

Witness Name: Scott McPherson

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: SM/01 - SM/42

Dated: 29 October 2025

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SCOTT MCPHERSON

I, Scott McPherson, will say as follows:

1. I make this statement pursuant to a Rule 9 request from the UK Covid-19 Inquiry dated 5 September 2025 in relation to Module 9: Economic Response.
2. For the purpose of this statement, I have focused principally on the work I engaged in, for the period between March 2020 and July 2020 (**'the relevant period'**) when, as explained below, I was an interim Director General of the Office for Civil Society at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (**"DCMS"**).
3. In order to assist my recollection of the matters referred to in the Inquiry's Rule 9 Request and the preparation of this statement, I have taken account of information supplied by DCMS. Due to the passage of time, to assist in the Inquiry and for expediency where it accords with my own recollection, I have drawn upon relevant parts of the DCMS corporate statement.
4. I was an interim Director General at DCMS for three and a half months. I have made best efforts to answer each of the Inquiry's questions. However, as my role was short in duration, I am cognisant that others may be better placed to assist the Inquiry.

Part A: Role and responsibilities

5. I have worked in the Civil Service since the mid-1990s and in Senior Civil Service roles since 2003. In addition to my role in DCMS, I held Director General-level positions at the following departments: UK Health Security Agency and its

predecessor NHS Test & Trace (October 2021 – December 2024), Department for Health and Social Care (November 2020–October 2021), Department for Transport (February – March 2020), Home Office (November 2017 – February 2020), Ministry of Justice (May– October 2017). I left the Civil Service at the start of 2025 and have since worked as a public policy consultant with the University of Cambridge and some private sector clients.

6. The majority of my career has been focused on policy advice and implementation as a member of the civil service Policy Profession. I also have experience of system leadership, stakeholder management, project and programme management and international relations.
7. I was an interim Director General for Civil Society, in DCMS from 17 March 2020 – 3 July 2020. My role was created by DCMS in response to urgent pandemic related pressures. As a Director General, I had responsibility to support and lead the coordination of the Civil Society’s emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The national lockdown was announced on 23 March 2020, so for the majority of my role I and my team worked remotely. My role came to an end in July when an existing DCMS Director General, Helen Judge, returned to the department from a period of leave.
8. The core of my responsibilities related to the existing Office for Civil Society (“OCS”) (which I understand was renamed by DCMS as the Civil Society and Youth Directorate in 2021). When I arrived in the role, the directorate was led by a director with three deputy directors. Given the pressures of the pandemic in relation to both the scale and speed of work that was required, this structure was bolstered by staff moved from elsewhere within DCMS. To provide resilience the senior leadership was increased to a total of four directors and five deputy directors. In addition, some staff were seconded into the team from the National Council of Voluntary Organisations and project support was provided by PricewaterhouseCoopers.
9. The OCS had responsibility for:
 - a. Supporting the voluntary sector to continue operating despite a dramatic fall in fundraising;
 - b. Seeking to mobilise volunteers to support society in response to the pandemic;

- c. Working with sector organisations to ensure that volunteers had sufficient guidance and support needed to volunteer safely; and
 - d. Enabling the voluntary sector to coordinate and link with government effectively so that policy could be informed by the best information available from those at the front line.
10. The OCS's two main areas of focus were in relation to how the voluntary sector could help the UK's pandemic response and how the government could maintain the sustainability of the sector when much of its fundraising was no longer possible. During my time at DCMS, my main focus of work was on strengthening the voluntary sector's delivery capability and leading the development and delivery of the £750 million charity support package (discussed below at paragraph 33).

