

Witness Name: Jonathan Black

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: JB/01 - JB/11

Dated: 10 October 2025

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF JONATHAN BLACK

I, Jonathan Black, will say as follows.

INTRODUCTION

1. I am a Civil Servant currently serving as Deputy National Security Adviser ("DNSA") for economic issues and a Director General ("DG") in the Cabinet Office. Between June 2019 and December 2022 – and therefore for the whole of the period with which the Inquiry is concerned – I was one of the DGs in the Cabinet Secretariat and, from September 2019, the Prime Minister's Sherpa for the G7 and G20.
2. I have prepared this statement in response to the Inquiry's request for evidence dated 20 June 2025 ("the Rule 9 request"), in which I am asked a range of objective and subjective questions relating to the UK Government's economic response to the pandemic and my role in it.
3. In preparing this statement, I have been assisted by lawyers instructed by the Cabinet Office. I have also consulted Joanna Key, who was the Director for Domestic Economic Issues in the Cabinet Secretariat during the relevant period.
4. The Cabinet Office's corporate statement for Module 9, signed by Simon Ridley and dated 5th September 2025, ("the corporate statement") provides a detailed explanation of the Cabinet Office's role in relation to economic matters. I agree with and adopt the evidence set out in that statement.

5. During the period I was involved in the Covid response, beyond in person meetings and conversations, I communicated with colleagues using email and WhatsApp. I have made my emails available to the Inquiry. My mobile phone has been replaced, resulting in the loss of WhatsApp content from my previous device.
6. This statement adopts the following structure. I explain my professional background (Section 1) and role in the Covid response (Section 2). I go on to explain my role in the Economic and Business Response Ministerial Implementation Group (Section 3) and Economic and Business Response Strategy Group (Section 4). I then respond to the Rule 9 request questions on analysis (Section 5) and collaboration (Section 6), before offering some wider reflections (Section 7).

SECTION 1: MY BACKGROUND AND ROLE

7. I have been a Civil Servant for approximately 25 years and have held a number of roles over that time. I started my career in HM Treasury ("HMT"), and my roles there included Private Secretary (2005-2007) and Press Secretary (2011-2014) to Chancellor of the Exchequer, as well as a number of domestic and international policy roles. While at HMT, I also served as the UK Director of the European Investment Bank (2015-17) and Alternate Director at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2008). I joined the Cabinet Office in January 2018 as a Director and subsequently acting Director General of the Europe Unit. In June 2019 I became DG in the Cabinet Secretariat and subsequently Deputy National Security Adviser with responsibility for economic issues, and also the Prime Minister's Sherpa for the G7 and G20 from September 2019 to January 2025. From January 2023 to January 2024, I took special leave from the Civil Service and was the Heywood Fellow at the Blavatnik School of Governance at the University of Oxford. Between August and November 2023, I also acted as the Prime Minister's Representative for the UK Summit on AI Safety. I have served in my present role, as Deputy National Security Adviser for economic issues, since February 2024.
8. My responsibilities in the Cabinet Office have reflected the department's as a whole, in particular: coordinating government policy to facilitate collective Cabinet agreement, and supporting the Prime Minister in their executive responsibilities internationally, principally through my role in relation to the G7 and G20. The Cabinet Office's responsibility for coordinating policy reflects the scope of policy subject to collective agreement as set out in the Cabinet Manual and reflecting wider constitutional arrangements. With respect to economic policy, therefore, the Cabinet Office plays its coordinating role on micro economic and

structural reform issues. Importantly, however, as reflected in the Cabinet Manual, Budget-related issues are not subject to collective agreement in the same way, and the Cabinet Office's responsibilities are much more limited, with such issues coordinated bilaterally between No10 and HM Treasury. These underlying constitutional arrangements applied to decision making and therefore my own role with respect to the Government's economic response to Covid. This included the remit of the Economic and Business Response Ministerial Implementation Group ("EBRIG"). I refer the Inquiry to the corporate statement.

