

Witness Name: Tracey Burke

Statement No: 1st in respect to CTPD

Exhibits: 366

Dated: 25 October 2023

UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF TRACEY BURKE

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 14 February 2023 and referenced WG - M2B-CTPD-01.

I, Tracey Burke, will say as follows: -

Preface

1. I extend my sympathies to those that have lost loved ones, friends, colleagues, and neighbours during the coronavirus pandemic.
2. This statement relates to the period 21 January 2020 to 30 May 2022 (which I will refer to as “the specified period”).

Background

3. This statement is intended to provide an overview of the Communities and Tackling Poverty Directorate (which I will refer to as CTP) within the Welsh Government, with particular focus on arrangements that were put in place to enable the organisation to support Ministers and to respond to the pandemic.
4. I have provided a statement in response to M2B-WG-EPSPG-01 where I outlined my background in detail, I have provided a summary for the purposes of this statement.
5. Before my employment with the Welsh Government, I worked across the UK and internationally. I have been directly involved in the regeneration and public service reform in Wales and Ireland for over 25 years working for the Welsh Government, Welsh Development Agency, the Irish Government, the UK Government as well as the European Commission and OECD.

6. I joined the Welsh Government in 2006, as Director of Strategy and Review, Enterprise Innovation and Networks Department, and have worked in many areas since this time. From 2008 to 2009, I was Acting Director, Infrastructure, Policy, Strategy and Corporate Services, Economy and Transport Department; from 2009 to 2010, I was Director, Economic Renewal Programme; from 2010 to 2011, I was Acting Director, Operations - Economy and Transport Department; from 2011 to 2012, I was Acting Director, Business Enterprise, Technology and Science; from 2012 to 2015, I was Director, Strategy – Economy, Science and Transport; and from 2015 to 2017, I was Director, Strategy – Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Group.

7. I was appointed to my role as Director General for Education and Public Services in November 2017, this was an overarching management role covering a range of government policy. It is in that capacity that I am providing this witness statement to the Inquiry. As Director General for Education and Public Services, I had line management responsibility for the Director for Local Government, Director of Housing and Regeneration, Director for Education (primary and secondary education), Director of Communities and Tackling Poverty and the Director for Digital. Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) were also part of the group although I had no management responsibilities for any officials within either inspectorate: the Welsh Ministers recognise the importance and necessity of professional independence and judgment in exercising these functions on their behalf. I understand that statements have been prepared for both of the Inspectorates.

8. In April 2022, I took up post as Director General for Climate Change and Rural Affairs with an equally broad leadership span and with line management responsibility for the Director for Transport and Digital Connectivity, the Director for Climate Change and Energy, the Director for Rural Affairs, the Director for Environmental Sustainability, the Director for Housing and Regeneration, and the Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales.

9. In preparing this statement, several members of the senior civil service and other colleagues have provided information, including:
 - Claire Bennett, former Director of CTP. Claire took up that post in April 2020, before moving to take up the post of Director of Environmental Sustainability in February 2023.

- Amelia John, now interim Director of CTP. Amelia John took up that post in March 2023 having previously been Deputy Director for Housing Policy from June 2020 to March 2023. In the period mid-March 2020 to May 2020, Amelia John led the team coordinating the cross-government response to shielding. Alongside this, the team took initial responsibility for coordinating cross-government action in relation to non-shielding vulnerable (NSV) people. From 27 April 2020 Amelia John reported to the Director of CTP, Claire Bennett, on the work. The non-shielding vulnerable team (referred to as the NSV team) then moved to the Communities Division of CTP in June 2020 when it was led by Joanne Glenn, reporting to Paul Dear.
- Alyson Francis, now Director Covid Inquiry. Alyson Francis was Deputy Director for the Communities Division of CTP during much of the specified period, leaving to take up the role of Deputy Director Covid Inquiry in August 2021.
- Ruth Meadows, now Temporary Director of Ukraine Response. Ruth Meadows took up that post in August 2022 having been a Deputy Director in the Ukraine response team from March 2022. Ruth joined the Ukraine team on an internal loan, her substantive post from September 2021 – March 2022 was as Deputy Director for what was then the Communities Division of CTP. Prior to that, and on return from a secondment to S4C, Ruth was responsible for 'Protect' within the Test, Trace, Protect programme leading the Protect (and later Protect and Vulnerable People team) from October 2020 – September 2021. Claire Bennett led the Protect team before that, from April to October 2020.
- Karen Cornish, former Deputy Director for what was then the Children and Families Division of CTP. Karen Cornish was in that role throughout the specified period, retiring in October 2022, at which time CTP was restructured and the Children and Families Division ceased to exist in that form.
- Maureen Howell, former Deputy Director for the Prosperous Futures Division of CTP. Maureen Howell was in that role throughout the period in question. In September 2022, and as part of the Directorate restructure, Maureen took up the role of Deputy Director for the Tackling Poverty and Supporting Families Division which she held until her retirement in March 2023.
- Claire Germain, now Deputy Director for the Tackling Poverty and Supporting Families Division. Claire Germain took up that role in February 2023, and prior to that was Deputy Director for the Performance and Partnerships Division in the Local Government Directorate.

- Nicola Edwards, Deputy Director for CTP’s Childcare, Play and Early Years Division. Nicola Edwards was in this role for the duration of the specified period, taking up the role of Deputy Director for Early Years, Childcare and Play in September 2022 as part of the Directorate restructure. Much of the work that Nicola Edwards led during the specified period has been covered in the separate witness statement that I provided in relation to education and childcare, M2B-EP5G-01.
- Paul Dear, Acting Deputy Director for CTP’s Cohesive Communities Division. Paul Dear took up this role in October 2022 and during the specified period was based in CTP’s Communities Division where he principally led on matters relating to community engagement and coordination of the Division’s response to Covid 19. Paul worked flexibly during this period, supporting a range of work areas, this included Protect and self-isolation payments.
- [NR] former Head of Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights. [NR] held that role throughout the relevant period and has now left Welsh Government.
- [NR] Head of Third Sector and Community Policy. [NR] was Head of Third Sector Team for the relevant period.
- [NR] Head of VAWDASV (Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence) and Community Cohesion. From August 2020, [NR] [NR] led on policy related to marriage; and policy on faith from November 2020.
- Zenny Saunders, Deputy Director of Post Compulsory Education and Training Reform, joined the team on an internal loan to provide additional capacity on volunteering advice and support for the third sector primarily between April 2000 and early July 2020.

Overview of CTP’s core remit and functions

10. CTP is and was during the specified period a particularly broad Directorate, spanning a range of policy functions aimed at supporting children and families; childcare and play; and those who are disadvantaged, marginalised and / or who face the most inequalities. CTP works across the Welsh Government to galvanise action to support and promote children’s rights; community cohesion and inclusion; human rights; and to tackle poverty, including child poverty; effective action to address violence against women, sexual violence and domestic abuse; support for families; supporting the third sector; digital and financial inclusion; childcare, play and the development of the childcare and play sector.

During the relevant period, CTP was also responsible for community employability programmes supporting those furthest from the labour market into work.

11. During the specified period, CTP was one of four policy Directorates within the Education and Public Services Group (ESP), of which I was Director General; it is now, following internal restructures, one of six Directorates in the Education, Social Justice and Welsh Language Group, of which Jo-Anne Daniels sits as Director General.
12. CTP has a number of strategic policy responsibilities – for example equality, children’s rights and tackling poverty – where CTP has a leadership role and some specific functions but where every other part of Welsh Government is directly responsible for embedding these considerations in their own work. Other areas of work overlap significantly with work carried out by other Directorates within the Welsh Government, for example in an area like early years, requiring close working with those other Directorates as well as with, very often, external stakeholders, UK Government, and the other Devolved Governments. Another important factor which I would highlight is that while many of CTP’s functions are devolved, there are some functions that fall within reserved areas, meaning that the Directorate works within a policy and legislative framework that is set by the UK Government. These functions include, for example, work to support refugees and asylum seekers. The work carried out by CTP within these reserved areas, in particular, necessarily requires a lot of engagement and collaboration with UK Government.
13. Before the specified period, CTP was engaged in cross-cutting work as part of the Welsh Government’s preparations for the UK’s exit from the European Union. This included work on settled status, migration policy, community cohesion, and impacts on minority communities. During the specified period, and in addition to its role in the Welsh Government’s response to the pandemic, CTP led the Welsh Government’s response to the events following the departure of the UK’s final troops from Afghanistan and the outbreak of war in Ukraine, with this latter workstream ultimately forming its own dedicated Directorate. At the same time, CTP also played a central role in the response to the cost-of-living crisis, delivering significant new programmes and the expansion of existing ones.
14. The broad nature of the work undertaken by CTP means that Cabinet responsibility for CTP policy matters lies across several different Ministers, with whom and to whom officials in CTP work. During the specified period, these were:

- the Counsel General and Minister for European Transition (Jeremy Miles MS) who, in the early days of the pandemic, was given responsibility for assuring that the needs of vulnerable people, including vulnerable children and young people were being identified and met;
- the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales (Ken Skates MS, and subsequently Vaughan Gething MS) in relation to matters of community employability;
- the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport (Lee Waters MS) in relation to the Valleys Taskforce;
- the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip / Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip (Jane Hutt MS) in relation to equality and human rights, poverty and social welfare matters and violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence;
- the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership had responsibility for LGBTQ policy as part of a broader portfolio supported by other Directorates following the 2021 Senedd election;
- the Minister for Health and Social Services (Vaughan Gething MS and subsequently Eluned Morgan MS) in relation to the Protect element of Test Trace Protect;
- the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services (Julie Morgan MS) in relation to childcare, play, early years, children, and parenting and family support services;
- the Minister for Housing and Local Government (Julie James MS) in relation to the work of the Protect team; and
- the Minister for Finance and Local Government (Rebecca Evans MS) also in relation to the work of the Protect team.

15. Ministerial portfolio responsibilities as of January 2019, October 2020 and May 2021 are exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-01-INQ000116485**, **WG/CTPD/01-02-INQ000066140** and **WG/CTPD/01-03-INQ000066141**.

16. Kate Edmunds was the Special Adviser to Jane Hutt MS until October 2020 in her capacity as Deputy Minister and Chief Whip/ Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip. Mitchell Theaker then took up this role for the rest of the specified period. Two specialist policy advisers were also in place for matters in relation to equalities and human rights policy: Jon Luxton, who was the Specialist Policy Adviser for disability, and Uzo Uwobi, who was the Specialist Policy Adviser for race. Both Specialist Policy Advisers provided broader advice on equality policy and advised on the other equality strands.

17. Jonathan Scourfield was the Specialist Policy Adviser to Julie Morgan MS in her capacity as Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services from March 2020 to April 2021. Ian Butler has been Special Adviser for this area since May 2021.

The structure of CTP

18. At the beginning of the specified period, CTP did not have a Director in post. This was because the previous Director, Jo-Anne Daniels, had left the role in October 2019 and the recruitment process for her successor was still underway. CTP's four Deputy Directors who were in post in March 2020 reported directly to me as the Director General for the Education and Public Services group for the period October 2019 to April 2020. Claire Bennett took up the post of Director of CTP in April 2020, having previously been Deputy Director for Curriculum and Assessment in the Education Directorate.

19. The Directorate consisted of four Divisions, which remained in place throughout the pandemic. These were Communities Division; Prosperous Futures Division; Children and Families Division; and Childcare, Play and Early Years Division. In addition, in April 2020, a small team initially known as the 'Protect' team and later the 'Protect and Vulnerable People' team was established to lead on the 'Protect' component of the Welsh Government's 'Test Trace and Protect' service (TTP). 'Protect and Vulnerable People' then became part of CTP's Communities Division in September 2021. In April 2022 functions relating to self-isolation and the self-isolation payments scheme transferred out of CTP to the Health Protectorate Strategy and System Oversight Division in the Health and Social Services Group. CTP also worked jointly with teams that had been established as part of the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19; for example, the team that was established to lead on Shielding and Non-Shielding Vulnerable People. The Non-shielding Vulnerable People team transferred to CTP on 27 April 2020, having worked alongside CTP teams in its initial phase of work. The Childcare, Play and Early Years Division and the Children and Families Division, worked closely with teams within the Education Directorate throughout the period in question, as well as with teams in Health and Social Services. CTP also led the cross-Government coordination of the support for vulnerable people and for vulnerable children and young people.

20. From approximately April 2020, the pandemic impacted substantially on the work of each Division in CTP. Many staff were diverted from their division's usual work to work wholly

on the response to the pandemic, either within the same Division or having been moved to work within the Welsh Government's Covid project team. In some cases, teams were expanded to manage the additional work that arose from the pandemic.

21. CTP also saw a number of new functions fall within its remit as a result of the pandemic. As I noted above, the work that was carried out by the non-shielding vulnerable people (NSV) team to support the non-shielding vulnerable populations was transferred to CTP on 27 April 2020 once the new Director was in post to provide leadership to this strand of work. Prior to this it had been led centrally within the Welsh Government by a coordination team which also had overarching responsibility for shielding until shielding was transferred into the Health and Social Services Group. As part of the NSV work, CTP led cross-Government co-ordination of the response to support vulnerable people. Similarly, and again as I noted above, CTP led on the Protect strand of the Welsh Government's Test Trace Protect (TTP) programme. These new functions resulted in additional staff joining CTP. CTP also led the cross-Government co-ordination of support for vulnerable children, young people and safeguarding. The policy responsibility for safeguarding lies with the Social Services Directorate of Welsh Government, but CTP stepped in to lead this workstream to ensure there was effective coordination. Over time, and as the response stabilised from an initial emergency response to ongoing support, these functions and some of the additional resources were absorbed into existing teams in Welsh Government.

22. I will now summarise the role of each of the four Divisions of CTP, their core functions as at January 2020, and a broad summary of their role in the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic.

Communities Division

23. The Communities Division was headed by Deputy Director Alyson Francis. The Division had four branches:

- (a) The Third Sector branch, which oversaw the Welsh Government's relationship with voluntary, not-for-profit and community organisations, which is a devolved area. Under section 74 of the Government of Wales Act 2006, the Welsh Government is responsible for implementing a scheme setting out how it will promote the interests of relevant third sector organisations (the Third Sector Scheme). The Third Sector branch managed the Third Sector Scheme, which included the management of the core funding provided by the Welsh Government to third sector infrastructure

bodies. This involved coordination of third sector engagement with each relevant Ministerial portfolio, as well as oversight of the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC), which is addressed in more detail later in this statement. During the specified period, the Third Sector branch carried out work ensuring that financial support continued to be provided to the sector, both to ensure that volunteers were able to be involved in the response to the pandemic, and to ensure that the sector remained financially viable despite the reduction in fundraising activities as a result of the restrictions in place;

(b) The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) branch, which had responsibility for Welsh Government's work in relation to these issues. VAWDASV work entails both devolved and reserved powers: the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 is the primary piece of legislation in this area, but there is substantial overlap with other Welsh and UK Government legislation, particularly in relation to the criminal justice, and equality, health and education aspects of VAWDASV. CTP's work in this area requires close engagement with the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office, as well as with the Police and Police and Crime Commissioners (which are non-devolved services), as well as specialist third sector agencies. The pandemic had a very significant impact on this area, with an increased risk to victims of VAWDASV and a reduction in the capacity of key agencies and facilities to deliver support or changes in the way support could be delivered. The restrictions in place at different times during the pandemic also reduced the opportunities for victims to seek help or for others to offer it. The VAWDASV branch worked on providing increased support to the sector, as well as raising awareness amongst the public of the help that remained available to victims and survivors during the pandemic;

(c) The Equality branch, which oversaw Welsh Government work on legislation and policy relating to equalities. The legislative framework is largely shaped by the Equality Act 2010 (EqA). The Equality branch was responsible for providing advice and guidance to other Directorates on equality impact assessments (EIAs); providing advice and guidance on the public sector equality duty under section 149 EqA and the associated Regulations which provide for the Welsh-specific duties (the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011); and carrying out work in preparation for, as well as providing advice and guidance on, the socio-economic duty under section 1 of EqA which came into force in March 2021. The branch liaised with the (non-devolved) Equality and Human Rights Commission

(EHRC) – principally its Wales team. The Equality branch also managed the Welsh Government's Equality and Inclusion Funding Programme, and coordinated Welsh Government contributions, via UK Government, to UN convention monitoring processes and other international agreements to which the UK is a signatory.

