

# Matt Hancock acted unlawfully over Covid contracts, judge rules



**Faye Brown**

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Matt Hancock failed to publish contract award notices within the 30 day time period (Picture: EPA/Getty)

**The Government unlawfully failed to publish details of billions of pounds' worth of coronavirus-related contracts, the High Court has ruled.**

The Good Law Project took legal action against the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) for its 'wholesale failure' to disclose details of contracts agreed during the pandemic.

The Government is required by law to publish the procurement of any contracts for public goods or services worth more than £120,000 within 30 days.

In a ruling on Friday, Mr Justice Chamberlain said: 'There is now no dispute that, in a substantial number of cases, the Secretary of State (Matt Hancock) breached his legal obligation to publish contract award notices within 30 days of the award of contracts.'

The Good Law Project and three MPs – Labour’s Debbie Abrahams, the Green Party’s Caroline Lucas and Liberal Democrat Layla Moran – argued there had been a ‘dismal’ failure by the DHSC to comply with their contract obligations

As well as missing the 30-day deadline, they claimed the Government was breaching its own transparency policy, which requires the publication of details of public contracts worth more than £10,000.



**Matt Hancock acted unlawfully by failing to publish details of Covid contracts, a judge ruled (Picture: PA)**

The judge said the Government spent ‘vast quantities of public money on pandemic-related procurements’ last year, and that the public was entitled to see ‘who this money was going to, what it was being spent on and how the relevant contracts were awarded’.

He added: ‘This was important not only so that competitors of those awarded contracts could understand whether the obligations ... had been breached, but also so that oversight bodies such as the National Audit Office, as well as Parliament and the public, could scrutinise and ask questions about this expenditure.’

The Government has awarded contracts for things like manufacturing PPE, Covid 19 testing and Test and Trace during the pandemic.

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The judge acknowledged the situation the DHSC faced in the first months of the Covid crisis was 'unprecedented' as 'large quantities of goods and services had to be procured in very short timescales'.

But he said that the DHSC's 'historic failure' to comply with the obligations to publish contracts because of the difficulties caused by the pandemic was 'an excuse, not a justification'.

Mr Justice Chamberlain rejected the Good Law Project's argument that there had been a department-wide 'policy of de-prioritising compliance' with the requirement to publish contract details.

The campaign group said the overall ruling was a 'victory' for anyone concerned with proper governance and 'proof of the power of litigation to hold Government to account'.



**Caroline Lucas**   
@CarolineLucas



Phew - we won!!

Congrats [@GoodLawProject](#), & thanks for all your work with us.

This indictment of Government secrecy should spell the end of the culture of cronyism which has swallowed billions of pounds of public money during [#Covid](#) crisis

[@Debbie\\_abrahams](#) [@LaylaMoran](#)



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BREAKING: WE'VE WON - High Court rules Government acted unlawfully by failing to publish details of Covid-related contracts.

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THREAD:

Founder Jolyon Maugham QC has invited Mr Hancock to agree to publish the names of all companies awarded public contracts under a fast-track 'VIP lane' and how much they were paid.

He has also asked the health secretary to 'commit to recovering public money from all the companies who failed to meet their contractual obligations' and set up 'a judge-led public inquiry into the handling of PPE procurement'.

In a statement, a DHSC spokeswoman said: 'We have been working tirelessly to deliver what is needed to protect our health and social care staff throughout this pandemic, within very short timescales and against a background of unparalleled global demand.

'This has often meant having to award contracts at speed to secure the vital supplies required to protect NHS workers and the public.'

She added: 'We fully recognise the importance of transparency in the award of public contracts and continue to publish information about contracts awarded as soon as possible.'

