

IN THE UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

Before the Right Honourable Baroness Hallett D.B.E

WITNESS STATEMENT OF DAME SHAN MORGAN

I, SHAN MORGAN, will say as follows:

Introduction

1. This statement is prepared in response to a request dated 21 March 2023 (the request) that wishes to draw upon my experience as Permanent Secretary to the Welsh Government in the period between 2017 and 2021. I have drawn on support from the Welsh Government in preparing this statement.
2. Before I address the substance of the request, I should like to express my personal sympathy to all those affected by the Covid 19 pandemic, and my sincere condolences to those who suffered bereavement. I hope very much that this Inquiry will be able to provide valuable lessons for the future.

Background

3. I was born in London of Welsh speaking parents. I attended South Park Girls' High School in Lincoln, Wycombe High School in High Wycombe and then the Royal Latin School in Buckingham. I attended the University of Kent and in 1977 I graduated with a BA Hons in French Literature and Language.

4. My early career focussed on employment and social affairs policy. In 1977, after I graduated, I joined the Employment Department working on youth and adult employment policy and on vocational education and training programmes in the Manpower Services Commission. Thereafter, between 1984 and 1987, I was seconded to the European Commission in Brussels to work on long term unemployment policy and local economic development (the LEDA programme). I returned to the UK in 1987 and became the Private Secretary to the Permanent Secretary, as well as holding a variety of posts in the Department of Employment Group and dealing with labour market policy. In 1991, I became a policy official in the National Training Task Force and in 1992 I became the Head of the Employment and Training Strategy Unit at the Government Office for London. In 1994, I worked as the UK's delegate to the International Labour Organization's Governing Body.

5. In 1997, I was seconded to the British Embassy in Paris as Labour and Social Affairs Attaché before taking up my first appointment to the UK Representation in Brussels as the Counsellor responsible for Social, Environmental and Regional affairs. In 2006, I transferred to the Diplomatic Service as Director European Union in the Foreign Office and was responsible for negotiations on the Lisbon Treaty and management of the UK parliamentary process of ratification. Between 2008 and 2012, I was HM Ambassador to Argentina and Paraguay and I was also appointed to the Foreign Office's Board of Management. Between 2012 and 2016 I was the UK representative to the EU Council's Committee of the Deputy Representatives of the Member States (Coreper I) in the Council. I was responsible for leading negotiations across a wide range of subject areas including climate change, environment, energy, fisheries, social affairs, health, transport and other Single Market issues.

6. In February 2017, I took up post as the Permanent Secretary for the Welsh Government. I was also appointed Dame Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (DCMG) in 2017. I remained the Permanent Secretary until October 2021 when Andrew Goodall was appointed to the role.

Permanent Secretary role and preparedness/resilience function in the Welsh Government

7. As Permanent Secretary for the Welsh Government, my role was threefold: to act as the Principal Accounting Officer, managing and accounting for the proper expenditure of public money; to lead the Civil Service of the Welsh Government, overseeing the allocation of resources and the wellbeing of staff; and to act as the Principal Policy Adviser to the First Minister, responsible for the quality of advice going to Ministers.

8. The practical reality of the role of Permanent Secretary is that your focus is determined by the First Minister's policy priorities and the various crises and problems that arise (such as, but not confined to, preparations for a "No Deal" Brexit). During my tenure, civil contingencies and related work was carried out effectively by officials. There was no time that I recall when either Welsh Ministers, officials or Members of Senedd were concerned about civil contingencies or the Welsh Government's capacity to respond to an emergency.

9. As Permanent Secretary, I was not involved in the day to day running of either the civil contingency function or the health emergency planning function, but it was part of my role to ensure that they were functioning effectively and that Welsh Ministers were receiving advice from officials where necessary. During the period February 2017 to January 2020 there were no health emergencies (outbreaks such as swine flu or Ebola) which needed to be dealt with. The Welsh Government had participated in Exercise Cygnus in 2016 before I took up my post and I was briefed on steps that were being taken to follow up on the exercise when I took up post in February 2017.

10. My office was copied in on correspondence from the Health Emergency Planning Adviser briefing the Cabinet Secretary about the request from the National Security Council (Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies), chaired by the Prime Minister for a

Review of the UK Pandemic Influenza preparedness to be undertaken in December 2017. I was aware that Welsh Government officials were involved in the UK Review and were represented on the UK Pandemic Influenza Readiness Board (PFRB) [**Exhibit SM-M01/01-INQ000184298 and SM-M01/02 - INQ 000184304**].

