

Witness name: Simon Case
Statement No.: First
Exhibits: SC/1-SC/16
Dated: 25 January 2023

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

CORPORATE WITNESS STATEMENT OF SIMON CASE

I, Simon Case, will say as follows:

1. SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction to the Author

- 1.1 I am a Senior Civil Servant and serve as Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service. I have held this position since rejoining the Civil Service on 9 September 2020.
- 1.2 As the Cabinet Secretary I am the Prime Minister's most senior official policy adviser, act as Secretary to the Cabinet and am responsible for supporting all Ministers in the running of government. As Head of the Civil Service I lead nearly half a million public servants who work in public institutions, administer tax, benefits and pensions systems and put government policy into practice¹.
- 1.3 Prior to my current role, I was Permanent Secretary at Number 10 Downing Street (No.10), focusing on COVID-19 and the response to the pandemic, on secondment from the Royal Household. Previously I held many other positions across government, having served in both David Cameron's and Theresa May's administrations as Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. I have also served in a range of senior roles across government, including in: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; the Northern Ireland Office; the Cabinet Office and GCHQ.

¹ My biography is available at: www.gov.uk/government/people/simon-case [INQ000086852]

Executive Summary

- 1.4 As required by the Inquiry, in this statement I set out, on behalf of the Cabinet Office including No.10, the structures and processes in relation to decision-making that existed and were established to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. I also describe, at a high level and by reference to the context at the time, how those structures and processes changed as the pandemic unfolded and how the Government evolved the central management of its response. The 'relevant period' (as defined by the Inquiry) covered by this statement is from 21 January 2020 to 22 February 2022. This statement does not describe individual decisions made, and since it is high level, does not purport to cover every detail. I understand that further detail on the structures and processes set out below will be provided to the Inquiry in due course: whether that is by other witnesses in response to Rule 9 requests from the Inquiry, through the provision of documents sought by the Inquiry or via any other route agreed with the Inquiry.
- 1.5 During the initial months of the relevant period, from 21 January 2020 to 5 April 2020, I was not in government, so for that time my statement relies entirely on papers and accounts provided by others who worked in the Cabinet Office including No.10 at the time. From 6 April 2020 to 21 May 2020, I was in government on loan from the Royal Household as a Director General in the Cabinet Office, responsible for coordinating the Government's efforts to support non-shielded vulnerable people. For that time, my statement draws in part on my direct experience of ministerial decision-making, as well as on papers and accounts provided by others who worked in the Cabinet Office including No.10 at the time.
- 1.6 From 22 May 2020 to 8 September 2020, I was Permanent Secretary at No.10 with responsibility for the COVID-19 response. For that time, my statement draws in part on my direct experience of ministerial decision-making, as well as on papers and accounts provided by others who worked in the Cabinet Office including No.10 at the time. On 9 September 2020, I rejoined the Civil Service and became Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service, with responsibilities broader than COVID-19. For the time since then, my statement draws in part on my direct experience of ministerial decision-making, as well as on papers and accounts provided by others who worked in the Cabinet Office including No.10 at the time.
- 1.7 Section 2 refers to the overall high-level principles of Cabinet government, devolution

and local government in England, then sets out the general and ongoing roles and responsibilities of the Cabinet Office including No.10.

- 1.8 As the Cabinet Manual (a publicly available guidance document on the functioning of the UK Government) sets out, “Cabinet is the ultimate decision-making body of government. The purpose of Cabinet and its committees is to provide a framework for Ministers to consider and make collective decisions on policy issues...The Cabinet system of government is based on the principle of collective responsibility”². The Cabinet Manual also describes the formal arrangements that the UK government and Parliament have with the devolved administrations and legislatures.
- 1.9 As the Government’s website explains, the Cabinet Office has responsibility for “supporting collective government, helping to ensure the effective development, coordination and implementation of policy”³. It also has responsibility for “coordinating the Government’s response to crises”. In these capacities the Cabinet Office enables collective decisions and provides direct policy and implementation advice to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (CDL) and other Cabinet Office Ministers. It draws on policy advice, expertise, data and analysis from departments with lead responsibility for specific issues, such as HM Treasury for the economy and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) for public health.
- 1.10 The Cabinet Office, and the agencies and public bodies which support it, have a wide range of other functions aimed at delivery of government. These functions are led by the Permanent Secretary for the Cabinet Office (which, at the beginning of the relevant period, was John Manzoni. He handed over to Alex Chisholm in April 2020). These functions are not addressed by this statement, but consistent with the scope of this statement, the structures and processes in relation to decision-making more broadly are addressed.
- 1.11 The Prime Minister is advised and supported by officials and special advisers (temporary civil servants appointed directly by Ministers who can, in addition to other roles, provide political support) based in No.10. As the Government’s website explains, together they help the Prime Minister “to establish and deliver the Government’s overall strategy and policy priorities, and to communicate the Government’s policies to

² The Cabinet Manual is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cabinet-manual> [INQ000086861]

³ The role of the Cabinet Office is summarised here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office/about> [INQ000086870]

Parliament, the public and international audiences⁴. Teams based in No.10 ordinarily include (but are not limited to) a private office, the PM Post team and a press office. The precise configuration of teams based in No.10 evolves over time at the discretion of the Prime Minister. During the relevant period it also housed a policy unit (throughout), a data and science team (from summer 2020) unit and a delivery unit (from spring 2021).

- 1.12 While the descriptions in Section 2 generally applied before and throughout the pandemic and continue to hold today, Sections 3 to 5 are accounts of the relevant period and therefore are in the past tense.
- 1.13 Section 3 describes at a high level the development of the COVID-19 Dashboard (the Dashboard) and the role of evidence more widely. I describe this before turning to the decision-making structures because those structures were shaped by the Government's understanding of the virus and its impacts. Data and evidence were a primary input into meetings at which Ministers made decisions. The Dashboard was the main process by which this was brought together, with input from the NHS, DHSC, HM Treasury, other departments and other public and private sources.
- 1.14 Section 4 provides an overview of the wide set of meetings which the Prime Minister and the CDL needed to have outside the ministerial committee structure to develop policy and strategy on COVID-19. The format, frequency of and attendance at these meetings were tailored to the issues at hand and the nature of discussion that needed to take place. This section highlights the key meeting formats but is not exhaustive. The meetings it describes, and the use of electronic communication channels (such as email, WhatsApp and the like), played a role in the Government's process for setting strategic direction and making decisions on issues. This reflected the scale, range and complexity of issues that the Government needed to consider through the relevant period.
- 1.15 The set of meetings described in Section 4 include the Prime Minister's daily morning meeting, which focused increasingly on COVID-19 from early March 2020 and enabled the Prime Minister to provide steers on the key issues for the day. These meetings would typically decide the focus of each day's press conference. The press

⁴ 10 Downing Street is described here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/prime-ministers-office-10-downing-street/about>
[INQ000086873]

conferences, which began on 3 March 2020 and were on a daily basis from 16 March 2020, played a crucial role in the Government's communications and in promoting public understanding of the Government's response.

- 1.16 The morning meeting evolved into the Dashboard meeting at which the Prime Minister, Chancellor, other key Ministers, officials and advisers received regular updates on the virus and its impacts. The Dashboard meetings complemented the policy-making process by developing a shared understanding of the data picture as it developed and building familiarity with the key indicators and trends.
- 1.17 The Prime Minister chaired meetings, sometimes referred to as 'Quads', with the small number of Secretaries of State most closely involved in the strategic response to prepare for and align their approach to key strategic decisions in the response to the pandemic.
- 1.18 The Prime Minister held a range of other meetings at different frequencies through the relevant period (in addition to those with his core team). These included: ad hoc and in depth meetings on COVID-19; bilateral meetings with key Ministers; and, meetings on specific policy and operational issues. The latter were sometimes referred to as 'deep dives' and covered issues such as personal protective equipment (PPE), health and social care, testing and vaccines. The Prime Minister also carried out a range of meetings within government and internationally to support his international engagement on COVID-19.
- 1.19 Section 5 sets out how the formal structure of Cabinet, its committees, Ministerial Implementation Groups and official support operated. Given the unprecedented scale and changing nature of the challenge the COVID-19 pandemic posed, the formal committee structures for making collective decisions, and the organisational capabilities needed in the Cabinet Office including No.10 to enable those, evolved throughout the relevant period. I summarise these meeting formats into three stages, noting that they were a subset of the meetings held through Cabinet Office including No.10 to enable decisions.
- 1.20 During the first stage of governance (the beginning of the relevant period to 15 March 2020), those decisions which required collective agreement were taken through the Cabinet Office Briefing Room ("COBR") mechanism and the Cabinet also considered the Government's response. Ministers continued to meet in these structures for the

remainder of the relevant period.