Part B: Cooperation and Joint Working

11. During the relevant period, I had a broad network of colleagues and contacts across Whitehall. Within DCMS, I had working relationships with other Directors General, Directors and senior civil servants. I also worked with the Permanent Secretary who had overall responsibility for the department and its operations.
12. I had working relationships with DCMS Ministers, particularly the Minister for Civil Society (Baroness Diana Baron) and the Secretary of State (Sir Oliver Dowden). The Secretary of State for DCMS had final responsibility for all policy decisions. As is normal in a government department, decisions were based on advice from DCMS officials. Some policy responsibilities were devolved to junior Ministers by the Secretary of State.
13. Outside of DCMS, my role required working relationships with other government departments including BEIS, CO, DEFRA, DfE, DHSC, HO, MOJ and MHCLG. While DCMS had general responsibility for civil society, other departments had responsibility for specific aspects, for example the HO held responsibility for voluntary organisations supporting victims of domestic abuse and modern slavery, while DfE worked with groups supporting vulnerable children. Communication between DCMS and these departments was vital to support coordination of efforts to respond to the pandemic and particularly in relation to administration of the voluntary, community and social enterprise ("**VCSE**") support package.

14. I found these working relationships with other departments to be very positive, reflecting a collective effort across Whitehall to respond to the exceptional challenges of the pandemic as quickly and effectively as possible. In practice this interdepartmental activity was managed through a variety of routes including existing relationships held by members of the Office for Civil Society with their counterparts in other departments, connections between finance teams (particularly with HM Treasury), attendance by DCMS officials (including me) at cross-Whitehall meetings organised in particular by the Cabinet Office, attendance by officials from other departments at meeting organised by DCMS. The main challenge that I recall was that everyone was exceptionally busy and there were regularly multiple meetings scheduled for the same time, which we managed through the resilience provided by additional senior leaders with the OCS team.
15. The Inquiry has asked specifically about the relationship between DCMS and HM Treasury. I found this to be equally positive. This is dealt with in more detail in Part D.
16. Beyond the UK Government, I had regular contact and meetings with charities and representative organisations in the VCSE sector to understand the evolving crisis they were facing. These issues were then able to be relayed and escalated to DCMS ministers and other government departments as necessary. As discussed below, various meetings that I attended provided channels of communication to liaise with relevant sector representatives.
17. I do not recall any significant engagement with Devolved Administrations or local government, which is not surprising given the fact that the VCSE support package was for England (with Barnett consequential for Devolved Administrations managed by HM Treasury).
18. I do not recall attending any Cabinet, COBR, Quad, Covid-O, Covid-S or Covid-19 Daily Meetings, but did attend numerous official level meetings coordinated by the Cabinet Office as well as specific meetings relating to the VCSE as detailed in this statement.

Part C: Economic support for the voluntary, community and social enterprise (“VCSE”) sector

19. As the Director General for Civil Society, my role was to support the department's Covid-19 work on volunteering and the charity sector. During the pandemic, the team

worked to support and mobilise the VCSE sector by developing and delivering government's financial support. This played a vital role in supporting local communities and helping to deliver government priorities.

Engagement with the VCSE sector

20. The voluntary community and social enterprise sector contains a diverse range of organisations from small local charities to national organisations. In 2020 DCMS estimated that there were 167,000 charities employing 870,000 people with a turnover of £50 billion and 100,000 social enterprises employing 2 million people with a turnover of £60 billion. It was therefore vital for government to engage the sector as it represented a significant part of the UK economy and had a vital role to play in supporting people through the challenges of the pandemic. Given the scale and diversity of the sector, there are multiple representative organisations such as the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (“**NCVO**”), National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (“**NAVCA**”), Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (“**ACEVO**”) and Social Enterprise UK (“**SEUK**”). OCS had existing relationships with these (and other) organisations, which were built on and adapted for the requirements of the pandemic.

19 March 2020 Roundtable

21. The Prime Minister announced several non-pharmaceutical interventions (“**NPIs**”) on 16 March 2020. The requirement to stay at home had a significant impact on DCMS sectors that relied on close social contact, especially the volunteering sector. The Secretary of State chaired a roundtable meeting with representatives of the civil society sector on 19 March 2020, which I attended in my third day in the role. The objectives of the meeting were to set out the government's approach, including a briefing by a senior medical adviser from Public Health England, and to listen to stakeholder concerns and their proposals on measure that could help them **[SM/01 INQ000623606]** **[SM/02 INQ000658564]**. The roundtable provided a useful platform to understand the varying difficulties that each organisation was facing. Stakeholders raised various concerns including:

- a. Charity income had either slowed or stopped and the sector needed a swift and substantial financial injection;
- b. School closures were expected to have a negative impact on productivity due to the loss of personnel; and
- c. Social care providers were experiencing significant pressure. Statutory sick

pay was needed for social care workers required to isolate.

