilience and broadcast security and resilience teams were both involved in the original national power outage programme planning arrangements led by BEIS from 2018. The programme looked at planning for a reasonable worst-case scenario in which transport, food, water supply, communications (including telecoms and broadcast) and energy could be severely disrupted for up to seven days. This work was paused as a result of Operation YELLOWHAMMER (which reviewed the government's preparations for a potential No-Deal Brexit) and the Covid-19 pandemic. It restarted as Project YARROW with a broader scope and remit in 2021.

Information, disinformation, media and social media

- 1.69. Prior to the pandemic, DCMS's crisis response preparation in this area was principally focused on mis/disinformation threats in the context of democratic events or public order issues. While the department had done work on vaccine mis/disinformation, this was largely focused on the threat to vaccine uptake over the long term. DCMS had not developed specific plans for a disinformation response in the particular context of a public health emergency. However, disinformation-based exercises, and the lessons drawn from experience of European and national elections in 2019, could be adapted to a range of different forms of crisis. As such, they were relevant in the pandemic context and ensured we activated a rapid response in March 2020. More detail is provided in Susannah Storey's statement.

Civil society

- 1.70. With respect to voluntary and community sector/cross-Whitehall engagement, from 2013 to 2016 the CSY directorate and CO jointly ran the £14 million Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund with the NESTA. The Innovation Fund piloted and scaled up innovative approaches to encourage and enable social action in and alongside public services, including improving emergency responses and building community resilience against economic and social shocks. One strand focused on digital solutions to improve public services. The Innovation Fund piloted a collaboration between the emergency response application, GoodSAM, and the London Ambulance Service, paving the way for the growth of GoodSAM's services. DHSC went on to use GoodSAM as the platform for the NHS Volunteer Responders Programme during the pandemic. A document was produced setting out the lessons learned from the Innovation Fund [SL/10 INQ000102752].
- 1.71. DCMS also worked closely with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and the Communities Prepare National Group (which CCS convened) to support and develop the capability of the voluntary and community sector in planning for and responding to emergencies:

“The Charity Commission (CC) has been working with a number of charities and voluntary sector organisations to develop proposals for greater coordination of the voluntary response for major incidents in England and Wales. This has taken place in the context of learning lessons, primarily from Grenfell, but also from the other major incidents in 2017.” [SL/1 INQ000102741] [P3].

Section 2: Planning for a pandemic**A: Expert Advice in DCMS**

- 2.1. As DCMS grew in size and span of responsibilities, we set up a transformation programme in 2019 to support and improve the capability needed as a high-functioning, data-driven and analytically rigorous department. Further detail of this programme, and the importance placed on it, is at paragraphs 3.17 and

3.18. Across all policy areas, DCMS teams seek to engage expert advice and opinions to help achieve better decisions and outcomes. The introduction of the role of DCMS Chief Scientific Adviser in 2019 (paragraph 1.22) and the more recent establishment of the College of Experts (paragraph 3.22) reflected our commitment to embedding expert advice throughout our policy and operational work. An overview of how experts are used in the key policy areas identified in this statement is below.

Critical National Infrastructure

- 2.2. In both the broadcasting and telecoms sectors DCMS has had a consistent approach to the use of experts. The security and resilience teams in both sectors have always used experts best-suited to the issue at hand.
- 2.3. In the broadcast sector, the broadcast security and resilience team uses a broadcast engineering technical expert to help inform resilience policy development and to support the team's engagement with the TV/radio broadcast network operators. With respect to cyber security assurance work, data is collected by cyber security technical experts at GCHQ's National Cyber Security Centre, working with TV/radio broadcast network operators to test technical capabilities and identify potential vulnerabilities. The information is used to provide advice and recommendations by the National Cyber Security Centre on strengthening the organisations' cyber security measures and capabilities.
- 2.4. Similarly, MI5's Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure expert security advisers conduct detailed assessments of the physical security of buildings and facilities operated by the broadcast organisations. The data is used to provide recommendations for improving the physical security of the sites.
- 2.5. In the telecoms sector, the telecoms security and resilience team used engagement with industry experts and technical experts in the National Cyber Security Centre to support policy development, inform planning assumptions and create resilience impact assessments for telecoms.

- 2.6. Data was either collected directly from industry (on a voluntary basis either by requests through Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group or formal published consultations) or was collected by National Cyber Security Centre technical experts. The telecoms security and resilience team also used cyber security experts and economic experts. For example, directorate economists were used to examine advice from an economic consultancy research project, commissioned by DCMS and delivered by the consultancy firm KPMG, to review economic impacts on the telecoms sector as part of the Telecoms Supply Chain Review in 2018-19.

Information, disinformation, media and social media

- 2.7. The Counter Disinformation Unit, which now sits in DSIT having previously been a part of DCMS, relies on expert input to identify instances where disinformation or misinformation may cause a risk to health and safety, for example, vaccine misinformation. In the CDU, data concerning harmful disinformation narratives is obtained through open-source monitoring of social media by a mixture of both internal and external experts and the CDU regularly engages with other government departments, civil society organisations and international partners who provide additional insights on potentially harmful disinformation, based on social media data and academic research. Further detail on the CDU's use of experts can be found in Susannah Storey's statement.

Civil society

- 2.8. The Civil Society and Youth (CSY) directorate uses expert advice from relevant Civil Society organisations such as infrastructure bodies, civil society data experts, funding bodies, regulators, special interest organisations and groups which focus on specific Civil Society areas, e.g volunteering, youth, loneliness. They aid the CSY directorate to identify areas of risk and inform policy to strengthen civil society resilience and sector health. The data and insights used by the CSY directorate, provided by experts in resilience and planning, tend to be drawn more from responses to previous disasters, such as the Grenfell Tower fire and the Manchester Arena bombing. The value in this approach comes from

getting experts to process that data and share insights based on their experiences and knowledge.

B: Lessons drawn by DCMS from past simulation exercises and near pandemic events

Response to civil emergencies

- 2.9. The teams covering broadcast security and resilience and telecoms security and resilience were involved in the emergency response planning for the 'Beast from the East', a severe cold weather event which was forecast to hit the UK in March 2018. Broadcast and telecoms infrastructure was, in the event, not disrupted, mainly because the power networks were largely unaffected. The broadcast security and resilience and telecoms security and resilience teams were involved in government coordination and reporting for the duration of the weather event.
- 2.10. The Salisbury Novichok poisonings in March 2018 also involved both these DCMS Critical National Infrastructure sector teams who joined briefings with the National Cyber Security Centre and the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure. Although there were no formal lessons learned, it was useful in considering how the Critical National Infrastructure sectors and other government agencies interact in an emergency. DCMS also considered the challenge of tackling disinformation from Russia in relation to this event [SL/11 INQ000102798]. This event was useful in allowing DCMS to understand how Russian disinformation could spread and prompted discussion on how we develop policies to address this issue.
- 2.11. In July 2018, the Winter Hill wildfire prompted engagement from the broadcast security and resilience and telecoms security and resilience teams. They worked with the broadcast TV/radio network operator, Arqiva, to monitor the response to the wildfire that made a close approach to the Winter Hill TV/radio transmitter. Both sectors were involved in the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and the Home Office led cross-Whitehall reporting.

2.12. DCMS developed an internal lessons report on the incident in September 2018, which detailed plans for more effective communication between responsible bodies in the event of a future similar type of incident. The document considered 3 key issues and all of the suggested actions were completed:

- a) Initial notice of wildfire: DCMS considered that industry engagement was positive, with early notice received of the wildfire and a timely telecoms Critical National Infrastructure response. Internal and cross-government communications were identified as needing improvement, with a suggestion that Critical National Infrastructure management teams be made aware of incidents even where there was no immediate Critical National Infrastructure impact. DCMS also planned to better anticipate potential Critical National Infrastructure impacts internally and to make sure contact lists across departments were up to date.
- b) Home Office/Civil Contingencies Secretariat response: DCMS had not communicated weekend contact arrangements for staff and HO and Civil Contingencies Secretariat contacts were out of date, meaning it took longer for information regarding the wildfire to reach the telecoms team over the weekend. HO and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat were also routing questions about Airwave, the emergency services communications network, to DCMS, despite DCMS not being responsible for Airwave (this is owned by the HO Critical National Infrastructure team). As well as updating contact lists, DCMS planned to include details of responsibilities in contact lists to avoid communication delays arising from messaging being directed to the wrong team.
- c) Battle rhythm reporting: Once contacts had been confirmed, the engagement with HO process was smooth, with effective communications on the calls and useful material received to brief back to industry [SL/12 INQ000102754].

2.13. Separately, Arqiva also provided the DCMS broadcast security and resilience team with a presentation of their internal lessons learned from the incident.

