

Witness Name: Gillian Russell

Statement No.: 2

Exhibits: GR2

Dated: 14 August 2023

## UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF GILLIAN RUSSELL

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**In relation to the issues raised by the supplementary Rule 9 request dated 31 July 2023 in connection with Module 1, I, Gillian Russell, will say as follows: -**

1. I am Gillian Russell of Scottish Government, St Andrews House, Edinburgh. I have been asked to give this statement to provide supplementary evidence following the Module 1 oral hearing.
2. I have prepared this statement myself, with the support of factual information supplied by Scottish Government Covid Inquiries Response Directorate, referenced in this statement, and have received appropriate assistance to enable the statement to be completed.
3. As outlined in my first Module 1 witness statement, I was the Director of Safer Communities from June 2015 (on an interim basis) and from January 2016 (on a permanent basis) to March 2020. On 17 March 2020 I moved to the role of Director of Health Workforce with responsibility at national level for the health workforce and aspects of the social care workforce. I remain in that role.

#### Planning, Delivery and Resilience Directorate

4. Prior to April 2021 the Resilience Division sat within the Directorate for Safer Communities in the Directorate-General for Education and Justice. It was then placed under the Directorate for Performance, Delivery and Resilience in the Directorate-

General for Strategy and External Affairs. My successor as Director for Safer Communities was Joe Griffin (March 2020 to April 2021). As Director for Performance, Delivery and Resilience, Shirley Rogers had responsibility for resilience from April 2021 and over the time that the Module 1 oral evidence took place. She has since been succeeded by Lisa McGuinness.

5. The Resilience Division helps internal and external partners and communities assess risk, and prepare, respond and recover from emergencies, such as severe weather, major incidents and public health outbreaks. To do this, they provide practical support to frontline public agencies and voluntary sector organisations that deliver emergency planning and response in Scotland.
6. In 2021 opportunities were considered to further integrate the Scottish Government's readiness and response functions, building on the experience of the previous year, not just on Covid-19 and EU Exit but across the range of concurrent risks and issues on which the Organisational Readiness Directorate, the Scottish Government Resilience Room (SGoRR) and the Resilience Division had worked with and supported the Deputy First Minister, other Ministers and teams across the Scottish Government. It was agreed that the most effective way to achieve that aim was to bring those functions under the same Directorate to improve the support provided to Ministers and bring greater coherence to the organisation's ability to plan for, respond to and recovery from complex, significant and concurrent events.
7. An added benefit was to reduce the span of responsibilities of the Director of Safer Communities. By reducing the ever present risk of having to respond to no-notice crises through Resilience, the change of dynamic aimed to allow for more work on strategic leadership to deliver outcomes.
8. To add further clarification, the Directorate-General for Health and Social Care also has a division with responsibility for resilience. The Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response (EPRR) Division currently sits within the Directorate for the Chief Operating Officer for NHS Scotland. The Directorate of the Chief Operating Officer came into being in 2022 and was previously called the Performance and Delivery Directorate. The EPRR Division was previously named the Health Resilience

Unit. One of the policy roles of EPRR is to support National Health Service (NHS) health boards in Scotland covering resilience areas. EPRR was involved in the planning and being prepared for a flu pandemic and worked with the UK Government and other devolved administrations to do so.

### National Risk Assessment

9. As a devolved administration Scottish Government's input to the preparation and production of the National Risk Assessment (NRA) was predominantly by participation in official Risk Assessment Steering Group (RASG) and Risk Assessment Steering Board (RASB) meetings (or equivalent), wherein Scottish Government officials would feedback on updates from the UK Government on the progress and development of the NRA/National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA). Pertinent information from these meetings was shared with appropriate Scottish Government policy areas for comment and fed back to the UK Government to enable Scottish input to the NRA/NSRA.
10. In addition to this, Scottish Government officials attended meetings of the Natural Hazards Partnership (NHP), which provides a separate challenge function to UK Government NRA/NSRA work. The NHP (established in 2011) is a consortium of Government departments and agencies and public sector research establishments and bodies who provide information, research and analysis on natural hazards for the development of more effective policies, communications and services for the UK's civil contingencies, governments and responder community.
11. Attendance at the NHP focussed more on risks from natural hazards, but would also include discussion and review of natural hazard risks in the NRA/NSRA, providing another channel for feedback.
12. As time has progressed the engagement between Scottish Government and UK Government risk assessment work has strengthened. The Scottish Government presently maintains a good working relationship with Cabinet Office (in particular the Cabinet Office National Risk Team) and attend regular informal meetings with risk officials from the UK Government and the other devolved administrations to share information on our respective national risk assessment work.