Office for Civil Society Meetings

22. Following the Secretary of State Roundtable on 19 March 2020, I chaired a series of meetings with a range of leaders from the VCSE sector. In broad terms the aims were twofold: firstly, to share information with the sector about what the government was doing, for example in relation to guidance and funding; and secondly, to get input from the sector about what was happening on the ground and how the government could support them.
23. These meetings did not formally report into another governance structure. Relevant issues were shared with others in government as required, for example reported to DCMS ministers in meetings or submissions. Similarly issues that were the responsibility of other departments would be communicated to them – for example, points around the operation of the furlough scheme in the VCSE sector would be shared with officials in HM Treasury. I believe that I was appointed as chair of these meetings as I was the most senior official in DCMS with specific responsibility for the VCSE sector and given my extensive previous experience of working with a wide range of stakeholders.
24. The Civil Society Covid-19 Conference Call on 25 March 2020 discussed volunteering, sector stabilisation and ideas for non-cash support to the sector [SM/03 INQ000623477] [SM/04 INQ000659712] A second meeting on 31 March 2020 was attended by the Minister for Civil Society Baroness Barran who acknowledged the importance of funding and noted ongoing discussion with HM Treasury. The main topics were again sector support and volunteering (including the fact that 750,000 people had signed up as NHS volunteer responders) [SM/05 INQ000659713] [SM/06 INQ000623487]

Similar meetings continued during April and May

25. Throughout April and May 2020, engagement with the sector continued through other meetings and forums. DCMS calendar records indicate I attended the following meetings:
- a. Ministerial Strategic Group for Covid-19 Civil Society Funding – 9 April 2020;
 - b. MCS Strategic Working Group (Funding) – 15 April 2020; 22 April 2020; 29

April 2020; 6 May 2020; 13 May 2020; 20 May 2020;

c. (Ministerial) Civil Society Covid-19 Conference – 14 May 2020; 20 May 2020;

Civil Society Stakeholder Group

26. Two regular meetings - one with stakeholders and the Minister for Civil Society and the other with stakeholders and policy officials - were joined to create the Civil Society Stakeholder Group ('CSSG') as part of a more streamlined model. I emailed members on 3 June 2020 to set out the new arrangements [SM/07 INQ000659720]. The terms of reference stated that the purpose of the group was to "*maintain strategic engagement routes between Government and Civil Society as we move into a new mid-term phase of COVID-19 response and recovery for the next six months*" [SM/08 INQ000623525].
27. The smaller core membership was recommended by the existing group and approved by the Minister for Civil Society. Members were selected to represent the views and specific issues of the sector during the Covid-19 pandemic, provide feedback on existing and new government sector support initiatives, communicate the agenda internally and externally with sector bodies within their field and advise the Minister on the government's engagement with VCSEs. The group was to share intelligence and evidence, and act as a central body for working groups to feed into.
28. The Minister for Civil Society attended the meetings alongside representatives from the VCSE sector. In total I chaired three meetings:
- a) 4 June 2020. This meeting discussed the revised structure for the Stakeholder Group, furlough, the impact of lifting restrictions, and an update on funding [SM/09 INQ000659721] [SM/10 INQ000659722].
 - b) 18 June 2020. This meeting again discussed furlough, lifting restrictions and funding [SM/11 INQ000659723] [SM/12 INQ000659724].
 - c) 2 July 2020. This meeting discussed a proposal from the Chartered Institute of Fundraising for a Gift Aid emergency relief package, progress on the distribution of the funding package, the review commissioned by the Prime Minister on strengthening communities, support for international charities, and community centre guidance from MHCLG. As this was my last week in the role, I thanked everyone for their positive engagement and said that the OCS Director David Knott would take over chairing the meetings [SM/13 INQ000659725] [SM/14 INQ000659726].

