

Crisis Capabilities Review: Responding to Crises from the Centre of Government

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Led by

Matthew Rycroft (Permanent Secretary, Home Office)

&

Dominic Wilson (Director General for Security Policy, MOD)

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Summary

1. Our existing model for planning and responding to crisis is the product of events early in the millennium. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) was established in 2001, the Civil Contingencies Act was published in 2004 and the last significant update to arrangements was in 2010. These plans were shaped by the experiences of fuel protests, flooding and foot and mouth disease. Their focus was organising government to work effectively with local responders through major emergencies and in response to acts of terrorism.
2. In the interim the character of crisis has changed significantly. Contemporary crises are manifesting in more complex ways affecting the UK's interests at home and overseas simultaneously. They are unfolding with greater speed and being complicated by cyber and disinformation campaigns. Responding to crisis is demanding higher-quality faster-paced central decision making, all against even more intense social and news-media scrutiny.
3. As detailed in the Integrated Review, the turbulent events and multiple crises of recent years are unlikely to be an aberration. Fragility in the global system post- COVID, the growing impacts of climate change and the trend towards sharper state competition will continue to generate a variety of serious crises in the years ahead.
4. To consistently succeed in this challenging future environment, the way we co-ordinate and lead the response to major crises from the centre of government now requires a significant overhaul. This should involve:
 - Re-clarifying the role of the Cabinet Office and its relationships with departments through crises
 - Reducing our dependence on COBR by complementing it with other robust and well-understood processes and structures

- Using new elements of process called ‘Overwatch’ and ‘Framing’ to mobilise and focus central government responses more effectively
 - Formally appointing DG level Crisis-SROs to improve leadership during crisis
 - Establishing a new single centre of crisis-response expertise and experience at the heart of government
5. These changes should be underpinned by a ‘professional project’ for crisis management. It should consolidate knowledge and best practise for teams leading the responses to national and international crises; both inside the Cabinet Office and across departments. It should close the gap between crisis management and other important functions in the Civil Service.
6. While these initiatives will support the professionalisation of our core crisis response arrangements – alone they are unlikely to be enough to manage the disruption caused to the working of central government by persistent recent crises.
7. For 20 years we have managed resilience and national security from a single Group inside government – made possible by the character of the risks and government’s focus on consequence management. However, more disruptive domestic challenges and more demanding national security work are challenging that model:
- a. Disruptive domestic challenges which are the product of deeper economic and social changes. These demand a more ambitious vision for ‘resilience’. It involves better use of data and the application of a broader policy toolkit, which lies upstream of traditional national security and civil contingencies approaches.

b.

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This requires adapting our ways of working to improve the speed of policy development and decision making.

8. In addition to managing crises more effectively – we should explore wider reforms upstream of crises which could create additional capacity across the system and reduce the number of issues which require crisis managing.
 9. Inside the NSS (National Security Secretariat), a new Director-led Cabinet Office Crisis Team should be created to provide a permanent, standing capability for managing national and international crises of all kinds. It should significantly improve our ability to scale quickly in the face of serious crises. It should also be a home for the leadership of a re-invigorated crisis management discipline across government.
 10. To deliver on the vision set out in the National Resilience Strategy and tackle disruptive domestic challenges further upstream, a new DG National Resilience post should be created to lead a National Resilience Group. The Group will bring together expertise from elements of the CCS, a variety of Cabinet Office data and analytical functions and the temporary taskforces which have been established to deal with various disruptive domestic challenges in the interim. In-light of its ambitious new remit, potentially spanning a number of domestic policy areas, the Group should report directly to the Cabinet Secretary.
 11. Creating this new Group will facilitate a refocussing of central government’s national security machinery - moving to a more tightly bound definition of ‘national security’ to guide the work of NSS
- Irrelevant & Sensitive**
- Irrelevant & Sensitive**
12. In addition to structures and process, consultations at all levels alighted on the culture flowing from senior officials through the Cabinet Office. Participants characterised a ‘hero model’ of leadership which emphasised

outstanding individual contributions, often at the expense of more collaborative and sustainable ways of working. This hero model becomes more pronounced at times of crisis. By creating more, and better organised, capacity for responding to crises, the proposed reforms should reduce some of the resource drivers of this behaviour. Further work to address it will also be required.

Introduction

Purpose

1. The Crisis Capabilities Review (CCR) is the most far-reaching examination of central government's approach to crisis response in over a decade. It was tasked to support the implementation of commitments made around crisis response in the Integrated Review; and provide recommendations for an updated national approach to managing crises of all kinds.

Scope

2. The CCR has tackled the 'Response' phase of crisis management with work for the 'Prepare' and 'Recover' phases to follow separately. As set out in its terms of reference (Annex A), the Review has addressed capabilities and wider arrangements which are predominantly the responsibility of the Cabinet Office. It has also addressed the role of the Cabinet Office in supporting other departments to lead the government's response to national and international crises. The *internal* crisis response arrangements of other departments across government have not been in scope.

Organisation

3. The CCR's findings and recommendations are based on extensive consultations: over 60 interviews including staff from Number 10, the Cabinet Secretary, Permanent Secretaries and senior officials responsible for crisis response across central government. The Review team has run workshops with the teams directly delivering crisis response in departments and in the Cabinet Office. It has also run a written consultation with over 20 other departments and agencies with a stake in the findings.
4. To provide a degree of independence, the work has been organised as a peer-review, led by Matthew Rycroft (Permanent Secretary, Home Office) and Dominic Wilson (Director General for Security Policy, Ministry of

Defence). It has been conducted by a small team drawn from a number of departments and guided by a senior Reference Group with membership also drawn from a variety of departments, including non-core national security departments¹.

