



Cabinet Office

# **UK Government Response to the Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 Report**

CP1240





# **UK Government Response to the Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 Report**

Presented to Parliament  
by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
by Command of His Majesty

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CP1240

**OGILBY**

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# Ministerial Foreword

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was unprecedented in modern memory. It led to the restriction of personal freedoms across the world, damaged livelihoods and ultimately caused the loss of far too many lives. My thoughts, and the thoughts of the whole Government, continue to be with all of those who lost loved ones during the pandemic. Many of them feel not just grief, but also anger that - as Baroness Hallett's Module 1 report sadly confirmed - the country was not as prepared as it should have been. If we want to honour their loved ones' memories, it is our duty to learn the lessons of this Inquiry and be better prepared for the next pandemic.

I express my thanks to Baroness Hallett's Inquiry and her comprehensive Module 1 report, which focused on resilience and preparedness, and made a series of important findings and recommendations for the UK and devolved governments.

National resilience is more important than ever. We live in an increasingly volatile world, with geopolitical conflicts undermining our security and driving up our cost of living, and the impact of climate change being felt all over the globe. The risks we face have increased in both frequency and scale, and have far-reaching consequences. While improvements to our national resilience have been made in the five years since the Covid-19 pandemic began, we have to go further in our preparedness.

To help us do so, in July 2024, as a direct and immediate response to the Module 1 report, the UK government announced a review of national resilience. That review will consider the Inquiry's recommendations as part of a wider consideration of where improvements are needed to ensure an agile system which helps the UK to resist, absorb and recover from the range of risks we face. In the meantime, we are already making progress with a number of recommendations. We have:

- established a single Cabinet committee for resilience to ensure clear Ministerial oversight;
- reviewed and strengthened national risk assessment, bringing in greater external challenge;
- designed a National Exercising Programme, published best practice guidance to improve the effective delivery of exercises and developed a toolkit to help local partners to identify and support vulnerable persons.

As Baroness Hallett rightly stated, risks and emergencies do not recognise borders. In our response, we have worked together with our colleagues in the devolved governments to consider the Inquiry's recommendations - identifying how we can best use the different levers each government holds to better protect the communities we serve.

We will continue to review the UK's resilience and monitor the implementation of the commitments made in this response.

# Introduction

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry (the Inquiry) was established in June 2022, with the aim of examining preparations and the response to the pandemic in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as learning lessons for the future. The Inquiry's chair, Baroness Heather Hallett, has been investigating a range of issues through the Inquiry's ten modules.

On 18 July 2024, the Inquiry published its Module 1 report which examined the resilience and preparedness of the UK at the time that the Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020.

This response to the Module 1 report sets out the ways in which the recommendations have been considered, acted on, and where further action will be taken. The UK government (the government) will drive the implementation of the recommendations and ensure that progress is recorded and tracked.

The most complex civil emergencies, like the Covid-19 pandemic, impact the whole system of central, regional and local government, alongside the private sector, voluntary sector and the public. They can affect all aspects of our lives and therefore are a whole-of-society endeavour. UK government preparedness is one key element of the response to these 'whole system' risks. Devolved governments, local responders, the private sector and the voluntary sector have critical roles and responsibilities too as part of the resilience system, alongside international partners, experts and others with insights and contributions to bring. We recognise the essential role of devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and are committed to effective engagement. We also recognise that local and community resilience across England is critical for preventing, planning for, responding to and recovering from incidents, and we will explore how we can strengthen these arrangements to ensure that local partners can adapt to the modern changing environment.

The government welcomes the Chair's findings and accepts that we must learn from past events and improve our preparedness and management of whole-system emergencies. As such, the government broadly agrees with the Chair's recommendations and sets out actions to address all of them. The Inquiry's findings are an important part of learning the lessons of the response to the pandemic to ensure we are fully ready for the future.

Delivering on our country's Missions – growing the economy, building a National Health Service (NHS) fit for the future, safer streets, improving opportunities for all, and making Britain a clean energy superpower – will contribute to the UK's resilience



and help us prepare for the range of risks we face. These Missions also rely on a strong, foundational system of resilience that must be maintained and improved.

Since the pandemic, there has been significant reform of resilience arrangements and capabilities, which is reflected in our response. We recognise that there is still further to go in building the UK's resilience and we will continue to develop and implement improvements through the resilience review and beyond. There are fundamental challenges still to be faced and tough choices that need to be made, but the UK government is committed to continue building the UK's resilience and ensuring that it is well-prepared for future civil emergencies. The government's response to each individual recommendation is set out in the remainder of this document, with key improvements since the Covid-19 pandemic including:

- The establishment of a single ministerial Cabinet committee for resilience and preparedness to drive change and action in resilience policy, and to ensure ministerial oversight.
- To support this oversight, our resilience and emergency response structures in the Cabinet Office have been overhauled with the establishment of the COBR Unit and the Resilience Directorate. A new Head of Resilience has been appointed to drive collaboration and coordination of a wide community of actors in resilience, both inside and outside of government.
- A transparent National Risk Register was published to provide businesses, risk practitioners and the voluntary and community sector with as much information as possible about the risks they face, to support their own planning, preparation and response.
- The [GOV.UK/Prepare](https://www.gov.uk/prepare) website was launched, providing advice to individuals, households, and communities on preparing for emergencies.
- Changes to improve overall government preparedness for whole system risks have been implemented and we have already started work to improve how the system plans for and reacts to catastrophic/whole system risks.
- The use of data to inform decision making has been transformed through the establishment of the National Situation Centre, which provides situational awareness for crisis response, bringing together data, analysis and critical expertise.
- We have acknowledged the disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups in the UK during the pandemic, and the risk of this occurring in future emergencies. Our response sets out the changes we have made to risk planning and data management to help ensure that we are reducing any disproportionate impacts on any groups or individuals, and targeting support where it can best help in civil emergency planning and management.
- The 2023 UK Biological Security Strategy was published to provide the overarching strategic framework for mitigating biological risks facing the UK. The Strategy sets the vision, mission, outcomes and plans to protect the UK

and our interests from significant biological risks, no matter how these occur and no matter who or what they affect.

- The Emergency Alerts system was introduced, which is now fully operational, providing a fast and versatile way to communicate with the public in life-threatening situations.
- A National Exercising Programme has been designed, with large scale national exercises planned annually across the next four years and publishing best practice guidance on exercising to help government, devolved governments, public and private sector organisations to test plans and capabilities to respond to risks. A pandemic exercise is planned for 2025.
- Five editions of the Lessons Digest<sup>1</sup> and Lessons Management Best Practice Guidance<sup>2</sup> have been published to support lesson-learning within and across responder organisations, government departments and wider resilience partners.
- A comprehensive cross-government crisis management training programme has been built, now already one of the largest in the world and a foundation for engagement with academia, business, frontline public bodies and the voluntary sector.
- A refreshed suite of National Occupational Standards<sup>3</sup> due by April 2025, led by the UK Resilience Academy, will provide clear, concise and consistent articulation of requirements for resilience and emergencies training qualifications.