- 1.21 From 16 March to 27 May 2020, the volume and scale of decisions that needed to be taken within a whole-of-government response demanded a bespoke architecture, which became the principal way by which decisions were made (alongside COBR meetings and Cabinet). New Ministerial Implementation Groups (MIGs) led the Government's key lines of operation: the Health Ministerial Implementation Group; the General Public Services Ministerial Implementation Group; the Economic and Business Response Ministerial Implementation Group; and, the International Ministerial Implementation Group.
- 1.22 The MIGs reported into a 9.15 strategy meeting chaired by the Prime Minister. Officials and advisers typically met at 8.15.
- 1.23 All meetings in stages one and two were supported by the Cabinet Secretariat, which comprises a number of secretariats which support the effective functioning of Cabinet government.
- 1.24 From 28 May 2020, the four MIGs were stood down. Earlier that month the Government had published a phased roadmap out of lockdown (Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy⁵), and it had become clear that a governance structure more sustainable for the longer term was required. The COVID Strategy Committee (COVID-S) and the COVID Operations Committee (COVID-O) were established. These committees remained in place until the end of the relevant period (COVID-O continued to meet for a short period thereafter while remaining issues were resolved).
- 1.25 During this third stage, the Government continued to manage its response to the pandemic with strategic plans, including: the COVID-19 Winter Plan (November 2020⁶); the COVID-19 Response: Spring 2021 Roadmap (February 2021⁷); COVID-19

⁵ Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy (May 2020) is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy> [INQ000086874]

⁶ COVID-19 Winter Plan (November 2020) is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-winter-plan> [INQ000086875]

⁷ COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 Roadmap (February 2021) is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021> [INQ000086876]

Response: Autumn and Winter Plan 2021 (September 2021⁸); and, the COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19 (February 2022⁹). COVID-O was used to oversee overall implementation of the plan in force at any one time and to hold topic-specific discussions on key aspects of the plans.

- 1.26 COVID-S and COVID-O were supported by a new unit, the COVID-19 Taskforce (the Taskforce), which was based in the Cabinet Office. The Taskforce was the unit at the centre of government which joined together strategy, analysis and coordination with departments across Whitehall to drive delivery. The Cabinet Office will provide additional information on the role of the Taskforce during the relevant period.
- 1.27 Overall, I wish to highlight three important factors which shaped the structures and processes described in this statement.

1.27.1 First, the governance as designed at any one time, and the practical reality of that governance, will often have differed. The early months of the pandemic were an exceptionally fluid time at the centre of government as structures were introduced and then evolved with the path of the virus. The pandemic was unprecedented in the post-World War II era and represented an extraordinary threat to the health of millions of citizens, affecting daily life in the UK in profound ways. Its sheer scale, pace and breadth meant that individuals and teams in the Cabinet Office including No.10 were seeking to manage a large volume of daily decisions. This was at the same time as trying to build new structures to support that process and enable longer term planning on how to tackle and ultimately exit the pandemic. As the initial acute phase of the crisis passed, new and clearer structures were developed for the prolonged challenge that followed. These included the formation, and development over time of the Taskforce.

1.27.2 Second, the relevant period began with considerable uncertainty around the data¹⁰. The Government had to respond to evolving evidence and

⁸ COVID-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan 2021 (September 2021) is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-autumn-and-winter-plan-2021> [INQ000086877]

⁹ COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19 (February 2022) is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19> [INQ000086878]

¹⁰ Precautionary SAGE 1 minutes: Coronavirus (COVID-19) response, 22 January 2020; available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/precautionary-sage-minutes-coronavirus-covid-19-response-22-january-2020/precautionary-sage-1-minutes-coronavirus-covid-19-response-22-january-2020> [INQ000086853]

knowledge as scientists developed their understanding of the virus and as the virus itself changed. The very global nature of the pandemic meant that the Government also had to take account of, and respond to, the actions of other countries. As the kinds of decisions needed evolved, so did the approach to government required to enable those decisions.

1.27.3 Third, and in common with many workplaces across the country, the Prime Minister and some staff became unwell with the virus and there was a shift in how people worked, whether in the office or at home. This posed an additional challenge to the arrangements and for the individuals concerned. Together with the need for resilience, it also meant that colleagues would often need to cover different roles or work interchangeably at points.

1.28 This corporate witness statement has been drafted with the assistance of the Government Legal Department and Pinsent Masons LLP ('Pinsent Masons'), co-partnering legal firm with the Government Legal Department. I understand that Pinsent Masons are, with the assistance of the Cabinet Office's Public Inquiry Response Unit ('PIRU') and respective Business Units, preparing factual narratives which summarise chronologically the meetings in Section 5, and which will attach the key documents from those meetings. These materials will be intended to be read alongside this statement.

1.29 The remainder of this statement is structured in the following sections:

Section 2: Cabinet government, devolved administrations, local government in England and the role of the Cabinet Office including No.10

Section 3: The development of the COVID-19 Dashboard and the role of evidence

Section 4: Meetings chaired by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster outside the ministerial committee structure

Section 5: Cabinet, its Committees, Ministerial Implementation Groups and official support

2. SECTION 2: CABINET GOVERNMENT, DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ENGLAND AND THE ROLE OF THE CABINET OFFICE INCLUDING NO.10

- 2.1. This section provides a high-level overview of Cabinet government, devolved administrations and local government in England, drawing from the Cabinet Manual, which provides further detail. This section goes on to describe the roles of Cabinet Office including No.10 in respect of decision-making.
- 2.2. Broadly, these descriptions applied before and throughout the pandemic and continue to hold today. They are not comprehensive. This section does not cover the changes to the institutional configuration of the Cabinet Office including No.10 which occurred from time to time during the relevant period as the response to the pandemic developed and expanded. These changes are described as relevant in Section 5.

Cabinet government

- 2.3. Our system of government is set out in a number of documents. Paragraphs 2.4 to 2.18 of this statement comprise of quotations from the Cabinet Manual, which provides a source of information on the laws, conventions and rules that affect the operation and procedures of the Government.
- 2.4. “Ministers’ powers derive from: Parliament, which grants powers through legislation; ministers’ common law powers to act; and prerogative powers of the Crown that are exercised by, or on the advice of, ministers. Each form of power is subject to limits and constraints, and its use may be challenged in the courts”.
- 2.5. “Cabinet is the ultimate decision-making body of government...Cabinet is chaired by the Prime Minister, who also determines its membership. It will usually comprise senior ministers. The Prime Minister may arrange for other ministers to attend Cabinet, either on a regular basis or for particular business...Cabinet committees help to ensure that government business is processed more effectively by relieving pressure on Cabinet...Cabinet Committee decisions have the same authority as Cabinet decisions”.
- 2.6. “The purpose of Cabinet and its committees is to provide a framework for ministers to consider and make collective decisions on policy issues....It is for the Prime Minister,

as chair of Cabinet, or the relevant Cabinet committee chair to summarise what the collective decision is, and this is recorded in the minutes by the Cabinet Secretariat”.

- 2.7. “The Cabinet system of government is based on the principle of collective responsibility. All government ministers are bound by the collective decisions of Cabinet, save where it is explicitly set aside, and carry joint responsibility for all the Government’s policies and decisions”.
- 2.8. “Collective agreement can be sought at a Cabinet or Cabinet committee meeting or through ministerial correspondence”. The Cabinet Manual does not give definitive criteria for issues which engage collective responsibility, but makes clear that “proposals will require consideration by a Cabinet committee if: the issue is likely to lead to significant public comment or criticism; the subject matter affects more than one department; and/or there is an unresolved conflict between departments”. The Cabinet Manual also sets out that “policy proposals with public expenditure implications will not be agreed unless Treasury ministers are content. If necessary, issues can be referred to the Prime Minister or, if he or she so decides, to Cabinet for a decision”.
- 2.9. The Cabinet Manual identifies “areas outside Cabinet collective decision-making”. It notes, for example, that “the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s Budget and any other Budget statement are disclosed to Cabinet at a meeting on the morning of the day on which they are presented to the House of Commons, although the content of the proposal will often have been discussed with relevant ministers in advance of the meeting. The expectation is that the proposals will be accepted by Cabinet without amendment, although the Chancellor may, if necessary, make amendments”.

Devolved administrations

- 2.10. The devolved administrations are the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. The devolved legislatures are the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 2.11. As the Cabinet Manual sets out, “broadly speaking, legislation provides that government ministers and Parliament remain responsible, among other things, for” certain areas, such as “macroeconomic and fiscal policy”.

- 2.12. “Broadly speaking, legislation provides that government ministers and Parliament are not responsible for” certain areas in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, “as they have been devolved to the respective legislatures and administrations”. These areas include, among things, “health and social care”.
- 2.13. “Parliament remains sovereign and retains authority to legislate on any issue, whether devolved or not...However, the Government proceeds in accordance with the convention that Parliament would not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters except with the agreement of the devolved legislature. The devolved administrations are responsible for seeking such agreement as may be required for this purpose on an approach from the UK government”.
- 2.14. “The Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland represent the interests of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the Government, and promote the Government’s objectives in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Scotland Office, Wales Office and Northern Ireland Office manage the day-to-day devolution issues which arise between the Government and the devolved administrations and are responsible for managing the devolution settlements”.
- 2.15. “Inter-governmental relations are conducted through formal mechanisms, such as the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) and the British–Irish Council (BIC), and working-level bilateral relationships across policy areas”.