SECTION 2: MY ROLE DURING THE PANDEMIC

9. My role during the pandemic can be broken down into three phases: before 5 March 2020, March-May 2020, and after May 2020.
10. In the first phase, prior to 5 March 2020, I had limited involvement in the response.
11. In the second phase, between March 2020 and May 2020, the Cabinet Office senior leadership team adapted their roles to step in to coordinate the Government's response to the pandemic, and the department significantly increased its resources devoted to responding to the pandemic. Over this time, I played broadly two roles: acting as the relevant Cabinet Secretariat DG covering economic issues (which included acting as secretary to the EBRIG); and, the more significant with respect to my time, playing a broader role overseeing the development of the roadmap for exiting the first lockdown of March 2020. Both these ended in May 2020.
12. In May 2020, the Covid Taskforce was created to take forward coordinating the Government's approach to Covid, including the implementation of that roadmap, and which saw the Cabinet Office take on broader executive responsibilities for the Covid response. I was not part of the Taskforce, and returned to a version of my previous role as the Sherpa for the G7 and G20 and subsequently Deputy National Security Adviser for economic issues. This reflected a planned evolution of my role in anticipation of the UK assuming the Presidency of the G7 in 2021. As DNSA I was responsible for international economic issues, but from May 2020 had no responsibility for domestic economic issues or for the Government's overall economic response to the pandemic. In my ongoing roles in Cabinet Office I did have a number of wider responsibilities relating to the Government's response to the pandemic, principally coordination and cooperation with other governments, in particular in relation to vaccines.

13. My direct role relating to the Government's economic response to the pandemic was therefore limited, essentially confined to the period March to May 2020, and within the constitutional remit of the Cabinet Office.
14. Taking these responsibilities in more detail, the Rule 9 request asks me what work, if any, I was engaged in during January and February 2020 related to preparing to respond to an economic crisis consequent on the outbreak of the pandemic, and the circumstances in which I came to be assigned responsibility for the economic response in March 2020.
15. I had limited involvement in work relating to Covid in January and February 2020, although it increased during that period and was principally focused on the international issues relating to the pandemic. It increased significantly into March, taking almost all my time during March, April and into May. On 5 March 2020, reflecting standing portfolios where relevant, the Cabinet Secretary allocated responsibilities for different parts of the response to Cabinet Secretariat DGs [JB/01 - INQ000285986]. I had responsibility for overseeing Cabinet Office's role with respect to the economic response, which was formalised in my role as senior secretary to the EBRIG. It is important to emphasise that, as explained in the corporate statement, responsibility for the economic response itself lay with HMT, and ultimately the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As described in paragraph 8 above, at least at this stage prior to the creation of the Covid Taskforce, the Cabinet Office's role reflected its constitutional functions with respect to coordination and convening in areas subject to collective agreement, with relevant departments leading on policy for which they were responsible. This coordination and convening role was performed through a number of Ministerial bodies - with respect to economic issues either one of the overall groups chaired by the PM or the EBRIG. I discuss the role of the EBRIG and the Rule 9 request with respect to it further below.
16. As I was colocated with him, during this period I also acted as alternate to Mark Sweeney in his role on overall coordination of the Cabinet Secretariat's work on Covid. I also continued to engage internationally on Covid issues through my role as G7 and G20 Sherpa, including supporting the Prime Minister in relevant G7 and G20 calls.
17. The Rule 9 request asks me to explain my role in ensuring the successful delivery and implementation of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, the Coronavirus Corporate Financing Facility, and the Small Business Grants Fund, on the premise that I had oversight of these workstreams as Director General (Cabinet Secretariat). However, as explained in the corporate statement the Cabinet

Office did not have responsibility for overseeing these workstreams or any of the other macro economic or fiscal interventions (and nor did I). These schemes were led by the relevant government department, principally HMT, DWP, BEIS and HMRC. The Cabinet Office did not have responsibility for or a material role in the design of these schemes, or responsibility for their delivery. The department did have responsibility for servicing the relevant Cabinet Committee - the EBRIG - for Ministerial oversight of the implementation of the schemes, and the development of the relevant dashboard monitoring them.

