

**UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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**THIRD WITNESS STATEMENT OF JEREMY POCKLINGTON**

**Module 2 – Tranche 3**

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I, JEREMY POCKLINGTON, Permanent Secretary of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 1 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0ET, **WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS**

1. I am the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. I commenced this role on 7 February 2023. Prior to holding this role, I was the Permanent Secretary for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (“the Department”). I commenced this role on a temporary basis in the first week of March 2020. I held the post officially from 30 March 2020 until 7 February 2023. I am duly authorised to make this witness statement in response to the Module 2 Rule 9 Request dated 7 October 2022.
2. Unless otherwise stated, the facts contained in this witness statement are within my own knowledge and are true. Where they are not within my own knowledge, they are derived from the sources to which I refer and are true to the best of my information and belief. Privilege is not waived in any privileged document or communication which is referred to in this statement.
3. References in this witness statement are to exhibits in the form **(JP3/X – INQ/000000)**.
4. Module 2 focuses on core political and administrative decision-making by the Government in the period 1 January 2020 to 24 February 2022. My first witness statement dealt with the period between 1 January 2020 and 26 March 2020. My second statement dealt with the period from 27 March 2020 to 31 October 2020. This third witness statement covers 1 November 2020 to 24 February 2022.
5. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (and its predecessor forms) is referred to as “***the Department***” throughout.
6. In the ‘introductory points’ section of my first witness statement I explained the approach I have taken to addressing non-pharmaceutical interventions, and I adopt the same approach here.
7. This witness statement is structured as follows:
  - A. Departmental role and responsibilities.
  - B. Overview of actions between 1 November 2020 and 24 February 2022.
  - C. Actions between 1 November 2020 and 24 February 2022.

- (i) Shielding
- (ii) Funding support for Local Authorities
- (iii) Adult Social Care
- (iv) Personal Protective Equipment
- (v) Tiering, Restrictions and Closures
- (vi) Compliance and Enforcement
- (vii) Local outbreaks and the CONTAIN framework
- (viii) Safer Public Places and 'Covid Marshals'
- (ix) Managed Quarantine Service
- (x) Community Testing
- (xi) Local Authority Workforce Capacity
- (xii) Domestic Abuse
- (xiii) Homelessness, rough sleeping, and support for the housing sector
- (xiv) Faith, race and integration
- (xv) Disproportionately impacted groups (including the 'Community Champions' initiative)
- (xvi) Death management
- (xvii) Steps in relation to forfeiture of commercial leases
- (xviii) Resilience and Recovery Directorate
- (xix) Data Modelling
- (xx) Role in development of legislation
- (xxi) Lessons Learned

8. This witness statement also includes the following annexes:

- (i) Annex A, which contains an alphabetical glossary of acronyms appearing in this witness statement.
- (ii) Annex B, which contains the chronological list and details relating to lessons learned as requested by the Inquiry.

9. Separately, the Department is providing a chronology comprising key events and decisions in which the Department was involved for the period 1 November 2020 to 24 February 2022 (“**the Chronology**”).

**A. DEPARTMENTAL ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

10. The Department’s role and responsibilities up to 26 March 2020 are set out in my first statement. The Department’s role and responsibilities during the 27 March 2020 to 31 October 2020 period are covered by my second witness statement. During the period between 1 November 2020 and 24 February 2022 covered by this witness statement the following change occurred from 21 April 2021: responsibility for updating and publishing guidance for the conduct of weddings moved from the Department to Cabinet Office (“**CO**”).
11. Overall, the Department continued work that had commenced prior to 31 October 2020, before activity began to reduce or finish across several areas towards the end of the period covered in this witness statement. As set out in my previous statement, the Department continued to utilise links with Local Authorities (“**LAs**”) throughout this period through a pre-established engagement framework. This included daily bulletins providing updates to recipients across the sector, a dedicated web page, regular webinars and political roundtables with senior leaders, and meetings with Chief Executives. The framework allowed cross-Government access (at Ministerial and senior official level) to LAs and access by LA leaders to Central Government. Relationship Managers in the Local Government Engagement team shared emerging local intelligence that they had picked up from discussions with LAs with officials across Government. The framework did not replace relationships that other departments already had with their own LA contacts.
12. Several significant decisions necessitated additional engagement with LAs using the regular established channels. For example, the Department facilitated several webinars and meetings with a group of LA chief executives in relation to national restrictions, the rollout of mass testing, compliance, enforcement, and the Covid-19 Winter Grant Scheme among other issues. Questions raised at webinars during this period were followed up via correspondence or through the daily bulletin.
13. New structures were also put in place elsewhere in Government which improved other departments’ understanding of LAs and enabled this Department to take a lesser role than previously in relation to coordination and communication. For example, the CO Covid-19 Taskforce set up a central LA Delivery board with representation from this Department, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (“**DEFRA**”), Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (“**BEIS**”), Department of Health and Social Care (“**DHSC**”), His

Majesty's Treasury ("HMT"), Ministry of Defence, Department for Transport, Department for Education ("DfE"), Home Office, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, CO, and local government representatives. The first meeting took place on 20 January 2021, and the board set out a coherent picture of the requests being made of LAs across Covid-19, to support LAs to prioritise resources.

14. In addition to existing Department structures to coordinate Covid-19 work, in this time period the Department also set up new secretariat functions for Covid-19 work. Further detail on these is set out below.

***Winter Secretariat***

15. From November 2020, the majority of Covid-19 related cross-Government meetings were coordinated by the Department's Winter Secretariat Team. The team held Winter Ministerial Committee meetings attended by Departmental Ministers and Winter Officials Committee meetings attended by senior officials. The Winter Secretariat Team also coordinated briefings for the Covid-19 Operations Committee ("COVID-O") and the Covid-19 Strategy Committee, where decisions on tiering were made. The Winter Secretariat was responsible for the strategic co-ordination of the Department's overall Covid-19 response until the end of April 2021.

***Omicron Secretariat***

16. In mid-December 2021, a secretariat function was set up to oversee the Department's response to the Omicron variant of Covid-19. The core role of the Omicron Secretariat was to co-ordinate sitreps, track actions and provide updates throughout the period of the Omicron response. The Omicron Secretariat also provided briefings for the Department's Secretary of State ("SoS") (Michael Gove) for COVID-O meetings.

**B. OVERVIEW OF ACTIONS BETWEEN 1 NOVEMBER 2020 AND 24 FEBRUARY 2022**

17. This section provides an overview of the various matters the Department was involved in (within the scope of Module 2) within the period 1 November 2020 to 24 February 2022. More detail is set out in Section C below.
18. The Department continued to co-ordinate the Shielding programme, including managing the relationship with LAs on behalf of all the engaged Government departments, through to COVID-O's decision on 6 September 2021 to end shielding advice permanently and shut down the contingency support model.

19. In relation to funding support for LAs, the Department continued to be alive to the wider need to ensure that LAs in England had sufficient resource to maintain services whilst responding the Covid-19 pandemic.
20. In relation to Adult Social Care (“**ASC**”) the Department continued to work closely with the DHSC. As set out in my two previous statements the Department does not have responsibility for policy decisions for ASC but has a role due to its overall relationship with the LA sector which commissions and delivers some ASC services.
21. The Department also carried out work relating to Personal Protective Equipment (“**PPE**”). Once the DHSC PPE Portal was fully operational and the emergency supply of PPE to Local Resilience Forums (“**LRFs**”) was ended, the Department continued to work with LAs on PPE funding matters and engaged with LRFs to ensure local issues were escalated to DHSC.
22. In relation to Tiering, Restrictions and Closures, the Department continued to provide support to the CO Covid-19 Taskforce and DHSC, leading engagement with LAs in some areas. After October 2020, the Department no longer led on closures, with responsibility being transferred to DHSC. CO and DHSC led on cross-Government development of regulations in relation to restrictions, though the Department continued to ensure that its interests were represented in the design of the regulations.
23. In relation to Compliance and Enforcement, the Department supported CO and DHSC to engage LA experts to inform better regulatory drafting. The Department also enabled LAs to provide feedback to CO and DHSC on whether LAs had adequate powers and could generate sufficient capacity to fulfil their role in assessing business compliance at a local level as restrictions changed. The Department also supported CO and DHSC to engage with LAs to manage local outbreaks and respond to variants of concern (“**VoC**”), and to explore the support needed to carry out their responsibilities.
24. In relation to public health communications the Department continued to publish guidance to reduce the risk of transmission in certain public spaces, including advice for owners and operators of public spaces on how to keep these settings safe.
25. The Department had a supporting role in the Managed Quarantine Service (“**MQS**”), led by DHSC, which provided quarantine hotels for those travelling to the UK from red list countries. This included convening the MQS steering group to ensure that local government could raise MQS related issues with the lead department responsible (DHSC).
26. The Department had a supporting role in the development of asymptomatic Covid-19 testing policies and self-isolation. This included the Community Testing Programme, where the

Department worked to ensure that the lead departments DHSC and NHS Test & Trace understood what LAs could and could not deliver and ensured that LAs understood what was expected of them.

27. In relation to LA workforce capacity, the Department led co-ordination of a cross-Government response to the impact of workforce absences in local government, including an analysis of the most affected services. The Department engaged with LAs regarding the prioritisation of statutory services and Covid-19 related delivery at times of significant staff absences due to the Omicron wave.
28. In relation to Domestic Abuse (“**DA**”), the Department continued to work closely with other Government departments (“**OGDs**”) to co-ordinate and ensure the response on DA accommodation was aligned. An emergency fund of £10 million was rolled-out to providers.
29. The Department continued its work to ensure that rough sleepers were supported off the streets and into longer-term accommodation during the further national restrictions in this period. The Department also made decisions to further extend or adapt the measures that had originally been introduced in the housing sector in March 2020 to reduce the number of people in accommodation who might be made homeless.
30. The Department continued to address Covid-19 related faith and community issues, working across Government as the regulatory framework was adjusted to reflect levels of transmission risk. On 8 March 2021, following initiation of step 1 on the roadmap for exiting national restrictions, responsibility for updating and publishing guidance for the conduct of weddings moved from the Department to CO.
31. In relation to disproportionately impacted groups (“**DIGs**”), the Department’s work continued. In particular, the Community Champions programme continued to develop with additional funding being provided, focussing on groups more likely to suffer long-term impacts from Covid-19.
32. The Department continued to have responsibility for ensuring local death management arrangements were not overwhelmed and to feed into decisions by Public Health England (“**PHE**”) and DHSC. Policy, operations, data and communication were the four main workstreams for the Department.
33. The Department led on measures extending the moratorium on forfeitures of commercial premises, and worked closely with the BEIS on the development of an exit strategy from the moratorium – the Commercial Rent (Coronavirus) Act 2022. BEIS led on the overall development of the legislation, with the Department responsible for engaging with Devolved

Administrations on both the legislation and updates to the voluntary Code of Practice for commercial property relationships following the Covid-19 pandemic.

34. The Resilience and Recovery Directorate (“**RED**”), formerly the Resilience and Emergencies Division) attended Cabinet Office Briefing Room (“**COBR**”) meetings and provided briefings on behalf of the Department. The Department also convened a Response Co-ordination Group for all LRFs in port areas impacted by the French Government’s decision to close the border with the UK.
35. With reference to the Inquiry’s interest in the Department’s involvement in data modelling and legislation, such involvement continued to be relatively limited but is set out further below in Section C under the appropriate sub-heading.
36. The final section describes the lessons learned exercises and reviews involving the Department relating to issues raised in the Provisional Outline Scope of Module 2. This section covers the period from January 2020 to February 2022, including the periods covered in my previous two statements, with further information set out in Annex B.

### **C. ACTIONS BETWEEN 1 NOVEMBER 2020 AND 24 FEBRUARY 2022**

#### **Shielding**

37. Key decision-making relating to the Shielding programme rested with COVID-O, and the Department’s role continued to involve co-ordination of the programme and managing the relationship with LAs on behalf of all the engaged central departments. As explained in my earlier statements, the Department was responsible for making sure the different parts of the Shielding programme, delivered by various departments, came together in support of the overall goal of providing support to Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (“**CEV**”) individuals. Clinical advice relating to shielding was not provided by this Department, including the advice that fed into the decision to stop the Shielding programme permanently, which is explained in more detail later in this section. During the time period covered by this witness statement, there were five key areas of decision making in which the Department was involved. I deal with these five areas of decision making below by addressing the areas separately, although there is some chronological overlap.

#### ***(i) the activation of national shielding***

38. On 31 October 2020, the Prime Minister announced new national restrictions to come into force from 5 November 2020 to 2 December 2020. This was announced in response to a rise in Covid-19 cases and is often referred to as the ‘second lockdown’. More formally, these are known as the ‘November 2020 National Restrictions’.

39. On or around 31 October 2020, on the basis of Deputy Chief Medical Officer (“**DCMO**”) advice, COVID-O decided that new advice for CEV individuals would be introduced nationally from 5 November 2020 in line with the November 2020 National Restrictions. This advice involved CEV individuals being strongly advised to work from home and if they could not do so, then they should not attend work, as well as being advised not to go to shops or pharmacies. This guidance was circulated in a joint letter dated 4 November 2020 from the DHSC and the Department (**JP3/01 – INQ000137034**).
40. On 18 November 2020, the Department published Version 2 of the LA Shielding Framework (COVID-19 Guidance to LAs on support to CEV individuals) (**JP3/02 – INQ000137035**). Version 1 having been issued on 13 October 2020 (**JP3/03 – INQ000137036**), which reflected updated clinical guidance to CEV individuals and what was expected of LAs to support individuals during the November 2020 National Restrictions. This version took on board feedback via the Shielding Stakeholder Engagement Forum and nine regional briefings with LAs.
41. On 3 December 2020, the Department shared Version 3 of the LA Shielding Framework (**JP3/04 – INQ000137037**) with LAs to reflect the return to the tiered system.
42. In line with the LA Shielding Framework, support for CEV individuals was arranged nationally and delivered locally. On 21 December 2020, shielding advice was updated on gov.uk, explaining that letters would be issued to all those affected by the new shielding rules for Tier 4 areas. This letter was signed off by the Department’s SoS and DHSCs SoS and advised CEV individuals to take extra measures to protect themselves, including staying at home as much as possible and strongly advising them to work from home if they could; if they could not, they should not attend work. The same letter was reissued to CEV individuals as more areas were added to Tier 4 (**JP3/05 – INQ000137038**). The advice was to remain in place until 21 February 2021; this period was later extended to 31 March 2021.
43. On 4 January 2021, the Department was informed at a CO Taskforce that DCMO had advised that if national restrictions were imposed, shielding would be re-introduced nationally. On the same day the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown and the re-introduction of shielding nationally from 5 January 2021.

***(ii) the introduction of Tier 4***

44. At meetings in the evening of 18 December 2020 and in the morning of 19 December 2020, COVID-O took the decision to introduce a new Tier 4: “stay at home” alert level. SoS (Robert Jenrick) was present at both meetings.



45. On 19 December 2020, the DCMO advised on the re-introduction of shielding in Tier 4 areas for the period of 20 December 2020 to 18 January 2021 (originally) and later extended to 31 March 2021. The advice from the DCMO was for shielding guidance to be akin to the measures in place during November 2020 National Restrictions. Further information on the Department's role with respect to Tiering and lockdowns can be found in the 'Closures, compliance and enforcement' section of this witness statement.
46. On 23 December 2020 Version 4 of the LA Shielding Framework (**JP3/06 – INQ000137039**) was introduced by the Department covering guidance and expectations for support to CEV individuals at Tier 3 and Tier 4 and when shielding guidance is in place. Version 4 was updated on 30 December 2020 and 8 January 2021.
47. On 23 December 2020, the Department wrote to LAs to re-introduce their local shielding support offer in areas where CEV individuals were advised to shield (**JP3/07 – INQ000137040**).
48. On 30 December 2020, DHSC announced that more areas would move into Tier 4 effective from 31 December 2020. This Department provided updated guidance to LAs on 30 December 2020 letting them know that shielding would be re-introduced in those areas and would remain in effect until at least 1 February 2021 (**JP3/08 – INQ000137041**). LAs were asked to deploy a contact strategy appropriate for their area, prioritising those CEV individuals in receipt of support during the November 2020 National Restrictions and ensuring that communications reflected the latest national advice and were accessible and in line with Equality Act 2010 duties. Those LAs not in Tier 4 were requested to continue to make preparations to stand up support as needed. On 7 January 2021, a further letter from the Department's SoS and DHSCs SoS was sent to those shielding following the new national lockdown on 4 January 2021.

***(iii) QCovid (Risk Stratification) classification***

49. As set out in my previous witness statement, beginning in late summer 2020, a New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group research team led by Oxford University developed a data-driven, predictive risk model, to better understand the cumulative risk for individuals of hospitalisation and death from Covid-19 taking into account wider factors such as age, ethnicity and BMI. This formed the basis of a new QCovid classification. The Department anticipated that this new classification could cause significant pressures on its support offer and on 2 February 2021 carried out a public sector equality duty ("**PSSED**") assessment. Overall, the assessment found that while the impact on the support offer carried a small risk of adversely or disproportionately impacting some individuals with protected characteristics, it was believed that the Department's mitigations would continue to be effective in managing these, including as QCOVID was rolled out.

50. On 3 February 2021, COVID-O made the decision to approve the addition of 1.9 million individuals to the Shielded Patient List (“**SPL**”), based on a recommendation from DHSC.
51. On 17 February 2021, Version 4 of the LA Shielding Framework was updated (**JP3/09 – INQ000137042**) further to cover the application of the QCovid model. Subsequently on 17 March 2021, Version 5 (the final version) of the LA Shielding Framework was published to reflect the national pause of shielding advice (**JP3/10 – INQ000137043**).

***(iv) the future scope of shielding support and contingency***

52. In April 2021, the Department and DHSC were considering options for a contingency support model. The Department carried out a PSED to review the effectiveness of mitigations in place to identify any issues and reduce the risk of resulting unequal impacts on individuals with protected characteristics.
53. At a COVID-O meeting on 18 May 2021, attended by Minister for Housing and Rough Sleeping, Eddie Hughes, it was agreed that a contingency support model for shielding would be retained until March 2022, subject to a review in August 2021. In practice this meant: retaining links with LAs with a contingency funding model to be agreed with HMT in case it was needed; retaining the ability to utilise the National Shielding Support System website should it be needed; and retaining data and readiness within LAs and supermarkets to facilitate provision of support should it be needed in future (including additional support from LAs and priority access to supermarket delivery slots). This decision was based on a joint paper from the Department and DHSC with the clinical context signed off by the Chief Medical Officer’ office (**JP3/11 – INQ000137044**).

***(v) shielding support and contingency shut down***

54. At the contingency support model review point in August 2021, the Department carried out another PSED assessment to consider the impact of ending the SPL and associated Shielding Programme. The assessment did not identify any disproportionate impacts on protected groups from shutting down shielding and identified some positives around increased clarity on the end of the programme.
55. Subsequently, the Department and DHSC supplied a joint paper (**JP3/12 – INQ000137045**) to a COVID-O meeting on 6 September 2021, attended by Minister for Housing, Chris Pincher, where the decision was made to end shielding advice permanently and shut down the contingency support model. DHSC with support from the Chief Medical Officer’ office led on the clinical advice to support this decision.