29. I believe that various meetings with VCSE representatives (from the initial Secretary of State roundtable through to the Civil Society Stakeholder Group) played an important role in coordinating the government's engagement with the sector. The meetings were valuable in providing input from the sector into the government's decisions and in ensuring the sector was aware of the government's plans.
30. The main challenges that I recall were: (1) how best to ensure appropriate representation from a very large and diverse sector without having unmanageably large meetings, which was addressed by engaging with sector leaders including in relation to the changes to membership made in June 2020; (2) how to balance the desire for rapid updates on a fast-moving situation against the need to avoid too many meetings, which resulted in the frequency of meetings being adjusted over time as the context evolved.

Cross Whitehall meeting of Directors General

31. On 2 April 2020, I chaired a cross-Whitehall meeting of Directors General to explore managing the funding process for the VCSE sector [SM/15 INQ000623488]. This cross-Whitehall coordination was essential given the diversity of the VCSE sector and the fact that many organisations had direct relationships with other departments' policy responsibilities (e.g. MOD's interest in charities supporting veterans etc). The voluntary sector was under significant pressure and had advocated for greater government support. The objective of the meeting was to ascertain priorities, existing interventions and support gaps for the sector from each department. DCMS was to use this to feed into its discussions with HM Treasury and the plan for stabilising the VCSE sector. During the meeting each department briefly summarised the key issues relating to the VCSE organisations in their sector. They were requested to provide further information to DCMS by 3 April 2020 on what impact would be achieved by additional funding [SM/16 INQ000659714]
32. Subsequent meetings were largely focussed on discussion around the £750 million funding package (more detail below) including:
- a) 9 April 2020, at which attendees were briefed on how the £750 million funding would be distributed. Departments were informed of the funding pot available and the process by which they could apply for funding [SM/17 INQ000659731]
 - b) 22 April 2020 at which attendees were briefed about the star chamber panel to agree funding for OGDs within the £750m funding package, and updated on the

NLCF funding criteria [SM/18 INQ000659715] [SM/19 INQ000659716]

- c) 1 May 2020, which discussed plans for announcing the OGD funding and the process for implementing the allocations; updated on the NLCF; and flagged a commission to OGDs on any funding to charities outside the package [SM/20 INQ000659717] [SM/21 INQ000659718] and
- d) 12 May 2020, which including updates on the NLCF, OGD's funding announcements, changes to the MOUs, and CO support for urgent grant-making [SM/22 INQ000659719]

£750 Million Support Package

- 33. Early in the pandemic, many charities experienced a significant drop in their income as a result of the cancellation of fundraising events, commercial activities and shop closures. The government's financial support packages available at that time were not able to adequately support the VCSE sector. For example, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ("CJRS") paid the salaries of workers who were put on furlough (not required to work). The voluntary sector was not able to furlough many of their staff as they required them to continue providing essential services. They were experiencing an even greater need and demand for their services, at the same time that they were receiving less income to pay their staff. Tailored financial support was urgently needed to support the sector.
- 34. Before the first lockdown began on 26 March 2020, DCMS officials had begun to gather evidence about the size and scale of funding that would be needed to meet acute service users' needs. On 18 March 2020, initial advice to the Secretary of State, based on some high level analysis, proposed a package totalling £2 billion consisting of: (i) a £1 billion UK Community Mobilisation Fund to ensure mission critical parts of the voluntary sector are able to respond to this emergency and (ii) a £1 billion Stabilisation Fund to prevent large scale closures of charities that provide direct support for the most vulnerable people in our communities, such as hospices [SM/41 INQ000623471].
- 35. Over the following weeks there were discussions between DCMS and HM Treasury at both official and ministerial level about the appropriate package of support for the voluntary sector. Negotiations and discussions were held in relation to the appropriate quantum, eligibility and how the funding would fit with existing schemes. Much of this process was managed through existing relationships between DCMS

finance and the relevant spending team in HM Treasury, with additional engagement by me and OCS colleagues.

