

Witness Name: Lynne Nicol

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: N/A

Dated: 18 October 2023

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF LYNNE NICOL

In relation to the issues raised by the Rule 9 request dated 15 August 2023 in connection with Module 2A, I, Lynne Nicol. will say as follows: -

1. I am Lynne Nicol of Scottish Government, St Andrews House, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG. Since October 2021, I have held the post of Deputy Director for Healthcare Planning and Quality at the Scottish Government, where I am permanently employed. Previous to this I was the interim Deputy Director for Healthcare Quality and Planning from October 2020. I have been employed by the Scottish Government since 1998.
2. I have prepared this statement myself by reference to records and material provided to me by the Scottish Government. I have also received assistance from the Scottish Government Covid Inquiry Information Governance Division to enable the statement to be completed.
3. Unless stated otherwise, the facts stated in this witness statement are within my own knowledge and are true. Where they are not within my own knowledge, they are derived from sources to which I refer and are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Overall responsibility

4. I have been employed by the Scottish Government since 1998, undertaking a number of policy posts in different areas of the Scottish Government. I gained permanent promotion to Deputy Director level in September 2021 in Healthcare Quality and Planning but acted on temporary promotion in that role from October 2020 to October 2021.
5. At January 2020 I was a C2 Unit Head for the Safety, Openness and Learning within Healthcare Quality and Planning which held policy responsibility for a number of policies including Duty of Candour legislation, Adverse Event Reporting, Scottish Patient Safety Programme, NHS Scotland Complaints Process.
6. I became aware of Covid-19 initially through media reporting; and then through updates from my Director, the National Clinical Director, as part of regular business updates.
7. In my opinion, the Scottish Government recognised the seriousness of the threat of Covid-19 and the wide-ranging implication for health and community and very quickly and set upon a range of decisions and actions.
8. As a C2 Unit Head, I was not engaged in the conversations that took place at that time, but was updated through my Director, the National Clinical Director to cover the situation and in particular if there were specific actions for my area of responsibility although this was for information only at this point.
9. I was not aware of any discussions around either the Nike Conference, or the Scotland-v-France Six Nations rugby game.
10. Within the early stages of response to the Pandemic, Health Planning and Quality Division, in which I worked, was identified to support some Covid workstreams due to its responsibilities for policies for those with clinical conditions and took on the standing-up of the 'Shielding' list in Scotland for those most clinically vulnerable to Covid-19. I was not involved in this work but did gain a temporary promotion to C3 in order to support my Deputy Director whilst she worked with colleagues on Shielding. I took on more oversight for some of the 'business as usual' policy work of the Division. This included policy responsibility for guidance around hospital

visiting, and we sought to work with NHS Boards in Scotland to implement consistent guidance on visiting over this period.

11. During this period, around November 2020, the division took on responsibility for End of Life and Palliative Care, this policy had previously sat in the Directorate responsible for Social Care.

Initial strategy and decisions making

12. I have been asked about my understanding of the Scottish Government's initial strategy in relation to Covid-19 during January to March 2020 but I am unable to comment because I was not involved in any of this work during that period. I did not provide any advice to the First Minister, other Scottish Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers, Scottish Government committees or its advisers during this period.

Role in relation to NPIs

13. I was not involved in the development of advice around NPIs.

Divergence

14. I was not involved with the development or instruction of regulations relating to Covid-19. Nor do I feel I have relevant knowledge therefore to comment on any divergence between UK and Scottish Government approaches.

Role in relation to medical and scientific expertise, data and modelling

15. I was not involved in the provision of medical and scientific expertise for data and modelling for Covid-19. Nor do I feel I have relevant knowledge therefore to comment on the Scottish Government's access to such information.

Role in Covid-19 public health communications

16. I had no role in the providing advice or briefings to the First Minister, other Scottish Cabinet Secretaries or any Scottish Government committees, groups or forums on the public health and coronavirus legislation and regulations.

Key Challenges and lessons learned

17. I have not provided any oral or written evidence to the Scottish Parliament or its committees or committees of the UK Parliament or any internal or external reviews.

Informal communications and Documents

18. Throughout the response to the pandemic, various WhatsApp groups were set up to support communication across teams in accordance with Scottish Government guidance on use of social media. These groups focused on setting up meetings, letting people know when calls were scheduled and sharing of logistical information. Government business was not conducted over WhatsApp or any other messaging service.
19. These groups changed numerous times over the course of this period, depending on who was in engaged at that that point.
20. I have not archived or kept these messages as they were not government business. Nor have I kept diaries or hand-written notes.
21. I can confirm that all Government business was saved as appropriate on our electronic filing system.

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: 18 October 2023