56. At this meeting, it was agreed that the Department would work with DHSC, Department of Work and Pensions and other relevant departments, to inform the 3.7 million people on the SPL that they would no longer be identified as CEV and that shielding policy was being stood down. Ministers also agreed to a proposed cross-Government support approach for both CEV individuals and those still at-risk post-vaccination, such as the immunosuppressed and immunocompromised groups.
57. The Department also advised the COVID-O meeting on 06 September 2021 that delivery partners would be required to delete data – in effect removing the ability to reinstate priority supermarket delivery slots; that the Department should instruct LAs to stand down their operational readiness; and that the government funding commitments for LAs to service shielding should end.
58. The Department worked with Government Digital Service on advising on the relative risks and benefits to Government of shutting down the National Shielding Support System. The change in clinical context and the fact that by this stage vulnerability to Covid-19 had changed meant that the existing data and support model would no longer be fit for purpose even in a worst-case scenario. On this basis, and as there were significant risks associated with holding and moving large volumes of people’s sensitive data, the Department advised the Government Digital Service to delete the personal identifiable information recorded on the National Shielding Support System.
59. In line with the decision made at the COVID-O meeting on 6 September 2021, the SPL and associated Shielding Programme as a contingency support offer was stood down on 15 September 2021. DHSC published a press release stating that the requirement for shielding guidance for people previously considered to be CEV was coming to an end.

### **Funding Support for Local Authorities**

60. This section sets out the package of measures introduced to support LAs and on ASC, the help provided to ensure adequate funding to meet additional costs. The main point at which financial support for LAs in the 2021/22 financial year was agreed was at the Spending Review which concluded in November 2020 (“**SR20**”). Negotiations between Departmental Ministers and HMT saw the following agreed at SR20:
- A fifth tranche of unringfenced funding for LAs, worth £1.55 billion;
  - Extending the Sales, Fees and Charges income replacement (“**SFC**”) scheme to cover Quarter 1 of 2021/22;

- Creating the Tax Income Guarantee scheme to compensate LAs for irrecoverable losses in 2020/21; and
- Providing £670 million in funding for additional Local Council Tax Support (“LCTS”) caseloads for 2021/22.

61. The SoS (Robert Jenrick) and Minister Luke Hall had advice from officials on 8 December 2020 seeking approval for an announcement of the details of the package of measures (**JP3/13 – INQ000137046**).

***Additional unringfenced funding***

62. The Department anticipated that councils would continue to experience higher costs for delivering services due to the pandemic. On 17 December 2020, the Department published a consultative paper to seek feedback (**JP3/14 – INQ000137047**) from stakeholders on the £1.55 billion of unringfenced funding for LAs in 2021/22 announced at SR20. The purpose of the consultative paper was to finalise the position on the four Covid-19 funding positions listed above and the Covid-19 financial impact monitoring (“FIM”) survey (alongside the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement).

63. Departmental ministers agreed to allocating this using the same Covid-19 Relative Needs Formula used for the third and fourth tranches of funding as described in my second witness statement. As with previous tranches of unringfenced funding, the consultative paper set out details of the priority areas for use of this expenditure, which focused on vulnerable groups, especially ASC, as well as support for CEV people and other essential expenditure. The paper also made clear that LAs should plan on the basis of not receiving any additional funding after this tranche.

***Sales, Fees & Charges***

64. The Department was concerned that councils would continue to see reduced income from SFC. SR20 therefore announced that the SFC Scheme would continue for the first three months on 2021/22 on the same basis as for 2020/21. This meant that the Government would compensate councils for 75p in every pound of eligible losses compared to budgets, above 5% of their planned SFC income.

***Tax Income Guarantee Scheme***

65. As noted in my previous statement, the Department anticipated that the pandemic would reduce LA income from Council Tax and Business Rates. The Government had previously committed to apportion tax income losses between central and local government. SR20 announced that

the Government would compensate LAs for 75% of irrecoverable losses in Council Tax and Business Rates income for the 2020/21 financial year.

***Local Council Tax Support***

66. The Department anticipated that LAs could see financial challenge through elevated LCTS caseloads, and SR20 announced £670 million funding to address this. LAs have a statutory duty to provide LCTS (which reduces the Council Tax bills) to those in financial hardship and have little control over caseloads. For 2021/22 it was decided that the most appropriate approach was to target funding according to LCTS caseloads.

***Sector engagement***

67. As stated above, interested parties were given from 17 December 2020 to 14 January 2021 to give their views on the four funding streams announced at SR20.
68. This culminated in the publication of a policy paper (**JP3/15 – INQ000137048**) in February 2021, which confirmed that:
- The additional LCTS funding would be distributed as set out in the consultative paper
  - For the Tax Income Guarantee scheme, front-loaded on-account cash payments would be made early in financial year 2021/22 before being reconciled against final outturn data; and
  - The SFC scheme would be extended into Quarter 1 of 2021/22 on the same basis as the 2020/21 scheme.

***Data***

69. The approach taken to data and modelling was broadly the same as in my second witness statement. The Local Government Finance Directorate continued to share data confidentially from the FIM process with relevant policy teams in a wide range of OGDs. These data sources were used to estimate the expected financial pressures on LAs arising from the Covid-19 pandemic on an ongoing basis. As the response progressed and more evidence became available it was possible to have more confidence in that modelling. With each completed FIM round, new analysis was produced of the latest estimates of a) pressures realised in the year to date; b) forecast pressures for the remainder of the financial year in question; and c) a comparison of these pressures with funding awarded to each LA.

***Cashflow relief***

70. There was one significant financial measure in this period not announced at SR20. In early 2021, it was recognised that the interaction of large Covid-19 business rates reliefs announced with the existing Business Rates Retention system would create cashflow problems for Major Precepting Authorities, County Councils and Fire & Rescue Authorities. Where the Government put in place reliefs from business rates, this could reduce income for LAs. The Government provided a grant to LAs to compensate for this change in income. However, the requirements of the Business Rates Retention system meant that Major Precepting Authorities would be required to make payments to other authorities before receiving this compensatory funding. To address this, the Department changed the schedule of payments between LAs via adjustment to the regulations. Officials submitted advice (**JP3/16 – INQ000137049**) to Minister Hall on 9 February 2021, which recommended he agreed to make the deferral, and to make the amending regulations subject to further consultation with LAs. Minister Hall agreed to the deferral and to make the regulations on 11 February 2021. Changes were then made to the regulations, which deferred relevant payments from Major Precepting Authorities to other LAs until March 2022.

**Adult Social Care**

71. During the period covered by this statement, the Department continued its role set out in my previous statements to: (1) work with DHSC to ensure LAs received adequate funding for the additional costs councils faced and those faced by providers; and, (2) to support communication and joint work between DHSC and councils so that DHSC policy properly considered the needs of councils in delivering their ASC roles and responsibilities in the pandemic. This included DHSC's work on workforce and infection control.
72. On (1) above, as set out in the previous statements, the Department led on funding for local government per its usual responsibilities through the Local Government Finance Settlement 2021-22. During the period of time covered by this statement, the Department led on the fifth tranche of un-ringfenced funding. This was worth £1.55 billion, as set out in the above section of this statement on Funding Support for LAs. LAs are always able to spend their un-ringfenced funding, including locally-raised revenue, on ASC services. DHSC separately delivered 8 rounds of specific ringfenced funding to LAs for infection control, testing, vaccines, and workforce capacity during the time covered by this statement. Decisions taken on this funding were made by DHSC, with the Department contributing to communications to LAs.
73. On (2) above, while DHSC retained responsibility for decisions regarding ASC policy, the Department sent joint Ministerial letters with DHSC to help LAs manage pressures in ASC. On 21 December 2021, the SoS for the Department, (Michael Gove) and the SoS for DHSC (Sajid

Javid) wrote jointly (**JP3/17 – INQ000137050**) to LAs regarding joint working with the NHS to respond to Omicron. On 18 January 2022, the SoS (Michael Gove) wrote to LAs outlining the need to protect statutory services, including ASC (**JP3/18 – INQ000137051**).

### **Personal Protective Equipment**

74. Once the emergency supply of PPE to LRFs was ended in September 2020, and the DHSC PPE Portal was fully operational, the Department ensured that LA PPE spend was tracked and costs were funded. The Local Government Finance team worked with LAs to produce financial monitoring returns and the Department used this data to ensure LA reimbursement needs were met via DHSC's Contain Outbreak Management Fund ("**COMF**").
75. The Department responded to issues raised by LRFs and Government Liaison Officers directly via the Local Government Response mailbox, and facilitated support for agencies, departments and local networks that directly worked in the public sector to obtain PPE items. The Local Government Response team communicated local issues to DHSC at fortnightly PPE OGDs Board Meetings.
76. On 29 October 2021, the Covid Response team co-ordinated a response for the Department to DHSC's cross-Government consultation (**JP3/19 – INQ000137052**) on the future procurement and distribution of PPE. The Department evidenced its consideration of the needs of DIGs by engaging with its Supported Housing, DA and Rough Sleeping teams in order to understand the needs of the sectors and to inform the Department's survey response. The return specified that although PPE had not been bought for the Department, it had been bought by sectors relevant to the Department's remit through the existing supply chain; the return provided information relating to the types of PPE that would be mostly required after March 2021 in DA and rough sleeping settings. It specified that the continuation of the current well-established route with DHSC and the continuing use of LA or LRF drop off points would be a determining factor in choosing to purchase PPE via the NHS Supply Chain rather than through other manufacturers/suppliers in the market.
77. Following DHSC's confirmation that PPE would continue to be free beyond March 2022, the Local Government Response team facilitated links between the Rough Sleeping and DA teams and DHSC's PPE policy team so that sector organisations could be registered on DHSC's PPE portal in order to continue to receive free PPE.

### **Tiering, Restrictions and Closures**

78. In my second witness statement, I outlined the Department's work to support the Government's move to introduce local restriction tiers by area. This introduced a three tier system of local

Covid-19 Alert Levels in England which was announced by the Prime Minister on the 12 October 2020.

79. In the period covered by this statement the Department's focus continued to be engagement with LAs and, supporting the CO Covid-19 Taskforce and DHSC to ensure that decision-making took account of the Department's interests from the second national lockdown through to the implementation of Plan B measures in 2021. The Department carried out this function by (i) attending cross-government meetings chaired by CO and DHSC where collective decisions on tiering restrictions and closures were made; (ii) providing updates to internal teams and local partners; and (iii) responding to commissions from CO and DHSC to feed in the Department's interests.
80. In addition, the Department ensured that the Mayor of London and London LAs had an opportunity to feed into central discussions on Tiering through a specific London Covid-19 escalation process which was agreed on 11 September 2020. This process set out steps that were to be taken when closures were being considered for London. This work was managed by the Department's London Taskforce and the approach had been agreed with DHSC, No. 10, the Mayor of London and London LAs.
81. The Department's work was primarily overseen by Emran Mian, Director General in the Department who led the response as Senior Reporting Officer, initially through the Department's Winter structures which were set up in November 2020. There were several different phases to this area of work which are set out in chronological order in the subheadings below.

***The Winter Plan***

82. On 31 October 2020 following an announcement by the Prime Minister, the tier regulations were revoked and replaced with a second national lockdown in England that came into force on 5 November 2020.
83. At the COVID-O meeting on 21 November 2020 the Government agreed to publish its "Winter Plan", developed by the CO, which set out the Government's approach to coming out of lockdown and managing Covid-19 throughout the winter; this included (i) moving back to a regional tiered approach at the end of the national lockdown on 2 December 2020; and (ii) launching the community testing programme, which the Department supported DHSC to develop. Further information on this programme and the Department's role is set out in the section on community testing below. Briefing (**JP3/20 – INQ000137053**) provided to the SoS (Robert Jenrick) for this meeting set out the Department's position and raised key points for LAs such as transparency on thresholds for moving between tiers, and clarity on geographical



allocations, as well as calling for more engagement with LAs expected to deliver community testing.

84. Following the publication of the Winter Plan, a COVID-O meeting took place on 25 November 2020 to agree the tier placements for each region from 2 December 2020. Proposed geographical allocations were based on recommendations from DHSC with some marginal cases the committee were asked to decide on. One of these marginal cases was London and Essex, with DHSC putting forward options for the committee to consider on the placement and potential division of London and Essex in respect of Tier 2/3 allocation. These options were:
- Option 1: London and the whole of Essex move to Tier 2
  - Option 2: London and Southwest Essex (Basildon, Brentwood and Epping Forest) move to Tier 3 with central and east Essex in Tier 2
  - Option 3: London is split with most of London and Essex in Tier 2 and East London and Southwest Essex in Tier 3 (Havering, Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham, Bexley).
85. The Department's view was that London should continue to be treated as one region. Officials provided a briefing (**JP3/21 – INQ000137054**) for SoS (Robert Jenrick) ahead of the COVID-O meeting making this recommendation, as well as highlighting the economic importance of London emerging in tier 2 for local leaders.
86. Following the COVID-O meeting on 25 November 2020, final decisions were agreed following a Cabinet meeting on 26 November 2020, where tiering allocations were finalised, which included London and the whole of Essex moving to Tier 2. DHSC then published a Written Ministerial Statement setting out the return to the regional tiered approach. The Written Ministerial Statement also set out the launch of the community testing programme which would be open to all LAs in Tier 3 areas.
87. In parallel to the publication of the Written Ministerial Statement, the Department wrote to LAs to notify them of the Tier levels, (**JP3/22 – INQ000137055**) and (**JP3/23 – INQ000137056**) and the SoS (Robert Jenrick) and the Department's ministerial team and officials then led engagement with the nine English regions (represented by Mayors, LA Leaders and Chief Executives and LRF Chairs) to discuss the decisions. These were led by the SoS (Robert Jenrick), the Minister for Housing, Christopher Pincher, the Local Government Minister, Luke Hall, and the Minister for Building Safety and Communities, Lord Stephen Greenhalgh, and supported by representatives from PHE, Regional Convenors, the CO Covid-19 Taskforce, DHSC, NHS Team Members, and the Local Government Association ("**LGA**"). Feedback from

these meetings was shared with CO and No.10 (**JP3/24 – INQ000137057**) and (**JP3/25 – INQ000137058**).

88. In line with the Winter Plan, on 2 December 2020 the second national lockdown ended, and the country returned to a regional, tiered approach with a statutory review of tiers every two weeks. During this time, decisions on tiering allocations continued to be made by at COVID-O based on public health recommendations informed by several factors, including case detection rate, positivity in the general population and NHS capacity. The Department continued to advocate for the needs of LAs and played a supporting role in engaging with LAs. For example, on 10 and 11 December 2020, the Department facilitated a series of tiering calls with Mayors and LA leaders (**JP3/26 – INQ000137059**).

89. Key dates relating to tiering and closures are set out below:

- 16 December 2020: At a COVID-O meeting attended by SoS (Robert Jenrick), a collective decision was taken on regional tiering allocations,
- 19 December 2020: Following a COVID-O meeting, the Prime Minister announced tougher restrictions for London and South East England, with a new Tier 4: 'Stay at Home' alert level. The rules on Christmas mixing were also tightened.
- 21 December 2020: The Tier 4 restrictions came into force in London and South East England.
- 23 December 2020: At a COVID-O meeting, tiering restrictions were collectively reviewed and agreed before the Christmas holiday period. On 26 December 2020, more areas of England entered Tier 4 restrictions.
- 4 January 2021: Following a cross-government regulations meeting to discuss increased restrictions and a Cabinet call which SoS attended, the Prime Minister announced that England would enter a national lockdown.
- 6 January 2021: England entered the third national lockdown.

***Exiting National Restrictions/The Roadmap***

90. On 22 February 2021 the Government published guidance setting out a four-step plan ("**the Roadmap**") to lift Covid-19 restrictions in England. Each step of the roadmap required regulations in order to ease restrictions.

91. As the Department's previous role on regulations had moved to DHSC in October 2020, for this subsequent period it was one of a number of interested departments which supported CO and DHSC to provide feedback on draft regulations and other restrictions.

92. The Department's focus was to ensure that LAs were engaged in the development of restrictions and that they were well informed about regulations they had to enforce, as well as ensuring they had sufficient powers to do so. The Department carried out this engagement function by (i) attending cross-government meetings chaired by CO and DHSC; (ii) providing updates to internal teams and local partners (**JP3/27 – INQ000137060**); and (iii) responding to commissions from CO and DHSC.
93. The steps to lift Covid-19 restrictions in England were: (1a and 1b) the relaxing of social restrictions; (2) the reopening of businesses in outdoor settings; (3) the reopening of businesses indoors; and (4) the complete reopening of society and the economy.
94. On 29 January 2021, a Departmental Winter(O) meeting took place to discuss the CO announcement of a new roadmap which would be published in February 2021, setting out the Government's exit strategy from national restrictions. Following this meeting, work commenced to prepare advice for Ministers and CO on the Department's priorities around exit.
95. This work culminated in a paper setting out exit strategy priorities for the Department. This included key considerations to enable LAs to successfully deliver the Roadmap such as collaboration with local government and co-design of their role in delivery, as well as assessment of LA capacity to deliver and the funding implications. This paper was shared with the CO on 4 February 2021 (**JP3/28 – INQ000137061**). In addition to this paper, the Department provided further comments to support the drafting of the Roadmap in relation to protecting vulnerable people following a request from the CO on 10 February 2021.
96. On 21 February 2021, a COVID-S meeting took place attended by SoS (Robert Jenrick) and the Roadmap was signed off. It was published on 22 February 2021 on GOV.UK (**JP3/29 – INQ000075756**).
97. Following the publication of the Roadmap, CO asked government departments for views on potential regulatory issues, or areas that required further clarity associated with the various NPIs at each step of the roadmap. The Department responded to the CO commission and provided feedback (**JP3/30 – INQ000137063**) on potential regulatory issues arising from the associated steps of the Roadmap to support the design of the Roadmap Regulations. The Department also provided a return on LA enforcement issues related to VoC work being carried out by Joint Biosecurity Centre/DHSC due to related considerations around regulations (**JP3/31 – INQ000137064**).
98. Additional key dates in relation to the exiting national restrictions are set out below:
- 8 March 2021, England began a phased exit from lockdown following the Roadmap.

- 12 April 2021, outdoor activities and trials of indoor activities were permitted as part of the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions.
- 17 May 2021, limited indoor mixing and the reopening of indoor hospitality venues took effect.
- 19 July 2021, most remaining restrictions in England were lifted.

***Introduction of Plan B***

99. On 14 September 2021 the Government published a Covid-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan (**JP3/32 – INQ000137065**). This included a proposal for 'Plan B' measures which could be introduced if needed - communications on cautious behaviours, introduction of mandatory vaccine-only Covid-19 certification ('Covid passes') and the introduction of mandatory face coverings in certain settings.
100. CO led the development of policies for Covid passes and face coverings and DHSC led the development of corresponding regulations. The Department played a supporting role by convening a subset of the Department's Compliance Working Group ("**CWG**") for CO and DHSC to consult LA compliance and enforcement experts at key points of development, as LAs would be responsible for enforcement against businesses. Further information about the CWG is set out in the Compliance and Enforcement section below. The Department also had an interest in which settings face coverings and Covid passes would be mandated.
101. On 25 October 2021, the Department was commissioned by CO to work with DHSC to produce a paper on Plan B delivery readiness ahead of a COVID-O meeting. This COVID-O was scheduled for 28 October 2021 but subsequently cancelled by the CO Covid-19 Taskforce.
102. On 27 October 2021, a COVID-O (O) senior officials meeting took place on Plan B delivery readiness, where it was agreed that the Department would work with the CO Covid-19 Taskforce on the criteria for LA compliance officers carrying out compliance checks for certification and on options for prioritisation of enforcement.
103. On 28 October 2021, a submission to SoS (Michael Gove) set out the Department's role and interests in Plan B (**JP3/33 – INQ000137066**).
104. During November 2021, the Department's officials continued to support counterparts in CO and DHSC to develop the draft policy, regulations, and guidance. It also worked with the Office for Product Standards and Safety to plan communication with LAs if Plan B was enacted.
105. On 8 December 2021, the CO Covid-19 Taskforce proposed the introduction of Plan B measures and this was agreed at COVID-O. The Department supported the Office for Product

Safety and Standards in providing appropriate communications to LAs in relation to compliance and enforcement of new regulations.

