

Witness Name: Angus Robertson

Statement Number: 1

Exhibits: ASCR

Dated: 31/10/23

## UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

---

### WITNESS STATEMENT OF RT. HON. ANGUS ROBERTSON M.S.P.

---

I am Angus Robertson MSP, the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, based at St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG.

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.

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.

## **A. Background, qualifications and role during the Covid-19 pandemic**

1. Prior to January 2020 I served as the Member of the UK Parliament for Moray between 2001 and 2017. Before that I worked as a journalist. I have an MA (Hons) degree in Politics and International Relations. I held no role in the Scottish or UK governments prior to January 2020.
2. Following my election to the Scottish Parliament as MSP for Edinburgh Central on 6th May 2021 I was appointed as Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture. I took part in Scottish Government cabinet meetings from 21 May 2021 until 18 April 2022.
3. Scottish Government cabinet meetings occur on a weekly basis.
4. I did not play a direct role in the relationships and communications including joint decision-making between the Scottish Government with a) the UK Government or b) the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland and Wales during the course of the pandemic
5. I did not play a direct role in the relationships and communications including joint decision-making between the Scottish Government and local authorities within Scotland during the course of the pandemic.

## **B. Initial Understanding and response to Covid-19 (January 2020 to March 2020)**

6. I was not a member of the Scottish Parliament or the Scottish Government between January 2020 to March 2020.
7. Ditto
8. Ditto
9. Ditto

10. Ditto

11. Ditto

**C. Role in relation to non-pharmaceutical interventions (“NPIs”)**

12. I was not an MSP or member of the Scottish Government until May 2021.

13. A) Ditto B) Ditto C) Ditto

14. As a member of the Scottish Government Cabinet from May 2021-March 2022 and attendee at SGoRR meetings, non-pharmaceutical interventions were regularly the subject of reporting and discussion, involving cabinet members, officials and medical advisors.

15. Ditto

16. Ditto. Significant consideration in decision making was given to the impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions.

17. A. Information and advice sought and received was adequate given constraints understanding the pandemic B. My experience of information sharing and communication was that it was a high priority for the Scottish Government C. There were very frequent Scottish Government coordination meetings, including my portfolio areas relating to Culture sector D. Strategy and planning was a significant consideration, including my portfolio areas relating to Culture sector.

**D. Divergence**

18. Divergence between the Scottish and UK Governments began before I was elected as an MSP and became part of the Scottish Government in May 2021.

19. Yes, although there were also good examples of coordination and joint action between different governments in the UK.

20. I believe A. the Scottish Government was correct in its preventative approach to the pandemic, and B) would have better at various stages if the UKG matched that approach.

**E. Role in relation to medical and scientific expertise, data and modelling**

21. N/A

22. N/A

23. N/A

**F. Role in Covid-19 public health communications**

24. I was not directly involved in this area.

25. Daily public briefings by the First Minister were extremely effective.

26. The issue was taken extremely seriously, leading to an apology by the First Minister and the resignation of Chief Medical Officer Dr Catherine Calderwood.

**G. Role in public health and coronavirus legislation and regulations**

27. N/A

28. I believe the Scottish Government public messaging, including the daily briefings by the First Minister, helped secure a very high degree of public understanding, trust and consent around legislation and regulation. As a result there was very little necessity for enforcement action.

**H. Key challenges and lessons learned**

29. N/A

30. A. The Scottish Government not having fully devolved decision-making powers, especially in financial areas, and was dependent on UKG making spending decisions, which would then provide Barnett Consequentials B. Maintaining and updating scenario planning relating to pandemics.

#### **I. Informal communications and Documents**

31. I did not use informal WhatsApp (and other messaging platforms), text or messages to discuss information or advice relating to Covid-19, record views and/or make decisions about the Scottish Government's response to Covid-19.

32. Not aware of any WhatsApp groups (or other forms of group chats).

33. I did not send or receive any relevant informal messaging.

+++++

#### **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: 31/10/23