



Department
of Health &
Social Care

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26 April 2021

Dear Chair

House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts Forty-Second Report of Session 2019-21, COVID-19: Government Procurement and supply of Personal Protective Equipment

I am writing to provide the Committee with an update from the Department of Health and Social Care on progress against the outstanding Recommendation 4 in the above-named report.

4: PAC recommendation: The Department should write to the Committee by the end of April 2021 to explain how it will revise its emergency response plans so that they include who will be supported, how and when. This must give appropriate weight to all sectors of health and social care, as well as occupations outside these sectors which are also at risk.

In the Treasury Minute, published on 19 April 2021, we committed to providing the Committee with an update on the work to confirm the future approach for the management of PPE, by the end of April.

Inevitably, the first few months of the pandemic were an emergency response, and this was the case globally. We took steps early on to ensure all health and social care staff had access to the PPE they needed to, which included standing up multiple distribution channels. In March 2020, we pushed stock to national wholesalers, provided an emergency drop of over 7 million PPE items to social care and stood up the National Supply Distribution Response Hotline providing 24/7 emergency drops to support immediate shortages. By early April, working with MHCLG, we commenced pushing PPE through Local Resilience Forums to further support frontline service, primary care and social care in particular. Furthermore, we began to pilot a PPE Portal, with the social care sector in mind as a key customer.



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Our PPE Portal, which started as an emergency top up system, has rapidly expanded, increasing both the number of providers registered and the order limits available. Based on our modelling, adult residential and domiciliary care providers who have registered with the portal are able to access all of their COVID-19 requirements through the Portal, free of charge. As of 9 April 2021, 94% of eligible care homes and 86% of domiciliary care providers are now registered on the portal and we've delivered over 1.7 billion items to adult social care and over 2.2 billion items to all other providers.

We have also supported the wider public sector and since July 2020 the Department has worked with officials from other government departments, including the Department for Transport, Department for Education and Ministry of Justice to understand PPE demand. Those departments are now able to request PPE from our central procurement process.

The Government has prioritised the diversification of UK supply chains of PPE – not just looking to new suppliers abroad, but also significantly ramping up our UK manufacture. Before the pandemic, just one per cent of PPE used in the UK was manufactured in the UK. For the period from 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021 UK-made supply comprised 82% of the expected demand for PPE in England, excluding gloves; exceeding the commitment to 70% that we set out in the PPE Strategy. This has helped us to build resilience into the future and we remain committed to building sustainable manufacturing of PPE in the UK.

More recently throughout February and March 2021, we have completed one-off drops of Type IIR masks, which can be used as a face covering for source control, to support school settings to be able to fully return. Furthermore, we are supporting election settings to have a small contingency stock of Type IIR face masks. The Department has begun conversations with other Government departments to understand what PPE procurement and distribution will need to look like and how we can support this. Furthermore, we are exploring how to best support other sectors starting with transport.

As the Committee is aware, in September 2020, the Department committed to provide eligible health and social care providers with COVID-19 critical PPE, free of charge, until the end of March 2021. The period for providing free PPE was first extended to June 2021 then, more recently, Ministers decided to extend this further, to the end of March 2022, as PPE usage is expected to remain high throughout the current financial year. This will ensure the ongoing heightened demand is met and will provide certainty for those working on the frontline.

Meanwhile, the Department continues to develop a framework to be used internally to determine how Government will best respond to any supply issues with PPE. We are considering how this might support the prioritisation of supplies in the health and social care sector and beyond. We continue to learn from the pandemic, including the need

*From the Permanent Secretary
Sir Chris Wormald*



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to be prepared for a wide range of pandemics and high-consequence infectious disease outbreaks. Emergency preparedness plans remain under constant review and the newly established UK Health Security Agency will strengthen the UK's ability to prepare for and respond to the health risks posed by pandemic hazards. The Department holds clinical countermeasures, including PPE, for other infectious disease outbreak threats. The Department will apply lessons from COVID-19 to ensure that these are held in sufficient volumes, monitored regularly, and can be rapidly deployed if needed in future outbreaks. Social care needs will be considered as part of these plans.

Yours sincerely,



**SIR CHRIS WORMALD
PERMANENT SECRETARY**