

Witness Name: Andrew Morris
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits: AM
Dated: 23 June 2023

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY
MODULE 2 and 2A

STATEMENT BY CHAIR OF COVID-19 ADVISORY GROUP

This statement is one of a suite provided for Module 2 and 2A of the UK Covid Inquiry and these should be considered collectively.

In relation to the issues raised by the Rule 9 notice dated 13 December 2022 (reference M2A/SGCAG/01) served on the Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group, in connection with Module 2 and 2A, the Chair, Professor Andrew Morris, will say as follows: -

1. The Scottish Government's COVID-19 Advisory Group ("C19AG", the "Group") was established as an independent advisory group, with Professor Andrew Morris appointed as the independent Chair, and administrative support was provided by Scottish Government officials. The Group was not established as a separate legal entity. A record of meeting papers, minutes, advice and other key material relating to the Group's activities has been prepared and made available to the Inquiry (Scottish Inquiry – Tranche 6 – Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group). Details of specific documents referred to in this statement that have been previously provided to the Inquiry are set out in a spreadsheet that accompanies the inventory. The Group's remit was advisory only and any decisions in relation to that advice were taken by the Scottish Government.

2. Professor Andrew Morris, the Chair of the C19AG, is Professor of Medicine and Vice Principal of Data Science at the University of Edinburgh, seconded since August 2017 to be Director of Health Data Research UK. He was formerly Chief Scientist (Health) at Scottish Government (2012-2017). The position of Chair of the C19AG is unpaid and the time devoted by the Chair and other independent members of the C19AG is provided pro bono.

The Scottish Government's COVID-19 Advisory Group ("C19AG")

3. The C19AG first met on 26 March 2020. The group was established by the Chief Medical Officer ("CMO") to "consider the scientific and technical concepts and processes that are key to understanding the evolving COVID-19 situation and potential impacts in Scotland". Full details of the Group's terms of reference and initial membership are set out in Scottish Inquiry – Tranche 6 – Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group.
4. Professor Morris was approached on 16 March 2020 by the then CMO, Dr Catherine Calderwood. She invited Professor Morris, on behalf of the First Minister, to chair an expert group which would advise the Scottish Government on the scientific aspects of the pandemic. Professor Morris subsequently wrote to the First Minister on 8 April, provided: [AM/0001-INQ000147305], and met her and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport for 60 minutes on 9 April to discuss the activities of the Group. At that time a new interim CMO had been appointed following the resignation of Dr Catherine Calderwood on 5 April. It is understood that the First Minister agreed how the Group would operate and the membership of the Group, on the recommendation of the CMO, following that discussion. That agreement provided the basis for the terms of reference for the Group, which reported to the CMO. Over time, there were changes to most of the Scottish Government members, including the CMO, Deputy Chief Medical Officers, Chief Scientific Adviser, Chief Social Policy Adviser and Chief Scientist (Health). Further independent members were also added, though none were replaced. A chronological list of membership of the group is provided: [AM/0002-INQ000147306].
5. Members of the Group were chosen based on the scientific or technical expertise which they could contribute and were invited to join by means of a letter from the CMO, together with a copy of the terms of reference. The template for the invitation letter is provided: [AM/0003- INQ000147307]. Professor David Crossman, Dean of

Medicine at the University of St Andrews and the then Chief Scientist (Health) for the Scottish Government, served as vice-Chair of the Group. As vice-Chair he chaired meetings when the Chair was not available. Members were expected to inform the Chair of any conflicts of interest they identified. In the event, the nature of the advice the Group was asked for meant that no conflicts of interest actually arose in practice. A copy of the group's Register of Interests is provided: [AM/0004-INQ000147308].