Local government in England

- 2.16. As the Cabinet Manual sets out, “local authorities are statutory bodies created by Acts of Parliament. They are not accountable to Parliament, as they are directly elected by their local communities. However, ministers can direct local government to adhere to national policy frameworks where legislation permits”.
- 2.17. “In England, there is both single-tier and two-tier local government...Local authorities are responsible for their own finances within centrally set parameters and budgets. However, the Government sets the overall level of central government funding for local government in England, and decides expenditure priorities and standards for improvement. Some funding will, exceptionally, be ringfenced for particular activities”.
- 2.18. “Local government is a devolved responsibility in Scotland, Wales and Northern

Ireland”.

The Cabinet Office

2.19. The Cabinet Office’s role is set out on the Government’s website as follows¹¹. “We support the Prime Minister and ensure the effective running of government. We are also the corporate headquarters for government, in partnership with HM Treasury, and take the lead in certain critical policy areas”. The Cabinet Office has responsibility for:

2.19.1. “supporting collective government, helping to ensure the effective development, coordination and implementation of policy”;

2.19.2. “supporting the National Security Council and the Joint Intelligence Organisation, coordinating the Government’s response to crises and managing the UK’s cyber security”;

2.19.3. “promoting efficiency and reform across government through innovation, better procurement and project management, and by transforming the delivery of services”;

2.19.4. “promoting the release of government data, and making the way government works more transparent”;

2.19.5. “creating an exceptional Civil Service, improving its capability and effectiveness”; and

2.19.6. “political and constitutional reform”.

2.20. The Equality Hub was created in the Cabinet Office in September 2020, when the Race Disparity Unit, the Disability Unit and the Government Equalities Office were brought together. It focuses on disability policy, ethnic disparities, gender equality, LGBT rights and the overall framework of equality legislation for the UK. The Director of the Equality Hub is providing a separate statement to the Inquiry.

2.21. The Cabinet Office, and the 26 agencies and public bodies which support it, have a

¹¹ Corporate information available here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office/about> [INQ000086854]

wide range of functions aimed at delivery of the effective running of government. These functions report to the CDL or other Cabinet Office Minister and are led by the Permanent Secretary for the Cabinet Office¹².

- 2.22. The Cabinet Office's role in respect of collective decision-making is managed by the Cabinet Secretariat, which reports through the Cabinet Secretary to the Prime Minister. It oversees the policy, practice and precedent underpinning cabinet collective responsibility. The Cabinet Secretary is the senior official for Cabinet, and as set out in the Cabinet Manual, "is responsible for the smooth running of Cabinet meetings and for preparing records of its discussions and decisions".
- 2.23. The Cabinet Manual makes clear that "the Prime Minister decides – with the advice of the Cabinet Secretary – the overall structure of the Cabinet committee system, including the chair, deputy chair (if any), membership and the terms of reference of each Cabinet committee". "Committees are usually established to consider a particular area of government business". "The committee structure varies depending on the requirements of the incumbent government".
- 2.24. Each Cabinet Committee has a senior official in the Cabinet Office, who will have responsibility for ensuring the effective functioning of their respective Committee (the Senior Secretary). The role of the Senior Secretary is to support the effective delivery of the meeting, to uphold the principles of collective agreement and to ensure that the Committee does not take decisions outside of its terms of reference.
- 2.25. In practice, running a Committee will usually mean: agreeing the work programme and a forward look of decisions needed and agendas with the Chair; ensuring relevant government departments produce material to support discussions; testing the material beforehand, often through an official committee meeting chaired by the Senior Secretary; ensuring the Chair is briefed; promptly recording and circulating actions and decisions; and, taking a minute of the meeting.

¹² Throughout the relevant period, a wide range of Cabinet Office functions supported the delivery of the Government's response to COVID-19. For example, the Ventilator Challenge was led from the Cabinet Office by Gareth Rhys Williams, Government Chief Commercial Officer, and the Government Commercial Function, with support from across Government including the Ministry of Defence, DHSC, NHS and the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. Another example is the support that the Cabinet Office's commercial experts provided to the Government's procurement exercise to secure critical PPE during the early months of the pandemic. These matters of delivery are not addressed by this statement, but consistent with the scope of this statement, the structures and processes in relation to decision-making more broadly are addressed.

- 2.26. The Cabinet Manual explains that “official committees may be convened for a variety of purposes, but would normally meet in advance of a Cabinet committee. This would enable them to consider the issues that would need to be covered in Cabinet committee papers and to help the Cabinet Secretariat identify points that are likely to be raised so that it can brief the chair of the Cabinet committee effectively”.
- 2.27. The Cabinet Office is responsible for coordinating the Government’s response to crises, working closely with the relevant lead government departments. The Government maintains the capability to respond to the range of hazards and threats facing the country through the activation of central response arrangements. This mechanism is known as COBR, which comes from ‘Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms’, the physical location in Westminster where COBR meetings usually take place.
- 2.28. The Cabinet Manual explains that COBR, run by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) during the relevant period, is “the mechanism for agreeing the central government response to major emergencies which have international, national or multi-regional impact. Meetings at COBR are in effect Cabinet committee meetings, although there is no fixed membership, and they can meet at ministerial or official level depending on the issue under consideration. In general, the chair will be taken by the secretary of state of the Government department with lead responsibility for the particular issue being considered”. It is standard practice for Ministers from the devolved administrations to be invited to COBR meetings where there may be impacts in the devolved administrations.
- 2.29. COBR meetings facilitate cross-government decision making and provide information and advice at times of crisis. COBR meetings are ordinarily provided with a Common Recognised Information Picture (CRIP), including facts and figures, the main developments and decisions, trends and upcoming decision points.
- 2.30. COBR meetings are supported (as necessary) by a number of separate cells and groups providing specialist input and advice. The Government’s website explains that “the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) is convened to provide independent scientific advice to support decision-making in the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) in the event of a national emergency”¹³.

¹³ See: About Us, The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies/about> [INQ000086855]. As the pandemic evolved, SAGE provided input to other ministerial meetings as well as COBR meetings.

2.31. The Government's website also describes the role of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and National Security Council (NSC) as follows:

2.31.1. The JIC "is the place where senior representatives from across government come together to review and endorse assessments on national security issues, usually written by the Joint Intelligence Organisation" (see below). "By drawing on the experience and knowledge of its attendees the JIC aims to give Ministers and senior officials agreed assessments which are as insightful and accurate as possible"¹⁴. The Chair of the JIC is Sir Simon Gass (since June 2019).

2.31.2. The NSC "is the main forum for collective discussion of the Government's objectives for national security and about how best to deliver them in the current financial climate. A key purpose of the Council is to ensure that Ministers consider national security in the round and in a strategic way. The Council is chaired by the Prime Minister"¹⁵.

2.32. "The Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO) leads on intelligence assessment and development of the UK intelligence community's analytical capability, supporting the work of the JIC and NSC". It provides "authoritative, all-source assessment for the Prime Minister, the NSC and senior policy makers to support their decision-making on national security and foreign policy priorities" ("all-source" means that to create this picture the JIO draws on a wide range of material at all classifications). JIO draws "on the knowledge of our network of experts across the intelligence agencies, the diplomatic service, operational and policy areas of government, international partners, think tanks and academia, open source providers, and the private sector". The Permanent Secretary-level Head of the JIO is also the Chair of the JIC. The JIO is providing a separate witness statement to the Inquiry on the role of the JIC and the JIO on COVID-19.

¹⁴ Text in 2.31.1 and 2.32 is from Joint Intelligence Organisation; see here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-intelligence-organisation> [INQ000086856]

¹⁵ National Security Council; see here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/national-security-council> [INQ000086857]

The Office of the Prime Minister (No.10 Downing Street)

- 2.33. The responsibilities of the Prime Minister are set out on the Government website as follows¹⁶. “The Prime Minister is the leader of His Majesty's Government and is ultimately responsible for the policy and decisions of the Government”. As leader of the UK government the Prime Minister also:
- 2.33.1. “oversees the operation of the Civil Service and government agencies”;
 - 2.33.2. “chooses members of the Government”; and
 - 2.33.3. “is the principal government figure in the House of Commons”.
- 2.34. “As Minister for the Union, the Prime Minister works to ensure that all of the Government is acting on behalf of the entire United Kingdom: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales”.
- 2.35. Support and advice to the Prime Minister, at the centre of a wide and complex system of government, is provided by a range of formal and informal means, from staff in No.10, the Cabinet Secretariat and departments across Whitehall.
- 2.36. No.10 houses the office of the Prime Minister. Its role is summarised on the Government website as follows. “The office helps the Prime Minister to establish and deliver the Government’s overall strategy and policy priorities, and to communicate the Government’s policies to Parliament, the public and international audiences”¹⁷.
- 2.37. Teams based in No.10 ordinarily include (but are not limited to) a private office, the PM Post team and a press office. The private office is made up of private secretaries who cover distinct areas of government business and are typically responsible for: commissioning advice to the Prime Minister on priority issues and assuring its quality; briefing the Prime Minister ahead of meetings; and, communicating the Prime Minister’s views and decisions across Whitehall. The PM Post team (comprising what

¹⁶ 2.33 and 2.34 are from gov.uk information on the Prime Minister, available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/ministers/prime-minister> [INQ000086858]

¹⁷ The Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/prime-ministers-office-10-downing-street> [INQ000086859]

were formerly known as duty clerks and garden rooms) manage the flow of papers and other material and provide secretarial services, supporting the private office. The press office is typically responsible for communicating the Government's priorities and overall narrative, including the coordination of government announcements.