18. Towards the end of March and into April, I took on responsibility for overseeing the development of the roadmap to exit the first lockdown that was published on 10 May 2020. This took up the vast majority of my time during April and May 2020 before my roles in this phase of the response ended. This roadmap was principally covered by Module 2 of the Inquiry, however I refer to it here to fully account for my own role during this period, and because the economic response was core to the roadmap. The central judgment in developing the roadmap was balancing the government's health, economic and social objectives - unlocking sufficiently cautiously so as not to risk the spread of the virus but not so cautiously that there was unnecessary economic and social impact. In practice, this involved developing a phased exit from the lockdown by sector and by activity, prioritising those areas of most economic and social importance. This work was led by Cabinet Office (and so a precursor to the role it took on with the Taskforce) but was a fully collaborative effort across departments, including with HMT.

SECTION 3: THE ROLE OF THE EBRIG

19. I am asked to provide details of the EBRIG, its membership and meetings, and my role within it. This is addressed in some detail in the corporate statement of Simon Ridley (the contents of which I agree with and adopt), though I provide a summary below.
20. The EBRIG was a Cabinet Committee which, in the usual way, reported to Cabinet. Its purpose was set out in its terms of reference [JB/02 - INQ000184030] in the following terms:

"The Economic and Business Ministerial Implementation Group will coordinate and advise on business-related regional, sectoral and corporate-level issues relating to the C-19 pandemic. It will report to the daily PM-chaired C-19 meeting, and will meet as required to ensure a coherent approach to communications, business intelligence, and

policy. In particular the Economic and Business Ministerial Implementation Group should:

- *agree the Government's business communications strategy, including the overall engagement plan for business. It should also consider and advise on individual Department's direct engagement with business, which will include Secretary of State-led roundtables with the most acutely affected sectors;*
- *oversee the assessment of intelligence and analysis of impacts on business, including the integrity of both domestic and international supply chains, with regard to public health measures;*
- *oversee policy support measures (and the thresholds for using them) for business and the economy, including monitoring the implementation and efficacy of existing and future measures.*

The Ministerial Implementation Group will not consider:

- *the development of new macro, fiscal or monetary policy measures, which are a reserved matter for HMT (although it will consider the implementation and efficacy of such measures as they affect businesses); or*
- *specific support for individual companies, which is a matter for HMT and the relevant sector-owning Department."*

21. As per the terms of reference, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was the Chair. I served as senior secretary. Several Secretaries of State (including the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) and senior officials were regular attendees, with other attendees joining as necessary.

22. As the relevant Cabinet Secretariat DG, I was appointed as the senior secretary to the EBRIG when it was established. As senior secretary, I was the senior official responsible for ensuring the effective functioning of the EBRIG. This was in line with normal practice for Cabinet Committees. I supported the effective delivery of the meeting, upheld the principles of collective agreement and ensured that the EBRIG did not take decisions outside of its terms of reference. I was ably assisted in this by a Director (as my deputy) and a small team. My responsibilities included developing the programme of issues to be considered by the EBRIG, preparing the agenda for specific meetings, commissioning papers from departments for the agenda items and ensuring they met the requirements of the Cabinet Manual, servicing meetings (including taking the minutes), and following up with agreed actions from meetings

and tracking their implementation. An important part of this was developing the tracker tool - the "Performance and Implementation Tracker" - for monitoring the implementation of relevant policy. Overall therefore my role was principally an administrative one consistent with the normal role of the Cabinet Secretariat, and we used that administrative responsibility - and in particular the information provided by the Tracker - to identify issues that needed the attention of Ministers and therefore were for consideration by the Group.

23. The first EBRIG meeting took place on 16 March 2020. The EBRIG met a further 8 times before the Ministerial Implementation Groups were replaced by the Covid-S and Covid-O structure in May 2020. I refer the Inquiry to the chronology of EBRIG meetings previously provided by the Cabinet Office [JB/03 - INQ000176784]. I exhibit as [JB/04 - INQ000655272] a chronological index of the relevant documents for each of the nine meetings.