In parallel with this response, the government is also undertaking a resilience review, which is considering evidence, lessons and the risk picture in order to better strengthen the resilience and preparedness of the UK. The review is considering how the government should mobilise the whole UK system to better understand, detect, prevent, plan for and respond to whole-system civil emergencies.

The government is committed to actively engaging with the Inquiry and awaits Baroness Hallett's findings and recommendations in subsequent module reports as she continues her important work.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epcresilience.com/knowledge-hub/lessons-digest>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lessons-management-best-practice-guidance>

<sup>3</sup> NOS are agreed definitions of core and transferable skills that are adopted by employers and qualifications bodies across the four nations of the UK to guide and promote skills development. The current set of civil contingencies NOS applies to both the public and private sector and outlines the knowledge and skills that individuals need to perform effectively and safely in any given role.

Recommendation 1: A simplified structure for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience

The governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should each simplify and reduce the number of structures with responsibility for preparing for and building resilience to whole-system civil emergencies.

The core structures should be:

- a single Cabinet-level or equivalent ministerial committee (including the senior minister responsible for health and social care) responsible for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience for each government, which meets regularly and is chaired by the leader or deputy leader of the relevant government; and
- a single cross-departmental group of senior officials in each government (which reports regularly to the Cabinet-level or equivalent ministerial committee) to oversee and implement policy on civil emergency preparedness and resilience.

This should be put in place within 12 months of the publication of this Report.

Within 6 months of the creation of the group of senior officials, it should complete a review to simplify and reduce the number of structures responsible for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience.

Subsequently, within 24 months of the publication of this Report, the ministerial committee should rationalise and streamline subordinate or supporting groups and committees responsible for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience. Any groups and committees retained or created to support this core structure should have a clear purpose and should report regularly about progress with, and completion of, tasks assigned to them.

The government agrees that clear governance is needed to build resilience across the UK.

As per the Inquiry's recommendation, in July 2024, the Prime Minister established a single ministerial committee to oversee action to build medium to long term resilience, capable of making decisions across government. The National Security Council (Resilience) is a Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Committee oversees action to build medium to long term resilience. The Health Secretary is a standing member of this Committee, in line with the Inquiry's

recommendation. The National Security Council (Resilience) is supported by an official-level committee, in line with the Cabinet Manual.

The government also has a cross-departmental group of senior officials to coordinate and drive implementation of policy on civil emergency preparedness and resilience. The Resilience Steering Board is a Director-level meeting, chaired by the Cabinet Office Head of Resilience, that meets monthly. The Board has a clearly defined purpose to provide collective cross-government leadership on resilience matters, within the core structure provided by the National Security Council (Resilience).

Resilience is a wide ranging and complex function that spans different policy areas, both reserved and devolved. The devolution arrangements in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland set out the policy areas that are the responsibility of devolved governments for which they are accountable to devolved legislatures. Risks and emergencies do not recognise borders and it is vital that the four nations across the UK work together to keep communities safe. Senior officials from the devolved governments attend the Resilience Steering Board, to ensure effective understanding and coordination of resilience activity across the whole of the UK. Senior resilience officials across the four nations also meet individually and together on cross-cutting matters with ministerial engagement as needed.

We will look to rationalise and streamline subordinate or supporting groups and committees responsible for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience. Further arrangements to manage whole system risks have been captured later in this response under the relevant recommendations.

## Recommendation 2: Cabinet Office leadership for whole-system civil emergencies in the UK

The UK government should:

- abolish the lead government department model for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience; and
- require the Cabinet Office to lead on preparing for and building resilience to whole-system civil emergencies across UK government departments, including monitoring the preparedness and resilience of other departments, supporting departments to correct problems, and escalating issues to the UK Cabinet-level ministerial committee and group of senior officials in Recommendation 1.

The government agrees with the need for a greater Cabinet Office role for whole-system civil emergencies. This is in addition to the Lead Government Department model which retains an essential role in preparedness and resilience.

In building the resilience of the UK to respond to whole-system emergencies, we are looking across a complex system which involves all of UK society, as well as international actors. The system needs to operate across the whole lifecycle of an extensive array of risks,<sup>4</sup> have clarity of roles and responsibilities, and act in an agile and efficient way at each stage of the cycle. Therefore, in improving the leadership of this system for whole-system civil emergencies, we have sought to maximise and best direct the available resources to provide the most effective impact.

For these reasons, the government has focused on the most serious whole-system risks with significant cascading impacts which affect the whole of society. These risks are those with a catastrophic impact level in the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA, further detail about this is included under recommendation 3).

To provide a clear line of accountability the UK has a 'Lead Government Department' (LGD) model<sup>5</sup> to cover all phases of the emergency management cycle for all risks in the NSRA. In the LGD model, designated government departments with the day-to-day responsibility for an issue or sector are responsible for leading work to identify serious risks and ensuring that the right planning, response and recovery arrangements are in place. This ensures that the responsibility and oversight sits with the body with the best understanding, relationships and mechanisms for delivery to identify and address risks. The system is most effective when responsibilities for

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<sup>4</sup> The emergency management cycle contains: risk anticipation, risk assessment, prevention/mitigation, preparation, validate, response, recovery and learning.

<sup>5</sup> [LGD list](#)

resilience are managed by those most able to discharge them, with central support for cross-system collaboration and information sharing, as no single organisation or government can manage these risks alone.

To support that balance, we will retain the Lead Government Department model for catastrophic risks, but with a greater role for the Cabinet Office in driving work to improve preparedness and resilience. Furthermore, the Cabinet Office is expected to provide leadership in responding to catastrophic risks should they arise, working closely with the LGD, to coordinate a whole-system response. This supplements the role of all government departments to prepare for and respond to the cascading impacts of these risks in the areas for which they are responsible. The Cabinet Office will collaborate closely with the LGDs and all departments to place the best available expertise on each catastrophic risk at the heart of our national preparations, supporting departments to identify and plan against a fuller range of cascading impacts.

To ensure these capabilities are integrated into the government's approach, we will publish updated guidance for all government departments on catastrophic risk management to ensure all parts of the system understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering whole-system preparedness. This is in relation to the primary risk impacts, but also to ensure preparedness and resilience to the cascading impacts of the risk.

The Cabinet Office has already taken steps to strengthen its role on catastrophic risks. Since the pandemic, the department has published a revised Lead Government Department list, which makes clear risk ownership across the UK and devolved governments to ensure that all civil contingencies risks are appropriately and effectively managed through all parts of the risk cycle.