5. The Cabinet Office teams at the centre of the Review have been exceptionally forthcoming throughout. Their commitment to leading and improving the response to major crises from the centre of government remains very impressive.

¹ Reference Group: Matthew Rycroft (Chair); Dominic Wilson (MOD); Susannah Storey (DCMS); Chloe Squires (Home Office); Beth Sizeland (Cabinet Office); Tom Drew (FCDO); Bernard Hogan-Howe (Independent)

Part One: Core Crisis Response Arrangements

The Evolution of Crisis Response Arrangements in in Central Government

6. Our existing model for planning and responding to crisis is the product of events early in the millennium. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) was established in 2001, the Civil Contingencies Act was published in 2004 and the last significant update to arrangements was in 2010, with the publication of the Cabinet Office’s ‘Concept of Operations for Responding to Emergencies’ (CONOPs). These plans were shaped by the experiences of fuel protests, flooding and foot and mouth disease. Their focus was organising government to work effectively with local responders through major emergencies and in response to acts of terrorism.

7. The CONOPs were conceived before the National Security Advisor’s post was formalised

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In the last decade the organisation of crisis management at the centre of government has subsequently evolved in a piecemeal fashion. As new challenges have emerged and the machinery of national security and resilience has changed, responsibilities for preparing and responding to crisis has become distributed across a number of different Cabinet Office teams.

8. Through the course of extensive consultations, the Review has identified a series of areas where reform is required – and developed a number of specific recommendations and proposals for change. Further detail on each of the proposed reforms can be found in the accompanying pack ‘*Crisis Capabilities Review: additional detail*’. In many places, the reforms proposed in the Review are aimed at establishing much better clarity over roles and responsibilities between and during crises. These will bring arrangements in central government back in-line with basic crisis

management best practice. In other regards, the Review proposes updating central government's structures and processes to reflect the changing demands of responding to crises, and the lessons learned in recent years.

Response Capabilities

9. Historically the character of risks faced by the UK was narrower and it was easier for a single team in the Cabinet Office (CCS) to take responsibility for underpinning the response to crises of all kinds. As the variety of risks has grown – for instance to encompass **Irrelevant & Sensitive** and the NSS has increased in size, crisis response has become more distributed and an extension of policy teams' routine work. Being prepared to respond to crisis is a responsibility which the team's relish – and bringing their expertise to bear will be essential for any future approach. However, over time the Cabinet Office has drifted to a set of arrangements which are too disparate. Teams working variously on domestic emergencies, **Irrelevant &** **Irrelevant & Sensitive** are all preparing to respond to crisis independently. While COBR – the process and the technical facilities – loosely underpins the teams' various plans, there is relatively little routine co-ordination between them. There are no common assumptions as to the likely crises central government may be required to face and no sense of an overall plan as to the breadth or capacity of the capabilities which may be required.
10. As a first step towards building a consolidated and professionalised set of arrangements at the centre of government, a definition of the capabilities required should be adopted. Through the course of the Review the set of proposed crisis response capabilities was developed. It includes:
- Quality Governance
 - A Single Authoritative Information Picture
 - A Strategic Approach

- Driving Delivery at Pace
- Continuously Improving

11. The full definition of crisis response capabilities proposed by the Review (Annex B) should be adopted and used as a framework underpinning the delivery of the reforms set out through this report.

Governance, Accountabilities & Responsibilities

12. The consultation revealed a lack of clarity around the high-level governance, accountabilities and responsibilities of ministers and senior officials – both between and during crisis. Currently, understanding of senior roles and responsibilities is largely implicit. It should be formalised, including clarity about the respective roles of ministers and officials. It should take account of the National Security Advisor’s post and the responsibilities of Permanent Secretaries in departments which may be asked to lead the national response to a crisis under the Lead Government Department model. The Review has proposed a formulation for these accountabilities and responsibilities at Annex C.

13. The high-level governance, accountabilities, and responsibilities for effective crisis response from central government should be clarified based on the proposal set out by the Review.

The Role of Cabinet Office and the Lead Government Department Concept

14. Central government’s response to crisis is organised under the ‘Lead Government Department’ (LGD) model. It dictates that where possible a single department should be placed in the lead for a crisis response with support provided by the Cabinet Office as required. In practice, the Review found that the LGD model is enjoying mixed success. Against well understood or recurrent risks (e.g. flooding or types of terrorist attack) the model works well. Departments have built impressive capability and the

relationship with Cabinet Office is well defined. However, for novel forms of crisis which do not sit neatly with a single department, the LGD approach can stall. At times departments are reluctant to take responsibility. At times the Cabinet Office is reluctant to relinquish it.

15. The relationship between the Cabinet Office and the LGD will vary with the nature of the crisis and the capabilities of the departments involved. Cabinet Office should seek to reinvigorate our approach to the LGD concept and strive to ensure that crises are managed from departments wherever possible. This has the advantage of putting officials and ministers with the greatest expertise closest to decision making and preserving bandwidth in Number 10 and the Cabinet Office.
16. The interdependent nature of modern society means that very few future crises will be limited to the interests of a single department. Ensuring that departments have the capability and authority to lead more complex crises will require a new more ‘expeditionary’ approach from a future Cabinet Office Crisis Team. It should work more proactively with LGDs to build relationships and anticipate the demands of potential crises. It should flexibly supplement LGD capabilities as required, rather than bringing problems reflexively into the Centre.
17. **A new Cabinet Office Crisis Team (see para 57) should build on work begun by the Review: reinvigorating the LGD concept and resetting expectations around the division of responsibilities between the Cabinet Office and departments for responding to crises.**

Governance: Process and Structures

18. Central government currently lacks a single set of authoritative guidance or doctrine for the structures and processes which should shape its response to crises. In the absence of guidance, several different approaches are variously employed. Frequently, new meetings and formats are improvised at the onset

of a crisis. The consequences can be unnecessary confusion, friction and time lost in the critical early phase of planning or initiating a response. A new more robust and enduring set of arrangements are required to minimise confusion through a crisis, and ensure central government is behaving consistently and in-line with best practise.