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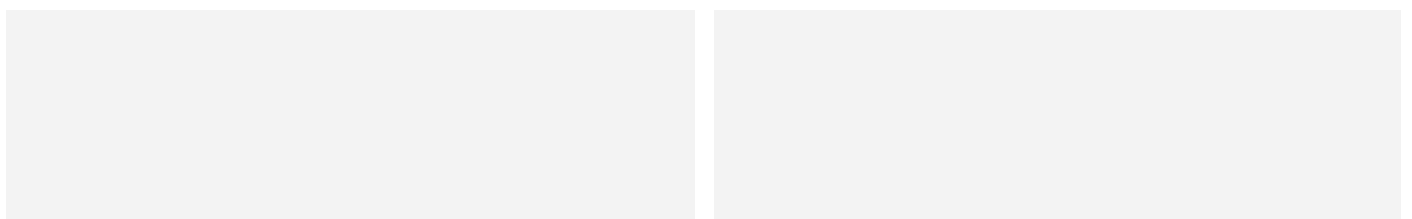
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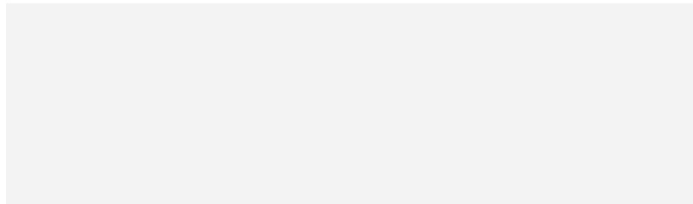
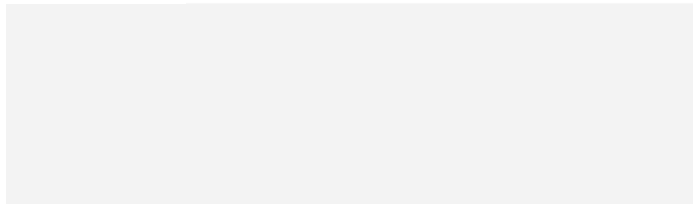
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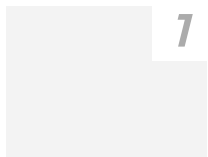




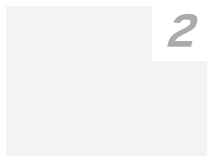
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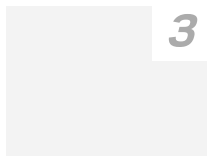
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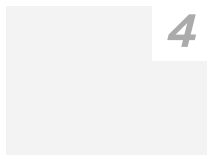
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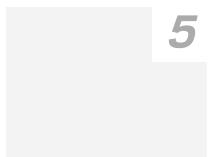
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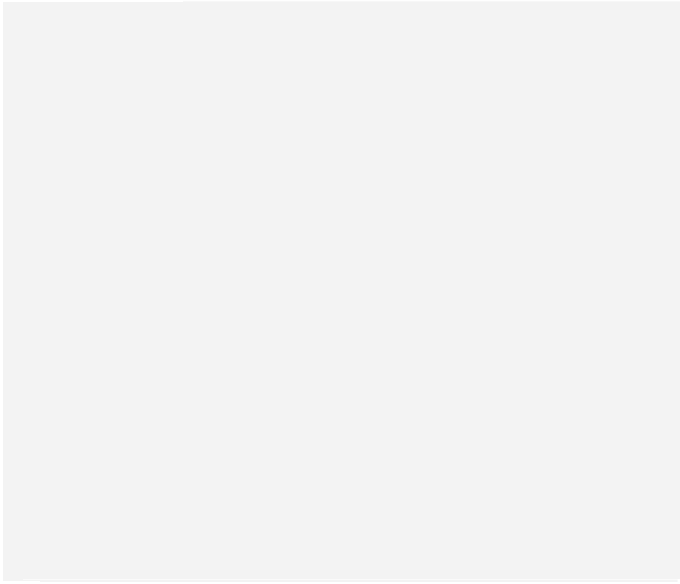