These actions strengthen the Cabinet Office's long-standing role in monitoring, supporting and improving the preparedness and resilience of other departments. This includes leadership of two cross-cutting resilience programmes, the Response Capabilities Programme and the National Exercising Programme (NEP). This programme monitors and identifies possible improvements to the government's core emergency response capabilities and the NEP delivers an annual national (or 'Tier 1') exercise to test cross-government co-ordination. National exercises involve regional/devolved government administrations and local responders, as well as relevant businesses and voluntary and community organisations and culminate in a post-exercise report which makes recommendations to improve the government's capacity and capabilities to prepare for and respond to risks. Further detail can be found in Recommendation 6.

For all risks, the decision to move to a centrally-led response remains at the discretion of the Prime Minister when considering the scale, complexity or severity of a crisis. To reinforce this, the Cabinet Office has:

- Developed a substantial update of the Central Government Concept of Operations for Emergency Response and Recovery (HMG CONOPs) which is due for publication in Spring 2025. This provides further detail on the role of the Cabinet Office in the immediate response to whole-of-system crises, and includes information on arrangements for when the Cabinet Office may take on a leadership role.
- Undertaken additional work on planning against defined catastrophic risks. This supplements the HMG CONOPs by creating plans for individual catastrophic risks should a response be required. These plans include trigger points for when a risk might escalate to a catastrophic level, clear decision-making authorities and processes, the activation procedures for acute crisis management structures, and data requirements. To support this the Cabinet Office also works with departments, devolved governments and local partners, where appropriate, to plan and prepare for the cascading impacts of catastrophic risks.
- Updated the governance structures for catastrophic risks to reflect the Cabinet Office's larger role. In this governance structure, the Cabinet Office supports departments to correct problems, and escalate issues to the UK Cabinet-level National Security Council (Resilience) and supporting senior official groups. The governance for catastrophic risks forms a key part of the wider governance structure set out in recommendation 1.

### Recommendation 3: A better approach to risk assessment

The UK government and devolved administrations should work together on developing a new approach to risk assessment that moves away from a reliance on single reasonable worst-case scenarios towards an approach that:

- assesses a wider range of scenarios representative of the different risks and the range of each kind of risk;
- considers the prevention and mitigation of an emergency in addition to dealing with its consequences;
- provides a full analysis of the ways in which the combined impacts of different risks may complicate or worsen an emergency;
- assesses long-term risks in addition to short-term risks and considers how they may interact with each other;
- undertakes an assessment of the impact of each risk on vulnerable people; and
- takes into account the capacity and capabilities of the UK.

In doing so, the UK government and devolved administrations should perform risk assessments that reflect the circumstances and characteristics particular to England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole.

The government agrees with the need to continually improve its approach to risk assessment as the basis for the entire system of preparedness and resilience.

The government's principal framework for risk assessment is the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA). The NSRA is a classified assessment of the most significant risks to the UK over the medium term (next two to five years). It is used as a tool for planning by government departments and Local Resilience Forums. The Inquiry recognised that significant changes have been made to the NSRA following the pandemic, including in response to an external review by the Royal Academy of Engineering in 2021. Most significantly, the NSRA has moved to a dynamic assessment process, with risks updated several times a year in response to changes to the risk landscape or new evidence. The government also published the most transparent public-facing version of the NSRA, the National Risk Register (NRR), in August 2023. The NRR provided more information from the NSRA than ever before, containing information for risk practitioners, academics, and private and voluntary sector organisations who might benefit from this information but who do not have access to the classified NSRA. This information provided by the government enables them to assess how the risks might affect their organisations and interests, and to carry out resilience planning.



The government agrees that risk assessment and planning should not be based in isolation on a single reasonable worst-case scenario. Cabinet Office guidance mandates departments to generate multiple and varied scenarios when assessing the impact of risks. Where different manifestations of risks may require significantly different planning or response requirements, these are presented separately in the NSRA. To go further, the government will reference variations and additional scenarios more prominently in future updates to the NSRA, considering where these could be tested through national exercises. The government believes that a plausible yet challenging reasonable worst-case scenario is the appropriate benchmark for developing generic response capabilities, which can be deployed for any type or number of risks, although departments consider many variations of scenarios at the planning stage.

The UK government continues to work closely with the devolved governments to collectively strengthen approaches to risk assessment across the UK. All NSRA data is shared across the four nations, and devolved governments are involved in methodology reviews.

The NSRA is supported by more detailed risk assessments produced by government departments and agencies, which cover the range of each kind of risk in more granular detail. For example, the UKHSA Health Security Risk Assessment (HSRA) is using an adapted version of the NSRA methodology to explore a greater variety of health hazards, with multiple different planning assumptions, including mitigated scenarios.

The government agrees that it is important to consider prevention and mitigation of an emergency as part of risk assessment. It will make changes to the NSRA over the course of 2025 to present the assumptions that underpin risk assessments more explicitly and consistently in future versions by strengthening departmental guidance and factoring this into the scenarios.

The government recognises that multiple risks can compound and/or cascade, amplifying their individual and collective impacts. In 2023, the Cabinet Office included an analysis of linked risks in the NSRA. These are risks that may cause or increase the likelihood of another, or risks that would have significantly greater impacts if they manifested concurrently. The government is developing a “digital NSRA” platform to visualise how risks interconnect. This is already in use by ministers and senior officials to support planning and preparation for civil contingencies, and will be rolled out more widely to departments over the course of 2025 and 2026.

The government agrees that assessing the impact of risks on vulnerable groups is critical to improving the resilience of the whole of society. The NSRA methodology includes a specific impact category on vulnerable people. The Cabinet Office issued new guidance to departments in October 2024 to improve consideration of the

disproportionate impacts risks may have on different groups across a full spectrum of vulnerability. In 2025 the Cabinet Office will also work with the NSRA expert group on vulnerable people to consider further ways to improve the quality of assessment in this area.

The government has also strengthened its approach to the assessment of long-term risks. The government has established a new process for identifying and assessing more continuous and enduring challenges - chronic risks - that erode elements of our economy, society, way of life and/or national security, in recognition of their different planning, preparation and response requirements compared to acute risks in the NSRA. Examples include antimicrobial resistance, climate change and serious and organised crime. This complements the government's assessments of acute risks identified and assessed through the NSRA and NRR. This work has been developed in consultation with government departments, Chief Scientific Advisors, external academics and experts. A number of key chronic risks have been identified and assessed and this work will support the government to enhance a shared view of the longer-term challenges facing the UK. This classified assessment has now been shared across government, helping departments to consider interactions between acute and chronic risks, to be updated as new evidence emerges. A public-facing version will be published soon.

