

**Written evidence submitted by the Ministry of Defence
Defence contribution to the UK's pandemic response**

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Assisting the nation in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has been Defence's highest priority since March 2020, when the MOD established the COVID-19 Support Force (CSF) and a Crisis Response team. Following the first wave, the CSF transitioned to form the basis of a new COVID-19 Recovery and Response Team, a single point of contact for Defence's COVID-19 response. The Team is responsible for delivering Defence's COVID-19 Recovery and Response Plan. This captures existing planning and activity taking place across the Department, and is the basis for driving new activity where required.

1.2. The MOD has supported the COVID-19 response in a variety of ways, with Defence employing skilled, trained and equipped personnel in numerous types of situations at pace. In particular, the COVID-19 crisis response has seen a breadth of demand for Military Assistance to the Civil Authorities (MACA).¹ By 21 September 2020, 316 tasks had been conducted at the request of the civil authorities and Devolved Administrations, and at its height, 3,943 Defence military personnel were deployed as part of the response. Defence has been committed to supporting the entirety of the UK in its response to COVID-19. Military personnel were deployed in support of the Devolved Administrations and were active in every region of the UK. Notably, the regional point of contact structure, with its extensive network of Liaison Officers and planners, provided reach and insight into regional and national partners, delivery agencies and front-line services.

1.3. Defence is working internally and across Government to plan for a concurrency of multiple challenges over the winter period. Winter resilience arrangements have been established to ensure that Defence has sufficient people and capabilities at readiness, as well as standing up a new Winter Operations Cell. Looking ahead a potentially difficult winter, Defence has conducted a lessons identification exercise to assess the effectiveness of the crisis response to COVID-19. The lessons learnt will inform the further development of the MOD's crisis response machinery.

1.4. COVID-19 will be a defining feature of the Defence operating environment in the short and medium term. Due to existing business continuity plans, additional prudent planning, and measures put in place to protect critical Force Elements, Defence has maintained its critical UK and overseas operational commitments and maintained forces at readiness to deliver core Defence tasks.

2. Defence's COVID-19 response

2.1. **Summary.** In March 2020, following an assessment of the Government's Reasonable Worst-Case Scenario, Defence generated the CSF. Approximately 20,000 personnel, with appropriate planning, logistical, and medical expertise, were grouped within the CSF and held at readiness to ensure Defence could respond wherever and whenever needed across the UK. Thousands of service personnel and civil servants have contributed to the response through their routine employment, whether within Defence Medical Services, Defence Science and Technology (DST) or Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

2.2. The initial focus, as highlighted in the HCDC memorandum published in June, was on support to NHS logistics, the temporary hospital programme, COVID-19 testing, and reinforcement to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) and Local Resilience Forums. This included visible work, such as: the planning, construction and staffing of Nightingale hospitals; delivering PPE and diagnostic equipment to hospitals and

¹ ANNEX B lists the Op RESCRIPT MACA tasks.

Local Resilience Forums; supporting ambulance and Medevac operations; repatriations from overseas; and conducting testing at regional and Mobile Testing Units. Additional tasks included: supporting national-level strategy formation in Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and MHCLG; countering disinformation; procuring PPE and medical equipment; supporting the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC); or liaison with the local resilience forums, and their devolved equivalents.

2.3. From June, the emphasis shifted from the delivery of the Nightingale Hospitals and support to the NHS, towards testing and support to wider Government priorities. More recently, the military support to Other Government Departments (OGDs) has been characterised by gradual draw down in all areas, as OGDs transition to sustainable provision of front-line service by their own delivery agencies and commercial partners. Defence maintains personnel at readiness in order to provide appropriate support when required.

3. Recovery and Response Plan

3.1. Defence is recovering from the initial peak of COVID-19, adapting to living with the pandemic for an extended period, and preparing to respond to any potential future resurgences of the virus. The MOD crisis response team has been significantly drawn down and now forms the basis of a new COVID Recovery and Response (CR&R) Team.

