

FINAL DRAFT WITNESS STATEMENT OF BERNIE ROONEY @ 26 March 2024

September 2019 and December 2019 this was the priority. The possibility of the UK leaving the EU without a deal, was being prepared for, at national level, and was being treated as a potential emergency. The situation was being reported daily in the media.

77. From September 2019 to March 2020, I was the only The Executive Office (TEO) Senior Civil Servant working on civil contingency matters located in Castle Buildings which was where the 'on site' development of the NI Hub project was taking place. Civil Contingencies Policy Branch staff had direct access to me to ask questions and raise their concerns. Their line manager Neill Jackson, Deputy Director of Executive and Central Services Division and his senior manager Chris Stewart were both located in Stormont Castle. I was increasingly drawn into meetings, including 'daily stand-ups,' planning and execution of test exercises and development of guidance and proposals to build an NI Hub.

Internal Review of Civil Contingencies

78. On 12 November 2019, Chris Stewart requested me to undertake a 'short sharp' review of the Civil Contingencies Policy Branch [Exhibits BRO/26 - INQ000469475 BRO/27 - INQ000469476]. This was a small part of the wider review. To the best of my recollection, Civil Contingencies Policy Branch had a wide range of responsibilities which included: Secretariat for Civil Contingencies (NI) Group; liaising with Cabinet Office; developing, managing and sharing guidance disseminated from Cabinet Office to Northern Ireland Departments; liaising with other Devolved Administrations; managing civil or public emergencies when they occurred, for example, flooding incidents; Thomas Cook collapse on 23 September 2019; representing Northern Ireland Departments on various working groups, including, Chair of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments C3 Leads Group (Operation Yellow Hammer working group), Flu Readiness Board, both at local and national level; stakeholder engagement with strategic partners including Local Government, Police Service for Northern Ireland, Fire Service and Ambulance Service, and developing a retrospective business case for the Northern Ireland contribution to Operation Yellow Hammer [Exhibit BRO/28 - INQ000145799].

79. The Branch work programme involved: review and update of guidance to enable departments to prepare plans and arrangements covering health, excess deaths and wider impacts of an influenza pandemic; review of Civil Contingencies Group (NI) protocols and Lead Government Department guidance and update in light of learning from recent emergencies; emergency planning exercises to work with NICS departments to plan and exercise scenarios to enhance effective multi- agency co-ordination through