High-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics

- 2.14. DCMS is not aware of, nor have we found any record of, any of its key policy areas being involved in lessons learned from past high consequence infectious disease outbreaks, including the 2012 MERS outbreak, except insofar as they arise from pandemic preparedness as discussed below. DCMS is also not aware of, nor have we found any record of, any of its key policy areas being involved in lessons learned from previous epidemics, including the bird flu outbreak or the Ebola or Zika virus epidemics.
- 2.15. During the Swine Flu Pandemic in the winter of 2009-10, DCMS fed into cross-Whitehall discussions concerning mass gatherings. No restrictions were introduced, but those attending mass gatherings were advised by the government to continue to adopt good hygiene measures including washing their hands frequently and covering their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. As a result of detailed planning undertaken over the preceding five years, government departments had identified potential changes to existing legislative provisions that might be necessary during a pandemic, including measures related to mass gatherings. CO published a Swine Flu Core Briefing Pack, which was regularly updated as the pandemic progressed, and considered whether existing secondary legislation, new primary legislation or Part 2 of the Civil Contingencies Act could be utilised in the event that restrictions were required [SL/13 INQ000102757].
- 2.16. The telecoms and broadcast sectors suffered very little disruption due to the Swine Flu Pandemic. At that time these sectors fell under the business department in government, then known as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Response and involvement in other significant past events

- 2.17. The broadcast security and resilience and telecoms security and resilience teams were both involved on the periphery of emergency planning for Hurricane Irma in September 2017. COBR requested action by the Critical National Infrastructure sectors focusing on the support UK telecoms operators could

provide to the British Overseas Territories. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat led the cross-Whitehall reporting which both teams were involved with. The telecoms security and resilience team specifically worked to support the return of mobile units⁸ to BT that had originally been requested and deployed by MoD.

- 2.18. The experience of Hurricane Irma led to DCMS supporting greater FCDO awareness of how telecoms work in the UK and overseas, ensuring it could be better prepared to respond to a loss of telecoms in the future. As part of this, we highlighted the importance of a clear exit/return strategy for equipment deployed from the UK to overseas territories.
- 2.19. In December 2018, the telecoms security and resilience team responded to an O2 data outage which resulted in a National Emergency Alert for Telecommunications (NEAT) call to test whether there were wider implications for the sector. During the NEAT, the telecoms security and resilience team provided advice to ministers and responded to parliamentary questions. The outage lasted 24 hours and did not have any wider Critical National Infrastructure implications although it did prove to be a useful test of the arrangements in place and showed that they worked well.

Simulation and testing exercises

- 2.20. DCMS was involved during the relevant period in past simulation exercises to test pandemic preparedness, as detailed below.
- 2.21. Exercise Winter Willow (for Pandemic Influenza) (2007). From 2006 onwards, DCMS was engaged in internal pandemic planning⁹. Details of DCMS's internal pandemic planning are set out at Section 3 below. In 2007, DCMS and some of its public bodies were invited to participate in Exercise Winter Willow (an exercise in planning for Pandemic Influenza), providing the department with the opportunity to test its plans. The exercise was led by DHSC, and the aim of the exercise was to enhance the UK's ability to manage the effects of an influenza

⁸ Temporary mobile masts/cell towers that provide connectivity in an emergency

⁹ The establishment of Exercise Winter Willow pre-dates the relevant period, but it is included in this witness statement given its relevance to the issues being considered by the Inquiry.

pandemic by practising and validating response policies and the decision-making process at national, regional and local levels.

- 2.22. The exercise was generally considered to have been a success. DCMS had to set up a dedicated operations room and supply staff to the exercise control team. On 2 April 2007, it was noted at the DCMS Influenza Project Board meeting that:

“Winter Willow – Lessons Learned

It was agreed that DCMS had coped more than adequately with the challenges of Winter Willow and there had been a good level of engagement across the department. Valuable lessons had been learned about the level of resource needed, and commitment of time, particularly from senior staff. These had been reflected in the Departmental Plan.

It was agreed that the Senior Management Team should be briefed on lessons learned from Winter Willow.” [SL/14 INQ000102758].

- 2.23. The lessons learned for the future included the need:

- To address the level of resources required in the Operations Room, as the level of resources needed was higher than anticipated
- For more engagement with DCMS Deputy Directors; and
- For the DCMS Press Office to be part of the Operations Room.

- 2.24. The exercise also identified that DCMS mailboxes were not able to send or receive large files and suggested we may wish to consider the benefits of bolstering our in-house scientific advice as we had not been able to play a significant role in science-based discussions.

- 2.25. In addition, DCMS decided to establish a mobile response team list, held and maintained by the human resources team, detailing staff from each DCMS team who would be made available in the event of a pandemic or other emergency. We are unable to ascertain from our records whether this team was ever deployed or how long it was in existence for.

- 2.26. Prior to Exercise Winter Willow, DCMS had a central plan in place setting out appropriate actions for each phase of a pandemic. The existing DCMS Pandemic Project Board and the Flu Steering Group (discussed in Section 3 below) were to become virtual networks following the exercise and would meet at least once a year. It was considered that progress was still needed in terms of planning for staff to be redirected to areas of greatest need and that more work was required to identify skills and to develop an appropriate system for home working [SL/15 INQ000102759; SL/16 INQ000102760].
- 2.27. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat prepared a lessons learned document from Exercise Winter Willow which was published on the DCMS Pandemic Guidance website. Key issues identified in the Exercise were around crisis management at the different levels of government, especially the devolved administrations, and the need for more consistency and communication. The exercise had also highlighted difficulties with the “business as usual” message when schools had been closed. Specific policy areas reviewed following the Exercise included travel to adjacent countries, the role of the Scientific Advisory Group, sickness certification and benefit payments and high mortality issues [SL/17 INQ000102761].
- 2.28. Exercise Cygnus (for Pandemic Influenza) (October 2016). DCMS joined preparations for Exercise Cygnus which looked at a simulated pandemic flu event and was due to take place in October 2014. It was led by Public Health England (PHE) and DHSC. Over the summer of 2014, the department planned to be a full participant and to send a junior minister to a simulated Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR) exercise. The scenario contemplated 50,000 infections with 375 deaths in the week before the exercise was set. The assessment was that, despite media interest, there would be little significant impact on the department’s sectors or core departmental business. This reflected the assumption that any pandemic would be primarily for other arms of government to respond to, with DCMS playing a supporting role and reacting where necessary. DCMS’s objectives for the exercise were to familiarise ministers and officials with COBR, explore command, control and decision making and to explore business continuity/staffing plans.

- 2.29. DCMS was invited to provide 'injects' for the exercise (fictional events to take place that would demand a response) and focused on potential impacts on our sectors, including sporting/cultural organisations asking if events should be postponed and cultural institutions raising issues with high staff absences. At the time of the simulated COBR exercise, junior ministerial availability proved to be a challenge and we put forward a senior official; however the exercise was cancelled at short notice due to the DHSC needing to refocus efforts due to the ongoing Ebola outbreak.
- 2.30. Cygnus was rescheduled for 18-20 October 2016 and DCMS was invited to take part. The department was unable to devote the same level of resource to the exercise and focused more narrowly on business continuity than exploring decision-making, familiarisation with Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR) processes or looking at potential policy issues. The department participated but did not create any specific scenarios to be exercised. We have not found any findings from the exercise, and no changes were made to the department's approach to planning/preparedness.
- 2.31. It is worth noting, however, that the final report of the exercise recommended that plans be made for mapping capacity in the voluntary sector during a pandemic and giving strategic national direction for how that resource should be used. This recommendation was assigned to the NHS, CO and the voluntary sector. As set out previously (paragraph 1.47), DHSC approached DCMS on this point in 2018 and we, in turn, directed it to NHS England's Voluntary Partnerships Team, the ambulance service volunteering programme and colleagues in the CO's Civil Contingencies Secretariat in order to take this forward.
- 2.32. General engagement with pandemic preparedness: A cross-Whitehall Pandemic Flu Readiness Board was established in 2017 alongside various working groups, including one on critical sectors' resilience. DCMS was represented at both the Board and working group. DCMS took the lead on telecoms and broadcast and worked with the Charity Commission and charity sector partners on proposals for greater coordination of the voluntary sector's response for major incidents in England and Wales. The telecoms broadcast security and resilience and broadcast security and resilience teams worked together on planning for the

impact of pandemic flu and consulted with the sectors via the Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group. DCMS produced a detailed statement of preparedness for the telecoms, internet and broadcast sectors in February 2018 and prior to this, in December 2017, attended a challenge panel made up of representatives from DHSC, the CO, GO-Science and PHE [SL/8 INQ000102804]. This work underlined the high level of readiness in both sectors and the expected limited impact of a pandemic [SL/1 INQ000102741].