24. In broad strokes, the EBRIG covered three areas:

- Providing Ministerial oversight of the overall implementation of measures to support the economy, and within that, businesses and individuals. The Performance and Implementation Tracker was the principal tool for this.
- Assessing non-fiscal options for supporting business during the first lockdown, focusing especially on non-fiscal easements.
- Informing work on the development of the roadmap for exiting that first lockdown, especially for progressively removing restrictions on different parts of the economy and the order in which that should be done.

25. The first of these three areas was a consistent theme throughout all meetings of the EBRIG, and a version of the tracker was operational by the second meeting and developed subsequently.

26. The development of the Performance and Implementation Tracker was an important part of the arrangements for the EBRIG and was its principal management tool. It was produced by the Cabinet Secretariat team that serviced the EBRIG and which reported to me. As referenced in paragraph 22 above, it was used during the life of the EBRIG to identify issues that needed attention, and so agenda items for meetings of the EBRIG. The Tracker was generally welcomed by attendees at the EBRIG as a way of bringing together information on the implementation of an increasingly comprehensive and complex set of policy interventions. To

that extent it served its initial purpose. See, by way of example, [JB/05 - INQ000083317] and [JB/06 - INQ000083347].

27. In relation to the second of these areas, an early focus of the EBRIG was on considering options for non-fiscal easements to support business during the first lockdown. These were developed by the relevant department, with BEIS as lead department. The Cabinet Office's role, using the EBRIG as the institutional arrangement, was to ensure work on easements was being developed across departments at pace and brought together coherently for Ministers to consider. This informed what issues were brought for specific discussion at the EBRIG. For example, the group took items on issues such as insolvency (given the pandemic inevitably posed solvency challenges in ways that had not been anticipated in the normal operation of the insolvency regime) and sectors such as construction (where there were particular issues to consider in relation to the sector continuing to operate during the lockdown). The Cabinet Office had a responsibility for working with departments to identify issues that required legislation. Supporting this work by the EBRIG was a significant part of my work on Covid in mid to late March.
28. The third of these areas - the development of the roadmap - became much more of a focus in the later EBRIG meetings, as attention turned to exiting the lockdown, with a repeated agenda item on safer spaces. It was also the dominant theme of my own wider work on the pandemic response through April into May 2020 (after which, as explained, my role changed). As described in paragraph 18 above, I led the project preparing the roadmap on exiting the first lockdown announced on 10 May. This project arguably marked the start of the Cabinet Office taking on much more executive responsibility for the response to Covid, and so beyond a coordination and convening role, that was subsequently reflected in the creation of the Covid Taskforce in mid-May. The work of the EBRIG fed into the roadmap. For example, the sequential plan reopening different parts of the economy through May to August 2020 were based on a difficult assessment for Ministers to consider of economic priority and health-related risk, which was informed, in part, by the EBRIG's ongoing agenda focus on "safer spaces".
29. In line with normal practice for Cabinet Committees, the EBRIG meetings at Ministerial level were preceded by EBRIG(O) meetings at official level. These meetings were used to prepare the Ministerial meeting and ensure the time in them was well spent. They were chaired by me or my aforementioned deputy, Joanna Key, as the senior secretary to the Group, and attended by officials from the departments represented on the Ministerial Group. I refer the Inquiry to the

corporate statement of Simon Ridley for the general protocol with respect to "O" meetings. I exhibit as [JB/06A - INQ000655273] a chronological index of the available documents for these EBRIG(O) meetings.¹

30. I am asked about my role, and that of the EBRIG, in communications. The communications strategy was led by relevant departments, and overseen by the communications functions in No10 and Cabinet Office. Communications was a regular item on EBRIG agenda lists so the strategy could be scrutinised by Ministers.

31. I am asked to explain my views as to the effectiveness of the EBRIG in assisting the UK Government's economic response to the pandemic, and any challenges that we encountered.