3.2. The central task of the CR&R Team is to develop and co-ordinate delivery of a Defence COVID Recovery and Response Plan. This plan draws together key strands of the Defence recovery from COVID and its capability to respond to resurgence of the virus either in the UK or overseas. The Plan is guided by the delegated model – ensuring direction from the MOD where it is required, and cohering activity across all Defence organisation and Commands where they have lead responsibility.

3.3. The Plan is composed of four pillars:

- i. **Understand and Inform.** Ensures effective governance and collective oversight of Defence's COVID plans and activity, including to ministers.
- ii. **Recovery.** Ensures that Defence is recovering in a coherent fashion, using national advice as the basis for broad direction from Head Office, implemented via local plans.
- iii. **Response.** Ensures that Defence is ready for a resurgence of the virus at home or overseas, and can respond to outbreaks as they occur.
- iv. **Secretariat.** Ensures consistent and effective communications on the MOD's response to the crisis, responsible for all Parliamentary Business and senior stakeholder engagement surrounding COVID-19.

4. Winter 2020-21

4.1. **Concurrent Challenges.** Winter 2020-21 will likely pose multiple concurrent challenges for Defence. The UK could plausibly see a combination of: a second COVID-19 peak; seasonal pressures upon the NHS; disruption associated with the end of the EU Transition Period; and seasonal flooding.

4.2. **Winter Resilience Arrangements.** Defence is planning for an exceptional period of demand and is organising itself to be capable of sustaining operations and other core activities, while responding to a variety of requests for support from Civil Authorities in the UK and overseas. Defence has put in place winter resilience arrangements, which will allow the Department to:

- i. Have sufficient people and capabilities at appropriate readiness and with the right delegations to respond effectively, with minimal disruption to other Defence business;
- ii. Understand the full breadth of requests for assistance being made to Defence, and assess and prioritise them quickly and consistently;
- iii. Monitor for heightened short-term risks to Defence's own resilience and ensure robust Head Office arrangements for directing winter operations – mindful that Defence will itself be tested by many of the anticipated challenges.

5. Longer-term impacts of COVID-19 for the UK's defence posture

5.1. **Adapting to COVID.** Defence is moving to establish an effective and sustainable posture for the 'new normal' in order to continue delivering its core and wider outputs under the constraints of COVID-19. This involves a transition progressively to a steady state of routine operations and contingencies in a way that COVID-19 precautions allow. The Future Workplace programme was recently established to drive this work forward, as part of the Defence Transformation programme.

5.2. Throughout this crisis, the safety and welfare of our people remains paramount, and the Department has measures in place to safeguard and reduce the risks to them and their families. New ways of working have been designed to provide flexibility to the individual and the Services, whilst maintaining the agility to react to any future outbreaks. It is too soon to assess the impact of COVID-19 on future Armed Forces recruitment and retention, although the re-engagement of Reservists throughout the crisis suggests that, at this stage, there will be no substantial issues.

5.3. **Overseas Activity.** Throughout this period, we have maintained core outputs at our overseas bases alongside preparing for potential outbreaks. Nonetheless, looking ahead, the movement of our people will continue to be tested by constantly shifting border controls and our operations and critical supply chains will be tested by outbreaks overseas. The global impacts of COVID-19 could also increase the likelihood of the UK being asked for assistance overseas and our overseas strategic aperture will likely widen to include support to allies' and partners' own responses to the virus.

5.4. The Department has kept a close watch on the activities of possible adversaries to ensure that they do not seek to gain advantage from the crisis. Defence maintains close relationships with its partners in NATO, the EU and elsewhere. It has shared information with them on the risks relating to the COVID-19 and the extent to which adversaries could be exploiting the crisis caused by the pandemic. NATO's pandemic response is now shifting from crisis management to a long-term support role for Allies and partners. We continue to pursue UK priorities: ensuring NATO remains active, builds capacity to combat disinformation, and monitors the risks of instability in vulnerable partners.

6. Lessons to be learnt from Defence's role in responding to COVID-19

6.1. The Department's lessons process forms part of any operation or exercise and ensures that our approach to responding to crises and emergencies remains current and effective.

6.2. During the crisis period, each major Command and organisation has run its own lessons process. These will be brought together at a Lesson Summit, later in the year, which will aim to generate specific and actionable recommendations for improving Defence's response to future crises.