2.33. In February 2018, the pandemic flu sector resilience statement of preparedness for the telecoms/internet and broadcast sectors was submitted to CO. It was noted that the main impact of a pandemic would be on the engineering workforce although also that home working was common practice in the sector, and that companies planned for significant staff absence as part of their business continuity. The impact on telecoms networks in the event of a major pandemic was expected to be limited. All the main telecoms and broadcast industry stakeholders were noted as members of the Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group and were consulted on their preparedness for a pandemic. Both the National Emergency Alert for Telecoms and the Telecoms Industry Daily Information Exchange (established for the 2012 Olympics) were regularly tested and used a number of times in 2017. The Electronic Communications Resilience and Response Group also ran its own annual emergency planning exercise. Given the existing mechanisms in place, it was considered there was not a need for additional measures. Individual companies also run their own internal emergency planning exercises and, in a number of cases, such exercises involved a pandemic scenario [SL/8 INQ000102804].

2.34. We have been unable to find any records of DCMS being involved in other pandemic response exercises, namely the Surge Capacity Exercise (for Ebola) (March 2015); Preparedness and Review Workshop (for Ebola) (May 2015); Exercise Valverde (for Novel Coronavirus) (2015); Exercise Alice (for MERS) (February 2016); Exercise Northern Light (for Ebola) (May 2016); Exercise Cygnet (for Pandemic Influenza) (August 2016); Exercise Typhon (for Lassa) (February 2017); PHE and Animal and Plant Health Agency Workshop (for Avian and Pandemic Influenza) (October 2017); Exercise Broad St (for Lassa and

H7N9 Influenza) (January 2018); Exercise Cerberus (for Avian Influenza) (February 2018); and Exercise Pica (for Pandemic Influenza) (September 2018).

- 2.35. Overall, the department's experiences over the years of various emergencies and exercises, although relatively minor, were of some benefit in terms of building experience and allowing teams to operate more efficiently. Formal lesson identification and learning processes are undoubtedly useful, and even being involved in an event more peripherally still allowed some teams to see how processes and formal structures, such as COBR, work and to gain experience of an actual response. This led to small changes within teams, making them better able to respond to a future emergency.

C: Emergency plans of DCMS

Description of the emergency plans of DCMS in respect of the key M1 functions

Emergency plans in respect of planning and resilience to pandemic flu

- 2.36. We have records that show DCMS started to plan for a flu pandemic in September 2005, setting up an internal Flu Pandemic Steering Board to look at how a pandemic would affect wider sectors, sponsored bodies and DCMS as a whole [SL/18 INQ000102762]. This was prompted by the Ministerial Cabinet Committee on Influenza Pandemic Planning (MISC 32), which met monthly.
- 2.37. The Flu Pandemic Steering Board met monthly and its purpose was to oversee preparation of departmental contingency plans [SL/19 INQ000102763]. It considered contingency planning, external communication strategy, working from home options, school closures and vaccinations. The Steering Group was also involved in preparing for Exercise Winter Willow and considered whether the 2006/7 Avian flu outbreak would impact Europe [SL/20 INQ000102764; SL/21 INQ000102765; SL/22 INQ000102766]

- 2.38. DCMS also set up an Influenza Project Board to progress preparations for pandemic influenza and develop a pandemic response plan¹⁰ [SL/23 INQ000102767]. By 2007 the board agreed that a credible plan was in place and DCMS could move to 'standby mode' with the board becoming virtual [SL/14 INQ000102758].
- 2.39. The pandemic response plan was updated in 2008. The following years saw significant change as DCMS scaled up to deliver the 2012 Olympics and then reduced in size, before growing again as it took on wider responsibilities for tech and digital policy.
- 2.40. The 2008 plan was drafted with business continuity as a key outcome, setting out clear communications processes and identifying those responsible for the approval and dissemination of critical messaging to DCMS staff, stakeholders and the press [SL/24 INQ000136896]. We do not have records of the pandemic response plan being updated until 2018, when, with the department growing rapidly, we recruited a dedicated business continuity and security manager specifically to ensure that business continuity and security plans were properly developed, implemented, monitored and reviewed to ensure they remained fit for purpose. This included the development of directorate-level business continuity plans and supporting business impact assessment tools, as well as the development and review of the continuity of crisis management (CoCM) and pandemic response plan. Between 2018 and 2020 the pandemic response plan was updated several times. The various versions are listed below with a short description of amendments.
- 2.41. The 2018 pandemic plan (DCMS Human Influenza plan) incorporated an improved understanding of pandemic phases, with the inclusion of the World Health Organisation pandemic flu phases action plan and additional flu pandemic 'frequently asked questions' [SL/25 INQ000136898].

¹⁰ Early versions of the DCMS pandemic response plan are referred to as *Human Influenza Pandemic Response Plan* and only refer to the Influenza virus. The current response plan, known as the *Pandemic Response Plan* refers to a range of infectious diseases, with a specific focus on Influenza. In this statement we use pandemic response plan for ease to refer to all statements.

- 2.42. The 11 February 2020 (version 1.3) update reflected recent changes to individual roles/titles and incorporated the latest flu reports from Public Health England and updates from Civil Contingencies Secretariat and the Cabinet Office [SL/26 INQ000136899].
- 2.43. The plan was updated again on 21 February 2020 (version 2.0) to give more detail to incident response command and control structures (introducing the Bronze, Silver and Gold hierarchy system that is commonly used across government) [SL/27 INQ000136900]. These outlined how a pandemic response would be managed at an operational, strategic and tactical level with clear roles and responsibilities set out for the Permanent Secretary, directors general and directors. The plan included action cards which described the specific responsibilities of key roles such as the directors general, security adviser, head of estates, the communications team, the director for people and workplace, the pandemic sector lead director and other directors across the department. Action log templates were also included to allow key staff and teams to track decision making. This update benefited from sharing information and ideas with other government departments such as the Cabinet Office.
- The 1 March 2020 (version 1.1) update incorporated further guidance, developed in collaboration with the DCMS health and safety team, giving more in-depth advice on hygiene, travel and absence, for example, than previously provided, and the guidance was shared widely with staff [SL/28 INQ000136901].
 - On 5 April 2020 the plan was updated (version 2.2) to add guidance around what staff should do in the event of confirmed Covid-19 cases [SL/29 INQ000136902].
 - On 6 July 2020, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) produced a business continuity best practice guide for all government departments to use when completing and reviewing their pandemic plans. On 6 August 2020, DCMS met with DWP to assess the departmental plan. DCMS received a green rating [SL/30 INQ000136903; SL/31 INQ000136904] as a consequence only minor changes were made in the 27 August 2020 pandemic plan review.

- On 11 October 2021 (version 3.1) the plan was reviewed with amendments to format and contact details [SL/32 INQ000136905].
- On 22 June 2022 (version 3.2) the plan was reviewed with minor amendments to wording and updated contact details [SL/33 INQ000136897].

- 2.44. Our plan was well developed when it was activated in February / March 2020 and the experience of the pandemic led to it being further refined and improved.
- 2.45. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat had also established a Flu Working Group by 2006, which included representation from DCMS. The Flu Working Group considered the current risks, including avian flu, and international and domestic preparedness for an outbreak [see for example SL/34 INQ000102768]. We have records (in the form of email invitations and agendas) indicating that we took part in this group until early 2009 but have no further information on attendance. A representation from DCMS also attended the Group's sub-committee, the 'Facemasks Wider Implication Group (FWIG)'. We did not play a significant role in terms of bringing issues for discussion or taking decisions to the Flu Working Group and the FWIG. Attendance at both groups was a means of gathering information to inform internal DCMS conversations around pandemic preparedness.
- 2.46. DCMS developed plans to ensure that the department itself would continue to function in the event of a pandemic, and relevant policy teams conducted work to ensure both they and their sectors were able to respond effectively to emergencies such as pandemics in the years before Covid-19 emerged (as set out above). DCMS as a whole did not have a single central team that was specifically designated to coordinate a department-wide response to an emergency scenario such as a pandemic. This was not unusual for a small, policy-focused department.
- 2.47. However, the department did have experience mobilising around big events. Events such as the London Olympics (2012), Commonwealth Games (2014) and ceremonial duties such as the centenary of the First World War meant that some

parts of the department did have experience of the sort of central coordination needed in such circumstances. This experience is very useful as it imparts skills that are similar to those needed in response to a crisis.