During the specified period, the Equality branch played a vital role in ensuring that there was regular, close engagement with people with protected characteristics, carried out through a number of committees, forums, and working groups through which policy officials engaged with stakeholder organisations, to understand the impact of the pandemic on those groups and disseminate this intelligence so it could inform decision making. Part of this team was also responsible for policy on hate crime. With schools closed due to restrictions, the team worked with local authorities and delivery partners to ensure hate crime and critical thinking skills could be delivered remotely under the Hate Crime in Schools Project. The Hate Crime Report and Support Centre, delivered on Welsh Ministers' behalf by Victim Support Cymru, was tasked with monitoring hate incidents and crimes arising from the pandemic. This initially related to anti-Chinese incidents and then focused more on English-Welsh border disputes. The team was also responsible for support for asylum seekers and refugees. Although the latter is non-devolved, there is a significant role for devolved services in supporting asylum seekers and refugees and significant issues to work through as a consequence of the pandemic. As noted elsewhere in this statement, this included supporting people from Afghanistan and responding to the temporary use of a former military base in Penally.

- (d) The Funding Alignment branch, whose principal responsibility was the management of the Welsh Government's Children and Communities Grant programme (known as the CCG), which provides funding to local authorities in delivering measures to support vulnerable children and adults in the local community.

24. The Communities Division formed its own Covid-19 response team within the Division, led by NR (Grade 6) who reported to Alyson Francis. This team consisted of seven staff members who were diverted from other team within the Communities Division. In addition, each of the four branches of the Division appointed a 'link' person who remained in their substantive role within the branch but who worked closely with the response team to manage and coordinate work.

25. In addition, as noted above, from June 2020 the team that coordinated the cross-Government work in relation to non-shielding vulnerable people (referred to as the NSV team) moved to the Communities Division, where it was led by [NR] who reported to [NR]. The work of the NSV team included liaison with local authorities to assess their provision for NSVs, to identify gaps in the support that was available to non-shielding people (for example, assistance with shopping for groceries), and to work with local authorities to ensure that such additional support was provided where it was required. Also as noted above, the Protect Team formed part of Communities Division from September 2021.

26. Generally, all staff within the Communities Division were occupied wholly or largely with work generated by the pandemic. The Third Sector team were under particular pressure due to the very significant impact of Covid-19 on the sector; the team increased from 10 to 12 members of staff to help manage the increased workload. The Equality Team's work also expanded very significantly. There were some changes in responsibility for aspects of equality during this period reflecting the significant work underway. An internal loan joined in September 2020 to lead work on the Race Equality Action Plan, later named the Anti-Racist Wales Action. An Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan implementation team was established in May 2022 and the Disability Rights Taskforce Team was established in October 2021.

Prosperous Futures Division

27. The Prosperous Futures Division (now the Tackling Poverty and Supporting Families Division with some changes in responsibility) was led by Deputy Director Maureen Howell during the specified period. It worked across Welsh Government to ensure that all departments were focused on supporting disadvantaged people and communities, in particular where the pandemic was exacerbating poverty. As with other parts of CTP, the Prosperous Futures Division maintained strong links with the other devolved nations, through both formal and informal structures.

28. The Prosperous Futures Division managed the Welsh Government's three community employability programmes (Communities for Work; Communities for Work Plus; and Parents, Childcare and Employment), which operated in partnership with DWP, local authorities and the third sector. These programmes provided intensive employment support and training to those furthest from the labour market.

29. In Wales, social security is currently reserved to the UK Government. There are no exceptions to this under the Government of Wales Act, and the majority of social security benefits in Wales (including Universal Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Personal Independence Payments and Pension Credit) are administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Some others (including Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Child Benefit) are administered by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Local authorities also administer some of the available support, such as Discretionary Housing Benefit Payments.
30. The Division also provided advice to the Welsh Government and liaised with DWP in relation to social welfare policy, including measures to increase welfare benefit take-up; and led on digital and financial inclusion, including managing the Discretionary Assistance Fund to support people experiencing extreme hardship (also addressed in more detail later in this statement). During the pandemic, officials fed back to their counterparts in DWP concerns which had been raised with Welsh Government about the five-week wait before receiving a Universal Credit pay and access to support for particular groups.
31. The digital inclusion team supported work across Government in relation to digital inclusion and the impact on service delivery, which included working with Education around access to education and working with the Equality Team on digital access, for example for Gypsy Traveller sites. During the pandemic the team advised other policy areas on levels of digital exclusion and ways to consider interventions as part of their policy response. The team consulted with other teams via email, virtual meetings and adding contributions to briefings requested from other policy areas.
32. The pandemic accentuated the need to tackle poverty. The Division leads on the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, which provides for the preparation of strategies by specified Welsh Ministers and local authorities, for contributing to the eradication of child poverty in Wales. During the relevant period the work of the Prosperous Futures Division became more focussed on immediate practical actions to support vulnerable households, with activity to address poverty in the longer-term put on hold (for example, the longer-term recommendations of the Child Poverty Review which went to Cabinet in March 2020). Activity included preparation of a *Child Poverty: Income Maximisation Action Plan* which was published in November 2020, and which contained a range of practical actions to support income maximisation.

33. The pandemic saw a significant increase in demand for emergency food aid as a result of reduced incomes and problems accessing food. Funding was provided which helped food banks meet the increase in demand and put in place alternative referral arrangements which met public health guidelines. Staff developed a leaflet providing information on the support available; these were printed and sent to food banks on request to include in food parcels. Arrangements were put in place for the delivery of food boxes to food banks that were running out of supplies.
34. In the initial stages of the pandemic (January to March 2020), almost all staff within the Prosperous Futures Division were required for work associated with the pandemic response, for example: liaising with community employability programme local authority partners regarding the release of their staff to support frontline services in responding to the pandemic. Some of the Division's staff were also released from their usual duties in order to provide support to the Welsh Government's central Covid project team.

Childcare, Play and Early Years Division

35. The Childcare, Play and Early Years Division was led by Deputy Director Nicola Edwards. Matters relating to childcare and play are devolved, and the work of the Division centres around the provisions of the Childcare Act 2006 and the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. Also relevant are the Child Minding and Day Care Exceptions (Wales) Order 2010 (amended in 2016) and the National Minimum Standards for Registered Childcare.
36. Local authorities in Wales are required to secure sufficient childcare for working parents and those making the transition to work. Unlike education, there is no statutory requirement for local authorities or others to provide, or for children to attend, childcare or play settings. The majority of service provision in this sector is provided by private and third sector organisations and paid for by parents. The Welsh Government does, however, provide some funded childcare for eligible children aged 3-4 under the Childcare Offer for Wales, and for children aged 2-3 under the geographically targeted Flying Start programme.
37. The Childcare, Play and Early Years Division was responsible for: all policy and legislation matters relating to registered childcare and play provision; the childcare and playwork workforce, including business support for the sector; delivery of the Childcare Offer for Wales; the pilot of a Baby Bundle scheme for Wales; and emerging policy around the

development of an overarching approach to the delivery of Early Childhood Education and Care. The Division was also in the process of designing and developing a digital platform to administer the Childcare Offer for Wales. Embedded within the Division were a small number of Government Social Researchers working on childcare, play and the Childcare Offer.

38. In the initial stages of the pandemic (January to March 2020), almost all staff within the Childcare, Play and Early Years Division were required for work associated with the pandemic response. From September 2020 onwards, some staff were also released from their usual duties in order to provide support to the Welsh Government's central Covid project team, including for example staff with analytical skills and those trained in supporting the Emergency Coordination Centre for Wales (ECCW). At around that time, in September 2020, some of the Division started to step back from the day-to-day pandemic response and returned to their core work. However, the work of officials in the childcare, play and workforce policy teams remained heavily weighted to the pandemic response.

39. The work of the Childcare, Play and Early Years Division is covered in the statement that I provided in relation to the Welsh Government's education and childcare structures, M2B-WG- EPSG-01.

Children and Families Division

40. The Children and Families Division was led by Deputy Director Karen Cornish. The Division was responsible for overseeing the delivery of a number of parenting and family support services, including Flying Start and Families First. Flying Start is the Welsh Government's targeted Early Years programme for families living in disadvantaged areas with children under the age of four; it provides part-time childcare, enhanced health visiting, access to parenting support, and support for speech, language and communication development. Families First is administered by local authorities. The programme is focussed on improving outcomes for children, young people and families. There was very significant engagement with delivery teams in local authorities and health boards during the relevant period to support reshaping service delivery in the light of the pandemic.

41. The Children and Families Division co-ordinated the Vulnerable children, young people and safeguarding workstream, championed the interests of children and young people

within Government and provided advice and guidance on policy topics relevant to the provision of support to children and families, for example in relation to the operation of parent toddler groups.

42. The team also provided advice within the Welsh Government on children's rights. This included the provision of advice and support to policy officials across the Welsh Government when carrying out Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) relating to policy proposals. As with EIAs, responsibility for approving CRIAs lies with the relevant Director or Deputy Director overseeing the policy decision.
43. In addition, the Division worked on the implementation of the legislation to remove the defence of reasonable punishment in the Children Act Wales 2020; the provision of parenting advice and support; managing the Welsh Government's recruitment of and relationship with the Children's Commissioner for Wales; and the development and publication of the Children and Young People's Plan.
44. The Division has the overall responsibility for the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 placed a duty on Welsh Ministers, when exercising their functions, to have due regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNRC) and to prepare a scheme setting out the arrangements made or proposed to be made, to comply with the duty.
45. In the early stages of Covid-19 (January 2020 to March 2020), like the Childcare, Play and Early Years Division, almost all staff in the Children and Families Division were required for work associated with the pandemic response. As with Childcare, Play and Early Years Division, some colleagues were released to support the wider Covid-19 response from around September 2020. Children and Families Division led the cross-government work to support vulnerable children and young people throughout the specified period, this remained a core focus of activity.

Protect Team

46. The Protect team and later Protect and Vulnerable People Team did not exist before the pandemic and was established in April 2020. It was led by Claire Bennett, Director CTP, initially and, from October 2020, it was led by Deputy Director Ruth Meadows at the point dedicated senior resource was available. It led on policy development and the delivery of support for individuals required to self-isolate as part of the Test, Trace and Protect

programme. The work of the Protect team included the provision of financial support under the Self-Isolation Support Scheme as well as wider support to help people stay at home (all of which is considered in more detail later in this statement). The team remained a small separate unit until it was incorporated into Communities Division in September 2021 when Ruth Meadows became the Deputy Director of Communities Division.

47. The focus of Protect was the support needed to enable people to self-isolate when required as a result of having contracted COVID-19 or being in contact with someone who had. This was always time-limited, focused support arising from the implications of being required to self-isolate – the time period for self-isolation varied in line with clinical advice as understanding of transmission risks improved and testing was rolled out.

48. This team was separate to the Non-Shielding Vulnerable people (NSV) team which, as I explained above, was initially led by Amelia John and which was moved to CTP's Communities Division in June 2020. However, from 27 April 2020 onwards, both the Protect and NSV teams reported to Claire Bennett, Director CTP, which minimised the scope for duplication.

49. To briefly set the context of shielding, between March 2020 and September 2021, the UK Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) identified and regularly reviewed the underlying clinical conditions for which people should be considered at high risk of complications from COVID-19 infection. The group, known as the shielded patients or people who were clinically extremely vulnerable, were given specific advice to minimise their risk of exposure to COVID-19 given the potential implications for them and were prioritised, for example, to receive the vaccine. That advice included, for example, severely limiting social contact and remaining at home, particularly in the early phase of the pandemic.

50. The identification of this group was based purely on clinical considerations.

51. Recognising the impact of this advice on individuals, a specific package of support, including the delivery of food parcels, was developed and coordinated implemented by a central team led by Amelia John; the responsibility for this work later transferred to health. In the early stages, CTP's engagement in this work related primarily to highlighting equality considerations in terms of, for example, the make-up of the food contained in the food parcels where we had received feedback from community organisations or representatives.

52. Alongside co-ordinating the approach to supporting those who were shielding, the central team led by Amelia John took initial responsibility for coordinating cross-government action in relation to non-shielding vulnerable (NSV) people. The work on non-shielding vulnerable people, as noted earlier in the statement, formed part of CTP's work from end April 2020. This work is covered in more detail later in this statement.

CTP's role in the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19: contribution to key decisions through engagement with stakeholder organisations

53. A central aspect of CTP's role in the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic, and specifically in relation to decision-making during the pandemic, was CTP's engagement with a wide range of stakeholder groups, committees and forums and disseminating the intelligence from these groups. This included engagement with groups in relation to equality; poverty; children and families; the third sector; the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence sector; and the childcare sector.

54. In relation to engagement in relation to equality, some of these groups existed before the pandemic and some were established directly in response to the pandemic; but in all cases, during the specified period there was a strong if not exclusive focus within these groups on the impact of Covid-19, and of the restrictions, on individuals with protected characteristics.

55. At the beginning of the specified period, in March and April 2020, the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip wrote to a number of stakeholder groups and representative bodies, including the Hate Crime Criminal Justice Board; the Disability Equality Forum; the Wales Faith Communities Forum; and members of the Chinese Communities in Wales (this is a range of organisations – Cardiff Confucius Institute; Bangor Confucius Institute; South Wales Chinese Association (Cardiff Met); Chinese in Wales Association; Newport Chinese Community Centre; Cardiff Chinese Christian Church; Bangor Chinese School; North East Wales Chinese Women's Association; North Wales Chinese Association). I exhibit examples of those letters as **WG/CTPD/01-05/INQ000281652**, **WG/CTPD/01-06/INQ000282173**, **WG/CTPD/01-07/INQ000282172** and **WG/CTPD/01-08/INQ000282166**.