- 2.38. The precise configuration of teams based in No.10 evolves over time at the discretion of the Prime Minister. Throughout the relevant period, No.10 also housed a policy unit, providing policy advice to the Prime Minister, reporting into the Prime Minister's private office. From summer 2020 a data science and analytics team was established in No.10, known as 10DS (10 Data Science), providing modelling and analysis and promoting evidence-based research within the government, initially reporting into the Prime Minister's private office. From spring 2021 a delivery unit was established in No.10, seeking to ensure the Prime Minister's priorities are delivered on time to best effect for citizens. The 10DS reporting line then moved into the Director General of the delivery unit, who reports directly into the Cabinet Secretary.

3. SECTION 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COVID-19 DASHBOARD AND THE ROLE OF EVIDENCE

- 3.1. The Cabinet Office including No.10 sought to ensure that decision-making meetings on COVID-19 were supported by data, analysis and expert advice. Many government departments held data relevant to the response and conducted analysis aligned to their departmental interests and responsibilities. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and its sub-groups provided expert scientific advice¹⁸. The role of the Cabinet Office including No.10 was to integrate these various inputs and present a single, integrated picture for decision-makers. The structures and processes to do so evolved during the course of the pandemic.
- 3.2. At the start of the relevant period, the CCS was principally responsible for monitoring the emerging situation in Wuhan. The first email update was circulated by CCS to senior officials and private offices in the Cabinet Office including No.10 on 13 January 2020 (Exhibit SC/1 - **INQ000106878**). The CCS Director chaired the first cross-government ad hoc senior officials meeting on the novel coronavirus on 17 January 2020 (the minutes and actions are at Exhibit SC/2 - **a) INQ000097687**, **b) INQ000097689** and **c) INQ000097688**).
- 3.3. On 21 January 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) published its first situation report on the novel coronavirus²⁰ and on 23 January 2020 the Health Secretary updated the House of Commons on “the outbreak of a new coronavirus in China and the UK’s response to protect the British public”²¹.
- 3.4. From 24 January 2020, the CCS, with contributions from relevant government departments, circulated a Commonly Recognised Information Picture (CRIP) on the coronavirus (see also 2.29).

¹⁸ List of participants of SAGE and related sub-groups, available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies-sage-coronavirus-covid-19-response-membership/list-of-participants-of-sage-and-related-sub-groups> [INQ000086860]

¹⁹ This statement refers to the ‘novel coronavirus’ before 11 February 2020, and ‘COVID-19’ thereafter.

²⁰ Situation Report available here:

<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200121-sitrep-1-2019-ncov.pdf> [INQ000086848]

²¹ Hansard available here:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-01-23/debates/38D462B1-70F8-4CC6-AABD-2CCF4E271C34/WuhanCoronavirus> [INQ000086862]

- 3.5. From 4 February 2020, the CCS, with contributions from relevant government departments, produced a daily cross-department Situation Report (SitRep) on the novel coronavirus. It included information on the current domestic and international situations and response, the latest scientific advice and communications. It was shared with staff based in the Cabinet Office including No.10, other government departments and the devolved administrations.
- 3.6. From 16 March 2020, the cross-department SitRep and the CRIP were replaced by a COVID-19 Dashboard (the Dashboard), operated for the initial months by the CCS.
- 3.7. The Dashboard provided a range of data available at the time related to COVID-19 including on mortality, infection, health, restrictions and mobility, the economy and the public sector. The Dashboard's interactive charts were downloaded and shared daily via a portable document format (PDF) from 16 to 23 March 2020 to a large cross-government and devolved administration distribution list.
- 3.8. On 24 March 2020, the CCS launched the interactive version of the Dashboard on a dedicated website, which was available across government. It was updated at close of play each day. Once it was updated, an email alert was sent to users along with a PDF version of the Dashboard. The interactive Dashboard was used to brief the Prime Minister and senior members of cabinet.
- 3.9. The range of data sources covered by the Dashboard expanded over time. For example, a wide range of data came through the NHS, testing, vaccination and other public health infrastructure for which DHSC was responsible. A key surveillance tool feeding into the Dashboard was the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) which was carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and commissioned by Public Health England in April 2020, with the first results made available in May 2020.
- 3.10. From late summer 2020, the Dashboard was used to present regular, often daily, updates to the Prime Minister and others, and to brief Cabinet and other ministerial meetings (see Sections 4 and 5). This continued until February 2022.
- 3.11. The other principal analytical function within the Cabinet Office in the first phase of the pandemic was the JIO, which produced a series of reports on the progress of the pandemic globally.

- 3.12. The International Comparators Joint Unit (ICJU) was established in April 2020 as a joint team between (what is now) the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Cabinet Office. It was made up of analysts, data scientists, economists and social researchers. The ICJU worked closely with the FCDO's overseas network and used open source data to understand the pandemic in other countries and how they were responding to it using comparative analysis, including on specific issues such as social distancing and international travel. This helped to identify possible lessons learned and to inform UK policy development and decisions. ICJU products were shared with No.10, the Cabinet Office and broadly across departments and the devolved administrations.
- 3.13. In summer 2020, a new analytical team was set up in the Cabinet Office. Initially two directors were brought in from other departments, who continued to grow and shape the analytical team, supporting strategic policy development for the roadmap. The team worked with CCS to evolve the Dashboard and provided analytical support to policy options which considered economic, social and health impacts. The remit of the separate 10DS team was to support more general policy decisions across the breadth of the government's agenda. Its specific work on COVID-19 was only to repackage data streams already in the COVID-19 Dashboard into a more general overview dashboard covering the Prime Minister's priorities in the round. The director of 10DS also provided feedback and advice on the publicly released COVID-19 data slides as part of the quality assurance process.
- 3.14. In summer 2020, the Cabinet Office established a science and projects team which provided a mechanism to ensure that commissions to SAGE and its sub-groups were aligned to ongoing policy development.
- 3.15. For certain periods of the pandemic, the ONS loaned a team to produce visualisations for use in press conferences. From November 2020 this team was supported by an advisory group comprising members of the Government Statistical Service and Fellows of the Royal Statistical Society, to ensure the clarity and accuracy of data presented to the public during these press conferences.
- 3.16. During the summer and autumn of 2020, the relevant data and analysis teams in the Cabinet Office were progressively merged into a single entity within the Taskforce (see also Section 5). This worked especially closely with DHSC, the Joint Biosecurity Centre, the ONS, HM Treasury and the secretariats of SAGE and its sub-groups. This

sought to ensure that the analytical effort across government and commissions to SAGE and its sub-groups were coordinated and aligned to the needs of policy development and decision-making. As part of this, in the summer of 2020, the Taskforce took on responsibility for running the Dashboard.

- 3.17. These capabilities supported policy formulation and decision-making. The Spring 2021 'Roadmap', for example, was explicit that decisions on unlocking the national lockdown that was in place at the time would be guided by "data, not dates"²². It set out four tests which the Government used to decide if it was safe to move from one 'step' to the next. The five week gap between steps was chosen to allow sufficient time for data on the impact of the previous step to be collected and the impact assessed.

²² COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 (Roadmap); available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021> [INQ000086863]

4. SECTION 4: MEETINGS CHAIRED BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER OUTSIDE THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

- 4.1. Given the role of the Cabinet Office including No.10 across the breadth of the Government response to COVID-19, the Prime Minister and the CDL needed to have a wide set of meetings outside the ministerial committee structure to develop policy and strategy. The format, frequency of and attendance at these meetings were tailored to the issues at hand and the nature of discussion that needed to take place.
- 4.2. The aim of these meetings varied from one to another but overall they sought to: provide lead ministers with data, analysis and expert advice; make or prepare for decisions; coordinate other government departments; and, take 'deep dives' into specific issues. These meetings necessarily evolved in structure and rhythm according to the path of the pandemic and the Government's response to it. This section highlights the key meeting formats but is not exhaustive.
- 4.3. In these meetings the Prime Minister or CDL would from time to time request actions or make decisions not judged as needing collective agreement.
- 4.4. I noted in paragraph 1.27.1 that the governance as designed at any one time, and the practical reality of that governance, will often have differed. As such, some of the meetings described in this section were pivotal moments at which key decisions crystallised (for example, the meetings in 4.12.1). When judged appropriate in the circumstances, formal confirmation was subsequently sought in wider collective meetings.
- 4.5. Meetings involving the Prime Minister or CDL were often recorded, as per long-standing practice, through readouts by a private secretary which were circulated to departments. From time to time, the private office in No.10 communicated the Prime Minister's decisions to departments via a formal letter or email.
- 4.6. As I noted in paragraph 1.14, the meetings described in this section, and the use of electronic communication channels (such as email, WhatsApp and the like), played a role in the Government's process for setting strategic direction and making decisions on issues.

