

Witness Name: Stephen Barclay  
Statement: 5  
Exhibits: SB/2/01-SB/2/067  
Dated: 27 October 2025

## THE UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

### MODULE 9 CORPORATE WITNESS STATEMENT OF HIS MAJESTY'S TREASURY SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF STEPHEN BARCLAY

1. I, Stephen Barclay, make this statement on behalf of His Majesty's Treasury ("**HM Treasury**" or "**the Department**") and I do so in response to the Inquiry's Rule 9 request dated 1 September 2025 ("**the Rule 9 request**").
2. I have developed the below statement based on my personal recollection of events, and where necessary my four previous statements to the Inquiry and His Majesty's Treasury's ("**HM Treasury**") corporate statements to the Inquiry. Key documents have been exhibited to this statement, which were found having made a reasonable search for documentation with the assistance of the Government Legal Department. I have made every effort to accurately recall events in order to assist the Inquiry. While I have not been able to review all contemporaneous records, I am happy to clarify or expand on any aspect of the evidence provided in this statement.

#### **Part A: The National Economy Recovery Taskforce ('NERT')**

3. NERT was announced on 3 March 2021 by the Prime Minister as part of the Build Back Better initiative. It was an internal taskforce, set up to replace the previous Domestic and Economy Strategy Committee with the aim of "*catalysing growth, levelling up across the UK and driving public service performance and delivery*", intended to meet fortnightly [SB/2/01 INQ000659680]. The Prime Minister, Chancellor, CDL, Business Secretary, Education Secretary, Communities Secretary, Trade Secretary, Transport

Secretary, Culture Secretary, Environment Secretary, and Work & Pensions Secretary were to sit on the committee, which was intended to feed into a secondary “Better Regulation” committee attended by Chancellor, CDL, Business Secretary and Trade Secretary, with other ministers attending as necessary [SB/2/01 INQ000659680]. This committee was intended to “refresh the strategy on making better regulation outside the EU”.

4. NERT had multiple subcommittees, specifically:
  - a. NERT Public Services, Better Regulation & Logistics;
  - b. NERT Policy; and
  - c. NERT Delivery.
  
5. The secretariat’s paper on the NERT(PS) committee can be found at [SB/2/03 INQ000659681]. The main charges for the Committee were:
  - a. *“assessing the scale and nature of the challenge across the public sector;*
  - b. *scrutinising departmental plans to restore performance, helping remove blockages and identifying policy changes to be escalated to NERT;*
  - c. *ensuring that positive changes to delivery models and lessons from the crisis are embedded in business-as-usual activity where that is appropriate; and*
  - d. *ensuring recovery plans are aligned with, and integral to, the Government’s public services reform agenda.”*
  
6. Specific direction was also given on the planning focus, in that we were encouraged to focus on planning for recovering performance in services that met the following criteria:
  - a. *“the service has suffered a steep change downwards in performance as a result of the pandemic;*
  - b. *the impacts on the public are particularly grave or significant;*
  - c. *restoring performance is important for public confidence.”* [SB/2/03 INQ000659681] [SB/2/05 INQ000659682]
  
7. Issues considered by NERT included consideration of court backlogs [SB/06 INQ000659683], elective treatment backlogs in healthcare, [SB/2/07 INQ000659684] lost learning [SB/2/08 INQ000659685], Project Speed [SB/2/09 INQ000659686] and other topics. The NERT (Logistics) committee discussed topics such as the package of measure to mitigate current on-farm animal welfare and food supply concerns. This included discussion about how to address the excess supply of pigs due to a reduction in the opportunity to export unbutchered pigs to China [SB/2/10 INQ000659687].

8. At various times, I raised points concerning the operation of NERT, wanting to ensure that the focus was on the use of good data. I had some concerns about the NERT committees being used to pre-empt the Spending Review by the departments involved, however, I worked to focus the committees on pushing towards cultural change **[SB/2/11 INQ000659688] [SB/2/12 INQ000659689]**.
9. Through its representation at Cabinet Ministerial level, NERT provided an opportunity for Cabinet Ministers to discuss issues of interest beyond a single department.
10. During the Autumn of 2021, in my role as CDL, I had a specific focus on the government response to farm animal welfare concerns, including the excess supply of pigs, food supply chain risks around poultry and the wider supply chain risk relating to petrol shortages and HGV driver challenges. NERT facilitated cross departmental flexibility in several areas by securing Cabinet Minister support for amendments such as to mitigate the animal welfare concerns of excess pig supply or through ensuring food supply chain concerns did not materialise as previously forecast over the festive period. In addressing the food supply risk, external expertise in the form of Sir David Lewis (former CEO of Tesco) was brought into the Cabinet Office to work closely with me as CDL to help mitigate these risks.
11. As part of the Inquiry's request for further documentation on the NERT Logistics and other subcommittees, the Terms of Reference for the various subcommittees and minutes and notes for meetings (where available) can be found in Annex A.

## **Part B: Domestic and Economic (Operations) Committee**

12. As referenced in my Module 2 statement, I convened the DE(S) Committee for the first time on 9 November 2021.<sup>1</sup> It had taken over from NERT Public Services, Better Regulation, and Logistics as part of a wider Cabinet Office restructuring of committees and was intended to consider supply chain issues **[SB/2/13 INQ000212258]**. It was intended in the immediate term to focus on supply chain issues **[SB/2/14 INQ000659690] [SB/2/15 INQ000659691]** DE(S) was tasked with assessing risks and wider impact of supply chain issues on public services. We also worked to ensure there were plans for protecting critical services, including those for communication in such scenarios to the public **[SB/2/16 INQ000212257]** and **[SB/2/17 INQ000212256]**.