56. In those letters, the Minister offered assurance that there were mechanisms in place to ensure that information relating to the impact of Covid-19 on different groups would be captured and shared with Welsh Government officials. The Minister also invited the

recipients of the letters to communicate directly with CTP regarding any such information by the team, and contact details were provided. Information that was passed to CTP in this way formed part of CTP's data repository which I explain in more detail later on in this statement. The letters also provided reassurance on action to tackle hate crime and access to sources of support, as well as links to public health information.

57. Through this engagement, CTP and the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip / Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip Jane Hutt MS developed a real and detailed understanding of how these groups were experiencing the pandemic. This information was fed back directly by the Minister and through policy officials to colleagues across Government, in partner organisations and other Ministers.

58. This included providing feedback to Cabinet as part of advice to inform decisions on the response to the pandemic.

59. Similarly, the Deputy Minister for Social Services was provided with regular feedback from engagement on children and families and childcare. This included regular engagement with the Children's Commissioner and her office about matters that were being raised with her by children and young people; feedback from the childcare and play sector and from delivery partners providing Flying Start and Families First. The information gathered through this engagement informed decision making in CTP and was shared across Government, as outlined below.

60. I exhibit by way of example of how this intelligence was used a document which CTP prepared which summarised equality considerations and potential mitigations to inform decision making around the proposed firebreak in October 2020. This is exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-09/INQ000048883**.

61. A further paper covering equality and children's rights and a more detailed Children's Right Impact Assessment were developed to inform the post-firebreak regime, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-10/INQ000281897** and **WG/CTPD/01-11/INQ000048893**.

62. I also exhibit a document prepared by CTP which summarised the specific risks to and issues affecting different groups with which CTP had been engaging, as a result of the proposed easing of restrictions in July 2021. This is exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-12/INQ000282077**.

63. I set out below a summary of the key groups with which CTP engaged during the specified period.

First Minister's Covid-19 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Advisory Group

64. On 14 April 2020, Judge Ray Singh, CBE Hon LLD, and Chair of the Race Council Cymru wrote to the First Minister expressing concerns regarding the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people across Wales. I exhibit a copy of that letter as **WG/CTPD/01-13/INQ000282183**, and the response the First Minister returned as **WG/CTPD/01-14/INQ000282169**. On 15 April 2020, the Romani Cultural and Arts Company (a community led, not-for-profit educational organisation representing the interests of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities) also wrote to the First Minister highlighting particular concerns in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in Wales. I exhibit a copy of that letter as **WG/CTPD/01-15/INQ000281664**.

65. In response to these concerns, the First Minister established the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic Covid-19 Advisory Group ("the Covid BAME Advisory Group"¹) and asked Judge Singh to Chair the Group, with Dr Heather Payne, Senior Professional Adviser on health policy to the Welsh Government, as technical adviser. The Covid-19 Advisory Group met for the first time on 29 April 2020, and continued to meet on a weekly basis after that, until 20 April 2021. I exhibit the minutes of the meetings that took place on 29 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-16/INQ000282064**); 6 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-17/INQ000282055**); 20 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-18/INQ000282047**); 27 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-19/INQ000282087**); 22 July 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-20/INQ000282072**) as examples.

66. The Covid-19 Advisory Group's membership comprised Welsh Government officials, representatives of Public Health Wales, NHS Wales Health Boards and Trusts, as well as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic NHS and care workers. Members of CTP's Equality branch were members of the Covid Advisory Group but did not lead on work in relation to the Group, which was the responsibility of Health officials. The Covid Advisory Group also worked with stakeholder organisations and expert advisers within Wales and across the UK, to share information and to consider options to redress the impact of the pandemic. It was supported in this work by the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical

¹ I would like to note at this juncture that, in line with the Welsh Government's Race Equality Action Plan, published in June 2022, the Welsh Government no longer uses the acronym 'BAME'. I have used it here only because this was the title given to this group at that time.

Services (KAS), which provided the Advisory Group with an analysis of the available relevant statistical data concerning the circumstances of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in Wales. This analysis was published on 22 June 2020, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-21/INQ000081237**.

67. The Covid Advisory Group produced a report in September 2021 which summarised the work that had been undertaken at that time. I exhibit a copy of that report as **WG/CTPD/01-22/INQ000066078**.

68. As Chair of the Covid Advisory Group, Judge Singh established two subgroups: the Socioeconomic Subgroup, chaired by Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna; and the Risk Assessment Subgroup, chaired by Professor Keshav Singhal.

The Socioeconomic Subgroup

69. The Socioeconomic Subgroup was set up specifically to identify the range of socioeconomic factors and wider social determinants influencing adverse Covid-19 health and social care outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, and to provide advice to the Welsh Government. Its membership comprised representatives from stakeholder organisations, as well as Welsh Government officials. It met regularly during the specified period, and I attach as examples minutes of those meetings on 11 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-23/INQ000282113**); 18 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-24/INQ000282061**); 27 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-25/INQ000282057**); 1 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-26/INQ000282124**).

70. CTP was directly involved with the Socioeconomic Subgroup and played an important role in its work: NR and other officials within the Equality branch provided the Subgroup with an evidence paper that summarised the information from CTP's data repository (which I address in more detail later in this statement) relating to the socioeconomic factors influencing adverse Covid-19 health outcomes among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in Wales.

71. On 22 June 2020 the Socioeconomic Subgroup published its report on those the key socioeconomic and environmental factors implicated in the disproportionate Covid-19 outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals. The report drew on the evidence provided by the equalities branch as well as reflecting the experience and

expertise of the members of the group. I exhibit a copy of this report as **WG/CTPD/01-27/INQ000227599**. The report made a broad range of immediate and medium-term recommendations, which the Subgroup was then responsible for monitoring before this work was taken on by the Race Equality Action Plan Steering Group (and its successor, the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan Accountability Group). An evidence paper, which had been relied on by the Subgroup in compiling the main report, was also published shortly afterwards, on 14 July 2020 as “COVID-19 BAME Advisory Group – Potential impact of COVID-19 evidence paper”, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-28/INQ000282068**.

72. It was at that stage that the responsibility for the Secretariat to the Socioeconomic Subgroup transferred from Population Health (the CMO’s team) to CTP. CTP played a central role in the work that was then carried out to coordinate the Welsh Government’s response to the report, which was published on 24 September 2020. I exhibit that response as **WG/CTPD/01-29/INQ000282184**.

73. The findings of the report of the Socioeconomic Subgroup also informed the development of the Race Equality Plan for Wales 2020-2025 consultation, which was published on 24 March 2021 and which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-30/INQ000282160**, and the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan developed from the consultation, which was published on 7 June 2022, I exhibit the published plan as **WG/CTPD/01-31/INQ000227788**.

The Risk Assessment Subgroup

74. The Risk Assessment Subgroup was set up at the first meeting of the Advisory Group, on 29 April 2020. The membership of the Risk Assessment Subgroup was diverse, comprising doctors, public health experts, epidemiologists, endocrinologists, intensivists, community leaders, GPs, geneticists, and NHS Wales leaders. This was a Health led group, however officials working within CTP’s Equality branch would attend; I include a summary of its work here for completeness, rather than because it fell within CTP’s remit. The Risk Assessment Subgroup was tasked with developing a workplace risk assessment tool (“the Risk Assessment Tool”) for use by NHS and Social care staff, to accurately assess their risk level for developing more serious symptoms if they came into contact with the Covid-19 virus, taking into account factors including ethnicity, sex, and age.

75. The Risk Assessment Subgroup met on 5 May 2020 and continued to meet regularly until 14 April 2020. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of the meetings that took place 27

May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-32/INQ000282058**) 20 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-33/INQ000281953**); 12 January 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-34/INQ000282062**).

76. On 26 May 2020, the First Minister published online the Risk Assessment Tool that had been developed by the Risk Assessment Subgroup and further refined by Welsh Government officials. It was widely relied on throughout the specified period to accurately assess the risk posed to public sector workers in their workplaces, so that those risks could be properly managed and so that the NHS and other public services could continue to operate. It was designed to be used by all health and social care staff, regardless of ethnicity.
77. An updated version of the Risk Assessment Tool was published on 7 August 2020, to take into account changes to shielding advice; and an adapted version was published on 10 August 2020 for use in the Education, Childcare Playwork, Youthwork and Further Education workplaces. All those versions of the Risk Assessment Tool are contained in the Annex of the report of the Risk Assessment Subgroup published in October 2021. I exhibit a copy of that report as **WG/CTPD/01-35/INQ000282020**.

Social Care Implementation Subgroup

78. The Covid-19 Advisory Group also established the Social Care Implementation Subgroup, which was chaired initially by Andrea Street, a Deputy Director in the Social Services Directorate. This was a social care led group, with attendance from Equalities officials; however, as in relation to the Risk Assessment Subgroup, this information is being shared here to assist the Inquiry rather than being a matter for which I or CTP were responsible. The purpose of the Social Care Implementation Subgroup was to ensure that the needs of the social care sector were fully taken into account in the work undertaken by the Covid Advisory Group, and in particular, to understand the impact of Covid-19 on Minority Ethnic workers employed in social care. A key element of the work of the Subgroup was to support the effective implementation of the Risk Assessment Tool in social care settings.

Covid-19 Moral and Ethical Advisory Group for Wales (CMEAG)

79. In the early stages of the pandemic, the Welsh Government established its Moral and Ethical Advisory Group for Wales (known as CMEAG), the terms of reference for which were published on 4 May 2020 and are exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-36/INQ000066079**. The decision to form CMEAG was made by the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, further to the

Ministerial Advice cleared by Dr Heather Payne on 1 April 2020, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-37/INQ000097679**.

80. The function and operation of CMEAG has been addressed in Dr Heather Payne's witness statement, M2B-WG-HP-01. I do not repeat that information here, save to note that, while CTP did not have a leading role in relation to the main CMEAG Group, it did help with the advice to establish the group and it set up the Funerals, Burials and Cremations subgroup to consider specifically the impact of Covid-19 on practices for funerals, burials and cremations.

81. I exhibit the Terms of Reference for the Funerals, Burials and Cremations subgroup as **WG/CTPD/01-38/INQ000282187**, and minutes of the meetings that took place on 2 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-39/INQ000281657**); 9 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-40/INQ000282050**); 20 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-41/INQ000282051**) as examples. Those meetings were attended by representatives of different faith communities as well as Welsh Government officials and were chaired by NR The work of the Funerals Burials and Cremations subgroup informed all the key decisions that were made by Ministers in this area, in the manner that I have described above – that is, information was fed back from the subgroup via policy officials to Ministers, who would then take that information into account in decision making both as part of the 21-day reviews and more generally.

The Wales Race Forum

82. The Wales Race Forum is a Welsh Government led forum chaired by the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt, MS. It was established in February 2012 and provides advice to the Welsh Government on issues that affect Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in Wales. Membership of the Forum consists of a number of third sector organisations. The Forum is also attended by Welsh Government officials, predominantly from the Equalities Branch of CTP's Communities Division, with officials from other Directorates also attending from time to time depending on the agenda items scheduled. During the specified period, information received from Wales Race Forum members regarding the impact of the pandemic on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in Wales was fed back to Ministers by the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, to relevant officials across Welsh Government and used to inform decision-making and 21-day review impact assessments.

83. Before the pandemic, the Wales Race Forum usually met four times a year. During the specified period, these meetings increased in frequency. In the early stages of the pandemic the Wales Race Forum provided vital information to the Welsh Government about the impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people and was able to identify such issues as they began to emerge. I exhibit, by way of example, an email thread on 19 and 20 March 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-42/INQ000281650** that demonstrates the nature of the engagement with members of the Wales Race Forum and the type of issues that were being raised in this way. I also exhibit a document entitled “Wales Race Forum Covid 19 Emerging Themes - March 2020” which was compiled by policy officials on the basis of information being fed through from the Forum, **WG/CTPD/01-43/INQ000282140**.

84. The Forum met on several occasions (12 meetings throughout the period), and I exhibit examples of minutes as: 22 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-44/INQ000282060**), 10 September 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-45/INQ000281859**), 19 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-46/INQ000282097**), 2 December 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-47/INQ000282158**), 18 January 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-48/INQ000282229**).

The Faith Communities Forum

85. The Faith Communities Forum helps to improve relations between all faith community groups in Wales. It was established long before the pandemic and its membership includes representatives of a range of faith organisations. During the specified period, it was chaired by the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, and meetings were attended by officials from CTP’s Communities Division, as well as other Welsh Government officials. The Forum met regularly to discuss the impact of the pandemic on the different faith communities that exist across Wales. I exhibit minutes of the meetings of the Faith Communities Forum that took place on 29 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-49/INQ000221190**); 3 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-50/INQ000282088**); 1 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-51/INQ000281883**) as examples.

86. In June 2020, a subgroup of the Faith Communities Forum was formed to engage with stakeholders specifically in relation to the reopening of places of worship with the easing of lockdown restrictions. This subgroup was called the Reopening Places of Worship: Task and Finish Group. It was chaired by NR and its membership comprised representatives of a broad range of faith communities in Wales. The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to consider and provide advice to the Welsh Government, as well

as providing a means of sharing information with faith communities about the changes, and any associated rules and guidance. An engagement session was held with the Task and Finish Group on 17 July 2020, the minutes of which are exhibited (**WG/CTPD/01-52/INQ000221189**). The information collected through the Forum informed decisions taken relating to the reopening of places of worship as part of the decision-making processes.

87. Alyson Francis also chaired three Q&A sessions in relation to the re-opening of places of worship, which were attended by a varied audience of representatives of different places of worship across Wales on 23 June 2020, 8 October 2020, and 14 January 2021. I exhibit informal notes of the meetings as Exhibit **WG/CTPD/01-53/INQ000282054**, **WG/CTPD/01-54/INQ000221196**, **WG/CTPD/01-55/INQ000282182** and an FAQ document that was produced for attendees as exhibit **WG/CTPD/01-56/INQ000282170**.

The Disability Equality Forum

88. The Disability Equality Forum is another a Welsh Government led forum, chaired by the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip. It was established long before the pandemic and provides advice to the Welsh Government on issues affecting disabled people. The members of the Disability Equality Forum include disabled people's organisations and third sector organisations. The meetings of the Forum are also attended by Welsh Government officials from the Equality branch of CTP's Communities Division. Other officials attend from time to time, depending on the issues under discussion. During the specified period, the Forum played a key role in collating and reporting crucial information to the Welsh Government about the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people in Wales. This information was fed back to relevant policy teams and Ministers including into the 21-day review process, where it informed decisions taken at Ministerial level.

89. The Disability Equality Forum met as and when it was required during the specified period. I exhibit minutes of the meetings that took place on 16 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-57/INQ000282066**); 30 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-58/INQ000282065**); 4 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-59/INQ000281736**); 23 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-60/INQ000281763**); 5 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-61/INQ000281885**); 6 November 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-62/INQ000282059**); 27 January 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-63/INQ000282063**).

