

Introduction

1. With the agreement of the Covid Transition Board and ExCo, a Covid-19 Lessons Learnt Exercise on the WG Civil Service's approach to developing and implementing a cross-government response to the pandemic was undertaken. This report presents the findings from the exercise, drawing out both lessons learnt for good practices and areas for further development of our approach, based on common views and themes as well as specific examples where relevant.
2. It is important to note that this report has mainly been compiled based on personal recollections and views expressed by people in response to questions designed to learn lessons in respect of the specific areas within scope of this exercise. Therefore, it is not a definitive record of activities and should not be relied upon as such.

Summary of key lessons

3. The key lessons emerging from this exercise are:
 - **Structures:** Have arrangements in place which enable a rapid redeployment of people in sufficient numbers at an early stage when a cross-government response to a crisis is required potentially including a permanent function for co-ordinating cross-government activity.
 - **Capacity to deliver:** Rapidly re-assess priorities when a cross-government response is required at scale with Ministerial cover secured for any decisions to de-prioritise work and clarity provided for staff.
 - **Expertise:** Establish capability to upscale expert advisory capacity to enable the provision of timely advice supportive of fully rounded policy development.
 - **New policy issues:** Ensure new areas of work are covered by swiftly identifying where responsibility lies and prioritising resources accordingly.
 - **Internal communication:** Stand up cross-government communication channels from the outset of a crisis with readouts for those unable to attend meetings.
 - **Ministerial engagement:** Ensure that the whole organisation is working in lockstep with Ministers through Cabinet, maintaining regular and close engagement facilitated by Special Advisers.
 - **Engagement with other UK governments:** Mobilise internally to engage fully with clarity around our roles, responsibilities and structures.
 - **Engagement with delivery partners:** Utilise and further develop strong relationships to work in partnership and align efforts around common goals.
 - **Virtual working:** Optimise virtual/hybrid working practices to capture the benefits while protecting staff welfare.
 - **Ministers' and Special Advisers' perspectives:** Enable wide ranging engagement between Ministers and civil servants focused on developing innovative solutions to a crisis. At the same time, structure resources and work to reflect Ministerial preferences about how to maximise progress on non-crisis related work.