

Written evidence submitted by the Paymaster General

Thank you for your time on 9 November. I am writing to follow up on a number of commitments I made to provide the Committee with additional information in writing. I will also address the additional questions which members were not able to ask during the session.

List of testing exercises

The UK Government undertakes a significant amount of exercise activity in addition to those real operations resulting from threats and hazards including terrorism, natural disasters, accidents and industrial action. Exercises at both the national and local level form an essential element of the Government's resilience and preparedness programme, and we learn and apply lessons after each one.

Building on local and departmental activity to validate plans, national level (Tier 1) exercises focus on the response to complex cross-sector scenarios where interoperability across responders is most challenging or where new capabilities have been developed following previous learning. Tier 1 exercises are complex, often involving national and local activity along with ministerial participation, and usually take at least a year to plan. In addition to Tier 1 exercises, officials regularly undertake exercises for a range of threats and hazards, and the MHCLG supports the local level in England to exercise their own plans. The Devolved Administrations lead on exercise planning around areas of devolved competence and participate in relevant Tier 1 exercises.

Annex A captures some examples of exercise activity that has taken place over the past few years. This does not include exercises that have tested the Government's preparedness to sensitive security related threats. However, as an exemplar, information on Exercise Border Review (2017) has been made publicly available. This exercise tested a counter-terrorism cross-border scenario and brought together Police Scotland and Northumbria Police, response to a terrorist incident.

Local Resilience Forums

You also asked about the support that the Government has provided to Local Resilience Forums (LRFs). The LRF Covid-19 Task Force (TF) conducted their work throughout March 2020. Its objective was to enhance LRFs capability to respond to Covid-19. This work was led by Andy Battle (former Assistant Chief Constable and LRF chair in West Yorkshire) and Dr Ruth Hussey (former Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for Wales). They were supported by officials from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The Taskforce was charged with rapidly assessing LRF preparedness for Covid-19 and identifying support that could be put in place to enhance LRF capability. The Task Force engaged with LRFs directly, attending table-top exercises, sharing best practice and reported to Ministers throughout March 2020 on LRF preparedness and actions to take to strengthen it.

Government has provided LRFs with guidance on how to prepare for pandemics, in particular a National Resilience Standard on Pandemic influenza preparedness was published in December 2019 for LRFs. The National Resilience Standards establish a consistent means for LRFs and their constituent local responder organisations to assure their capabilities and overall level of

readiness, and guide continuous improvement against readiness requirements, and against good and leading practice, as set out under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) and other relevant legislation. The latest version of the National Resilience Standards can be found on GOV.UK:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/913502/NRS_for_LRFs_V3.0_Aug2020.pdf

Regarding the support and guidance given to local authorities and LRFs on preparing for and prioritising other different types of risks, the Civil Contingencies Act provides a common framework for preparedness activity, putting a duty on emergency planners and responders to identify and assess the risks of emergencies affecting the area in which they operate. The National Security Risk Assessment provides the basis for the work the local tier conducts to identify potential risks and prepare plans for either preventing or mitigating their impact of incidents locally.

This work is coordinated through Local Resilience Forums in England and Wales, Regional Resilience Partnerships in Scotland, and Emergency Preparedness Groups in Northern Ireland. These multiagency partnerships are made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS and the environment agency local teams.

These local partners also draw on support by other organisations such as Highways England and public utility companies. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) in the Cabinet Office works with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide guidance on the planning and preparation work coordinated by local partners based on the NSRA.

Statutory obligations for testing exercises and preparedness

During the session, you also asked about the legal obligations for testing and preparedness in the health and care sector. The NHS England Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response (EPRR) Framework sets out that providers and commissioners of NHS funded services must show they can effectively respond to major, critical and business continuity incidents whilst maintaining services to patients. NHS England has an annual statutory requirement to formally assure its own and the NHS in England's readiness to respond to emergencies

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the NHS Act 2006, as amended by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, underpin EPRR within health. Both Acts place EPRR duties on NHS England and the NHS in England.

Dependency on PPE from China

The Government is committed to building a resilient, diversified supply chain of PPE. We have therefore significantly expanded both our supply of PPE from overseas and our domestic manufacturing capability. There is a huge global demand for PPE, creating a highly competitive market. We are both sourcing and shipping stock from abroad, alongside working with our brilliant British manufacturers.

We have sourced and received medical supplies from a range of countries, including: China, Malaysia, Thailand, the US, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Turkey. Where we were in an emergency situation at the start of the pandemic, we have now moved to a stable situation which has equipped us for any further spikes or waves.

Thanks to the unprecedented domestic production of PPE, by December UK manufacturers will be able to provide 70 per cent of the amount of PPE we expect to use from December to March, for all items except gloves. Before the pandemic, just 1 per cent of PPE was produced in the UK. UK based supply gives us great resilience against any future disruption to global supply chains, or export bans from specific markets, such as China.

Public communications

Our public information campaign is shaped by weekly audience and behavioural insights which will guide messaging and accompany Government policy responses, maximising its impact across the UK. It has reached 95% of the UK population on average 15 times a week since it was first launched.

Our strategy and approach will continuously evolve to reinforce wider HMG strategy and respond to contextual challenges over the coming months. Recall of Government communication has remained extremely high, between 75%-95%, including key behaviours of 'Hands, Face, Space'.

Our strategy also ensures hard to reach audiences receive bespoke COVID-19 communications. Our media partnership includes 47 BAME publications, and core marketing materials are translated into 10 different languages, with 9 additional languages available on request, as well as full accessibility formats.

The Government remains committed to scrutiny and transparency, and ensuring our rapid response is the best value for taxpayer money. We are publishing Covid-19 contracts on GOV.UK.

Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP

2 December 2020

Annex A

Below we have captured some examples of exercise activity that has taken place over the past five years. This is not a comprehensive list of all exercises, but demonstrates the different levels and regularity at which exercises take place across Government.

- **Coronavirus Outbreak, February 2020:** CCS, with support from Public Health England held an exercise to rehearse Ministerial-level decision making for the UK's pandemic preparedness and response within the context of what was known at that point about the Coronavirus outbreak.

- **The UK's withdrawal from the European Union, February and October 2019:** A series of Cross-Whitehall exercises to validate contingency planning against issues arising from the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.
- **National Electricity Failure Scenario, June 2018 (Officials), November 2018 (Ministerial), January 2020 (Officials):** There has been a specific series of exercises to review the UK arrangements for responding to a national electricity failure scenario in 2018. Further to this, in January 2020 a further official level exercise took place to identify weaknesses, gaps, disconnects or overlaps in cross-government contingency planning and capabilities.
- **Foot and Mouth Disease, 2018:** Tested the response to an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease. This tested three command and control levels - strategic, tactical and operational. At the strategic level this included a simulated COBR response.
- **Pandemic Influenza (Exercise Cygnus), October 2016:** A national level pandemic influenza exercise which took place over 3 days.
- Senior officials have also led a number of exercises to review response and contingency plans including for a **severe weather event** (2017), **Ebola Medevac** arrangements (2019) and a number of exercises to test the UK's coordination and response to a range of **flooding scenarios**.
- Over the past few years, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies has also been exercised to test the process and the advice that would be given under a range of different scenarios. This includes a **national electricity failure** (2020), a **zoonotic animal disease outbreak** (2019), a **civil nuclear accident** (2018) and a **malicious radiological release** (2018).