36. Throughout this period, DCMS officials updated ministers. For example, on 25 March 2020, OCS submitted advice to the Secretary of State following some initial feedback from HM Treasury that the Chancellor wanted to see the market reaction to the general package of economic support announced the previous week before making further allocations. This submission proposed a smaller initial package of £10 million to the National Emergencies Trust and £500 million to be distributed through the NLCF [SM/23 INQ000623559] Feedback from advice submitted to the Chancellor over the following weekend was that HM Treasury was proposing a package of £100 million of new money plus £50 million of reallocated DCMS money, plus bringing forward £105 million of NLCF from 2021/22. This was set out in the further advice submitted on 31 March 2020 to DCMS ministers [SM/24 INQ000623484]

37. On 1 April 2020, I emailed Philip Duffy in HM Treasury to provide a summary of the current state of the discussions. That email made clear that DCMS ministers did not accept that the current proposals from HM Treasury (of £100 million of new money plus £50 million of repurposed DCMS money) were a sufficient response and set out the elements of proposed package [SM/25 INQ000659727]

38. The figure of £750 million for VCSE funding was agreed through negotiations between DCMS and HM Treasury and ministerial steers [SM/26 INQ000623557]

[SM/27 INQ000623468] The objectives of the funding were to:

- a) Ensure essential services were provided to vulnerable people through increased community support;
- b) Provide critical frontline services to vulnerable groups affected by Covid-19;
- c) Reduce the closure of charities providing essential services to vulnerable people by ensuring they had the financial resources to operate, thereby reducing the burden on public services; and
- d) Provide key services specific to supporting the Covid-19 response, to reduce the burden on the NHS or other public services.

39. The £750 million package of support for the VCSE sector was announced on 8 April 2020. The package was made up of multiple different funding streams and was intended to be a one-off funding award, allocated and distributed quickly in order to

target those areas where it was most needed at the time. This was new funding from HM Treasury, with £200 million allocated by HM Treasury to DHSC for hospices, and £60 million to the devolved administrations. The rest was allocated to DCMS, who then either distributed it via the various funding streams outlined in this section or allocated the remaining £160 million to other government departments with the agreement of HM Treasury. Final decisions were made jointly by DCMS and HMT ministers.

40. The funding aimed to ensure that charities and other VCSE sector organisations could continue day-to-day work during the pandemic and meet any increased demand to support people in need. On 8 April 2020, I advised attendees of the cross departmental meeting on voluntary sector support (discussed at paragraph 31) about the funding package [SM/28 INQ000659728]. The same day, the Permanent Secretary wrote to Wednesday Morning Colleagues to inform them about the funding packages and wider work to support the VCSE sector (as well as my role leading an expanded OCS) [SM/42 DIG00306858].
41. The Inquiry has requested more detail on the process for allocating funding in relation to government departments. The VCSE sector covers a range of sub-sectors and service delivery areas. In the early days of the government's Covid-19 response, government departments were considering the likely funding needed to maintain service delivery. In order to prevent potential duplication and to streamline the process of departments bidding to HM Treasury for new funding, DCMS (as government lead for the VCSE sector) worked with HM Treasury and co-ordinated a cross-government process for all of the VCSE sector.
42. The views of other departments on the need for funding in their sectors was discussed at the cross-Whitehall DGs meeting that I chaired on 2 April 2020 (mentioned at paragraph 31) [SM/15 INQ000623488]. Following that meeting DCMS emailed other departments requesting that they provide additional information by 3 April 2020 [SM/16 INQ000659714].
43. Following a further call on 9 April 2020, I emailed other departments later that day [SM/17 INQ000659731] attaching a detailed proforma application for them to complete by 17 April 2020 [SM/29 INQ000659730]. This related to the £160 million of the package available for other government departments (with £200 million already allocated to the hospices as set out in the Chancellor's announcement).

44. The proforma returns were assessed by DCMS officials against the strategic, economic, management, financial and commercial cases, as well as checking for any overlap between proposals (for example, both HO and MOJ had proposals in relation to victims of crime). Next steps were set out at the cross-Whitehall DGs meeting that I chaired on 22 April 2020 [SM/19 INQ000659716] including plans for a ‘star chamber panel’ to take place that week with each department attending to answer any questions about the details of their proposal.