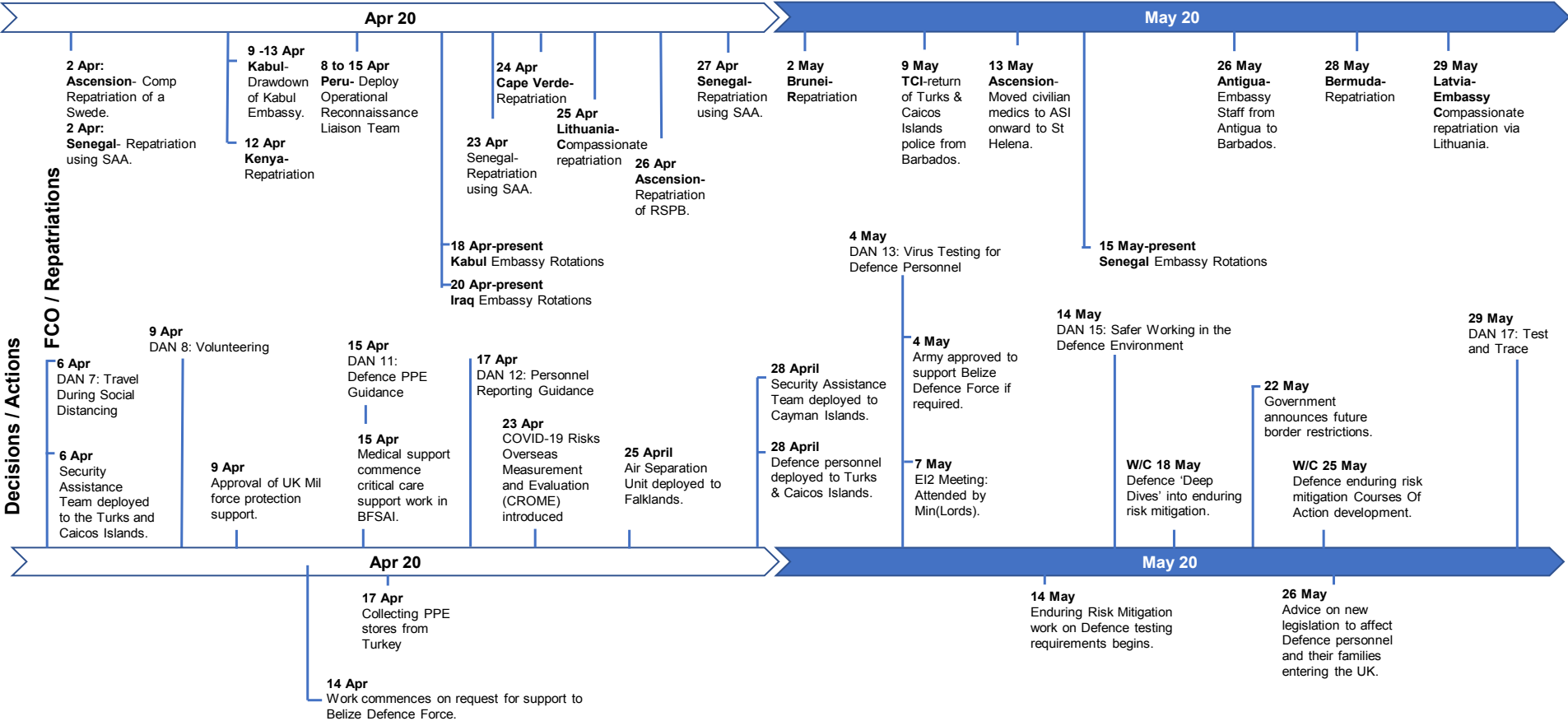
5 October 2020

Annex A

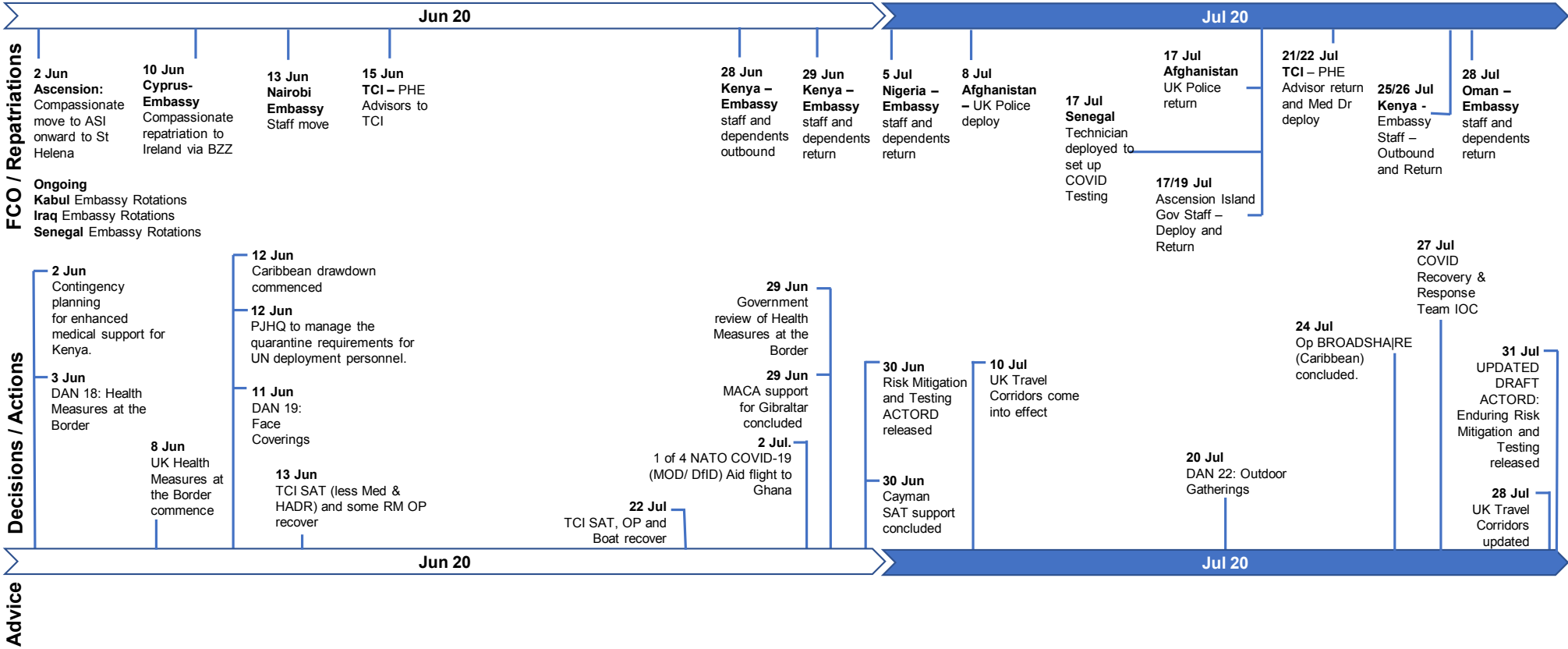
Op RESCRIPT and Op BROADSHARE Timelines

A timeline of the key Op BROADSHARE events from April to mid-September 2020 is shown below:

