

Witness Name: Clare Jenkins  
Statement No: M2B/WG/05/01  
Dated: 13 December 2023

## **UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF CLARE JENKINS**

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I, Clare Jenkins, will say as follows:

1. I provide this statement in response to a request made by the Chair of the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry ("the Inquiry") pursuant to Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, dated 25 October 2023, and referenced M2B/WG/05 ("the Rule 9 request").
2. During the relevant period I had personal and Welsh Government issued mobile phones. WhatsApp cannot be used on a Welsh Government phone, but I did use my Welsh Government mobile phone to send and receive text messages about the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19. I also used my work phone for Microsoft Teams. I used my personal mobile phone for WhatsApp and text messaging, which included messages about the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19.
3. To add context to my response I will outline what has been my general approach to text and other informal messaging data on mobile phones. I started routinely deleting all messages (such as texts, iMessages) from my mobile phones periodically whilst working in my previous public sector role and continued to do so in this Welsh Government role, including during the relevant period (January 2020 to May 2022). I started doing so following GDPR / data access training some years ago, to ensure I did not retain information inappropriately. I take a consistent approach to all messages whether work or personal. When I started using WhatsApp I applied the same approach. I do not recall specific dates of when I deleted messages during the relevant period, a rough estimate would be every four to six weeks but this would have varied.

4. I do specifically recall deleting all messages on my phones on two occasions. Once, in relation to my personal phone, I deleted all messages before I took it to be repaired as it had malfunctioned. From memory this occurred in November 2020 (further detail provided below, paragraph 11). In relation to my Welsh Government issued phone, I deleted all messages before handing my phone back when my secondment ended with Welsh Government, ahead of the May 2021 election. The phone I believe was stored, and I received the same phone back following my reappointment in May 2021.
5. I also use automatic deletion tools for text messages and WhatsApp messages on my personal and work phones. Again, this is to try to ensure I do not retain information inappropriately. Whilst secondary to security considerations, I also find these tools free up storage space on devices, and in general remove unnecessary clutter, for example unneeded media files. Whilst I cannot recall precisely when I became aware of the ability to set automatic deletion on text messages, it would have been during the relevant period, possibly after the 2021 election. I do recall setting up automatic deletion for text messaging as soon as I became aware of it. I also became aware that you could set a rule (currently called 'disappearing messages') on individual WhatsApp chats / groups at some point during the relevant period and I have used it routinely since. It is only more recently (I think after the relevant period) that I have become aware of the ability on WhatsApp to turn on 'disappearing messages' by default for all new chats / groups, and I now use that. Where WhatsApp chats / groups were set up by others I continued to delete manually. I did not and do not back up messages. I applied a similar approach to work related messages in that I would record any key information in an email or action any requests.
6. The Rule 9 request has asked me for disclosure of any informal or private communications about the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19 of which I was a part including informal groups (such as text messages and WhatsApp groups) or private email communications with Ministers, senior civil servants or advisors.
7. The Inquiry has also referred me to a section of a witness statement I have provided to the Inquiry, also for Module 2B. My statement (dated 13 October 2023, provided to the Inquiry in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, dated 6 February 2023, referenced M2B/WG/CJ/01), states (at paragraph 22):

*My working pattern over this period became 16 hour working days as a norm along with 7-day weeks. Once technology allowed, I was often juggling different*

*virtual meetings simultaneously on different Welsh Government devices. Ministers were also working similar 7-day weeks as well. I did not routinely communicate with ministers or senior civil servants via WhatsApp or any other non-Welsh Government device. I would however on occasion contact ministers and officials informally by text or WhatsApp message to confirm their availability to receive Teams calls or check the Welsh Government devices for information if I could see they were not signed into the Welsh Government system at the time for example. These forms of communication were not however used for any decision making. Some text communication was made on an old phone issued by the Welsh Government. I have checked with our Knowledge and Analytical Service if they are able to retrieve the messages but they cannot. Other text and WhatsApp communications were made using my personal phone but these messages were regularly deleted at the time. In any event these would not however likely assist the Inquiry as they were, as noted, used mainly to ascertain availability and were not use[d] for decision making.*

8. Regarding this paragraph I am asked: whether the 'old phone' is accessible to me; if not, when I last used it and when it was disposed of; and if I do have access, what investigations were made and by whom to see whether the messages can be retrieved.
9. The 'old phone' I refer to was one issued to me by the Welsh Government, I no longer have access to it. I last used it when I returned it to the Welsh Government's IT service when I was issued with a new work phone on 14 November 2022 as part of a routine upgrade. I have been informed that data on the old phone would have been wiped by IT for security reasons in line with standard operational procedures, and that messages would have been removed at the point the handset was wiped, which would have been within a day or two of me returning the handset. I recall being given a handout containing instructions from IT and I set up my phone according to those instructions / that guidance. I can confirm that I have checked my current device for messages sent or received about the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19 and can confirm that there are none on the phone.
10. I should emphasise that text messages were primarily used for practical / logistical purposes, such as to let Ministers know to expect papers or meeting invitations or to flag urgent issues that would require attention. Sometimes I would message factual information during meetings that might help them to answer a question. Similarly I would use messages to contact officials (usually out of hours) to check their availability

for a meeting or respond to press office questions about whether I was available to clear lines. I would also use text messages to provide a level of general support to Ministers, particularly after the election when the Minister was new in post.

11. I largely used text and teams for 1:1 communications. I was a part of a small number of WhatsApp groups. I largely used the Special Advisers group to ask or answer practical questions about phone numbers for outside stakeholders, to flag meetings or the arrival of papers or to ask or give factual information. I used the Ministers WhatsApp group occasionally, largely to flag meetings or papers out of hours. The messages were not decisions made by the Welsh Government in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic]. Cabinet (and the Ministerial Advice process) is where decision-making occurs for the Welsh Government. Whilst I do not have access to the text messages for the reasons outlined above, I understand that text messages which I was a party to, that are capable of being accessed, have been (or are due to be) provided to the Inquiry by others.

12. I did not use private (personal) email to communicate with Ministers, senior civil servants or advisors about the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19. I did send and receive work-related emails from my work email account.

13. My personal phone has changed twice in recent years. The first handset completely malfunctioned and did not work, whilst the second phone malfunctioned in that it could not hold the length of charge I required, so I upgraded the handset. As mentioned above, I tried to have the first handset fixed in around November 2020, and wiped messages from the device before providing it to the phone shop to fix it. They were not able to fix the phone, and it was recycled. My phone provider has informed me that my new contract started on 1 December 2020, so I would have had the new handset from that date I believe. When that, newer handset's battery diminished I upgraded the phone with my mobile provider. My provider has informed me this new contract started on 27 March 2023, so I would have received my current handset around then. I wiped the faulty handset and gave it away to someone who needed a phone as theirs had broken. I have checked the handset currently in my possession for messages sent or received about the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19 and can confirm that there are none on the phone.

14. Whilst, for the reasons outlined above, I do not have access to text messages or WhatsApp messages sent or received by my personal mobile phones during the

relevant period, I understand that messages which I was a party to, that are capable of being accessed, including several WhatsApp groups, have been (or will be) provided to the Inquiry by others.

**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:** 13 December 2023