

Witness Name: Lesley Fraser

Statement No. 6

Exhibits: LF6

Dated: 06 March 2024

**UK COVID-19 INQUIRY
MODULE 2A**

WITNESS STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL CORPORATE

This statement is one of a suite provided for Module 2A of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry and these should be considered collectively.

Introduction

1. This statement sets out the steps taken by the Scottish Government (SG) to interrogate the SG laptop used by the late Mr Andrew Slorance, pursuant to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry (UKCI) request of 27th Dec 2023.
2. This statement has been prepared for me by colleagues within the Scottish Government's Covid Inquiries Response Directorate (CIRD), Scottish Government information technology (iTECS) and Scottish Government cyber security colleagues who undertook the processes described herein.
3. This statement details the steps taken by the SG to secure, access and interrogate the laptop. I hope that it assures the Inquiry that we have made best endeavours to meet the Inquiry's request.

4. I trust that the statement also provides assurance to the Inquiry that we have already provided them with Mr Slorance's emails and documents that would have been identified by the searches already undertaken by the SG and, where relevant, disclosed to the UKCI.

Mr Slorance's laptop

5. It first came to the attention of the SG that Mrs Slorance was still in possession of her late husband's laptop on Thursday 9 November 2023, through media coverage of an interview with Mrs Slorance covered by Paul Hutcheon in the Daily Record.

6. Following that coverage, the UKCI wrote to SG on Monday November 13, 2023, at 18:44 to inform the SG that the legal representative of Mrs Slorance had written to the UKCI inviting the Inquiry to take possession of her late husband's Scottish Government issued laptop. That correspondence noted that the UKCI did not feel it appropriate to take possession of the laptop and asked if the SG might do that on behalf of the UKCI. That course of action was agreed between the SG and UKCI over the course of the week commencing 13 November 2023.

7. SG confirmed to the UKCI on Wednesday 22 November that we had agreed with Thompsons, the legal representatives of Mrs Slorance, to take possession of the laptop. The laptop was received at the Scottish Government Office Saughton House, from a secure courier on 28/11/23 by mail room staff. The cyber security unit (CSU) collected the laptop from the mailroom on the 29/11/23 and secured it in evidence bag P09461994 and placed in the CSU safe in Saughton House.

8. On Monday December 4, 2023, the SG's Chief Information Security officer reported that it had been possible to charge up and power on the laptop but that it was not possible to get past the BitLocker encryption.

9. Two independent external forensic experts confirmed they were unable to access any information without the Bitlocker. Finally on 20th December, cyber colleagues managed to identify one final avenue of accessing the data which they did so.

They recovered:

- 43 files in the downloads folder
- 17 image files (Screenshots and others) and 6 photos of Mr Slorance.
- 6 files in Objects (eRDM)
- 242 links to files accessed in eRDM (eRDM is the SG's electronic records management system which is the official corporate record)
- Lots of Web links in Mr Slorance's Favourites folder

10. These files were downloaded to a portable storage device (USB stick) that was driven from our offices at Saughton House by a member of SG staff to the SG offices at St Andrews House on Wednesday December 20, 2023.

11. The USB Drive was secured in Evidence Bag M31699969, and the bag was not compromised. At St Andrews House it was handed to the Interim Director of CIRD who stored it securely in a combination locked safe in the presence of the staff member who delivered it.

12. We updated the UKCI on developments on December 21, 2023, requesting that the UKCI instruct SG with regards to what information they wished us to interrogate the files for. That instruction was received on December 27, 2023.

13. On December 28, 2023, the files on the USB were reviewed by the Deputy Director for Covid Inquiries Policy. That review confirmed that that there was no new material discovered of relevance to either of the Covid Inquiries.

14. Further advice was again sought from external experts who had taken a forensic image of the laptop. Cyber Security had shared the BitLocker recovery key with them, and this allowed for a successful image to be taken of the laptop. This image was shared with Cyber Security Colleagues on the 22nd of Dec. They were able to recover a large amount of data; documents, emails, browsing history etc. Not all the files were recoverable, with in some cases only email headers (To/From/Subject/Date) and names of documents being able to be recovered. There was nothing stored locally on the device, recovered files were only available as these had been opened on the device.

15. The experts captured what they had recovered as an image which was transferred to

removable media to allow us to interrogate further.

16. Review of the further material that was forensically recovered, using the term Covid, identified 753 docs from a total of 7575. The material included SGORR, COBR and MIG papers, some pre-pandemic material, and daily data, which has already been provided to the Inquiry. There were also some internal documents including staff performance appraisals and contact details.

17. The email account only recovered five attachments, two of which related to pre-pandemic (ministerial submissions) that have already been provided to the inquiry (module 1). The other three were Brexit preparedness related. There were 767 emails that were partially recovered i.e. we can see who the email was sent to but beyond that very little. A filter by covid identified five of these as being emails sent to various covid teams. We are not able to see the content of any of these emails.

18. There were over 59k partial images with most containing little more than a few pixels. We've looked at those which actual images in them, they include some saltire pictures of individuals and individuals we cannot identify. It is not possible to identify where the images came from, it is likely that most have come from the web and sources such as saltire. Saltire is the SG's internal website for staff communications.

19. In conclusion then, to the best of our knowledge and endeavours, we have not identified anything from our interrogations of Mr Slorance's laptop that was not already held on the corporate record and that where relevant had not already been supplied to the UKCI.

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: 6 March 2024