11. My office was copied into subsequent updates from the Health Emergency Planning Adviser on the Pandemic Influenza UK Review, including work on the Pandemic Flu Bill and it appeared that the processes in place in the Welsh Government on preparedness were working effectively [**Exhibits SM-M01/03-INQ000177329, SM-M01/04-INQ 000177332, SM-M01/05-INQ000177333**]

The R.9 request

12. 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.

13. The request asks five questions which I shall answer in turn.

Key policies affecting Wales's pandemic readiness

14. I have been asked to set out the key policies, implemented during my time as Permanent Secretary, that had a material impact on Wales's pandemic readiness and to explain the effect that these policies had.

15. Although the passing of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the 2015 Act) pre-dated my appointment as Permanent Secretary, its implementation was current during my tenure.

16. The Welsh Government published its first well-being objectives in September 2016 in 'Taking Wales Forward', the statement of its priorities after the 2016 Assembly election. Then, the Welsh Government committed to revising the objectives as part of a national strategy. In September 2017, it published Prosperity for All: the national strategy with a revised list of 12 well-being objectives. The objectives were organised under four key themes for the rest of the Assembly term. The objectives were underpinned by 136 commitments. The Welsh Government also identified five priority areas which it believed offered the greatest potential to improve prosperity and well-being and need cross-government working: early years, social care, housing, mental health and skills and employability. It added a sixth priority – decarbonisation – in September 2018.

17. This was an important underpinning policy which aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of the Welsh population. In my view, the implementation of this Act across a number of different policy areas was an important part of preparedness in that its intention was to improve health and other outcomes for the Welsh population. It also set out a series of measures to try and tackle inequalities.

18. A Healthier Wales was one part of the implementation of the 2015 Act but particularly relevant to the issue of policies that would have a material impact on preparing Wales for a pandemic. A Healthier Wales set out plans for the future of health and social care in Wales in the following terms:
 - (1) We want services which support people to stay well, not just treat them when they become ill.

- (2) When people need help, health and social care services will work with them and their loved ones to find out what is best for them and agree how to make those things happen. We call this a 'personcentred approach'.
- (3) More services will be provided outside of hospitals, closer to home, or at home, and people will only go into hospital for treatment that cannot be provided safely anywhere else. This 'community-based approach' will help take pressure off our hospitals, reduce the time people have to wait to be treated, and the time they spend in hospital when they have to go there.
- (4) Our health and social care services will use the latest technology and medicines to help people get better, or to live the best life possible if they are not able to get better.

19. I believe that the 2015 Act has provided a strong framework for close collaboration and partnership across Wales, including through the establishment of Public Services Boards for each local authority area, bringing together local authorities, Health Boards, Fire and Rescue Authorities, the Natural Resources Wales and a range of other bodies including the Welsh Government and voluntary organisations. I believe that the regular communication and collaboration between key actors at local level helped improve pandemic planning and preparedness in Wales. This was clear, for example, in Wales's response to the Shielding Initiative which got off the ground quickly as a locally-led initiative rather than a top-down initiative.

Key policy decisions and the structure of public services

20. I have next been asked what effect policies that were implemented, particularly those relating to the funding and structure of health and social care, had on pandemic preparedness and resilience in Wales.

21. I should like to draw out the important context for Wales of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and its requirement for politicians and policymakers to consider the long-term impact of policies and decisions, working in partnership with

stakeholders and communities to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle including a focus on the prevention of future problems.

22. The Healthier Wales long term plan for health and social care in Wales was co-created with a wide range of stakeholders and customers to ensure that it both responded to the needs of the people of Wales and it also secured buy-in from those who would be closely involved in the delivery of the programme. This approach meant that there was widespread support for the new Healthier Wales programme from its launch. I believe that this process of collaboration and communication between key stakeholders and actors in the field of health and social care provided a strong basis for joint working during the pandemic.

What was done correctly?

23. I have been asked to provide my views on what had been done correctly in relation to pandemic planning, preparedness and resilience during my time in office and why I think that is the case.

