Written evidence submitted by the Mayor of Greater Manchester

Many thanks for your letter dated 17 May seeking a contribution from Greater Manchester to your inquiry on the UK's national security machinery.

I would like to focus my response on the relationship between local and national government through the prism of the ongoing Covid response. However, these thoughts are by no means exhaustive. You may wish to refer to our previous submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Risk Assessment which goes into more detail on some aspects of the UK's national security machinery.

Greater Manchester benefits from a close working relationship with UK Government, whether that be through the historic devolution agreement reached in 2014; or the ongoing work to bring our bus network under local control. In addition, Greater Manchester has strong, well-established links with the UK central government on matters of national security, such as through the UK Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government Resilience and Emergencies Division (MHCLG RED) who sit on the multi-agency Greater Manchester Local Resilience Forum (LRF). Individual agencies that work within Greater Manchester to foster national security also have productive day-to-day relationships with their respective government departments (for example Greater Manchester Police and the Home Office).

We welcome the ongoing consultation into the Protect Duty, and we hope that this leads to a coherent and consistent approach to mitigate and prevent atrocities such as the Manchester Arena Attack ever happening. However it is important that a frank and constructive discussion between local and national government takes place, specifically looking at how the requirements of the legislation are undertaken, and what resources are available to do this. We also support the current commitment as set out in the Integrated Review to look closely at the role of LRFs, which have been used as a key delivery mechanism for both EU exit planning and COVID-19. Recent expectations of the GM LRF go beyond the statutory duties set out in the Civil Contingencies Act, which are focused on multi-agency planning, and have placed significant demands and associated resource challenges on the component organisations the LRF comprises. While our councils and the GM LRF have risen to this challenge, there is a need for clarity about the future role of LRFs, their legal obligations, the organisations which should be sitting around the table for LRF planning discussions, and how their work will be resourced and funded.

Despite our LRF being used as the key tool of local planning and response delivery in relation to these two national events we have experienced significant challenges relating to the timely release of critical information and planning assumptions that enable planning at the local level. UK emergency planning doctrine is based on the principle of subsidiarity, and local partners are being tasked with a range of roles alongside their individual organisational responsibilities: however, the failure to share vital planning assumptions or relevant data for local areas, in relation to both EU exit and COVID-19, not only hinders our ability to protect our communities, but also raises questions of trust.

To turn specifically to COVID-19, the response has at times shown how the national and local tiers can work together in productive and innovative ways, for example through the local delivery of business support schemes, funded by national government. However, unfortunately, it has also exposed several concerns, two of which I would like to highlight:

1. Covid has highlighted the weaknesses and barriers in local and national government in terms of delivery. The pandemic has shown that it makes little sense to try to deliver
local services from a national level as local agencies are better equipped to coordinate, activate and coalesce different sectors (public, private, voluntary). For example, local agencies would have had more success in delivering services to those shielding if they had been able to design appropriate systems from the start, rather than when it was already clear that the national programme couldn't reach any further into that cohort. As a further example adult social care directors were not adequately consulted on guidance for care homes when they could have helped to shape that guidance to be more effective.

2. COVID-19 has laid bare the pre-existing inequalities our city-region faces, and has resulted in a disproportionate impact regarding those affected. There has been a failure to recognise the intractable issues, such as deprivation, that a city-region such as ours faces, and the associated increased level of resource required to contain the virus and respond to outbreaks. This failure of recognition not only has direct implications for the residents of Greater Manchester, but also has impacted on the security and safety of the rest of the UK. For example, increased resources, including vaccinations, at the onset of the spread of the Delta variant, could have limited ongoing rising transmission rates across the UK through limiting spread.

We also hope that government recognises that there are many other risks and threats to national security that could require the sort of interventions we have seen during COVID-19. For example, a cyber attack that takes out elements of critical national infrastructure could have devastating consequences, and we could find ourselves in a similar response scenario to that experienced during COVID-19. The private sector and technologies are advancing at a terrific pace and the policing world is struggling to keep up in terms of both capabilities and investigative practice on a mass scale. The damage and harm caused through not only Cyber dependent crime; but also Cyber enabled crime is huge and requires a co-ordinated approach to tackle effectively.

Lastly, I hope that the experience of dealing with COVID-19 will lead to a greater degree of trust in local agencies to deliver any planning and response to threats to national security, and we look forward to working with government to help develop and deliver the UK Resilience Strategy as detailed in the Integrated Review.

I hope this letter is useful to your ongoing inquiry, and please let me know if there is any way I can further assist.

Andy Burnham

12 July 2021