Daily meetings with the Prime Minister

- 4.7. Throughout the relevant period, the Prime Minister would typically chair a daily morning meeting to provide steers on the key issues for the day. From early March 2020, this daily meeting focused increasingly on COVID-19, bringing in other key Ministers, as well as other officials and advisers, such as the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA). These meetings typically decided what the key policy elements of the response needed to be on that day and how to communicate them to the public. Particularly in the earlier period, preparing for the press conferences (which were held on 3, 9 and 12 March 2020 and then daily from 16 March 2020) was an important informal way of keeping the Prime Minister abreast of developments and deciding on the public line-to-take on issues.
- 4.8. The daily meeting evolved into the 9.15 strategy meeting between 17 March and 15 May 2020 (covered in more detail in Section 5, which explains its interaction with the Ministerial Implementation Groups which operated at that time). Ahead of the 9.15 strategy meeting, officials and advisers usually met at 8.15. As well as making sure the 9.15 meeting was prepared and that information was shared across teams, the 8.15 meeting was used to surface and tackle issues which might need urgent central attention or had emerged overnight.
- 4.9. Subsequently, as the Taskforce was formed (see Section 5), the daily meeting evolved further into the Dashboard meeting. This was held by the Prime Minister, with the Chancellor, the CDL, Health Secretary, officials and advisers (including the CMO and the GCSA). The frequency was determined by events and developments in the pandemic and response.
- 4.10. The Dashboard meetings with the Prime Minister complemented the policy-making process by developing a shared understanding of the data picture as it developed and building familiarity with the key indicators and trends. The Prime Minister also used dashboard meetings to ask questions and request follow-up briefing.

Other meetings chaired by the Prime Minister

- 4.11. The Prime Minister chaired meetings, sometimes referred to as 'Quads', with the small number of Secretaries of State most closely involved in the strategic response. This was to prepare for and align their approach to key strategic decisions in the response

to the pandemic, such as the Spring Roadmap (published in February 2021²³) and the Living with COVID-19 strategy (published in February 2022²⁴). The Chancellor, the CDL and the Health Secretary usually attended and at times, other Ministers were present. These meetings aimed to provide a shared understanding of the data picture and the policy options and to give key Ministers the space to discuss the issues and develop the strategy.

4.12. The Prime Minister held a range of other meetings at different frequencies through the relevant period (in addition to those with his core team):

4.12.1. The Prime Minister held ad hoc and in depth meetings on COVID-19, sometimes at weekends, which would be attended by key Ministers, advisors and officials. These enabled the Prime Minister to prepare ahead of wider collective meetings, taking stock informally of the strategy, plans and approach, in light of the data.

4.12.2. As is routine for any Prime Minister, he had bilateral meetings with key Ministers. While the exact pattern of these varied, they took place at a high frequency with the key Ministers involved in delivering the pandemic response. These meetings enabled the Prime Minister to hold key Ministers to account and explore topics in depth with them to inform ongoing development of policy options. For example, as is normal, the Prime Minister and Chancellor continued to have regular bilateral meetings, prepared by officials in No.10 and HM Treasury, to discuss the pandemic, its implications for the economy and the government's response. Similar meetings took place with the delivery departments, for example with the Education Secretary when considering measures on schools.

4.12.3. On an ad hoc basis, or regularly for periods of time, the Prime Minister had meetings on specific policy and operational issues, with the attendance tailored to those issues. In these meetings, the Prime Minister considered, and sometimes made decisions on, the policy approach or operational implementation. Examples of issues covered

²³ COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 Roadmap (February 2021) is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021> [INQ000086864]

²⁴ COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19 (February 2022) is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19> [INQ000086865]

in these meetings, sometimes referred to as 'deep dives', include PPE, health and social care, testing and vaccines.

- 4.12.4. The Prime Minister carried out a range of meetings within government and internationally to support his international engagement on COVID-19.
- 4.13. On 6 April 2020, a statement from Downing Street announced that the Prime Minister, who had been admitted to hospital with persistent symptoms of coronavirus, had asked Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, who was the First Secretary of State, "to deputise for him where necessary"²⁵. While in that capacity, the First Secretary of State decided to chair strategy meetings which also included the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the CDL and the Health Secretary, supported by key officials and advisers. These meetings were referred to as 'Quads'. They laid the groundwork for the first Roadmap (published in May 2020²⁶), supported by the No.10 team led by Tom Shinner (see paragraph 5.27.1) and the Cabinet Office team led by Jonathan Black and Mark Sweeney (see paragraph 5.27.3.2)

Meetings chaired by the CDL

- 4.14. From time to time during the pandemic, a Small Ministerial Group (SMG) was set up, under the chair of the CDL, to bring together Ministers with an interest in a specific issue, to track progress or scrutinise delivery. This was at the request of the Prime Minister or remitted by a ministerial committee or on advice from officials. As examples, an SMG meeting on 28 January 2021 considered the approach to the second phase of the vaccine rollout and a series of SMG meetings in March and April 2021 oversaw the development of the COVID-Status Certification Review. While these meetings did not take collectively agreed decisions, actions and next steps would be agreed and circulated to all attendees.
- 4.15. I described, from paragraph 2.10, overall principles relating to the devolved administrations. Recognising the shared challenge presented by the pandemic, and to support coordination between the devolved administrations and UK government, the

²⁵ Statement from Downing Street: 6 April 2020; available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-from-downing-street-6-april-2020> [INQ000086866]

²⁶ Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy; available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy> [INQ000086867]

CDL held regular calls - at times on a weekly basis - with the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the First and deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland. These meetings reviewed the data (supported by the Dashboard, as described in Section 3) and considered the UK-wide response. These calls also took place in advance of significant announcements. I referred in paragraph 2.15 to the formal structures of the BIC and JMC. Member governments updated each other on their handling of the pandemic, and plans for recovery from the pandemic, at the BIC summits during the relevant period²⁷. The JMC is a committee structure which meets in various formats. One JMC committee had meetings during the relevant period: the JMC (EU Negotiations) committee²⁸.

- 4.16. CDL's regular calls with the devolved administrations complemented the regular calls of the four Chief Medical Officers. In the next section, at paragraph 5.28, I describe at a high level the wider structure by which officials worked with the devolved administrations.

²⁷ BIC communiqués are available here: <https://www.britishirishcouncil.org/bic/summits>

INQ000097839

²⁸ Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations) communiqués are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/communiqués-from-the-joint-ministerial-committee-eu-negotiations>

INQ000097840

5. SECTION 5: CABINET, ITS COMMITTEES, MINISTERIAL IMPLEMENTATION GROUPS AND OFFICIAL SUPPORT

- 5.1. I understand that Pinsent Masons are, with the assistance of the Cabinet Office's PIRU and respective Business Units, preparing factual narratives which summarise chronologically the meetings in this section and which will attach the key documents from those meetings. These materials will be intended to be read alongside this statement.

First governance stage - from beginning of the relevant period to 15 March 2020

- 5.2. As the novel coronavirus was identified and began to spread globally, the first collective ministerial decisions about the response, as distinct from those decisions within the responsibility of a single department, were taken at ministerial COBR meetings. The Cabinet Manual says that "in general the chair will be taken by the secretary of state of the government department with lead responsibility for the particular issue being considered". DHSC was the lead government department for responding to infectious diseases²⁹. As per the standard practice, No.10 officials coordinated with Cabinet Office officials to nominate a chair for each specific COBR meeting.
- 5.3. Following the WHO situation report on 21 January 2020 and the Health Secretary's statement to Parliament on 23 January 2020, the first ministerial COBR meeting on the novel coronavirus took place on 24 January 2020. It was convened by the Cabinet Office and chaired by the Health Secretary. The meeting considered, for example, proposed trigger points that would generate an escalation in the Government's response and how the devolved administrations and the UK government would work together, in particular on public communications.
- 5.4. COVID-19 was considered at further ministerial COBR meetings during the first stage, chaired by either the Prime Minister, the CDL or the Health Secretary. The first ministerial COBR meeting on COVID-19 chaired by the Prime Minister was on 2 March 2020.