19. Central government's arrangements must themselves contain a degree of flexibility, depending on the nature of the crisis. At times officials have been too keen to squeeze a crisis response into the COBR mould, irrespective of the circumstances. COBR remains a powerful brand and useful – especially at the outset of a crisis. However, it was devised in large part to facilitate and sustain situational awareness through a crisis when communications infrastructure was less sophisticated or reliable. While secure communications are still far from perfect, gathering ministers or officials from a very wide range of departments and agencies is no longer required to achieve situational awareness. Moreover, it is often not appropriate for the management of complex, especially sensitive, or protracted crises.
20. The Review proposes a new 'Governance Playbook'. It anticipates that COBR will routinely be used just once at the outset of a crisis, providing early co-ordination, and often signalling government's resolve in the face of an emerging challenge. Thereafter, a new format of 'Crisis Management Groups' (CMGs) should form the backbone of future responses.
21. These should operate in three broad configurations, which can be used in different combinations and at whatever intervals the circumstances require:
- CMG(Strategic) – CMG(S) chaired by the PM or a Secretary of State and providing strategic direction through a crisis
 - CMG(Ministers) – CMG(M) chaired by a secretary of state or junior minister. It should feature Ministers and senior officials contributing flexibly to drive delivery through a crisis

- CMG(Officials) – CMG(O) an Official’s level meeting – chaired by the Crisis-SRO or a delegated senior official. Driving more routine co-ordination and planning

22. This approach builds on lessons learned from recent crises – including innovation through the response to COVID-19. It delineates more clearly between meetings required to secure ministerial agreement and direction, and meetings used to drive implementation and hold departments to account. The CMG’s build on trends in ministerial decision making described through the consultations. These include a more executive style of senior ministerial decision-making, sometimes drawing just on ministers who are directly responsible for issues at hand; and a more flexible, practical style of working between junior ministers and senior officials to drive day to day implementation and quickly tackle ‘blockers’ as they arise.

23. The Governance Playbook is intended to be ‘adaptable but predictable’; providing the agility to respond quickly to crisis and shape the style and cadence of meetings to the issue at hand. It also provides a degree of familiarity and prevents ad-hoc and untested arrangements being improvised at short notice.

24. Central government should commit to the ‘Governance Playbook’ as the basis for a single set of overarching arrangements for responding to future crises.

Moving to Crisis

25. The consultation revealed that central government could collectively make much better use of the time available to it in the prelude to a crisis. Some crises offer very little advance warning. But many have been tracked for time as issues of concern, before tipping into a full-blown crisis which threaten HMG’s capacity to respond. Our arrangements for tracking issues of

concern, prioritising between them and mobilising government to prepare for the most dangerous, can be improved.

26. Currently, pre-crisis activity can be un-structured, the urgency of an issue can be unclear to those not working directly on it making it hard to plan the prioritisation of resources across the Cabinet Office and departments. At times Cabinet Office teams or departments press for a move to crisis as a means of simply breaking through the ambiguity and getting things going, rather than because the seriousness of the situation strictly demands it.
27. To address these problems – whenever circumstances allow - Cabinet Office should lead a more graduated and well sign-posted way of moving from business as usual towards crisis. Building on an approach already used by CCS, the Review proposes the adoption of a new element of process called ‘Overwatch’.
28. In future, when an issue looks likely to mutate into a crisis and threaten the capacity of government to respond effectively, the NSA - in consultation with ministers and LGD officials, should declare a move to Overwatch. At this point, more deliberate efforts to avert the crisis can be paired with planning for a crisis response, should one be required. Overwatch would signal to all departments that, among the many issues of concern at any moment, issue X poses significant danger and is a collective priority for central government.
29. To be of real enduring value, Overwatch should be used judiciously. Central government should avoid a situation where Overwatch is continually declared against a variety of problems and never definitively ended. In many circumstances a move to Overwatch will require agreement with ministers and may require public handling. Overwatch will usually end either because the challenge has receded, and the crisis has been averted (even if just temporarily) -or because a crisis has materialised, and full crisis response arrangements are in play.

30. The decision to move to Overwatch may often be finely balanced. But instituting the process upstream of crisis should be a useful mechanism for driving difficult conversations and addressing ambiguity earlier in the cycle. This should reduce the ‘drift’ towards crises which can be a feature of current arrangements. Ultimately, Overwatch should ensure better use is made of the time available for planning before a crisis.

31. In future a new element of process called ‘Overwatch’ should be employed when an issue has the potential to imminently overwhelm business as usual arrangements and require a crisis response from central government.

Leadership of Crisis

32. The consultations consistently identified weaknesses in the way that crises are led in central government. At present, there is no formal process for appointing a DG level official to take the lead in a crisis. It invariably takes too long for an individual, either from the Cabinet Office or a LGD to become established as the lead - and the extent of their authorities and responsibilities often remains unclear. The problem is more pronounced in complex crises where multiple departments may have a major stake and multiple senior officials across departments and in the Cabinet Office may also be interested. The result has frequently been ambiguity, friction and a struggle to regroup departments and align their various approaches.

33. In line with crisis management best practice, the NSA should identify a crisis leader at the first opportunity before, or at the onset, of a crisis. They should be designated in a newly formalised position of ‘Crisis SRO’ (CSRO). Usually a DG level official, the CSRO will often be drawn from the relevant LGD. However, it should equally be possible to draw upon well-qualified candidates from elsewhere in government if their experience, or the nature of the crisis, warrants it.