6. The secretariat for the C19AG was provided by Scottish Government civil servants within the CMO's Directorate, with the oversight of a senior official in the Covid Public Health Directorate – initially Niamh O'Connor (replaced by Daniel Kleinberg in June 2020). The role of the secretariat was to coordinate agendas and papers for meeting, draft minutes, correspondence and other material for the group, including initial drafts of advice from the group for the Chair, based on comments and papers from members, and arranging for publication of Group papers on the Scottish Government website.
7. The C19AG had a number of sub-groups. These were: the Advisory Sub-Group on Public Health Threat Assessment; the Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues; the Advisory Sub-Group on Universities and Colleges; the COVID-19 Nosocomial Review Group; and the Scientific Advisory Group on Testing. All of these groups were chaired by members of the C19AG. The terms of reference and membership of these groups were provided in Tranche 6 of the Scottish Inquiry. The purpose of each group is outlined in its terms of reference.

Meetings of the C19AG

8. The C19AG initially met very frequently, meeting 17 times between 26 March 2020 and 28 May 2020. Thereafter, meetings were roughly weekly until the end of January 2021, when the frequency reduced to roughly fortnightly and then, from June 2021, monthly until the Group's final meeting on 3 February 2022. An exception to this pattern was the three meetings held in December 2021, in response to the emergence of the Omicron variant.
9. It was decided in February 2022 that it was unlikely there would be a continuing need for regular external advice on the science of COVID-19 from the Group. The last meeting of the Group was held on 3 February 2022. It was made clear that, if advice

- was required in future (on a new variant for example), then a meeting would be arranged but otherwise any matters arising would be dealt with in correspondence.
10. The minutes, agendas and papers for the meetings of the C19AG and its sub groups are available at: Scottish Inquiry – Tranche 6 – Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group. The meetings of the C19AG and its subgroups provided advice which fed into Scottish Government decisions on COVID-19. However, the role of the C19AG was purely advisory and the Group made no decisions in relation to the Scottish Government response to the pandemic. A full list of meetings of the C19AG, including attendance, is provided: [AM/0002-INQ000147306].
11. In addition to the regular meetings, the Group also participated in a number of briefing sessions, known as 'Deep Dives', involving the First Minister and other Scottish Ministers. This included a joint briefing session on The Future of COVID-19, with the Standing Committee on Pandemic Preparedness on 9 March 2022, provided: [AM/0005-INQ000147309]
12. Agendas for meetings were formulated through discussion between the Chair and the secretariat, driven by the priority issues at the time – especially where the Group had been asked for specific advice – and the need to stay informed of the latest developments in the science, data and modelling.

Provision of advice from the C19AG to the Scottish Government

13. The C19AG provided advice in writing to the Scottish Government in the form of papers setting out the consensus view of the Group. Some of this advice was in response to requests for advice, communicated to the Group via the secretariat (who had a dedicated email address), while other advice was provided on the Group's own initiative. If there was not a consensus on the issue or on aspects of an issue then the advice made clear where that was the case. Communication channels were clear, as the Group reported to CMO with excellent secretariat support, therefore ensuring effectiveness. It should be emphasised that the Group only provided advice to Government, and did not make decisions. The Group did not produce bulletins, briefings or other written guidance for the Scottish Government other than their formal written advice.

14. Among those routinely copied in to the Group's advice were the First Minister, Deputy First Minister, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (subsequently Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care), the Director General for Health and Social Care and Chief Executive of the NHS, the National Clinical Director, Covid Public Health Director and other senior officials involved in the response to COVID-19. Those officials, together with those listed below, and Ministerial offices may have shared the advice further, where necessary, but the secretariat to the C19AG did not track that information. These Ministers and officials would also routinely receive a brief informal update following meetings of the C19AG, noting the issues discussed in advance of the formal minutes of the meeting. Copies of the advice issued by the Group, and these update emails can be found in the return: Scottish Inquiry - Tranche 6 - Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group.
15. As members of the Group, the CMO, Deputy Chief Medical Officers, the Chief Scientist (Health), the Chief Scientific Adviser and senior officials from Public Health Scotland would normally have been involved in discussing and agreeing advice and they and/or their offices would receive copies of the advice once it was issued.
16. In addition to the regular meetings of the C19AG, a number of briefing meetings with Ministers were arranged, referred to as 'Deep Dives'. Professor Morris chaired these meetings and agreed the agendas for them with the secretariat, focused on issues of current interest to the Scottish Government where a better understanding of the science could be helpful to Ministers. These meetings provided the opportunity for the independent members of the Group to speak directly to Ministers and for Ministers to question experts about the science. The usual format was short presentations by Group members, based on the briefing papers provided for that meeting by the secretariat and members, followed by discussion and questions from Ministers. Any decisions made in relation to the issues discussed at these briefings were made by the Scottish Government and the Group's role, as with written advice, was only to advise, not to decide. Agendas and papers for these meetings can be found in the return: Scottish Inquiry - Tranche 6 - Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group. On occasion, these meetings were arranged through the Scottish Government Resilience Room ("SGoRR") and SGoRR officials received copies of meeting agendas and papers, in addition to those who regularly received C19AG meeting papers.