²⁹ For further detail, see:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61354/lead-government-department-march-2010.pdf [INQ000086868]

- 5.5. The First Ministers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (and the deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland) were invited to attend all ministerial COBR meetings on COVID-19, in this first stage and throughout the relevant period. The respective Health Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and officials for each nation were also invited as appropriate.
- 5.6. The Senior Secretary to ministerial COBR meetings was the Director of the CCS. These meetings were supported by COBR officials meetings, chaired by the Senior Secretary, and other officials meetings on particular workstreams.
- 5.7. The first discussion of the novel coronavirus at a formal Cabinet meeting was on 31 January 2020. This was an update from the Health Secretary on the Government's understanding of the outbreak and how it might progress. The update included the domestic response, support for UK Nationals overseas, how the Government was supporting the international response and planned escalation steps.
- 5.8. COVID-19 was considered at further Cabinet meetings during the first stage. The Cabinet Secretary (Mark Sedwill at the time) was the senior official for Cabinet, responsible for its effective functioning.

Official support structures during the first governance stage

- 5.9. On 27 January 2020, the CCS set up its response in line with its standard practice, including a policy cell, operations cell and an information cell, with links to key departments via liaison officers. Staff from across the CCS were redeployed to resource the response and 'business as usual' activities were deprioritised. The CCS national security watchkeeper team (which provided monitoring of national security and civil contingencies risks) and CCS crisis management team (which provided technical and operational support to the COBR facility) augmented the response. The CCS capability grew to three shifts a day from 17 February 2020.
- 5.10. As the pace and scale of the crisis increased, officials from the Economic and Domestic Secretariat (EDS) helped prepare material for COBR meetings to consider when and how to implement measures to mitigate the spread of the disease, given their wide social and economic impacts. Similarly, officials from the National Security Secretariat (NSS) provided support.

Second governance stage - from 16 March 2020 to 27 May 2020

- 5.11. On 3 March 2020, the Prime Minister launched the UK COVID-19 action plan on containing the virus and potential measures that could be taken if needed in future.³⁰
- 5.12. The scale of the crisis and the breadth of the response, as a whole-of-government effort, continued to grow. The volume and scale of decisions that needed to be taken within a whole-of-government response demanded a bespoke architecture, which became the principal way by which decisions were made (alongside COBR meetings and Cabinet).
- 5.13. On 13 March 2020, the Director General, Cabinet Secretariat (Mark Sweeney) and the Deputy Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Cabinet Secretariat (Helen MacNamara), on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary, submitted advice to the Prime Minister recommending the need to “make sure we have resilient structures in place for managing through the long haul. A pandemic of this scale is no longer solely a health crisis; the challenge will be to get through the next six months without damaging public confidence in the Government and institutions they trust like the NHS.” A new approach to ministerial governance and decision-making structures, with a new and sustainable rhythm of meetings to support the Prime Minister, was needed. This advice is at Exhibit SC/3 - INQ000087166. The Prime Minister agreed to this advice.
- 5.14. On 16 March 2020, the Cabinet Secretary wrote to all Heads of Department across government informing them that to “ensure that the entire national response is coherent, focused and agile, the Prime Minister has decided to establish new structures to lead the Government’s key lines of operation”. This letter is at Exhibit SC/4 - INQ000087163.
- 5.15. On 17 March 2020, these structures were announced to the public via a press notice published on gov.uk.³¹ They remained in place until late May. I now briefly summarise each committee in this stage.

³⁰ Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 3 March 2020; available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-at-coronavirus-press-conference-3-march-2020> [INQ000086869]

³¹ New government structures to coordinate response to coronavirus: 17 March 2020; available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-government-structures-to-coordinate-response-to-coronavirus> [INQ000086849]

- 5.16. Ministerial COBR meetings continued to review overall progress and make important decisions in this stage. This was the key forum to take strategic decisions on issues including Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs). Meetings in this stage were, therefore, usually chaired by the Prime Minister. Subjects covered in these meetings included, for example: social distancing measures (on 16 March); closure of schools (on 18 March); enhanced social distancing measures (on 20 March - which, as an exception during this period, was chaired by the CDL); and the first national lockdown (on 23 March).
- 5.17. Some COBR meetings sought consensus on a UK-wide measure (such as the first UK-wide lockdown) which was within the competence of the UK government. Other COBR meetings aimed to provide a shared understanding of plans as they were being developed across the UK, but did not seek consensus on those plans, as the powers to take action were devolved (for example, certain aspects of social distancing measures).
- 5.18. In addition to First Ministers (and the deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland) from the devolved administrations, representatives of local government attended on occasion when the issues discussed had a local impact. After a ministerial COBR meeting decided the national lockdown on 23 March, the frequency of its meetings decreased.
- 5.19. Formal Cabinet meetings discussed COVID-19 on a weekly or other frequent basis during the second stage. Cabinet calls (not formal Cabinet meetings, but calls to which all of the Cabinet were invited and that considered pressing issues or updates outside of the weekly Cabinet meetings) were also convened from time to time. The Cabinet Secretary (Mark Sedwill during the second stage) was the senior official for Cabinet, responsible for its effective functioning.
- 5.20. During this stage, the daily 9.15 strategy meeting of key Ministers, officials and advisers chaired by the Prime Minister was the key forum for oversight of all issues and strategy. Reporting into it were four new ministerial implementation groups (see 5.23 and 5.24 below), the Chairs of which attended the daily 9.15 meeting. At each 9.15 Strategy meeting: the Dashboard was presented; there were discussions of priority issues from the ministerial implementation groups and any other priorities; and, a standing item covered the daily communications narrative and press conference.
- 5.21. The Senior Secretary for the 9.15 strategy meeting was Mark Sweeney. Other

Directors General in the Cabinet Secretariat - Jonathan Black, Jessica Glover and Simon Ridley - would sometimes cover this meeting, to allow for resilience and illness (the central COVID-19 secretariat ensured that there was a clear “central Director General” for each day). Typically at least two meetings prepared the 9.15 strategy meeting:

5.21.1. The Cabinet Secretary (Mark Sedwill) chaired a daily afternoon or evening meeting to which all Permanent Secretaries and relevant Directors General and Directors were invited. This was formally the Officials meeting which corresponded to the 9.15 strategy meeting the next morning. It also aimed to ensure that work for other ministerial meetings and programmes was properly aligned and on track.

5.21.2. Mark Sweeney (or other Director General as above) would chair a 8.15 meeting of officials and advisers. As well as making sure the 9.15 meeting was prepared and that information was shared across teams, it was used to surface and tackle issues which might need urgent central attention, or had emerged overnight.

5.22. The Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab MP, in his position as the First Secretary of State, deputised for the Prime Minister as Chair of the 9.15 Strategy meetings from 6 April until 25 April 2020 (inclusive). As described in the previous Section (paragraph 4.11), while deputising for the Prime Minister, the First Secretary of State also chaired ‘Quads’.

5.23. To lead the Government’s key lines of operation during this stage, four new Ministerial Implementation Groups (MIGs) were set up, each chaired by a different Cabinet Minister. These Implementation Groups (paragraph 5.24) had the status of Cabinet Committees and took collective decisions. Relevant Ministers from the Devolved Administrations were invited to the HMIG, GPSMIG and EBRMIG meetings as required, but typically not IMIG meetings, consistent with international relations being reserved to the UK government.

5.24. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for each MIG are at Exhibit SC/5 - INQ000087167. The high level summaries with each are also provided below.

5.24.1. The Health Ministerial Implementation Group (HMIG) was set up,

according to its ToR, “to focus on: policy interventions to protect public health, including monitoring and implementation of current interventions, and consideration of any future interventions; oversight of NHS capacity; social care preparedness, notably ensuring capacity in the critical care system for those worst affected; and medical and social support for those to whom we will be providing the shielding intervention”. The HMIG meetings ran between 18 March 2020 and 26 May 2020. The Chair was the Health Secretary. The Deputy Chair was the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government. The Senior Secretary for the HMIG was Simon Ridley.

5.24.2. The General Public Services Ministerial Implementation Group (GPSMIG) was set up, according to its ToR, to “coordinate and advise on public sector issues relating to the C-19 pandemic across the UK, excluding the NHS and social care” (which were covered by the HMIG). The GPSMIG meetings ran between 17 March 2020 and 21 May 2020. The Chair was CDL. The Senior Secretary for the GPSMIG was Jessica Glover.

5.24.3. The Economic and Business Response Ministerial Implementation Group (EBRMIG) was set up, according to its ToR, to “coordinate and advise on business-related regional, sectoral and corporate-level issues relating to the C-19 pandemic”. The meetings ran between 16 March 2020 and 21 May 2020. The Chair was the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Deputy Chair was the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The Senior Secretary was Jonathan Black.

5.24.4. The International Ministerial Implementation Group (IMIG) was set up, according to its ToR, to “coordinate and advise on UK’s role in the coordination and delivery of the international health and economic response to the C-19 pandemic, bilaterally and through multilateral (e.g. G7/20) and international (e.g. WHO, IMF, World Bank) organisations. Setting the UK’s strategic approach to the threats and opportunities arising from the pandemic and setting the course for the longer term strategic national recovery”. The meetings ran between 18 March 2020 and 7 May 2020. The Chair was the Foreign Secretary.

The Senior Secretary was David Quarrey (the Prime Minister's adviser on International Affairs and Deputy National Security Adviser).