34. In circumstances where the scale or severity of the crisis mean the Prime Minister is personally routinely providing leadership, the CSRO position may have to be performed from the Cabinet Office. However, we should strive to keep leadership of a crisis (both LGD and CSRO) with departments wherever possible - facilitated by improved Cabinet Office support.
35. The CSRO should have specific responsibilities associated with the effective leadership of a crisis and should discharge them through a combination of support from their own Department and a future Cabinet Office Crisis Team.
36. Responsibilities should include:
- Ensuring the nature of the crisis and the governments objectives have been agreed with ministers and are widely understood (see Framing below)
 - That crisis governance and structures are in place
 - That appropriate expertise and advice (including from outside government) has been identified and is being drawn into the response
 - That the response is appropriately resourced against the anticipated challenge
37. **The Cabinet Office should establish a new role of ‘Crisis SRO’ (CSRO) to be appointed by the NSA to the best placed DG level official at the first opportunity pre-crisis.**

Preparing Crisis Leaders

38. For senior officials, leading central government’s response to major national crises, holding the confidence of ministers and driving delivery across departments can be extremely demanding. Our consultations indicated it requires a specific and uncommon blend of skills. Considering the gravity of the responsibility, surprisingly little is done to prepare senior leaders for leading the response to crisis from central government. It is often assumed

that because an individual has achieved seniority, they will automatically be a good leader in a crisis. A more deliberate programme of development is required to prepare those most likely to be asked to lead the response to major national crises.

39. The Review has developed a proposal for a Crisis Leadership Cadre consisting of senior officials in roles which may see them appointed as a CSRO. Proposals for the cadre reflect the unique nature of crisis leadership from the centre of government. The Cadre should be run by the Cabinet Office for relevant DGs. It should:

- Provide some basic training in crisis management leadership principles and CSRO responsibilities
- Consolidate a peer support network for senior officials with crisis management responsibilities
- Facilitate and exchange of learning and ideas – including with crisis leaders in other professions
- Be a means to maintain a cohort of capable crisis leaders who could add resilience to the national response in the case of very serious or enduring crisis

40. The Cabinet Office should establish and sustain a Crisis Leadership Cadre consisting of senior officials in roles which may see them appointed as a CSRO.

Setting Direction and Agreeing Objectives

41. The consultations revealed that our current ways of working before or during crisis can lack clarity about key aspects of the crisis and the government's plan for responding to it. There is no process for explicitly agreeing objectives and priorities. As officials and ministers move urgently between meetings, subtly (or significantly) different interpretations can exist about

the nature of a crisis, and our objectives in managing it. This can cause friction or confusion both with ministers and between departments. These subtle misunderstandings and differing perspectives can remain unreconciled, even through many months of crisis planning.

42. To address this problem the Review recommends the adoption of a new process called 'Framing'. It should become one of the principal responsibilities of the CSRO. Framing should set out agreed analysis and direction for the crisis response across key questions:

- Why exactly is/could this become a crisis?
- What are the key UK interests affected?
- What are the secondary impacts – what else should we be thinking about?
- What magnitude of crisis should we be planning for?
- What are our objectives for averting or mitigating the crisis? How will we prioritise between them?
- How will we pursue our objectives - with what capabilities?

43. Framing should be explicit i.e. committed to paper and shared with all departments supporting a crisis response. The framing document should be agreed with and between ministers and updated as our understanding of a crisis develops. Framing should ensure that the whole of government fully understands the magnitude of the crisis at hand, and the lengths to which the government is prepared to go to avert or manage it. It should be the basis for significantly improved situational awareness and clarity re. objectives in the face of crisis. It should also be the basis for a more strategic and coherent approach while co-ordinating the management of a crisis across departments.

44. The Cabinet Office should adopt a new process called 'Framing'. It should become one of the principal responsibilities of the CSRO at the onset of a crisis.

Cabinet Office Structures and Resources

45. Responsibility for responding to national security and international crises is currently distributed across several policy teams in the NSS; with the CCS holding responsibility for managing the response to most civil contingencies (excluding terrorism) and managing the COBR facilities in 70 Whitehall. Thus, a number of different teams are expected to be independently capable of leading and resourcing most aspects of the response to a crisis should one be required in their policy area. The CCS is considerably the largest team in NSS and carries most crisis experience by virtue of the breadth of its responsibilities. While it does provide support to other teams during major crises – there are no standing arrangements, and the support is usually negotiated ad-hoc on a case-by-case basis.

46. This largely ‘self-help’ approach to crisis response is a product of circumstances rather than design. It is unusual in comparison with other government departments and agencies which routinely manage crises. While the teams in NSS do an admirable job to make it work, it has several fundamental weaknesses:

- It underplays the importance of crisis management expertise. This model assumes that crisis management is a natural extension of policy work and capable staff recruited to do one will be able to do the other. This isn’t borne out by experience. Gifted policy advisors may not possess the specific organisational and planning aptitudes required to co-ordinate a crisis response – sometimes under extreme pressure
- Conversely, the model makes poor use of specialist policy skills and expertise through crisis. There are a variety of administrative and secretariat roles which are common to all crises – using staff with specific thematic or regional expertise to co-ordinate meetings or manage crisis inboxes is a suboptimal use of resources

- Experience is squandered. As major crises pop up sporadically in different policy areas, there is no mechanism for ensuring that hard won staff experience is carried forward onto future crises.
- There is very little capacity or capability building between crises. In practice, busy policy teams inevitably relegate preparation for future crises, when faced with busy day jobs. This comes at the expense of the preparatory working required to support an effective crisis response. Teams in NSS were frank about the lack of training or exercising for crises, the absence of updated guidance or doctrine and the inconsistent approach to gathering/learning lessons from crises.
- Multiple teams preparing and responding to crises independently inevitably breeds inconsistent approaches to processes and structures which undermines ministerial confidence and degrades Cabinet Office's overall capability over time.