Disability Equality Forum Steering Group and the Locked Out report

90. In the summer of 2020, recognising the impact of the pandemic on disabled people, the Disability Equality Forum established a Steering Group to lead on the co-production of a report called “Locked out: liberating disabled people’s lives and rights in Wales beyond Covid-19”. The Steering Group was chaired by Rhian Davies of Disability Wales, the national association of disabled people’s organisations in Wales, and its members included members of the Disability Equality Forum as well as Welsh Government officials. Dr Debbie Foster, who also sat on the Steering Group, took the role of author of the report, responsible for synthesising the vast range of information that was collated by the Group.
91. I have described above the involvement of CTP in the collation and provision of evidence that was relied on by the Socioeconomic Subgroup of the First Minister’s Covid-19 Advisory Group. CTP provided similar assistance in relation to the development of the “Locked Out” report, for which purpose another evidence paper was provided to the Steering Group that summarised the data relating to the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people that was contained in the Welsh Government’s equalities data repository. I exhibit that paper as **WG/CTPD/01-64/INQ000282159**.
92. The Disability Equality Forum Steering Group met regularly between October 2020 and February 2021, and I exhibit, by way of example, the draft terms of reference as **WG/CTPD/01-65/INQ000282078**, minutes of the meetings that took place on 20 April 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-66/INQ000282177**) 12 May 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-67/INQ000282175**); and 3 June 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-68/INQ000282176**).
93. The “Locked Out” report was published on 2 July 2021. I exhibit a copy as **WG/CTPD/01-69/INQ000282167**. The report made a series of findings about the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people across a number of different areas and made recommendations for how those inequalities should be addressed. The Welsh Government published its response to the “Locked Out” report on the same date, 2 July 2021, and I exhibit a copy of that response as **WG/CTPD/01-70/INQ000282168**.

Disability Rights Taskforce

94. As part of the Welsh Government’s response to the “Locked Out” report, the Disability Rights Taskforce was established in October 2021. The Taskforce, which continues in

operation presently, is and was co-chaired by Dr Debbie Foster and the Minister for Social Justice, and its membership of around 40 individuals includes disabled people and representatives of disabled people's organisations, Welsh Government policy officials, public bodies, Commissioner's offices (including the EHRC), and all members of the Locked Out Steering Group and of the Disability Equality Forum. The purpose of the taskforce was to begin to address the inequalities identified in the "Locked Out" report and to oversee implementation of the recommendations by the Welsh Government, and by external public, private and third sector bodies, where applicable. It met for the first time on 18 November 2021, and I exhibit the minutes of that meeting as **WG/CTPD/01-71/INQ000282028**. I also exhibit the minutes of the subsequent meeting, on 3 February 2022, as **WG/CTPD/01-72/INQ000282174**.

95. The Disability Rights Taskforce was supported by the "Prioritisation" Working Group, the purpose of which was to provide policy officials and Disability Equality Forum members with the opportunity to meet, discuss and agree priority topics to be considered by the much wider Disability Rights Taskforce in advance of its meetings. I exhibit the minutes of the meetings of the Prioritisation Working Group that took place on 14 January 2022 (**WG/CTPD/01-73/INQ000282105**); 20 January 2022 (**WG/CTPD/01-74/INQ000282106**); and 14 February 2022 (**WG/CTPD/01-75/INQ000282181**). A number of workstreams have been established since that time.

Weekly meetings with Disability Wales

96. CTP held weekly meetings with Disability Wales during the specified period. These meetings were chaired by policy officials from CTP. These meetings were an opportunity for Disability Wales to provide information obtained from the organisations it represented, which was in turn fed back to relevant teams across Welsh Government by officials. Ministers were also updated on key matters. I exhibit, by way of example, notes of the meetings held on 8 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-76/INQ000282046**); 22 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-77/INQ000282048**); 28 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-78/INQ000282073**); 8 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-79/INQ000282156**); 10 November 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-80/INQ000282157**); 2 February 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-81/INQ000282162**).

97. These discussions fed into a range of decisions. For example, concerns were raised at the meeting on 22 April 2020 (exhibited above) about the impact of prioritised supermarket delivery slots for people who were shielding, in relation to disabled people who did not

need to shield (for example, blind people) but who still relied on being able to access delivery slots. This resulted in discussions with supermarkets about their approach.

Regular meetings with Eyst

98. Eyst is the Ethnic Minorities Youth and Support Team Wales, an organisation which was funded to support the Welsh Government's engagement with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people. During the specified period, CTP agreed with Eyst that they should redirect its business plan to support engagement with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people on Covid-19 specifically. Eyst undertook extensive engagement and held online forums on a range of policy topics from education to healthcare, which provided insight on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people's concerns on these issues during the pandemic. Eyst provided feedback from the forums directly to CTP, and this was discussed further at regular meetings that took place between Eyst and CTP.

99. I exhibit, by way of example, notes from the forums that took place on 6 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-82/INQ000282152**), 6 July 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-83/INQ000282153**) 21 July 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-84/INQ000282163**).

Accessible Communications Group

100. In early June 2020, the Accessible Communications Group was established by **NR** **NR** working in conjunction with the Welsh Government's Communications Directorate. The purpose of the Accessible Communications Group was to improve access to information about Covid-19 by members of the public during the pandemic. The membership of the Group consisted of policy officials as well as a range of Welsh organisations that represent the interests of people who may face barriers in accessing communications, including deaf people, blind people, those with hearing loss, those with sight loss, older people, children, refugees, those with learning difficulties, or people from Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities. The Group met on 4 June 2020 and 18 June 2020 (minutes are exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-85/INQ000282180** and **WG/CTPD/01-86/INQ000282179**) and heard feedback from its members, which is summarised in the document I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-87/INQ000282067**. In summary, the feedback revealed that there was more that could be done by the Welsh Government to improve accessibility of information for different groups of people in Wales.

101. The Group developed a set of guidelines to be used by all Welsh Government staff when producing communications, to ensure that these were accessible to all members of the public. This is exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-88/INQ000282164**.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people

102. CTP also engaged extensively with groups representing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. For example, the Equality branch of CTP's Communities Division held weekly meetings with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller service providers to discuss the impact of Covid-19. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of the meetings that were held on 1 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-89/INQ000282095**), 9 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-90/INQ000282096**), 21 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-91/INQ000222760**), 5 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-92/INQ000282074**), 4 September 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-93/INQ000282101**); 9 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-94/INQ000282083**).

103. The Equality branch also met weekly throughout the specified period with Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru, the Welsh children's charity providing support to vulnerable and marginalised children, young people and families in Wales, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of the meetings that took place on 22 April 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-95/INQ000282135**; 6 May 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-96/INQ000282136**; 13 May 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-97/INQ000282137**; 19 October 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-98/INQ000282138/**; and 28 October 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-99/INQ000282139**.

104. Specific guidance was issued by the Equality branch to local authorities and other partners to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people during the pandemic. I exhibit a guidance letter sent to a number of entities including local authorities and the four Police areas on 26 March 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-100/INQ000281654**. Further guidance was issued on 15 May 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-101/INQ000282075**, and on 18 September 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-102/INQ000282114**.

105. There was also a Four Nations group on Gypsy Roma and Traveller related concerns during the pandemic, which Welsh Government officials from the Equality branch hosted. These meetings were also attended by officials from the other Devolved Governments, as well as the UK Government's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, as it then was. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of the meetings of the Four Nations group that took place on 27 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-103/INQ000282154**); 5 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-104/INQ000282049**); 30 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-105/INQ000282155**);

15 December 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-106/INQ000282098**) and 19 January 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-107/INQ000282161**).

Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights Steering Group

106. The Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights Steering Group (SAEHRSG) was established in May 2020 by the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip. I exhibit its term of reference as **WG/CTPD/01-108/INQ000282186**. Its purpose was to oversee research commissioned as part of the Welsh Government's commitment to developing a clear approach in Wales to ensuring equality and human rights are fully considered and protected. While this work did not arise directly as a result of the pandemic, the exacerbation of existing inequalities by Covid-19 was a key theme of the research that was undertaken.

107. SAEHRSG published a report detailing the findings of the research in August 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-109/INQ000282171**), which was followed by the Welsh Government's response published on 23 May 2022 (**WG/CTPD/01-110/INQ000282185**). The actions set out in the response continue to be overseen by the Steering Group, which has since been reconstituted as the Human Rights Advisory Group, co-chaired by the Minister for Social Justice and the Counsel General.

Equality branch: other engagement with stakeholder organisations

108. Outside of the formalised groups and meetings that took place during the specified period, the Equality branch of CTP's Communities Division was regularly in communication, on a more ad hoc basis, with stakeholder organisations. This communication similarly enabled officials to collect information regarding the impact of Covid-19 on the many groups represented by those organisations and to feed this back to the Welsh Government. The organisations included:

- (a) Women's Equality Network (work with a coalition of organisational and individual members towards a Wales free from gender discrimination where all women, men and non-binary people have equal authority and opportunity to shape society and their own lives);
- (b) Chwarae Teg (a charity inspiring, leading and delivering gender equality in Wales);
- (c) Stonewall/StonewallCymru (an organisation with the aim of creating transformative change in the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the UK);

- (d) Victim Support (an independent charity dedicated to supporting victims of crime and traumatic incidents in England and Wales);
- (e) The Welsh Refugee Council (support sanctuary seekers and refugees to build new futures in Wales);
- (f) Asylum Justice (provide free specialist immigration advice and representation, up to and including court level, to asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable migrants);
- (g) BAWSO (BAWSO support people from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds who are affected by domestic abuse and other forms of abuse, including Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Human Trafficking & Prostitution);
- (h) Women Connect First (a Charity to Empower Black and Minority Ethnic Women);
- (i) Race Equality First (an independent charity and a race equality council);
- (j) PLAN International (development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls);
- (k) Citizens Advice Bureau (a national charity and network of local charities that offer confidential advice regarding a range of issues)
- (l) TUC Equality Committee (Trade Unions congress);
- (m) Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST - provide targeted, culturally sensitive and holistic support service to Black, Minority Ethnic children and young people, families, and individuals including refugees and asylum-seekers living in Wales.

Cross-Department Vulnerable People's Group

109. The Vulnerable People's Cross-Departmental Group was an internal group chaired by Claire Bennett that enabled policy leads from across Welsh Government to share information on the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable people, and on the support being provided by different policy areas. The Group was established at the beginning of the pandemic and held regular meetings that were attended by relevant officials, including those dealing with food, medicines, and pharmacy, safeguarding, Protect and shielding. Although there were no external or stakeholder organisations represented at these meetings, officials were able to share information that they had received through engagement with stakeholder organisations in their respective policy areas.

110. It also provided a mechanism to integrate the Protect response into wider work to support vulnerable people. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of the meetings of the Group that took place on 8 June 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-111/INQ000282142**; 15 June 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-112/INQ000282145**; 23 June 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-113/INQ000282146** 29

June 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-114/INQ000282147**; 15 December 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-115/INQ000282143** and 12 January 2021 **WG/CTPD/01-116/INQ000282144**.

Protect Task Group

111. The Protect Task Group was established in June 2020. It was jointly chaired by Claire Bennett and Chris Bradshaw, Chief Executive of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Council on behalf of the WLGA. Its members included representatives from local authorities, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), County Voluntary Councils, and Local Health Boards. I exhibit the membership list for the Task Group as **WG/CTPD/01-117/INQ000282141**; its Terms of Reference as **WG/CTPD/01-118/INQ000281715**; the initial scoping paper that was prepared for the first meeting of the Task Group on 1 June 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-119/INQ000281716**; and the updated scoping paper of 8 June 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-120/INQ000282274**.

112. The purpose of the Task Group was to enable a high degree of compliance with self-isolation as part of the Test, Trace and Protect scheme, by identifying the support which may be required by some people to enable them to successfully self-isolate, and to consider how this support was to be provided. The Protect Task Group met regularly throughout the specified period. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of meetings of the Protect Task Group on 8 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-121/INQ000281738**); 27 July 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-122/INQ000281738**); 1 September 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-123/INQ000281836**); and 12 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-124/INQ000281889**).

113. In the early stages of its work, the Task Group provided important insight into practical issues on the ground with implementing contact tracing measures. For example, following localised outbreaks at meat plants in South Wales and in Anglesey in June 2020, information was received via the Protect Task Group (specifically, from local authority public protection staff, as well as representatives of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board) about potential barriers to compliance with the requirement to self-isolate which were likely exacerbating the situation. These included the fact that the site employed a significant number of migrant workers, which resulted in language difficulties when communicating the importance of isolation; concerns amongst the workers about sharing data due to risks to their immigration status; and the nature of the housing in which many of the workers were living, which posed significant challenges to isolation. This feedback was extremely important in highlighting matters that Welsh Government needed to address in order to ensure that the Test, Trace and Protect scheme was able to function

effectively, and in particular the nature of the support that the Protect team needed to consider. As an example, I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-125/INQ000282271**, the minutes of the TTP Protect Task Group 22 June 2020 where this issue was discussed.

114. Once expectations in relation to Protect support had been communicated and the self-isolation payment was in place, the Task Group was replaced with the Protect Leads Group. Welsh Government convened and chaired the Group which involved Protect leads from all 22 local authorities and all the CVCs, as well as WLGA and WCVA. The Group met monthly and provided a forum to identify emerging issues; share good practice and approaches to particular challenges and identify gaps in support. The group also provided feedback on proposed changes to the Self-Isolation Payment Scheme and was mechanism by which proposals for the behavioural insight pilots were identified.

Vulnerable children, young people and safeguarding workstream

115. When the Minister for Education announced that schools were to close on 20 March 2020 to all but the children of critical workers and vulnerable children, Welsh Government officials in the Children and Families Division of CTP established a cross-government workstream to consider the priorities for safeguarding and vulnerable children. The policy responsibility for safeguarding lies with the Social Services Directorate of Welsh Government, but CTP stepped in to lead this workstream to ensure there was effective coordination. This was known as the Vulnerable children, young people and safeguarding workstream or VCYPs workstream.

116. The VCYPs workstream included officials from across Welsh Government. Although the workstream itself was solely a Welsh Government initiative and did not include representation from external organisations, the information that was received from relevant stakeholder bodies was nonetheless a central aspect of the functioning of the VCYPs workstream. This information was received via the VCYPs Advisory Group, which did consist of external organisations, and which I address in more detail below.

117. The purpose of the VCYPs workstream was to ensure that issues relating to the safety and wellbeing of children were identified from as broad a range of sources as possible; to ensure that a coherent approach was taken to responding to such issues; and to ensure that intelligence received across Welsh Government from relevant stakeholders was appropriately shared. I exhibit the Ministerial Advice, cleared by Karen Cornish and dated

2 April 2020, which sought approval for the VCYPs workstream, as **WG/CTPD/01-126/INQ000116756**.

118. In the first phase of the VCYPs workstream (March 2020 to September 2020), the focus was on *vulnerable* children and young people. This focus shifted from September 2020 onwards, when it was recognised that the ongoing nature of the pandemic and restrictions made *all* children and young people potentially vulnerable in a range of different areas.

119. The VCYPs workstream led on the production of guidance and FAQ documents in this area. It also led on the development of the definition of 'vulnerable' child, for the purpose of determining which children continued to have access to school during the periods of school closures; this has been addressed in more detail in the statement that I provided on education and childcare, referenced M2B-EPSSG-01.

120. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of meetings of the VCYPs workstream that took place on 11 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-127/INQ000282110**); 20 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-128/INQ000282094**); 14 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-129/INQ000282100**); 28 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-130/INQ000282053**); 19 November 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-131/INQ000282109**); 31 March 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-132/INQ000282052**); and 16 April 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-133/INQ000282099**).

121. The first phase of the VCYPs workstream was closed in February 2021, and I exhibit the associated Ministerial Advice, cleared by Karen Cornish and dated 10 February 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-134/INQ000282108**. I also exhibit a copy of the report summarising the work undertaken by the VCYPs workstream during the period March 2020 to September 2020, which was provided to external stakeholders, as **WG/CTPD/01-135/INQ000282125**.

122. On 4 May 2021, a briefing paper was presented to Ministers, addressing the work being undertaken as part of the second phase of the VCYPs workstream. I exhibit a copy of that briefing paper, dated 4 May 2021, and cleared by Karen Cornish, as **WG/CTPD/01-136/INQ000282151**. I also exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-137/INQ000220855** the report that was produced by the VCYPs workstream in early 2021 which identified the potential harm and negative impacts which were occurring in children and young people in Wales, associated with the pandemic restrictions, and as **WG/CTPD/01-138/INQ000282008** a copy of the data that was produced in conjunction with the Knowledge and Analytical Services that monitored the potential harms to children and young people.

Vulnerable children, young people and safeguarding External Advisory Group (VCYPS Advisory Group)

123. As I noted above, the VCYPS workstream was supported by an external advisory group. The VCYPS Advisory Group included representatives from a broad range of external organisations, including the Children's Commissioner, third sector organisations, the Youth Board, the National Safeguarding Board, the Police, Public Health Wales, as well as policy officials from across Welsh Government. The purpose of the Advisory Group was to share intelligence, to identify any emerging risks and any gaps in the work being undertaken by the VCYPS workstream, and to feed its input back into the VCYPS workstream.

124. I exhibit the Terms of Reference for the VCYPS Advisory Group as **WG/CTPD/01-139/INQ000282126**. By way of example, I exhibit the minutes of the meetings of the VCYPS Advisory Group that took place on 11 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-140/INQ000281744**); 9 July 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-141/INQ000282121**); 15 January 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-142/INQ000282104**); 12 March 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-143/INQ000282103**); 16 April 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-133/INQ000282099**); and 14 May 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-145/INQ000282119**).

Children's Rights Advisory Group

125. The Children's Rights Advisory Group (CRAG) has been in existence since at least 2016. Its role is to provide external children's rights expertise and advice to Welsh Government policy teams. Its membership comprises representatives from Children in Wales (the national umbrella body for organisations and individuals who work with children, young people, and their families in Wales); the office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales; the Wales Observatory on Human Rights of Children (a project based at Swansea University which provides a forum for research, debate, education and knowledge exchange on human rights of children and young people); and UNICEF.

126. CRAG met on a quarterly basis until January 2022, when it started to meet monthly. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of the meetings of CRAG that took place on 4 March 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-146/INQ000282148**; 18 June 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-147/INQ000282086**; 10 December 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-148/INQ000282165**; 11 March

2021 **WG/CTPD/01-149/INQ000282149** and 20 January 2022 **WG/CTPD/01-150/INQ000282150**.

127. In June 2020, CRAG members raised concerns that the Children's Rights Impact Assessment process had been dispensed with for Covid-related decisions in the early stage of the pandemic, given the imperative to take rapid decisions in light of the reasonable worst-case scenario for numbers of fatalities. CRAG members were concerned that the assessment process should be resumed for any future decisions. The same concerns were also raised by the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee (CYPE), chaired by Jane Bryant, MS. On 12 May 2020, Jane Bryant, MS, wrote to the Minister for Education, the Minister for Health and Social Services, and the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, following those Ministers' appearance before the Committee on 28 April 2020 and 5 May 2020, and requesting further detail in relation to a number of subjects, including CRIAs. I exhibit a copy of that letter as **WG/CTPD/01-151/INQ000281704**.

128. To address those concerns, the Children and Families Division:

- (a) Wrote to the work stream leads of the VCYPs workstream, reminding them of the requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment (including a Children's Rights Impact Assessment) for all decisions made in relation to their respective policy areas; **WG/CTPD/01-152/INQ000281696**.
- (b) Wrote to the Coronavirus Legislation team, the wider Covid-19 response team, and the Test, Trace and Protect team, similarly reminding them of the requirement to undertake IIAs (including CRIAs) and offering support from the Division in doing so; **WG/CTPD/01-153/INQ000281708**.
- (c) Verbally briefed the Covid-19 Preparedness Bird Table meeting (a group co-ordinated by the Covid project team, as addressed in more detail in the witness statement of Andrew Goodall, M2B-WG-01), about the need to ensure that IIAs (including CRIAs) were being carried out;
- (d) Reminded Directors and Deputy Directors who were responsible for making Covid-19 decisions of the need to ensure that IIAs (including CRIAs) were being carried out and offered support from the Division in doing so. A draft briefing note was developed to aid these discussions and is exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-154/INQ000282111**.
- (e) The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services wrote to the Chair of the Children and Young People's Committee on 8 June 2020, following a letter from

the Chair of 12 May, providing a response on a number of issues including the approach to CRIAs, exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-155/INQ000281729**.

- (f) A further reminder of the importance of undertaking and publishing CRIAs was published on the Welsh Government intranet site in October 2021, I attach the news article submission form as exhibit **WG/CTPD/01-156/INQ000282254**.

Children's Commissioner

129. There was regular engagement with the Children's Commissioner by policy officials across CTP (and across Welsh Government), and indeed with Ministers, throughout the specified period. In particular, the Commissioner met regularly with the Director of CTP and with the Director of Education and the Director of Social Services. The Children's and Families Division were not always involved in all such engagement.

130. The Commissioner and her office maintained their independence and role championing children and young people's voices during the pandemic, but they were more closely involved in policy making and informing decision making during the pandemic than would be the norm, recognising the expertise they could bring to support better informed decisions.

Children's Commissioner for Wales: Coronavirus and Me survey

131. The Children and Families Division of CTP also engaged with the Children's Commissioner for Wales, and with Children in Wales and the Welsh Youth Parliament, to set up the "Coronavirus and Me" survey. The survey was conducted online in May 2020 and sought information from children and young people about their experiences during the pandemic, including information about the impact of Covid-19 on children with disabilities, older children, and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children. I exhibit the associated Ministerial Advice dated 7 April 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-157/INQ000097638**. The Welsh Government was the first of the four UK nations to seek information from children and young people about their experiences of Covid-19.

132. Over 23,000 children and young people participated in the survey, and the Children's Commissioner held a briefing session with Welsh Government policy officials to discuss the findings of the survey on 23 September 2020, to which approximately 250 staff attended. I exhibit an email which details the content of the session as **WG/CTPD/01-158/INQ000281843** and a follow email sent to participants as **WG/CTPD/01-**

159/INQ000281851. An update paper was developed for use of briefing Ministers as required and I exhibit this as **WG/CTPD/01-160/INQ000282190.**

133. A second “Coronavirus and Me” survey was carried out in January 2021, again with the Children’s Commissioner working in conjunction with the Welsh Government, Children and Wales, and the Welsh Youth Parliament. I exhibit the Ministerial Advice for the second survey, dated 18 January 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-161/INQ000116781.**

134. Policy officials within CTP ensured that the 21-day review team, Ministers, and policy colleagues from across Welsh Government, were kept informed of the findings from both surveys, both before and after publication. This information assisted officials in better understanding the experiences of children and young people relating to a range of policy issues, including schooling, home learning, play, and health and wellbeing, and for that information to feed into policy decisions and CRIAs. Policy decisions that were informed by the results of the surveys included, for example, decisions around the reopening of schools and decisions around the provision of support to the childcare and playwork workforce.

Childcare and play stakeholders

135. Senior management and policy official within CTP’s Childcare, Play and Early Years Division regularly met with local authorities and stakeholder organisations. These meetings are addressed in the statement that I have provided to the Inquiry in relation to education and childcare, M2B-EPSP-01, and I do not repeat that information here.

Third Sector Partnership Council

136. The Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC) was and is a working group, the membership of which comprises representatives of third sector organisations working across a broad range of areas, as well as the Chief Executive Officer of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action. Meetings of the TSPC are chaired by the Minister with responsibility for the Third Sector Scheme in Wales (during the specified period, this was the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, and subsequently the Minister for Social Justice), and attended by Welsh Government policy officials from CTP, as well as third sector organisations.

137. The TSPC was established shortly after devolution and ensures compliance with the Government of Wales Act 2006 section 74, which I referred to earlier in my statement. Before the pandemic, and since the end of the specified period, the TSPC meets with the Minister twice a year. During the specified period, meetings increased in frequency. I exhibit the minutes of the meetings that took place on 30 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-162/INQ000282189**); 21 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-163/INQ000282089**); 2 July 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-164/INQ000282273**); 15 July 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-165/INQ000282178**); and 17 November 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-166/INQ000282188**).

138. During the specified period, these meetings enabled the sector and Welsh Government to share information on the impact of Covid-19 and of the restrictions on the third sector. This information helped make the case for further funding to be made available. At the request of the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, a TSPC Recovery Sub-Group was established. I exhibit the draft Terms of Reference of the Recovery Sub-Group as of August 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-167/INQ000282117**. The Recovery Sub-Group provided a formal structure for the sector to engage with Welsh Government in relation to recovery planning. The TSPC Recovery Sub-Group met for the first time on 25 August 2020, minutes are exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-168/INQ000282223** and published its report in March 2021 which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-169/INQ000282266** This report continues to influence the Welsh Government's actions in this area.

EHRC and Older People's Commissioner

139. Welsh Government policy officials, including from CTP, had joint meetings with EHRC and the Older People's Commissioner on 17 June 2020 and 19 August 2020, to discuss a number of matters that fell within CTP's remit, including Equality Impact Assessments. I exhibit the minutes of those meetings as **WG/CTPD/01-170/INQ000281754** and **WG/CTPD/01-171/INQ000281830**.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner

140. The VAWDASV branch of CTP's Communities Division participated in weekly calls chaired by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, Nicole Jacobs. The meetings were set up by the Commissioner's office at the beginning of the pandemic, primarily for organisations operating in the sector in England and Wales, in order to share information, facilitate cross-sector working, and to identify matters of concern that needed to be raised with Government. Those organisations were represented at the meetings,

with Welsh Government and UK Government officials being invited to attend from the second meeting onwards. I exhibit the minutes of that second meeting, which took place on 30 March 2020, as **WG/CTPD/01-172/INQ000282264** and the note of the call on the 20 April 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-173/INQ000282268** as examples.

VAWDASV stakeholder questionnaire

141. Throughout the specified period, the VAWDASV branch engaged regularly with representatives of the sector to better understand how the needs of victims and survivors had changed as a result of the pandemic. Key partners with whom the team engaged included Welsh Women's Aid; New Pathways; Public Health Wales; BAWSO; Dyn Project; Cymorth Cymru; Respect; and the Police and Crime Commissioners' Office.

142. On 3 April 2020, the team commissioned an information gathering exercise in the form of a questionnaire, which was sent to relevant stakeholder organisations through the VAWDASV regional co-ordinators (individuals employed by VAWDASV regions to lead and deliver an effective approach to the coordination and commissioning of services across their respective regions; North Wales, Mid and West Wales, Cwm Taff Morgannwg, Cardiff and the Vale, Gwent and Mid and West Wales). 16 responses were received, providing information which assisted the team in understanding the impact of the pandemic on the provision of VAWDASV services. I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-174/INQ000282241** the report that was produced for use within the team.

143. This engagement was in addition to the formalised VAWDASV groups and committees on which stakeholder organisations were represented, and which were equally a source of vital information throughout the specified period.

Covid-19 VAWDASV Strategic Group

144. The Covid-19 VAWDASV Strategic Group was established at the outset of the pandemic by CTP's VAWDASV branch and continues to meet to respond to the ongoing situation. The VAWDASV Strategic Group comprised members representing key organisations working in the sector and is chaired by Welsh Government officials from the VAWDASV branch. The purpose of the Group was and is to monitor the impact of Covid-19 on VAWDASV by obtaining information directly from stakeholder organisations. Information obtained at the meetings was fed back to Ministers by policy officials and informed policy and funding decisions, and the 21-day review process. The information obtained also

informed the work of the VAWDASV branch, for example in informing public awareness campaigns.

145. During the initial stages of the pandemic, the Strategic Group met weekly; this was subsequently reduced to once every three weeks, with additional emergency meetings taking place as required. The Deputy Minister and Chief Whip attended a small number of the meetings of the Strategic Group during the specified period. I exhibit the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Group, dated September 2020, as **WG/CTPD/01-175/INQ000282203**. As examples, I exhibit the minutes of the meetings that took place on 20 March 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-176/INQ000282197**); 27 March 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-177/INQ000282198**); 3 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-178/INQ000282195**); 17 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-179/INQ000282193**); 14 August 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-180/INQ000281832**); 20 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-181/INQ000282112**); 28 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-182/INQ000282200**); 6 November 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-183/INQ000282209**); 29 January 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-184/INQ000281986**); 19 February 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-185/INQ000282070**).

VAWDASV Vulnerable Children and Young People Stakeholder Group

146. The VAWDASV branch established a Vulnerable Children and Young People Stakeholder Group in May 2020, which met twice during the early stages of the pandemic, on 6 May 2020 and 6 June 2020. I exhibit the minutes of these meetings, which were chaired by Welsh Government officials, as **WG/CTPD/01-186/INQ000282191** and **WG/CTPD/01-187/INQ000282194**. The membership of the Stakeholder Group comprised representatives from a range of organisations working in the sector, as well as the VAWDASV National Adviser.

All Wales Honour-based Abuse Leadership Group

147. The Welsh Government co-chairs the All Wales Honour-based Abuse Leadership Group, with the Crown Prosecution Service and BAWSO. During the specified period, in response to the report of the First Minister's Covid Advisory Group's Socio-economic Subgroup, the Leadership Group worked to identify the particular risks and barriers faced by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people during the pandemic, and to make recommendations. I exhibit the minutes of the meeting of the Leadership Group that took place during the specified period, on 5 June 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-188/INQ000282218**); 24

September 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-189/INQ000282219**); 27 October 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-190/INQ000282243**); and 10 February 2022 (**WG/CTPD/01-191/INQ000282244**).

148. In particular, the Leadership Group contributed to a review of the recommendations that had been made in the 2013 report “Unchartered Territory: Violence against migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women in Wales”, which had been produced by the Welsh Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) with funding from Public Health Wales. I exhibit the meetings that took place during the specified period at which the report and its recommendations were reviewed, on 20 August 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-192/INQ000282215**); 1 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-193/INQ000282216**); 29 October 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-194/INQ000282220**); 14 December 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-195/INQ000282217**).

VAWDASV Perpetrator Workstream

149. The VAWDASV Perpetrator Workstream was established before the pandemic to provide governance and strategic direction for criminal justice, voluntary, statutory and third sector organisations providing VAWDASV perpetrator services in Wales. Such organisations are represented on the Workstream’s membership. The Workstream is accountable to the Integrated Offender Management Cymru Board (IOMCB). I exhibit the Terms of Reference of the Workstream as **WG/CTPD/01-196/INQ000282259**.