17. Other than the Deep Dives, and the advice produced by the Group, there was no formal or informal contact with Scottish Ministers. Scottish Government officials had access to the Group's advice and notes of meetings, as described above. Similarly, the Group did not meet separately with individuals or representatives from organisations outside the Scottish Government, regarding the response to COVID-19, other than on one occasion, when members of the C19AG participated in a briefing for business leaders. Members of the Group may have participated in such meetings, but not representing the Group per se, and the secretariat would not have tracked that information. A full chronology of the Deep Dives, including attendance, is provided: [AM/0002-INQ000147306]. Details of the meeting with business leaders are provided: [AM/0006-INQ000147321].

The C19AG and Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

18. The Chair first attended SAGE on 29 March 2020 (SAGE 20), following the first meeting of the C19AG on 26 March, and attended frequently thereafter until 31 January 2022 (SAGE 103). Other members of the C19AG also attended SAGE in their official capacities, including the CMO, Chief Scientific Adviser, Chief Scientist (Health) and Deputy Chief Medical Officers but the C19AG secretariat do not have a record of their attendance. The Group is not aware of any SAGE meetings to which the Chair was not invited.
19. Meetings of the C19AG typically followed soon after meetings of SAGE. SAGE papers and minutes were routinely shared with the C19AG at the same time as they were shared with the Scottish Government, and provided valuable information on and insight into developments in the pandemic. While the Group was not involved in agreeing SAGE agendas and was not asked by the Scottish Government to raise specific questions at SAGE, advice from SAGE was frequently discussed at meetings of the C19AG and that input often contributed to the development of advice from the C19AG to the Scottish Government. Papers from SAGE provided valuable information and advice which contributed to the Group's understanding of the pandemic and which the C19AG's discussions helped interpret for a Scottish context. Where the Chair or other members of the Group, or officials who provided input to the Group, had attended SAGE or its sub-groups and heard the discussions on issues covered in SAGE papers that often provided useful additional insight in interpreting SAGE papers and advice.

20. The 'Principle of Reciprocity' with SAGE reflected SAGE's agreement to share their papers and minutes with the C19AG. In return, the Group agreed to share C19AG meeting papers and minutes with SAGE. As a result, the SAGE secretariat was on the copy list for distribution of C19AG papers and minutes over the period the Group was active. SAGE participants, other than those who were also members of the Group, did not attend regular meetings of the C19AG. Sir Jeremy Farrar, who was a SAGE participant, did participate in a personal capacity in a Deep Dive facilitated by the Group on 16 December 2020.
21. SAGE advice was held in high regard by members of the C19AG. SAGE provided significant advice on the fundamental science of COVID-19 which was immensely helpful. And, while their information and analysis rarely focused solely on the Scottish dimension, the C19AG had separate sources of information on Scotland, and the insight provided by SAGE analysis was always helpful in assisting the Group's understanding of the position in Scotland.