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47. To address these problems, the Cabinet Office should move to a new model of crisis response which would place a permanent Cabinet Office Crisis Team at the centre of the NSS. This 'standing capability' would act as a hub for building crisis management experience and expertise against major national and international crises of all kinds. It should function as a 'service provider', operating in-support of all NSS policy teams, LGDs and CSROs.
48. Between crises, the team should provide stewardship of the crisis management function in the Cabinet Office and across central government. This should include:

- Driving development of a central government crisis response capabilities programme (Annex B)
- Building capacity and interoperability across the CO and with LGD
- Managing key crisis infrastructure (COBR etc)
- Co-ordinating the Crisis Leadership Cadre & wider upskilling

49. During crises, the new Crisis Team should:

- Work with the NSA, CSRO and policy teams to begin practical planning for the national response to a crisis
- Provide a single, highly expert crisis secretariat in CO – capable of supporting crises managed through CO or led in LGDs
- Own and implement plans for scaling up central government's response in the face of serious crises

50. Further work will be required to determine the exact functions of a new team and the degree of continuity from the roles elements of CCS perform now. Other departments successfully maintain relatively small, permanent crisis response teams. However, effective arrangements for scaling up quickly in the face of crises are essential to the success of this approach. Key criteria which should inform the design of the new team are:

- It should be equally capable of supporting the response to domestic and international crisis across all areas of national security and resilience work
- It should be capable of working at all classifications
- It should not have routine domestic or international policy responsibilities which threaten to crowd out capacity building and capability development responsibilities – these are essential for genuinely professionalising crisis management in the Cabinet Office

60. A new permanent Cabinet Office Crisis Team should be established in the NSS – included in its responsibilities should be owning and implementing plans for scaling up central government’s response in the face of major crises.

Data

51. Our approach to the use of data through a crisis remains a work in progress.

The consultations revealed widely differing expectations about how ‘big-data’ should be used, and its real utility through a crisis. A maximalist view is that, building on the very impressive progress made with data through the C-19 response, large data sets will now routinely sit at the centre of our response to crises, increasingly allowing us to anticipate how events will unfold and shaping the development of policy. Conversely, we encountered a view that the opportunities presented by big data were overstated.

Participants observed that the nature of C-19, and the significant data resources invested in it, mean it may represent a high-water mark in the medium term.

52. At times departments do appear to have failed to grasp the opportunities presented by data through crises. However, at times the Cabinet Office has also been guilty of pursuing large volumes of data from departments which do not really aid situational understanding or decision making. Through the Review parallels were drawn with the way we set intelligence requirements and the principles we have developed for using intelligence with ministers. We now need to embark on a similar journey with data and develop a much clearer concept of when and how HMG can use big data to genuinely aid understanding and support ministerial decision making, before and during crisis.

53. Learning the lessons of recent crises, Cabinet Office should consult with departments and establish a set of clear principles for how they will

work with large data sets before and during future crises - including commissioning data and presenting it to ministers.

54. The National Situation Centre ('SitCen') is positioned at the centre of this developing field of practice. While it is an impressive facility, its exact responsibilities, the concept for how it will work alongside departments and the way it will support senior decision makers remained unclear to many of those consulted. The SitCen is one of a number of different data and analytical capabilities distributed across the centre of government. They appear to have overlapping responsibilities and are competing for scarce data talent. The Cabinet Office should consider how the capability of these various data and analytical teams can be consolidated in a single place to deliver a more effective Cabinet Office data and analytical function. It should support the response to crises - but may have even greater utility working further upstream against the protracted domestic policy issues which have increasingly generated crises in recent years. As discussed in Part II, we recommend a new National Resilience Group as a likely home for a consolidated data function.

55. The Cabinet Office should consider how the capability of central government's various data and analytical teams can be consolidated in a single place, to deliver a more effective Cabinet Office data and analytical function.

A Professional Project

56. At a time when other important functions in central government have sought to formalise and professionalise their work, crisis management stands out as a discipline which has not made progress. Departments have independently introduced their own training arrangements; but at the centre of government - for staff in the Cabinet Office and departments who may be required to support the COBR process - there is a conspicuous lack of basic inductions.

In future, a new Cabinet Office Crisis Team should assume responsibility for the delivery of a training package for all staff who may be required to support the response to serious national or international crises from the centre of government.

57. A new Cabinet Office Crisis Team should assume responsibility for the delivery of a basic training package for all staff who may be required to support the response to a crisis from the centre of government.

58. This should be the minimum. In a review focussed on crisis response it would be obvious to recommend that central government press on and aspire to achieve full equivalence for crisis management with other functions in government e.g. finance or policy. Views through the consultations were mixed and it remains unclear if crisis management truly has the salience to become a fully-fledged ‘function’. Whilst it is an essential aspect of the work of central government – it is often an extension of other roles and very rarely the key anchor around which a career is built. Consequently, through the Review we have developed a scalable set of options for a Crisis Skills Learning Package delivered virtually through the new ‘Campus for Government’. This approach has a variety of benefits, including:

- Providing access to consistent high-quality training and learning
- Supporting the implementation of the core-crisis response reforms set out through this review
- Underpinning better interoperability and the effective surging of staff in the face of future major crises

59. We have stopped short of recommending even fuller arrangements for professionalisation e.g. a government crisis profession. But suggest that more ambitious options are kept under review as the proposals here are bedded in.

60. Building on the work begun by the Review, Cabinet Office should pursue the development and delivery of a fuller ‘Crisis Skills Learning Package’, likely to be delivered through the new Campus for Government. Options for even further professionalisation of crisis management should be kept under review.

