The BMJ

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2020;371:m4145<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m4145>

Published: 27 October 2020

Pandemic preparedness: Government hasn't released full report of exercise, say campaigners

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The UK government is being accused of failing to disclose the full report of a simulation exercise that showed the country was not ready to cope with a pandemic, as campaigners prepare to take the case back to court.

NHS doctor Moosa Qureshi and journalist Tommy Greene have said the document released by Matt Hancock, the health and social care secretary for England, on 20 October represented only part of the report on Exercise Cygnus, which in 2016 war gamed the government's response to a future flu pandemic.

The pair submitted a request under the Freedom of Information Act to see the full findings in April.¹ They also lodged an application with the High Court asking for a judicial review of the government's decision not to disclose the full report.

Qureshi and Greene said the report disclosed by Hancock was the same as a document leaked to the *Guardian* newspaper last May. In their legal case they explained their understanding that there was a "compendium" document containing all the lessons and recommendations from Exercise Cygnus that differed from the leaked report Hancock has now published.

A High Court judge initially denied the pair permission to apply for a judicial review over the failure to release the information, partly on the basis that a response to the freedom of information request should already have been received. A renewal of the judicial review application will be heard by the High Court on 19 November.

The health department has been defending the judicial review case on the basis that a freedom of information request was the appropriate route. But Leigh Day, solicitors for Qureshi and Greene, said that their attempts to obtain the full findings had been met with "evasion and obstruction."

Hancock's announcement that the report was published on 20 October followed an order by the information commissioner to the government, requiring a response to the freedom of information request by 23 October.²

¹ Dyer C. Pandemic preparedness: doctor leads campaign for UK government to release report. *BMJ* 2020;369:m1732. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1732 pmid: 32349981

² Iacobucci G. Pandemic preparedness: Government must release 2016 report, says information commissioner. *BMJ* 2020;371:m3953. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m3953 pmid: 33046458