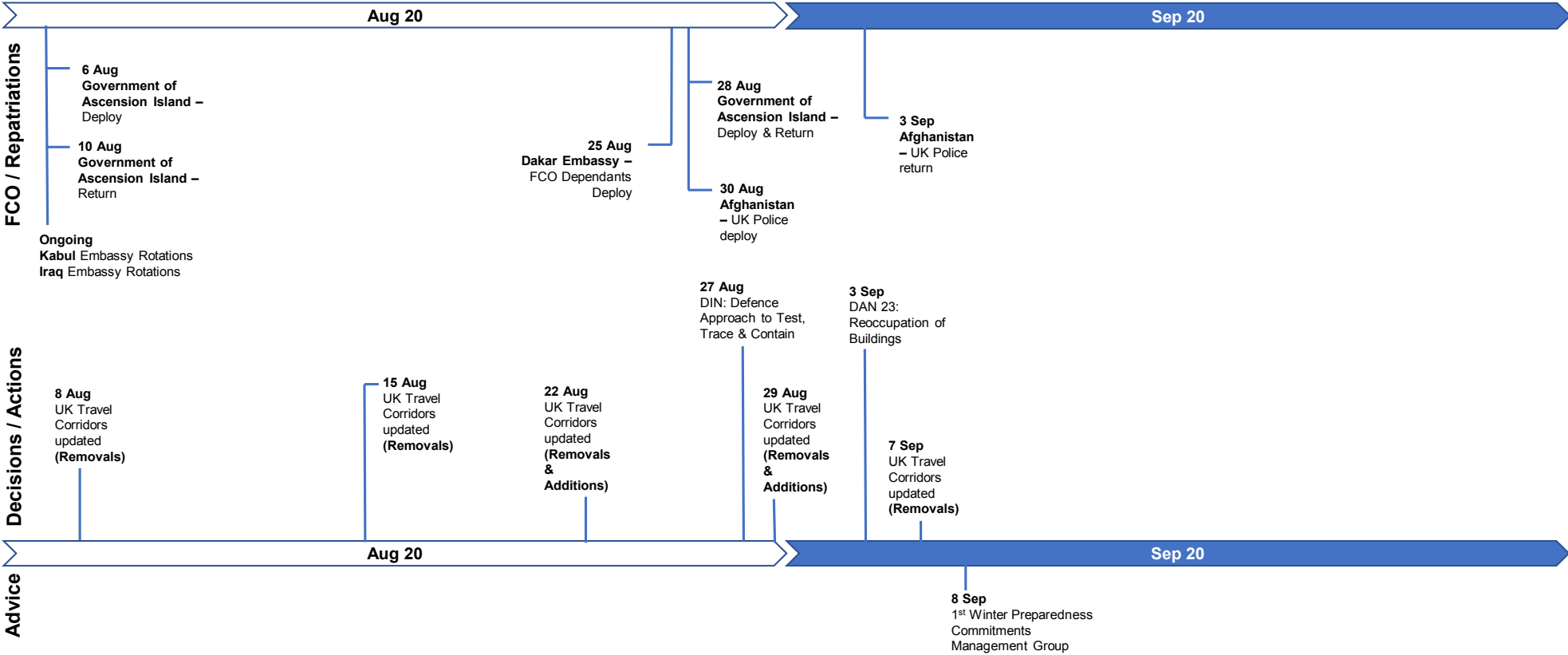
Op BROADSHARE timeline of events



Op BROADSHARE timeline of events

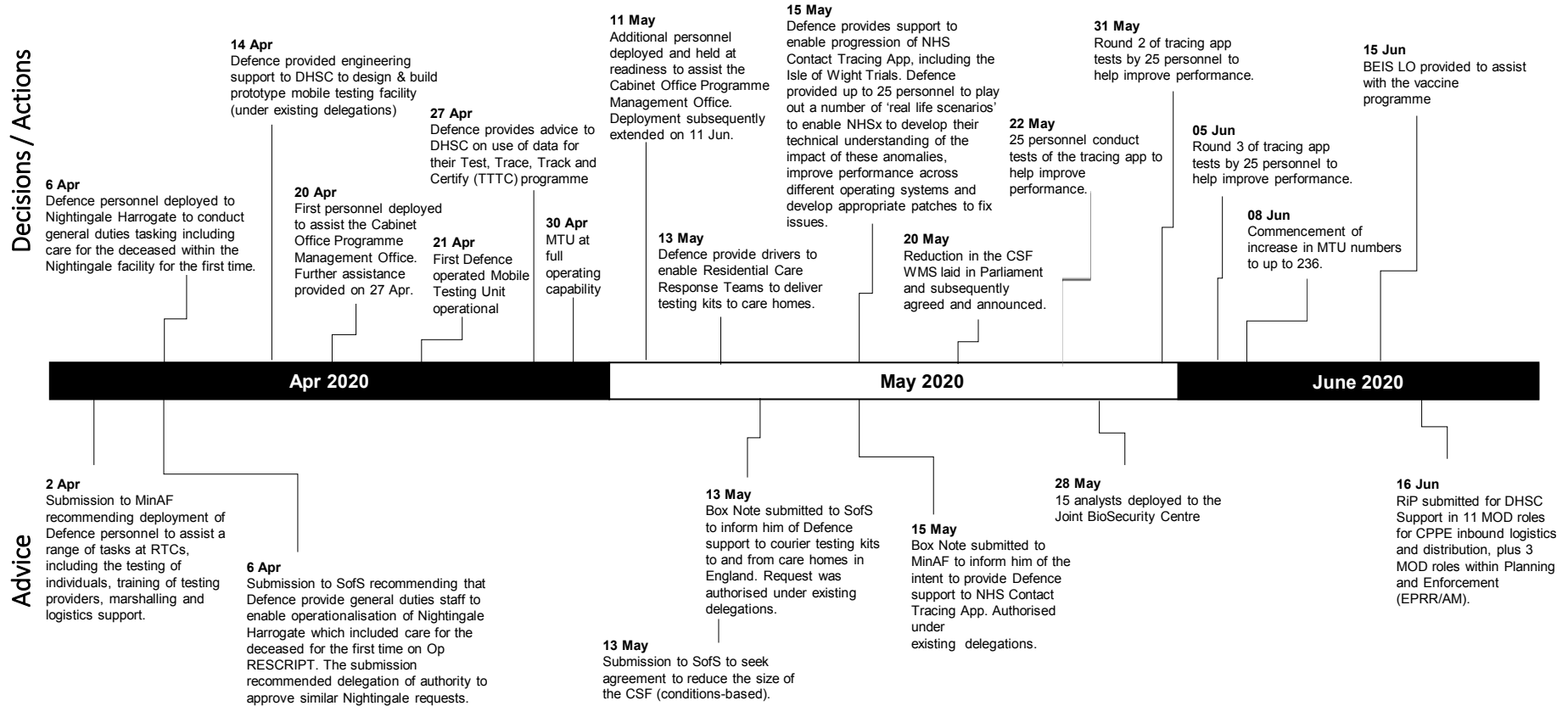


Op BROADSHARE timeline of events

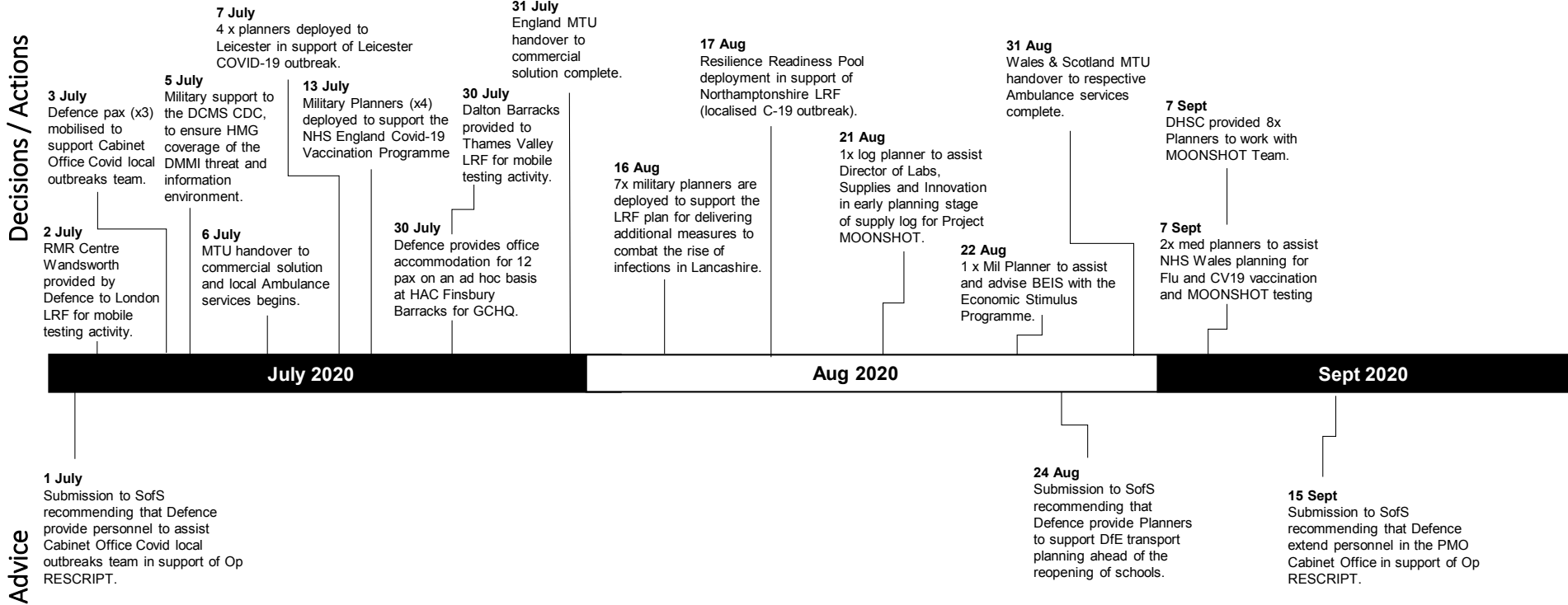


A timeline of the key Op RESCRIPT events from April to mid-September 2020 is shown below:

Op RESCRIPT timeline of events



Op RESCRIPT timeline of events



Annex B
Op RESCRIPT MACAs

Full list of Op RESCRIPT MACAs that supported COVID (closed and open) for time period 01 Jun 20 – 23 Sep 20.

Department of State	Number of MACAs
BEIS (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy)	2
Cabinet Office	1
DCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport)	1
DofE (Department for Education)	1
DHSC (Department for Health & Social Care)	10
Home Office	1
MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government)	8