24. On taking up post as Permanent Secretary, I was briefed on the civil contingencies and emergency health plans for Wales. I saw the contingency planning systems in operation successfully when Cardiff hosted the Champions League Final in 2017. The event brought about 170,000 additional visitors to the city, requiring complex monitoring and coordination across emergency and other public services. I was aware that communications and coordination systems had already been tested successfully during Wales's hosting of the Ryder Cup in Newport, attended by high security guests including President Obama. This demonstrated effective contingency and crisis collaboration at UK, Wales and local levels at an official level.

25. The experience of contingency planning for the potential impact on Wales of a potential “No Deal Brexit” provided a ‘dress rehearsal’ for the intensive collaboration required to bring together all parts of the Welsh Government and its partners to focus on the mitigation of risks to the people of Wales. This included consideration of issues such as assuring the continued supply of food to care homes across Wales. The No Deal Brexit preparations required close collaboration between Ministers and officials at UK, Wales and local levels. As a member of the Whitehall Permanent Secretaries’ Group (Wednesday Morning Colleagues) I engaged directly in that collaboration.

26. In order to maximise collaboration and communications across the different departments of the Welsh Government Civil Service, I established a new cross-governmental coordinating committee - bringing together key officials on a weekly then fortnightly basis to address the wide spectrum of policy and operational issues expected to flow from a No Deal Brexit. I decided to replicate that approach to manage the Welsh Government’s response to Covid 19 from the start of the pandemic. This executive committee was named ExCovid - its core membership included all Director Generals, the head of the legal services, the HR and Finance Directors, the Director of Governance, head of Communications and the head of the military team embedded within the Welsh Government. Additional experts attended for deep dives and challenge sessions on specific topics. I believe this approach worked well in helping to generate a common sense of purpose and ensuring effective cross-governmental communications and action at official level.

27. I should also add that the scale of Wales enables closer and effective communication between Welsh Government, local government and other public authorities such as local health boards. Coming from the Foreign Office, when I became the Permanent Secretary it was striking feature of administration in Wales that Welsh Ministers knew key individuals in, say, local authorities and local health boards (often well) and were able to discuss and resolve problems effectively. That became an important strength when the pandemic struck in early 2020.

Key changes regarding preparedness for future pandemics

28. 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.

29. Although I was not involved in the day-to-day operation of programmes, as Chair of the ExCovid responsible for assessing and directing the Welsh Government response to the pandemic, I maintained oversight of policy developments and operations. This included chairing 'deep dives' into particularly challenging issues as well as holding a number of lessons learned exercises.

30. To maximise preparedness and resilience for possible future pandemics I would recommend holding regular semi-live exercises to test systems, structures and communications. This may already have been adopted by the Welsh Government since I left post in 2021.

Key lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic

31. 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.

32. I was struck throughout the time I was involved in the Welsh Government response to the pandemic by the benefits of the close working relationships between politicians and officials of the Welsh Government and their counterparts in local government. Those well-established relationships enabled the Welsh Government to get initiatives such as "Shielding" off to a rapid start based on a ground upwards rather than top-down approach.

33. Similarly, I observed the value of the close communications and engagement in Wales with the third sector and with academia. This was particularly the case in relation to equality issues. The First Minister's BAME Covid 19 Advisory Group produced a report on the risks for BAME communities by Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna of Cardiff University Business School. This laid the foundation for the Welsh Government's approach to identifying and responding to the risks for BAME communities during the pandemic.
34. Another important lesson was the value added by the Army in terms of logistical support and advice, particularly in relation to the rollout of the vaccination programme and the track and trace initiative. The team was embedded successfully in the Welsh Government and made an outstanding contribution which was recognised by Welsh Ministers and officials alike. It was particularly helpful that the head of the team spoke fluent Welsh, so quickly gained the confidence of Welsh Ministers and officials.
35. The importance of effective communications and collaboration between the UK Government and the Devolved Governments at Ministerial and official level cannot be underestimated. The structures in place to underpin that collaboration were strengthened during the pandemic and should be reviewed to ensure that they remain effective.
36. Finally, a very practical lesson learned from the pandemic was the importance of investment in effective IT systems and equipment for remote working. The Welsh Government had completed the roll out of a high-quality new system in October 2020, which meant that on lockdown the entire organisation was immediately able to work remotely.

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.

Personal Data

Signed:

Dated: 04 May 2023