32. As context, the EBRIG was one of four Ministerial Implementation Groups ("MIGs"). These were established as the government's response moved from the initial acute phase of the crisis into a more chronic crisis. The EBRIG was effective, judged by reference to its objectives. It provided a forum for considering easements to address the economic impact of the lockdown, for considering options that would inform exiting from it, and put in place the basis for Ministerial oversight of implementation of decisions made. But it is important to recall both that the EBRIG had a relatively limited role (which, as explained, did not extend to macro economic, fiscal or monetary policy issues) and was only in existence for around 2 months (and 9 meetings). Ultimately, it was too short-lived to be able to see through oversight of implementation and that was picked up in the successor Covid-S and Covid-O arrangements. And, as the Inquiry heard in Module 2, there were problems with the MIG structure overall, which led to its replacement with Covid-S and Covid-O (and the Covid Taskforce). For example, at paragraph 374 of his first witness statement [JB/07 - INQ000252914], Simon Ridley stated "*These structures worked to drive decision making as the response to Covid-19 became a whole of government focus. As time progressed, however, it became clear that the MIGs led to too many overlapping meetings and not enough clear direction or overall strategic coordination. Giving each of the four strands of the Government response a Ministerial Committee became an over-elaborate structure, especially as many decisions on the key issues were, in reality, being decided through the PM's strategy meeting and other issue specific meetings with the Prime Minister and other key Ministers and advisors.*" These observations are equally true in relation to the EBRIG. I provide an assessment of the lessons

¹ I am informed that Cabinet Office has searched for all documents relating to these meetings, but there may be documents which it has been unable to locate.

to be learnt from governance arrangements, and especially the transition from an acute to chronic phase of a crisis, below.

SECTION 4: THE ROLE OF THE EBRS

33. I am also asked about the Economic and Business Response Strategy Group ("EBRS"). The role of the EBRS was described in its terms of reference [JB/08 - INQ000593313] as follows:

"The Covid-19 Economic and Business Strategy Group will operate alongside the Economic and Business Response Ministerial Implementation Group. Its purpose will be to support a cross-Whitehall approach to the economic recovery by providing a forum for:

- *Sharing intelligence on the business environment and impact of Covid-19, in particular emerging challenges;*
- *Considering the strategic and policy approach to the post-pandemic economic and business recovery*

The group shall be supported by the EBRIG secretariat which will circulate the following for meetings:

- *The EBRIG Performance and Implementation tracker*
- *Non-papers to support discussion, as appropriate*
- *EBRIG Forward Look*

Frequency

The Economic and Business Strategy Group will meet once a week for an hour. The frequency, purpose and attendance of the Group will be kept under review."

34. The EBRS reported to the Cabinet Secretary. All departments with an interest in the economic impact of Covid or with important business stakeholder relations were represented on the Group. This included HMT, BEIS, DCMS, DIT, DfT, DEFRA, MHCLG, DfE, DWP, FCO and HMRC, as well as Cabinet Office and No10. Representatives of Government Communications and the Chief Scientist were also present.

35. The EBRS was established on my initiative, based on an assessment of how we were gathering, sharing and synthesising intelligence on the business impact of the pandemic, and based on discussion with the Second Permanent Secretary of the Treasury, Charles Roxburgh. In discussion with Charles and other Permanent Secretaries, including the BEIS, it was felt that we were gaining important insight from senior business leaders into how the pandemic was impacting the economy from across government and into what measures might be appropriate to support the economy and subsequently exit from the lockdown, but that we didn't have a mechanism for bringing that together at a senior level to identify common themes and potential policy priorities. The EBRS was agreed as a way of addressing this. We agreed that it was sensible for Charles to chair it with me as deputy, given his wider role with respect to business engagement. My principal responsibility was to ensure relevant information from the EBRS informed wider policy making, including through the EBRIG. The group was supported by the EBRIG secretariat in Cabinet Office.
36. The Group was explicitly not meant to be a group directly preparing meetings of the EBRIG in the way that the EBRIG(O) described above was. Rather it sought to provide space for intelligence sharing and stepping back as far as was possible in this early phase of the pandemic. As the Chair's Brief for the first meeting explained [JB/08 - INQ000593313], the EBRS *"is not an 'O' meeting for EBRIG: that exists already. This [the purpose of this Group] is not to clear papers. It is to carve out space for strategic thinking and problem solving, both for the immediate COVID-19 response and the plan for exit and recovery, and to give colleagues a safe space to discuss the biggest risks and whether the Government is doing enough to deal with them"*.
37. The EBRS met on 12 occasions between 08/04/2020 and 21/07/2020. I exhibit as [JB/08A - INQ000655274] a chronology of meetings, together with references to relevant documents.
38. For the limited period I was involved in the EBRS, it effectively served its intended purposes. I can recall no challenges in relation to the operation of the EBRS.