- 2.48. Following the EU referendum in 2016, and concerns regarding a potential 'No Deal' Brexit, the government instigated Operation YELLOWHAMMER, which mandated that all departments prepare themselves to engage with a coordinated response to potential economic and social impacts. YELLOWHAMMER was led by CO with all departments, including DCMS, expected to form a Departmental Operations Centre that would plug into a central command and control structure. Our previous experience with large, national events, the expertise of our Critical National Infrastructure teams in operational response, and the instruction and training provided by CO meant that we were able to build and train the required Departmental Operations Centre in 2019 ahead of the potential 'No Deal' withdrawal dates.
- 2.49. Although YELLOWHAMMER ultimately did not need to be activated, it was exercised intensively across government to ensure it would be effective. This experience was valuable in getting DCMS as a department used to the idea of centralised emergency response and built up useful skills across a large number of staff. As a result, at the outset of the pandemic there already was a pool of staff that could be relatively easily switched over to response work, and many of the organisational structures previously built could be amended as necessary and used again.

Section 3: Planning for future pandemics

A: Reviews into DCMS's response to the Covid-19 pandemic

- 3.1. Ways of working within DCMS in response to Covid-19 has been a continual process of review over the course of the pandemic, with individual sector and policy teams drawing lessons and the department as a whole looking at how to improve functions and activities for all teams to make DCMS more prepared for, and responsive and resilient to, future emergencies.

- 3.2. The pandemic occurred during a period of significant growth for DCMS that was necessitating the transformation of many of its central processes. This meant the department was both adapting to the pandemic and maturing its critical functions as the pandemic progressed. We were regularly reviewing progress and refining ways of working within this context, and assessing how we could have improved our initial and ongoing response.
- 3.3. DCMS commissioned a number of internal reviews between 2020 and 2022 on its response to the pandemic, as well as engaging with the National Audit Office (NAO) on its report in 2021.

Internal review

- 3.4. Internally, the department conducted several exercises to support critical reflection on our pandemic response while it was ongoing, and to ensure we could learn and develop that response in real time.
- 3.5. In July 2020 a paper was sent to the Departmental Board for high-level discussion. This referenced DCMS's response to the Covid-19 pandemic as having delivered:

"...a huge amount of work to support our sectors and staff through the Covid-19 crisis all while operating remotely.

We have worked closely with HMT to inform the development of an unprecedented suite of business support interventions. We have developed a number of sector-specific interventions such as the world-leading £1.57bn support package for cultural organisations; a £750m package of grants to support charities; and a £500m 'convertible' loan scheme for high-growth tech firms. Alongside this, we delivered new legislation, conducted a large-scale stakeholder engagement exercise and have worked at pace with rapidly changing demands from the centre, delivering 27 pieces (so far) of guidance to ensure that our sectors can reopen safely and supporting companies in distress. We have also delivered a strong analytical offer, rapidly upskilling in analysis of business and financial issues and producing robust outputs that have been influential in understanding impacts and influencing OGDs. This all represents a significant achievement." [SL/35 INQ000102770].

- 3.6. The department also considered its response from a business continuity perspective, producing a report on 22 July 2020 which viewed preparations and the immediate response through this lens. It was deemed that key priorities were able to be delivered throughout and that the overall response of the department was effective. The report further noted:

“Whilst the pandemic didn’t unfold as planning assumptions had expected, the DCMS response was adaptable and responsive. A key assumption across Business Continuity planners was that a pandemic would unfold gradually leaving a longer period of time to plan and prepare, however this was not the case and a rapid escalation was seen. Lessons were identified informally across the department throughout the preparation and response period and then these informal lessons were incorporated in real time to continuously improve [the] response. Despite the successes, there are still areas of the response that can be learnt from when preparing for another pandemic, or any other business continuity event.” [SL/36 INQ000102782].

- 3.7. The report outlined five key areas of response that could be learnt from, as follows:
- a) Staff education and awareness: The report recommended: adding a pandemic annex into directorate business continuity planning; that business continuity training be added to all staff mandatory training; that reviewing directorate leads should ensure the right person is in the role with sufficient interest and resources available to them; exercising at directorate away-days could be offered to increase awareness of how an actual incident may run.
 - b) Senior leaders’ roles and responsibilities: The report recommended reviewing membership of the business continuity management team (made up of senior staff working to ensure business continuity), and conducting a basic bi-annual discussion exercise for the team to clarify roles and responsibilities as well as annual exercising for senior leadership teams in all directorates to increase familiarity with how to respond during an incident.
 - c) IT capability: The report recommended providing intranet advice for getting IT support remotely and troubleshooting various scenarios.

- d) Effective resourcing of incidents: The report recommended establishing a process for cross-departmental resourcing; developing a corporate business continuity team resourcing profile to ensure security, estates and human resource are adequately resourced during an incident; and including a “workstream prioritisation” template in all directorate business continuity plans to be completed at the beginning of an incident alongside the business impact analysis to ensure clear prioritisation of activities.
- e) Communication to keep staff informed and assured: The report recommended improving internal communications and integrating these into departmental business continuity plans, and putting pre-written ‘Working securely at home’ and ‘IT support at home’ advice in the department business continuity plans, to be published quickly during an incident.

3.8. Between July and September 2020 DCMS undertook a lessons identification exercise which was primarily focused on the internal aspects of the department’s response to Covid-19, and also considered stakeholder engagement. A report detailing the findings from this exercise went to the Executive Board in October 2020 alongside an annex listing all recommendations and a detailed spreadsheet of actions [SL/37 INQ000102786; SL/38 INQ000102787; SL/39 INQ000102788]. The report noted that DCMS was somewhat hindered due to its size given that it *“lack[ed] the inbuilt flexibility in scale of resources [of] larger departments”*. The department’s response was assessed on the basis of four key themes: leadership and management; governance and organisational structure; resourcing and prioritisation; and sector engagement and knowledge. In each of these areas, recommendations to improve the department’s management of future crises were identified. Stakeholder engagement was noted to have improved across the department with relationships deepening, although lack of key data for some sectors was noted in the early stages of the response. The recommendations were categorised as either short term (the next two to three months) or longer term (considering aims for future emergencies/pandemics).

3.9. The report noted that the structures put in place in direct response to the pandemic, including shifting of roles and responsibilities at director level and the

creation of new teams such as the Covid-19 Hub, the Economic Response directorate and the enhanced Civil Society and Youth directorate were positive. The Covid-19 Hub and the Economic Response directorate both received praise from sector teams for their support on developing sectoral support packages and it was felt that high quality work was done in an extremely high-pressure environment. One issue raised was that these processes should have been implemented sooner. During the early stages of the pandemic, work had mostly landed on the policy teams in the CSY directorate, tourism and sport as the areas most directly affected at this time, and the report sets out that:

“[t]hose teams noted the significant pressure caused by their having to manage the entire department’s response at the early stages of the crisis, prior to the establishment of new structures, though also acknowledged they could have done more to assert the need for DCMS wide activity sooner.”
[SL/37 INQ000102786].

- 3.10. In February 2021 the Executive Board considered the progress that had been made since its October 2020 meeting. It was noted that *“[s]olid progress has been made on key activity quite rapidly”* and it was felt that the department had responded positively to the four themes identified, with most of the short-term recommendations being completed or in train and the longer-term aims being progressed [SL/40 INQ000102789]. Primary recommendations were around improving internal crisis communications strategy and improving wellbeing mechanisms. The Executive Board noted again that the Covid-19 Hub and Economic Response directorate were formed rapidly at the start of the response and that plans should be developed to ensure that a future crisis response structure could be put in place more quickly. In terms of sector engagement it was felt that the department’s relationship with its sectors was greatly improved, although gaps in some key data meant that responses were sometimes delayed. This was also flagged as an issue in terms of resourcing and prioritisation, with some staff redeployment decisions delayed due to specific pieces of staff data only being held locally within teams (such as return dates from loans to other departments, security clearances and detailed working patterns), and less swiftly fed into central decision-making processes as a consequence.

- 3.11. On 7 June 2022, a Covid-19 Hub 'lessons identified' document was produced, reviewing feedback from sector teams conducted as part of a lessons learned exercise. This was a part of the process around the winding down of the Covid-19 Hub. Sessions were held with relevant policy teams that looked at: operational readiness; resourcing and resilience; guidance and the triple-lock process¹¹; and relationships and engagement with stakeholders. In line with previous exercises, it was felt that a formal process ought to be put in place through which a similar crisis response structure could be activated in the future, and that training people across the department in crisis response would allow for the most efficient staffing of such a response. These lessons were discussed at the Executive Board, and action taken by the department to deal with this is outlined later in this statement (paragraph 3.26).