45. Following a preparatory meeting with departments on 23 April 2020, I chaired a ‘star chamber’ meeting on 27 April 2020. The term ‘star chamber’ is used within government to refer to an informal, high-level meeting of cabinet members and / or senior officials used to discuss and scrutinise important issues like spending plans, often looking to ensure efficiency and value for money. In this case the meeting was attended by officials and special advisers (not ministers) from DCMS, HM Treasury and the Prime Ministers’ Office. The purpose of the meeting was to review the totality of evidence submitted by departments and finalise proposals for recommendation to ministers (as detailed in Annex C of the 28 April 2020 submission). As the funding package covered spending by various other departments – not just DCMS – it was important that the final advice to ministers reflected input from HM Treasury and No.10, as would normally be the case when HM Treasury was making funding allocations. Advice was then put to the Secretary of State and DCMS junior ministers (and in parallel to HM Treasury ministers) on 28 April 2020 setting out a proposal to allocate the available £160 million of funding against 53 bids totalling £277.4 million [SM/30 INQ000661437] It proposed “*a balanced package covering a broad range of policy areas and needs.*” Key considerations were whether bids met the objectives of the fund, whether they could be better funded through the NLCF, and the ability to deliver at pace to meet urgent need. In response, DCMS ministers questioned the inclusion of funding for zoos given they were not charitable organisations. A final decision-making submission was put to the DCMS Secretary of State on 29 April 2020, making clear that the inclusion of zoos was a red line for the Chancellor [SM/31 INQ000661438] Both submissions set out next steps for announcing the package.

46. It is important to note that the submissions of 28 and 29 April 2020 set out proposed allocations including 20% match funding from the relevant department. I believe that this accounts for the difference in numbers between those submissions and the those

detailed in the Rule 9 letter to me – for example, the submissions allocated £15 million (including 20% match funding) to BEIS to support Citizens Advice Bureau whereas the rule 9 letter (at paragraph 21e) lists £12 million for the same purpose.

47. Although DCMS coordinated and oversaw the process through which this funding was allocated, responsibility for managing and distributing the funds was assumed by the responsible department. Recipient departments were expected to adhere to the Managing Public Money Principles. Award letters were sent to departments in May 2020

48. The £750 million package ran until March 2021, beyond my time as Director General in DCMS, so I did not play any role in evaluation of the effectiveness of the funding. I understand that an evaluation was completed by DCMS and is detailed in their Corporate Statement.

49. The inquiry has invited me to reflect on the adequacy of the funding package and on what worked well or did not work well. I make the following observations:
 - a) £750 million was a very substantial amount of money, and the independent evaluation conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (after I had left the department) estimated that the funding package benefited 21.5 million people. Additional money would clearly have enabled the delivery of additional benefits. However the size of a package reflected a negotiation between DCMS and HM Treasury ministers, and HM Treasury clearly faced a large number of competing financial pressures.
 - b) The funding package was agreed and implemented remarkably quickly, particularly given the complexity of the VCSE sector and the multiple government departments involved.
 - c) It was unusual for DCMS to have a role in allocation of £160 million of funding between other government departments, rather than HM Treasury allocating funds directly. That was a pragmatic response to wider pressures on HMT and the value of having a cross-Whitehall mechanism to consider the best allocation of funding across the VCSE sector.
 - d) Distributing the Coronavirus Community Support Fund through the National Lottery Community Fund made good use of an existing delivery partner and enabled funding quickly to reach many more small, local, community groups than would have been possible through a central government process.

- e) Within DCMS (and other departments) many people worked tirelessly, often for long hours and seven days per week, frequently in new emergency roles with new colleagues, in order to deliver the best possible response to a fast-moving and unpredictable pandemic.

Coronavirus Community Support Fund

50. As part of the £750 million support package, £200 million was allocated to the Coronavirus Community Support Fund (“CCSF”) to be distributed by the National Community Lottery Fund. The fund aimed to provide support for vulnerable people affected by the pandemic and to reduce closures of essential organisations such as charities and social enterprises. DCMS was involved in the decision-making process with this funding partner (the National Lottery Community Fund) because it was the first funding scheme established, the largest in value and potentially high risk as a lot of awards would be given to organisations with limited experience of managing government funds. This included non-registered or new organisations and was given as part of rapid emergency funding.