SECTION 5: DATA AND ANALYSIS

39. The Rule 9 request asks me to describe my role with respect to the development of a strategic 'Observatory' function, which would gather data on the broader economic, domestic and international implications of Covid-19.

40. For some time before the pandemic began, I felt the analytical capacity in Cabinet Office needed strengthening, especially longer-term futures, forecasting and scenarios capacity. I felt that we needed a stronger set up for coordinating analysis across government and for bringing it together on cross-cutting issues. Further I felt that the model of assessment that was used for national security through the Joint Intelligence Committee ("JIC") structures could have wider application for wider policy areas, especially multi-domain issues. I first discussed this with colleagues within Cabinet Office and No10, including the Prime Minister's Chief Adviser on Data and Digital, Ben Warner, in January 2020, so prior to Covid.
41. As the pandemic developed, ensuring we were collecting and interpreting the appropriate data to monitor the impact of the pandemic and assess its impact in an integrated way was an urgent priority. For example, extensive effort was put into a structure around a dashboard used for key decisions and into a mechanism for monitoring other countries' approaches. As discussed above, collating and analysing data was also a central feature of the work of operation of the EBRIG, with the development of the Performance and Implementation Tracker. However, as we started to develop the various lockdown interventions, and to design options for exiting from the lockdown, there was increasing attention on how we developed systems for integrated assessment of choices, especially integrating health, economic and social issues and impacts.
42. In April 2020, I was involved in discussions at a senior official level regarding the development and organisation of a strategic 'Observatory' function, which would "gather data on the broader economic, domestic and international implications of C-19" [JB/09 - INQ000308296] [JB/10 - INQ000198053], and prepared a proposal [JB/11 - INQ000653845].
43. This eventually culminated in the significant analytical team within the Covid Taskforce, which was established in May 2020. But developing analytical capacity at the centre began prior to that. This was informed by the earlier thinking prior to Covid I refer to above. I provide my assessment on the lessons to be learnt from this at the end of my statement.

SECTION 6: COOPERATION AND JOINT WORKING

44. The Rule 9 request asks me to describe the working relationships I had with the Prime Minister; senior civil servants in the Cabinet Office, HM Treasury, other UK Government departments, and the Devolved Administrations; senior officials in Local Government; and parties external to government.