150. During the specified period, the meetings of the Workstream provided a forum in which the impact of Covid-19 on VAWDASV perpetrator services could be discussed. I exhibit minutes of the meetings that took place on 20 May 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-197/INQ000282267**); 9 September 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-198/INQ000282279**); 9 December 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-199/INQ000282282**); 10 March 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-200/INQ000282281**).

Data on impact of Covid-19 on different groups

151. In addition to meeting regularly with stakeholders to gather information, CTP also established and maintained throughout the specified period a repository of data, research and information regarding the impact of Covid-19, and the impact of the imposition and easing of restrictions, on different groups. The data repository was established in April 2020 by policy officials in the Equality branch and in the Welsh Government’s Knowledge

and Analytical Services (KAS). They ensured that the large volume of relevant evidence and information that came into the Welsh Government was logged in the repository.

152. The intention behind the data repository was to create a tool that would inform effective, evidence-based Equality Impact Assessments for all Covid-related decisions taken by the Welsh Government, as well as to ensure that the Welsh Government had access to up-to-date information regarding the potential wider and longer-term effects of Covid-19 on equality. From the outset of the pandemic, the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip in particular was very keen to understand these potential longer-term impacts of Covid-19, and to begin to develop new, post-pandemic policies across Welsh Government to mitigate such effects.

153. The repository was made available to all Welsh Government officials and was promoted in a news article published on the Welsh Government intranet site in July 2020. Data was stored in the repository so that it could be searched by key words as well as by the relevant protected characteristic(s) and policy area(s), to enable users to filter the available information. Officials who wished to search the repository were required to request access. No access to the repository was granted to anyone outside of Welsh Government.

154. As I have already explained, data in the repository was used to inform the development of the report of the Socioeconomic Subgroup of the First Minister's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Covid-19 Advisory Group, published on 22 June 2022 and exhibited above; and also the "Locked Out" report, published on 2 July 2021 and exhibited above.

155. In addition, after the "Locked Out" report was published, CTP was involved in the work carried out by the Disability Rights Taskforce, which as I outlined earlier in this statement was established in order to oversee the recommendations made in the "Locked Out" report. Similarly, CTP contributed to the evidence chapter of the Race Equality Action Plan consultation. Specifically, officials worked with the Wales Covid-19 Evidence Centre and with the Specialist Unit for Review Evidence (SURE) team at Cardiff University to carry out further research on the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people in Wales.

156. CTP officials met the Wales Covid-19 Evidence Centre and the SURE team on multiple occasions to develop and refine the research question and discuss progress. On completion of the work the findings were presented to CTP officials by the SURE team. In

addition, two reports were published as a result of this work: Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on disabled children and adults, which I exhibit the draft report officials commented on as **WG/CTPD/01-201/INQ000282260** (ownership of final version belong to the Wales Covid-19 Evidence Centre) and a statistical article; Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on disabled people which is exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-202/INQ000271826**.

157. More recently, officials in CTP and KAS have also been involved in establishing three distinct Evidence Units, which have been designed to improve the availability, quality and accessibility of evidence about individuals with protected and associated characteristics that informs decisions made by the Welsh Government. The Evidence Units were established formally in January 2022, each led by a policy official. I exhibit the paper that was submitted to Cabinet in December 2020, outlining the intended role of the Units and requesting Ministerial approval, as **WG/CTPD/01-203/INQ000281864**. I also exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 28 July 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-204/INQ000282286**. Following the approval for the Evidence Units in December 2020, it was agreed that an experienced analyst would be brought into the Communities Division to undertake scoping work for the Evidence Units. This work included exploring how the Evidence Unit teams would work, what their remits would be and what the resourcing requirements were in more detail. The scoping was undertaken throughout 2021. An evidence assessment was undertaken to understand what had worked elsewhere and what lessons could be learnt. This involved scoping workshops, interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders from the public sector, third sector and academia. It also involved reviewing relevant literature. This all contributed to a high-level logic model that captured the overarching aims and initial work strands for the Evidence Unit teams.

158. The proposal for options for the three teams were put forward for Ministerial approval in July 2021 (MA/JH-/2279/21 – **exhibited above as exhibit CTPD/01-204/INQ000282286**). Following Ministerial approval, preparatory work was undertaken for establishing the teams, such as recruitment and evidence planning. The joint leads of the Equality, Race, and Disability Evidence Units were recruited in the Autumn 2021, as was one of the heads of branch, all of whom took up their new posts in early January 2022. Following a series of external recruitment exercises throughout 2022, to ensure that people with lived experience had the opportunity to apply for roles, the teams have been fully staffed since October 2023.

159. For completeness, though it is outside the specified period, I exhibit the Cabinet paper providing an update on progress with the Units in August 2022 as **WG/CTPD/01-205/INQ000282285**. I also exhibit the published Strategy for the Units from October 2022, as **WG/CTPD/01-206/INQ000282242**, and the published Priorities for the Units for 2022-2027, as **WG/CTPD/01-207/INQ000282248**.

CTP's role in the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19: funding and support packages

160. A key aspect of CTP's role in the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic was in the establishment and implementation of a wide range of funding and support packages that were made available across the breadth of policy areas within CTP's remit. Decisions about what packages to implement and when were made by Ministers on the advice of CTP, such advice being informed in large part by the ongoing and wide-ranging engagement with stakeholder organisations which has been outlined above.

161. I will now summarise the key funding and support packages which CTP either instigated or into which it provided a significant input.

Discretionary Assistance Fund

162. The Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) was overseen by the Prosperous Futures Division. The DAF, which was already in operation prior to the specified period, provided two types of grants to individuals who were experiencing extreme financial hardship (due to, for example, the loss of a job) and who were in need of immediate financial support. The grants were one-off payments and did not need to be repaid. The two types of DAF grants were:

- (a) The Emergency Assistance Payment (EAP), which helped individuals to pay for essential costs, such as food, gas, electricity, clothing or emergency travel.

- (b) The Individual Assistance Payment (IAP), which helped the applicant or someone they care for to live independently and covered the cost of items such as home furniture, fridges, cookers, washing machines, and other 'white goods'.

163. Before the pandemic, the DAF operated on the basis that eligible individuals were entitled to three Emergency Assistance Payments at 28-day intervals in a rolling 12-month period. When the pandemic happened, there was a surge in applications for new payments. The decision was taken to relax those rules and instead to allow up to five Emergency Assistance Payments at seven-day intervals in a rolling 12-month period. This was intended to provide financial support to those severely affected by the effects of Covid-19, particularly those who had lost their jobs and/or were having to isolate and not in receipt of pay. The DAF was a fund of 'last resort' and many of the people in receipt of one or both of the grants were the most vulnerable in society and were therefore at greater risk from the impacts of Covid-19, whether health-related or financial.
164. The relaxation of the rules took effect on 1 May 2020, initially for a period of three months, to 31 June 2020. The flexibilities were further extended several times up until 31 March 2023 in light of the protracted nature of the pandemic and the impact of the end of the Universal Credit uplift. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice as **WG/CTPD/01-208/INQ000145331**, **WG/CTPD/01-209/INQ000281777**, **WG/CTPD/01-210/INQ000145340**, **WG/CTPD/01-211/INQ000282133**, **WG/CTPD/01-212/INQ000215309** and **WG/CTPD/01-213/INQ000282211**.
165. Before the pandemic, the Discretionary Assistance Fund had a budget of £10.3 million (2019/2020). In 2020/2021, the budget was £11.2 million. A total of £25.9 million additional funding was secured for the changes made during the specified period for the financial years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. In 2020/2021, the Discretionary Assistance Fund supported nearly 200,000 individuals with more than £14.6 million in Emergency Assistance Payments. In 2021/2022, more than 367,000 individuals were supported with £16.2 million in grants.

Communities for Work Plus

166. Communities for Work Plus (CfW+) was introduced in April 2018 following the closure of the Communities First Programme. Its purpose is to support the continued delivery of the ESF funded Communities for Work programme and to enable intensive employability support to be provided to people either in or at risk of poverty and who face barriers to employment, who are not eligible for CfW or regional ESF employability projects.

167. In July 2020, Ministers approved additional funding of £39.673 million as part of the Welsh Government's Employability and Skills response to the impact of the pandemic. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 12 June 2020 and cleared by officials in Welsh Treasury, Employability and Skills, and CTP's Prosperous Futures Division, as **WG/CTPD/01-214/INQ000136790**.

168. This included an additional £3 million for 2020-2021 for CfW+, which funded the employment of additional employment mentors and employer liaison officers to enhance support to those furthest from the labour market. This also funded the purchase of some 600 laptops through Digital Communities Wales, which were loaned to individuals to help them with them online job searching and training. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial advice as **WG/CTPD/01-215/INQ000282255**.

169. In February 2021, a further £6 million was approved to continue this additional support for CfW+ in 2021-2022, as agreed in MA/KS/0285/21, exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-216/INQ000282250**.

Additional support for families and vulnerable children

170. In October 2020, CTP's Children and Families Division made a combined bid with the Welsh Government's Social Services Directorate for additional funding to support families experiencing difficulties during the pandemic – for example, as the result of the challenges presented by lockdowns, job losses or other financial strains, and mental or physical health issues. All such pressures could place strain on family relationships and lead to conflict in the home. It was intended that the additional funding would be used to implement additional support measures that would assist in reducing this stress and improving individuals' ability to parent adequately. The additional funding was awarded as a one-off grant, out of the Covid-19 Reserve. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 9 October 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-217/INQ000116659** and the Written statement produced as **WG/CTPD/01-218/INQ000282127**.

171. In December 2020, following invitations from the Directorate, local authorities submitted proposals to CTP as to how the funding would be spent. The series of proposals were approved under separate Ministerial Advice, and published as a package of support for children, young people and families. The measures included, for example, the provision of additional training to local authority staff; the development of community-based peer support groups; the provision of counselling services; and the provision of

three digital packages of parenting training. Letters making awards to local authorities for those measures were sent out on 23 December 2020. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice as **WG/CTPD/01-219/INQ000145178**, **WG/CTPD/01-220/INQ000145180** and refer you to exhibit **WG/CTPD/01-218** as noted above.

Income maximisation initiatives

172. The pandemic had a more significant financial impact on the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups. These groups also faced the biggest barriers to claiming additional finance support and consistently failed to claim their full entitlement to social security benefits. The Welsh Government's Single Advice Fund (SAF), which was already in operation before the pandemic, offered advice and assistance to individuals in understanding what benefits they could be entitled to and in navigating the often-complex social security system in order to access those benefits in full. The SAF was funded from the Advice and Advocacy Services budget, which was overseen by CTP's Prosperous Futures Division.

173. During the specified period, it was all the more important to ensure that those individuals who were hardest hit by the pandemic could be assisted in this way. To that end, CTP's Prosperous Futures Division implemented income maximisation measures utilising £1.5 million of additional funding granted by the Minister for Finance and Local Government, out of the Covid-19 Reserve. £1.1 million of this funding was used to increase capacity within the SAF advice services, at national and regional level. The remaining £400,000 was used to fund a multi-media communications campaign which encouraged people to find out what financial support they were entitled to.

174. As a result of these measures, during 2021/2022 the SAF advice services helped over 9,500 people to claim additional social security income, totalling £4.6 million.

175. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 22 July 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-221/INQ000145219**.

Digital Inclusion

176. The existing 'Digital Communities Wales: Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being' (DCW) programme which was delivered by the Wales Co-Operative Centre (funded jointly by CTP and Health) worked with organisations from all sectors that were able to help reach digitally excluded people. The programme was designed to provide training and support to front-line staff, volunteers, and organisations, to engage with and develop, through face-to-face communication, the digital skills of individuals who might require assistance in this area.
177. In response to the pandemic, DCW altered its offer from the traditional face-to-face engagement to telephone, email and (if appropriate) virtual support for organisations who reach those most likely to be digitally excluded.
178. Following a huge increase in demand for the loan of devices (an aspect of the programme which was already being delivered, but to a lesser degree) the Wales Co-Operative Centre submitted a proposal to Health for additional funding. I attach the proposal as **WG/CTPD/01-222/INQ000282236**, and an email to the Minister for Housing and Local Government, from the Digital Inclusion Unit confirming variation to contract had been made as **WG/CTPD/01-223/INQ000281655**.
179. The Minister for Health and Social Services approved the provision of an additional £669,234 (excluding VAT) to the DCW contract, to allow the programme to purchase electronic tablet devices. These devices were provided to vulnerable and/ or elderly individuals who were most in need, to maintain family connection, to access vital health services, and with the broader aim of developing their digital confidence. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 27 March 2020, as **WG/CTPD/01-224/INQ000136772**.
180. The team also contributed to a report led by the previous Chief Digital Officer assessing Welsh Government Services during Covid, I exhibit this as **WG/CTPD/01-225/INQ000282235**.
181. A Digital Inclusion progress report, reflecting support provided during pandemic was published on 14 March 2022, the report is exhibited for information as **WG/CTPD/01-226/INQ000282247**.

Support for small towns: Valleys Taskforce area

182. The Valleys Taskforce was a cross-governmental body set up in 2016 to co-ordinate policy and interventions to improve prosperity in the South Wales Valleys. The Taskforce was established in response to concerns about insecurities and lack of prospects in the area, connected with the decline of heavy industry and the end of coal mining. It operated until March 2021.

183. In July 2020, the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport agreed to re-allocate £3 million funding to provide support to town centres located in smaller towns within the Valleys Taskforce area that had been particularly badly impacted by the pandemic. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice as **WG/CTPD/01-227/INQ000281769**. In November 2020, the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport wrote to local authority leaders, inviting them to bid for a proportion of the funding. Applications were received from nine out of the ten local authorities within the Valleys Taskforce area, and grant letters were issued in December 2020. The funding was used to support a wide range of activities, including support for local businesses, the provision of active travel routes, and better digital provision across the region. For example, improving WiFi, free access and connectivity in towns and town centres, to aid town centre recovery and flexible working; and the provision of technology, such as parking lot sensors, gateway sensors and traffic counters, to better understand the movement of people within and around town centres.

Support for the Third Sector

184. The third sector was relied on from the outset of the pandemic to provide a wide range of community services that were in high demand as a result of Covid-19, including health and social care services, children's services, and services to promote health and wellbeing. This increase in demand led to unprecedented pressure on the third sector. At the same time, many organisations had lost income because fundraising activities had to be stopped or limited due to the lockdowns and were concerned about how they could continue to deliver their normal services during periods of lockdown or restrictions.

