

# **UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 Report: Scottish Government Progress Update July 2025**

**July 2025**

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**Summary: Progress update on the actions taken forward by the Scottish Government in response to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry's Module 1 Report – July 2025**

## Ministerial foreword

On 16 January 2025, the Scottish Government published its [response](#) to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry's Module 1 report and recommendations. The response welcomed the Chair's careful and considered recommendations, and set out details of the actions Scottish Government will take to deliver the changes needed.

The Scottish Government continues to be fully committed to making effective, practical and measurable improvements in pandemic planning and preparedness. Implementing the actions set out in response to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry's module 1 findings is a commitment in the [Programme for Government 2025-26](#).

Over the past six months the Scottish Government has been working, in partnership with local and national stakeholders and working as a four nations group, where appropriate, to implement the accepted recommendations within the timeframes set out in our response. During Autumn 2025, the Scottish Government will be participating in the UK-wide pandemic exercise, Exercise Pegasus, to test our national and local preparedness for future pandemics. This is the first exercise of its kind in almost a decade.

The Scottish Government has provided funding to Public Health Scotland to support the establishment of the National Scottish Pandemic Sciences Partnership, a key recommendation of the [Standing Committee on Pandemic Preparedness - gov.scot](#). The National Scottish Pandemic Sciences Partnership will augment our existing approach to pandemic preparedness and establish itself as a collaboration that leverages our strengths in pandemic science.

This progress report sets out the actions the Scottish Government has taken since January 2025 and further work planned over the coming months.

The Scottish Government recognises, however, that there is still further work to be done to ensure that Scotland is as resilient as possible to future risks and we are committed to taking the necessary steps. The Scottish Government looks forward to continuing to work closely with our partners and stakeholders to deliver these

recommendations and we will provide our next progress update by the end of January 2026.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Forbes', written in a cursive style.

**Kate Forbes MSP**  
**Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic**

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## **1. Simplified Structure**

Recommendation One – A simplified structure for whole system civil emergency preparedness and response

Chair's recommendation:

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
- 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 this Report (by July 2025). Within six 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 (by July 2026), 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.

### **Implementation actions and timescales set out in our January 2025 response:**

- Cabinet will consider the first of its biannual papers on whole system civil emergencies in spring 2025
- The Future Pandemic Preparedness Ministerial Oversight Group will meet for the first time in early 2025 and will meet on a six-monthly basis thereafter
- The Crisis Preparation Oversight Group (CPOG) will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to discuss cross-government preparedness and structures and will meet again in early 2025

### **Progress update:**

- The Scottish Cabinet considers a broad range of resilience issues and impacts on an ongoing basis in response to specific incidents and issues arising as well as to global developments. The Cabinet paper to consider strategic resilience in Scotland, previously scheduled for spring 2025, is now due to be considered in autumn 2025. It will provide an update on progress on

significant programmes of work. The paper will also set out the approach undertaken to minimise the occurrence of a risk and mitigate its impact should it occur, and to respond to a crisis.

- The Future Pandemic Preparedness Ministerial Oversight Group chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs has met twice in the last six months since its establishment. The first time on 30 January 2025 and again on 4 June 2025. The next regular meeting is due to take place in December 2025.
- The Crisis Preparation Oversight Group, the group of senior officials within the Scottish Government who lead and coordinate work on preparedness for and resilience to a wide range of civil emergencies, have continued to meet.

## **2. Cabinet Office Leadership**

Recommendation Two – Cabinet office leadership for whole-system civil emergencies in the UK

Chair's recommendation:

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 the 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.

Commentary:

This recommendation remains for the UK Government to consider and implement. The Scottish Government values the existing good working relationships with our UK Government and Devolved Government counterparts. Any change in approach considered by the UK Government in response to this recommendation would need to take into account devolved responsibilities for managing certain emergencies, and their impacts. The Scottish Government should be consulted on, and remain informed of, any proposed changes to existing structures.

## **3. Risk assessment**

Recommendation Three – A better approach to risk assessment

Chair's recommendation:

The UK Government and devolved governments 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 governments should perform risk assessments that reflect the circumstances and characteristics particular to England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole.

#### **Implementation actions and timescales set out in our January 2025 response:**

- Our review and implementation of any improvements will be completed by the end of 2025.

