

Witness Name: Alison Greenhill

Statement No: 2

Exhibits: 0

Dated: January 2026

Module 9 of the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry (“the Inquiry”)

Reference for Rule 9 Request - M9/R9R/AG02

SUPPLEMENTARY WITNESS STATEMENT OF ALISON GREENHILL

I, Alison Greenhill, will say as follows:

I am the Chief Operating Officer for Leicester City Council. I was appointed to this post in March 2021. Prior to that I was the Chief Finance officer for the council between 2012 and 2021. This witness statement is supplemental to my first witness statement in relation to this Module 9, and is made in response to a supplementary Request for Evidence, pursuant to Rule 9 Inquiry Rules 2006, issued on behalf of Baroness Heather Hallett, the Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry,

Introduction

Covid Inquiry - Recommendations for the Future

1. Government needs to show greater trust in local government and accept that we all want the same results. We are not just part of the civil service and have our own democratic legitimacy. In practice, this probably means more delegation, both constitutionally (so that we don't just do what we do at the discretion of central government) and financially (a wider resource base, not subject to government controls). I believe we are an outlier in international terms. We also have local knowledge not available to central government, which is too easily overlooked.

2. Proper engagement with local government on issues in which we have a stake. As far as civil emergencies are concerned, this could involve standing arrangements to prepare for any new emergency, together with arrangements that could be brought into effect at short notice once an emergency has been declared.
3. More effective engagement between the UK Government and local authorities during a whole-system civil emergency requires a pre-agreed national framework, established in advance, which recognises Local Authorities as partners rather than solely delivery agents.
4. The absence of such a framework during the Covid-19 pandemic led to delays, duplication, avoidable errors and uncertainty for both local authorities and recipients of support.

Practical recommendations are:

PRE-CRISIS SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

5. A pre-crisis support infrastructure should be established and maintained on a standing basis, which can be activated immediately at the point a civil emergency is declared. While such an infrastructure may not anticipate every eventuality, it would provide a clear governance and operational framework from which all interested parties can work, allowing greater focus on scheme design and delivery rather than emergency setup.

FORMAL ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

6. The formation of a standing national emergency economic response group, convened by central government and capable of rapid activation.
7. This group should include relevant UK Government departments, senior local authority representatives, the Local Government Association (LGA), relevant professional bodies such as the Institute of Revenues, Ratings and Valuation (IRRV) and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), business and sector representative bodies, the Public Sector Fraud Authority and key software suppliers.
8. The group should be chaired at senior official level, with clear escalation routes to Ministers where required.

SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT

9. During a civil emergency, local authorities should have a single, clearly identified lead department and senior responsible owner within the UK Government, responsible for coordination, guidance, scheme changes and escalation of delivery risks.

PAYMENT SYSTEMS AND DELIVERY MODELS

10. Payment systems should be considered in advance, recognising that local authority revenues systems are primarily designed for income collection rather than outbound payments.

DATA AND INFORMATION

11. Data and information publication requirements should be agreed at the outset of any scheme, with systems capable of generating consistent management information.
12. Desist from the practice of publishing league tables.

INFORMATION SHARING

13. The framework should include pre-agreed data sharing arrangements between local authorities, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

APPLICATION DESIGN

14. The application process should be simple, accessible and designed around the target claimant. A single application portal designed by the Government or a software supplier can bring consistency with further validation checks.

POST EVENT ASSURANCE

15. A clear process for post-grant audit and review should be scoped in advance, drawing on lessons learned from Covid-19.

FUNDING

16. In my witness statement, I complained about the fragmentation of funding. I

recommend that all support is provided in the form of general unringfenced funding and accept that some authorities would be better funded than others. This approach could perhaps be supplemented by exceptional funding for authorities with particularly unusual circumstances (e.g. those with airports or local lockdowns in the case of the pandemic).

17. Additionally, the option starts from the premise that all “like” authorities are affected similarly – e.g. if grant is distributed by means of a formula that recognises population and deprivation, then a deprived authority of a certain size is treated as being equally affected to one of the same size and level of deprivation. We know this doesn’t apply in all circumstances – for instance, authorities with airports, different levels of outsourcing. The distribution could recognize some of these issues in the distribution formula, at the expense of greater complexity but some “hard cases” would remain. Possibly, there is a case for business support to continue to be funded with separate grant.

LESSONS LEARNED

18. A reflection and review of decisions, actions, outcomes and impacts is both good and common practice after any incident. In order for such a review to be meaningful and have relevant recommendations then (representatives) of all parties involved is essential.
19. During my evidence giving I was made aware of two draft playbooks prepared by Department for Business and Trade (DBT), which are intended to be “lessons learned and how to next time” in relation to the pandemic. I have not been made aware of or consulted on these playbooks in my role at Leicester City Council and I am not aware of any of my peers across the local government sector or the LGA having been consulted.
20. The observations and criticisms identified in my original statement need to be considered alongside other sector representatives and central government in order to determine good practice for future incidents.

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: 09.02.2026