### **Compliance and Enforcement**

106. As noted in my second statement, the Department's Closures Team stood down on 2 October 2020 after which DHSC formally assumed full responsibility in relation to Public Health Regulations. From that date, CO and DHSC led on cross-Government development of regulations in relation to restrictions.
107. During the period of this statement, the Department had a role to support CO and DHSC to consult LA compliance and enforcement experts when drafting regulations and guidance. The Department also enabled LAs to provide feedback to CO and DHSC on the whether LAs had adequate powers and could generate sufficient capacity to fulfil their role in assessing business compliance at a local level as restrictions changed. LAs shared responsibility for business compliance with the Health and Safety Executive ("**HSE**"). LAs enforced against premises including retail, hospitality, and offices. HSE enforced against more industrial premises, such as manufacturing plants.

#### ***Local Authority powers and supporting regulatory development***

108. As set out above in the section on Plan B, the Department supported CO and DHSC to engage LA experts to inform better regulatory drafting and taking steps to ensure LAs had support capacity, and to consider the implications for compliance and enforcement delivery. The Department facilitated this primarily through the CWG which was set up in Autumn 2020 and was regularly attended by Environmental Health Officers, Trading Standards Officers and stakeholders from the LGA and the Office for Product Safety and Standards and HSE.

#### ***Enhanced powers – December 2020***

109. In the run up to Autumn/Winter 2020, effective, targeted enforcement was considered an important component of reducing transmission. The CWG considered what could be done to enhance LA enforcement powers. This fed into the DHSC's development of the LA Enforcement Powers Regs and the supporting guidance.
110. These regulations came into force on the 2 December 2020 and allowed councils immediately to issue Coronavirus Improvement Notices, Coronavirus Restriction Notices and Coronavirus Immediate Restriction Notices against businesses which were not complying with regulations. These powers expired on 19 July 2021 as being unnecessary beyond the Roadmap period / Step 4.

***Extending the No.3 Regulations beyond Step 4***

111. During summer 2021 the Joint Biosecurity Centre consulted OGDs on whether The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations 2020 (“**the No. 3 Regulations**”) should be extended. These Regulations gave LAs powers to close specific individual premises, outdoor public spaces and events in response to serious and imminent threats to public health posed by Covid-19.
112. The Department made recommendations (**JP3/34 – INQ000137067**) to Joint Biosecurity Centre based on evidence gathered from LAs which suggested that the Regulations should be extended because they gave LAs the discretion to act more quickly and precisely than other regulations under certain limited circumstances. This work culminated in the decision taken by CO and No.10 to retain the No. 3 Regulations until at least September 2021.
113. The Department also supported DHSC in developing revised guidance for the No. 3 Regulations which covered how they might be used in a Step 4 context, giving them an ability to be utilised after the end of national Covid-19 restrictions. The No. 3 Regulations were retained as residual powers until 24 February 2022.

***Local Authority Capacity***

114. Alongside the work outlined above on restrictions and powers, the Department had a role in monitoring that LAs could generate sufficient capacity, in particular staff, to carry out compliance and enforcement work. Following reports of a shortage of Environmental Health Officers, the Department put a paper to COVID-O on 11 November 2020 (**JP3/35 – INQ000137068**), with a range of measures for increasing capacity which included (i) expanding the HSE offer to allow remote spot checks on businesses, taking pressure off LA qualified staff; (ii) developing a good practice framework to identify approaches to support high-quality compliance and enforcement activity (**JP3/36 – INQ000137069**); (iii) progressing work by the Food Standards Agency to introduce a new activity-based competency framework to facilitate recruitment of staff, reducing pressure on key staff; and (iv) progressing work to explore whether there were any barriers, or any mechanisms government could deploy to ensure LAs conducted mutual aid where possible. The paper also asked Ministers to agree new enforcement regulations to be introduced (which had been delayed, following initial agreement at COVID-O on 21 October 2020). COVID-O recommended that departments take forward the proposals and confirmed that DHSC should agree with No. 10 a slot to bring in the new LA powers before 2 December 2020.

***Funding: Compliance and Enforcement Grant and Dashboard***

115. In November 2020, the Department paid a £30 million ringfenced grant to support LAs to drive compliance and enforcement activity. The funding was intended to allow LAs to appoint Covid-19 marshals alongside other activity. It was calculated to provide enough for four months of activity. The grant was allocated to LAs with lower tier responsibilities using the Covid-19 Relative Needs Formula, which factors in population density and multiple indices of deprivation – two drivers of high rates of Covid-19 transmission.
116. The Department produced a regular Compliance and Enforcement dashboard until August 2021, which brought together data from across government. The dashboard combined data (**JP3/37 – INQ000137070**) from the Office for Product Safety and Standards Covid-19 Business Restrictions Survey and DHSC data on use of the No.3 Regulations, as well as information from relevant media coverage, and feedback from councils via LRFs and the CWG to provide a summary of compliance and enforcement activity in England for the SoS (Robert Jenrick).

**Local Outbreaks and the CONTAIN framework**

117. In the period covered by this statement the Department was not responsible for making decisions in responding to local outbreaks. The Department played a supporting role with a focus on representing local government interests in policy development, implementation, and delivery in managing local outbreaks and responding to Covid-19 VoC.
118. As set out in my second statement, on 17 July 2020, DHSC published the Contain Framework as a guide for local decision makers to prevent, manage and contain outbreaks of Covid-19 in their communities, as well as setting out the decision-making and incident response structures. Once the UK Health Security Agency was set up in April 2021 responsibility for this framework moved to them.
119. The Contain Framework set out the requirements of LAs on the Covid-19 response, and factoring these into their local outbreak management plans.
120. Local systems were required to publish, and regularly refresh their local outbreak management plans to align with the overall national response as it evolved, setting out their proposed response to outbreaks and VoC.
121. The Contain Framework provided detail on the funding available to LAs through the COMF. This was a DHSC fund set up to support LAs to carry out public health activities directly related to the Covid-19 response, such as: testing, non-financial support for self-isolation, support to vulnerable groups, communications and engagement, compliance and enforcement.

122. COMF was DHSC's primary source of funding to support LAs to deliver their outbreak management plans and implement measures to tackle enduring transmission, and enhanced response activity in areas with particularly challenging situations. For the financial year 2021 to 2022 £400 million was allocated using the Department's Covid-19 Relative Needs formula, which was weighted according to population and deprivation, allowing for funding to be directed appropriately.
123. The Department supported DHSC to revisit the Contain Framework on several occasions, to develop how national and local partners worked with the public and businesses at a local level to prevent, contain and manage outbreaks, dependant on the epidemiological situation at the time. The Department contributed to this by feeding into the review processes established by the Contain Framework Task and Finish Group (**JP3/38 – INQ000137071**). This was set up by DHSC in February 2021 to oversee the work to refresh the Contain Framework to set out national and local roles and responsibilities on the end-to-end response, including emerging work on VoCs. The Department provided further feedback (**JP3/39 – INQ000137072**) ahead of a COVID-O meeting on 4 March 2021, calling for DHSC to work with the Department to engage LAs on tackling enduring transmission. On 9 March 2021 COVID-O agreed to the publication of a refreshed Contain Framework in March, subject to clearance by No. 10, HMT, the CO Covid-19 Taskforce and the Department. This first update of the Contain Framework was published on 18 March 2021 following the publication of the Roadmap.
124. The Contain Framework also set out the measures available to provide support to local areas facing challenging situations through DHSC's Enhanced Response Area ("ERA") package. These ERAs were designed to respond early to unusual rises in cases allowing more time to manage the disease and its impacts locally to avoid overwhelming local NHS pressure.
125. On 14 May 2021, the Prime Minister held a press conference to announce extra measures to tackle the spread of the Delta variant in three LAs (Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire). On 21 May 2021, this was extended to an additional five LAs (Bedford, Burnley, Hounslow, Leicester, and North Tyneside) following the Health Secretary's announcement on 19 May 2021 of further measures for these areas. The Department and DHSC held conversations with several Chief Executives of LAs and Directors of Public Health at affected LAs following the coverage of these changes.
126. On 3 June 2021, SoS (Robert Jenrick) attended a COVID-O meeting where DHSC presented a paper which included further details of the ERA package which could be offered to all areas experiencing rapid growth of the Delta VoC and designated as an ERA. The meeting also included a proposal to agree additional local areas to apply these measures to outside of the



existing 8 LAs already designated as ERAs. The committee agreed the extension of the ERA package and that DHSC and the Department would lead local engagement ahead of an announcement in the week commencing 7 June 2021.

127. On 21 June 2021, in preparation of moving toward Step 4 in the Roadmap, DHSC engaged the Department to support with updating the Contain Framework and the supporting Outbreak Management Response Toolkit. Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 5 July 2021 to set out the five-point plan for living with Covid, DHSC asked for a further review of the documents before publication of an updated Contain Framework, which the Department provided on 8 July 2021.
128. On 30 July 2021, the updated Contain Framework was published following the move to step 4 of the Roadmap. This was agreed at official level.
129. On 17 September 2021, DHSC shared an updated Contain Framework and asked for comments from the Department. On 30 September 2021, DHSC shared an updated draft of the Contain Framework with the Department, seeking final comments and the Department's approval prior to publication. On 1 October 2021, officials in the Department gave their approval to DHSC to publish the updated Contain Framework (**JP3/40 – INQ000137073**).
130. On 7 October 2021, the updated Contain Framework was published in line with the Covid-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan 2021. The Contain Framework was formally withdrawn on 7 April 2022, following the publication of the guidance: Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 on 1 April 2022 (**JP3/41 – INQ000137074**).

#### **Safer Public Places and 'Covid Marshals'**

131. The Department continued to publish guidance to reduce the risk of transmission in certain public spaces, as described in my previous statement. During the period covered by this statement, the Department fed into the development of legislation and measures responding to fluctuations in Covid-19 transmission, alongside maintaining guidance to advise owners and operators of public spaces on how to keep these settings safe.
132. As per my previous statement, the three pieces of guidance managed by the Department were:
  - Managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms;
  - Safer Urban Centres and Green Spaces; and
  - Managing Beaches, the Countryside and Coastal Areas.
133. Ahead of step 4 of the Government's Spring 2021 Roadmap, the CO commissioned departments to streamline or remove all Covid-19 guidance where necessary. The

Department's officials proposed to consolidate these guidance documents into a single light touch piece of guidance. This was to help manage the lifting of restrictions, but to maintain good practice on hygiene and management. Minister Hall agreed this consolidation on 12 July 2021. Following comments from CO, PHE and DHSC, this consolidated guidance was published on 19 July 2021 (**JP3/42 – INQ000137075**).

134. Through autumn 2021, the Department maintained this guidance and led on coordinating any necessary updates. The consolidated guidance, 'Safer public places - managing public outdoor settings', was finally withdrawn in April 2022.
135. The team responsible for this guidance coordinated guidance updates across the Department. The CO commissioned all departments when changes were needed. Major changes required clearance via the CO, and in some cases also via No. 10. I exhibit a list of the Department's Covid-19 guidance including the stage at which they were withdrawn (**JP3/43 – INQ000137076**).

#### **Managed Quarantine Service**

136. The MQS provided quarantine hotels for those travelling to the UK from 'red list' countries and was launched by DHSC on 15 February 2021. The purpose of the MQS was to minimise the import of Covid-19 and to ensure that any new variants were identified. The Department did not have policy responsibility for the MQS and key decisions on this were led by DHSC.
137. Concerns were raised by LAs about the operation of the MQS at meetings convened by the Department on 21 and 26 April 2021, and by DfE on 10 May 2021. These included issues around standards, safeguarding, testing and transportation. Working with DHSC and DfE, the Department, with the support of the LGA, proposed (**JP3/44 – INQ000137077**) setting up of a Local Government steering group to address these concerns in an effort to provide a single vehicle for local government to input into the red list hotel quarantine element of the MQS programme.
138. The 'MQS Red List LG Steering Group' met for the first time on 21 May 2021 (**JP3/45 – INQ000137078**). The group brought together key MQS stakeholders so that local government could escalate any issues (not specific to one area/hotel) and opportunities directly with the leadership of the MQS, including the clear articulation of local roles and responsibilities (**JP3/46 – INQ000137079**).
139. The Department chaired the steering group several times until 21 July. DHSC then assumed responsibility until the final meeting on 3 November 2021.

## **Community Testing**

140. In November 2020, as part of the development of the Winter Plan the Government began to explore options to expand Covid-19 testing capacity with the Community Testing programme. As with other elements of the Winter Plan the Department was not responsible for decisions on this programme; its role was to ensure that DHSC understood what LAs could and could not deliver in respect of testing.
141. The Department liaised between local government and DHSC/NHS Test and Trace to ensure that the testing delivery mechanism through LAs, which eventually became the Community Testing programme, was achievable.
142. On 18 November 2020, COVID-O met to consider DHSC proposals for the expansion of mass testing capacity. DHSC's initial proposal was based on exploring the potential to scale up the city of Liverpool pilot of 'whole population testing' which would involve an offer to areas with the highest prevalence of Covid-19 in December 2020 and January 2021 for a programme of repeat testing over up to eight weeks. The Department's officials' briefing for SoS (Robert Jenrick) for this meeting focused on LA challenges, including prioritisation and capacity issues, and for additional consideration to be given to vulnerable groups (**JP3/47 – INQ000137080**). COVID-O agreed that DHSC should work with the Department to investigate adding homeless shelter and outreach support workers to the priority list for test allocations.
143. Across 18 November 2020 and 19 November 2020, the Department held calls with 30 councils across Yorkshire and the Humber, the North East and the North West to understand the challenges and appetite for whole population testing.
144. On 20 November 2020, feedback from these calls informed a submission to the SoS (Robert Jenrick) ahead of two separate meetings regarding next steps on whole population testing (**JP3/48 – INQ000137081**). These were (i) a meeting between SoS (Robert Jenrick) and DHSC Second Permanent Secretary (Shona Dunn) and; (ii) a COVID-O meeting scheduled for 21 November 2020. The submission highlighted that of the LAs that the Department had engaged, most did not see the benefit in wide scale whole population testing but would welcome assistance and support to deliver targeted testing at scale that focused on specific hard to reach communities or locations – either where prevalence was higher or those people who would not come forward for testing voluntarily.
145. On 21 November 2020, COVID-O met to agree plans for whole population testing. Briefing for the SoS (Robert Jenrick) (**JP3/49 – INQ000137082**) for the meeting set out that following the engagement calls of 18 and 19 November 2020, the majority of LAs would support targeted

testing, but expressed concerns about carrying out whole population testing. COVID-O agreed that the CO Covid-19 Taskforce would work with NHS Test and Trace to revise the proposals for community testing.

146. On 22 November 2020, a Cabinet meeting to discuss next steps on the Covid-19 response took place. Briefing for SoS (Robert Jenrick) set out a number of issues that needed clarifying to enable LAs to deliver targeted population testing (**JP3/50 – INQ000137083**). These included (i) clarification on funding and incentivisation; (ii) clarification on whether CEV individuals were in scope and the implications of this; and (iii) clarification on the support for and requests to be made of LAs.
147. On 23 November 2020, the Prime Minister made an oral statement to Parliament on the Covid-19 Winter Plan, which included announcing the launch of the Community Testing programme, involving an initial six-week surge of rapid lateral flow testing to LAs in tier 3 areas of England. After the initial offer prioritising LAs based on the Tier System, the programme was extended to all English LAs from 10 January 2021.
148. DHSC and NHS Test and Trace continued to support the Community Testing programme through providing lateral flow tests, funding and wider support until the end of July 2022 when the Government's Universal Testing Offer ended. Throughout this time the Department continued to play a role helping to ensure that LA needs were understood, but the Department was not responsible for significant decisions in relation to the programme.

#### **Local Authority Workforce Capacity**

149. In addition to the measures set out above on LA capacity in relation to enforcement powers, during the period set out in this witness statement the Department supported LAs to maintain sufficient workforce capacity to enable appropriate levels of public service delivery.

#### ***Workplace Testing Scheme***

150. On 8 January 2021, COVID-O agreed that NHS Test and Trace should establish a programme of widespread employer/workforce asymptomatic testing, in partnership with government departments, for workforces that could not work from home.
151. The Workplace Testing programme was led by DHSC/NHS Test and Trace. In order to establish a cross-government structure to shape the delivery of this programme, DHSC established the cross-government Director General Testing Strategy Group.
152. The initial scope of the Workplace Testing Offer was to support delivery of asymptomatic testing to large organisations with more than 250 employees.

153. As the Workplace Testing programme expanded, it brought workforces that the Department had an interest in into scope. Following the expansion, the Department played a supporting role by helping to ensure that organisations and sectors that the Department had an interest in were aware of the offer and that their interests were communicated back to DHSC (**JP3/51 – INQ000137084**). Workforces of interest to the Department included: supported housing services, housing associations, organisations working with rough sleepers and organisations working with victims of DA. The sectors set out above are not exhaustive but provide examples of key sectors in relation to this programme.
154. The Department also produced stakeholder communications to (i) promote the Workplace Testing programme and encourage take up; (ii) communicate changes or developments to the programme; and (iii) share guidance in relation to the programme (**JP3/52 – INQ000137085**).
155. Key dates in relation to the Workplace Testing programme are set out below;
- 28 January 2021: the cross-government Director General Testing Strategy Group convened to set out the expansion of the Workplace Testing programme, with the offer to be extended to employers with 50 or more employees rather than 250 employees. This was announced on 7 February 2021.
  - 3 February 2021: The cross-government Director General Testing Strategy Group confirmed that following COVID-O, an internal target had been set for all government departments of 75% for eligible employees in each sector that they were responsible for to be able to access testing through their employer by 31 March 2021.
  - 22 February 2021: CO announced via the release of the Covid-19 Response - Spring 2021 Roadmap that the Government's offer of free test kits to workplaces for staff who could not work at home would be extended until the end of June 2021.
  - 6 March 2021: DHSC announced that the Workplace Testing scheme was expanded to all businesses in England with workers who needed to leave their home to work, including those with fewer than 50 employees.
  - 11 March 2021: The Local Government Response Team produced a stakeholder communication which promoted the expanded Workplace Testing offer, together with more information on alternative routes for testing. This communication was sent to key stakeholders and sector bodies, such as the National Housing Federation, so that they could then share this with relevant workforces in their sectors.
  - 28 March 2021: DHSC announced the expansion of the Workplace Testing scheme to allow all employers to be able to offer their employees home testing.

- 19 July 2021: The Workplace Testing scheme ended in line with step 4 of the Government's Roadmap to ease Covid-19 restrictions in England.