Lessons and Exercising

61. The Review found the current approach to capturing lessons through crisis, and exploiting lessons post-crisis, to be very uneven. There is no real requirement on teams to make provision for capturing lessons, and no consistent approach across the Cabinet Office. In CCS, where there is relatively more resource available for crisis response, lessons capture was incorporated more often into the response to crisis. But not always. In other areas, there was evidence of teams attempting to capture and learn the lessons from their response to crises – but it was constrained by the resource available. Lesson-learning is typical of the less-urgent, but still important, capability building activity which is consistently deprioritised or crowded-out entirely under the current ‘self-help’ Cabinet Office model. As such, the Cabinet Office is failing to consistently identify, learn and improve on its responds to crises in any systematic way.

62. The Review found that the classic model of large Tier 1 and 2 exercises had somewhat fallen out of favour with departments which found them excessively resource intensive and often lacking clear and achievable learning outcomes. In practice these major Tier 1 and 2 exercises have been increasingly postponed in recent years given the competing demands imposed by planning for EU Exit and the constraints of COVID. In their place Cabinet Office teams have successfully innovated with a greater number of smaller, more targeted exercises, often developed at pace against emerging requirements.

- 63. The current Cabinet Office approach to learning lessons through crisis is haphazard. A future Cabinet Office Crisis Team should have an explicit responsibility for capturing lessons through a crisis and running effective learning processes post event. Learning from crises should be shared more freely and more routinely across departments**
- 64. Large set-piece exercises are resource intensive and can fail to deliver real learning. In future, central government should build on the good COVID-driven trend towards smaller more focussed exercises targeted against specific testing or learning.**

Part Two: Wider Reforms

Upstream of Crisis

1. While the changes set out in Part One should support the professionalisation of our core crisis response arrangements – alone they are unlikely to be enough. Even with improved crisis response arrangements, the consultations were clear that the extent to which the centre of government is continuing to be drawn into the management of crisis in recent years is unsustainable. Two broad areas emerged as prolific generators of crisis:

- a. A set of disruptive domestic challenges which are the product of deeper economic and social changes.
- b. More demanding day-to-day national security work being driven by more intense geopolitical competition and sharper grey-zone conflict.

2. The crises arising from both these areas pose some bigger structural questions for our national security and resilience arrangements. Since the early 2000s we have integrated the governance and government machinery used to manage both national security and wider resilience. This aligned well with the character of the risks we faced. Our principle national security challenges around terrorism, sat comfortably alongside wider resilience challenges on the spectrum of contingences the government was planning most actively to manage.

3. In recent years the risks the UK faces have diverged in character. Irrelevant & Sensitive

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At

the same time, events – not least the pandemic – have revealed the scale of work required to underpin genuine national resilience to be on a bigger scale than previously contemplated. Core national security activity and the wider endeavour of ensuring national resilience have each become more

demanding and specialised in their own right. This prompts the question of whether it is still useful - or feasible - to manage this breadth of activities from a single Group in NSS – or whether HMG should explore options for building additional capacity and more specialist capabilities across the system.

4. Part II of this report sets out a model for re-organising upstream of crisis. Broadly, it proposes the Cabinet Office pursue a new more ambitious concept of ‘National Resilience.’ It should become the basis for the work of a new National Resilience Group located outside the NSS. It would build on elements of CCS’ current approach – but also be an opportunity to bring a much broader set of planning and policy making capabilities together to tackle a variety of ‘disruptive domestic challenges’ with the sophistication now required. While a new concept of National Resilience would need strong residual links with elements of national security work – it is likely to be in the linkages with wider domestic policy (e.g. industrial policy or immigration rules) which now have the greatest salience.
5. These changes would create an opportunity to refocus Cabinet Office’s national *security* machinery, working with more tightly bound definition of ‘national security’ and focusing on the most dangerous threats emanating from hostile states and other malign actors.

Disruptive Domestic Challenges

6. These are a group of issues which sit at the heart of the requirement for a new ‘National Resilience’ approach. Work is required to more closely define a group of specific policy areas – but what we have characterised as ‘disruptive domestic challenges’ were widely recognised through the consultations. They are a set of issues that have been brought to the fore by major structural changes and upheavals to the UK’s economy and society. They flow in part from our exit from the EU, but also changes induced by

- the pandemic and longer term economic and societal trends. They span markets and supply chains, foreign investment, ownership, and regulation.
7. Understanding and managing these challenges requires both a deeper understanding of the drivers of change, and a more sophisticated, proactive policy toolkit to shape them. It requires approaches which are nimbler and more operational than routine domestic policy making; but which are beyond the capability of our current civil contingencies machinery. Work to address some of these issues is taking place – for instance in the Supply Chains Unit.
 8. This ‘taskforce approach’ has been useful in rapidly addressing a variety of issues which defy our existing structures. However, multiple temporary arrangements do not recognise the likely scale of the medium-term challenge. Nor do they provide a basis for maturing the important new approaches and capabilities required to get ahead of structural problems and mitigate future crises.
 9. Consequently, the Cabinet Office should now re-think the way it is organised against this new seam of issues putting its approach onto a more sustainable footing and closing the gap between classic civil contingencies and longer-term policy making. The Review proposes we do this by brigading central government’s effort under a new more ambitious concept of National Resilience with the creation of a new National Resilience Group. This should be under the leadership of a new DG National Resilience.
 10. More detailed design work has been outside the scope of this Review. However, a new National Resilience Group could quickly address a number of the challenges identified above by:
 - Drawing on traditional resilience planning capabilities and incorporating the relevant teams from the CCS
 - Building on those capabilities with the creation of a new directorate focussed on larger, longer-term and more structural resilience issues

- Underpin those planning and policy capabilities with an Analysis Directorate – consolidating a number of the data and analysis functions currently distributed across the Cabinet Office