51. A joint panel between DMCS and The National Lottery Community Fund was established in May 2020. The Terms of Reference for the Joint Panel were detailed in Annex 6 to the Grant Agreement between DCMS and NLCF [SM/08 INQ000623525]. This stated that the purpose of the panel was to “*provide additional strategic review and assurance over the fund and help to protect its integrity.*” The panel reviewed grant funding recommendations made by The National Lottery Community Fund and drew out any matters for The National Lottery Community Fund to consider in its decision making. Importantly, the final decision-making authority was held by the National Lottery Community Fund, as outlined in the Terms of Reference.

52. The panel was to be “*chaired by a Director General at DCMS*”, which I did for the first four meetings. Membership was specified as “*no more than nine members including the chair; five of whom will be nominated by DCMS and four by NLCF.*” The other members for the initial meetings were:

- Kevin Bone – NLCF England Committee and Partner, LGT Lightstone
- Richard Collier-Keywood – Dormant Assets Commissioner
- Sherry Coutu – NED, DCMS

- Claire Dove – VCSE Crown Representative
- Fozia Irfan – Member, NLCF Advisory Board, CEO, Beds and Luton Community Foundation
- Maggie Jones – CEO, Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies
- Danielle Walker-Palmour – Member, NCFL Board, Director, Friends Provident Society
- Anna Wechsberg – Director, DCMS

53. The Joint Panel had a range of roles, primarily to “*assess whether the applications meet the criteria and objectives of the fund*”, but also, for example, to suggest “*further targeting of decision making, for example to encourage more grants from particular geographies, vulnerable groups or types of organisations.*” Specific funding proposals were discussed if they met the pre-agreed threshold: £300,000 or more in value or considered to be noteworthy or contentious. Proposed funding decisions considered noteworthy or contentious were identified in the following two ways: by The National Lottery Community Fund directly during assessment or by DCMS when undertaking a rapid review process, which worked as follows: “*NLCF will provide DCMS with the name, description and value of a grant they are looking to fund in regular batches. These will be reviewed by DCMS within 48 hours and any applications which are found to be contentious will be sent back to NLCF and referred to the Joint Panel*”.

54. A list of meetings that I chaired and accompanying meeting materials is provided below:

Joint Panel Meeting Date	Relevant Materials	
4 June 2020	Agenda	SM/32 INQ000659734
	Minutes	SM/33 INQ000659735
11 June 2020	Agenda	SM/34 INQ000659736
	Minutes	SM/35 INQ000659737
18 June 2020	<i>This meeting was postponed</i>	
26 June 2020	Agenda	SM/36 INQ000659738
	Minutes	SM/37 INQ000659739
2 July 2020	Agenda	SM/38 INQ000661445
	Minutes	SM/39 INQ000661446

55. The meeting on 4 June 2020 largely focused on the proposed use by the National Lottery Community Fund of a number of External Delegation Agreements (“EDAs”),

which were a mechanism to delegate the power to select grant recipients to another organisation. The National Lottery Community Fund used EDAs where another organisation had specialist expertise or reach to a particular geographic or thematic area.

56. The meeting on 11 June 2020 had a discussion on further potential EDAs. As recorded in the minutes, I noted that DCMS had updated ministers on the proposed use of EDAs, but had not yet received feedback from ministers.
57. The meeting on 26 June 2020 included an update that *“Ministers had confirmed that they would prefer the funding to go through the core processes of TNLCF and not through EDAs for two reasons: (i) The fund was created with a focus on high level criteria of eligibility so a wide range of organisations could access it. Ministers were concerned that allocating a large proportion of the funds at the outset to specific recipients could limit access. (ii) There was also a concern that EDAs could increase the amount of applications that may not align with the purpose of the fund and would therefore increase risk.”* It was noted that not using EDAs would impact timescales and the ability to reach some communities and there was a discussion around sharing the news with potential EDA partners.
58. That meeting reviewed and supported one large application (over £300,000) and reviewed and supported seven applications that had been identified through the rapid review process. There was also a discussion about the rapid review process including whether it was duplicating the National Lottery Community Fund processes, the potential for bias against certain organisations and whether it was highlighting applications for minor reasons. These concerns would be reported to ministers and a future meeting updated on any changes to the process.
59. The meeting on 2 July 2020 reviewed management information about the distribution of funds and discussed some improvements to the data presentation. There was an update on the Rapid Review process, which had been paused while DCMS considered potentially operating it with a higher bar or dropping it completely. This was my final meeting as chair. Helen Judge took over as Panel Chair from the week commencing 6 July 2020.