The 'four nations' and international context

22. The C19AG did receive information on the development of the pandemic and associated activity across the four nations. However, the Group did not attend four nations meetings as a Group or have formal, systematic contact with counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland, though individual members (including the CMO) had such interaction in their individual roles. The similarities and differences to the situation and developments in Scotland were discussed, where that was relevant to issues being considered or where it helped inform the Group's understanding of the position in Scotland.
23. In general, the C19AG (as a Group) did not routinely liaise directly with international organisations. However, Andreas Poensgen, a member of the German COVID-19 advisory group, attended one meeting on 13 April 2020, the education subgroup held a meeting with Norwegian public health officials and David Nabarro of the World Health Organization participated in a Deep Dive on The Future of COVID-19 on 9 March 2022.
24. While the C19AG (as a Group) did not routinely liaise directly with international organisations, the Group received a substantial amount of information on developments internationally, both via the Scottish Government and via SAGE and

its sub-groups as well as through international scientific journals and other publications. Further information was available to the Group through individual members' international contacts, which could be extensive. This information on the international situation was valuable in increasing understanding of the science of COVID-19 and in informing understanding of actual and potential developments in the course of the pandemic in Scotland.

Data, information and modelling

25. The Scottish Government provided the C19AG with a substantial amount of data and information on the development of the pandemic in Scotland. The Group had no role in the dissemination of that information. The C19AG had no remit to commission its own modelling but advised Scottish Government to source this expertise from within the Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland or academic groups.
26. The main source of the information received by the Group was the Scottish Government COVID-19 Corporate Analytical Hub. The Scottish Government's Chief Social Researcher, Dr Audrey MacDougall, who was head of the Analysis Hub, was a member of the Group. Officials working within the Analysis Hub worked with SAGE and its sub-groups on modelling the pandemic in Scotland. The Scottish modelling was a valuable source of information which was regularly considered and discussed by the Group.
27. The C19AG was well informed by a wide range of information. As already mentioned, SAGE and its subgroups were key sources of advice on developments in the pandemic. The information received from the Scottish Government was also invaluable; while it primarily focused on the situation in Scotland, it included information and data on the position elsewhere in the UK and internationally. The Group also received a number of personal briefings at meetings from policy leads within the Scottish Government. Further information came to the Group via the secretariat, where relevant research papers or similar information had come to their attention. The members of the Group all had significant expertise and were informed by their own experience and sources of information.
28. The C19AG received a great deal of information and data over the course of the pandemic, but the secretariat did not maintain a log of everything received, nor

- permanently store it. Where specific data, information or evidence was particularly relevant to the advice provided by the Group it was referred to in the written advice.
29. The C19AG's remit was to advise in particular on the scientific and technical aspects of the pandemic and, broadly, on the health impacts. Where those health impacts extended to the potential impacts on the population as a whole, or specific groups within the population, then the Group was able to draw on the relevant expertise within the group, from the Scottish Government and from other sources. The Group did not advise on economic issues.
30. The C19AG regularly received information on the nature and spread of COVID-19 outwith the UK and the steps taken elsewhere to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Developments outside the UK were regularly discussed by the Group, particularly where it appeared they could impact on the situation in Scotland, alert the Group to potential developments in Scotland, or there was evidence available on successful approaches to tackling the pandemic elsewhere. Learning from experience elsewhere often informed the Group's views and advice on the response to the pandemic in Scotland.
31. The C19AG aimed to present a consensus view in its advice to the Scottish Government. Where it was not possible to reach a consensus on a particular aspect then the advice provided by the Group made that clear. The advice provided by the Group is available at: Scottish Inquiry - Tranche 6 - Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group.

Advice on Nonpharmaceutical Interventions ("NPIs") and other issues

32. The C19AG provided advice on a number of NPI related issues, including advice on Lockdown, Schools, Care Homes, Face Coverings and Physical Distancing. The process followed by the C19AG for providing formal advice on NPIs was no different from any other advice provided by the Group. As already explained, the advice was provided in writing, identifying any points where there was not a consensus view, and minutes published. In every instance, the Group provided advice rather than made decisions. Decisions on NPIs were made by the Scottish Government, as was the case for other issues. All of the advice provided by the Group can be found in the return: Scottish Inquiry - Tranche 6 - Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group.