The government agrees that risk assessment must be connected to strategy and planning. It will implement, by 2026, the further recommendation from the Royal Academy of Engineering's 2021 NSRA methodology report to pilot an alternative approach to risk assessment that considers preparedness for risks, rather than on the likelihood of risks occurring.

#### Recommendation 4: A UK-wide whole-system civil emergency strategy

The UK government and devolved administrations should together introduce a UK-wide whole-system civil emergency strategy (which includes pandemics) to prevent each emergency and also to reduce, control and mitigate its effects.

As a minimum, the strategy should:

- A. be adaptable;
- B. include sections dedicated to each potential whole-system civil emergency – for example, one on pandemics with a clear explanation of the roles and responsibilities of the UK government, devolved administrations and their departments/directorates as well as local responders;
- C. consider a wide range of potential scenarios for each type of emergency;
- D. identify the key issues and set out a range of potential responses;
- E. identify how the strategy is to be applied to ensure that any potential responses are proportionate to the particular circumstances of the emergency;
- F. include an assessment in the short, medium and long term, based on published modelling, of the potential health, social and economic impacts of the emergency and of potential responses to the emergency on the population and, in particular, on vulnerable people; and
- G. include an assessment of the infrastructure, technology and skills the UK needs to respond effectively to the emergency and how those needs might change for different scenarios.

The strategy should be subject to a substantive reassessment at least every three years to ensure that it is up to date and effective, incorporating lessons learned between reassessments.

The government agrees with the Inquiry's insights, and they align with our own reflections. The government is therefore implementing a common strategic approach to preparing for and responding to whole-system civil emergencies, which will form part of a refreshed resilience strategy. The resilience strategy will be developed and published in spring 2025 following the resilience review and will set out the government's vision for a stronger and more resilient UK.

Alignment and interoperability across the UK and devolved governments is absolutely critical to our ability to effectively respond to catastrophic risks. However, all governments agree that a single UK-wide strategy which covers all of the sub-recommendations would be unwieldy and would not be appropriate given devolution

arrangements, responsibilities and accountabilities. We agree that risk planning should be done jointly or in concert, and we will cooperate closely as we develop the approach to a new resilience strategy.

Risk profiles vary greatly for different whole-system risks; to create long-term improvements the government has strengthened risk-specific strategies to drive forward meaningful change. Risk-specific planning documents can be refreshed more frequently, enabling greater agility in the face of a changing risk landscape. The UK Biological Security Strategy was published in June 2023 with a renewed vision, mission, outcomes and plans to protect the UK and our interests from significant biological risks, no matter how these occur and no matter who or what they affect. It provides the overarching strategic framework for mitigating biological risks to the UK and sets the framing for several threat and disease specific UK strategies (such as the recently published Antimicrobial Resistance National Action Plan, and the new strategic approach to Pandemic Preparedness). This government has adopted the Strategy in full and committed to ensure we have the capabilities we need to protect the public from a spectrum of biological threats.

To fulfil a commitment in the Strategy, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) is publishing a government health and care pandemic preparedness strategy that will set out how the health and care system is implementing the principles of the new strategic approach to pandemic preparedness.

DHSC is also leading work to complete a UK-wide respiratory response plan for health and care, followed by response plans for all other routes of transmission: oral, blood and sexual, contact and vector. In the autumn 2024 budget, the government announced it is strengthening the UK's pandemic preparedness and health protection with £460 million of investment.

The government also agrees that having clearly defined and well-understood roles and responsibilities is a pre-requisite for an effective UK-wide response. Following the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government implemented a programme of substantial change to how it plans for and responds to whole-system risks. This includes:

- a substantial refresh of the government's risk-agnostic framework for how we collectively respond to crises - the Central Government Concept of Operations for Emergency Response and Recovery (HMG ConOps). This will be published by spring 2025;
- risk-specific operational plans which reflect the leadership role for the Cabinet Office in whole-system emergencies. These will be delivered by spring 2025 and will be scalable and adaptable, clarify roles and responsibilities (departments, agencies and devolved governments), and set out triggers and thresholds for moving to a centralised response;

- improvements to the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA) where assessments will be based on published modelling, where available, and will include the potential health, social, environmental and economic impacts of the emergencies as well as potential impacts on critical infrastructure and services. The assessments will also aim to evaluate the impacts of potential response options on the population and, in particular, on vulnerable people;
- building on the National Response Capabilities Programme, which provides oversight of the government's ability to respond to civil emergencies through a set of emergency response capabilities (including plans, personnel, legislation, training, equipment, data, infrastructure, technology and skills);
- completing mapping of key cascading impacts of catastrophic risks to support departments in their planning and response and ensure a more developed and whole-system approach to risk planning. Crucially this includes identifying gaps where further work is required, which will then be escalated through refreshed governance structures; and
- establishing and building the skills needed to respond effectively across the UK through the UK Resilience Academy and the Crisis Management Excellence Programme.

We welcome the Inquiry's emphasis on a whole of society and whole system approach to resilience. The multi-agency partnership role of Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) is key to local areas better preparing for, responding to and recovering from incidents. This government will continue to strengthen local resilience working closely with LRFs and wider local partners, and will work with local leaders to consider the role of Strategic Authorities in building resilience across their areas.

### Recommendation 5: Data and research for future pandemics

The UK government, working with the devolved administrations, should establish mechanisms for the timely collection, analysis, secure sharing and use of reliable data for informing emergency responses, in advance of future pandemics. Data systems should be tested in pandemic exercises.

The UK government should also commission a wider range of research projects ready to commence in the event of a future pandemic. These could be 'hibernated' studies or existing studies that are designed to be rapidly adapted to a new outbreak. Better working with international partners should be encouraged. This should include projects to:

- understand the prevalence of a new virus;
- measure the effectiveness of a range of different public health measures; and
- identify which groups of vulnerable people are hardest hit by the pandemic and why.

The government agrees with the Inquiry that data and research are crucial to preparing for, responding to and recovering from a pandemic.

The government recognises that effective response to any future pandemic requires a refined and developed understanding of data, research, analysis, and other evidence required to underpin the response. At the beginning of the pandemic we lacked the systems, structures and processes needed to collect, analyse and distribute data quickly enough. These are now significantly improved, and robust epidemiological data will always be dependent on the availability and scale of appropriate surveillance and testing. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) including via NHS networks, are responsible for the collection, analysis and distribution of data related to infectious disease, as well as ensuring it is available, where legal frameworks allow, to support research projects. There are responsibilities across the government to plan, deliver and understand research commissioned between pandemics, to develop an ever deeper understanding of the evidence informing pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The Cabinet Office is responsible for ensuring that ministers and senior decision makers have the right information – including data – to take key decisions through the COBR mechanism during an emergency response.