13. Scottish Government officials also participated in the expert challenge groups set up for scrutiny of the 2022 NSRA, predominantly as observers but also actively participating in the expert challenge group for vulnerable people.

#### Scottish Risk Assessment

14. It is the role and responsibility of the relevant Scottish Government policy team or National Agency to lead on the development and assessment of the Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS) which falls within their remit, as they have the expertise and links to subject-matter experts.

15. This may involve advice and independent challenge from subject area specialists from National Agencies, academia, industry, and Scottish Government analysts, together with bodies such as the Natural Hazards Partnership and the National Centre for Resilience.

16. The above is outlined in pages 4-5 of the SRA 2018 methodology document previously provided to the Inquiry [GR2001 - INQ000180186].

17. The SRA 2018 'Influenza type disease (pandemic)' risk assessment was authored by the Health Resilience Unit in the Performance and Delivery Directorate (as of 2018) in line with the SRA methodology.

18. The SRA pandemic flu risk draws heavily on the equivalent 2016 UK NRA risk, given the direct read across in almost all areas. The UK risk is long standing and is informed by input from sources such as the UKG expert group Scientific Pandemic Influenza – Modelling Group, in relation to the planning assumptions for example.

#### Scottish Flu Pandemic Preparedness Board

19. The Cross Government Pandemic Flu Readiness Board (PFRB) was commissioned by the UK National Security Council in 2017 to work collaboratively with DAs and other

government departments to “ensure the UK was prepared to manage the health effects of severe pandemic influenza...”.

20. Subsequently, the Scottish Government established the Pandemic Flu Preparedness Board (PFPB) in 2017 which was chaired jointly by Directors from both the Health and Social Care and Justice Directorates (the latter of whom had responsibility for cross-directorate resilience matters). This focused on pandemic preparedness, both in terms of work with key stakeholders, such as the NHS and internal SG preparedness and business continuity, as well as with other UK nations.

21. The Board met eight times, with the last meeting in June 2019.

22. The Board took forward six key workstreams focused on key areas identified from Exercises Cygnus and Silver Swan and were aligned to the cross-government work led by the Department for Health and Social Care and Cabinet Office:

- o Health and Social Care (including Moral and Ethical)
- o Legislative
- o Excess Deaths
- o Sector Resilience
- o Communications
- o SG Preparedness

23. As at 21 January 2020, of the six PFPB workstreams, three had work outstanding – Legislation, Health & Social Care, and Scottish Government Preparedness.

24. Development of UK and SG preparedness measures took place in 2018 in line with the National Security Council Commission.

25. Several other key areas of work were halted in November 2018 due to EU Exit preparations.

26. Throughout 2018-19 the Board undertook an in-depth review of key areas of Scottish and UK legislation as part of the PFRB legislative workstream. The draft UK Pandemic Flu Bill was nearing completion when Covid-19 struck. Work already undertaken on a

draft UK Pandemic Flu Bill was beneficial in quickly developing into the Coronavirus Act 2020, which delivered powers critical to Scottish Government's response and management of Covid-19.

27. The Board also led on updating the updating and issued the "Pandemic Flu Guidance for Health & Social Care in Scotland" for consultation to key partners in 2019. However, as stated previously, the final version was delayed due to the Covid pandemic. The format of future guidance is under review.

28. Between 2021-23 future planning and preparedness work was under review. Joint 4 Nations work is ongoing to review planning scenarios, countermeasures and capabilities required to respond to future pandemics.

#### Corrections to be entered into the evidential record

29. In line with advice from the Inquiry, I would like to offer a correction to be entered into the evidential record following Module 1 oral evidence. I refer to pages 8-9 of the Inquiry transcript from 28 June 2023 in which the location of the Resilience Division is discussed. As outlined previously in this statement, this Division was placed under the Directorate for Performance, Delivery and Resilience in the Directorate-General for Strategy and External Affairs in April 2021. The change was incorrectly identified as having taken place in 2020 during oral evidence.

**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:** \_\_\_\_14 August 2023\_\_\_\_\_