185. In response to these concerns, CTP issued a Ministerial Advice dated 24 March 2020, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-228/INQ000145187**. As a result, on 27 March 2020 the Welsh Government announced new funds of some £24 million for the third sector as part of its pandemic response. In addition, the Welsh Government diverted and repurposed £5.3 million from other Welsh Government-funded third sector initiatives. Collectively, these funds were referred to as the Covid-19 Third Sector Response Fund, which was used to implement the following key measures during the specified period:

- (a) Additional funding was provided directly to Third Sector Support Wales (TSSW), which is the network organisation which acts as the primary support for the third sector in Wales and through which Government funding is usually provided. TSSW is made up of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) as the national membership body for the third sector in Wales, and the 19 County Voluntary Councils (CVC) working at regional and national level. The additional funding, which was provided through the Infrastructure Enabling Fund, was used to provide the necessary resources to the WCVA and CVC as they led, supported and co-ordinated the community sector emergency response to Covid-19. This included, for example: producing new materials; providing training to existing staff who were dedicated to supporting volunteers and co-ordinating the volunteer effort; increasing working hours; purchasing ICT equipment to enable remote working; and engaging skilled staff from partner agencies where necessary.
- (b) The Welsh Revitalising Trusts programme was established. The function of the programme was to identify dormant or ineffective charities/ trusts (meaning those with an expenditure over the previous five years of less than 30% of their income). These charities/ trusts were contacted by the Charity Commission to find a way of revitalising the organisation (by, for example, changing its charitable purpose), or to agree a transfer of funds and the closure of the organisation, depending on what was deemed best. To date this work has revitalised over £1 million which is five times Welsh Government's original investment.
- (c) The Third Sector Resilience Fund (TSRF) was launched on 7 April 2020. The Third Sector Resilience Fund provided a mix of loan and grant funding to third sector organisations that were struggling to continue their normal activities. Its remit was subsequently broadened (as addressed in the relevant Ministerial Advice exhibited below as **WG/CTPD/01-229/INQ000103947**) to allow it to support expenditure by organisations to 'futureproof' their operations (by, for example, investing in systems to guard against potential future emergencies). The TSRF was operated by the WCVA, on behalf of the Welsh Government. It should be noted that, in setting up this fund, officials recognised that some organisations could receive support through the Welsh Government's Economic Resilience Fund. Work was undertaken with colleagues in Economy and WCVA to identify and avoid duplication and fraud.

(d) The Voluntary Services Emergency Fund (VSEF) was launched on 27 March 2020 to support the volunteer response to the pandemic, providing grants of up to £100,000. In particular, the VSEF helped organisations meet the additional costs of accommodating the increase in volunteer numbers. This enabled vital support activities to take place, including support for the elderly, those isolating, and/ or struggling to access food and other services. Funding for the VSEF was met by re-allocating funds previously intended for the Volunteering in Wales Fund. In August 2020, VSEF became the Voluntary Services Recovery Fund (VSRF) as lockdown measures were relaxed. I refer you to **WG/CTPD/01-229/INQ000103947** (referenced above) as the relevant Ministerial Advice that led to that decision and the associated additional funding at that stage. Like the TSRF, both the VSEF and the VSRF were operated by the WCVA on behalf of the Welsh Government.

(e) The Community Asset Loan Fund (CALF) was established, which provided loans of up to £300,000 to fund the purchase of property intended for community use.

186. Additional funding for the Covid-19 Third Sector Response Fund was later provided for 2020/2021, totalling £7.7 million, and I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advices, dated December 2020 and 29 January 2021 as **WG/CTPD/01-230/INQ000145208** and **WG/CTPD/01-231/INQ000136842**. Funds were also allocated from the Covid-19 Recovery budget to provide support to the third sector during the transition from the emergency response to recovery, and I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice dated 23 November 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-232/INQ000145207**. For the recovery funding, organisations were provided with high-level conditions and invited to bid to receive a recovery grant.

187. Officials from the Third Sector branch in the Communities Division, in conjunction with the Grant Centre of Excellence, worked together to develop guidance for third sector organisations in receipt of grants from the Welsh Government about what steps to take if, for example, the organisation ever experienced difficulties in providing grant-funded services and when the organisation should inform their Welsh Government grant manager. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 2 April 2020, as **WG/CTPD/01-233/INQ000282251** and a copy of the guidance, as **WG/CTPD/01-234/INQ000081009**

188. In July 2022, Audit Wales published a Memorandum for the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee on the Covid-19 Third Sector Response Fund, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-235/INQ000066532**.

VAWDASV

189. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence, has intensified. The United Nations referred to this as the “shadow pandemic”.
190. In the early stages of the pandemic, CTP’s VAWDASV branch identified an urgent need for increased funding to provide additional support to the sector, which was experiencing many of the challenges that other public services were experiencing (for example, the additional costs of continuing to provide services during the lockdown; increased PPE and cleaning costs; staff absences), which were exacerbated by an underlying increase in the level of VAWDASV and the complexity of cases within the community. By June 2020, when VAWDASV made its bid for additional funding, as outlined in the Ministerial Advice dated 18 June 2020 and which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-236/INQ000103929**. Respect (a perpetrator helpline) was reporting a 150% increase in calls; the NSPCC was reporting a 30% increase in calls reporting domestic abuse; the National Domestic Abuse helpline was reporting a 66% increase in calls; and visits to the Live Fear Free website had increased by 144%. Extra resources were therefore required to enable organisations to clear their existing backlogs and to develop their resilience in order to meet this increased demand for services.
191. The additional funding provided at that stage was allocated to the sector on a needs basis, through regular consultation carried out by the VAWDASV team. VAWDASV officials then issued grant letters specifying what funding was being provided and for what purpose(s).
192. In July 2021, a further £1 million funding was provided which facilitated the following five specific measures:
- (a) Local authorities were able to employ additional Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors and additional Independent Sexual Violence Advisors in their areas, thereby strengthening the existing infrastructure under which VAWDASV services were provided.
 - (b) Organisations providing sexual violence counselling services were able to employ additional counsellors, or increase the working hours of existing counsellors, in order to meet the increased demand that occurred as restrictions began to ease.
 - (c) Software and hardware facilitating remote Court hearings, including capacity for victims of VAWDASV to give their evidence securely by video link, was

implemented. This both helped alleviate the stress of attending Court for victims, and reduced the backlog of cases waiting to be heard.

- (d) Training was provided for teachers and others working in the education sector to be able to deal with disclosures made by children and young people about domestic abuse occurring in the home.
- (e) Additional training was provided under the existing 'Ask and Act' scheme, which provided guidance to relevant professionals on how to identify and take action in respect of potential or suspected instances of domestic abuse.

193. I refer to exhibit **WG-M2B-CTPD-01-221/INQ000145219** as exhibited above, the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 22 July 2021.

Test Trace Protect – Protect support to enable self-isolation

194. 'Protect' or support to enable people to self-isolate – as well as considerations around enforcement of the rules – was a core element of the Welsh Government's Test, Trace, Protect programme. Responsibility for Test and Trace lay with the Welsh Government's Health and Social Services department but Protect was led by CTP, working primarily with local authorities, the third sector, and health boards.

195. In June 2020, the Protect Task Group was established by officials in CTP. I have addressed the role and function of the Protect Task Group earlier in this statement, in the context of CTP's engagement with stakeholder organisations. In early June 2020, the Task Group carried out a mapping exercise that identified what support was at that time already available at local level, and from which sources. I exhibit a copy of that document as **WG/CTPD/01-237/INQ000281722**.

196. Following this exercise, the Task Group agreed a letter that was sent to local authorities jointly by the Minister for Housing and Local Government, the Minister for Health and Social Services, and the WLGA, on 12 August 2020. I exhibit a copy of that letter as **WG/CTPD/01-238/INQ000281828**. In the letter, it was explained that much of the support that might be needed to enable individuals to self-isolate was similar to the support which had been provided to shielding and non-shielding vulnerable people in the early stages of the pandemic, and that local authorities were best placed to continue to lead, coordinate and deliver this support locally, working with third sector organisations and referring to other specialist services where appropriate. This included, for example, assistance with supermarket shopping, pharmacy collections, and dog-walking. The letter

also explained that any material, additional costs incurred by local authorities could be claimed out of the Hardship Grant.

197. I also exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-239/INQ000136795** the Ministerial Advice under which the Protect Offer was established.

198. The Protect Task Group was a key mechanism through which issues emerging on the ground were followed up with relevant policy teams, including by the provision of advice on proposed approaches and guidance informed by the practical reality of dealing with outbreaks and barriers people were facing on the ground. This included, for example, commenting on scripts and action cards for use by contact tracers and advising on where the boundary between contact tracers sign-posting support and referral for more in-depth support by local authority teams should lie; discussion of accessible communications and reaching all communities in Wales; highlighting issues in relation to access Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) and commenting on guidance and highlighting a range of challenges around self-isolation in shared homes / accommodation and commenting on guidance on self-isolation. I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-240/INQ000282085** a Protect support summary document.

199. In March 2021, the Protect Leads Group was involved in the running of two pilot “enhanced” Protect offers in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board area and in the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board area, during which additional support for the provision of food, mental health services, and assistance with digital skills were made available for those needing to self-isolate. Following these pilots, an enhanced Protect offer was introduced. Guidance to local authorities on the enhanced Protect offer was published, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-241/INQ000282280** and the Ministerial advice as **WG/CTPD/01-242/INQ000282249**.

Self-isolation support scheme

200. In October 2020, a decision was taken by the Minister for Housing and Local Government, the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd, and the First Minister to establish a Self-Isolation Support Scheme (“SISS”) for Wales. The purpose of the SISS was to ease the financial barriers faced by people of low incomes when needing to self-isolate. This followed the introduction by the UK Government of a parallel scheme in England, from 28 September 2020. I exhibit the Ministerial Advice that relates to the establishment of

the SISS in Wales, dated October 2020, as **WG/CTPD/01-243/INQ000282122**. The SSIS was developed by the Protect team within CTP, working with colleagues from the central COVID team.

201. Under the SISS, a payment of £500 was payable to any individuals who had been told to self-isolate by Test, Trace and Protect and who were in receipt of Universal Credit or other specified benefits and would be unable to work from home. Individuals who were not on benefits but who were otherwise at risk of financial hardship, as assessed on a discretionary basis by the relevant local authority, were also entitled to the payment. SISS payments could be made to employed or self-employed people, and local authorities were responsible for administering the scheme, which was intended to increase compliance with the requirement to self-isolate and thereby reduce transmission rates. The SISS went live in Wales on 16 November 2020, with an initial allocation of £32 million in funding which came from the Covid-19 Reserve and which was managed through the Local Government Hardship Fund.

202. Leading on the development of the SISS in Wales were senior officials from CTP, including Claire Bennett, Ruth Meadows, and NR, as well as senior officials from what was then the Welsh Government's Recovery and Restart group and officials from the Local Government Directorate.

203. From September 2020 onwards, the Welsh Government team worked with UK Government policy colleagues who were developing the scheme for England. In particular, the UK Government delivered 'briefing' sessions for the Devolved Governments, and there was contact with HMRC (regarding the tax status of the payments), the Department for Health and Social Care, and Four Nations meetings. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of the initial 'briefing' call between UK Government and the Devolved Governments on 17 September 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-244/INQ000281842** emails between Welsh Government officials and officials in HMRC as **WG/CTPD/01-245/INQ000281901** and **WG/CTPD/01-246/INQ000281854**; notes of an internal meeting on 27 October 2020 which touches on engagement with UK Government, as **WG/CTPD/01-247/INQ000282131**; and notes of meeting between Welsh Government and WLGA on 2 December 2020 which includes a note of a Four Nations meeting on 30 November 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-248/INQ000282090**.

204. In addition, the UK Government established a Group at which local authorities in England were represented as well as the other Devolved Governments, and where the

operations of the proposed scheme were discussed. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of the meetings of the Steering Group on 27 October 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-249/INQ000282079**.

205. Generally, the meetings with UK Government mainly focused on mechanisms to deliver the payment in England; the issues which English local authorities had identified; and lessons learned, which could apply in Wales and in the other Devolved Governments.

206. Senior Welsh Government officials also attended separate meetings with policy colleagues from the other Devolved Governments. The aim of these meetings was to understand the mechanisms being used by the other Devolved Governments; to consider the most effective delivery means; and, insofar as possible, to align the approaches taken across the Devolved Governments.

207. As well as designing payment scheme, UK Government was also exploring making self-isolation a legal requirement. This was also given consideration as options for Wales were developed. I exhibit the attached meeting note of an early discussion of options for Wales from 21 September 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-250/INQ000282129**.

208. Within Welsh Government, an internal Steering Group was set up in September 2020 and met at least weekly until January 2021. It was attended by representatives from across Welsh Government, as well as representatives the WLGA from time to time. I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of meetings of the internal Steering Group as **WG/CTPD/01-251/INQ000282132**. In addition, officials also attended an external Group, involving Welsh Government, WLGA, representatives for Local Authority Revenue and Benefits Teams and I exhibit, by way of example, minutes of one of those meetings as **WG/CTPD/01-252/INQ000282261**. Welsh Government also met all 22 Revenue and Benefits Teams to discuss implementation of the scheme.

209. These Groups provided feedback on guidance for local authorities on the administration of the scheme, which was published in around November 2020, and regularly updated thereafter. I exhibit the original version as published in November 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-253/INQ000281916**; updated versions are available and will be provided if the Inquiry would like to see them.

210. The SISS swiftly evolved to include additional groups who were likely to be adversely financially impacted by the requirement to self-isolate. From 14 December 2020, parents

and carers of those who were required to self-isolate were also entitled to the £500 payment, and I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice for that decision as **WG/CTPD/01-254/INQ000282102**. In January 2021, the decision was taken to extend the scheme to individuals who had been advised to self-isolate by the NHS Covid app, and I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice for that decision, dated 27 January 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-255/INQ000145341**. Prior to this, only individuals who had been told that they needed to self-isolate under the Test, Trace and Protect scheme were eligible for the £500 payment, because it was not possible to verify that users of the app had been advised to self-isolate. A technical solution was eventually developed that allowed the verification of app users to be carried out. These financial cost of these changes to the eligibility criteria for the SISS was met out of the initial allocation of £32 million.

211. In June 2021, a decision was taken to extend the operation of the SISS until the end of March 2022. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice for that decision, dated June 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-256/INQ000282071**. An additional £4 million was provided from the Covid-19 Reserve to the Local Government Hardship Grant (the Grant is addressed in more detail in M2/WG/LGD/01), in order to meet the financial cost of the extension of the SISS to March 2022.

212. In October 2021, the payment made under the SISS was increased from £500 to £750. I attach the Ministerial Advice relating to that decision, which is dated 29 July 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-257/INQ000136886**. By this time, the numbers of people being told to self-isolate were decreasing, and it was anticipated that, by August 2021, only a small proportion of the adult population would be unvaccinated. The unvaccinated group tended to be in lower income groups and less likely to benefit from the option to work from home, meaning that self-isolation for that group would continue to be more challenging and more likely to lead to social and economic hardship. The increase in payment amount was intended to encourage people to continue to engage with testing (both symptomatic and asymptomatic), to engage with the contact tracing process, and to help people adhere to the self-isolation regulations. The additional cost of the increased payment was met through repurposed funding from the Local Government Hardship Grant.

213. In January 2022, the payment amount under the scheme was returned to its original sum of £500, which was in line with the amount then offered under the equivalent schemes in the rest of the UK. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice for that decision, dated January 2022, as **WG/CTPD/01-258/INQ000145583**. This decision was based on feedback received from local authorities, via the internal SISS Steering Group, that their

experience was that most individuals who were claiming support under the scheme were in fact losing between £200 to £300 when needing to self-isolate. It was also based on feedback received from Beaufort Research, which had been commissioned by the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales to undertake quantitative and qualitative research on people's experience of self-isolation. I exhibit a copy of Beaufort Research's report, which was published on 23 March 2022, as **WG/CTPD/01-259/INQ000282130**.