#### **Situational awareness data for crisis response**

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, surveillance, data collection and distribution were often manual and time-consuming. The process of identifying, collecting and reporting data to support a sustained national response took time, as did developing

a dashboard, which was a cause of frustration among policy and decision makers. There was a lack of consistently comprehensive UK-wide data.

We have made significant progress on this. The National Situation Centre was established in 2021. It provides situational awareness for crisis response, bringing together data, analysis and critical expertise. It is already highly regarded internationally as a benchmark for the use of data in crisis, and represents a fundamental improvement since the pandemic - data now leads responses by default.

The establishment of the National Situation Centre means that we are better prepared to use anonymised and aggregated data to support strategic decision making on a range of national emergencies where that data is available. More than 700 such data sets have been mapped or ingested and, at short notice, we can produce analysis for over 85% of risks identified in the NSRA, and this coverage is ever expanding. Critical data sets, such as near real-time telephony data, cover the four nations. These capabilities are used regularly. It is vital to recognise that being prepared for a crisis requires us to take action before the crisis arises, which is why we have mapped or ingested this data ahead of time.

Dashboards – similar to those which took significant time to set up at the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020 – are now available on our Data, Analytics and Situational Awareness Hub. These collate information from government and non-government sources so that those working on a crisis have access to relevant and timely data related to that crisis and provide support to strategic decision making. They are hosted on a dedicated secure platform, built by the National Situation Centre, and are shared across government and with the devolved governments. This is supported by a dedicated crisis liaison officer responsible for ensuring the efficient and effective sharing of data between the devolved governments and the National Situation Centre.

However, in a future pandemic response, new sources of data such as specific targeted surveillance programmes as were established during COVID-19, would be needed to complement existing data streams and support decision making. Not all data which was used during the Covid-19 pandemic would be immediately available, and UKHSA and NHSE's ability to increase data collection and surveillance will be dependent on the availability of diagnostics tools specific to the pathogen being available for use across the UK laboratory network, and appropriate data systems to share this information being in place. This is set out in more detail in the subsequent section.

Departments and bodies have gained valuable experience of working with providers of data and expertise outside of government. For example, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) continues to receive data from card payment providers for use in economic statistics. During the pandemic response, this data source was able to provide near real-time indicators of economic impacts. The Government Office for

Science has set up an active continuous improvement programme for the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) which strengthens the government's ability to identify and consult the best available experts across a more diverse range of scientific disciplines and better prepare them to support in an emergency. Under this programme, the Government Office for Science has worked with the National Situation Centre to develop ways of working that better connect scientific expertise with data, data analysis and data products during a crisis. Additionally, in 2022, The Government Office for Science established a new cross-government function, the Social and Behavioural Science for Emergencies Steering Group (SBSE), to strengthen coordination, identify cross-cutting social and behavioural evidence and data gaps for emergency preparedness and government capabilities and awareness.

Building on the lessons learned from visualising health data during Covid-19, the National Situation Centre is developing a new Biothreats Radar capable of scanning human, plant and animal health risks to create a powerful, near real-time view of emerging bio-threats and the impact they could have. The Radar will provide centralised data capability and actively monitor this information to provide decision makers with a comprehensive picture of known and developing biological threats. This sits alongside the UK Health Security Agency's work to monitor new and emerging infectious diseases that could threaten the UK population. The Biological Security Strategy commits to scoping the development of integrated biosurveillance capabilities, to allow for more comprehensive monitoring of threats over time. Data and analysis, assured by experts, would flow into the National Situation Centre's Biothreats Radar, providing decision makers with a comprehensive picture in crisis.

As noted above, the National Situation Centre has also developed a "digital NSRA" platform to interrogate the impacts of a risk, or a number of risks. It allows users to see the impacts which the materialisation of a risk may cause and immediately determine which of those impacts are compounded if multiple risks were to occur concurrently. If a new pandemic were to emerge, we would be able to consider complex, concurrent scenarios in minutes.

Further, supported by the ONS, the National Situation Centre has created a Risk Vulnerability Tool (RVT) to estimate the number of people who are vulnerable to the negative impacts of National Security Risk Assessment risks. It will be made available across government, including the devolved governments, through the aforementioned Data, Analytics and Situational Awareness Hub, supporting faster understanding of the scale and location of disproportionately impacted populations ahead of and during crises.

The National Situation Centre has been supported since early 2024 by a 'Crisis Surge Team', a pool of trained ONS analysts called upon to provide the Situation Centre with support during times of concurrent or enduring crises. This ensures skilled analysts can be deployed swiftly and efficiently to support matters of national importance. We



recognise that the devolved governments are concerned about the demands of identifying, collecting and reporting data to the UK government. The National Situation Centre will continue to work with the devolved governments and local partners to strengthen and streamline systems, structure and processes for data sharing, both in preparation for and response to crises.

Overall, the ONS has been working closely with the devolved governments to improve data comparability and to ensure, as far as possible, that data is collected on a four-nations basis. The UK Concordat on Statistics, agreed in 2021, sets out the framework for co-operation in the production of statistics between the UK and devolved governments. Collection of new data during emergencies should, where possible, include the whole UK, allowing robust comparisons between different regions and areas. A model for this was the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey (CIS), rapidly set up by ONS and academic partners, to measure the prevalence and viral load, and identify, track and understand variants of SARS-CoV-2 across the UK, delivering breakdowns by age and region across all four nations. ONS has continued to work on household health surveys, having delivered the Winter CIS with UKHSA in 2023/24, and now the Health Insight Survey commissioned by NHS England. In England, Scotland and Wales, ONS runs the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, a monthly survey covering topics relating to people's experience of daily life and events. This survey can be rapidly adapted to new topics as required, as happened during the pandemic.

The Cabinet Office also continues to provide the ResilienceDirect online service to enable collaboration and information sharing across multi-agency boundaries for the full cycle of emergency management: planning, exercising, response and recovery. The service already has nearly 67,000 active users from across the UK, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories and continues to be used daily to protect and save lives.

### **Approach to Research, Development and Data for pandemic preparedness and response**

Effective coordination of scientific research in advance of and in response to a future pandemic is essential to support in building the capacity and capability, and the scientific knowledge, in order to prepare and respond optimally to emerging infectious diseases and pandemics.