MoJ (Ministry of Justice)	2
Northern Ireland Office	4
Scotland Office	0
Wales Office	0

(DPR0007)

Serial	Dept of State	MACA number	Date received into HQ	Summary
1	BEIS	20/272	29-Jun-20	1 x Mil Planner to SUPPORT BEIS in a planning and development role within the Economic Stimulus Programme.
2	BEIS	20/301	10-Aug-20	1 x Mil Planner to assist and advise BEIS with the Economic Stimulus Prog Refined and resubmitted 20/272 requesting change of task and extend new end date by 6 months.
3	Cabinet Office	20/276	1-Jul-20	3 individuals to support Cabinet Office Covid local outbreaks team.
4	Cabinet Office	20/300	31-Jul-20	Refine task and resubmission 20/226. 1xOF4 J2 in the DDT. Extension Submitted under Amdt 001 revising end date to 31 Mar 21.
5	DCMS	20/287	15-Jul-20	Military support to the DCMS CDC, to ensure HMG coverage of the DMMI threat and information environment.
6	DHSC	20/251	3-Jun-20	NHS Contact Tracing App support Round 3 (Repeat of 20-228/247). 25 pers for 1 day & real estate to test NHSx App.
7	DHSC	20/260	16-Jun-20	11 x MOD role to sp CPPE inbound logistics and distribution within NHS England at Skipton House (RiP of 20-125 which ceases 03 Jul 20)
8	DHSC	20/261	16-Jun-20	3 x MOD roles - planning & reinforcement within EPRR/AM Transition roles in NHS England in Skipton House. (RiP of 20-125 which ceases 03 Jul 20)
9	DHSC	20/262	16-Jun-20	3 x MOD Exec Team roles extended to 28 Sep 20 within NHS England Programme Integration Design Unit (PIDU) in Skipton House (new MACA to extend this element of 20-125 which ceases 03 Jul 20)
10	DHSC	20/266	22-Jun-20	Request for GEOINT support (4 x CCGI SME SP and 4 x Geospatial analysts at reach back in RAF Wyton) from the National Centre for Geospatial Int (NCGI) to

