

IN THE UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

Before the Right Honourable Baroness Hallett D.B.E

STATEMENT OF MARTIN SWAIN

I, MARTIN SWAIN, will say as follows:

Introduction

1. This statement is prepared in response to a request dated 21st March 2023 (the request) that wishes to draw upon my experience as Deputy Director of the Community Safety Division of the Welsh Government, in the period between 2016 and 2019. I have drawn on support from my former office in preparing this statement.
2. I played a small part in the response to Covid-19, working for an organisation that was required to maintain critical business services throughout the periods of lockdown, I do not, however, under-estimate the challenges faced by those working on the front line of public services during the pandemic. I would like to take the opportunity in this statement to pay tribute to those people working within the NHS, emergency services and the wider public service for their dedication and commitment in their unwavering endeavour to keep us all safe during such difficult times. But, most of all, I would like to express my deepest sympathies to those families who lost loved ones, were affected in other ways by the pandemic and to those who will carry the burden of this disease for many years to come.

Background

3. I was born in Newport, Gwent and attended Chepstow Comprehensive School. I left school at 17 years of age and entered a training scheme for young people whilst continuing my education at Newport College of Further Education. I later returned to part time education whilst in full time employment, where I attended the University of Wales. I achieved a Post Graduate Diploma and Masters Degree in Business Administration.
4. I worked for the Welsh Government from June 1992 until December 2018. I worked in a variety of administrative, policy and delivery roles across a wide range of policy and subject matters including education, health, industrial and economic policy and in service delivery roles. Between 2010 and 2015 I worked as the Deputy Director for Children and Families, leading on major national early years and family support programmes. In 2015 I became the Deputy Director of the Community Safety division.
5. In December 2018, I left the Welsh Government to work for Companies House as the Director of Policy, Strategy and Planning. In January 2023, I became the Director of Intelligence and Law Enforcement Engagement and still work in this role at the time of writing.

The R.9 request

6. I understand that a number of requests for information, under r. 9 of the Inquiries Rules 2006, have been made by the Inquiry in relation to Module 1. I also understand that the substance of the Welsh Government's preparedness arrangements has been set out in statements, provided by senior officials, in response to those requests.
7. From the outset, I think it is important that I explain the line management structure which existed for civil contingencies when I was Deputy Director, as this will put into context the answers I provide to your questions.
8. When I was in post, Community Safety Division was a large Division which not only had responsibility for civil contingencies but also Prisons, Crime, Justice, Cyber Resilience, Fire Policy, Policing, Armed Forces (Veterans), Modern Slavery and Emergency Services

Mobile Communications Programme. For some of the time I was also responsible for policy matters in relation to Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence. In 2017, there were around 50 members of staff working within the Division **[Exhibit MS1M1MS01/001 – INQ000184310]**.

9. Because of the varied range of responsibilities I needed to cover, I had a Deputy Head of Division in post (at Civil Service Grade 6 level) to support me and to lead on the more day-to-day running of certain policy areas. These included civil contingencies, but also, modern slavery, armed forces and national security (including counter-extremism, radicalisation, and cyber resilience).
10. Although I acted as line manager, and provided support on policy decisions, ministerial submissions and resources, my Deputy would work directly with Reg Kilpatrick, as Director for Local Government, on civil contingencies matters to allow me to focus more on the other policy areas. Consequently, whilst I had some understanding of civil contingencies work and would become involved, where necessary, in clearing submissions, exercises and training, the main responsibility and expertise lay with my Deputy and her experienced Resilience Team, who often worked directly with Ministers through such groups as the Wales Resilience Forum. They took the lead on all internal groups, external multi-agency groups and building external relations not only with responders in Wales but with Whitehall and the other devolved governments.
11. The request asks four questions which I shall answer in turn. They will be answered in the context of my role as explained above.

Key policies affecting Wales' preparedness

12. I have been asked to set out the key policies, implemented during my time as Deputy Director of the Community Safety Division, that had a material impact on Wales' civil contingency planning, pandemic preparedness and resilience. I am also asked to explain what effect these policies had.
13. Civil contingencies, as a discrete function, was not devolved to the Welsh Government when I was first in post. Consequently, there was little in the form of policy making as such. Most of our work was geared towards supporting Welsh Ministers, building capability,

working through multi-agency groups to develop plans at the all-Wales level, and to support Local Resilience Forums and individual organisations in resilience matters.