***Critical Workforce Reasonable Excuse Scheme***

156. On 19 July 2021, COVID-O met to assess a proposal from DHSC regarding the self-isolation of critical workforces, which in tightly controlled circumstances would allow certain critical workers to attend work rather than self-isolating, subject to a number of controls.
157. Briefing provided for the SoS (Robert Jenrick) set out a number of roles provided by local government that should be in scope for the proposed scheme (**JP3/53 – INQ000137086**). These included LA public health workers and children's services. COVID-O agreed that DHSC's proposal should only be used in very limited circumstances.
158. On 19 July 2021, CO and DHSC issued a press release confirming that in exceptional circumstances a limited number of critical workers may be informed by their employer, following advice from the relevant government department, that they may be able to leave self-isolation to attend work. Employers were advised where they believed that the self-isolation of certain key employees would result in serious disruption to critical services, they should contact the relevant government department.
159. This was a small and targeted intervention to ensure that services critical to the safety and functioning of society could continue. Criteria for inclusion into the scheme included workers whose absence would have a major detrimental impact on the availability, integrity, or delivery of essential services. This included those services whose integrity, if compromised, could result in significant loss of life or casualties. On 23 July 2021, the Department sent a submission to the SoS (Robert Jenrick) (**JP3/54 – INQ000137087**) setting out the proposed arrangements to manage requests from employers to allow their workers to leave self-isolation, in respect of local government roles. The submission also set out a number of local government roles that were covered by OGDs. These were (i) ASC (DHSC); (ii) Children's Services (DfE) and; (iii) Waste collection (DEFRA).
160. On 26 July 2021 the Department issued a letter to LA Chief Executives which provided further information on the approval process (**JP3/55 – INQ000137088**). The letter confirmed which sectors had already been approved by OGDs that were likely to be of interest to LAs. This included ASC, Waste Services and Children's Services. LAs were asked to consider if there were other sectors that were not already covered by the above and to carefully consider whether they met the criteria and very high bar set out in the guidance before submitting requests for approval via the Department's Local Government Response email inbox.

161. The following two-stage approval process was applied to those requests that the Department considered met the bar set out in the guidance:
- i. The Department submitted sector requests to DHSC/CO for agreement that the particular role met the criteria, should it be necessary, before any decisions were made to allow a named individual to be excused.
  - ii. Following stage 1 approval from DHSC, the nominated responsible official for the sector, Julia Sweeney, Director in the Department, made decisions on a case-by-case basis for named individuals to leave isolation for work, based on a recommendation from the Local Government Response Team.
162. Between 2 August 2021 and 13 August 2021, the Department approved 25 critical workers to have a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation. The Scheme ended on 16 August 2021 when exemption from self-isolation for fully vaccinated contacts was introduced.

***Local Authority Workforce Contingency***

163. During Winter 2021/22, the CO Supply Chains Unit kept under review the potential impact of workforce absences on certain priority sectors including local government. The Department took a co-ordinating role in relation to reviewing local government capacity and mitigations, working in particular with departments responsible for commissioning priority services through LAs: DHSC (ASC), DfE (children's services) and DEFRA (waste services).
164. In November 2021, CO started workforce contingency planning. This Department collected information from LAs via a light touch qualitative survey and sent a paper to CO summarising the findings on 17 November 2021 (**JP3/56 – INQ000137089**).
165. On 17 December 2021, a Prime Minister chaired COVID-O commissioned analysis of the impacts of potential 10-20-25 percent absence rates for all key workforces. The CO paper gave actions to all Departments including: reporting absences and their impact on services to CO regularly and developing contingency plans and mitigations for public service absences.
166. On 18 December 2021, daily COVID-O meetings began to track the workforce position. On 19 December 2021, the Department finalised its first paper including an analysis of the most affected services within local government which was subsequently sent to CO (**JP3/57 – INQ000137090**).
167. On 22 December 2021, the Department sent a paper for COVID-O (**JP3/58 – INQ000137091**) which set out how LAs manage contingencies at a local and regional level; highlighting key services and discussing current pressures. The paper proposed that lead departments (DHSC,

DfE and DEFRA) increase data flows and prepared a menu of easements; and that this Department convened LAs to better understand what could be needed.

168. On 23 December 2021, COVID-O reviewed the Department's paper and commissioned further work with OGDs.
169. On 31 December 2021, the Department sent a paper (**JP3/59 – INQ000137092**) to CO's Supply Chains Unit and Covid-19 Taskforce. This set out: (i) plans for increased engagement and regular data; (ii) legislative easements, noting limited appetite for deployment from lead departments; (iii) non-legislative activity that was taking place to reduce burdens; and (iv) that the Department was keeping funding under review.
170. A list of 11 key 'asks' was received from the LGA on the 6 January 2022. The LGA document was reviewed by relevant teams and subsequently discussed with a regional spread of LA chief executives and the LGA.
171. The Department provided a further paper (**JP3/60 – INQ000137093**) to COVID-O on 13 January 2022 setting out that most LAs were managing absences well but that additional support might be useful in some cases owing to longer term issues. It also proposed that the Department wrote to LAs on prioritising statutory services, including those commissioned by OGDs.
172. COVID-O agreed the Department's proposed letter and SoS (Michael Gove) wrote to LAs on 18 January 2022 (**JP3/61 – INQ000137094**) asking them to protect statutory services and to prioritise Covid-19 related delivery including vaccinations to vulnerable groups. Engagement with LAs during January 2022 confirmed that they were in fact able to manage the Omicron pressures within the existing arrangements.

### **Domestic Abuse**

173. Throughout the period covered by this witness statement, the Department continued to work closely to co-ordinate and ensure its response on DA safe accommodation was aligned with the Home Office as the lead department on Violence Against Women & Girls and Ministry of Justice ("**MOJ**") as the lead department on support for Victims & Witnesses.
174. No significant or Ministerial-level decisions were made during the period covered by this witness statement. For the remainder of the period, the emergency fund of £10 million described in my second witness statement was rolled-out to providers. Bedspace vacancies were monitored by the Department's DA team using the same channels as set out in my second statement and officials provided updates on bedspaces to the Department's Minister for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping (Kelly Tolhurst until January 2021 then Eddie Hughes until December 2021) and to the Victim and Witness Silver Command until January 2022. Officials continued to attend



MOJ-led Victim and Witness Silver Command, which reported through to a Ministerial Gold Command. The Department monitored spending through interim reports received during the fund spending period until 31 March 2021. After this period ended, the Department received formal grant monitoring from providers in line with the grant conditions. Officials attended regular meetings with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and reporting information was shared with them as the lead department for the allocation of funding to support charities providing key services to help vulnerable people during the pandemic.

### **Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Support for the Housing Sector**

175. Following the announcement of a further national lockdown, on 2 November 2020, advice was sent to SoS (Robert Jenrick) and Minister Tolhurst (**JP3/62 – INQ000137095**). The advice set out options to further protect people sleeping rough during the 4-week period the national restrictions would be in force and the recommended course of action was to provide accommodation for people sleeping rough and to target this support at the most vulnerable.
176. Following a meeting with the SoS (Robert Jenrick) and further advice sent on 3 November 2020 (**JP3/63 – INQ000137096**), the Department announced the Protect programme on 5 November 2020, through which £15 million funding was allocated to LAs that needed additional support to provide accommodation for rough sleepers (**JP3/64 – INQ000137097**). The Department also asked all LAs to ensure that they had updated plans in place to protect rough sleepers.
177. Following the announcement of a third national lockdown, on 5 January 2021, advice (**JP3/65 – INQ000137098**) was sent to Minister Tolhurst and SoS (Robert Jenrick) on further measures to support LAs and protect people sleeping rough, including proposals to expand the Protect programme. Following the readout, this expanded version of the programme, 'Protect Plus', was announced on 8 January 2021 (**JP3/66 – INQ000137099**). Protect Plus provided £10 million to support all LAs to redouble efforts to help accommodate rough sleepers. The Department also asked all LAs to actively use this opportunity to make sure that all rough sleepers were registered with a GP where they were not already and that they were factored into local area vaccination plans, in line with JCVI prioritisation for Covid-19 vaccinations. The Department also set out more information to LAs about who they could lawfully support and provided further information regarding continuation funding for Rough Sleeping Initiative Year 4 to ensure continuity of services.
178. On 15 October 2021, advice was sent to SoS (Michael Gove) and Minister Hughes (**JP3/67 – INQ000137100**). Following the readout, on 23 October 2021, it was announced (**JP3/68 – INQ000137101**) that £65 million would be provided to top up the Homelessness Prevention

Grant to support LAs to help vulnerable households with rent arrears built up during the pandemic to reduce the risk of them being evicted and becoming homeless.

179. On 16 December 2021, advice was sent to SoS (Michael Gove) and Minister Hughes on protecting rough sleepers from the Omicron variant (**JP3/69 – INQ000137102**). Following the readout, funding was allocated to LAs across England including up to £25 million to accommodate people sleeping rough and £3.2 million to help LAs improve the vaccination rates of people sleeping rough. Minister Hughes wrote to LAs on 20 December 2021 setting this out (**JP3/70 – INQ000137103**).
180. During this period, officials within the Department also continued to monitor and provide updates to Ministers (**JP3/71 – INQ000137104**) on the reopening of night shelters and whether communal sleeping spaces were being used and steps being taken to reduce transmission.
181. Throughout January to March 2022, the Department worked with DHSC, UK Health Security Agency, Office for Health and Improvement Disparities and CO to make free testing available for those vulnerable to Covid-19 in high-risk settings, this included homelessness settings but also included testing for those in other high-risk settings for which the Department had day-to-day policy responsibility, including those in supported housing and victims of DA in refuge accommodation. The provision of free testing was confirmed at a COVID-O meeting on 29 March 2022.
182. Beyond these measures, the Department made or contributed to decisions to further extend or adapt the measures that had been introduced in the housing sector from March 2020 to reduce the number of people who might be made homeless. These were:
  - i. Section 81 and Schedule 29 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, requiring landlords to give tenants longer notice periods before seeking possession of residential property; and
  - ii. Amendments to the Civil Procedure Rules in relation to the stay of possession proceedings and enforcement of evictions. Decisions were taken having considered evidence of their impact, public health guidance and the best interests of both tenants and landlords.
183. In respect of Section 81 and Schedule 29 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, the Department led on the following decisions impacting on the notice periods for evictions.
  - On 5 November 2020, the Department issued an announcement (**JP3/72 – INQ000137105**) setting out protections for renters during national restrictions. This included restrictions on bailiff enforcement (further detail on this below) and built on protections announced earlier in the year (6-month notice periods), except in the most

serious cases remaining in place until at least the end of March 2021, as announced in August 2020.

- On 10 March 2021, the Department announced (**JP3/73 – INQ000137106**) that the period in which landlords were required, except in the most serious cases, to provide 6 months' notice would be extended from 31 March 2021 to 31 May 2021. A PSED assessment was carried out relating to this decision.
- On 12 May 2021, the Department announced (**JP3/74 – INQ000137107**) that 6 month notice periods would be reduced to 4 months from 1 June 2021 to 30 September 2021, again with exemptions for certain serious cases where there would be shorter notice periods. This announcement also indicated that from 1 August 2021, notice periods in cases of non-serious rent arrears (less than 4 months arrears) would be reduced to 2 months. A PSED was also carried out for this decision.
- On 8 September 2021, Regulations were laid before Parliament providing that all notice periods would return to the pre-Covid-19 lengths from 1 October 2021 and an additional PSED was carried out to support this. The Regulations also extended the 'relevant period', defined in Schedule 29 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, to 25 March 2022. During this period, the Department had the power to reintroduce different notice periods should the public health situation warrant it. This followed the Department's submission to a Star Chamber, co-chaired by the Minister for Technology, Innovation and Life Sciences at DHSC (Lord Bethell) and the Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt), setting out that if the relevant period was not extended, the only way to provide enforceable protections for tenants would be via primary legislation. The Department considered this would likely mean it would not be able to respond quickly enough to protect tenants. The Star Chamber agreed.

184. During this period the following measures were also brought into effect. This work was led by the MOJ and HM Courts and Tribunals Service with policy input provided by the Department:

- The announcement on 5 November 2020 noted above also included that bailiff-enforced evictions were suspended in all but the most serious cases until 11 January 2021. On 17 November 2020, regulations brought this suspension into effect.
- On 8 January 2021, the Department announced (**JP3/75 – INQ000137108**) extra Covid-19 protections for rough sleepers and tenants: the ban on bailiff-enforced evictions was extended until at least 21 February 2021; court support was confirmed for landlords and tenants; and a mediation pilot was launched.
- On 14 February 2021, the Department announced a further extension to the ban on bailiff-enforced evictions to 31 March 2021 (**JP3/76 – INQ000137109**).

- Court rules contained within Practice Direction 55C were extended to 30 November 2021. These governed the resumption of possession proceedings following the lifting of the stay on evictions on 20 September 2020, and how new cases issued after the stay were to be managed. The requirement within Practice Direction 55C for landlords to provide a notice to the court on the effect of Covid-19 on their tenant was also extended to 30 June 2022. The Department published guidance (**JP3/77 – INQ000137110**) for social and private landlords and tenants on 17 September 2020 to help them understand their rights and responsibilities when taking possession action. It also provided practical information about court processes in relation to the court rules contained within Practice Direction 55C.
185. The Department worked with the MOJ to jointly design and fund the Rental Mediation Service pilot to help address an anticipated rise in possession claims following the lifting of the bailiff ban. The aim of this service was to enable tenants and landlords to access a free, independent mediation service during the court possession process to resolve issues, sustain tenancies and reduce burdens on the court. The pilot was launched in February 2021 and ended in October 2021. The Department shared policy responsibility for this initiative with the MOJ.
186. Throughout this period, the Department also worked to help LAs prioritise their duties and responsibilities including their regulatory responsibilities in the private rented sector. As part of this guidance, the Department advised LAs they were expected to take a pragmatic and common-sense approach to enforcement of standards in the private rented sector and that the level of any penalty should be set after taking into account likely harm and culpability. The Department also ensured there was guidance on work being able to take place in people's homes in line with BEIS guidance (**JP3/78 – INQ000137111**).
187. During this period, the Department, working with the Department for Work and Pensions and MOJ, also continued to monitor and provide updates to Ministers on the financial resilience and security of tenants. This supported policy development including the additional £65 million top up to the Homelessness Prevention Grant announced in October 2021 to support LAs to help vulnerable households with rent arrears noted above.
188. Finally in relation to housing market sector generally, the Department's SoS (Robert Jenrick), the Executive Chairman of the Home Builders Federation and Chief Executive of the Federation of Master Builders agreed to jointly publish an open letter (**JP3/79 – INQ000137112**) to the housing industry making it clear that house building and supporting supply chains should continue working securely, and that the Government believed work could continue if done in line with public health guidance. The letter was published on 3 November 2020.

### **Faith, Race, and Integration**

189. The Faith Team continued to work with CO, DHSC and OGDs as the regulatory framework was adjusted to reflect levels of transmission risk. Key issues over this period included the use of Places of Worship for communal worship and gathering limits; the conduct of, and attendance at, weddings, funerals and other life-cycle events; and the rules governing singing and the use of music during services.
190. The Department's Faith Team coordinated meetings of the Places of Worship Task Force and supported Faith Roundtable meetings as regulations and guidance were amended to ensure that faith issues were understood and reflected. Workshops and webinars reviewing the risks associated with singing and other communal activities were established
191. The Department also engaged with DHSC and PHE to understand how Places of Worship and faith communities could best support the development and rollout of the vaccine programme. The Department worked with faith leaders to identify where pop-up vaccination centres could help engage the hardest to reach groups, working alongside the developing Community Champions programme. Further information on the programme is set out in the Community Champions section below.
192. The Faith Team continued to update and publish guidance for Places of Worship. From 21 April 2021, responsibility for updating and publishing guidance for the conduct of weddings moved from the Department to CO (**JP3/80 – INQ000137113**). The Faith Team also continued to provide guidance on the conduct of religious festivals and events, including supporting PHE on funerals guidance and contributing to other Covid-19 guidance on faith issues as required.
193. The Faith Team also continued ongoing stakeholder engagement to understand the concerns of faith communities, ensuring that issues were considered as the regulatory and guidance framework evolved. The Department used established communications channels with faith leaders and their communities to publicise and disseminate Government advice and guidance on Covid-19 related issues.
194. Alongside other Departments impacted by regulation changes, the Faith Team drew on the available evidence (produced outside of the Department) to complete PSED returns to DHSC, reviewing and recording faith and other community impacts and concerns. These returns were compiled by DHSC for each regulation change.

### **Disproportionately Impacted Groups**

195. During the period covered by this statement, key decision-making relating to DIGs rested with COVID-O. As set out in my second statement, Emran Mian, Director General in the Department

was the Senior Reporting Officer for this work, supported by officials from the CO and the Department who together formed the DIGs team. This team had a cross-government role co-ordinating activity for this work on behalf of CO. This included Emran Mian chairing the cross-government Covid-19 DIGs Steering Group. The purpose of this group was to drive policy development across Government to support the Government's ambition to reduce the mortality, morbidity, and other related negative consequences of Covid-19 for people who were disproportionately impacted. This was a convening role, with departments taking responsibility for their own measures.

196. The Department's substantive response in relation to mitigating the adverse impacts of Covid-19 on DIGs is addressed below under 'community champions'.

***Community Champions & Community Vaccine Champions***

197. The Community Champions scheme was initially agreed at COVID-O on 24 September 2020 and is covered in my second statement. The Department set up the Community Champions scheme to support communities at greater risk of Covid-19, especially some faith groups, hard to reach communities and DIGs. The scheme was proposed in response to evidence of substantial obstacles hindering vulnerable individuals in these communities from accessing and acting upon Government Covid-19 guidance.
198. Community Champions (also known as health champions) were community members who volunteered to promote health and wellbeing or improve conditions in their local community. They were individuals with credibility in target communities and who could tap into existing social networks to help bridge the gap between services and communities.
199. Initial funding was agreed in October 2020 and is covered in my second statement. On 25 January 2021, SoS (Robert Jenrick) announced further funding from the Department of £23 million (**JP3/81 – INQ000137114**). Initially this would include developing new networks of champions in areas where they did not previously exist. The funding was aimed at groups shown to be more likely to suffer long-term impacts and poor outcomes from Covid-19. They included the elderly, disabled, and people from ethnic minorities.
200. As the Government's vaccination campaign expanded, many areas funded through the Community Champions programme pivoted their work to address challenges around vaccination deployment in local areas. This included tackling misinformation and encouraging take-up, which eventually lead to the creation of a new, but related initiative known as "Community Vaccine Champions" ("**CVC**"). This was specifically aimed at addressing vaccine inequity in areas where vaccine uptake was low and where there were disparities in vaccine

uptake, as well as COVID-19 related outcomes, across different socioeconomic and ethnic groups.

201. Key dates relating to the establishment of the CVC programme were as follows;

- 20 July 2021: Following approval from the SoS (Robert Jenrick) on 24 May 2021, the Department developed and submitted a business case to HMT, proposing £28.3 million funding for CVC (**JP3/82 – INQ000137115**).
- 17 September 2021: HMT gave conditional approval of funding up to £23.3 million for the CVC programme.
- 13 December 2021: Following the identification of the Omicron variant a submission was issued to SoS (Michael Gove), recommending the launch of the CVC programme, which would provide funding to 60 LAs (**JP3/83 – INQ000137116**).
- 14 December 2021: The SoS approved the programme and requested that work continued in order to progress with the launch of CVC at pace.
- 19 December 2021: The Department and DHSC jointly announced the launch of CVC programme (**JP3/84 – INQ000137117**).
- 20 December 2021: The Department wrote to the 60 LAs who were selected to be part of the programme (**JP3/85– INQ000137118**).
- 5 January 2022: The Department issued a submission to Minister Badenoch, seeking approval with the allocation and delivery of funding to the 38 LAs who were new to the CVC programme, and seeking approval to make payments to all 60 LAs in the week commencing 17 January 2022, which was approved (**JP3/86 – INQ000137119**).