The UK government is commissioning a range of research projects ready to commence in the event of a future pandemic. These are primarily research infrastructure and studies that conduct research in the inter-pandemic period and are designed to be rapidly adapted to a new outbreak and includes hibernated protocols which can be rapidly triggered. The "UK Research and Development Framework for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response" was developed to facilitate

effective collaboration between funders by determining research infrastructure needs, research priorities and appropriate funding routes to rapidly deliver research. UKHSA, along with the wider health system, identifies research needs and priorities for pandemic and epidemic preparedness, working with government funders and others to ensure that these are addressed under this new Framework. This was developed by all four nations with representation from all major UK government funders of research including UK Research and Innovation and the DHSC-funded National Institute for Health and Care Research. Research priorities are delivered through a coordinated toolkit of capabilities coupled with strengthened research infrastructure. This approach enables the advance funding and planning of a complementary suite of studies and identification of a collaborative network of researchers. It also gives us the ability to prevent and prepare effectively as well as adapt to changing priorities through pivoting pre-existing programmes.

Health equity considerations are essential to identifying evidence gaps on risks to vulnerable groups, and are therefore embedded in UKHSA Incident Research and Scientific Evaluation prioritisation criteria as well as the cross-government framework for pandemic preparedness research. UKHSA relies significantly on NHS pathology data for routine surveillance and is working to develop systems that can capture equity data characteristics routinely outside of pandemic periods. UKHSA is expanding the number of surveillance systems that can routinely report on social deprivation and ethnicity, and linking existing datasets as routine surveillance data do not always include these characteristics. Whilst not research, this supports UKHSA in the identification and prioritisation of research and development.

Understanding the effectiveness of different public health measures and how they affect specific groups is also vital. To support this, UKHSA has an ongoing programme of work to rigorously examine the evidence base relating to Public Health and Social Measures (PHSM), which are also a pillar of the cross-government framework. UKHSA's work on PHSM aims to map the evidence of effectiveness and unintended consequences; generate evidence on PHSM across all routes of transmission; and translate evidence into public health advice that can be shared with external partners.

UKHSA has strengthened the ability to access health data through secure systems, and enabled sharing with international, national, local, and academic partners since the pandemic. The UKHSA data dashboard, a key part of the UK data landscape, puts public health data in the hands of stakeholders, policy makers and the public. Besides this, aspects of the Covid-19 response have been integrated into core business functions of UKHSA, including a Pathogen Genomics Strategy and programme which will strengthen UKHSA's ability to embed genomics data from other sources and manage this data in surveillance and incident response activities. UKHSA is also strengthening automated reporting of epidemiological information from private diagnostic laboratories and joining up data operations with UKHSA's incident response structure.

UKHSA is delivering the Enterprise Data Analytics Platform, which allows staff to see real-time data on health security incidents to inform agile and scalable responses to these threats. UKHSA is also supporting national to local data sharing through the Data Sharing Framework with Upper Tier Local Authorities and the Local Authority Data Access Platform, enabling local partners secure access to sensitive health data to inform policy making and response.

DHSC and UKHSA continues to work closely with international partners to develop and deliver research priorities, which includes research to combat epidemics and outbreaks at source. For example, international research priorities are identified through: engagement via new international funders networks such as Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness (GLOPID-R); triggering rapid reviews of global research to identify gaps through the Pandemic Analytical Capacity and Funding Tracker (PACT); and responding to the priorities set out by the World Health Organization and local stakeholders.

### **Investment in key capabilities**

The research and development improvements made to prepare for and respond to a pandemic must be underpinned by investment in key capabilities that will enable these efforts, such as data and laboratory infrastructure, and researcher capacity and capability, including across a range of Health Protection areas.

As well as funding research itself, DHSC invests significantly in research expertise and capacity, specialist facilities, support services and collaborations to support and deliver research in England. NIHR infrastructure funding supports the country's leading experts to develop and deliver high-quality translational, clinical and applied research that is funded by the NIHR's research programmes, other public funders of research, charities and the life sciences industry. Additional focus has been placed on pandemic preparedness across the NIHR infrastructure. For example, from Spring 2025, all NIHR Health Protection Research Units (HPRUs) – partnerships between the UK Health Security Agency and academia, covering infectious diseases, emergency preparedness or cross-cutting themes must have a research theme addressing pandemic preparedness. Additionally, funding will be awarded to one HPRU to be a hub that will coordinate and embed pandemic preparedness activities across all HPRUs to ensure they are complementary and responsive. HPRUs have and will continue to have a responsive mode to support UKHSA in addressing emerging research needs from emergencies and incidents, whilst ensuring that health equity is addressed within their research.

Quality critical infrastructure, including high containment laboratories, are a core capability to support research and are essential for the UK to identify, characterise and respond to dangerous infectious diseases (including epidemics and pandemics), and

conduct crucial research into disease prevention, treatment and decontamination. These laboratories are a key element of the government's Health Mission, essential to identifying, characterising, surveilling and monitoring the pathogens that cause animal, plant and human disease outbreaks. For example, the government is continuing to invest in The Science Capability in Animal Health programme which is redeveloping the UK's main animal health science laboratories. High containment facilities are critical infrastructure for the UK, handling a wide range of threats to animals, plants and humans - several of which feature on the UK National Risk Register. They are essential for developing diagnostics and evaluating infectious disease countermeasures (such as therapeutics and vaccines). For example, during the 2022 Mpox outbreak, UKHSA used their high containment laboratory facilities to rapidly develop a test to detect Mpox-immunity in individuals who had contracted Mpox or received the smallpox vaccine.

On data, since 2022, DHSC has had the public commitment to adopt Secure Data Environments for the secondary uses of health data through the £175m Data for Research and Development programme. The NHS Research Secure Data Environment Network covers all of England and quickly provides privacy protecting access to a range of data against the full spectrum of research. By March 2025, there will be over 500 research studies in the SDE Network pipeline, including multi SDE projects, and industry studies.

This strengthened ability to share data through secure, interoperable platforms holds huge potential for future pandemic research, provided it can be accessed safely whilst maintaining public trust. It can help to support faster access to richer, UK-wide datasets for researchers in what will be the world's largest linked health datasets. It will also give organisations greater control and oversight over their data as it remains within the secure space.

To facilitate fast research, by March 2025, the NHS DigiTrials Service, using digital tools to enhance the number of research volunteers, is anticipated to have enabled the recruitment of over one million participants into clinical research. This demonstrates its efficacy to support rapid trial recruitment when required. The plan is to develop fast, pandemic ready data streams for use during pandemics, including during pandemics.

Similar approaches to data access are being taken by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and we are continuing to work to improve better system wide alignment and interoperability between health data platforms across the UK. Collectively these data infrastructure assets allow the UK to accelerate secure, publicly trusted health research agnostic of pandemics, but could be pivoted to more successfully support high-quality research and analysis at times of future crisis.

#### Recommendation 6: A regular UK-wide pandemic response exercise

The UK government and devolved administrations should together hold a UK-wide pandemic response exercise at least every three years.

The exercise should:

- test the UK-wide, cross-government, national and local response to a pandemic at all stages, from the initial outbreak to multiple waves over a number of years;
- include a broad range of those involved in pandemic preparedness and response; and
- consider how a broad range of vulnerable people will be helped in the event of a pandemic.