#### **Progress update:**

- The Scottish Government review of how we can optimise use of the UK-wide risk assessment and improve our process for taking into account Scotland's circumstances and characteristics is progressing on schedule. Implementation of any improvements identified will commence by the end of 2025, and will extend beyond 2025 to maximise effectiveness.
- On 17 June 2025, Scottish Government published the findings from a significant horizon scanning project. The ["Future Trends for Scotland"](#) report and the accompanying Trend pack describe the 60 trends likely to be important to Scotland over the next 10 to 20 years. This work involved over 100 stakeholder interviews and several sense-making workshops with a mix of external and internal stakeholders, together with a specific project focused on engaging young people.
- By publishing these findings, Scottish Government is enabling leaders across Scotland to make future-focused decisions. Scottish Government's improvement work will also explore how these longer term trends might interact with civil contingencies risks to allow the interconnections to be understood in order to strengthen preparedness.

#### **4. A UK-Wide Strategy**

Recommendation Four – A UK-wide whole-system civil emergency strategy

Chair's recommendation:

The UK Government and devolved governments 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:

- Be adaptable;
- 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 governments and their
- departments/directorates as well as local responders
- Consider a wide range of potential scenarios for each type of emergency;
- Identify the key issues and set out a range of potential responses
- Identify how the strategy is to be applied to ensure that any potential
- responses are proportionate to the particular circumstances of the emergency
- 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
- 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.

#### **Implementation actions and timescales set out in our January 2025 response:**

- A first version of the core Concept of Operations (CONOPS) for the Scottish Government Resilience Room (SGORR) will be completed by end of July 2025. It will subsequently be subject to regular reviews and adaptations to ensure continued fitness for purpose and additions of scenario-specific plans developed with consideration of the risk landscape.

#### **Progress update:**

- Work is progressing to develop the updated version of the core CONOPS for SGORR by the end of July 2025. A draft has been shared with our four nation colleagues, to invite challenge and ensure alignment of understanding and responsibilities; the final version will be shared with them once available. As work on the SGORR CONOPS progresses, the need for risk-specific plans for emergencies that require additions to SGORR's generic arrangements will emerge. Scottish Government will, as required, engage with relevant stakeholders, such as the UK Government, to ensure roles and responsibilities are clear and agreed for these risks.
- The Scottish Government fed into the UK Government's Amber Book (national framework for crisis response, establishes roles and responsibilities) ahead of its publication on 28 April 2025, including the annex which focuses on four nations working and links between devolved governments and the UK

Government during response. The SGORR CONOPS references the Amber Book and reflects the principles on four nations working the Amber Book sets out. The Scottish Government will continue to provide input on further UK Government response plans as requested to ensure plans are aligned.

- Work is also underway to consider the development of a Resilience Strategy in Scotland. The Scottish Government will ensure these considerations include assessment of the UK Government Resilience Strategy which is shortly due to be published.

## **5. Using Data and Research**

### **Recommendation Five – Data and Research for future pandemics**

Chair's recommendation:

The UK Government, working with the devolved governments, 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.

### **Implementation actions and timescales set out in our January 2025 response:**

- The Scottish Government and partners will agree a framework setting out the processes for how analytical resource across the Scottish Government can be rapidly redeployed to respond to a future pandemic supporting the timely collection, analysis, sharing and use of required data and associated research and modelling by summer 2025

### **Progress update:**

- A new Data Delivery Group has been set up to take forward the development of the Analytical Framework. The group brings together analysts from across the Scottish Government and key partners (such as Public Health Scotland, NHS National Services Scotland and National Records of Scotland). The Group has agreed the scope and outline content of the Framework and work is underway to develop the content throughout the summer.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been agreed between UK Government Cabinet Office and the devolved administrations for the sharing of emergency preparedness and/or response data, and agreed by Scottish

Government Ministers. This MoU forms part of the Analytical Framework outlining the mechanism to enable rapid sharing of data and analysis between the UK and Scottish Governments in a future crisis. The MoU will be signed by the Cabinet Office and the devolved administrations in the coming weeks.

## **6. Regular Response Exercises**

Recommendation Six – A regular UK-wide pandemic response exercise

Chair's recommendation:

The UK Government and devolved governments 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.

