UK COVID-19 INQUIRY
MODULE 2/2A

STATEMENT BY DIRECTOR GENERAL COMMUNITIES

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 request, dated 2 February 2023, served on the Scottish Government, in connection with Module 2/2A, the Director General for Communities will say as follows: -

Covid-19 Recovery Plans

1. The Covid Recovery Strategy [LM/001- INQ000131075] was published in October 2021 and sets out the Scottish Government's ambitious vision for recovery and a fairer future. The strategy details three priority outcomes: to enhance the wellbeing of children and young people; to increase financial security for low income households; and to create good, green jobs and fair work. These outcomes are supported by an overarching ambition to reform public services, building on the urgency, flexibility and creativity seen during the pandemic. This ambition to reform public services is in line with the approach set out in the Christie Commission [LM/002-INQ000131076].

2. It is important to note that the Covid Recovery Strategy is separate to sectoral-specific recovery plans which are instead focused on the resumption of public services following significant disruption during the pandemic.

3. The Covid Recovery Strategy was informed by messages shared through the Social Renewal Advisory Board and a series of public engagement events. In the summer

of 2021, the Deputy First Minister met with more than 60 stakeholders from business, the third sector, local government and academia.

Responsibilities for development of the plans

4. The Covid Recovery Strategy was developed by a small team of officials led by Mary McAllan (Director for Covid Recovery and Public Service Reform) with strategic leadership provided by Paul Johnston (then DG Communities). Clare Hicks was the Deputy Director during the initial development of the Covid Recovery Strategy; Simon Mair is now the interim Deputy Director.

5. In August 2021, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) leaders endorsed a joint approach to Covid Recovery which is produced [LM/003-INQ000131077].

6. The Deputy First Minister and COSLA President currently co-chair the Covid Recovery Strategy Programme Board which meets quarterly to oversee the delivery of the Covid Recovery Strategy and promotes the shared outcomes and vision across the public sector in Scotland. The Covid Recovery Strategy Board is responsible for ensuring progress towards the shared outcomes of the Covid Recovery Strategy and the overarching ambition of reforming public services. The Board provides overall strategic direction, leadership and ambition for this programme. Delivery of individual policies included in the Covid Recovery Strategy remains the responsibility of individual policy and delivery teams within the Scottish Government and wider public sector.

7. The Scottish Government is working in close partnership with local government, Public Health Scotland and the Improvement Service to promote the shared Covid Recovery outcomes and consider the experiences of different people and places across Scotland. Together, we are using a range of data sources, including National Performance Framework indicators, to better understand and evaluate progress towards our shared outcomes.

Economic Recovery

8. In April 2020 the Scottish Government established an independent expert group to advise it on economic recovery priorities. The group was asked to provide advice on

actions that would make a difference to businesses across sectors and to regions throughout Scotland to enable a swift economic recovery that would also ensure the Scottish economy will emerge stronger and more resilient.

9. The Advisory Group on Economic Recovery, chaired by Benny Higgins, published its report, *Towards a Robust, Resilient Wellbeing Economy for Scotland* [LM/004-INQ000131080] on 22 June 2020.

10. In response to the Advisory Group's report, on 5 August 2020, the Scottish Government published its *Economic Recovery Implementation Plan* [LM/005-INQ000 131081].

11. The Economic Recovery Implementation Plan was developed in a cross-Directorate process, coordinated by the Covid-19 Economy Hub. This Hub has since been disbanded. Publication of the Plan was approved by the then Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture, Fiona Hyslop MSP.

12. Implementation of the Plan's actions was taken forward by policy areas across the Finance and Economy portfolio, with a monitoring and oversight function being provided by the Economic Policy and Capability Division (EPCD).

13. The monitoring of the Economic Recovery Implementation Plan by EPCD has now ended as all actions were taken forward, or included in The National Strategy for Economic Transformation [LM/006-INQ000131082] which was published in March 2022.

14. In addition, a range of sector-specific recovery plans have been produced, including in relation to the following sectors of Scotland's economy. These related to Construction, Manufacturing, Tourism and Hospitality, Food and Drink, and the Retail Industry.

Construction – *Manufacturing and Industries Division, Directorate for Economic Development*

15. The *Scottish Construction Industry Recovery Plan* [LM/007-INQ000131083] was published on 6 October 2020 by the Construction Leadership Forum (CLF), which is

a collaboration between industry and the Scottish Government chaired by the Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise.

Manufacturing – *Manufacturing and Industries Division, Directorate for Economic Development*

16. An updated and final version of *Making Scotland's Future: A Recovery Plan for Manufacturing* [LM/008-INQ000131084] was published on 3 June 2021. The Plan details a set of actions, established by industry, public sector, trade union and academia.