National Audit Office

- 3.12. The National Audit Office also produced a report (in November 2021) setting out lessons for the government on risk management in the context of the government's preparedness for the Covid-19 pandemic [SL/41 INQ000102790]. This external review noted that a potential pandemic or infectious disease outbreak was not a dedicated top-level risk on DCMS's principal risk register. However, DCMS, along with a majority of other departments, did identify a generic risk of some kind of external event or shock that would lead to some of the consequences or impacts that we saw in the pandemic, such as economic slowdown, funding shortfalls, impacts on operational performance, staff wellbeing and supplier failure.
- 3.13. The report identified the need for a cross-government view of risks to understand the 'knock-on effects' from other departments when a risk is realised, such as the health risk of a pandemic having an economic impact on a number of departments. The report also recommended that CO and government departments should work together to ensure risk management, business continuity, and emergency planning were more comprehensive, holistic and

¹¹ This was the clearance method for public-facing guidance to various sectors on how to work safely taking into account Covid-19 risks, which saw drafts cleared by the Cabinet Office, No.10, and the Department of Health and Social Care / Public Health England before they were published.

integrated. The report notes this would involve ensuring the government is able to rely on timely and accurate data in the event of a major emergency, improving information sharing and coordination between the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and risk managers, and applying best practice in risk management.

- 3.14. While CO is best placed to reflect on how a more comprehensive approach to emergency planning has been implemented across government, DCMS has improved its ability to engage with CO-led planning processes with the establishment of the incident response team (discussed at paragraph 3.26). This team has coordinated recent departmental involvement in central planning for risks such as another pandemic and energy shortages.
- 3.15. On the recommendation to improve risk management across government, a new Risk Management Centre of Excellence was established within HM Treasury in 2022. DCMS now works with this Centre of Excellence to align its risk management approach as revised standards and frameworks are developed. We have also reviewed and revised our approach to risk management, further details of which are at paragraphs 3.37 - 3.43.
- 3.16. The National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee also published reports into the £750 million support package for charities. DCMS further commissioned NatCen Social Research to carry out an evaluation of the £750 million funding package and also commissioned Ipsos MORI to undertake an evaluation of the Community Coronavirus Support Fund, a key stream of funding as part of this package.

B. Identification and description of the measures taken by DCMS to improve its state of planning, preparedness, and readiness for future pandemics

- 3.17. As referenced above (paragraph 2.1), DCMS's responsibilities and headcount had grown significantly in the period leading up to the pandemic, requiring a transformation in our ways of working and a number of our corporate functions. We created the 'transformation programme' as part of our planning for the 2019 Spending Review. The focus of the programme has been on becoming more economically and analytically heavyweight and data-driven; more diverse and

inclusive in talent, skills, experience and geographical location; and more delivery-focused, with the capability to run high impact programmes across the department and our network. The programme was led by a central team until March 2022, when it was sufficiently advanced that the task of driving forward further gains in each workstream was handed over to individual directorates.

- 3.18. With work on some key priorities already underway in 2019, by the start of 2020 we had already begun to enhance our essential corporate support functions, organisational resilience and analytical ability. This put us in a better position to respond to the pandemic, but, in turn, the experience of the pandemic has shaped, enhanced and accelerated our reforms - such as our scientific and emergency response expertise; our organisational agility and resilience; our awareness and management of risk, and our approach to working with partners and supporting our sectors. Many of the improvements will have material benefits for a future pandemic response.

Building capability and expertise

- 3.19. The pandemic reinforced the importance of our focus on becoming more analytically heavyweight. We found that for some sectors, data was not sufficiently accessible for the hugely complex and fast-paced discussions going on across government. Covid-19 analysis became one of the biggest demands on our analysts and, in response, we formally centralised resources to create the Covid-19 Analytical Hub, led by a deputy director, in November 2020. This made it easier to rapidly resource and undertake cross-cutting analysis in support of the complex policy work being done across the department.
- 3.20. As part of DCMS's transformation programme, we established the stand-alone Analysis Directorate and appointed its first Director in August 2021, further strengthening the department's analytical foundations.
- 3.21. The role of the Chief Scientific Adviser, established in January 2019, was essential in helping the department to respond to a crisis so driven by scientific considerations. The Chief Scientific Adviser provided vital scientific input into policy development, and continues to play an instrumental role in making the

DCMS voice credible and influential when engaging with other government departments on scientific issues.

- 3.22. We have continued to build on this, and in 2022 created DCMS's College of Experts, made up of 49 external specialists from across academia and industry to provide independent expertise and support to the department and supplement our existing relationships. The College acts as a source of scientific and technical input, focusing on providing evidence and research knowledge to inform policy developed by DCMS. This is done largely through roundtables and workshops, providing ad hoc advice and document critique, and facilitating wider engagement through access to their extended networks.

Increasing organisational agility and resilience

- 3.23. The pandemic forced an acceleration in the development of key corporate processes, which had to react rapidly to ensure the department was able to keep functioning as smoothly as possible. We had to assess quickly the ways in which we deployed our staff, initially reactively, but which have been built into a systematic approach that more carefully considers spillover effects. We moved from an ad hoc method of assigning ownership of emergency work to the creation of a centralised team dedicated to managing crisis. Like many organisations, we had to support the instant transfer of all staff to working from home, and the associated challenges of IT support and managing business continuity, which has informed our current approach to hybrid working and DCMS's increasing geographical footprint.
- 3.24. Rapid reprioritisation of staff was a challenge in the early phases of the pandemic, with demands for people to take up urgent new roles not always spread evenly across the department. In response we have created 'workstream prioritisation' templates for inclusion in business continuity plans, which encourage directorates to identify work that can or cannot be paused in response to an emergency.
- 3.25. We are also working to further embed a culture of agility at an organisational level to enable around 10% of our existing resources to be deployed onto emerging

priorities within each Director General group. In particular, we are seeking to ensure that, should anything unexpected emerge as a new pressure, directorates have plans in place to support rapid re-prioritisation [SL/42 INQ000102791]. This work is in its early phases and is a focus for the medium term during the current Spending Review. All directorates undertook an initial confidence assessment on their ability to meet this need in February 2022, and the results were set out in a report, 'Developing a Sustainable Resourcing Model'. The report sets out the cultural, structural and contractual changes DCMS intends to undertake [SL/43 INQ000102792].

- 3.26. As set out above (paragraphs 3.5 - 3.11), lessons identification exercises discussed by the Executive Board in 2020 and 2022 recommended that a formal process was needed to manage responses to future crises. A proposal for this was agreed by the Executive Board, and a formal incident response team, with substantive ongoing funding, was created in August 2022.
- 3.27. The agreed approach was based on a small, central team supported by staff from across the department who could be moved at short notice in the event of an emergency. The incident response team consists of two full time staff (plus part-time leadership support from two other staff). It designs the approach to central coordination during a crisis, developing the products and structures that a coordinating team would require while also providing training to a pool of staff (currently around 80 people) across the department who can transition to crisis response work at short notice if the need arose. The incident response team also maintains a central email inbox, file structure and document templates that would likely be required in the event of a crisis like a pandemic.
- 3.28. In the event of a future emergency, the incident response team would seek agreement from the Executive Board to form a central response with the requisite number of staff drawn from the incident response volunteer pool. Having these products and processes in place should make any future response much faster, more efficient and effective, allowing the department a single means of rapid coordination linking up with the business continuity team and wider government response structures (more detail on this is provided in paragraph 3.85).

- 3.29. The incident response team is also developing itself as a centre for best practice in the department when it comes to working through crises, preparing contingency plans and testing ideas through exercises. By offering this expertise to other teams within the department, the incident response team will improve its value offer, making it more likely to be maintained through future resourcing decisions.
- 3.30. At the start of Covid-19, DCMS had an existing IT system which allowed for a relatively smooth transition to remote working in response to the initial stages of the pandemic. In 2018 the department had begun looking at opening a second headquarters in Manchester (alongside our Whitehall office) and by 2019 we were exploring a number of options including smaller offices around the country. However, this work was in its early phases and our human resources policies remained geared towards in-person working in a single location. We reviewed these at pace to ensure continuity of essential functions (such as payroll and recruitment) in response to the lockdown in March 2020. This experience has enhanced our policies and practices to allow for remote, virtual and hybrid working as standard.
- 3.31. Recruitment and resourcing policies have also been fully reviewed and updated to provide clarity on methods for filling vacancies and facilitate accelerated recruitment. As part of our 'transformation programme' we invested in a business partnering model that ensures each directorate has a named HR professional to provide support and with detailed knowledge about resourcing in each area. Relationships were also established and maintained with other government departments with surge resources, such as His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), which operates a surge and rapid response team from which support can be requested in future when rapid capacity is needed.
- 3.32. Business continuity plans did not cover all of the unprecedented issues encountered as Covid-19 emerged, such as the need to switch to fully remote working. We were, nonetheless, able to adapt existing processes quite quickly, meaning that core operations were not disrupted, and we have reflected

subsequently on our preparedness for a future pandemic.

