

Witness Name: Roger Hargreaves

Statement No.: Fourth

Exhibits: To follow

Dated: 28 June 2023

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

FOURTH CORPORATE WITNESS STATEMENT OF ROGER HARGREAVES

I, Roger Hargreaves, Director of the COBR Unit, 70 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2AS, will state as follows:

1. I make this further statement in response to a further Rule 9 request raised following the evidence of Katharine Hammond to the Inquiry on 16 June 2023. I have taken the contents of this statement from the Cabinet Office's records and it is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. As I highlighted in my previous statement of 1 February 2023, the UK Government works closely with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to promote effective emergency planning that is, as far as possible, consistent with that of the rest of the UK, whilst respecting the devolved settlements. The Cabinet Office cooperates with the devolved administrations to inform emergency planning and response by way of regular working-level discussions, core membership of certain working groups (for example, on risk assessment) and ad-hoc membership in others, as appropriate (for example, the cabinet committee subgroups with responsibility for resilience). Devolved administrations are, of course, not part of the UK collective government decision making on England only, or reserved matters, but the Cabinet Office looks to share information on issues which could affect their jurisdiction and reach a common view, where practical. By way of illustration, I noted in my previous statement of 28 April

2023 that I currently attend, along with the UK's Head of Resilience, 'four nations' meetings with other senior officials responsible for risk and resilience at least once a quarter. This meeting aims to share information on priorities, concerns and areas of joint working, rather than scrutinising or monitoring preparedness on any particular issues which are matters of devolved responsibility. These dedicated meetings supplement other subject specific meetings where the devolved administrations have had membership, for example, in the relevant period. They were represented, for example, on the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board (2017-2020).

3. The national risk products (National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA) / National Risk Assessment (NRA) and National Risk Register (NRR)) are part of our anticipation and assessment of risk and are shared with the devolved administrations to inform their risk assessments. The UK Government works on the basis that the devolved administrations should have the fullest practical access to its assessments.
4. At page 202 of the transcript of her evidence on 16 June 2023, Katharine Hammond was asked by lead Counsel to the Inquiry to provide further information on the degree to which the Welsh Government was involved in the national risk assessment process, with particular reference to 2016. The Cabinet Office has been asked to carry out this research by the Inquiry by way of a letter dated yesterday, 27 June 2023. I focus on the attendance of the devolved administrations at meetings, noting that this should be seen in the wider context of information-sharing I describe above.
5. I can confirm that officials from the Welsh Government were invited to join meetings relating to the preparation of the National Security Risk Assessment ("NSRA"). For example, they attended the Risk Assessment Steering Group ("RASG") on 25 August 2016 (INQ000043180) and 25 July 2017 (INQ000186692). The Risk Assessment Steering Group considered risk assessment documentation prior to submission to the National Security Council (Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies) Sub-Committee ('THRC').
6. There was also specific discussion of the pandemic influenza risk in the NSRA at a meeting between Civil Contingencies Secretariat ("CCS") officials (of whom Katherine Hammond was one), the Department of Health and Social Care

(“DHSC”), and the Welsh Government on 14 June 2018 (exhibited to my third statement at 6.6, INQ000211678).

7. I have been asked to also give details on the involvement of other devolved administrations. The Scottish Government was represented at the RASG on, for example, 15 January 2016 (INQ000196319), on 25 August 2016 (see above), when Scottish Government officials provided an update on the Scottish Risk Assessment, and on 2 November 2018 (INQ000186698). A meeting was held with representatives from the Scottish Government on 27 March 2018 (INQ000211677).
8. The Northern Ireland Office, which is a UK Government department, attended a RASG meeting on, for example, 5 May 2016 (INQ000186666) on 25 August 2016 (see above) and on 2 November 2018 (INQ000186698).
9. Officials from the devolved administrations were able to receive papers for the RASG meetings that they did not attend.
10. There were also meetings between the devolved administrations and the CCS, such as on 21 March 2017 at which the Welsh and Scottish government representatives met with the CCS (INQ000044469) and the risk assessment was discussed, and on 4 July 2017, when pandemic flu was discussed (INQ000020763).
11. The Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive work with the UK Government to ensure that devolved issues are identified, considered and represented in the NSRA. The devolved administrations are encouraged, where relevant and appropriate, to apply the NSRA when making their own emergency preparedness and response plans, taking into account devolution arrangements and their respective risk landscapes.
12. The devolved administrations were invited to attend THRC (Officials). The Scottish government and Welsh governments attended all or the majority of these meetings, though the Northern Ireland Executive attended more rarely in the period that I have reviewed from June 2016 onwards. On 29 June 2017, when pandemic influenza was raised, it was attended by representatives of the Republic of Ireland, as well as the Northern Ireland Executive and the other devolved administrations (INQ000020841).
13. The Scottish and Welsh Governments also regularly attended THRC (Resilience)(Officials), for example on 25 September 2018 where an update to the

NSRA process was given and all departments were encouraged to provide feedback. The Welsh government attended on the same occasion and on other occasions. The Northern Ireland Executive did not attend in the period that I have reviewed from March 2017 onwards.

14. The devolved administrations received copies of the NSRA via Resilience Direct. The CCS update for all devolved administrations in June 2018 (INQ000205300) stated that they were “strongly encouraging all Departments and organisations to liaise with each other and all key stakeholders to ensure that the consequences and impacts of these risks are fully understood”.
15. I am not personally aware as to why the different devolved administrations were able to attend different numbers of meetings, although typically practical matters of availability do impact attendance occasionally.
16. I understand that the relationship with devolved administrations would also have been broader than the above, and not solely concerned with formal meetings as listed above. The devolution settlements can sometimes be complex in all areas of public policy and delivery, but officials in all parts of the UK understand the importance of working through issues and maintaining strong cooperation.
17. I provided further details on the devolved administrations at paragraphs 6.5-6.8 of my third statement of 26 May 2023.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this corporate statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Personal Data

Signed:

Dated: 28 June 2023