

Dr Christopher Johnson  
Interim Head of VPDP  
Public Health Wales

14<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Dear Ms Whitaker

**Module 2B of the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry  
Response to request for Evidence under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006  
Reference for Request - M2B/CJ/01**

Please find outlined the answers provided to the best of my ability to the questions which you asked about my membership of the Welsh Government Technical Advisory Group (“TAG”). For clarity I have also included reference to work undertaken when I was not a member of TAG, however, I have not gone into significant detail on these areas.

1. *A brief overview of your qualifications, career history, professional expertise and major publications.*

I am a non-medical Consultant in Public Health registered with the UK Public Health Register (UKPHR). I hold a degree and PhD in environmental chemistry, and a masters degree in Public Health (MPH). I am a member of the faculty of public health (MFPH) My career in public health is outlined below:

October 2006 – August 2011. **Health Protection Agency, Chemical Hazards and Poisons Division**  
- Senior Environmental Scientist

August 2011 – August 2016. **Public Health Wales – Speciality Training Scheme.** Speciality Registrar

August 2016 – December 2016. **Public Health Wales – North Wales Local Public Health Team –**  
Locum Consultant in Public Health

January 2017 – August 2021. **Public Health Wales – Health Protection Division –** Consultant in Health Protection

August 2021 – Current. **Public Health Wales – Health Protection Division** Consultant epidemiologist / interim Head of the Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme (VPDP)

Since qualifying as a Public Health Consultant in August 2016 I have focussed primarily on leading the response to cases and outbreaks of communicable disease in Wales, including COVID-19.

My significant publications relating to public health / health protection are listed below

Hobson, G *et al* Family cluster of three cases of monkeypox imported from Nigeria to the United Kingdom, May 2021, *Eurosurveillance*, 26(32) (2021)

Ziwayr SR *et al* Impact of place of residence on place of death in Wales: an observational study, *BMC Palliative Care* 16:72 (2017)

Johnson CD, Jones, S & Paranjothy, S. Reducing low birth weight: Prioritizing action to address modifiable risk factors, *Journal of Public Health*, 39(1), (2016)

Johnson CD et al, Exploring the potential to link primary care data with the national cancer registry of the Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit. *European Journal of Cancer Care* 24:71 (2015)

Johnson CD et al, Learning from the Brazilian Community Health Worker Model in North Wales. *Globalisation and Health* 9(1):25 (2013)

2. *A list of the groups (i.e. TAG and/or any of its subgroups) in which you have been a participant, and the relevant time periods. Please also confirm if you are or have been a participant in SAGE or other relevant groups in the relevant time periods.*

#### **TAG**

I was a member of TAG from my appointment as interim Head of Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme at Public Health Wales in August 2021 until the end of the inquiry scope in May 2022. I was not a member of any subgroup of TAG.

I can confirm I have never been a member of SAGE. During the inquiry scope I also attended or was a member of the following groups

#### **UK level (Aug 21 onwards – coincided with my membership of TAG)**

Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI) COVID-19 (observer)

JCVI COVID-19 monitoring working group

Commission of Human Medicine Expert Working Group on Vaccine Risk Benefit (EWG-VBR) (observer only)

PHE COVID-19 Vaccination Working Group

#### **Wales / Regional level**

*August 2021 onwards – coincided with my membership of TAG*

Wales Vaccine Equity Committee (VEC)

Vaccine Clinical and Prioritisation Group (VCAP)

Covid Vaccine board Data and Epidemiology Subgroup

Welsh Government COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Board

Welsh Government COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Development Group

COVID-19 Vaccine Operational Group

*Jan 20-July 21 – prior to my membership of TAG*

Welsh Government Test Trace Protect Programme Board

Welsh Government COVID-19 Intelligence Group

North Wales COVID-19 Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG)

North Wales COVID-19 Compliance and Enforcement Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG)

Incident Management Team / Outbreak Control Team meetings for specific outbreaks across North Wales and Powys

3. An overview of your involvement with those groups between January 2020 and May 2022, including:
  - a. When and how you came to be a participant;
  - b. The number of meetings you attended, and your contributions to those meetings; and

c. Your role in providing research, information and advice.

I became a member of TAG in August 2021 as a result of my appointment as interim Head of the Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme at Public Health Wales. In the period between August 2021 and May 2022 I attended TAG on 6 out of a total of 16 meetings.

My role and attendance at other meetings are captured in the following table.

Meeting	Role	Number attended / frequency
<b>UK level</b>		
JCVI COVID-19 monitoring working group	<p>Observer – represented NHS Wales and operational perspective when requested. As an observer I did not have a vote on decisions or contribute an opinion to discussions.</p> <p>I presented vaccine uptake data for Wales to the monitoring group.</p> <p>I was invited to the meeting in my role as interim Head of Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme at Public Health Wales</p>	Attended almost all meetings from Aug 2021 onwards
PHE COVID-19 Vaccination working group	Provided a devolved administration perspective and update where required.	Attended 10 out of 20 meetings held
NHS-E COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Board	Was invited to the meeting in my role as interim Head of Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme at Public Health Wales	Attended approximately 5 out of 10 meetings held
CHM EWG-VBR	Observer – My role was to observe and gather insight and knowledge on adverse events. I did not contribute to its recommendations. As an observer I was excluded for the sections of the meeting where regulatory issues were discussed.	I attended most of the 13 meetings.
<b>Wales level</b>		
Coincided with membership of TAG		
Wales Vaccine Equity Committee (VEC)	Represented PHW vaccine preventable disease programme.	Attended 4 out of 5 meetings held
WG Vaccine Clinical and Prioritisation Group (VCAP)	Provided updates on key deliverables for the programme and changes / developments anticipated in the vaccine programme	Attended 12 / 12 meetings held
WG Covid Vaccine board Data and Epidemiology Subgroup	Provided public health and technical vaccination advice	I attended all of the 4 meetings held