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<sup>1</sup> {INQ000498328}

13. The challenges faced by this committee, in common with many other committees were poor quality of data, the lack of real time data and lack of expert knowledge in Whitehall (e.g. food supply chains).

14. The Terms of Reference and a chronological list of all meetings with their readouts where available can be seen at **Annex B**.

**PART C: HMT Collaboration**

15. As CST I worked effectively with the Chancellor and officials within the department.

**PART D: Analysis and Reflections**

16. I would refer the Inquiry to my four previous witness statement and previous oral evidence as to my previously stated analysis and reflections

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed: Personal Data

Dated: 27 October 2025

## Annex A

### Terms of Reference & Meeting Events

- a) Terms of Reference **[SB/2/18 INQ000659633]** for:
- a. NERT (Policy) – To catalyse growth, level up across the United Kingdom, and drive public service performance and delivery;
  - b. NERT (Better Regulation) – *“To consider matters related to making better regulation”*;
  - c. NERT (Public Services) – *“To drive the development and delivery of plans to recover public service performance in light of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic supporting economic recovery and levelling up”*;
  - d. TOR for NERT (Logistics) – *“To drive the development and delivery of plans to strengthen supply chain resilience, supporting economic recovery and levelling up”*.
- 22 September 2021 NERT (Logistics Meeting) – **[SB/2/19 INQ000659634]**
  - 24 September 2021 NERT (Logistics Meeting) – **[SB/2/20 INQ000659635]**
  - 30 September 2021 NERT (Logistics) Meeting – **[SB/2/10 INQ000659687]**
  - 1 October 2021 – NERT (M) Meeting on UK Shared Prosperity Fund and levelling up – **[SB/2/22 INQ000659636]**
  - 7 October 2021 –NERT (Logistics) Meeting – **[SB/2/10 INQ000659687]**
  - 13 October 2021 – NERT (Logistics) Meeting – referred to in this email chain from Olivia Shillabeer **[SB/2/10 INQ000659687]** and enclosed document
  - 21 October 2021 - NERT (Logistics) Meeting – referred to in this email **[SB/2/25 INQ000659637]**

### Minutes, actions and papers considered

- **[SB/2/19 INQ000659634]** and **[SB/2/27 INQ000659638]** - Papers for NERT (Logistics) meeting on 22 September 2021
- **[SB/2/20 INQ000659635]** and **[SB/2/29 INQ000659639]**, **[SB/2/30 INQ000659640]**, **[SB/2/31 INQ000659641]**, **[SB/2/32 INQ000659642]** – Papers for a NERT (Logistics) meeting on 24 September 2021
- **[SB/2/33 INQ000659643]**, **[SB/2/34 INQ000659644]**, **[SB/2/35 INQ000659645]**, **[SB/2/36 INQ000659646]**, **[SB/2/37 INQ000659647]**, **[SB/2/37A INQ000659648]**,

**[SB/2/38 INQ000659649], [SB/2/39 INQ000659650]** – Papers for a NERT (Logistics) meeting on 30 September 2021

- **[SB/2/40 INQ000659651]** - Action for SoS for LEVELLING UP, HOUSING, and COMMUNITIES from NERT(M) meeting on 1 October 2021
- **[SB/2/41 INQ000659652], [SB/2/42 INQ000659653], [SB/2/43 INQ000659654], [SB/2/44 INQ000659655], [SB/2/45 INQ000659656], [SB/2/46 INQ000659657], [SB/2/47 INQ000659658], [SB/2/48 INQ000659659], [SB/2/49 INQ000659660]** and **[SB/2/50 INQ000659661]** - Papers for NERT (Logistics) meeting on 8 October 2021
- **[SB/2/51 INQ000659662], [SB/2/52 INQ000659663]** and **[SB/2/53 INQ000659664]** - Papers for NERT (Logistics) meeting on 13 October 2021
- **[SB/2/54 INQ000659662], [SB/2/55 INQ000659665], [SB/2/56 INQ000659666], [SB/2/57 INQ000659667], [SB/2/58 INQ000659668]** - Papers for NERT (Logistics) meeting on 21 October 2021
- **[SB/2/59 INQ000659669]** and **[SB/60 INQ000659670]** - Actions from NERT (Logistics) meeting circulated on 29 October 2021 in advance of next meeting
- **[SB/2/61 INQ000659671]** and **[SB/2/62 INQ000659672]** - Actions from DE (Ops) / NERT (Logistics) circulated on 5 November 2021 in advance of next meeting
- **[SB/2/63 INQ000659673]** and **[SB/64 INQ000659674]** - Actions from DE (Ops) / NERT (Logistics) circulated on 11 November 2021 in advance of next meeting

## **Annex B**

*Please note: this list of documents applies only to the specified period 15 September 2021- July 2022 (whilst SB was Chancellor to Duchy of Lancaster)*

**Terms Of Reference: [SB/2/15 INQ000659691] (Page 14)**

### **List of DE(O) Meetings identified:**

- Week commencing 18 October 2021 – [SB/2/59 INQ000659669]
- 03 November 2021 – [SB/2/67 INQ000659675]
- 09 November 2021 – [SB/2/68 INQ000659676]
- 06 January 2022
- 17 January 2022
- 27 January 2022 – [SB/2/71 INQ000659677]

### **List of minutes and actions from each DE(O) Meeting identified**

- 03 November 2021 – [SB/2/67 INQ000659675] and [SB/2/73 INQ000659678]
- 09 November 20201 – [SB/2/74 INQ000659679]
- 11 November 2021 – [SB/2/63 INQ000659673] and [SB/2/64 INQ000659674]
- 27 January 2022 – [SB/2/71 INQ000659677]