

Witness Name: Rebecca Evans

Statement No: 2

Exhibits: 0

Dated: 15th December 2023

UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF REBECCA EVANS

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 25 October 2023 and referenced M2B/WG/05.

I, Rebecca Evans, will say as follows:

Preface

1. I have previously provided a statement dated 1 November 2023 detailing my professional background and the roles I have undertaken in the Welsh Government between June 2014 and the present day.

Mobile phones

2. During the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 May 2022, in addition to my personal mobile phone, I had issued to me a Senedd mobile phone and a Welsh Government mobile phone.

Senedd mobile phone

3. I almost never use my Senedd phone. Until our Government phones were changed following the 2021 Senedd elections, we could access both our Senedd and Government emails on our Government phones, which meant that I had no use for a Senedd phone. I barely (if ever) turned it on, never had WhatsApp installed on it, did not use texts, and did not make phone calls. The only time I now use my Senedd phone is when I am away from

home (on holiday, for example), so that I can stay on top of my constituency emails while I am away.

4. My Senedd phone was not in my possession from around the start of the first lockdown, until June 2023, as I gave it to my Senedd constituency office manager to use when working from home. My Senedd phone was returned to me by my office manager in June 2023, although in the event my office manager never turned it on, preferring to make and receive calls from her Senedd-issued laptop. I assume that I was issued with a new Senedd phone after the Senedd election in 2021.

Welsh Government issued mobile phone

5. A Welsh Government phone had been issued to me prior to January 2020. From this phone I could exchange text messages, but the download and use of WhatsApp was not permitted.
6. I understand that the Welsh Government's records note that, after the election in May 2021, I received a new Government phone on 13 May 2021. To the best of my recollection, I would have returned my old handset on the same day. I understand that, when a Welsh Government mobile phone is returned, for reasons of security, the data on the phone is wiped within a day or two of being handed back. Data is not backed up and there is no "profile" as such on phones to recover. I therefore no longer have access to the data that was held on my old handset.
7. However, I can confirm that I generally used my Welsh Government phone to access emails, although I did use text messages on occasion.

Personal mobile phone

8. I had a new contract and upgraded my handset on 1 June 2023. Whilst I cannot find out the exact date when I upgraded my phone before the most recent upgrade, I can confirm that I usually upgrade my phone approximately every two years. Each time, I will have used the previous handset up until the arrival of the new handset. I still have the handset I used up to 1 June 2023 and also its predecessor. Whenever I have a new phone, I transfer all data over to my new phone.

Use of informal communications

9. I have reviewed my phones carefully and have made arrangements to provide to the Inquiry any messages found which have anything to do with the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19. These are a mix of text and WhatsApp messages.
10. The vast majority of my WhatsApp messages have nothing to do with the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19. Those that do comprise messages to my Cabinet colleagues, sometimes from my perspective as a constituency member of the Senedd, or to Special Advisers seeking confirmation of factual information, exchanging information and views, giving updates, making practical arrangements and providing each other with support. I did not make decisions via informal messaging platforms. We have well-established processes in place through the Ministerial Advice process for taking and recording decisions, and proper forums for discussion and debate in Cabinet and other minuted meetings.

Retention of messages

11. Whilst I do have disappearing messages on some of my contacts, these were installed after 31 May 2022, so, where I retain a whole thread of either WhatsApp or text messages, messages to contacts between 1 January 2020 and 31 May 2022 have been retained.
12. However, I am conscious that I may not have retained all messages threads. I have checked my personal mobile phone and can see that my WhatsApp messages are set to back up. I am seeking further advice on accessing my WhatsApp back up. I will arrange for any additional messages recovered which are about the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19 to be disclosed to the Inquiry.
13. I do not have a copy of a Ministerial WhatsApp group chat. I do not recall precisely when I deleted the group, but it was before the First Minister informed us that the Inquiry might be interested in reading our personal messages. I understand the Inquiry will have received a copy of this group chat from one of the other members of the group.

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: 15th December 2023