**Implementation actions and timescales set out in our January 2025 response:**

- We will participate in the UK-wide Tier 1 Pandemic Exercise during autumn 2025 (Exercise Pegasus).

**Progress update:**

- Scottish Government officials are involved in the preparation for Exercise Pegasus, due for delivery in Autumn 2025. Exercise Pegasus is a UK wide exercise and provides an opportunity to test national and local level preparedness for future pandemics.
- The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of our readiness to provide a quick and effective whole system response to any future pandemic. We are developing our Social Care Pandemic Preparedness Plan for testing during Exercises Pegasus later this year. The plan will be refined and improved beyond Exercise Pegasus to ensure its effectiveness.
- Scottish Government is committed to learning from the findings of Exercise Pegasus.

## **7. Publication of findings and lessons**

Recommendation Seven – Publication of findings and lessons from civil emergency exercises

Chair's recommendation:

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.

#### **Implementation actions and timescales set out in our January 2025 response:**

- We will reinvigorate the Scottish Exercise notification process and Scottish National Exercise Calendar by July 2025
- We will publish lessons learned reports and findings, to the extent possible, within six months of each exercise.

#### **Progress update:**

- The Scottish Government has consulted with Partners and we have now taken steps to reinvigorate and improve the Scottish Exercise notification process and the Scottish National Exercise Calendar.
- The Scottish Government has produced draft documents in support of this and will now collaborate with both internal and external Partners to ensure we build a process that works across all areas of the business, and will give a truly Scotland wide picture of all activity within the Exercise space.
- The Scottish Government will build on the work already done over the coming months and aim to have a robust process in place by the end of 2025.
- Scottish Government will consider the publication of the Scottish element of Tier 1 exercises. To support this, the Scottish Government is in the process of developing a new presence on Resilience Direct which will be the default publication point until and unless an alternative is presented or suggested. Resilience Direct is a Cabinet Office-owned web-based platform which provides government and categorised responders with a secure space to share information relating to planning, response and recovery from emergencies.

### **8. Regular reporting**

Recommendation Eight – Published reports on whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience

Chair's recommendation:

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.

**Implementation actions and timescales set out in our January 2025 response:**

- We will lay our first report before the Scottish Parliament during September 2025, with further reports to follow at least every three years.

**Progress update:**

- The Scottish Government remains committed to providing a report to parliament every three years, setting out the improvements made to the resilience landscape. The first of these reports will be provided in September 2025.

**9. Red teams**

Recommendation Nine – Regular use of red teams

Chair’s recommendation:

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.

**Implementation actions and timescales set out in our January 2025 response:**

- By July 2025, we will have scoped the potential use of further ‘red teaming’ and external scrutiny to support the development and implementation of our plans, processes and procedures

**Progress update:**

- Following consultation with the resilience sector in Scotland, we believe there is significant capacity and expertise across the resilience sector to provide robust external challenge and scrutiny to plans.
- The Scottish Government will continue to work with UK Government and Scottish partners to develop training to increase the number of those formally “Red Team” trained in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government will work to develop and enhance wider existing mechanisms for peer review and challenge in our work, using networks both within the wider civil service (our counterparts in UK Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive), as well as a range of partner agencies.
- The Scottish Government will update the Preparing Scotland guidance to strengthen advice on peer review and challenge.
- The National Centre for Resilience have been commissioned to support Scottish Government throughout this year (2025-2026) in facilitating and coordinating access to a range of academic and practitioner expertise, ensuring that independent academic insight and scrutiny is applied to key elements of our approach to planning for emergencies.
- The Scottish Government will establish a mechanism to formally track the application of external challenge to key civil service planning, processes and procedures.

## **10. Independent statutory body**

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

Chair’s recommendation:

The UK Government should, in consultation with the devolved governments, 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 governments 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.

**Implementation actions and timescales set out in our January 2025 response:**

- Dependent on further consideration of this recommendation by the UK Government and its consultation with the devolved governments

**Progress update:**

- The Scottish Government remains committed to participating in consultation with the UK Government and the other devolved governments on this recommendation, ensuring that the needs of the Scottish Government and the Scottish context is taken into consideration.



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