14. For my part, the most significant policy development I was involved with during this period was the Welsh Ministers (Transfer of Functions) Order 2018 (TFO) and the section relating to civil contingencies. I was not directly part of the negotiations with Cabinet Office on the TFO, but I was involved in clearing the ministerial advice. My Deputy led on all policy matters thereafter whilst I took a keen interest in ensuring that the team was properly resourced and located to take on the additional responsibilities. I provided advice to the Permanent Secretary seeking an additional resource in the region of £375k to £400k to increase staffing numbers [Exhibit MS1M1MS01/002 – INQ000184299] and also secured a new location for the Team to operate which provided greater security.

What was done correctly?

15. I am asked to provide my views on what was done correctly in relation to civil contingency planning, pandemic preparedness and resilience during my time in office and why I think this is the case.
16. Although I was not routinely involved, I did occasionally work in the Emergency Co-ordination Centre (Wales) during exercises and real events (such as the UEFA Champions League Final), I underwent multi-agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group training through Exercise Wales Gold, and I sometimes attended live counter-terrorist exercises. What I witnessed at these events was a strong synergy between all agencies, all working together in close partnership to achieve a common goal. I think the inclusive structures built by Welsh Government linking local to national, the working relationships we built across the emergency planning communities and the willingness of everyone involved to work as part of a wider team, helped set a foundation from which we could develop and build. This also created a network of trust and reliance which we could draw upon when having to respond to emergencies and challenging events.
17. My attendance at Exercise Wales Gold, working with senior officers from all responder agencies, allowed me to see first-hand the benefit of our investment in training. Through such initiatives, people were brought together to learn new skills and how to operate in challenging situations. Not only that, those attending took away learning that could be

applied beyond the civil contingencies environment. I certainly applied much of what I learnt to leading the Welsh Government response to the Grenfell Tower fire and its consequences to buildings in Wales. There were many other examples during my time where the investment in training proved its worth.

Key changes regarding preparedness for future pandemics

18. I have been asked to set out my views on what key changes could be made to the structure, systems and processes of the Welsh Government to make it better prepared for a pandemic in the future.
19. Whilst I acted as ECC(W) Director for one shift during Exercise Cygnus in 2016 [**Exhibit MS1M1MS01/003 – INQ000184311**], my main focus that year was on the counter-terrorist exercise (Red Kite) where I not only acted as ECC(W) Director but also attended the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee meeting [**Exhibit MS1M1MS01/004 – INQ000184312**]. Generally, I had little input into the planning for the flu exercise and in the overall work on pandemic flu preparedness. As set out earlier in my statement these were in the main led by my Deputy Head of Division and her teams. In the same way, I was lead contact for the prisons element of the Pandemic Flu Bill and was a copy recipient on some updates on the Pandemic Flu Preparedness Board, particularly in relation to excess deaths and sector resilience on which the Resilience Team led [**Exhibit MS1M1MS01/005 – INQ000184296**]. Other than that, my understanding of pandemic flu preparedness is limited and my answer to the question is based on a broader issue of preparedness and how Welsh Government in general was structured to respond to emergencies of all kinds.
20. Central to the issue of Welsh Government preparedness in my time was resources. We had a small Resilience Team which not only had to advise Ministers and co-ordinate the internal planning but also manage the Wales-level structures whilst, at the same time, maintaining relations with the UK Government on policy issues. Added to this workload was the drive to develop wider support to the Team, on a voluntary basis, whenever the ECC(W) was established for exercises as well as in response to emergencies. Whilst I believe the resourcing of the Team has since been addressed in recent years, I believe the corporate issues of wider staff support to ECC(W) remains of concern. It certainly was

an issue in my time, with the Resilience Team spending a lot of time and effort trying to recruit and train staff on a voluntary basis to provide the necessary support to any response. Without a robust solution to this issue, there will always remain a vulnerability in the way the Welsh Government can fulfil its role without a cadre of available, trained staff to support the corporate response.

Key lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic

21. Finally, I have been asked to give my views on what should be learned from the Welsh Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
22. As I had left the Welsh Government before Covid-19 happened, I was not involved in the response and I am not, therefore, in a position to understand how well the preparations for a pandemic were implemented in any detail and therefore cannot answer this question.

Conclusion

23. As I said at the beginning of this statement, the answers I have provided to your questions are based on my limited involvement in civil contingencies during the period in question and should be viewed in this context. However, what I will say is that during my time as Deputy Director of Community Safety Division I could see that our preparedness in Wales was built on a foundation of partnership and commitment, where a small resilience community worked together with Welsh Government to build structures and systems to develop a framework for response and then pulled together whenever the need arose.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness 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.

Signed:

Personal Data

Dated: 04/05/2023