### **Death Management**

202. As set out in my previous statements, the Department had a role in relation to death management. Towards the end of 2020, significant concerns were raised by LRFs regarding the number of people attending funerals, and PHE guidance was updated (**JP3/87 – INQ000137120**).

203. The Department and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (“**CCS**”) held joint regional workshops with LRFs, and newsletters on key death management decisions and regulation were issued (**JP3/88 – INQ000137121**).

204. In March and April 2021, a year 1 review of measures in the Coronavirus Act 2020 was undertaken and agreement was sought from the Department on whether to suspend Schedule 28 to the Act. This referred to the transportation, storage and disposal of dead bodies, including directions and other measures for addressing lack of capacity issues; powers to direct LAs if it

was considered they had failed to exercise any of their related functions; and matters related to the wishes of the deceased.

205. Initial advice to Ministers on 4 March 2021 (**JP3/89 – INQ000137122**) had been to retain the Part 2 powers (relating to directions and other measures to address lack of capacity for dealing with dead bodies within LAs), as although these had not been used, it was felt that keeping the powers would be prudent. However, this was subsequently updated following a steer from DHSC on 16 March 2021 to suspend as many powers as possible if they had not been used, and in April 2021 it was confirmed that Part 3 would automatically be suspended as it could not be separated from any decision on Part 2.
206. The Department continued to update the statutory guidance for LAs in England on Schedule 28 (**JP3/90 – INQ000137123**), which provided powers to support local and national death management..
207. On 25 November 2021, DHSC wrote to OGDs proposing to expire all the remaining temporary provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020 as of March 2022, including Schedule 28. The Department consulted with CCS who confirmed that they would not be advising DHSC to extend Schedule 28. The Department and CCS then jointly consulted with LRFs on this intention to which there was agreement.
208. Through December 2021 and the emergence of the Omicron Covid-19 variant there were discussions between the Department and CCS on whether to revive parts of Schedule 28 to help manage capacity in the death management systems locally. The Department engaged with LRFs on this issue and found that these powers were not likely to be needed.

#### **Steps in Relation to Forfeiture of Commercial Leases**

209. Following the announcement of a second national lockdown, the Department announced on 9 December 2020 that business owners affected by the Covid-19 pandemic would be protected by an extension of the moratorium on eviction for 3 months from 31 December 2020 until 31 March 2021 (**JP3/91 – INQ000137124**), following a decision made by the Department's SoS (Robert Jenrick) on 5 November 2020. This was announced as the final extension to encourage landlords and tenants to reach a negotiated settlement over rent arrears which was the Government's desired outcome.
210. The impact of the second national lockdown and subsequent Tier 4 restrictions on commercial tenant businesses was particularly acute, as it came at a time of year when they would normally expect to see substantial levels of trade to support them through the leaner months of the first quarter of the new year. The Department recognised that ending the moratorium on the ability



of landlords of commercial properties to evict tenants by forfeiture would have made tenant businesses vulnerable to landlords seeking recovery of rent arrears accrued during the first lockdown.

211. Whilst recognising the necessity of extending the moratorium in these circumstances, the Department's SoS (Robert Jenrick) also agreed on 5 November 2020 that further work should be done to identify potential measures to bring about an orderly end to the moratorium without creating a "cliff edge" where tenants immediately became liable for the full amount of their accrued arrears.
212. Following the announcement of the extension of the moratorium to 31 March 2021, the Department worked with MOJ, the Insolvency Service, HMT and BEIS to try and develop a Pre-Action Protocol, the intention being to oblige landlords to take steps to negotiate a settlement with their tenants regarding rent arrears on terms that would enable the tenant's business to survive. However, this idea was abandoned in favour of the mandatory arbitration model ultimately adopted.
213. By March 2021, rent collection data continued to show worrying levels of accrued rent arrears and low levels of rent payment, particularly in the retail and hospitality sectors and from discussions with tenant representative bodies the Department believed the true market position was potentially much worse. The Department therefore decided to conduct a 'Call for Evidence' to gather rent payment and arrears data from across the sector to inform its future policy decisions and support the development of options to exit the existing arrangements.
214. To accommodate this Call for Evidence, Minister Eddie Hughes signed the necessary statutory instrument on 9 March 2021 to extend the moratorium on commercial lease forfeiture to 30 June 2021. The further extension was announced by the Department on 10 March 2021 together with restrictions on the use of Commercial Rent Arrears Recovery (**JP3/92 – INQ000137125**).
215. The Department worked closely with BEIS, HMT and MOJ in conducting the Call for Evidence and the final options for inclusion were agreed by ministers in the Department and BEIS. The Call for Evidence ran for 4 weeks and was published on 4 May 2021 (**JP3/93 – INQ000137126**).
216. During this period the Department's SoS (Robert Jenrick) also attended a COVID-O meeting where it was agreed the moratorium would be retained.
217. Following the analysis of the Call for Evidence responses, on 4 June 2021 the Department and BEIS submitted joint advice to ministers (**JP3/94 – INQ000137127**) recommending the moratorium be further extended for a minimum of 9 months to 24 March 2022 to provide the time needed to introduce legislation for a binding arbitration system to help resolve outstanding

pandemic-related rent debt. On 8 June 2021, both the Department and BEIS SoS (Robert Jenrick and Kwasi Kwarteng) agreed with these recommendations and the secondary legislation necessary achieved clearance on 30 July 2021

218. On 14 July 2021 SoS (Robert Jenrick) agreed to recommendations (**JP3/95 – INQ000137128**) that the Department would retain the lead on the moratorium and supporting measures and BEIS would lead on the development of primary legislation and the arbitration system. The Department and BEIS continued to work collaboratively however throughout policy development.
219. On 8 July 2021, the Department convened the first of a series of fortnightly Steering Group meetings allowing officials in the Department, BEIS, MOJ and HMT to review and direct key decisions related to the policy and which continued until Royal Assent of the Act on 24 March 2022.
220. In the period July to December 2021, the Department and BEIS continued to develop the legislation, led by BEIS. To support BEIS, the Department led on stakeholder engagement with the sector and advice was sought from the Steering Group, the Department's SoS and BEIS's Minister.
221. On 16 September 2021, the Steering Group agreed this Department should progress work on additional tenant protection measures relating to County Court and High Court Judgments working with BEIS lawyers and MOJ officials and their legal counterparts to look at retrospective legislation.
222. A draft Code of Practice was submitted by the Department to Departmental and BEIS ministers on 13 October 2021. Approval was provided on 14 October 2021 with No. 10 then clearing before the Write Round began. To accompany the Code of Practice, the Department drafted a notice describing their proposals for retrospective action on County Court Judgements and High Court Judgements; this was required to give adequate notice to the sector and prevent unnecessary claims that would be later dismissed on the Bill becoming law. Following approvals, including from MOJ, the Code of Practice and accompanying notice were published on 9 November 2021 (**JP3/96 – INQ000137129**).
223. On 30 November 2021, advice (**JP3/97 – INQ000137130**) was submitted to the Department's SoS (Michael Gove) recommending that the Department reserve the right to extend the moratorium on forfeiture and decline to participate in the DHSC COVID-O process for extending provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020, until it became clear whether passage of the Commercial Rent (Coronavirus) Bill was delayed beyond 25 March 2022. On 6 December 2021,

the Department's SoS (Michael Gove) agreed not to engage with the DHSC-led process and to continue monitoring Bill passage. Further advice was submitted to the Department's SoS (Michael Gove) on 24 January 2022 (**JP3/98 – INQ000137131**) which continued to recommend that the Department reserve the right to extend the moratorium dependent on passage of the primary legislation. On 28 January 2022, the Department's SoS (Michael Gove) confirmed he was content with this approach, and a Dear Colleagues letter was sent to the DHSC SoS (Sajid Javid) confirming the Department's position.

224. Until 24 February 2022, BEIS continued to lead on progressing the primary legislation through Parliament, with officials in the Department providing support for Bill passage where required and monitoring the situation regarding the moratorium and whether it may need to be retained beyond 25 March 2022.

### **Resilience and Recovery Directorate**

225. RED senior officials attended Winter(M) and Winter(O) meetings and provided updates about LRF readiness to the Department (**JP3/99 – INQ000137132**).
226. Following a review of the team's operating model by the Bain & Company management consultancy firm in Summer 2020, a Situation Awareness Division was set up. Initially led by PA Consulting, officials were recruited throughout 2021 with additional Departmental support from the Analytical and Data Directorate until early summer 2021. This Division provided the Department, OGDs and LRFs with situational awareness encompassing emergency response situations, as well as periods of preparation, and included ongoing development of data science capabilities to allow early risk and incident detection.
227. The Situational Awareness Team shared relevant products and information with the Department's Covid-19 Co-ordination Unit and Winter Secretariat Team to inform ministerial briefings in the winter of 2021/2022.

### ***LRF Assurance***

228. Due to the collective risks of a second wave of Covid-19, winter weather, and potential disruption caused by the transition period of the UK leaving the European Union, a panel of 3 independent experts - Andy Battle (a retired senior police officer), Robyn Fairman (former Deputy Chief Executive of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) and Mel Harrowsmith (former Head of Civil Contingencies at the Met Office) - examined LRF preparedness and planning for the Winter of 2020. This was intended to give the Department and LRFs themselves an indication of where additional support may be required. The review started in October 2020, and a report was produced on 11 December 2020 and sent to Ministers on 22 December 2020. Key findings

were shared across the Department and with OGDs, and a summary was also shared with LRFs. The report made recommendations to be implemented by this Department, with cross-Government liaison on specific issues requiring other departments' involvement.

229. In the lead up to winter 2021, RED reviewed LRFs' winter preparedness. 37 LRFs self-assessed as 'well prepared' or 'very well prepared' in the survey. The Humber LRF self-assessed as having lower levels of preparedness, but senior RED staff considered that Humber took a more cautious approach to the risks they faced and that their preparatory work and general readiness were in line with others with higher ratings.
230. RED responded to the rise of the Omicron variant in Winter 2021/2022. Resilience Advisors ("RAs") attended local multi-agency meetings, and RED coordinated briefings for COBR(M) and COBR(O) when they were called during that time. RED held 4 extraordinary Chairs Call to share information about Omicron with LRF Chairs.

### ***Kent Engagement***

231. RED provided bespoke local engagement support to Kent LRF between 1 December 2020 and 31 January 2021 to enable Kent to prepare for the end of the European Union Transition Period. However, due to concurrent Covid-19 pressures, the Department recruited senior officials into RED to facilitate engagement with senior strategic leaders in Kent County Council and across the LRF, enabling the Head of Regional South-East Team to focus on regional Covid-19 issues. This work included:

- Supporting Kent to develop a death management business case, in response to the Delta and South African variants, requesting national assistance which secured additional temporary mortuary arrangements from CO.
- Facilitating support to Kent through engagement with DHSC resulting in a military aid request to deploy 175 troops, in response to the closure of the French border on 20 December 2021.
- Developing new emergency response policy to secure hotel accommodation for drivers who tested positive for Covid-19 in Kent.

### **Data Modelling**

232. During the period covered by this statement, the Analysis and Data Directorate continued to provide modelling and analysis supporting various Covid-19 related workstreams within the Department. The Analysis and Data Directorate's role was largely centred on providing data and analysis, not data modelling. There was a particular emphasis on analytical work to inform

policy development or operational activity, including the tasks as identified in this section of my earlier statements. I have set out specific examples of work undertaken during this period below.

233. The Department gathered management information on the number of rough sleepers who had been accommodated during the Covid-19 pandemic. The data was published at different points throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and was expanded to publication on a quarterly basis (**JP3/100 – INQ000137133**). This work was relevant to the Department's work on Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Support for the Housing Sector as outlined in that section above.
234. In respect of Shielding, the Department gathered management information (**JP3/101 – INQ000137134**) including the size of the shielded population in different council areas and the estimated spend per person to calculate estimated total cost to LAs of shielding the clinically vulnerable.
235. The Department continued to share data from the FIM process described in the Local Government Finance section above with relevant policy teams in a wide range of OGDs, strictly on the basis of confidentiality. These data sources were used to model the expected financial pressures on LAs arising from the pandemic on an ongoing basis. As the response progressed and more evidence became available, it was possible to have more confidence in that modelling. With each completed FIM round, new analysis was produced of the latest estimates of a) pressures realised in the year to date; b) forecast pressures for the remainder of the financial year in question; and c) a comparison of these pressures with funding awarded to each LA. This modelling was not shared with OGDs.
236. Assisting with the Department's work outlined in the Community Champions section above, the latest available NHS statistics on vaccination uptake was used to identify LAs with the lowest vaccine uptake rates and the trajectory of vaccine uptake for individuals over the age of 18. 60 LAs were selected to help reach a large proportion of those communities in the areas where vaccine uptake was lower than 5% or more than the average median vaccine uptake.

#### **Role in Development of Legislation**

237. In terms of the Department's role in the development and enforcement of public health and Covid-19 legislation and regulations during this period, aspects of this have already been referred to above.
238. The Department's role continued to be principally to support or contribute to the implementation of various pieces of secondary legislation made pursuant to the key primary legislation relating to Covid-19 i.e., the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and the Coronavirus Act 2020.

239. The Department also regularly drafted and contributed to legislative-related guidance published online in relation to most of the policy areas discussed above.

### **Lessons Learned**

240. In this section I describe the lessons learned exercises and reviews involving the Department relating to issues raised in the Provisional Outline Scope of Module 2. This section covers the period from January 2020 to February 2022, including the periods covered in my previous statements.

241. The Inquiry has requested a chronological list of lessons learned reviews, exercises, reports and initiatives conducted or participated in by the Department insofar as they relate to the Provisional Outline Scope of Module 2, identifying the key details and recommendations of those exercises and the Department's response to them. I produce this as Annex B to this statement, including exhibits of the key documents relating to each exercise or review referenced.

242. The Inquiry will note that the chronology does not attempt to include every reflective/lessons learned-type exercise conducted by all teams within the Department between January 2020 and February 2022: its focus, as required for Module 2, is upon those exercises which relate at least in part to core political and administrative decision-making.

243. The chronology is colour-coded to indicate whether reviews involved an audit or Parliamentary committee, cross-Government review or were Departmental only.

244. The Department responded to the pandemic applying an approach of continuous improvement, recording lessons and where necessary adapting its structures. The most notable changes in relation to pandemic preparedness and our structure were recorded in Catherine Frances' statement of 1 December 2022 in relation to Module 1. I note that the Inquiry wishes statements not to rely on cross-references to statements provided for other Modules, so I repeat the relevant section here with updated text in relation to the Department's COVID-19 Playbook.

### ***Resilience and Emergencies Directorate restructure***

245. In the summer of 2020, primarily in response to the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic's first wave, and in order to prepare most effectively for the anticipated second wave, significant changes were made to RED's operational structure, processes, IT systems and staffing levels. These changes included:

A. Developing RED's regional engagement model, including:

- i. The introduction of five regional hubs with dedicated RAs to support LRFs. Previously in RED, RAs routinely led on more than one LRF as well as carrying out other projects. The structural change meant that RAs' role would be dedicated to engagement with one LRF only which increased the support the Department could provide;
  - ii. The establishment of a dedicated function to plan and facilitate regular video conference meetings with LRF Chairs to provide strategic updates; and
  - iii. RED convening an expert panel of LRF Chairs to act as a trusted partner and to reflect on the roles LRFs can usefully play in the future of resilience.
- B. Developing RED's situational awareness capability by the introduction of:
- i. A dedicated, permanently staffed Strategic Insights function within RED. The role of this Strategic Insights function includes gathering both human intelligence (provided through Government Liaison Officers) and data from a range of sources (including OGDs); and
  - ii. Cross-Government "Discovery" meetings, which include representatives from other Departments, where data on local risks is combined with human intelligence to give a comprehensive picture of risk, and tolerance to risks, within LRFs.
- C. Enhancing RED's response model to include:
- i. The introduction of more specialised teams within RED - including dedicated operational, analytical, policy, strategy, and business management teams - each focused on performing its own specific function, in place of the previous approach of having multi-skilled staff who were deployed more flexibly to perform different functions based on where they were most needed at any time;
  - ii. Bolstering capability for proactively managing issues raised by local responders by establishing a specialist issue resolution function with its own dedicated resources;
  - iii. Ensuring that recovery work is factored into all work carried out within RED's response teams; and
  - iv. Replacing RED's Emergency Response Plan with the Response and Recovery Plan that sets out RED's new operating model and formalised processes for ensuring appropriate resourcing levels within RED for dealing with emergencies. I exhibit a copy of the Emergency Response Plan (**JP3/102 – INQ000137135**),

246. RED's change in name at this time (to the Resilience and Recovery Directorate) reflected its strengthening of capability in the resilience space, including recovery from emergencies.
247. More recently, we have introduced further changes to strengthen resilience capabilities within and beyond the Department. These have included:
- A. Provision of dedicated funding, including innovation funding for LRFs since 2021 which has, for example, supported the development of digital tools to aid effective information sharing at LRF level. We continue to put this at the heart of our focus as part of our programme to continue to strengthen LRFs; and
  - B. The establishment of a new Central Response and Coordination Unit in 2022. Amongst other things, this provides a dedicated secretariat function for the new Resilience Board which oversees activity across the Department's responsibilities in planning for and responding to emergencies and major events.

***Emergency Survival Manual***

248. In Spring 2021, the Department completed a programme of work to ensure that it retained corporate knowledge and captures lessons learned from prior emergencies and events, and to ensure that it has robust information management processes in place. An Emergency Survival Manual was developed and is intended to help the Department respond effectively to future emergencies or events, which cannot be managed or resourced through business-as-usual business planning and have a significant impact for multiple teams across the Department. The Emergency Survival Manual was developed to capture learning arising from the 'Winter 2020' structures. The 2020 structures were in place from around October 2020 across a number of Government departments and were put in place to manage concurrent winter risks, primarily Covid-19 and the impending EU Exit. The Department's response to the winter arrangements were instituted to ensure sufficient staffing, governance and risk escalation systems were in place. The Emergency Survival Manual captured learning from the winter arrangements, as well as drew on previous emergency and major events.
249. The Manual sought to provide a framework for identifying when a non-business-as-usual response may be required and the shape of that initial response. Whilst each emergency will inevitably require a tailored response, with structures and processes adapted to the particular circumstances that evolve as the response progresses, the Manual sets out the common principles and a recommended approach for triggering, standing up and scoping that response.



250. I exhibit the Manual as (**JP3/103**), and its separate annexes as follows; Annex B (**JP3/104**), Annex C (**JP3/105**), Annex G (Sample sitrep 15.04.20) (**JP3/106**), Annex G (Sample sitrep 05.02.21) (**JP3/107**). These documents were exhibited to the statement of Module 1 statement of Catherine Frances, dated 1 December 2022 with the following exhibit numbers; **CF/31 INQ000023165**, **CF/31A INQ000023166**, **CF/31B INQ000023167**, **CF/31C INQ000023169** and **CF/31C INQ000023168**. A copy is also retained by the Executive Team Board Secretariat, the Central Portfolio Office, and the Government Internal Audit Agency.

***Covid-19 Response Playbook***

251. Since April 2022, the Department has also undertaken work to develop a Covid-19 Response Playbook to describe the Department's role in the context of DHSC and UK Health Security Agency planning.