Tourism and Hospitality – *Tourism Policy Division, Directorate for Economic Development*

17. The recovery of the Tourism and Hospitality sector was taken forward through the recommendations of the Scottish Tourism Recovery Taskforce [LM/009-INQ000131085] which were published on 23 October 2020. The Taskforce was established by Scottish Ministers and comprised members from the tourism sector, transport and aviation, the Chambers of Commerce, Banking, the unions and academia, to provide independent recommendations for Scottish Ministers and the UK Government on the essential actions to support tourism and hospitality recovery in Scotland.

18. In August 2021, the Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group (STERG) submitted a set of 13 recovery proposals to the Scottish Government, covering the next two years (2022-2023 and 2023-2024). However, with no further consequentials from the UK Government available, the Scottish Government was unable to allocate any further funding in the 2022-2023 Budget to support the STERG proposals for phase 2 of the Tourism Recovery Programme.

19. The Scottish Government continues to work together with its partners on support for the Tourism sector through the new Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group (ILG), which will help drive recovery and sustainable growth across both sectors in the long term. The new ILG will oversee the delivery of *Scotland Outlook 2030* [LM/010-INQ000131086] published in March 2020.

Food and Drink – *Food and Drink Division, Directorate for Agriculture and Rural Economy*

20. The Food and Drink recovery plan, *Recovering from Coronavirus and fuelling Brexit preparation* [LM/011- INQ000131087], was published on 21 November 2020. The plan was a joint industry and Scottish Government programme for Scotland's farming, fishing, food and drink sector.

Retail Strategy – *Local Economic Delivery Policy, Directorate for Economic Development*

21. The Scottish Government Retail Strategy, *Getting the Right Change* [LM/012- INQ000131088] was published on 24 March 2022. The Strategy sets out how the Scottish Government will work with business and unions to deliver a strong, prosperous and vibrant retail sector.

22. The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser led on assessing the economic impact and economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

23. The sectors affected by Covid-19 were key considerations in the assessment of impact and recovery from the pandemic on Scotland's economy, as was the relative importance of the sectors to Scotland's economy pre-Covid-19. Important considerations also included the consequences for businesses in terms of lower turnover and cashflow, jobs furloughed, as well as the level of capacity at which they could operate. The length of time that economic activity was impacted and the implications on unemployment and redundancies was considered in conjunction with the impacts on health and social harms.

Education Recovery

24. The Scottish Government published the Education Recovery Strategy [LM/013- INQ000131089] on 5 October 2021. The strategy outlines the key actions and next steps to help Scotland's education system continue to recover from Covid-19.

25. The Covid Education Recovery Group (CERG) was the stakeholder group involved in developing the strategy, and involved key stakeholders from across the sector, including young people.

26. The CERG considered and provided feedback on working drafts of the strategy on an on-going basis from July 2021 onwards. Ultimate responsibility for developing and drafting the Strategy lay with officials from the Learning Directorate in Scottish Government. Once CERG had agreed on a near final draft, this was shared with the Cabinet Secretary for Education for final clearance ahead of publication.

27. A number of teams across the Directorate for Learning, Directorate for Education Reform and Directorate for Lifelong Learning & Skills are responsible for implementing the actions set out in the Strategy. Education Scotland also has responsibility for actions within the strategy.

28. As indicated in the Strategy, it is the Scottish Government's intention to maintain transparency and openness regarding progress and to identify at the earliest stage where any additional work or change of course is required. HM Inspectors of Education will undertake national thematic reviews to support improvement and identify what is working well and highly effective practice. They will also highlight areas where further improvement is required.

29. Essential to such transparency will be the monitoring and reporting of outcomes. The Scottish Government has well-established monitoring and evaluation programmes designed to assess existing policies to improve attainment and wellbeing; intrinsically linked to the aims set out in the strategy. The following sources of data and evidence will be used in monitoring:

- Attendance, Absence and Exclusion statistics
- Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels data
- Summary Statistics for School in Scotland
- School Leaver Attainment and Initial Destinations statistics
- Follow up leaver destination statistics
- Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children
- Health and Wellbeing Census results
- Regular updates to the National Improvement Framework Evidence Report.

Justice Recovery

30. The "Recover, Renew, Transform" Programme was a collaboration developed by justice organisations, which also had responsibility for delivery.

31. Plans for the renewal and transformation elements of the programme were led by the organisations with the lead operational role in each, as follows:

- High Court Trials – led by Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS)
- Virtual Summary Trials – judicially led, sponsored by SCTS
- Summary Procedures – led by Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS); later became judicially led
- Virtual Custody Courts – led by Police Scotland
- Community Justice and Prisons – led by Community Justice Scotland and Scottish Prison Service.

32. Each project has its own governance structure. The Scottish Government was a member of the Project Boards for three of the workstreams: High Court Trials, Summary Procedures and Community Justice. In relation to the programme, the Scottish Government played a coordinating role, chairing and facilitating meetings of the Senior Responsible Officers (SROs).

33. Delivery plans were developed within each workstream and shared with the SRO group. The SROs for each workstream were responsible for implementing the delivery plan. Each organisation which received recovery funding was responsible for implementing its recovery plan.

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: 19/06/2023