The government agrees that regularly programmed exercises should test pandemic preparedness. A ministerial, national level (Tier 1) exercise has been programmed for 2025 to test the response to a major pandemic. In addition, smaller scale exercises, including testing the pandemic response and other catastrophic risks, will be tested across government through the National Exercising Programme and existing departmental exercising programmes. It is important to balance the regularity of testing pandemic preparedness against the need to conduct Tier 1 exercises on other whole-system risks.

The Cabinet Office is responsible for the delivery of the National Exercise Programme (NEP), which covers a range of whole-system risks, with the priority areas for testing informed by cross-cutting and systemic vulnerabilities and capability gaps. The NEP sets out a timetable of annual Tier 1 exercises (2024-2028), requiring a central response and cross-government coordination. Tier 1 exercises are large-scale national exercises involving devolved governments and regional/local tier responders, as well as relevant industry engagement such as key businesses, voluntary and community organisations. Government departments fully participate at senior official or ministerial level.

In 2025, the Department of Health and Social Care will lead on the Tier 1 exercise testing the response to a major pandemic. The aim is to “assess significant elements of the UK’s preparedness, capabilities, and response arrangements in the context of a pandemic arising from a novel infectious disease”. UKHSA is leading on planning for the exercise and stakeholder engagement is underway. This complements the commitments within the 2023 UK Biological Security Strategy, to the “regular domestic and international exercising of our collective preparedness and defences to biological threats”.

The Cabinet Office has provided additional support to those involved in exercising across the system, publishing Exercising Best Practice Guidance on gov.uk, which was developed in consultation with departments, local resilience leads and resilience experts.<sup>6</sup> This helps government departments, devolved governments, public sector organisations and others to plan for, resource and deliver exercises, from small scale table top exercises to large scale national exercises.

The guidance recommends that exercise planners consider and embed exercise objectives that explore the impact on vulnerable groups including those who could be disproportionately impacted. A bespoke toolkit (Exercise in a Box) has been designed and shared with Local Resilience Forums to enable them to consider the challenges and demands of identifying and supporting vulnerable persons during significant disruptive events, as part of their exercise programme.

The government recognises that there is still further work required to ensure that the impact of inequalities and vulnerabilities within pandemic decision making is fully explored. Lessons Management Best Practice Guidance<sup>7</sup> (published in 2024 on gov.uk) advocates for a participatory approach to emergency management which considers the impacts of emergencies on individuals and builds community resilience. Further detail can be found in Recommendation 7.

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<sup>6</sup> [Exercising Best Practice Guidance](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Lessons Management Best Practice Guidance](#)

### Recommendation 7: Publication of findings and lessons from civil emergency exercises

For all civil emergency exercises, the governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should each (unless there are reasons of national security for not doing so):

- publish an exercise report summarising the findings, lessons and recommendations, within three months of the conclusion of the exercise;
- publish an action plan setting out the specific steps that will be taken in response to the report's findings, and by which entity, within six months of the conclusion of the exercise; and
- keep exercise reports, action plans, and emergency plans and guidance from across the UK in a single, UK-wide online archive, accessible to all involved in emergency preparedness, resilience and response.

The government agrees that, given the UK-wide cross-cutting implications, the UK government should publish findings and lessons from all Tier 1 civil emergency exercises (except where there are justifiable reasons not to do so, such as national security concerns). Tier 1 exercises (as described in Recommendation 6) involve cross-government participation and relevant devolved government, regional and local responders.

The Academy Exercising Hub, which will form part of the UK Resilience Academy (UKRA) from its launch in April 2025, will ensure that government departments, devolved governments, local and regional tiers of government, and those in the voluntary and community sectors have access to the appropriate resources to strengthen exercising and lessons management. It will also fulfil a convening role, encouraging collaboration on exercising and lessons management across organisational silos.

As part of the vision and outputs for the UKRA the government published Lessons Management Best Practice Guidance on gov.uk<sup>8</sup> in 2024. It has been designed to complement existing learning activities, be used in conjunction with established lessons' platforms, and to support continual improvement at national and local levels.

The guidance sets best practice for the dissemination of a report summarising the findings, lessons and recommendations within three months of an exercise and advocates for the agreement of a strategic Implementation Action Plan within six months of the conclusion of an exercise. It should be recognised that for a Tier 1

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<sup>8</sup> [Lessons Management Best Practice Guidance](#)

exercise, the process of governance, debriefing, evaluating, disseminating and reviewing may take up to 12 months to make a report publicly available. The guidance also provides templates that can be used in the lesson management process. These include an Observation Capture Template, Cold Debrief Template and templates for a Lessons Management Register and Implementation Action Tracker which can be used for any exercise, regardless of scale.

To complement this guidance by providing context and highlighting examples of the lessons management process in practice, the UK Resilience Lessons Digest<sup>9</sup> has been produced in collaboration with the Emergency Planning College. The publicly available Digest synthesises lessons learned from major exercises and emergencies, with each issue providing analysis of lessons arising from public facing reports generated after the events. It coordinates knowledge to promote continual improvement in UK resilience training, exercising, doctrine, standards and good practice.

A further established platform for capturing lessons is Joint Organisational Learning<sup>10</sup>, hosted on ResilienceDirect. It is used to capture and share lessons identified from local and national multi-agency exercises and emergencies. The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme<sup>11</sup> team (responsible for encouraging interoperability across the emergency services and supported by a cross-government board) is actively working to encourage improved use of the platform to help minimise isolated lessons capture and limited sharing.

The government recognises that there is more to do to strengthen the systematic management of lessons from exercising. This will require a central, UK-wide online repository of information relating to civil emergency exercises, embedding the guidance on making effective recommendations in exercise reports, and a system that continues to promote a learning culture across teams, departments, organisations and multi-agency partners. The Cabinet Office is scoping and testing solutions to resolve this issue.

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<sup>9</sup> [UK Resilience Lessons Digest](#)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.jesip.org.uk/joint-organisational-learning/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.jesip.org.uk/>



Recommendation 8: Published reports on whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience

The governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should each produce and publish reports to their respective legislatures at least every three years on whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience.

The reports should include as a minimum:

- the risks that each government has identified are likely to result in whole-system civil emergencies;
- the recommendations that have been made to each government to mitigate those risks, and whether these recommendations have been accepted or rejected;
- a cost–benefit analysis setting out the economic and social costs of accepting the risks as against taking action to mitigate the risks;
- who may be vulnerable to the risks and what steps are being taken to mitigate those risks;
- a plan setting out the timescales for implementing the recommendations that have been accepted; and
- an update on the progress that has been made on implementing previously accepted recommendations.