252. The aim of the Playbook was to set out arrangements and considerations for the Department's response to a significant increase in Covid-19 infections and disease. Its objectives were:

- A. To describe the Department's command, control and co-ordination arrangements to be implemented in the event of a significant increase in Covid-19 infections and disease;
- B. To set out key considerations and potential response measures for the Department in the event of a significant increase in Covid-19 infections and disease; and
- C. To outline roles and responsibilities across the Department when responding to a significant increase in Covid-19 infections and disease.

253. A working draft was compiled in April 2022 and was based on learning from previous waves of Covid-19 across a wide range of the Department's workstreams, for which individual playbooks were developed during the Module 2 period. It also took into account the Reasonable Worst Case Scenario identified by the Scientific and Advisory Group for Emergencies and wider Government planning.

254. This learning has enabled the Department to set out within the Playbook considerations, roles, and responsibilities for its future response against a range of themes:

- A. Engagement with Local Government
- B. Local Government funding
- C. Workforce & supply chain pressures
- D. Local Government regulatory services
- E. Remote Council meetings
- F. Vulnerable people & equality
- G. Provision of guidance to the public and businesses

- H. Test & trace
- I. Self-isolation
- J. Vaccination
- K. PPE
- L. Compliance & enforcement
- M. Regulations
- N. Death management
- O. Homelessness & rough sleeping
- P. Supported housing
- Q. DA refuges
- R. FASC
- S. Social Housing
- T. Faith & Communities
- U. Housing
- V. Rented Sector (Private & Social)
- W. Planning
- X. Covid Certification
- Y. Managed Quarantine
- Z. UK Wide Response

255. The Version 1.0 of the Playbook was issued on 31 January 2023 following thorough consultation with relevant response Directors and endorsement from the Resilience Board. I exhibit this as **(JP3/108 – INQ000137136)**. A working draft has been available since May 2022. The Playbook will be subject to Departmental review on a 6 monthly basis.

***Other Themes***

256. As well as specific actions taken following lessons learned such as restructures and manuals set out above, other themes emerged on which the Department has taken action, particularly around engagement with the local tier and intelligence gathering.

257. The Department closely engages the local tier as a matter of course but during the pandemic this role evolved quickly. During the early stages of the pandemic, the Department provided a vital link between lead departments and LAs and LRFs. The Department enabled other departments to engage with local delivery partners in order to develop and improve decision-making. Over time the relationship between lead departments, such as CO and DHSC, and the local tier developed such that the Department could take a step back from supporting engagement directly. Where the Department had a leading role itself, the collaborative approach

and extensive engagement enabled shifts to locally-led delivery – for example, in the operation of the Shielding Programme.

258. The importance of real time situational awareness through data quickly became clear. In response, the Department improved its real time data at the LRF level and shared data with local areas where possible. Similarly, the Department continued to improve how it collected financial information during the pandemic through establishing a monitoring process. This enabled the Department to collect real-time data to inform policy making and ensure that it was providing sufficient funding at the right time, so that LAs could maintain core services and Covid-19 delivery as the pandemic continued.

**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**

Name: Jeremy Pocklington

Date: 22 August 2023

**UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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**ANNEX A: GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS**

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The acronyms below appear in the body of the witness statement and are collated here for ease of reference. They are listed alphabetically.

ASC	Adult Social Care
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
CCS	Civil Contingencies Secretariat
CEV	Clinically Extremely Vulnerable
CO	Cabinet Office
COBR	Cabinet Office Briefing Room
COBR(M)	Cabinet Office Briefing Room (M)
COBR(O)	Cabinet Office Briefing Room (O)
COMF	Contain Outbreak Management Fund
COVID-O	Covid-19 Operations Committee
CVC	Community Vaccine Champions
CWG	Compliance Working Group
DA	Domestic Abuse
DCMO	Deputy Chief Medical Officer
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
DfE	Department for Education
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DIGs	Disproportionately Impacted Groups
ERA	Enhanced Response Area
FIM	Financial Impact Monitoring
HMT	His Majesty's Treasury

HSE	Health and Safety Executive
LA	Local Authority
LCTS	Local Council Tax Support
LGA	Local Government Association
LRF	Local Resilience Forum
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MQS	Managed Quarantine Service
OGDs	Other Government Departments
PHE	Public Health England
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PSED	Public Sector Equality Duty
RA	Resilience Advisor
RED	Resilience and Recovery Directorate
SFC	Sales, Fees and Charges
SoS	Secretary of State
SPL	Shielded Patient List
SR20	Government Spending Review concluded in November 2020
VoC	Variants of Concern

**UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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**ANNEX B: LESSONS LEARNED**

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**KEY**

Type of Lessons Learned exercises and corresponding colour used in tables below	Audits and Parliamentary committee reports	Cross-government work	Departmental work
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No.	Date or date range	Lead Dept/team and nature of exercise	Key details of review/exercise	Dept response/ implementation	Exhibit ref
1	May 2020	Internal - A report called "Risk Refresh in light of Coronavirus" was presented to the 5 May 2020 meeting of the Executive Team.	<p>This report considered changes to known Departmental risks in light of the pandemic. It notes at paragraph 6: <i>"In the immediate response to the crisis, the department, in common with Whitehall more generally, has prioritised speed of action over normal controls, judging the risk of inaction greater than the risks associated with swift action. Existing and new programmes have not had the depth of scrutiny they normally would during this time. Instead, the Department's emergency procedures have been used, notably the GOLD structure and accompanying Temporary Operating Model which has brought significant, intense senior official and Ministerial focus on the risks faced by the department and country in the crisis and ensuring a prompt and effective response to them."</i></p> <p>While the Department's Executive Team were asked to approve this part of the report as a summary of the principal ways that the Department had had to adapt its risk management approach, there was detailed analysis of previously recognised risks and how these had changed due to the pandemic, and also would be impacted as Covid-</p>	Part D of the report included next steps which entailed using the meeting of the Department's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) in June 2020 to assure the Department's approach to risk management in light of Covid-19 and re-establish controls. The June ARAC meeting did review risk management arrangements. The meeting was informed that the immediate priority of the Risk Sub-Committee was ensuring the Department was on top of the changed risk landscape, and in the absence of portfolio boards was focussing on the major programmes. It was also acknowledged that the Risk	<p><b>JP3/109 – INQ000137137</b> Executive Team paper dated 5 May 2020: "Risk Refresh in light of Coronavirus"</p> <p><b>JP3/110 – INQ000137138</b> Department's latest Risk Management Framework dated 17 May 2022</p>

			19 measures ended e.g., moratorium on repossessions in the rented housing sector.	Sub-Committee was shifting from focussing on immediate risks to taking a longer-term view of the risk landscape. Since then, the Department has refreshed its suite of principal risks, published a revised risk management framework, and enhanced risk management at a portfolio level.	
2	May 2020	Internal – team with responsibility for establishing mobilisation team	<p>A project closure report was prepared to set out key outputs and outcomes of the Mobilisation project which ran from mid-March – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 and successfully oversaw the onboarding, training and deployment of over 600 volunteers into roles to support the Department's response to the Covid-19 emergency.</p> <p>Eight points were made as to what had gone well and 22 points recommended future improvements by the Department. The most important six recommendations were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a simpler, more systematic data-driven method for collection of information on volunteer skills and the skills requirement for role from business units.</li> <li>2. Explore finding a new, permanent data platform to deal with emergency mobilisations and that can talk to Deputy or get SharePoint and Deputy to talk to each other. This platform should be designed for a crisis, not in a crisis. This will allow for clear auditing as well as swift mobilisation.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Established a permanent Rapid Response Team of circa. 35 Project Managers and policy professionals who can surge in to help resource incident responses.</li> <li>2. People, Capability and Change directorate set-up a nine-month programme to establish and implement lessons learned from resourcing and organising people from various incident responses since 2018. This focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forming a better understanding of resourcing demand for the resilience risks the Department owns or has an active interest in, ahead of any incident</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p><b>JP3/111 – INQ000137139</b> Mobilisation – Project Closure report</p> <p><b>JP3/112 – INQ000137140</b> Mobilisation Team Handover Manual (section 11 covers Lessons Learned)</p>



			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Ensure that for operational changes, there is SCS support in the relevant business unit. If absent, changes will be delayed or unsuccessful.</li> <li>4. Extend the Department's mobilisation function from an existing business operations unit in RED that deal with changing staff levels in emergency situations. This function should be responsible for maintaining mobilisation expertise and plans, which would be more efficient than establishing a new function run by policy professionals at short notice.</li> <li>5. Use the significant institutional expertise amassed through multiple emergency mobilisations across permanent policy staff about crisis response. This information should be captured so that those with relevant expertise can be retained and called on in future crises. Consideration should be given to how to preserve links, possibly through refresher training.</li> <li>6. Ensure a clear understanding of departmental structures vital to a smooth mobilisation process, including maintaining a clear, high level Departmental organogram.</li> </ol>	<p>response being activated. The approach is repeatable on a regular cycle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing people capacity and capability through developing an on-going pool of people who can be pivoted into incident response at short notice, including at SCS level.</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Further work was undertaken to ensure we capture and record the skills and expertise held within the Department in one central system.</li> <li>4. Established a permanent Central Response Coordination Unit to oversee the Department's resilience risks and preparedness and take the lead in coordinating when an incident is activated.</li> <li>5. Established structures for mobilising people in incident response through the Department's Concept of Operations document.</li> </ol>	
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3	July 2020	Public Accounts Committee	<p>The PAC report “Whole of Government response to COVID-19” (Thirteenth Report of Session 2019-21) had one recommendation for the Department: “<i>The Ministry needs to minimise the risk of local authorities running into severe financial difficulties by taking action to identify authorities at risk and working with the Treasury to determine a clear and timely financial settlement to support all local authorities through the next phase of the pandemic.</i>”</p>	<p>As part of its package of financial support for Local Authorities, the Department introduced an ‘Exceptional Financial Support’ scheme, the framework for which was finalised in July 2020. This was aimed at those Local Authorities at serious risk to ensure early engagement with the Department.</p>	<p><b>JP3/113 – INQ000137141</b>  Public Accounts Committee report “Whole of Government response to COVID-19”</p> <p><b>JP3/114 – INQ000137142</b>  Government response to PAC “Whole of Government response to COVID-19”, page 36</p>
4	July 2020	Internal review joined by members of the Department’s Covid Secure team, Compliance and Enforcement team, and RED	<p>The Leicester local lockdown began on 4 July 2020, with some restrictions continuing until September 2020. Anticipating that this may become a model used again, a workshop was conducted on 13 July 2020 to understand what went well and what could have gone better with the initial implementation of the local lockdown.</p> <p>The key issues identified were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarifying cross-government roles and responsibilities - DHSC’s role vs this Department’s role in the context of local lockdowns.</li> <li>• Ensuring that local expertise was systematically used to inform decision-making.</li> <li>• Securing clarity of the Joint Biosecurity Centre’s role.</li> </ul> <p>Participants from the attending teams also noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong collaboration with the Department and with DHSC.</li> <li>• Rapid and successful mobilisation.</li> <li>• Strong agility in team operations.</li> </ul>	<p>This workshop was an informal internal exercise. The team responsible for the Leicester lockdown then carried this insight into their work on subsequent local lockdowns throughout July and August. Ultimately the lessons contributed to the Department’s handover of ownership of regulations for local lockdowns to JBC.</p>	<p><b>JP3/115 – INQ000137143</b>  Notes from Leicester Lockdown Lessons Learned exercise</p> <p><b>JP3/116 – INQ000137144</b>  Closures Team Handover Guide to Joint Biosecurity Centre</p>

Witness Name: Jeremy Pocklington

Statement No.: 3

Exhibits: **JP3/01 – JP3/175**

Dated: [xx] August 2023

5	July – Aug 2020	Internal – Covid-19 Places, Compliance and Regulations Division	Guidance evaluation exercise, involved working with other policy teams who had also led on Covid-19 guidance in the Department. The outputs of the evaluation were to look at success and learning from the individual items of guidance produced, to help inform Departmental planning of updating guidance / what further guidance may be needed.	Learning was incorporated into the Department's "Guidance Playbook" for future pandemics. This explains the Cabinet Office Commission process used to commission the drafting of guidance from the Department, and how some of it was subject to triple approval from DHSC, Cabinet Office and what is now the UK Health Security Agency.	<p><b>JP3/117 – INQ000137145</b> COVID-19 Secure Guidance – Evaluation Report</p> <p><b>JP3/118 – INQ000137146</b> Covid Guidance Playbook</p>
6	Aug 2020	Externally conducted review:  "Rapid Stocktake of Lessons Learnt and Good Practice in the Management of Local Covid-19 Outbreaks: with a focus on the experience in Leicester City and Leicestershire"	<p>On 5 August 2020 Dame Mary Ney was commissioned by the Department's Secretary of State to carry out a rapid stocktake of lessons learnt and good practice in the management of local Covid-19 outbreaks with a focus on the experience in Leicester City and Leicestershire. This was submitted to the Department on 21 August 2020 and published on 14 September 2020.</p> <p>The learning points are identified as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review the national and local governance frameworks to clarify the interface between them, how councils will be engaged and to strengthen local political oversight.</li> <li>2. Councils need to exercise local outbreak scenarios so they are well prepared.</li> <li>3. The management and effectiveness of announcements of changes in local restrictions could be improved by the use of a checklist of requirements.</li> </ol>	The report was used by the Department to feed into ongoing work on engagement with LAs and diverse communities and to consider how best to secure compliance with local regulatory regimes.	<p><b>JP3/119 – INQ000137147</b> Report by Dame Mary Ney: "Rapid Stocktake of Lessons Learnt and Good Practice in the Management of Local Covid-19 Outbreaks"</p> <p><b>JP3/120 – INQ000137148</b> Secretary of State Jenrick response to Dame Mary Ney report</p> <p><b>JP3/108 – INQ000137136</b> Department's Covid-19 Response Playbook ver 1.0</p>

			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Ongoing work is required to improve the testing data available, in particular, data on ethnicity and workplace.</li> <li>5. Councils should ensure they understand their communities and have community cohesion arrangements in place so that community and business engagement is effective.</li> <li>6. In devising tactical control plans don't underestimate the range of skills and local knowledge that councils can deploy at pace from across the organisation.</li> <li>7. There is scope to further the role of local councils and to move to a more preventative whole system approach on the ground bringing together scaling up of testing, tracing and supporting self-isolation and shielding.</li> <li>8. There is a need to refine the application of the new regulatory framework in achieving compliance of businesses and events.</li> <li>9. In Civil Contingencies arrangements, the role of local political leaders and local elected representatives should be reviewed.</li> </ol> <p>Good Practice identified by the report:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Implementation of a Local Political Oversight Board to provide a forum for local political leaders to have collective oversight of the management of the outbreak.</li> <li>11. Integration of the PHE Incident Management Team into local resilience structures and establishing a joint outbreak management team.</li> </ol>		
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Dated: [xx] August 2023

			<p>12. Community and Business Engagement building on local knowledge and community cohesion work.</p> <p>13. The local approach to scaling up testing – City Reach – used on the ground teams drawing on the local knowledge of council staff, local NHS staff and volunteers to undertake door to door visits.</p> <p>14. Tracing contacts using the range of existing council data bases and systems as well as on the ground teams.</p> <p>15. Bespoke Data Base built to capture activity and testing outcomes of the City Reach Teams.</p>		
7	Sept 2020	Internal - Reorganisation of Resilience and Emergency Division (RED)	<p>Significant reorganisation of Resilience and Emergency Division to be the Resilience and Recovery Directorate; other changes to their role and plans.</p> <p>Details set out within the Witness Statement.</p>	<p>As part of the RED role, the Emergency Survival Manual was prepared, in part, on the basis that it <i>“seeks to capture and draw deeply on our learning from our response to Covid-19 to-date”</i></p>	<p><b>JP3/103 – CF/31</b> <b>INQ000023165</b></p> <p><b>JP3/104 - CF/31A</b> <b>INQ000023166</b></p> <p><b>JP3/105 - CF/31B</b> <b>INQ000023167</b></p> <p><b>JP3/106 - CF/31C</b> <b>INQ000023169</b></p> <p><b>JP3/107 – CF/31C</b> <b>INQ000023168</b> Department's Emergency Survival Manual and separate annexes (exhibited to main witness statement).</p>

8	Sept 2020	Internal – team with responsibility for Compliance and Enforcement - Closures	<p>Lessons Learned exercise conducted into Closures workstream and report finalised 11 September 2020. The report highlighted what went well in that phase of the pandemic:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Positive, collaborative working across a range of government departments.</li> <li>2. Flexibility and adaptability.</li> <li>3. Clear roles and responsibilities to enable effective delivery.</li> </ol> <p>It also highlighted what could be improved:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clearer governance structures.</li> <li>2. Ensuring the overall coherence of the regulations.</li> <li>3. Communications.</li> <li>4. Resourcing.</li> <li>5. Defined leadership for departmental policy concerns.</li> <li>6. Having an end-to-end view.</li> </ol>	<p>Learning was incorporated into the Department's "Guidance Playbook" for future pandemics and the "Local authority Covid-19 Compliance and Enforcement Playbook"</p>	<p><b>JP3/121 – INQ000137149</b>  MHCLG Closures Team: lessons learned report</p> <p><b>JP3/122 – INQ000137150</b>  Covid-19 Compliance and Enforcement Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/118 – INQ000137146</b>  Covid Guidance Playbook</p>
9	Sept 2020	Internal workshop facilitated by Civil Service Organisational Development and Design	<p>Directors and Directors-General from the Department discussed and recorded their perceptions of the most important lessons for the Department to learn from Covid-19 response work to date.</p> <p>There were two sessions. The first on 9 September 2020 was primarily a listening exercise. This reviewed reflections on a range of themes including resourcing, work patterns, governance, data, wellbeing, playbooks and co-ordination.</p> <p>The second on 17 September 2020 built on the first workshop and included consideration of what priorities</p>	<p>The following actions were agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a playbook – writing down sections on governance, resourcing, comms and info flows.</li> <li>• Resource prioritisation board established to develop a stronger approach to resource prioritisation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>JP3/123 – INQ000137151,</b>  <b>JP3/124 - INQ000137152,</b>  <b>JP3/125 - INQ000137153,</b>  <b>JP3/126 – INQ000137154</b>  Slides and read outs from each of the two Workshops</p> <p><b>JP3/108 – INQ000137136</b>  Department's Covid-19 Response Playbook ver 1.0</p>

			<p>should be to prepare for a further peak of Covid. This produced a list of priorities around resourcing, communications, governance and playbooks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mapping of resources and all areas of resource in the playbook.</li> <li>• Think about how to access MoD capability - lots of accountants and programme managers. Needs resource planning.</li> <li>• Ensuring LAs are properly resourced for response.</li> <li>• Take opportunity to build back better, e.g., pursue beyond Whitehall agenda.</li> </ul> <p>These were then rolled into the future Winter Planning work.</p>	
10	Autumn 2020	Internal – team responsible for shielding	<p>An internal Lessons Learned review was conducted into shielding after the first lockdown. This detailed paper noted that the Department was asked to lead on shielding for the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) due to capacity issues with DHSC. It noted that it was a good example of cross-government working, as DHSC and NHS England led on the clinical advice, identification of individuals, patient communications, guidance to NHS Trusts and GPs, and oversaw delivery of medicines. NHS Digital had oversight of the production and dissemination of the Shielding Patient List. DEFRA held responsibility for food supply and delivery. DWP managed the national call centre. Government Digital Service (GDS) led on the website and voice recognition phonenumber. The Department also led wider coordination of shielding policy across</p>	<p>Informed the design of shielding programme during subsequent lockdowns.</p> <p>Learning incorporated into the later Shielding Internal Review (August 2021 – see below) and informed future shielding models.</p>	<p><b>JP3/127 – INQ000112537</b>  Shielding Phase I – MHCLG Lessons Learned</p>