- 3.33. Our initial response (discussed at paragraph 3.6) showed a need for improved strategic direction from the business continuity management team and better awareness of business continuity procedures across the department [SL/36 INQ000102782].
- 3.34. We have instigated a system whereby each directorate has its own business continuity plan specific to its key business activities, identifying critical business assets, services and stakeholders, and a prioritisation of work across the directorate. A named business continuity lead is responsible for updating and reviewing plans, and pandemic response planning has been added as an annex in each directorate's plan [SL/44 INQ000102771]. These plans include advice on managing staff in different office locations and ensuring they are set up for home working. Business continuity training is also covered in induction training for all new staff. Since 2020, each directorate has also been expected to take part in an annual business continuity exercise (with scenarios covering a range of issues including pandemics and high levels (30%) of staff absence) and their business continuity leads are supported through a quarterly forum.
- 3.35. We have also taken steps to ensure that the business continuity team reports more regularly to the People and Operations Committee¹², and we updated our Pandemic Response Plan in September 2022 to include a clear command and control structure using a gold, silver and bronze model. This is a framework commonly used across government for delivering a strategic (gold), tactical (silver) and operational (bronze) response to an incident. This model is flexible enough to be applied to any incident and ensures responsibilities are clearly set out [SL/45 INQ000102774].
- 3.36. We have done more detailed thinking about how we would respond to a future pandemic through the updated Pandemic Response Plan, which includes a revised set of planning assumptions, recognising the likelihood of multiple waves

¹² A sub-committee of the DCMS Executive Board with decision making responsibilities relating to staffing, processes and systems

of infections and the need to remain flexible and responsive to different phases of a pandemic.

Risk management and awareness

- 3.37. Risk management has been another area of focus for DCMS as it matured into a larger organisation. A review by the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA) in 2019 had given it a 'limited' rating¹³ [SL/46 INQ000102808], reflecting a less developed understanding of risk, a tendency to focus on risks to delivery of the government-agreed plan for DCMS (known as the 'single departmental plan') and a less systematic approach to assessment and escalation.
- 3.38. Following this review, an external consultant was commissioned to propose an updated approach and DCMS began transitioning to an improved system of both local and strategic reporting. Regular reporting on the progress of risk management changes is made to the Performance, Assurance and Risk Committee, which was established in May 2020.
- 3.39. Changes were phased in to meet the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA) recommendations, with progress captured in this document of September 2021 [SL/47 INQ000102815]. Headway had been made in a number of areas, including in relation to the effectiveness of the risk dashboard, identification of recurring trends across directorates in relation to risk reporting at the Executive Board, consistency in risk recording, monitoring and reporting across directorates, clearer definitions in the risk management framework and the development of a role handover (succession) plan regarding the expected departure of the head of assurance, performance and risk. A follow-up December 2021 GIAA audit provided an improved 'moderate' rating¹⁴, reflecting the progress that had been made [SL/48 INQ000102816].

¹³ A limited rating means that "there are significant weaknesses in the framework of governance, risk management and control such that it could be or could become inadequate and ineffective"

¹⁴ Moderate assurance means "some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control"

- 3.40. DCMS established a grants, risk, assurance and fraud team to address its risk processes, with a refreshed Executive Risk Register established following a top-down Executive Board risk identification session in October 2021. Response to Covid-19 remained a risk on the Executive Risk Register until March 2022, and in April it was amended to cover risk in responding to wider crises including, for example, the war in Ukraine. This risk was removed in November 2022 with the establishment of the incident response team (see paragraph 3.15) and the risk of having to respond to a cross-cutting crisis is now managed within the Strategy and Operations group, which I lead, and escalated to the Executive Risk Register as appropriate.
- 3.41. A new head of risk was appointed in December 2021, who revised the processes set out in the 'Risk Management Policy and Risk Process Guide' [SL/49 INQ000102817; SL/50 INQ000102818] to support more effective and efficient risk management activities. Changes include the use of a refreshed risk appetite statement by all teams when assessing risks and the establishment of monthly Executive Board summary reports in April 2022 to supplement quarterly Executive Board reports and updates to the Audit and Risk Committee. The full details of the risk within the Director General Risk Register must be reviewed by directors general, who will sign off any updates to escalation status, mitigations, risk scores and descriptions a week in advance of Executive Board paper deadlines, to enable the grants, risk, assurance and fraud team to extract the most recent information for Executive Board reports. The Executive Board Risk Register keeps a record of when and which governance bodies have reviewed each risk in detail.
- 3.42. DCMS is also rolling out a new risk software tool that will improve our recording and monitoring of risks, and make processes less manual-resource intensive. Overall, there is now much greater clarity on how risks are escalated and de-escalated across the core department and our public bodies.
- 3.43. In June 2022, the Performance, Assurance and Risk Committee undertook a deep dive review of the Executive Risk Register to ensure that it reflected the current departmental position given that *"[a]t times of such extreme uncertainty, it*

is vitally important that we have a meaningful overview of our key risks at the highest level” [SL/51 INQ000102781].

Enhancing how we work with partners and support our sectors

- 3.44. DCMS has always maintained close relationships with its various sectors, via our many public bodies, representative groups and individual organisations. The pandemic required that we made these relationships even deeper, and at pace.
- 3.45. The unprecedented nature of the interventions that the government put in place demanded a much more detailed understanding of how organisations in our sectors operated. We grew our analytical capabilities in order to develop deeper insights, but also had to extract more data from our sectors on which that analysis could focus. We found we needed a better understanding of the lived experiences of people and organisations in our sectors so that we could make sure policy was designed to meet their specific needs.
- 3.46. We built on existing relationships, formalising engagement, increasing regularity and broadening the remit of relationships and fora where needed. As part of this, we established the Cultural Renewal Taskforce (one of five cross-government ministerial-led taskforces set up to provide expert advice on issues of how closed sectors might be supported and reopened safely), which brought together representatives from the arts, recreation and leisure sectors as well as medical advisers to prepare sectors to reopen and work safely with Covid-19. Eight working groups were chaired by DCMS Ministers, with representatives from around 150 key sector bodies and organisations from broadcasting, film and production; entertainment and events; heritage; library services; museums and galleries; sport; the visitor economy; and youth services.
- 3.47. Before the pandemic, in autumn 2019, the Executive Board set out an ambition to improve partnership working with public bodies, with the Partnership Project launching in January 2020. The overall goals of the project remained consistent through the pandemic, but they were refined, and timeframes redesigned, so that the pandemic response could be a focus.

- 3.48. Comprehensive engagement structures were put in place to ensure dissemination of central government information, and to hear from our public bodies as they navigated the required changes. Quarterly update calls with the Permanent Secretary were instigated; and additional ad hoc meetings were convened around key points and following government announcements.
- 3.49. Weekly calls with relationship managers within DCMS for each public body (referred to as “sponsors”) ensured that information was shared and that we were able to feed back concerns to CO as policy was being developed.
- 3.50. We continue to build on the engagement model of this period. Functional directors and senior sponsors meet their public body counterparts on a monthly basis; sponsors meet regularly with their working level contacts and the Permanent Secretary has continued to meet with chairs and chief executives on a quarterly basis (two of which are in person) and additional support has been put in place to support sponsors in their roles.
- 3.51. The pandemic showed the importance of clear communications channels, with DCMS taking an extremely active role in ensuring that our public bodies are fully up-to-date with government messaging and offering guidance where needed. This has led to stronger relationships that will add value in future emergency response scenarios. Changes in how we work together have been made across the whole organisation - with the sponsors deepening their relationships which has made us stronger in responding collectively to challenges that have arisen since - such as the impact of the energy crisis across our sectors. Our public bodies and the issues that impact them are better understood across the whole of DCMS, rather than just in individual sponsor teams.
- 3.52. As well as being in a stronger position to respond to future emergencies, the structures and processes we put in place to respond will be easier to recreate in the event of a future pandemic.

Critical National Infrastructure

- 3.53. In terms of the sectors with roles in the pandemic response and for which DCMS is responsible, those involved in Critical National Infrastructure were found to be broadly ready and resilient and to have good relationships with the department. Telecoms and broadcast sectors and the networks managed largely as expected and, despite the rapid move to home working, the network and operators responded positively. Both telecoms and broadcast sectors had done significant work preparing for all sorts of contingencies, including a pandemic, during the timeframe referenced, and both the telecoms security and resilience and the broadcast security and resilience teams were well prepared to work with them throughout the pandemic. The programme of work previously outlined that took place in 2017/18 was also useful in prompting the broadcast Critical National Infrastructure operators to review their existing plans and in helping DCMS understand these plans and the potential impacts on the organisations and their respective workforces.
- 3.54. Both the telecoms and the broadcast sectors had emergency response plans in place that they were able to modify to fit the precise circumstances and roll out, ensuring the continued functioning of the telecoms network and the maintenance of TV and radio broadcast services. We consider the performance of the telecoms security and resilience and the broadcast security and resilience teams to be a success and, while there will be areas to build on and enhance in planning for future incidents, significant changes in approach are not felt to be required.
- 3.55. In telecoms, there will have been some localised issues which may have exacerbated poor or unreliable connectivity in certain areas, but existing DCMS connectivity programmes already seek to address those systemic service gaps (and roll-out of these programmes continued throughout the period, albeit at a slower rate). Learning from the experience has highlighted the need for closer working across resilience and economic policy teams, including on thinking more broadly about policy responses to resilience challenges that go beyond the maintenance of service availability. A broader understanding of key workers, the

types of companies that encompass Critical National Infrastructure, and how telecoms can support wider cross-departmental responses (for example 'white listing' certain critical NHS sites, data allowances for critical workers etc) was vital during the pandemic. Before the machinery of government change in February 2023, DCMS was considering how resilience planning for different risk scenarios can encompass this range of demands on telecoms providers. This thinking will continue within DSIT.