33. On all occasions the advice provided by the C19AG reflected the best understanding of the position at the time the advice was given.
34. For NPIs as for other areas where it was asked to provide advice, the C19AG considered the scientific and technical concepts and processes that were key to understanding the evolving COVID-19 situation and potential impacts in Scotland. This included some consideration of the potential impact of proposed measures as part of the wider consideration of scientific evidence. The C19AG was not involved in impact assessments for policies and/or decisions of the Scottish Government.
35. The most significant impact of the land border with England is that it sets the limit of devolved powers. In general, it was not an issue for significant discussion, other than in relation to advice on travel, where the land border was considered among other factors to inform the Group's advice. Advice on travel and borders was provided to Scottish Ministers on 28 January 2021, [AM/0007-INQ000147323].
36. As previously indicated, all decisions on NPIs were made by the Scottish Government. The role of the C19AG was to advise. The reasons for that advice are set out in the advice provided, and were always informed by the position in Scotland. The notion of herd immunity was one of many issues discussed by the C19AG. The Group did not provide formal advice on this issue and did not make decisions about the Scottish Government's strategic response to COVID-19.
37. The C19AG provided advice on the scientific and technical aspects of the pandemic and not on funding. The Chief Economic Advisor for Scotland had no role in formulating the advice provided by the C19AG.
38. The C19AG's remit was to advise the Scottish Government. It had no role in relation to the UK Government. The Group did not formally track decisions made by the UK or Scottish Governments on NPIs or decisions made in relation to Northern Ireland or Wales or in relation to advice given by SAGE. Where the C19AG was made aware that a decision had been made by the UK Government which was relevant to advice being provided by the C19AG, that would have been reflected in advice given by the Group to the extent that it was relevant to the situation in Scotland.

Parliamentary evidence

39. Professor Morris gave evidence to the Westminster Scottish Affairs Committee on 21 May 2020 as Chair of the C19AG, provided: [AM/0008-INQ000147324]. Professor Morris also gave evidence on COVID-19 to other Parliamentary committees, though not in his capacity as Chair of the C19AG (the Westminster Science and Technology Committee on 23 March 2022, provided: [AM/0009-INQ000147325] and the Science and Technology Committee and the Scottish Parliament's Covid Recovery Committee on 29 September 2022, provided: [AM/0010-INQ000147326]). The C19AG secretariat did not track Parliamentary appearances by members of the Group.

Public Health Communications

40. The C19AG did not play a direct role in public health communications in Scotland during the pandemic. Nor did the Group prepare or approve any public health communications in relation to steps being taken in Scotland to control the spread of the virus, or explaining NPIs or campaigns to limit the transmissibility of COVID-19 in Scotland. The Group did provide advice on risk and risk communication, provided: [AM/0011-INQ000147327] and other advice given by the C19AG to the Scottish Government may have included advice on effective communication with the public in broad terms, where that was relevant, although any decision made on such advice, including decisions on communication, was made by the Scottish Government.

41. The Scottish Government made clear that membership of the Group was not intended to interfere with the freedom of members to hold and express their own views. The Government publicly stated that they valued that independence of views. Members were however asked to make clear, when making statements to the media, where any statements reflected their personal views rather than the views of the C19AG. This was communicated to the C19AG as part of the meeting papers for 4 May 2020, provided: [AM/0012-INQ000147328]. The C19AG secretariat did not track statements given by members of the Group to the media.

42. The role of the C19AG was to provide advice to the Scottish Government on the scientific and technical aspects of the pandemic. The Group did not make any statements to or provide guidance or advice to the public. However, minutes of meetings and other papers were published on the Scottish Government website and

therefore available to members of the public. The Group was not involved in any internal or external reviews, lessons learned exercises or other reports. The C19AG had no involvement with the coronavirus legislation proposed and enacted by the Scottish Government.

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: 23 June 2023