			<p>these departments and Cabinet Office, HM Treasury, DCMS, DfE, DWP, and BEIS.</p> <p>The review analysed what went well, issues arising, what could have been done differently and recommendations across the categories of food, basic care and contact, medicines, patient registration and data, patient contact, relationships with Local Authorities, governance and staff wellbeing</p>		
11	Oct 2020	Internal – team with responsibility for Covid Secure	<p>A Lessons Learned exercise was conducted to capture learning following the announcement and implementation of the Covid Secure Marshals policy (as described in the Witness Statement).</p> <p>This covered issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreeing comms plan early internally, improving communications with No 10.</li> <li>• Ensure clearer lines of accountability for respective remits / deliverables and that these are communicated, to avoid any crossed wires.</li> <li>• Bringing in the Department's local government engagement, local government finance and analytical teams earlier.</li> <li>• Very clear prioritisation – clear senior steer of what could be paused as we developed this work.</li> <li>• Engagement with LAs and Local Government sector bodies should have taken place at an earlier stage.</li> </ul>	<p>Planning document shows planned implementation – which items were to change immediately and which were medium term. The learning was incorporated into Department's Compliance &amp; Enforcement Playbook which covers Covid Secure Marshals.</p>	<p><b>JP3/128 – INQ000137156</b>  Planning document from Lessons Learned exercise on the Marshals policy</p> <p><b>JP3/108 – INQ000137136</b>  Department's Covid-19 Response Playbook ver 1.0</p> <p><b>JP3/122 – INQ000137150</b>  Covid-19 Compliance and Enforcement Playbook</p>
12	Summer to Oct 2020	Internal – team responsible for	<p>Lessons Learned exercise conducted together with policy advisers on support offered to rough sleepers during first lockdown. This identified the following as actions:</p>	<p>Informed scheme design for further support for rough</p>	<p><b>JP3/129 – INQ000137157</b>  Local lockdown planning session (rough sleepers policy)</p>



		rough sleeping/ homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need efficient system for ministerial engagement</li> <li>• Risk workshop and risk register (building on Rough Sleeping Response Taskforce board mechanisms).</li> <li>• Ministerial sign up to a playbook e.g. key principles signed off in advance.</li> <li>• Be more strategic in contingency planning.</li> <li>• Build resilience in the directorate e.g. switch of roles to help with retention? Exemption from redeployment?</li> </ul>	sleepers/homeless considered in October 2020.	<b>JP3/169 – INQ000137197</b> Homelessness and Rough Sleeping (HRS) Variant of Concern (VoC) COVID-19 Playbook
13	After Jan 2021	Internal - team responsible for Community Champions	<p>Collation of information on the model, delivery and findings of the Community Champions Programme into a presentation for internal dissemination. It focused on the transferability of the model to various health and social settings as well as the flexibility of the programme in how LAs planned to design and deliver their local projects to meet the objectives of the programme. One conclusion was:</p> <p><i>“Community Champions schemes are central to combatting issues such as vaccine equity, health disparities and regional inequalities where there is enduring transmission of Covid-19. They are likely to be effective in situations where trust is low, helping to reduce barriers to health seeking behaviour and increase social cohesion through locally generated solutions.”</i></p>	Findings shared across Department through Lunch and Learn sessions. The findings also informed the policy and delivery of the Community Vaccine Champions, particularly around LAs incorporating vaccine equity work into the wider health inequalities work.	<b>JP3/130 – INQ000137158</b> Lunch, Learn and Listen with Community Champions
14	Feb 2021	GIAA audit on Winter Planning	<p>This audit provided independent and objective assurance on the framework of governance, risk management and control regarding Winter Planning. It covered the unique concurrent challenges, such as: moving from local and regional local restrictions to national lockdowns in response to Covid-19 and some disruption arising from the EU Transition as well as usual winter pressures. Key findings identified 'moderate' risks:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Department established a single Winter Senior Responsible Owner.</li> <li>• A dedicated Winter Co-Ordination Unit was set up to manage internal governance structures and coordinate</li> </ul>	<b>JP3/131 – INQ000137159</b> Government Internal Audit Agency report on Winter planning  <b>JP3/132 – INQ000137160</b> Communications strategy on Winter planning

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant gaps in governance and risk management for Winter Planning.</li> <li>• Reporting of risks on the Department's central reporting system ("RADAR") to ensure there is a holistic view of risks captured across the entire programme, especially given the fast nature of the work.</li> <li>• Look to develop a communications strategy in line with responsible, accountable, consulted, informed principles.</li> </ul>	<p>briefings for external meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central situation reports were used to provide necessary structure at meetings to discuss key buckets of work, and to give consideration of winter concurrent risks which were formalised and documented.</li> <li>• The Department has moved to full use of the RADAR system for risk management, and post audit, compliance with RADAR reporting requirements 'greatly improved'.</li> <li>• A high-level strategy was pulled together for how the Department should communicate over the winter period.</li> </ul>	
15	Feb 2021	National Audit Office	<p>The NAO report "Protecting and Supporting the clinically extremely vulnerable during lockdown" covered the work of the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS as well as the Department. The report had the following recommendations for the Department (including cross-government recommendations):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By April 2021, the Department should review the effectiveness of the new National Shielding Service System, introduced for the second lockdown, to ensure that it provides intended benefits.</li> </ul>	<p>The Department subsequently carried out the recommended review (see below – August 2021).</p>	<p><b>JP3/133 – INQ00059879</b>  NAO report "Protecting and Supporting the clinically extremely vulnerable during lockdown"</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Department should set out how it can establish the capacity and capability of Local Authorities to support shielding-type exercises in a timely way in the event of future pandemics or civil emergencies and how it can engage more effectively with Local Authorities.</li> <li>• For future pandemic planning, government should consider how it will approach balancing the relative merits of central, universal offers of support against targeted local support.</li> </ul>		
16	Mar to Sept 2021	Internal - team responsible for Community Champions commissioned external reports	<p>SPI-B affiliated academics prepared three spotlight reports on the Community Champions programme. These reports were not published as they were not anonymised. The reports found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within a few weeks of initiating the programme, new connections had been developed linking formal and informal support networks and services.</li> <li>• Local Authority areas were engaging with a wider range of groups, some of which were not previously visible and would have remained invisible without the support of Community Champions.</li> <li>• Positive outcomes of the programme include increased vaccination uptake, decrease in fly tipping, increased trust and engagement with wider services, and some improvements to community cohesion.</li> <li>• The programme achieved these outcomes through a number of coordinated activities such as setting up vaccination hubs, circulation of translated materials in multiple languages and modes of delivery, 'foot-patrol' visits to neighbourhoods, facilitating two-way dialogue and Q&amp;A forums.</li> </ul>	The findings of the reports were used in developing the policy for the Community Vaccine Champions programme e.g. allowing LAs flexibility to use and repurpose the funding, incorporating vaccine equity work into wider health inequalities, encouraging LAs to form partnerships with the voluntary, community and social enterprise section and co-design solutions with communities, incorporating mid- and small grant funding schemes into LA funding.	<b>JP3/134 – INQ000137162, JP3/135 - INQ000137163, JP3/136 – INQ000137164</b> Community Champions Policy: Development, Training and Strategic Implications for Recovery from Covid-19 – Spotlight Reports 1 - 3

			Each spotlight report was by the London School of Economics and called: "Community Champions Policy: Development, Training and Strategic Implications for Recovery from Covid-19".		
17	Mar 2021	Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee	<p>Report entitled "Protecting the homeless and the private rented sector: MHCLG's response to Covid-19" published 31 March 2021 (Sixth Report of Session 2019–21) and Government response May 2021. This followed an earlier interim report (recommendations did not relate to Covid-19).</p> <p>In total there were 26 conclusions and recommendations. On <u>homelessness</u>, while recognising the "<i>enormous success</i>" of the 'Everyone In' initiative, the majority of the report relates to design of non-Covid-19 schemes for the homeless which pre-date the pandemic and so is not relevant for the Inquiry. The report states: "<i>We recommend the Government immediately issues clear guidance to local authorities stating that they can and should use their legal powers ... to find accommodation for those otherwise ineligible for support during a public health emergency.</i>"</p> <p>On <u>protecting the private rented sector</u>, the part relevant to Covid-19 recommended the Government:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. "<i>publish an exit plan for the private rented sector from national and local restrictions.</i>"</li> <li>b. "<i>deliver a specific financial package – we prefer discretionary housing payments – to support tenants to repay rent arrears caused by covid-19.</i>"</li> </ol> <p>Other recommendations related to design of existing schemes.</p>	Government sent further LA communications which included additional advice about the assessments LAs were conducting for people with limited eligibility, though the underlying policy itself did not change.	<p><b>JP3/137 – INQ000137165</b>  Select Committee report "Protecting the homeless and the private rented sector: MHCLG's response to Covid-19"</p> <p><b>JP3/138 – INQ000137166</b>  Government response to Select Committee report</p>

18	Mar 2021	Public Accounts Committee 49 <sup>th</sup> Report of Session 2019-21	<p>Based on an investigatory report from the National Audit Office called “Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic”, a PAC Report entitled “Covid-19: Housing People Sleeping Rough” was published March 2021 and the Department’s response was published August 2021.</p> <p>The recommendations mainly related to further work required to end rough sleeping by the end of the current Parliament rather than learning from the pandemic itself. The first finding and recommendation was the most relevant:</p> <p><i>“The ‘Everyone In’ initiative succeeded in its objective of protecting public health in the first wave of the pandemic, averting more than 20,000 infections. The Department showed flexibility in rapidly reorganising its activities but maintaining a high tempo for a prolonged period impacted on its resilience; delays in the awarding of funding in autumn 2020 may be signs that the Department’s capacity was being stretched.</i></p> <p><i>Recommendation: The Department should, in seeking to learn lessons from what made Everyone In a success in the first wave of the pandemic, assess what additional staff capacity it needs to be able to sustain its response and its support for local partners, as the pandemic continues.”</i></p>	<p>The recommendation on staff capacity was incorporated into the Department’s response to the Omicron variant, as the Department considered how it would resource further waves of Covid-19.</p>	<p><b>JP3/139 – INQ000137167</b>  National Audit Office investigatory report “<i>Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic</i>”</p> <p><b>JP3/140 – INQ000137168</b>  Public Accounts Committee report “<i>Covid-19: Housing People Sleeping Rough</i>”</p> <p><b>JP3/141 – INQ000137169</b>  Government response to PAC Report “<i>Covid-19: Housing People Sleeping Rough</i>”</p>
19	Spring 2021	Multiple teams within the Department	Emergency Survival Manual (detail set out in the body of the Witness Statement).	Details set out in the body of the witness statement.	<b>JP3/103 – CF/31 INQ000023165,</b>

					<b>JP3/104 - CF/31A</b> <b>INQ000023166,</b>  <b>JP3/105 - CF/31B</b> <b>INQ000023167</b>  <b>JP3/106 - CF/31C</b> <b>INQ000023169</b>  <b>JP3/107 – CF/31C</b> <b>INQ000023168</b>  Department's Emergency Survival Manual and separate annexes (exhibited to main witness statement)
20	Apr 2021	Lessons Learned from the Winter Operating Model	<p>In November 2020 the Department stood up a new Winter Operating Model designed to help the Department respond to concurrent winter pressures. This built on the learning from the stand up of the previous Gold Secretariat in Wave One. A Lessons Learned exercise in April 2021 found:</p> <p><i>Went well</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting up a central co-ordination function and creating extra capacity helped ensure that other parts of the Department were not overwhelmed.</li> <li>• Governance structures enabled officials to understand what concurrency of risks in particular places looked like in practice rather than as an abstract idea.</li> <li>• Regular Situation Reporting was generally seen as a useful product and helpful in judging which risks needed to be raised to Ministers.</li> </ul>	The lessons were incorporated into the Emergency Survival Manual as described in the Witness Statement.	<b>JP3/103 – CF/31</b> <b>INQ000023165,</b>  <b>JP3/104 - CF/31A</b> <b>INQ000023166,</b>  <b>JP3/105 - CF/31B</b> <b>INQ000023167</b>  <b>JP3/106 - CF/31C</b> <b>INQ000023169</b>  <b>JP3/107 – CF/31C</b> <b>INQ000023168</b>  Department's Emergency Survival Manual and separate annexes (exhibited to main witness statement)

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Winter Capacity and Capability Board provided a helpful forum for setting out resource requests and ensured that requests for additional staff were fulfilled.</li> </ul> <p><i>Lessons for the future (sample from Annex A of exhibited Emergency Survival Manual [JP3/103 – CF/31 INQ000023165 ])</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are agreed at the outset and clearly communicated.</li> <li>Ensure a single individual is clearly identified as SRO for the overall response.</li> <li>Communication between the co-ordinating secretariat and policy teams should be frequent and ongoing.</li> <li>Clear, agreed processes needed for the decision to stand up central co-ordinating functions in the future.</li> <li>Frequency of reporting should reflect the speed at which data is moving.</li> <li>Be clear from the outset about the scope of the reporting and its intended audience.</li> <li>Cross-cutting, place-based data can provide useful and different insights alongside programme-based reporting.</li> <li>Ensure that all the teams with an interest are engaged in the co-ordinating structures from the outset.</li> </ul>		
21	Apr 2021	Public Accounts Committee	<p>Report published "Covid-19: Supporting the Vulnerable during Lockdown" HC 938 had the following recommendations for the Department (most recommendations were addressed to DHSC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Department should ensure that Local Authorities will continue to have the capacity and resilience to support the needs of clinically extremely vulnerable</li> </ul>	<p>The Department accepted the first of the two recommendations directed to it, but did not agree that there was a lack of capacity within Local Authorities. It noted: "As part of contingency planning, Ministry of Housing,</p>	<p><b>JP3/142 – INQ000060681</b>  Public Accounts Committee report "Covid-19: Supporting the Vulnerable during Lockdown"</p>

			<p>people, particularly given the significant increase of people advised to shield in February 2021 – from 2.2 million to 3.9 million people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Department should urgently update the Committee on whether it has now successfully confirmed the support needs of all vulnerable people, including the additional 1.7 million people advised to shield in February 2021.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has tested future delivery confidence with nearly all upper tier councils across England, finding that councils are confident in their ability to stand up shielding support rapidly in future. MHCLG continues to work closely with councils and to keep funding under review so councils can support those who need it, whilst providing value for money</i>".</p> <p>See also internal review of shielding below (August 2021).</p>	<p><b>JP3/143 – INQ000137171</b>  Government response to Public Accounts Committee report "Covid-19: Supporting the Vulnerable during Lockdown"</p>
22	Apr 2021	GIAA audit of Covid-19 Governance and Evidencing of Key Decisions	<p>This audit provided independent and objective assurance on the framework of governance, risk management and control regarding Covid-19 governance and evidencing of key decisions looking at the period March 2020 to August 2020.</p> <p>GIAA found substantial assurance of the Department's Local Government Finance team, within an overall framework of moderate assurance across the wider scope of the review.</p> <p>The following areas for improvements were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variable risk management processes and practices leading to key risks not being captured, monitored and reported.</li> </ul>	<p>The report identified varying levels of readiness and quality of governance across the Department. This report prompted significant enhancements in winter governance that fed into the planning for winter 2021, which also benefited from enhanced, dedicated resource as part of the Covid-19 response.</p>	<p><b>JP3/144 – INQ000137172</b>  Government Internal Audit Agency – report "Covid-19 Governance and Evidencing of Key Decisions"</p> <p><b>JP3/103 – CF/31 INQ000023165,</b>  <b>JP3/104 - CF/31A INQ000023166,</b>  <b>JP3/105 - CF/31B INQ000023167</b>  <b>JP3/106 - CF/31C INQ000023169</b></p>



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All areas reviewed were subject to resource challenges. All teams noted difficulties given the workload and speed of response required.</li> <li>• Documentation needed to audit decisions were hard to obtain, requiring significant time and effort.</li> <li>• Lessons learned were not always formally captured and used to drive process improvements, either leading to ineffective working practices becoming embedded or good practice not being shared.</li> </ul>		<p><b>JP3/107 – CF/31C</b>  <b>INQ000023168</b></p> <p>Department's Emergency Survival Manual and separate annexes (exhibited to main witness statement)</p>
23	June 2021	Internal but relating to DHSC and Test & Trace – report prepared by the Department's community testing team and addressed to the Department of Health and Social Care / NHS Test & Trace	<p>Report called "MHCLG Internal Briefing note- Covid Testing Challenges" finalised 18 June 2021. Purpose was <i>"To summarise MHCLG's understanding of local authority challenges in relation to Covid-19 testing, along with potential government actions for consideration."</i></p> <p>Requests/ recommendations for DHSC/NHS with relevance to this Department:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider working with Local Authorities to produce a written, overarching testing strategy/framework.</li> <li>Engage Local Authorities in a review of the national comms plan for testing.</li> <li>Consider setting out the totality of the Local Authority role in testing.</li> <li>Consider mechanisms to communicate to and engage with Local Authorities on the totality of testing policy/issues.</li> <li>Ensure that comms and engagement with local government by central government is as timely and streamlined as possible.</li> <li>Review the data requests made by Local Authorities.</li> </ol>	The recommendations were addressed to other agencies, reflecting the shifting of responsibilities to them in the course of 2020. Overall learning was incorporated into the Department's "Covid-19 Testing Playbook".	<p><b>JP3/145 – INQ000137173</b>  MHCLG Internal Briefing note <i>"Local Authority Covid Testing Challenges"</i></p> <p><b>JP3/146 – INQ000137174</b>  Covid-19 Testing Playbook</p>

			<p>Requests from the Department for assistance from Test &amp; Trace were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Assistance in developing a better understanding of government testing governance.</li> <li>b. Assistance in understanding the governance for addressing local government requests/issues raised and how further the Department can provide support.</li> <li>c. Consider adjusting the cross-Whitehall policy engagement forum agenda to include certain regular items.</li> <li>d. Consider developing a shared testing core brief/script/lines for government officials.</li> <li>e. This Department to be added to the distribution list for all key Test &amp; Trace/DHSC/Department for Education updates to Local Authorities and any core brief/core scripts.</li> </ol>		
24	July 2021	Internal – paper presented to the Department's Executive Team	<p>A paper dated 6 July 2021 was presented to the Executive Team called: "COVID-19 Scenario Planning, Inquiry and High Incidence Planning Update". The main recommendations were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree that in their planning all impacted teams should be using the scenarios derived by Cabinet Office/DHSC, and that major updates to these will be reflected in planning across teams in the Department.</li> <li>2. Note that in light of the current context the Department's Covid response teams will reduce our strategic cross-government role as we come out of the roadmap, with a smaller team in place for the autumn. Any change to our expected role to address particular/significant issues will require an explicit decision and associated resourcing.</li> </ol>	<p>The Next Steps noted by the paper were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. We will provide impacted teams with the scenarios, and further updates, to enable them to plan for any impacts.</li> <li>ii. Following Step 4 we will begin the winddown of Covid-19 response teams to a smaller core for the autumn, with playbooks developed to enable a stand up in the case of significant change e.g. in the case of a</li> </ol>	<p><b>JP3/147 – INQ000137175</b>  Executive Team report  "COVID-19 Scenario Planning, Inquiry and High Incidence Planning Update"</p> <p><b>JP3/108 – INQ000137136</b>  Department's Covid-19 Response Playbook ver 1.0</p>

