HCS/S7/26/12/1

Health, Care and Sport Committee
Wednesday 25 November 2026
12th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Pandemic Preparedness – Note by the Clerk

Introduction

1. At a recent work programme discussion, Members indicated they wished to hold a one-off evidence session on the subject of pandemic preparedness.

2. The previous Health Committee in Session 6 held evidence sessions on pandemic preparedness on 3 June 2025, as well as scrutiny of the provisional common framework on Public Health Protection and Health Security in late 2021 and early 2022.

3. It is also worth noting that pandemic preparedness had previously fallen under the remit of the Covid-19 Recovery Committee, which was established at the start of Session 6 and subsequently dissolved on 14 July 2023.

4. Context should also be given to the fact the session is occurring during the ongoing UK Covid-19 Inquiry, an independent public inquiry established to examine the UK's response to and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to learn lessons for the future. The recommendations to the Scottish Government stemming from this inquiry have formed much of the basis for this evidence session.

5. There is also a separate Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry, whose work is also ongoing.

6. This is the first time the Committee will be undertaking work in this area in Session 7.

Background

7. In the UK, pandemic preparedness falls under the umbrella of 'civil emergencies' with an 'emergency' defined as:

> "[A]n event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the UK, the environment of a place in the UK, or war or terrorism which threatens serious damage to the security of the UK."

8. The legal framework is largely set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 although it is complemented by other topic-specific legislation such as the Public Health (Scotland) Act 2008.

9. Pandemic plans are a specific type of emergency plan and are subject to a continuous process of planning, exercising and revision. A pandemic plan is therefore a living document which is reviewed at intervals and revised if there is a change in the global guidance, evidence-base or national/international legislation.

10. The UK Covid-19 inquiry published its report from module 1 of the inquiry in July 2024. This module was focused on the resilience and preparedness of the UK and set out a series of key findings and recommendations including the following:

- Recommendation 1: A simplified structure for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience;
- Recommendation 4: A UK-wide whole-system civil emergency strategy; and
- Recommendation 5: Data and research for future pandemics

11. The Scottish Government issued its response to the recommendations set out in module 1 on 16 January 2025. The Scottish Government has committed to issuing a response to each of the UK COVID-19 inquiries module reports.

12. The UK COVID-19 Inquiry has published seven reports thus far of an expected 10 in total:

- Module 1 - Resilience and preparedness
- Modules 2, 2A, 2B, 2C - Core decision-making and political governance
- Module 3 - The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on healthcare systems
- Module 4 - Vaccines and therapeutics
- Module 5 - Procurement
- Module 6 - Care sector
- Module 7 - Test, trace and isolate

Today's meeting

13. The Committee will take evidence from the following panel of witnesses:

- Professor Sir Gregor Smith, Chief Medical Officer, Scottish Government
- Derek Grieve CBE, Director for Health and Social Care Performance, Scottish Government
- Dr Jim McMenamin, Strategic Consultant Lead for Health Protection, Public Health Scotland
- Professor Devi Sridhar, Chair of Global Public Health, University of Edinburgh (**attending remotely**)

14. Members will have up to 75 minutes for this evidence session, which can be extended if needs be.

Clerks to the Committee
November 2026