- 11. To meet the challenges posed by a variety of disruptive domestic challenges that sit between routine domestic policy and crisis response; the Cabinet Office should re-organise aspects of its work around the more ambitious concept of National Resilience. It should create a new National Resilience Group led by a DG National Resilience.**
- 12. Given the broader more ambitious remit of a new National Resilience Group, it should report directly to the Cabinet Secretary.**

National Resilience: Governance

13. Making these changes to the machinery of central government would also present an opportunity to re-think the ministerial oversight that sits above them. Currently ‘resilience’ formally sits within the terms of reference of the National Security Council (NSC). If pursuing structural changes to achieve greater focus on national security and resilience respectively; ministerial oversight of a new programme for National Resilience could be achieved via the establishment of a new National Resilience Council. A new Council would assist with establishing a distinctive new basket of policy areas across departments and drive a better focus on a National Resilience agenda across government.
- 14. NSS should work with the wider Cabinet Secretariat to explore options for adjusting the terms of reference for ministerial committees to refocus the NSC on more conventional national security matters and create the capacity for more deliberate ministerial oversight of National Resilience work.**

Adapting for National Security

15: **Irrelevant & Sensitive** that more intense geo-political competition and

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19. Moving the locus of National Resilience Activity outside the Group and the creation of a new DG National Resilience should create an opportunity to concentrate the work of NSS. It should give a re-titled Deputy National Security Advisor additional bandwidth to drive a new focus on ‘hard’ national security issues - and implement a programme of change intended to cultivate these new ways of working.

20. The mission of the NSS should be concentrated against core national security issues including countering terrorism and addressing hostile state activity against the UK. Leading the national response on these issues in a future security environment will require the development of new ‘ways -of-working’ enabling the NSS to develop policy and drive activity in a more agile but sustainable fashion.

Consolidated Recommendations

Part 1: Core Crisis Response

1.	The definition of <u>crisis response capabilities</u> proposed by the Review should be adopted and used as a framework underpinning the delivery of the reforms set out in the CCR.
2.	The <u>high-level governance</u> , accountabilities and responsibilities for effective crisis response from central government should be clarified based on the proposal set out by the Review.
3.	A new Cabinet Office Crisis Team should build on work begun by the Review: <u>reinvigorating the LGD concept</u> and resetting expectations around the division of responsibilities between the Cabinet Office and departments for responding to crises.
4.	Central Government should commit to the <u>Governance Playbook</u> as the basis for a single set of overarching arrangements for responding to crises.
5.	In future a new element of process called <u>‘Overwatch’</u> should be employed when an issue has the potential to imminently overwhelm business as usual arrangements and require a crisis response from central government.
6.	The Cabinet Office should establish <u>a new role of ‘Crisis SRO’</u> (CSRO) to be appointed by the NSA to the best placed DG level official at the first opportunity pre-crisis.
7.	The Cabinet Office should <u>establish and sustain a Crisis Leadership Cadre</u> consisting of senior officials in roles which may see them appointed as CSROs.
8.	The Cabinet Office should adopt a new process called <u>‘Framing’</u> . It should become one of the principal responsibilities of the CSRO at the onset of a crisis.

9.	A new <u>permanent Cabinet Office Crisis Team</u> should be established in the NSS – included in its responsibilities should be owning and implementing plans for scaling up central government’s response in the face of major crises.
10.	The Cabinet Office should consider options for more effectively delivering to senior decision makers a high-level situational awareness of risks and issues which may deteriorate into crises.
11.	Criticism of elements of the Cabinet Office’s organisational culture were prominent through our consultations. The challenge appears to go beyond national security and crisis response. More work is required to fully diagnose the issues and propose reforms.
12.	Learning the lessons of recent crises, Cabinet Office should consult with departments and establish a set of clear principles for how they will work with large data sets before and during future crises - including commissioning data and presenting it to ministers.
13.	The Cabinet Office should consider how the capability central government’s <u>various data and analytical teams can be consolidated in a single place</u> to deliver a more effective Cabinet Office data and analytical function.
14.	The Cabinet Office should consider how the capability of central government’s various data and analytical teams can be consolidated in a single place to deliver a more effective Cabinet Office data and analytical function.
15.	A new Cabinet Office Crisis Team should assume responsibility for the delivery of a basic training package for all staff who may be required to support the response to crisis from the centre of government.

16.	Building on the work begun by the Review, Cabinet Office should pursue the development and delivery of a fuller ‘Crisis Skills Learning Package’, likely to be delivered through the new Campus for Government. Options for even further professionalisation of crisis management should be kept under review.
17.	In future, CSROs should be responsible for <u>ensuring that a breadth of advice is available to ministers</u> , sourced from in and outside government. SAGE represents a powerful model for blending a range of perspectives in support of decision making; Cabinet Office should look for opportunities to replicate it in other fields commonly drawn upon in crisis e.g. logistics
18.	The current Cabinet Office approach to <u>learning lessons through crisis</u> is haphazard. A future Cabinet Office Crisis Team should have an explicit responsibility for capturing lessons through a crisis and running effective learning processes post event. Learning from crises should be shared more freely and more routinely across departments
19.	Large set-piece exercises are resource intensive and can fail to deliver real learning. In future, central government should build on the good COVID-driven trend towards <u>smaller more focussed exercises</u> targeted against specific testing or learning.