			<p>3. Note that high prevalence periods, or movement to a more negative scenario, may impact on prioritisation and resourcing across a range of teams. In the event of unanticipated workload increases we will seek to meet the resource requirements within the Department.</p>	<p>dangerous variant, and initial preparatory work done on the inquiry.</p> <p>iii. Develop and assess a surge resourcing approach and submit a workplan to manage this with PC&amp;C (People Capability and Change).</p> <p>Further to (i) - (iii) above: Covid-19 response teams were reduced in size and merged in August 2021. This team used available scenarios from CO and UKHSA for planning its work. During the response to the Omicron variant in late 2021 and early 2022, additional staff were deployed from the Rapid Response Team and from other parts of the Department.</p>	
25	June 2021	Public Accounts Committee Fourth Report of Session 2021-22: Local Government Finance	<p>A report by the National Audit Office called "Local Government Finance in the Pandemic" was published 10 March 2021 and informed this Public Accounts Committee investigation (though it had already started to take evidence). The PAC's report into Local Government Finance was published 4 June 2021 with three witnesses from the Department giving oral evidence in March 2021. The findings and recommendations (latter in italics) relating to Covid-19 were:</p>	<p>The Department's response was published accepting all the PAC's recommendations. In addition, the Local Government Finance team within the Department wrote in February 2022 in specific response to the first</p>	<p><b>JP3/148 – INQ000115370</b>  National Audit Office report: <i>"Local Government Finance in the Pandemic"</i>  <b>JP3/149 – INQ000137177</b>  Public Accounts Committee report: <i>"Covid-19: Local Government Finance"</i></p>

			<p>a. The Department was not sufficiently prepared for the local government finance implications of a severe emergency. <i>PAC recommendation: The Department should capture learning from the pandemic and write to us by the end of 2021 setting out how it will use this to prepare a flexible framework for responding quickly to the implications of severe national emergencies for local government.</i></p> <p>b. The pandemic has exposed limitations in the data that the Department normally collects from local authorities, meaning it has not had a proper picture of local financial resilience. <i>The Department should draw on the experience of collecting data during the COVID-19 pandemic to improve its regular collections of local government financial data. In particular, it should write to us by October 2021, setting out: i) what, if any, changes it plans to make to its regular collections based on its experience of data collection and use in the pandemic; and ii) how it plans, in consultation with the sector, to improve the usefulness of its data on local authority reserves specifically.</i></p> <p>c. Government support schemes during the pandemic were not always designed with sufficient knowledge of local government finance or input from the sector. <i>HM Treasury, the Department for Education, the Department of Health &amp; Social Care, the Department for Business, Energy &amp; Industrial Strategy, the Department for Environment, Food &amp; Rural Affairs, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media &amp; Sport, in co-operation with the Department, should write to us by October 2021 setting how they will improve, and then maintain, their understanding of the operational</i></p>	<p>recommendation. The themes covered in the letter were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Scaling up data gathering in an emergency</li> <li>2. Engagement with LAs</li> <li>3. Suitability of different means of providing financial support</li> <li>4. Spending Review and the Local Government Finance Settlement</li> </ol> <p>Relating to the second recommendation, following consultation, the Department has recently updated the guidance to Local Authorities concerning finance data collection.</p> <p>In relation to the final recommendations, the Department has established a new Office for Local Government to oversee how Local Authorities are performing and delivering against priority public services.</p> <p>The Department's Local Government Finance team now has a "Financial Shocks"</p>	<p><b>JP3/150 – INQ000137178</b>  Department response to the PAC report "Covid-19: Local Government Finance"</p> <p><b>JP3/151 – INQ000137179</b>  Department's letter on lessons learned to Public Accounts Committee Chair for report on "Covid-19: Local Government Finance"</p> <p><b>JP3/152 – INQ000137180</b>  Local government finance data collection: Guidance to local authorities</p> <p><b>JP3/153 – INQ000224536</b>  Department's Financial Shocks Playbook v.1.0</p>
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			<p><i>realities of local government finance and the financial pressures authorities face.</i></p> <p>d. The Department has not fulfilled previous assurances that it will be transparent about financial risk in the sector by sharing information with the National Audit Office. <i>In discussion with the National Audit Office, within three months the Department should find a way to share information relevant to financial risk in the sector, including about individual local authorities, while indicating on what basis it can or cannot be shared further.</i></p> <p>e. The Department's over-optimism about the impact of the pandemic on Local Authorities' risk leading to reductions in services for local people. <i>The Department, working with other government departments, should ensure that decision-making about actions to stabilise local government finance is informed by sufficient information about the service implications of current financial pressures.</i></p>	<p>playbook to cover all types of impacts on the finances of Local Authorities, this is linked within the wider Covid-19 Response Playbook.</p>	
26	Aug 2021	Public Health England	<p>The team with responsibility for the Community Champions Programme worked with Public Health England (now the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities) on the development of a review of the Community Champions model and approaches. The report was published on GOV.UK on 26 August 2021 which included examples from practice and implications. The summary of the report states these key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Champion approaches are highly relevant to reducing health inequalities in a range of contexts.</li> <li>• There are range of different models and ways of building Community Champion programmes.</li> </ul>	<p>Learning was factored into subsequent planning for Community Vaccine Champions programme.</p> <p>Learning was incorporated into the Department's main "Covid-19 Response Playbook" which says:  <i>"Consider the potential to utilise community champions to support the operational response. For example, by</i></p>	<p><b>JP3/154 – INQ000137182</b>  Public Health England report: <i>"Community Champions: A rapid scoping review of community champion approaches for the pandemic response and recovery"</i></p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These approaches can be applied flexibly to meet local needs and assets.</li> <li>• Champions can be key connectors in communities but these roles do not operate in isolation and need to be embedded in effective community engagement strategies.</li> </ul>	<i>supporting vaccine roll-out (if applicable) and/or by enhancing engagement with official public health messaging within under-reached communities and groups.”</i>	
27	Aug 2021	Internal – team responsible for Safer Public Spaces	<p>A Lessons Learned exercise of the Safer Public Places workstream was conducted. Summary of conclusions (focuses on the production of published guidance):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safer Public Places guidance was of high quality, the guidance was kept up to date with latest changes in policy and updates were made in a timely fashion. The guidance was developed in close collaboration with stakeholders, but timelines of commissions meant in later iterations there was much less engagement with stakeholders. Little feedback was received on the guidance so often ‘in the dark’ about how it was received, assumed silence was positive. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Action: consider how to evaluate guidance more thoroughly in future. For example, develop a survey or more actively ask for feedback from a small group of engaged stakeholders.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Safer Public Places team took on a role to coordinate guidance updates for Step 4 due to the significance of the changes. Guidance was updated on or shortly after Step 4 which was a success. The role of the SPP team in guidance coordination during Step 4 and previous to this was never completely clear, it was often hard to know how far to ‘lean in’ in supporting other teams.</li> </ul>	<p>Learning was incorporated into the Department’s “Guidance Playbook” for future pandemics. This explains the Cabinet Office Commission process used to commission the drafting of guidance from the Department, how some of it was subject to triple approval from DHSC, Cabinet Office and what is now the UK Health Security Agency</p>	<p><b>JP3/155 – INQ000137183</b> Safer Public Spaces: Lessons Learnt – Summary</p> <p><b>JP3/118 – INQ000137146</b> Covid Guidance Playbook</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Action: if a guidance coordination role is needed again in the future, roles and responsibilities should be set clearly at the outset.</li> <li>● The division created a strong evidence base to understand the impact of the Roadmap, especially for Step 2 which saw the most significant changes for our sectors. The evidence based utilised different forums such as LRF discovery meetings, the Compliance Working Group and the Beaches and Tourism Group. This allowed us to provide confident briefings to Ministers and have a grip on key risks and issues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Action: ensure evidence base work is captured thoroughly in our division's playbooks. Consider how to stand up forums, such as the Beaches and Tourism Group, if needed again in the future. Also be aware of pre-existing structures we can tap into if needed, such as the 'R9 meetings' with local authority representatives.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● The Safer Public Places team utilised the convening power of the Cabinet Office to put in place an Open Spaces Task and Finish Group to manage the move to Step 2 cross-government. Many of the policies which impact Safer Public Places don't sit within the Department, and engagement from other government departments on the risk of Step 2 to outdoor public places was initially low. The Task and Finish Group put focus on these risks and allowed for joint working. Cabinet Office provided feedback that the pressure from the Department to form this group was effective. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Action: consider how and when to utilise the convening power of the Cabinet Office, along</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
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			with their cross-government view. Consider how and when to escalate to seniors if needed.		
28	Aug 2021	Internal – team with responsibility for testing/ isolation	This team designed the “Critical Workforce Reasonable Excuse” programme and a Lessons Learned exercise was subsequently conducted. This evaluated what worked, what could have been done better, across the themes of Organisation, Communications, Process for Stages 1 -3. A Next Step was identified as: <i>“The guidance changes will have shifted the pressures and the nature of close contact isolation is that self-isolation pressures are different to other types of workforce pressure. Keeping a list of sectors to bulk pre-approve in event of needing to run a similar scheme and overview of types of roles most impacted would be useful.”</i>	Learning was incorporated into the Department’s “Workforce Absences Playbook” though this focuses on the Local Government workforce. This incorporates at section 13 some Lessons Learned findings collated in March 2022, which noted that data and intelligence gathering could have been improved, including early identification and clarity of roles, that there were difficulties around cross-government working in agreeing easements, though there were existing strong relationships with DHSC and DfE.  Learning also incorporated into the Department’s “Self-Isolation Playbook.”	<b>JP3/156 – INQ000137184</b> Critical Workforce Reasonable Excuse Scheme: MHCLG Lessons Learned <b>JP3/157 – INQ000137185</b> Workforce Absences Playbook <b>JP3/158 – INQ000137186</b> Self-isolation Playbook
29	Aug 2021	Internal – team responsible for shielding	The NAO report “Protecting and supporting the clinically extremely vulnerable during lockdown” (see above February 2021) and PAC report “Covid-19: Supporting the Vulnerable During Lockdown” (see above April 2021) was followed up by a Lessons Learned exercise within the Department.	There had been an earlier review of shielding for the clinically vulnerable after the first lockdown (see above), however this later review covered subsequent lockdowns, and is linked within the Department’s	<b>JP3/159 – INQ000137187</b> Internal Review of the Shielding Programme <b>JP3/160 – INQ000110722</b> Record of oral evidence given by the Permanent Secretary for the Public Accounts



				<p>"Covid-19 Response Playbook". The Public Accounts Committee had recommended that such a review be carried out, as part of their report "Covid-19: Supporting the vulnerable during lockdown" (HC 938 – see above April 2021) and in his evidence to the committee in February 2021 the Department's Permanent Secretary gave evidence of the shielding programme being good evidence of cross-government and cross-sector working.</p>	<p>Committee report "<i>Covid-19: Supporting the vulnerable during lockdown</i>"</p>
30	Nov 2021	<p>GIAA audit on the Department's pandemic exit strategy</p>	<p>The audit review focussed on an assessment of whether the Covid-19 Response Division had a clear exit strategy as the Department moved from the pandemic into business as usual. The review found that <i>"the structures, governance arrangements, policy, decision making, and cross Whitehall stakeholder engagement strategies are in place to ensure an effective exit strategy is in place. This strategy is agile, has contingencies, and responds to a fast-moving and ever-changing risk landscape. We are pleased to note that lessons learnt from our previous winter planning review have been taken forward."</i></p> <p>No recommendations were made for additional action.</p>	<p>The Department noted the review's assessment that the framework of governance, risk management and control is adequate and effective.</p>	<p><b>JP3/161 – INQ000137189</b>  Government Internal Audit Agency report '<i>Covid-19 Recovery planning (Pandemic exit strategy)</i>'</p> <p><b>JP3/108 – INQ000137136</b>  Department's Covid-19 Response Playbook</p>
31	Dec 2021	<p>Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select</p>	<p>The report called "Supporting Our High Streets After COVID-19" published on 1 December 2021 made 40 wide-ranging recommendations ranging from reform of</p>	<p>In the time since the report was published, the Department has not conducted a review into the impact of the handling of the</p>	<p><b>JP3/162 – INQ000137190</b>  Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee's report</p>

		<p>Committee's sixth report of Session 2021-22</p>	<p>Compulsory Purchase to Active Travel to Business Rates, not all of which related to the Department.</p> <p>The first four findings/ recommendations related to Covid-19:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We commend the Government for acting decisively and quickly to implement a wide-ranging package that supported high street businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. We additionally commend the Government for taking steps to avoid a cliff-edge of support, both by extending schemes beyond the lifting of restrictions, and by winding down gradually schemes such as the business rates holiday and coronavirus job retention scheme. While recognising the speed at which decisions needed to be taken, it is a matter of regret that there seemed to be a lack of co-ordination across Government. We also praise local authorities, Business Improvement Districts, the High Streets Task Force, and others, for their work on the ground to protect high streets and the public's health.</li> <li>2. The Government's commitment in its hospitality strategy to learning lessons from the pandemic for the hospitality sector is a welcome start, but it should do so for high streets and town centres in the round. Learning lessons will not only help central and local government be better prepared to support the high street through any future health crises, but may also highlight opportunities for policy development to support high streets beyond the pandemic, such as the Government has done by extending pavement licenses.</li> </ol>	<p>pandemic. To share best practice and highlight opportunities to support high streets, we have continued to work closely with Business Improvement Districts and the High Street Task Force (HSTF). The HSTF has now provided support to a total of 115 places so far.</p> <p>To address business rates, from 1 April 2023, the business rates revaluation will update rateable values for non-domestic properties in England.</p> <p>The pandemic caused a substantial build-up of rent-debt. To address this, on 24 March 2022, Government passed the Commercial Rent (Coronavirus) Act. The Act established a new statutory arbitration process, delivered by independent arbitrators appointed by approved arbitration bodies. The deadline for making an application to arbitration under the Act was 23 September 2022.</p> <p>We have considered how adaptations made on the high</p>	<p><i>"Supporting Our High Streets After COVID-19"</i></p> <p><b>JP3/163 – INQ000137191</b>  Government response to Select Committee report <i>"Supporting Our High Streets After COVID-19"</i></p> <p><b>JP3/164 – INQ000137192</b>  Department's Build Back Better High Streets strategy</p>
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			<p>3. We recommend that the Government conduct a full lessons learned review that specifically examines the impact of the handling of the pandemic at central and local government level on the short- and long-term health of high streets and town centres. The Government may wish to consider high streets in its independent inquiry into the Government’s handling of the pandemic, but given the pressing challenges facing the high street it should conduct a separate review immediately. The review should consider the various schemes on an individual basis as well as differential impacts by sector and by geography. It should consider the value for money of schemes that supported the high street, including how taxpayer money lost to fraud and error could have been prevented. The review should also consider how well high street businesses have been supported to implement COVID-19 public health measures, such as the Test and Trace system, social distancing, and guidance on wearing face coverings. As well as considering lessons learned, the review should consider opportunities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic for future policy development to support high streets and help them evolve in a post-pandemic world.</p> <p>4. While we consider that an immediate lessons learned review is needed, we recognise that the pandemic is not over. The Government should continue to monitor the impact of the full range of COVID-19 business support that affects the high street with a view to being prepared to adjust such support in case of a serious new variant or variants.</p>	<p>street during the pandemic could evolve in a post pandemic world. In doing so, further to the commitment in the Government’s Build Back Better High Street Strategy we are now making permanent the temporary streamlined process for businesses to gain a pavement licence through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, introduced earlier this year.</p>	
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32	March 2022	External – CCS review into Death Management	<p>Cabinet Office convened a meeting of their Death Management Steering Group to look at some lessons learned and potential triggers which might necessitate continuation or standing up of cross-government death management arrangements.</p> <p>Key areas of success were noted as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder and Devolved Administration engagement.</li> <li>• Cross Whitehall co-ordination.</li> <li>• Deployment of 200+ refrigerated and freezer temporary body storage units.</li> <li>• Coronavirus Act legislation and statutory instruments to support it.</li> <li>• Data collection, modelling and analysis.</li> <li>• Negotiating early designation of staff in the sector as key workers.</li> <li>• Brokering priority access to vaccinations for sector critical workers.</li> <li>• Access to additional funding to support Local Authorities in death management activities.</li> <li>• Administration of the critical workers exemption scheme.</li> <li>• Facilitating contract novations to secure long-term access to units through Crown Commercial, the contractor and local stakeholders.</li> </ul> <p>Challenges were noted as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability of Local Resilience Forums to collect data.</li> <li>• Collaboration between Local Resilience Forums and the funeral sector.</li> <li>• Fast changing nature of guidance and policy.</li> </ul>	Learning for the Department was incorporated into “Death Management Playbook.”	<p><b>JP3/165 – INQ000137193</b> Covid 19 Death Management Programme Lessons Capture Paper</p> <p><b>JP3/166 – INQ000137194</b> Slides used at meeting of Death Management Steering Group where Lessons Capture discussed</p> <p><b>JP3/167 – INQ000137195</b> Department’s Death Management Lessons Capture to feed into Death Management Steering Group exercise</p> <p><b>JP3/168 – INQ000137196</b> Death Management Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/108 – INQ000137136</b> Department’s Covid-19 Response Playbook ver 1.0</p>
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of initial local resilience for body storage.</li> </ul>		
33	Apr 2022 onwards	Internal to the Department	<p>Development of Covid-19 Response Playbook, focusing on future mobilisation in the event of new variants of concern arising. It encapsulates the Department's main learning from the pandemic across its policy areas.</p> <p>Details set out in the body of the witness statement.</p>	Details in body of the witness statement.	<p><b>JP3/108 – INQ000137136</b>  Department's Covid-19 Response Playbook ver 1.0</p> <p><b>Policy area playbooks/ internal reviews linked within the main Playbook:</b></p> <p><b>JP3/168 – INQ000137196</b>  Death Management Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/169 – INQ000137197</b>  Homelessness and Rough Sleeping (HRS) Variant of Concern (VoC) COVID-19 Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/157 – INQ000137185</b>  Workforce Absences Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/170 – INQ000137198</b>  Regulatory Services Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/158 – INQ000137186</b>  Self-isolation Playbook</p>

Witness Name: Jeremy Pocklington  
Statement No.: 3  
Exhibits: **JP3/01 – JP3/175**  
Dated: [xx] August 2023

					<p><b>JP3/159 – INQ000137187</b> Internal Review of the Shielding Programme</p> <p><b>JP3/171 – INQ000137199</b> Vaccinations (LA Role) Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/172 – INQ000137200</b> PPE Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/173 – INQ000137201</b> Covid Legislation and Regulations Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/174 – INQ000137202</b> Supported Housing: Planning Ahead Winter 2022/23 against threat of a new variant of serious concern</p> <p><b>JP3/175 – INQ000137203</b> Managed Quarantine Service Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/118 – INQ000137146</b> Covid Guidance Playbook</p> <p><b>JP3/122 – INQ000137150</b> Compliance &amp; Enforcement Playbook</p>
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Witness Name: Jeremy Pocklington

Statement No.: 3

Exhibits: **JP3/01 – JP3/175**

Dated: [xx] August 2023

					<b>JP3/146 – INQ000137174</b> Covid Response Testing Playbook
					<b>JP3/153 – INQ000224536</b> Financial Shocks Playbook v.1.0