

Witness Name: Thomas Smithson
Statement No: 2
Exhibits: 0
Dated: 13 December 2023

UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF THOMAS SMITHSON

I provide this statement as supplementary information to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 3 February 2023, reference M2B-WG-TS-01, and in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 25 October 2023, referenced M2B-WG-05.

I, Thomas Smithson, will say as follows: -

CONTEXT

1. I am preparing this statement as a serving civil servant in the Welsh Government. The statement concerns my use of private and informal communications relating to the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19 while in my role as a civil servant during the pandemic.

INFORMAL COMMUNICATIONS

2. I was not part of any WhatsApp groups with Welsh Government Ministers, officials, senior civil servants or advisers, nor was I part of any group with UK Government counterparts.
3. Prior to 1 October 2021, I sent a small number of direct iMessages and possibly texts to Welsh Government officials using my Welsh Government work phone. We worked remotely and these communications generally took place in situations where a party lacked immediate access to their work laptop or when there were network connectivity issues. These messages concerned administrative matters such as setting up meetings – low level transactional communications that would have been taken care of with a quick word over the desk had we been sitting opposite in the

office. My Welsh Government work phone was operated on its default settings and I did not delete messages. I did not separately save these messages to the network because of their low significance to substantive work.

4. In October 2021 my Welsh Government work phone was replaced with a new work phone as part of an IT asset upgrade. The messages from the old work phone did not transfer to the new one. I understand that the old phone was wiped shortly after being handed in as part of IT security and asset disposal procedures. I also understand that these procedures created no message backups and left no profile from which to retrieve the messages. I therefore cannot access or disclose the messages from my old Welsh Government work phone.
5. I still possess the Welsh Government phone that I received from the October 2021 asset upgrade. I used it to infrequently send and receive texts and iMessages of an administrative or transactional nature. I have used this phone on its default settings, I have not deleted any of the messages and I will arrange disclosure of those that relate to the Welsh Government's Covid-19 response.
6. I used my personal phone on two occasions to send and receive direct WhatsApp messages relating to the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19. To confirm, the WhatsApp messages were ad hoc bilateral exchanges with a single colleague, James Gerard, whom I could not reach at the time via work numbers or usual online communication methods. None of these involved WhatsApp groups. These informal communications were administrative or transactional in nature. I operated my phone on its default settings and did not delete messages. I will arrange for their disclosure.
7. Other than the communications that I have described in this statement, I had no other form of informal or private communication relating to the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19.

Statement of Truth

8. 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.

9. Signed:

Personal Data

10. Dated:

13/12/23