Developments in official support structures during the second stage

- 5.25. I describe from paragraph 5.26 to 5.31 the organisational structure in the Cabinet Office including No.10 during the second stage. It proved in practice to be relatively complex with some overlapping of responsibilities. As I explain from paragraph 5.51, a clearer structure was developed in the third stage, in particular the setting up of the COVID-19 Taskforce.
- 5.26. On 16 April 2020 the Cabinet Secretary wrote to Heads of Department, setting out governance structures and programme Senior Responsible Officers (SROs). This letter is Exhibit SC/6 - INQ000087164, and the associated list of programmes of work and the respective SROs, is Exhibit SC/7 - INQ000087171.
- 5.27. Within the Cabinet Office including No.10, around 20 Directors General and Directors moved from their 'day jobs' to the COVID-19 response. This entailed the temporary repurposing of EDS, large parts of NSS, the Trade Secretariat, and the Transition Taskforce (which had been set up to prepare for the UK's departure from the EU). These officials set up new teams to advise and support the ministerial meetings.
- 5.27.1. A dedicated COVID-19 team was established in No.10. Tom Shinner was appointed to lead this team as Director General for COVID-19.
 - 5.27.2. Each MIG was supported by a dedicated team in the Cabinet Office, led by the Senior Secretary for that Committee.
 - 5.27.3. A central COVID-19 Secretariat in the Cabinet Office worked to Jonathan Black and Mark Sweeney, with each providing resilience for the other. This included:
 - 5.27.3.1. A central coordination team which triaged issues that potentially needed Ministerial agreement and discussion, and directed the engagement between the different meetings, working with No.10 staff.

- 5.27.3.2. A strategy function for the roadmap (once lockdown had been implemented and as attention turned to 'unlocking' in phases). Tom Shinner's team also worked on strategy.
 - 5.27.3.3. A data and analysis function.
 - 5.27.3.4. A Programme Management Office which commissioned delivery plans and began to track the implementation of measures across government, working alongside Tom Shinner's team.
 - 5.27.3.5. In addition, Philip Barton, Director General, led a Cabinet Office team on long-term planning and the eventual recovery from the pandemic.
- 5.28. The wide-ranging coordination between the UK government and the devolved administrations was supported in the Cabinet Office by the UK Governance Group, headed by Lucy Smith (later Peter Lee as Acting Director General), which supported UK government departments and devolved administrations to ensure that the response fully considered the devolution perspective and UK-wide impacts. This included a Devolution Policy Desk which monitored and worked across the UK government on live issues and set up a Senior Officials Group at Director level, bringing together officials from the UK government and the devolved administrations to discuss decisions spanning the COVID-19 response. The Dashboard team provided data and briefings to the devolved administrations. All of the above was in addition to the coordination taking place through other departments (for example, the four Chief Medical Officers met regularly).
- 5.29. Existing functions in the Cabinet Office including No.10 pivoted to COVID-19 as relevant. For example, in No.10, the private office and press office. The cross-government Communications Hub (led by Alex Aiken) brought together around 200 communication staff to design the communications strategy, run the national and local campaigns and evaluate their effectiveness. Other functions ramped up their support to the operational delivery of the Government's response, such as the ventilator challenge and PPE procurement (see footnote 12).
- 5.30. On 6 May 2020, "to accelerate the delivery of the key programmes", the Cabinet

Secretary recommended to the Prime Minister that “we establish three new Covid Taskforces that are headed by the external Executive Chairs you have been appointed [sic] - Paul Deighton on PPE; Dido Harding on Test, Track & Trace; and Kate Bingham on Vaccines & Treatments. Appointing them in this way, and ensuring that it is widely known that they have your full authority, would give them the public profile and licence to deliver. The Taskforces should include permanent secretaries and/or ministers from the relevant departments plus external experts and industry figures...Although the Taskforce Chairs will report directly to you and we will make clear to the Cabinet and Whitehall that they have your full authority, Ministerial accountabilities to Parliament should remain as now - DHSC for PPE and Test, Track and Trace, and BEIS for Vaccines. This is in effect the same model we use for EU negotiations, where you have oversight and control but CDL answers to Parliament”. This advice, to which the Prime Minister agreed, is at Exhibit SC/8 - INQ000087170.

- 5.31. Once these Taskforces were up and running, later in 2020 I aligned their reporting lines to the relevant Departments, while making sure the Prime Minister was able fully to engage with these issues. The three Taskforces should not be confused with *the* Taskforce (described from paragraph 5.51).

Third governance stage - from 28 May 2020 to March 2022.

- 5.32. By early May, the UK had passed the initial peak of the COVID-19 pandemic³². The first Roadmap out of lockdown was published on 11 May 2020³³.
- 5.33. On 20 May 2020, the Cabinet Secretary, in a communication to the Cabinet Secretariat (at Exhibit SC/9 - INQ000087172), set out that I would extend my secondment from the Royal Household to become Permanent Secretary in No10: “responsible for supporting the Prime Minister and Cabinet in developing the Government’s COVID-19 response and recovery policies, and leading implementation”.
- 5.34. On 22 May 2020, Helen MacNamara and I submitted advice to the Prime Minister recommending changing the approach to ministerial governance and decision-making

³² See remarks by the Prime Minister, 10 May 2020:

www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-to-the-nation-on-coronavirus-10-may-2020 [INQ000086850]

³³ Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government’s COVID-19 recovery strategy; available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy> [INQ000089917]

structures (at Exhibit SC/10 - INQ000089916). In summary, we advised that more sustainable and streamlined governance structures, with clearer and more focused lines of accountability, were required given the likely longevity of the pandemic and government response. These changes were agreed by the Prime Minister and communicated to Heads of Departments across government in a letter from the Cabinet Secretary on 28 May 2020. This letter is at Exhibit SC/11 - INQ000087165.

- 5.35. I now briefly summarise each aspect of this third stage of governance, which endured for more than a year and a half until shortly after the relevant period. This stage was managed overall by the Taskforce, about which I provide a short summary from paragraph 5.51.
- 5.36. During this stage the Government managed different phases of the pandemic with strategic plans. These included further periods of national lockdown and subsequent unlocking, as well as action on local areas (e.g. 'tiers'). Meanwhile, specific topics developed in scale, such as testing and vaccines. Therefore, while the formal structure for making collective decisions remained relatively and notably consistent during this prolonged third stage, the use of those structures evolved.
- 5.37. COBR continued to meet periodically during this stage, particularly where issues required cross-UK action. For example, on 22 September 2020, COBR agreed a joint statement of the UK government and devolved administrations reaffirming their "shared commitment to suppressing the virus to the lowest possible level and keeping it there, while we strive to return life to as normal as possible for as many people as possible"³⁴. Another example was on 24 November 2020, when COBR agreed a joint statement of the UK government and devolved administrations on UK-wide Christmas arrangements³⁵.
- 5.38. An update on COVID-19 continued to be taken at each weekly meeting of Cabinet. Cabinet meetings or calls were also conducted ahead of key moments and publications. From time to time, collective decisions on COVID-19 were taken at

³⁴ See Joint statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 25 September 2020; available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-statement-on-covid-19/joint-statement-on-coronavirus-covid-19> [INQ000086851]

³⁵ See Joint statement on UK-wide Christmas arrangements from the UK Government and Devolved Administrations; available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-uk-wide-christmas-arrangements-from-the-uk-government-and-devolved-administrations> [INQ000086871]

Cabinet. As I noted in paragraph 3.10, from late summer 2020, Cabinet Ministers received briefings on the Dashboard. The Cabinet Secretary (Mark Sedwill initially during the third stage, then myself from 9 September 2020) was the senior official for Cabinet, responsible for its effective functioning.