45. As a Cabinet Office DG and with a specific role supporting the Prime Minister as G7/G20 Sherpa, I had established relationships with the Prime Minister, First Secretary of State, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and other members of the Cabinet. I also had established relationships with the Cabinet Secretary, colleagues in No10, Cabinet Office, HM Treasury and other government departments.
46. I drew on these relationships when fulfilling my responsibilities with respect to Covid. During the early phase of the pandemic the context was obviously extremely challenging. The virus was spreading fast in a way that was not fully understood, with an impact that was also not yet fully understood, including on children. The pressure on the NHS was rising inexorably, with genuine concern that it was at risk of being overwhelmed. The lockdown inevitably involved implementing restrictive measures at pace without precedent and with uncertain impact. The virus was also directly impacting on those in Downing Street and Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister himself. Decision making structures were having to adapt to what was emerging as an extended national emergency, with everyone adapting to remote working. Everyone was also adapting to the impact of the virus on wider life, including children being out of school and concern for vulnerable relatives and friends. This wider context is relevant - it inevitably put enormous strain on people individually and on systems. Taking this context into account I did not experience significant challenges working with the Ministers and officials described in the Rule 9 request, including those in HMT. And, as I say in Section 7 below, this was a period in which, fundamentally, people were working incredibly hard to do their very best for the country in incredibly difficult and pressured circumstances.
47. Reflecting the nature of my role, I did not have extensive relationships with officials in local government and the Devolved Administrations. I did, however, have extensive relationships with G7 and G20 counterparts in other countries.
48. I am specifically asked in the Rule 9 request about collaboration with HMT, including whether in relation to EBRIG and/or EBRS I encountered any challenges working with HMT, whether HMT's communication, coordination and information-sharing within the groups was adequate and whether it was sufficiently transparent in its approach.
49. Overall I consider the working relationship between Cabinet Office and HMT to have been effective during the period I was involved in the Covid response. I cannot recall any occasion where any department, including HMT, did not cooperate fully with EBRIG's work. HMT

designed the tracker with the Cabinet Office, including sharing all relevant information for it. It cooperated with agenda items for the meeting and provided relevant papers and analysis when the need arose. HMT cooperated with the committee in monitoring the implementation of HMT's fiscal interventions. And HMT worked with the Cabinet Office team to support the Chancellor in chairing the Group. HMT were also fully engaged and cooperative in relation to the EBRS. It was explicitly a collaboration between Cabinet Office and HMT, and Charles Roxburgh approached it as such. Separately, the Treasury was also fully involved and collaborative in the development of the roadmap.

50. The Rule 9 request asks me about my perception of the level of attention being given to the potential for an economic crisis in HM Treasury in January to March 2020. I am unable to give an informed answer, as I was not privy to HM Treasury's internal resourcing and planning, nor would I have expected to have been.

SECTION 7: ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS

51. As described earlier in this statement, my involvement in the response to the pandemic was relatively time-limited, and so my professional reflections are confined to that period.
52. Overall, taking all the context into account, my main reflection is that this period was characterised by people working incredibly hard in difficult circumstances to do their best for the country.
53. Beyond this, I would make three reflections with respect to this period that may be of interest to the Inquiry.
54. First, the short period of my involvement in the response to the pandemic saw its rapid development from emerging potential risk to full national whole-of-government chronic crisis. The change in governance for the response from COBR through the MIGs to Covid S/O and the Taskforce were a reflection of that. Some of the challenges experienced during this time were a reflection of the challenge of moving from a set up for a response to an acute crisis (which COBR is principally designed for) to something much more chronic and all-encompassing. Systems for responding in future to national whole-of-government crises need to build in playbooks for transitioning from the acute to the chronic phase of a crisis.

55. Second, by definition systems for managing a national whole-of-government chronic crisis require an integrated approach across all issues and all levers of the state. A capability to provide fully integrated analysis and assessment across economic, social, security and, in the case of a pandemic, health is essential to this. The systems developed in real time during March through to May 2020 with respect to Covid had this at their core. Implicit in the creation of the Covid Taskforce was a judgment that the Cabinet Office needed to assume a stronger role for cohering (and in some cases executing) policymaking as well as convening on and coordinating it. With respect to the focus of this module, it is a point for reflection in a chronic national crisis how the established constitutional arrangements for collective agreement with respect to economic policymaking should be applied to fully enable integrated decision making (and necessary preparation for that) by the Prime Minister, Chancellor and other critical Secretaries of State.

56. Third, it is very difficult to balance short- and long-term national interests, when inevitably the risks around the former are more immediate than the latter. This was a constant thread through the development of the roadmap where the economic and social risks inevitably crystallised over a much longer time frame than the immediate health related risks. Again, the decision on when to reopen schools was the most acute example. Systems for decision making in future national whole-of-government crises need to build this in.

Statement of Truth

I hereby declare the contents of this statement to be true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed:

PD

Dated:

10/10/25