- 3.56. In the broadcast sector, the pandemic led directly to more regular meetings (weekly or fortnightly) from March 2020 between the broadcast security and resilience team and key operations and business continuity management staff in the broadcast Critical National Infrastructure operators. These meetings were very useful and, in particular, helped to build trust and more mature working relationships. Regular working-level meetings continue to be held on a range of other resilience issues and programmes of work, such as on Project YARROW (contingency plans for a national power outage).
- 3.57. Information flows between government and Critical National Infrastructure partners are extremely important for building trust and promoting good planning. Both broadcast and telecoms stakeholders have asked for annual updates on the outlook for pandemic disease and planning assumptions from DHSC and GO-Science to share with trusted organisations. While this is not solely within DCMS's gift, we will continue to advocate for sharing information where possible.
- 3.58. Although data infrastructure resilience is not officially categorised as part of the UK's Critical National Infrastructure, DCMS's approach to it evolved rapidly to the point that, during the pandemic, it was treated in largely the same way and we are confident that the government would be able to support it appropriately in the event of a future pandemic. A recent (May 2022) call for views sought input from the sector on risks related to service disruption and, as part of future policy development, we expect that DSIT will consider the industry's ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from the challenges posed by hazards such as pandemics.

Information, disinformation, media and social media

- 3.59. At the start of the pandemic our position was based on mobilising a cross-government team, the Counter Disinformation Cell, to respond to disinformation threats [SL/52]. Our experiences during the pandemic of building relationships with platforms, civil society and academia led us to move away from this cross-government team. We created the Counter Disinformation Unit within DCMS, which continues to lead the government's domestic operational response for countering disinformation, now as a part of DSIT following the 2023 machinery of government change. Further detail on the experiences and learning leading up to this point can be found in Susannah Storey's statement.

Civil society

- 3.60. The Civil Society and Youth directorate drew lessons from emergency situations such as the Grenfell Fire and Manchester Arena terrorist attack, working with the voluntary and community sector to improve coordination in response to emergencies. As outlined in section 1 of this statement, the CSY directorate worked with the voluntary and community sector in response to these events to develop a proposal, and then provide start-up funding, for the National Emergencies Trust, which was launched in November 2019.
- 3.61. The CSY directorate began funding the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership in May 2020, providing £6.3 million up to March 2022 for its response to the pandemic. The Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership now coordinates 230 partners to support people and organisations to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. It closely works with - and provides a single point of contact for - government, local partners and communities to direct resources and specialist support, including volunteers and emergency relief, to where it is needed the most. DCMS recognises the importance of the voluntary and community sector having strong relationships with government departments responsible for a wide range of crises. In 2022, the CSY directorate awarded additional three-year funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership, allowing DCMS to

support greater connections between other government departments and voluntary and community sector providers.

- 3.62. The CSY directorate also established the Civil Society Stakeholder Group at the start of the pandemic to provide the department with insight and perspectives from the sector. This stakeholder group had a number of time limited, focused subgroups that brought together expertise to provide input across a range of issues including funding, finance, young people and inclusion. During the pandemic, the CSY directorate also established a volunteering guidance reference group to ensure guidance on safe and effective volunteering drew on expertise as well as the needs of volunteer involving organisations and the communities they serve.
- 3.63. The CSY directorate was quick to recognise the financial strains that the pandemic would place on the voluntary and community sector, and the government made a £750 million package of support available in April 2020. Following the Public Accounts Committee's report on government support for charities, the CSY directorate is exploring a range of options to enhance its data and evidence base on civil society, in line with the recommendation that DCMS should set out the specific actions it is taking to monitor and understand the financial health and resilience of this sector:

"By primarily focusing on distributing funding in a timely manner, the Department hasn't developed a way to measure the impact funding has had across the country or what the aftermath of the pandemic will mean for the long-term financial health and resilience of the sector. As part of its evolution due at the end of 2021, it will be essential that the Department fully understands the benefits that have been delivered as a result of taxpayers' investment. Whilst we recognise that government's funding was not intended to support or save every charity, we remain concerned about the long-term financial health and resilience of the sector as the pandemic continues. We urge the Department to continue to monitor the situation and update us on what further action it intends to take." [SL/53 INQ000102783].

DCMS's response to this recommendation noted that:

“Our efforts to understand the sector over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted an absence of robust, timely and sufficiently granular data to monitor the [voluntary and community] sector’s health and resilience. Going forward, we recognise that having access to this data is critical to our efforts to pre-empt challenges to, and opportunities for, sector health and resilience...While the complexities associated with monitoring and measuring the financial health and resilience of such a diverse sector are not new – and will not be remedied overnight – supporting long-term improvements is a priority, so we are therefore exploring a range of options to enhance data and evidence base on the sector” [SL/54 INQ000102784].

- 3.64. The CSY directorate has made good progress on the above aim to significantly strengthen our understanding of the civil society sector. This has included working closely with external sector bodies to access data and share expertise, supporting the Charity Commission’s new charity classification register¹⁵ and commissioning a feasibility study on a civil society ‘satellite account’¹⁶.

C. Critical reflections on DCMS’s planning, readiness and preparedness for the Covid-19 pandemic as well as its contribution to the UK’s resilience to the pandemic

- 3.65. DCMS remains a small core department compared to most other departments, albeit with the largest network of public bodies. It had increased in size rapidly before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, and is now reducing again following the machinery of government change in February 2023. For some time prior to the pandemic we had been moving towards a more centralised organisational structure, with the 2019 Spending Review (which we used to kickstart the department’s transformation programme) and our experience gained during Operation YELLOWHAMMER assisting in this move. This transition was still ongoing at the start of the pandemic; had it been more advanced, we would have put a centralised response in place more quickly.

¹⁵ The new register will help improve the coverage and accessibility of data collected from charities about what they do, how they do it and who they help.

¹⁶ This would bring together data to help better understand the economic value of the civil society sector.

- 3.66. By late 2019, following a successful Spending Review bid, the department was fully engaged in planning its programme of transformation and investing more in the necessary skills, reviewing our ways of working and building our analytical capability. Our approach to risk was a central focus, moving away from a culture which, while not precluding the assessment of a pandemic, did foster a tendency to focus on the impact on individual work programmes. The department had developed plans for dealing with the impacts of a pandemic on its workforce and on Critical National Infrastructure but was less well prepared for an event which would lead to a step-change in the way we worked (i.e. completely closing down physical offices) or organised ourselves (needing to move large numbers of people into specific response roles).
- 3.67. This approach to risk was reflected in the department's involvement in Covid-19 discussions across Whitehall at the start of January 2020, which were led by the tourism sector team. While this was being reported up to the Executive Board, it was largely viewed through the lens of a problem for the visitor economy and, with hindsight, the department's response stayed in that team for too long.
- 3.68. As the threat of Covid-19 increased in proximity, the People and Operations Committee commissioned directorates across the department to complete business impact assessments to focus minds on the operational impacts should the virus begin to spread in the UK.
- 3.69. At the same time, the volume of work generated by the response was rising and extra staff were drafted in to bolster the tourism team and support on risks that were starting to emerge beyond the visitor economy. On 29 January, CO ran a simulated COBR meeting that assumed Covid-19 would become a pandemic in the UK and explored caring for the sick in hospitals and in the community. Diary pressures prevented a DCMS minister from attending this simulation exercise, which was attended by a senior official; in hindsight it would have been better to expose ministers to this discussion.
- 3.70. By the end of the month it was apparent that the situation would likely continue to escalate, with the workload continuing to increase, and a director (who had led

work during operation YELLOWHAMMER) was drafted in to lead a virtual team consisting of the tourism team, representatives from the telecoms and sport teams, and the Civil Society and Youth directorate.