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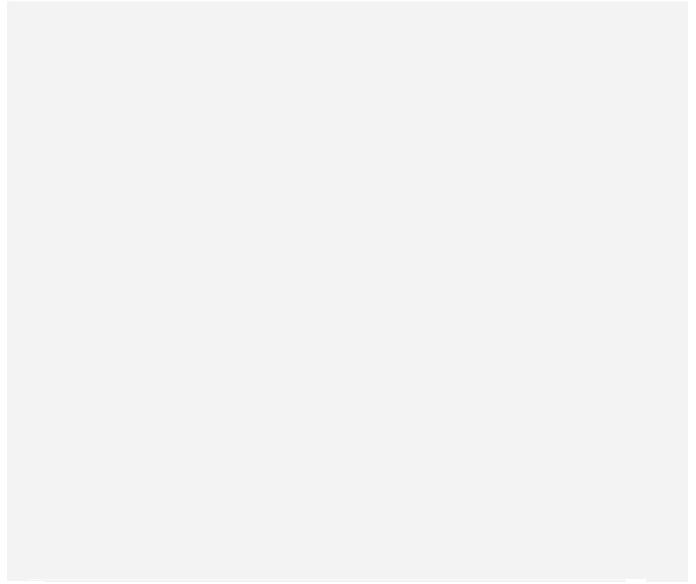


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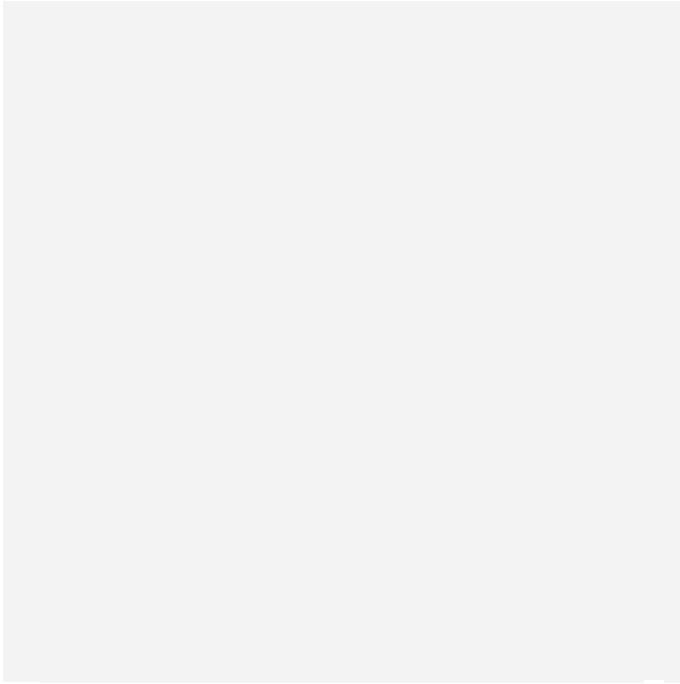
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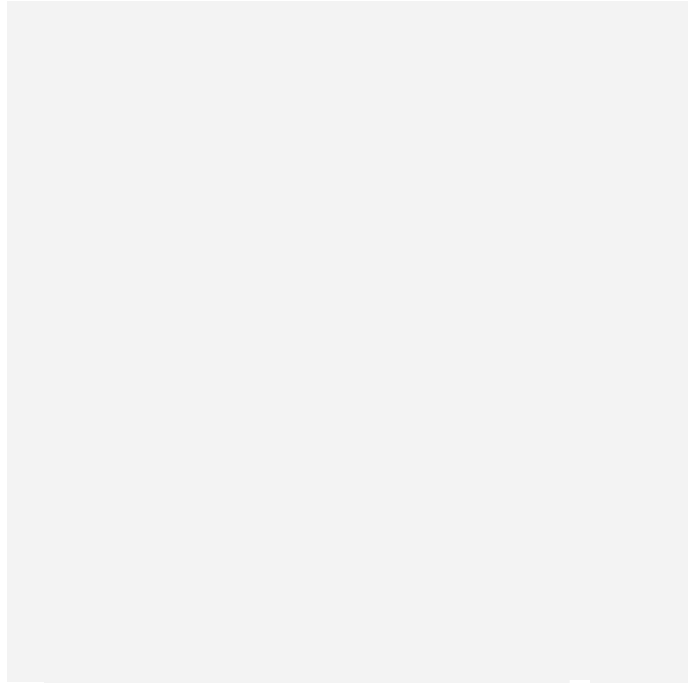
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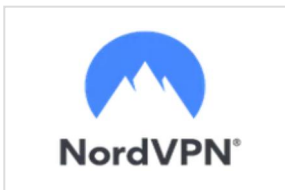
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