Part II: Wider Reforms

20.	To meet the challenges posed by a variety of disruptive domestic challenges that sit between routine domestic policy and crisis response; the Cabinet Office should re-organise aspects of its work around the more ambitious concept of <u>National Resilience</u> . It should create a new National Resilience Group led by a DG National Resilience.
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21.	Given the broader more ambitious remit of a new National Resilience Group, it should <u>report directly to the Cabinet Secretary</u> .
22.	NSS should work with the wider Cabinet Secretariat to explore options for adjusting the terms of reference for ministerial committees to refocus the NSC on more conventional national security matters and create the capacity for more deliberate <u>ministerial oversight of National Resilience</u> work.
23.	The mission of the <u>NSS should be concentrated against core national security</u> issues including countering terrorism and addressing hostile state activity against the UK. Leading the national response on these issues in a future security environment will require the development of new ‘ways -of-working’ enabling the NSS to develop policy and drive activity in a more agile but sustainable fashion.

Annex A: Terms of Reference

CRISIS CAPABILITIES REVIEW.

PHASE ONE: RESPONSE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

The National Security Advisor has directed a review of the UK's national crisis response capabilities. It should draw on lessons learned from recent crises, including the COVID response. It should support the implementation of commitments made around crisis response in the Integrated Review; and provide recommendations for an updated national approach to managing crises of all kinds.

Governance and Leadership

Senior oversight of the work will be provided by a 'Review Reference Group', Chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Home Office. The Review Reference Group will include the Deputy National Security Advisor (National Resilience and Security), Director General level representation from the Home Office, Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, and the Ministry of Defence. The Reference Group will also be attended by an independent NED with relevant crisis management experience. Representatives from other Government Departments and agencies will be invited on an ad hoc basis. The Review Reference Group will meet fortnightly. Director General, Security Policy (MOD) will be responsible for appointing a cross-Government, multi-disciplinary team and routinely directing the review work.

Scope

Phase One of The Review will focus on the elements of crisis response currently characterised as 'The Central Response Framework' i.e. all aspects of Central Government's arrangements for coordinating the national response to a crisis and facilitating timely and robust decision making. The Review should examine and bring recommendations on:

- The principles which guide our approach and our ability to balance between commonality of response and bespoke, specific 'playbooks'
- The governance and structure of central crisis response arrangements before and during a crisis
- The practical capabilities now required to support an effective crisis response
- The training and exercising offer which should underpin the central government's crisis response, both for ministers and officials

Approach

This is a Peer Review intended to retain a degree of independence from the teams who routinely plan and manage crisis response in Central Government. The Review should provide challenge to the current crisis response arrangements and changes to the system which are already planned. The Review should be consultative, including perspectives from ministers, government departments and wider agencies which routinely support the central response. The Review should be transparent and build on existing work and existing, routine performance reviews - avoiding unnecessary duplication. In addition to the Review Reference Group, the Review team to engage routinely at a working level with colleagues across government to update on their progress.

Output

Phase One of the review should begin immediately and be complete by the end of September 2021. A Review paper with recommendations and any other supporting materials should be agreed with the Review Reference Group and submitted to the National Security Advisor. The Review Team should work with the Cabinet Office to ensure recommendations inform their planning for the Autumn Spending Review.

Annex B: Core Crisis Response Capabilities



Crisis Capabilities Review

HMG Core Crisis Response Capabilities

A comprehensive set of capabilities commensurate with the challenge of responding to crisis in a post-IR world:

Quality Governance. High quality governance which is well understood and features robust, predictable but adaptable structures and processes. Effective embedded governance is the basis for effective collaboration and Ministerial decision making.

A Single, Authoritative Information Picture. Data and information from across HMG capabilities combined with the best insight from open sources to generate powerful shared understanding.

A Strategic Approach. A clear, authoritative assessment of how the UK's interests are engaged in any crisis, a single set of objectives for navigating the country through crisis; and a common understanding of the ways in which departments will be expected to contribute.

Developing Expert-informed Policy Options. Working across departments to bring ministers the best possible options with the time and information available. Quickly securing trusted advice from outside government where the situation requires it.

Making Decisions. Getting the right ministers and officials together, in the right format at the right time - to enable effective and timely decision making. Ensuring effective challenge is baked into the decision making process.

Driving Delivery at Pace. Clear and timely dissemination of decisions and direction matched with lean commissioning and reporting processes. Cultivating an 'operational mindset' and retaining a focus on crisis objectives.

Communicating Confidently with the public, partners and adversaries. Sensitive, proactive communication maintaining public confidence. Clear, considered, assertive messaging effectively shaping activity in support of HMG response objectives.

Resilient and Inclusive. Resources and structures which are scalable and sustainable in the face of serious crises. Building capacity between crisis to reduce the risk to staff wellbeing in crisis. Maximising opportunities for inclusion and diversity throughout a response.

Continuously Improving. Deliberately capturing and learning lessons during and after every crisis. A modernised approach to training and exercising. A commitment to adequately prepare everybody for their role in a crisis response.

Annex C: Clarifying Top Level Governance



Clarifying Top Level Governance

Clear lines and collective understanding of accountability and responsibility will enable good governance and empower the system to operate effectively.

Summary of Senior Roles and Responsibilities	
PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ultimately accountable for the overall performance of HMG crisis response. • Responsible for assuming the position of - or appointing - a Lead Minister for the response.
Cabinet Ministers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountable for the effective delivery of their department's contribution to the xHMG crisis response. • May be appointed as the Lead Minister for the HMG response and accountable for the coordination of xHMG political decision making for the response.
Cabinet Secretary & NSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal advisors to the Prime Minister on issues of national security and resilience, including response to crises. • Accountable for ensuring HMG Crisis Capability is fit for purpose and appropriately deployed. • Responsible for appointing and empowering a CSRO at the outset of a crisis.
Permanent Secretaries of LGD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountable for resourcing their department's contribution to the HMG crisis response. • Responsible for assuring their department's standing crisis capability and readiness to respond. • Responsible for selecting and preparing DGs capable of the Crisis SRO role.
Crisis SRO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal advisor to the Lead Minister of the HMG response. • Responsible for leading an effective response to crisis from Central Government