Part D: HM Treasury collaboration

60. The inquiry has asked me to comment specifically about my engagement with HM

Treasury during the pandemic. In the limited time that I was a Director General at DCMS, I regarded the relationship with HM Treasury as a productive and collaborative one. HM Treasury was easy to access, responsive to requests for information or meetings and receptive to DCMS's input. An example of this was most evident with the discussions and formulation of the £750 million package of support for the VCSE sector (detailed at paragraphs 35-38). The sharing of information, data and analysis (both ways) was sufficient to understand the decisions made by the respective departments or ministers and the basis for these decisions. It is worth noting that the relationship with HM Treasury was managed through multiple routes, not just contact by me and OCS. The relevant routes included the normal relationship between the DCMS finance team and the HM Treasury Spending Team, and overall coordination of the DCMS position by the dedicated Economic Response Directorate.

61. There was also a mutual recognition within both departments that everyone was under pressure and performing an incredibly difficult task to very tight deadlines and working against a backdrop of significant uncertainty. Like all departments, DCMS was advocating for as much financial support as possible. HM Treasury ultimately had to reconcile this against other wider factors, competing interests and broader vulnerabilities within the UK.

62. I did not encounter any specific challenges in working with HM Treasury and considered that their communication, coordination, information sharing and transparency were good given the pressure that they faced in responding to the pandemic.

Part E: Inequalities, Impact assessments and vulnerable groups

63. The VCSE sector supports people from all walks of life in every community across the country but has a particularly important role in tackling inequalities and supporting economically vulnerable groups. Support for the sector therefore inherently had a positive impact in tackling the inequalities that arose from the pandemic. The cross-Whitehall process to allocate part of the overall funding package helped ensure that multiple vulnerable groups received support – for example victims of domestic abuse through HO and homeless people through MHCLG. Allocation of £200 million through the CCSF meant that funding was provided to many thousands of small groups supporting vulnerable people in local communities, with a total of over 14,000 organisations supported by the funding package.

64. As a public body, DCMS is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (“PSED”) contained within Section 149 of the *Equality Act 2010*. PSED analysis was produced for various elements of the VCSE sector funding package. For example, a note dated 8 June 2020 provided a PSED analysis for the VCS Emergencies Partnership coordination of the voluntary sector’s Covid-19 response [SM/40 INQ000623544]. The analysis conducted an assessment on the potential policy impact on protected characteristics. It concluded that the project had no adverse or disproportionately negative impact on individuals who share protected characteristics and that the project was considered to have an overall positive impact on groups covered by the Equality Act.

Part F: Analysis and reflections

65. The Covid-19 pandemic was an unprecedented crisis which significantly impacted livelihoods. DCMS moved quickly, developing new approaches and reprioritising work to respond to an unprecedented and rapidly evolving situation. The department was largely successful in its efforts to provide financial support, prevent business failure and preserve jobs. I have recorded specific reflections earlier in this statement on work with other departments including HM Treasury, and the £750m funding package.

Part G: Request for Documents

66. With the assistance of DCMS and GLD (as I no longer have access to any DCMS files), I have attached relevant documents and emails to support this witness statement.

67. When I started in my role at DCMS, I was issued with a DCMS laptop and mobile phone. Much business was conducted through video calls and meetings. I used email as my primary means of written communication. I also used text messages or WhatsApp on my DCMS mobile phone for incidental messages like checking whether someone was attending a meeting. I returned both my laptop and mobile phone to DCMS when I finished the role in the Summer of 2020 so no longer have access to those devices.

68. During my time in DCMS I kept informal notes of meetings, actions etc. in a personal notebook to assist me in managing my work. When these notes were no longer

required after I left the role, I securely destroyed them at home. I did not keep a personal diary.

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: 29/10/25