		whilst I was a member,
WG COVID-19 Vaccine Programme Board		Attended nearly all of 16 meetings held.
WG Programme Development Group		
COVID-19 Vaccine Operational Group		Attended nearly all of the 21 meetings held
Preadated membership of TAG		
Welsh Government Test Trace Protect Programme Board	Provided specialist health protection information and advice to these multiagency meetings	Attended most meetings held.
North Wales COVID-19 Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG)		Attended most of the 12 meetings held
North Wales COVID-19 Compliance and Enforcement Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG)		Attended only 1 or 2 of the 10 meetings held.
Incident Management Team / Outbreak Control Team meetings for specific outbreaks across North Wales and Powys	<p>Provided specialist health protection advice to multiagency meetings responding to local outbreaks of COVID-19</p> <p>In some instances I also chaired the group</p> <p>These meetings were arranged on an adhoc to respond to particular clusters or outbreaks of disease. The number and frequency of the meetings was determined by the needs of the outbreak / incident response</p>	

4. *A summary of any documents to which you contributed for the purpose of advising TAG and/or its related subgroups on the Covid-19 pandemic. Please include links to those documents where publicly available.*

I only contributed to 1 document during my membership of TAG. I provided comment on the draft Advice from Technical Advisory Cell and CSA-H in response to a commission on the evidence for the use of COVID Pass. This document formed part of the 21-day review cycle.

[updated-advice-from-the-technical-advisory-group-and-chief-scientific-advisor-for-health-on-the-evidence-for-the-use-of-covid-passes.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

5. *A summary of any articles you have written, interviews and/or evidence you have given regarding the work of the above-mentioned groups and/or the Welsh Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Please include links to those documents where publicly available.*

I have contributed to papers presented to the various groups for consideration, and to Public Health Wales advice notes to the Chief Medical Officer as part of my work with the above groups. In particular

PHW Public Health Protection Response Plan (Apr 20)  
PHW Reduced effectiveness of Test Trace Protect (TTP) arising from its original design compounded by non-availability and increased turnaround time of sampling/testing for COVID-19. (Sept 20)  
PHW Enhanced Contact Tracing (Sept 20)  
PHW Operationalising Test and Release Policy within Contact Tracing CRM (Oct 20)  
PHW Contact Tracing in a Population Screening Environment (Nov 20)  
PHW Contact tracing implication of test and isolate policy (Nov 20)  
PHW Recommendation on application of PCR contact testing to those undertaking with regular asymptomatic testing

COVID-19 TTP Programme Board – COVID-19 Phase 3 Case Finding and Contact Tracing: Operating framework

PHW Advice Note 14 – Variation of NPIs for vaccinated individuals (Jul 21)  
PHW Advice Note 20 – Ongoing Control of COVID during Recovery (Oct 21)  
PHW Advice Note 25 – Impact of vaccination on infection and transmission of SARS-CoV2 (Jan 22)  
PHW Advice Note 27 - Wider impacts of COVID-19 on 5-11 year olds in Wales (Jan 22)

I have not written any articles or been interviewed on the advice of the groups or Welsh Governments response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. *Your views as to whether the work of the above-mentioned groups in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic (or Wales's response more generally) succeeded in its aims. This may include, but is not limited to, your views on:*
- a. The composition of the groups and/or their diversity of expertise;*
  - b. The way in which the groups were commissioned to work on the relevant issues;*
  - c. The resources and support that were available;*
  - d. The advice given and/or recommendations that were made;*
  - e. The extent to which the groups worked effectively together; and*
  - f. The extent to which applicable structures and policies were utilised and/or complied with and their effectiveness.*

In my opinion the general groups that I attended work well under extremely challenging circumstances. I believe that challenges did exist it was not between groups in Wales but related to decision making and impacts between nations.. It sometimes felt like the ability of the groups to maximise effective operation was sometimes handicapped by unequal access to information or to influence the timing of actions which had impacts in all 4 nations.

I think that Wales response to the COVID-19 pandemic succeeded in its aims. The devolved nature of the response allowed flexibility to tailor responses to the local needs and to advise on approaches that were fit for purpose for the population and specific challenges in Wales.

Focusing of TAG specifically, I did not attend many meetings because the majority of advice about vaccination were being supplied by JCVI and MHRA not TAG, and therefore I needed to prioritise my contribution. However, when I did attend, I felt that the group had access to a wide range of experts, and were therefore able to get insight into the broad scope of the issues considered. I felt that advice and recommendations were robustly discussed, and the group worked well together.

7. *Your views as to any lessons that can be learned from the Welsh Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular relating to the work of the above-mentioned groups. Please describe any changes that have already been made, and set out any recommendations for further changes that you think the Inquiry should consider making.*

I would recommend that the inquiry consider ensuring that the relationship between expert bodies (e.g. JCVI) and the devolved nations of the UK are equal and well defined.

8. *A brief description of documentation relating to these matters that you hold (including soft copy material held electronically). Please retain all such material. I am not asking for you to provide us with this material at this stage, but I may request that you do so in due course.*

I do not personally hold any material. My advice and actions were provided in my role as an employee of Public Health Wales, and therefore all relevant materials are held by Public Health Wales.