

Oral Opening Statement on behalf of PHS

Introduction

The following is an outline Oral Opening Statement made on behalf of Public Health Scotland (PHS).

At the outset we wish to say that we are very grateful to the Inquiry for its considerable work in getting to this important milestone, the start of the Module 1 hearings; and for our having been afforded an opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, this module of the Inquiry's work.

We are well aware, it is only by dint of the huge amount of work and effort by you my Lady, CTI, and the rest of your team, that the Core Participants including PHS and the wider public, are now on the verge of being able to listen to the first of many important witnesses to this Inquiry, give their oral testimony.

In short, PHS is grateful, and pleased, to be here on this historic and important day.

PHS, its legal team and I, look forward to participating over the coming weeks in these hearings and to assisting you, my Lady, and your team in whatever way we can. PHS sincerely believes it has much to contribute and share by way of experience and expertise, but equally important from PHS's perspective, we're here to learn. To learn from the Inquiry what can be done to better protect the people of Scotland from future threats to their health. PHS is committed to that.

PHS - Working with the Inquiry

For several months now, PHS has now been working hard to produce all of the information the Inquiry has asked of it. To date, the organisation has produced detailed statements, chronologies, narratives and other documents across a number of the Inquiries' Modules. It

is hoped the documentation produced has been informative and assisted the Inquiry in gaining a fuller understanding of who PHS is, and the work it does.

During this process we have very much been "speaking" to the Inquiry, and although, as a result, the Inquiry will now, we hope, have a much better idea of who PHS is, we are very conscious that the wider public who are watching and listening today, may very well not.

Hence, in this Opening Statement, our strong desire and intention is to speak not only to the Inquiry but to the public also - in particular, the Scottish public - especially those who have an interest in the work of PHS. It goes without saying, that I am very much also speaking to the Scottish Covid 19 Bereaved families for Justice who have such an important place in this Inquiry. It is our hope that what I say today is helpful to all those with an interest in PHS.

PHS - Creation, Role, Values

Public Health Scotland is what is termed a "Special" Health Board and is the lead national organisation in Scotland for improving and protecting the health and well-being of Scotland's population. It was created after a Public Health Reform Programme in Scotland which was designed, amongst other things, to strengthen national leadership in public health. The organisation draws upon a range of expertise within its staff to deliver these objectives: including healthcare consultants, nursing staff and healthcare scientists.

Health, social care policy and funding, including public health policy, are devolved matters. This means that PHS operates in a different context to its counterparts in the other UK nations. PHS is committed to helping the Inquiry navigate the complexities that this will inevitably create for a UK-wide investigation.

In terms of its relationships with others, PHS is accountable to both Scottish Government and local government reflecting the fact that public health in Scotland is viewed as a shared endeavour, of local and national government. Indeed, PHS is uniquely sponsored by Scottish

Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) on behalf of local government. On a day-to-day level, PHS collaborates across public and third sectors.

It is important to note that PHS is a relatively young organisation. It came into existence legally in December 2019, becoming operational on 1st April 2020, at around the start of the pandemic, and at the time of the first UK-wide lockdown.

It will be apparent that, consequently, during the period with which this Module of the Inquiry is concerned, PHS was not operational. Responsibility for protecting the Scottish public from infectious diseases and environmental hazards fell to a different organisation: Health Protection Scotland (or HPS for short). When PHS was created many of the staff and functions of HPS were transferred over to PHS. Moreover, it is important to understand that because of the pandemic, at the time of PHS's launch, there required to be a rapid re-thinking of a number of plans in relation to the organisation which had been put in place over a number of years previously. It is fair to say that the organisation faced a number of coalescing and difficult challenges at that time.

Despite the pressure of being very much on the frontline of the nation's response to dealing with the pandemic, in September 2020 PHS published a three-year strategic plan setting out its goals for Scotland, focussing on four cross-cutting areas: COVID-19, community and place, poverty and children and mental wellbeing.

The original strategy was strengthened in November 2022 with the publication of a new three year plan. This plan built on the 2020 strategic plan, and set out PHS's purpose as Scotland's national public health body: to lead and support work across Scotland to prevent disease, prolong healthy life and promote health and wellbeing.

PHS's publicly stated values include respect, collaboration, innovation, excellence and integrity. PHS undertakes that going forward, it will continue to do everything in its power to

assist the Inquiry with its work in whatever way it can; it will endeavour to approach the Inquiry with openness, respect and candour – all underpinned by a genuine desire to learn and do better. As a public body, PHS understands the responsibility it owes, not only to the Inquiry, but to the people of Scotland and it will do everything it can to meet those responsibilities.