- 3.71. During February the work of completing business impact assessments continued, and was discussed at the People and Operations Committee. The virtual team established at the end of January took on more staff and began establishing itself as a formal coordinating function at the centre of the department, and at this time DCMS became involved in preparations for the Coronavirus Act, passed in March 2020. While the risk from Covid-19 continued to be recorded as a risk primarily for tourism within DCMS, conversations at the Executive Board were increasingly recognising this as potentially a much broader issue.
- 3.72. These heightened concerns led to the Executive Board holding a scenarios workshop on Covid-19 on 10 March 2020, with the risk now recorded on the Executive Risk Register [SL/55 INQ000102819, SL/56 INQ000102820, SL/57 INQ000102821, SL/58 INQ000102822], and we sought information from our public bodies, checking whether they had pandemic plans in place. In the preceding weeks it was recognised that a much larger central response was now required and significantly more staff were drafted in, widening the scope of the virtual team established in January to a department-wide coordinating effort and batch recruiting to the formal Covid-19 Hub over the first 10 days of March. This was to be the department's single point of contact across Whitehall and to coordinate the overall response as well as our involvement in legislation. We benefited greatly from experience gained during YELLOWHAMMER and were able to bring in a number of individuals with relevant experience.
- 3.73. By the end of the month we had implemented a full departmental reorganisation to create the Economic Response directorate, reprioritise work across teams to focus on Covid-19 and greatly grow our role in supporting volunteering, with the recruitment of a new director general to lead it. Throughout these fast-moving few weeks we sought to guide our public bodies and sectors through the changes that were taking place, keeping them up to date with government positions and

guidance while ensuring that they felt their issues were understood and we were working to resolve them.

- 3.74. The lockdown saw the rapid mobilisation of the department's corporate functions to ensure that business could continue uninterrupted and staff were properly supported. Alongside the focus on immediate unfolding events, the Executive Board strove to get ahead of the near term crisis-response and consider the longer-term strategic challenges when it met on 2 April 2020 for a workshop [SL/3 INQ000102745]. It envisaged a four-phase response to the pandemic, with the department recognising the importance of deprioritising all non-urgent work to focus on Covid-19, while also envisaging a final phase of recovery and re-emergence identifying longer term goals and opportunities for our sectors. The follow-up session held on 8 April 2022 confirmed the approach discussed and shows the scale of resource that was shifted to focus on Covid-19 response work [SL/59 INQ000102785].

Improvements within the department

- 3.75. These actions represent a significant organisational change in a short period of time against the backdrop of a global pandemic that had serious and sweeping impacts across society and the economy. Reviews recognised that DCMS showed a nimbleness and flexibility in confronting such a challenge and changing its organisation and some processes radically (paragraphs 3.1 - 3.11); they also highlighted that we could learn lessons to enhance our response to a future pandemic scenario.
- 3.76. Our approach to risk was already changing in 2019 (paragraph 3.71) in response to the changing requirements and responsibilities of the department. We continued to draw lessons during the course of the pandemic and created a new corporate risk team in September 2021. The additional processes put in place by this team have improved the understanding of risk across the department and our public bodies - we have now hosted five bi-monthly risk fora with our public bodies, following a recommendation from our Audit and Risk Committee in early 2022.

- 3.77. Both the government's risk culture, and the management of system-wide risks require effective join-up across government, and we welcome the establishment of the new Risk Management Centre of Excellence by HM Treasury in 2022 and the appointment of a Head of Government Risk Profession to lead on greater cross-government working and standards for the management of risk. DCMS is working with this team on initiatives such as the cross-government assurance group and the development of the risk and control framework. We will further align our risk management approach as this framework and functional standards are developed. The Centre of Excellence will also provide direction to improve cohesion between risk management and resilience.
- 3.78. In terms of DCMS's processes for responding to risks, when CO flags that a risk may be increasing in proximity and requires more focused contingency planning, the first consideration is where that work should sit within the department. Previously, this could evolve in a less systematic way, with the most relevant sector team taking the lead and ownership of an issue; a team could then, in some cases, lead for longer than appropriate, and might also be protective of its ownership.
- 3.79. The experiences of the Covid-19 Hub, and our wider risk work, provided the basis for the incident response team, formally created in August 2022, and which reflects the department's recognition of the importance of being able to stand up a central team quickly to coordinate comprehensively across DCMS in the event of a pandemic or similar emergency.
- 3.80. The incident response team is now the default team to turn to for coordination when a significant risk begins to emerge. It is able to support individual sector teams and ensure cross-cutting impacts are visible to senior leaders. It is a small team, and we are conscious of the need to protect the space to focus on these issues and to provide sufficient support when needed through flexing staff from across DCMS in a timely manner. The incident response team is building its expertise so it can advise on best practice and it is DCMS's single point of contact for the COBR unit and national resilience framework team. It is also

engaged with CO and DHSC processes around future pandemic risk, such as UK Health Security Agency workshops on Covid-19 contingencies, and it is a member of the cross-government Pandemic Disease Capabilities Board (led by CO), coordinating requests for information to aid planning where appropriate.

Ensuring a more effective response next time

- 3.81. As set out in this statement, DCMS has had a consistent focus on transforming and maturing its ways of working since the year before the pandemic, and the groundwork laid in 2019 was critical to our ability to respond and adapt to such an unprecedented event, and sustain our focus for its duration. The lessons learned during the pandemic not only reinforced the importance of this transformation, but showed us what a response should look like - and if faced with a similar scenario in the future, I believe that DCMS would respond with a speed and efficacy built on these foundations.
- 3.82. The overhaul of our approach to risk provides a more systematic means of identifying cross-cutting risks and prompting senior-level discussions on options to mitigate them. Our integration into the cross-Whitehall risk community and the crisis planning teams within CO supports ensuring that warning signs are picked up earlier and that we are fully engaged in government contingency planning. When crystallisation of a risk is imminent, our deepening culture of crisis response and organisational flexibility will allow us to mobilise the staff needed and identify work that can be deprioritised to allow for the scale of response required.

Reflections on our effectiveness and contribution

- 3.83. The role that DCMS played in the overall government response to the pandemic was shaped by both our size and relative importance in dealing with the immediate effects of the pandemic. The department does not 'own' much of the legislation and regulations of most importance to a government-wide response, and our policy and sector responsibilities mean we have a smaller role to play in dealing with the early stages of a pandemic.

- 3.84. Unlike departments such as DHSC and CO that are central to managing a pandemic's immediate impacts, DCMS was managing a small number of first order areas relating to Critical National Infrastructure. The department is much more affected by second and third order impacts, as the response to the disease changes behaviours and the way that large parts of the economy can operate.
- 3.85. That said, DCMS also has a number of frontline policy responsibilities that can be deployed directly in response to a pandemic. Volunteering is one such area, and the civil society sector was impressive in its response, with both voluntary and community organisations and individual citizens showing agility and altruism in providing for the changing needs of their neighbours and communities. DCMS's role largely focused on the coordination of supply and demand for volunteers, helping government departments articulate their needs, and supporting the voluntary and community sector and public sector organisations to work together. This included managing the complexities of an inherently decentralised response mechanism, where volunteering responses were happening at a local level but with central government keen to fully understand the intricate details of community-level responses. The work done by the Civil Society and Youth directorate on developing a deeper understanding of its sector and stronger relationships, particularly with the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership, will ensure that we can use this policy area even more effectively in the event of a future pandemic.
- 3.86. As the government lead on the domestic operational and policy response for countering disinformation at the time, DCMS also contributed to the UK's management of anti-vaccine and other Covid-19 related misinformation narratives through the work of the Counter Disinformation Unit. The CDU was made into a permanent team within DCMS, and now exists in DSIT. The unit's response to the pandemic led to developments in our ways of working, such as the ability to prepare and pivot smoothly to work on completely new areas of risk. This was demonstrated in February 2022 when the CDU pivoted rapidly to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Further detail is provided in Susannah Storey's statement.

- 3.87. In terms of the wider impacts of Covid-19 on DCMS, an early realisation for the department was the extent of the pandemic's reach beyond our first order areas of Critical National Infrastructure, and the existential effect it could have on such a broad range of sectors. Our response ultimately involved every team in DCMS, and tested all of our governance and coordination structures. Our development as a department set out from paragraph 3.17 onwards - in terms of building expertise; increasing organisational agility and resilience; risk management and awareness; and enhancing the way we work with partners and support sectors - was essential in allowing us to address that challenge.
- 3.88. We are acutely aware that a future pandemic would have wide-ranging impacts on our sectors and policy areas. Individual sector and policy teams have drawn extensive lessons and experience from Covid-19 and the activities set out throughout this statement. Coupled with our increased organisational agility and maturity, including a more dynamic understanding of risk, I believe that this leaves the department in a stronger position to respond to a future pandemic.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings 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 of its truth.

Personal Data

Signed:

Dated: 30/03/2023