(DPR0007)

				the Joint Biosecurity Centre
11	DHSC	20/267	25-Jun-20	4 x Military Planners to support NHS E/I COVID-19 Vaccination Programme
12	DHSC	20/275	30-Jun-20	Request to us RMR Centre in Wandsworth for mobile testing site.
13	DHSC	20/310	17-Aug-20	1x log planner to asst Dir of Labs, Supplies and Innovation, in early planning stage of supply log for Project MOONSHOT
14	DHSC	20/320	29-Aug-20	DHSC Request 8 x Planners to work with MOONSHOT Team
15	DHSC	20/325	7-Sep-20	5 x BMS for Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust Virology Laboratory to support the COVID-19 'Moonshot' DHSC led National Population Scale Testing programme
16	Home Office	20/290	21-Jul-20	Office accommodation for 12 people on an ad hoc basis at HAC Finsbury Bks for GCHQ.
17	MHCLG	20/254	6-Jun-20	2 x 2 pax to enhance the capacity of LRF MAIC, enabling a broader spectrum of analysis to be undertaken in sp of local decision makers. Sp the trial of concept following the recommendations of the interim operational review.
18	MHCLG	20/256	18-Jun-20	Extension and consolidation of 156 x MOD Planners (of which 48 to be held at R2) to 31 Jul 20 to support LRFs in England. It is a brigading and extending of MACAs 20/021, 20/025 and 20/037.
19	MHCLG	20/264	6-Jul-20	4 x planners to Leicester in sp of Leicester COVID-19 outbreak.
20	MHCLG	20/280	25-Jul-20	Thames Valley LRF request the use of Defence Estate at Dalton Barracks (Abingdon, Oxon) for mobile testing activity. Extension submitted revising end date to 30 Oct 20.
21	MHCLG	20/292	14-Aug-20	Resilience Readiness Pool (R2P) deployment in support of Northamptonshire LRF (localised C-19 outbreak). Initial deployment for 2 weeks

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22	MHCLG	20/304	14-Aug-20	7x military planners (1x COS, 6x Planners) are required for up to 6 weeks to support the LRF plan for delivering additional measures to combat the significant rise in infections within Lancashire. R2P team 3 and IA Pool 1 at R1(24) from 161400AAUG20. Annex B Extension of 4 x Mil Planners requested until 1 Oct 20 (not supported under this MACA see 20-333)
23	MHCLG	20/305	19-Aug-20	Extension of 1 x mil planner assigned to Sussex LRF (prev MACA 20-264)
24	MHCLG	20/313	17-Sep-20	4 x military planners with experience from MACA 305 are required until 1 Oct 20 to support the LRF in delivering additional test and trace measures to combat the significant rise in infections within Lancashire and therefore preserve life and wellbeing in response to the COVID-19 emergency.
25	MHCLG	20-333	6-Jun-20	2 x 2 pax to enhance the capacity of LRF MAIC, enabling a broader spectrum of analysis to be undertaken in sp of local decision makers. Sp the trial of concept following the recommendations of the interim operational review.
26	MoJ	20/270	26-Jun-20	GOJ: The continued use of secure covered infrastructure and staff to store, manage and distribute PPE. Amdt001 Ext to 30 Sep 20 and reduction in numbers Amdt002 Ext to 7 Oct 20, reduction in number to 5 and transition to commercial solution.
27	Northern Ireland Office	20/250	1-Jun-20	NI Dept of Health requests additional storage facilities on short-term basis (end of week commencing 1 Jun until end of Sept) to store and distribute PPE to organisations throughout NI. Use of hangar at Kinnegar Logistics Base.
28	Northern Ireland Office	20/253	5-Jun-20	The PSNI requests use of a portion of the buildings (Bldg 45) at Kinnegar currently leased to NI Department of Justice and that an amendment to the contract be made.
29	Northern Ireland Office	20/255	6-Jun-20	Air mvt of critical care team and confirmed COVID-19 patient from NI (Aldergrove) to Leicester. A400M departed Aldergrove at 062053ZJUN20. Storyboard linked.

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30	Northern Ireland Office	20/259	16-Jun-20	1 x patient in Ulster Hospital with confirmed COVID-19 req urgent transfer to Glenfield Hospital Leicester
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