- 5.39. The MIGs were stood down at the beginning of this stage and two new Cabinet Committees were established. This Committee structure resembled that of the Cabinet Committee structure for managing EU Exit, EU Exit Strategy and EU Exit Operations Committees (usually referred to as XS and XO), which had enabled discussions on both strategy and on driving delivery and assurance of implementation
- 5.40. The COVID Strategy Committee (COVID-S) was chaired by the Prime Minister. The core membership of COVID-S comprised the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary, Secretary of State for the Home Department, the CDL, the Health Secretary and the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. According to its ToR, COVID-S was set up “to drive government’s strategic response to COVID-19, considering the impact of both the virus and the response to it, and setting the direction for the recovery strategy.” The meetings ran between 4 June 2020 until 21 February 2021, to set in place the overarching strategy, and then at key strategic junctures in the response to the pandemic. The ‘Quads’ referred to in paragraph 4.11 were also used to set the government’s strategic direction.
- 5.41. The COVID Operations Committee (COVID-O) was usually chaired by the CDL. On occasion, meetings were chaired by the Prime Minister (see paragraph 5.43) or delegated to the Paymaster General or the Minister for the Cabinet Office. The core membership was the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Health Secretary (other departments would be invited according to the agenda of a particular meeting). According to its ToR, COVID-O was set up “to deliver the policy and operational response to COVID-19.” The meetings ran between 29 May 2020 and 29 May 2022. Meetings often started with data and science briefings either from the Dashboard or key experts. The devolved administrations were invited to meetings where a UK-wide approach was needed, for example on border measures and vaccination.
- 5.42. Prior to the first meeting, the secretariat provided two documents to the Chair in addition to the Chair’s brief and papers. These set out fuller terms of reference for COVID-O (including that it should seek to meet twice a week), at Exhibit SC/12 - INQ000087168, and also the process for managing and running the Committee, at

- 5.43. The Prime Minister chaired COVID-O meetings on occasion. In 2020, these included meetings on: local restrictions (29 June, 16 July, 30 July, 19 October); readiness for the return to schools (27 August); national lockdown (30 October); test and release regimes (3 November); Christmas planning (17 November); a review of local 'tiers' (25 November and 29 December); and, the approach to the Alpha variant (18 December). In 2021, these included meetings on: national intervention (4 January); options for response (10 January); travel and borders options (15 and 26 January); education (27 January); Step 2 of the Roadmap (5 April); and, the decisions to move to Steps 3 and 4 (10 May, and 13 June and 5 July respectively). Later in 2021, these included meetings on: the move to the Plan B contingency plan in response to the Omicron variant (8 December); and, planning for disruption to critical workforces and the delivery of services (17 December).
- 5.44. Other COVID-O meetings made decisions taking a strategic lead from COVID-S, other meetings such as the Quads, or the steers of the Prime Minister, for example in response to the weekly notes which the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP sent to the Prime Minister during his time as CDL. These notes set out the progress made at, and forward look for, COVID-O meetings, so that the Prime Minister was kept abreast of all developments.
- 5.45. The Government managed different phases of the pandemic with strategic plans. COVID-O was used to oversee overall implementation of the strategic plan in force at any one time, such as the progress of the Spring Roadmap 2021, and the Autumn/Winter Plan 2021. COVID-O was also used for topic-specific discussions on the design or delivery of key aspects of the strategic plans, such as education and testing. This dual role meant that the frequency and focus of COVID-O meetings varied according to the path of the pandemic and the shape of the Government's response to it. With its large volume of meetings, it took on some of the role that had originally been envisaged for COVID-S and became a regular forum on some ongoing issues at different times.
- 5.46. Both COVID-S and COVID-O were supported by officials meetings, chaired by a senior official in the Taskforce, depending on the policy area being discussed. A senior official from the Taskforce also took the role of Senior Secretary for the Ministerial meeting.

- 5.47. COVID-O typically agreed decisions through a meeting, but like all Cabinet committees, also took a number of smaller decisions through a written procedure in line with Cabinet Committee procedure, whereby the Minister from the relevant department wrote formally to the Chair and Committee members seeking agreement to a proposal.
- 5.48. In addition to the collective decisions taken by COVID-O, over 1,000 actions were assigned during its meetings. These actions would either fall to the Taskforce to take forward or to other departments and agencies. In July 2020, a formal process of reporting on the progress of these actions was started by the secretariat and reported to the CDL as chair of the Committee. This process identified actions that were completed, on track to be delivered by the deadline or off track and the actions being taken to address this. This reporting process continued during the time of the Taskforce and the secretariat produced reports to the CDL.
- 5.49. On 4 February 2021, a new sub-Committee of COVID-O (Managed Quarantine) was established by the Prime Minister. The purpose of this sub-Committee was to ensure the smooth launch of the Managed Quarantine Service on 15 February. The sub-Committee was chaired by the Health Secretary. Core membership comprised: the Foreign Secretary; the Secretary of State for the Home Department; Secretary of State for Transport; and, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Additional attendees were invited as necessary, including the devolved administrations. The Committee met for the final time on 8 February 2021. The personal minute from the Prime Minister to the Health Secretary establishing this Committee is at Exhibit SC/14 - INQ000087160 and its terms of reference are at Exhibit SC/15 - INQ000087161.
- 5.50. In late 2020 and early 2021, joint meetings of COVID-O and the EU Exit XO committees were held when necessary to ensure that decision-making took account of the concurrent impact of COVID-19 and EU Exit, for example the impact of COVID-19 border testing requirements on freight flow at the border.

Developments in official support structures during the third stage: the COVID-19 Taskforce

- 5.51. It was clear within the Cabinet Office including No.10 during April 2020 that the Government needed to establish a dedicated, single unit focussed on COVID-19 and that this needed to be resourced appropriately. Some duplication had emerged between the Cabinet Office and No.10 operations which had necessarily been built at

speed. It made sense to streamline these operations as the Government moved from the acute to the chronic phase of the crisis.

- 5.52. In addition, the Prime Minister and other Ministers wished to ensure that both the COVID-19 response and the rest of the Government's policy agenda (which had largely been put on hold from mid-March) could now be pursued in parallel. The Cabinet Office's initial model for COVID-19, by which new teams had initially been lent from their 'business as usual' roles, needed corporate change, with more settled resourcing and management structures. At the same time there needed to be a rebuilding of the structures at the centre, such as EDS and the Transition Taskforce, which had previously supported the rest of the policy agenda and which had been temporarily diverted onto the COVID-19 response.
- 5.53. In May 2020, a new COVID-19 Taskforce was formed and the other COVID-19 teams were ended, so that many staff were able to return to their previous roles. The Taskforce initially reported to me as the Permanent Secretary at No.10 responsible for COVID-19. Its first incarnation brought together the No.10 team (led by Tom Shinner) and a Cabinet Office team (led by Simon Ridley). The other Cabinet Office Directors General who had supported the COVID-19 response (Jonathan Black, Mark Sweeney and Jessica Glover) returned to versions of their previous roles
- 5.54. The Taskforce became the unit at the centre of government which joined together strategy, analysis and coordination with departments across Whitehall to drive delivery. I now provide a summarised description of how the Taskforce evolved.
- 5.55. The Taskforce coalesced over the summer of 2020. To meet the challenges of developing the Government's ongoing response and enabling the decision making required, the Taskforce had to bring in resource from around the Government, beginning this process in May and June. Its size, having begun in the tens, reached hundreds within six months.
- 5.56. After Tom Shinner left in July 2020, Kate Josephs joined the Taskforce to replace him. At this point all the staff in the Taskforce formed a single team in the Cabinet Office, which worked closely with No.10.
- 5.57. I was appointed the Cabinet Secretary in September 2020. Simon Ridley and Kate Josephs led the Taskforce until James Bowler was appointed Second Permanent

Secretary in the Cabinet Office with responsibility for leading the Taskforce from October 2020. Kathy Hall joined the Taskforce in October 2020 ahead of Kate Josephs leaving in December 2020 for a new role. Rob Harrison joined the Taskforce in October 2020 to lead the analysis and data team and to continue building these capabilities. James Bowler, Kathy Hall, Simon Ridley and Rob Harrison remained the Taskforce senior leadership until July 2021.

- 5.58. Around the time that delivery of the roadmap concluded, James Bowler was appointed as Permanent Secretary to the Department for International Trade with effect from August 2021. Simon Ridley led the Taskforce from this point until March 2022, supported by Kathy Hall (who remained in post until January 2022) and Rob Harrison (who remained in post until February 2022).

Other developments in official support structures during the third stage

- 5.59. In Autumn 2020, the Cabinet Office established a Winter Cell. Its mandate was to identify and integrate linked risks, indicators and decisions that had the potential to significantly affect the UK over the winter 2020/21, either directly or indirectly. The Winter Cell worked with all the key areas of the Cabinet Office so that the UK was better able to endure the specific challenges of the period.
- 5.60. In September 2021, the Supply Chains Unit was established at the request of the Prime Minister in order to provide support and oversight to the functioning of essential supply chains. This Unit, under the leadership of Jessica Glover, led the Government's response to the Omicron variant in relation to its impacts on workforces.

Changing structures as part of the Living with COVID Strategy: from the end of March 2022 onwards

- 5.61. On 21 February 2022 Cabinet agreed the COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19³⁶, which was published later that day. The Government's objective in the next phase of the COVID-19 response was to enable the country to manage COVID-19 like other respiratory illnesses, while minimising mortality and retaining the ability to respond if necessary.

³⁶ COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19; available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19 [INQ000086872]

- 5.62. COVID-O continued to meet until the Taskforce was formally disbanded on 31 March 2022. It met for the final time on 29 March 2022 to consider details of testing and guidance in the context of the new strategy. COVID-O also took its final decision via letter on 5 April 2022 to agree the terms of reference for the UK Commission on COVID Commemoration.
- 5.63. On 19 May 2022, advice to the Prime Minister proposed a Cabinet Committee restructure and recommended that COVID-S and COVID-O be formally stood down, with any decisions needed beyond that point taken at a relevant Committee (Exhibit SC/16 - INQ000087162). COVID-S and COVID-O were formally stood down in September 2022.

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 in its truth.

Personal Data

Signed:

Dated: 24 January 2023