The government agrees with the importance of transparency and ensuring that the wider public sector, private sector and the general public have an understanding of not only the risks that the UK faces but also the steps that are being taken to mitigate these risks. Furthermore, it will provide information on the steps that they can take to ensure their own preparedness.

There are commonly used arrangements for Parliamentary scrutiny of the government’s work across the resilience cycle, including on whole system-risks.

To increase transparency and improve public accountability on risk and resilience, the Resilience Framework, published in 2022, introduced an Annual Statement to Parliament on civil contingency risk and resilience. The inaugural statement was delivered by the then Deputy Prime Minister in December 2023. It was accompanied by an Implementation Update, which set out a public-facing summary of the risk landscape faced by the UK, alongside a progress update covering the government’s work on resilience, including on the implementation of the Resilience Framework in the first year following publication.

The 2023, UK Biological Security Strategy also committed the lead minister to report annually to Parliament on its rigorous implementation. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made his first report to Parliament in October 2024.

The Annual Statement to Parliament will be maintained and the resilience review will further explore how to deliver this in the most appropriate format. The government will work with the devolved governments to seek to coordinate the delivery of the statement across the legislatures of each nation as well as in Westminster.

#### Recommendation 9: Regular use of red teams

The governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should each introduce the use of red teams in the Civil Service to scrutinise and challenge the principles, evidence, policies and advice relating to preparedness for and resilience to whole-system civil emergencies. The red teams should be brought in from outside of government and the Civil Service.

The government agrees that red teams are an effective means to scrutinise and challenge preparedness for and resilience to whole-system civil emergencies.

The Secretary of State's Net Assessment and Challenge team within the Ministry of Defence brings together a cross-government red teaming community, which works to expand the use of red teams as a tool to challenge conventional thinking. The Cabinet Office also organises red teaming activities targeted at emerging threats and risks.

To go further, the Cabinet Office, working with the Government Office for Science, will strengthen central HMG red teaming capability, and clarify the expectations on departments to use red teams in their risk preparations. Specifically, this will form part of the next government-wide Capabilities Assessment.

Red teaming is an intrinsic part of the Crisis Management Excellence Programme, the government's new crisis training curriculum for Civil Servants, including those working in the devolved governments. The purpose of this training is to ensure that participants are aware of the critical importance of red teaming, challenging assumptions, and avoiding cognitive biases and fallacies such as groupthink. Over the last six months, the Crisis Management Excellence Programme (CMEP) has delivered this free training to over 680 civil servants. The wider CMEP training offer - including training in crisis leadership for Director Generals and Permanent Secretaries, and training in crisis management basics for all civil servants - has already reached over 2,100 delegates and aims to expand capacity significantly over the next year.

External challenge is an established part of the government's risk assessment process. With the move to a dynamic NSRA (described in the response to Recommendation 3), this expert challenge will be expanded and made permanent. The government will establish eight standing advisory groups of technical and scientific experts, each led by an independent chairperson. The programme is being designed to learn lessons from the Covid-19 Inquiry, for example allowing experts the freedom to advise by setting the agendas, and building in two-way feedback between experts and lead officials.

Red teams are one of many ways to bring expertise into decision-making on risk and resilience. The government also agrees with the Inquiry's broader finding that the timely provision of expert advice is essential to prepare for and build resilience to whole-system civil emergencies.

UKHSA's exercise and preparedness activities include expert challenge and red teams. The forthcoming Tier 1 pandemic exercise (described in the response to Recommendation 6) will use a variety of mechanisms, including a red team component, to provide this challenge to current arrangements for pandemic response.

Recognising the importance of scientific advice in planning for and responding to a crisis, the government will build on improvements already made to the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), including the transparency of SAGE; its ways of working; and the recruitment, induction, diversity and support of SAGE experts. The Cabinet Office and the Government Office for Science will strengthen expectations and guidance for government departments to bring the best scientific evidence to bear on planning for emergencies before they happen. The Government Office for Science will also play an enhanced role in the development and co-ordination of pre-crisis science advice, including supporting departmental Chief Scientific Advisers and other relevant scientific leads to identify and deploy the relevant scientific evidence and expertise to support resilience planning.

Adjacent to these improvements to SAGE, a group of Chief Scientific Advisers from across government and the devolved governments was established in 2023 to ensure that strong and independent scientific evidence, capability and analysis underpins decision making on Biosecurity.

Recommendation 10: A UK-wide independent statutory body for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience

The UK government should, in consultation with the devolved administrations, create a statutory independent body for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience.

The new body should be given responsibility for:

- providing independent, strategic advice to the UK government and devolved administrations on their planning for, preparedness for and building resilience to whole-system civil emergencies;
- consulting with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector at a national and local level and directors of public health on the protection of vulnerable people in whole-system civil emergencies;
- assessing the state of planning for, preparedness for and resilience to whole-system civil emergencies across the UK; and
- making recommendations on the capacity and capabilities that will be required to prepare for and build resilience to whole-system civil emergencies.

As an interim measure, the new body should be established on a non-statutory basis within 12 months of this Report, so that it may begin its work in advance of legislation being passed.

Since the pandemic, significant strategic and material changes have been made to the way in which the UK and devolved governments handle crises. Considerable progress has been made against the longer-term programme to build a more resilient UK. The UK and devolved governments now have greater access to strategic expert advice and challenge. The government recognises the need to go further, to ensure the system benefits from fresh thinking and new perspectives. Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) will be key in this, given they provide critical knowledge and expertise by bringing multi agency partnerships together to plan, prepare for and recover from local incidents and emergencies. This government is committed to supporting and strengthening local partnerships and improving local risk management, including by investing in LRF capacity and capability.

Recognising the importance Baroness Hallett placed on this recommendation when publishing the Module 1 report, we accept that independent strategic advice and assessment is an essential component for an effective UK wide civil emergency and resilience system. The government will always remain responsible and accountable

for policy and resource allocation decisions and we will spend further time working on the appropriate solution to deliver challenge, direction and strategic advice.

We will consider how the work of experts could be called upon to provide further advice and assessment to the government. Use of scientific and expert advice is already being strengthened through improvements already made to SAGE and associated independent advisory groups. In addition, the new NSRA process is expanding the use of external advice and challenge by establishing eight standing advisory groups of technical and scientific experts, each led by an independent chairperson. The government also welcomes the establishment of the multidisciplinary pandemic science networks and institutes that provide world-leading academic and scientific expertise.

As part of our consideration of the best mechanism to provide challenge, direction and strategic advice to government on resilience, we will look at how the government could further draw on independent expertise to provide challenge and undertake reviews. The introduction of a new 'Hillsborough Law' will place a legal duty of candour on public servants and authorities. This will be a catalyst for a changed culture in the public sector by improving transparency and accountability where public services have failed.



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