214. At the same time, it was also decided that the SISS would be extended to 30 June 2022. This was because it was intended that contact tracing would also continue until at least that date. Given that the Local Government Hardship Grant, through which the SISS was funded, was due to be discontinued on 31 March 2022, the extension of the SISS beyond this date was funded directly from the Local Government Major Expenditure Group (MEG) which was allocated an additional £12.35 million for this purpose.

215. The effectiveness of the SISS was reviewed as part of the Adherence Confidence Text Survey (ACTS) and the Contact Adherence Self-Isolation Behavioural Insights Study (CABINS). These were text message and telephone surveys conducted in November 2020 to January 2021, and September to October 2022, respectively, with individuals who had been notified of the need to self-isolate or who had completed a period of self-isolation. I exhibit a report published by Public Health Wales which considers the key findings of those surveys as **WG/CTPD/01-260/INQ000281992**.

216. Funding was also made available to undertake a research project to explore interventions aimed at promoting effective behaviour, such as adherence to social distancing, self-isolation rules, and vaccine uptake. This project included rapid experimentation aimed at identifying and sharing best practice amongst local authorities and local health boards to help drive positive behaviours to reduce community transmission. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice dated 16 December 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-/INQ000116772** and the final report, published in the Spring of 2022, as **WG/CTPD/01-262/INQ000282038**.

Broader support for non-shielding vulnerable people

217. On 14 April 2020, the NSV Team produced a paper that was submitted to Ministers setting out proposed definitions of wider vulnerable and 'at risk' groups of adults, beyond the cohort who had been advised to shield, and what support those groups might need. I exhibit a copy of that paper as **WG/CTPD/01-263/INQ000282128**. Around the same time, a paper was submitted to Ministers by Prosperous Futures Division that set out proposed

definitions of those who were likely to be economically vulnerable as a result of, or having existing economic vulnerability exacerbated by, Covid-19, and possible measures that the Welsh Government might be able to put in place. I exhibit as copy of that paper as **WG/CTPD/01-264/INQ000282134**.

218. Following that, on 17 April 2020, the Minister for Housing and Local Government wrote a letter to local authority leaders asking them to provide information as to what work was then being carried out by local authorities to provide support to isolated individuals in their area who were not shielding, in order to help the Welsh Government in understanding what further interventions might be helpful. I exhibit a copy of that letter as **WG/CTPD/01-265/INQ000281667**.

219. Once this information was received from local authorities, it was analysed and summarised it in a Ministerial Discussion Paper which was produced on 29 April 2020 and which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-266/INQ000281702**, along with its annexes as **WG/CTPD/01-267/INQ000281674**, **WG/CTPD/01-268/INQ000281676** and **WG/CTPD/01-/INQ000281675**. This material was also shared with the WLGA. Ministers met on 5 May 2020 to discuss the information, and a further paper was produced on 22 May 2020 **WG-WG/CTPD/01-270/INQ000281699** which set out the action taken at that point in relation to the recommendations that had been agreed at the meeting on 5 May 2020.

220. There was a further Ministerial meeting on 5 June 2020, I attach the Ministerial discussion paper as **WG/CTPD/01-271/INQ000281731**, and a further update on progress with the recommendations after that **WG/CTPD/01-272/INQ000281791**. It was noted at the meeting on 5 June 2020 that, in the main, discussions with local authorities and County Voluntary Councils had given officials confidence that there was not a significant unmet demand for support at that time; it was agreed that Welsh Government would review the provision of local authority support in three months' time, and that officials would continue to work with the WLGA in the meantime, all of which took place.

221. One of the areas for Welsh Government action emerging from feedback was to have a comprehensive central resource to guide people to appropriate support. A 'triage tool' was designed and launched to signpost people to guidance and support and went live on 3 June 2020. This followed Ministerial advice on the tool on 22 May 2020, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-273/INQ000145468**.

222. A Ministerial meeting on 8 August 2020 considered the implications of ceasing food box delivery as a result of shielding being paused. CTP worked with colleagues in the

Welsh Government's Food Division to establish the options for further support. I exhibit a note of this meeting as **WG/CTPD/01-274/INQ000281773**.

223. The Minister for Housing and Local Government wrote to local authority leaders and Chairs of County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) on 12 August 2020 requesting information to provide an up to date understanding of the ongoing capacity and resilience of local authorities and CVCs in continuing to provide support to vulnerable people. It also asked for information about any longer-term impacts and challenges that were anticipated, and what support Welsh Government could provide. I exhibit a copy of that letter as **WG/CTPD/01-275/INQ000281819**.

224. The letter and questionnaire was followed up directly with conversations with local authorities and CVCs as part of the work Zenny Saunders undertook in relation to volunteering and capacity across Wales.

225. The feedback from local authorities and CVCs was used to inform ongoing policy in relation to volunteering, support for the third sector, and local authorities. It was also fed into discussions in the Cross-Government Vulnerable People's Group, the Covid-19 Birdtable, and other decision-making processes.

226. The findings were published on 16 December 2020 in a report entitled 'Review of the support for non-shielding vulnerable people (NSV) during Covid-19', which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-276/INQ000282210**.

227. Since the publication of the report, its findings have been used to inform the Welsh Government's approach to cost of living support.

Operation and funding of childcare settings during the specified period

228. Matters relating to childcare and play provision have been addressed in the statement that I have provided to the Inquiry on education and childcare provision, M2B-EP5G-01, and I do not repeat that information here. A short summary of the key activities is provided here to reflect the work undertaken across the Directorate. Reference should be made to M2B-EP5G-01 for further detail in relation to these measures.

- Temporary suspension of the Childcare Offer for Wales scheme from 6 April 2020 to 31 August 2020.
- Establishment of the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme from 1 April 2020 to 31 August 2020.
- Continued assistance under the Flying Start Scheme.
- Funding of childcare provision for vulnerable children during the summer holidays of 2020.
- Funding of the provision of free leisure, sporting, recreational and cultural activities for children and young people as part of the “Summer of Fun” programme in the summer of 2021.
- Funding of the provision of the “Winter of Wellbeing” in the winter of 2021.

229. In addition, CTP’s Childcare, Play and Early Years Division was involved in the following measures and initiatives which are not addressed in M2B-EPSPG-01 and so I outline those here in full.

Provision of additional financial support to the childcare sector

230. On 12 August 2020, the Welsh Government announced that it was providing £4.5 million in funding to establish the Childcare Provider Grant, a dedicated funding package for the childcare sector to help more childcare providers to re-open. Under the new scheme, one-off grants of £2,500 were available to childcare providers who had not been able to secure financial assistance through any other schemes during the pandemic. I exhibit the Ministerial Advice dated 4 August 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-277/INQ000145424**.

Child Development Fund

231. In response to Covid-19, CTP’s Children and Families Division established the ‘Operating in a COVID World Working Group’, comprising Welsh Government officials and local authority delivery partners, as a means of gaining a better understanding of the impact of Covid-19 and how services were adapting to meet the needs of children and families during the pandemic and beyond. The Working Group identified child development as a key area requiring attention, and the following concerns in particular which needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency:

- a. speech, language and communication delay,
- b. fine and gross motor skill delay, and

c. personal and social development.

232. The Child Development Fund (CDF) was established in response to these concerns. It was developed under a co-construction approach, meaning that policy officials from CTP worked collaboratively with local authorities who would also be responsible for delivering the services that were to be funded. The funding was provided to all 22 local authorities in Wales to enable them to provide additional developmental support to children aged 0-5, in order to address identified needs as soon as possible rather than allowing problems to escalate to a point of crisis. The funding comprised:

In 2020-2021:

- £1.25 million in repurposed funding from Health and Social Services MEG, due to a pause in Early Years Integration Programme pathfinder activity. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 27 July 2020 and cleared by Karen Cornish, as **WG/CTPD/01-278/INQ000103950**.
- A further £2 million secured from the Covid-19 reserve together with £258,102 from the Early Years Integration Transformation Programme. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 12 October 2020 and cleared by Karen Cornish, as **WG/CTPD/01-219/INQ000145178**.

In 2021-2022:

- £3.5 million from the Covid response funding for the Health and Social Services MEG, to continue the CDF from April 2021 to September 2021. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 23 March 2021 and cleared by Karen Cornish, as **WG/CTPD/01-280/INQ000145181**.
- A further £4.5 million allocated to continue the CDF until the end of March 2022. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 28 July 2021 and cleared by Karen Cornish and Nicola Edwards, as **WG/CTPD/01-281/INQ000116670**.

In 2022-2023:

- £7 million as part of the budget process to continue the CDF and to embed the CDF within the Children and Communities grant (rather than through Covid response funding). I exhibit the Ministerial Advice, dated 15 December 2021 and cleared by Karen Cornish, as **WG/CTPD/01-282/INQ000145183**.

233. The funding that was provided through the CDF enabled a range of interventions to be supported, including:

- Enhanced screening, assessment and development tools to address speech language and communication delay.
- Activities and resources to promote play and physical literacy.
- Resource packs, interactive activities, and parenting support to promote social development.
- Increased funding for childcare provision to support child development.
- Local pilot projects to support digital inclusion.
- Workforce development for early speech, language and communication.

Early Help Fund

234. The Early Help Fund was instigated as a result of feedback received by CTP's Children and Families Division from Flying Start and Families First delivery partners, and in response to the valuable intelligence gathered via a survey circulated to local authorities at regular intervals during the pandemic.

235. The purpose of the Early Help Fund was to address the adverse effects of the disruption caused by the pandemic on children and young people aged 0-25 years, including those who were newly vulnerable. The additional funding was made available to local authorities to ease the pressure on, and reduce waiting times for, vital early help and support services for children, young people and parents in response to the pandemic.

236. In September 2021, local authorities were notified of their additional Early Help Fund allocations, which were allocated via the Children and Communities Grant, totalling £7 million. The amount for each local authority was calculated using the current allocation formula for Flying Start.

237. A further £7 million was allocated for the Early Help Fund in 2022-23. I have already exhibited the relevant Ministerial Advice underlying that decision, which were the same as those for the CDF funding decisions (dated 28 July 2021 and 15 December 2021). This funding was made available via the Welsh Government's Covid-19 Reserve.

238. The additional funding provided to local authorities under the Early Help Fund supported (but was not limited to) the following types of activity:

- Additional investment in existing contract and services;
- Investment in different or complementary services that may boost provision in one area whilst easing the pressure on another;
- Investment in training and upskilling the workforce to be more responsive to the needs of families;
- Investment in increasing the capacity of the existing workforce.

239. In general, the activities funded by the Early Help Fund were well aligned with the core purpose of the additional funding. Anecdotal feedback received by the local authorities indicated that the support provided to children and families in this way was vital in enabling them to access support which might not otherwise have been available to them.

Asylum seekers and refugees

240. The community cohesion team within Equality Branch in CTP brokered access to Welsh Government PPE and food supply framework contracts for those supporting refugees and asylum seekers (via the Welsh Refugee Coalition) and the Home Office's asylum accommodation provider (Clearsprings Ready Homes). The team also facilitated conversations between local authorities and Clearsprings Ready Homes to ensure children in asylum accommodation could access food parcels during lockdowns.

Other measures

241. Aside from the activities which I have addressed above, CTP was involved in the following measures as part of the response to Covid-19.

Volunteering

242. Third Sector Branch in CTP has responsibility for policy on volunteering. The role of volunteers and volunteering was a key issue, including ensuring that the appropriate infrastructure was in place to identify, meet and collectively plan for the needs of communities during the Covid 19 pandemic.

243. There were well-established Welsh Government funding and governance infrastructure for the third sector was in place and a national digital Volunteering Wales portal was already established for volunteers to formally register to access opportunities posted by CVCs, Local Health Boards (LHBs), local authorities and others. This

infrastructure combined with strong relationships at official and ministerial level with the third sector, enabled close partnership working as the pandemic progressed.

244. Welsh Ministers agreed in March 2020 that this existing infrastructure should be used as the principal way to manage the recruitment and deployment of volunteers in Wales, complemented by the work of individual local authorities in many areas. When the GoodSAM app was launched in England, Welsh Government officials were able to refer to the current systems in place and not introduce a new system.

245. A report on the Covid 19 Volunteer Response was produced in July 2020 focusing on lessons learnt and observations and informed ongoing work in this area. The report was not published and used for internal purposes only. I exhibit the report as **WG/CTPD/01-283/INQ000282275**.

Re-opening of parks and indoor play areas

246. CTP's Childcare, Play and Early Years Division participated in the 21-day review process in relation to the re-opening of parks, including wider green spaces and playgrounds, which took effect from 20 July 2020. The Division collated views from across CTP and fed that advice back to the 21-day meetings. I attach an example of an email that was shared as **WG/CTPD/01-284/INQ000281682**. Once the decision to re-open parks and green spaces had been made, the Division worked with local authorities and with the national charity Play Wales to develop guidance and support materials, Ministerial approval for which was sought in the Advice which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-285/INQ000235853**, dated 16 July 2020 and cleared by Nicola Edwards. I exhibit the guidance as **WG/CTPD/01-286/INQ000282234**.

247. The Division was also involved in considerations around the re-opening of indoor play areas, from 10 August 2020. The Division engaged with BALPPA, the British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions, and I exhibit those emails as **WG/CTPD/01-287/INQ000281786** and **WG/CTPD/01-288/INQ000281797** BALPPA produced guidance, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-289/INQ000282239** and the underlying Ministerial Advice, dated 7 August 2020 and cleared by Nicola Edwards, as **WG/CTPD/01-290/INQ000235995**. An updated Ministerial Advice was issued on 14 September 2020, **WG/CTPD/01-291/INQ000116786**, and on 29 January 2021, **WG/CTPD/01-292/INQ000116700**.

Provision of "Protective Measures" guidance for childcare and play settings

248. CTP's Childcare, Play and Early Years Division issued "Protective Measures Guidance" for childcare and play settings on 8 June 2020. The guidance set out suggested control measures to be implemented in child and play settings, to assist them in operating safely given the challenges in maintaining social distancing when caring for children under five years old. The guidance was developed and maintained by the Division with support from public health colleagues within the Welsh Government, and Public Health Wales. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 8 June 2020 and cleared by Nicola Edwards, as **WG/CTPD/01-293/INQ000145175**. I also exhibit a copy of the guidance, in the form published, as **WG/CTPD/01-294/INQ000082163**.

249. In July 2020, following a request from the Open Access Play sector, the Division produce separate guidance for that sector: I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advice, dated 31 July 2020, and cleared by Nicola Edwards, as **WG/CTPD/01-295/INQ000116763** and a copy of the guidance as **WG/CTPD/01-296/INQ000282093**.

250. The guidance was updated regularly throughout the specified period, in conjunction with public health colleagues in Welsh Government, to reflect changes to public health advice or Welsh Government policies and restrictions. Advice was also sought and provided at various stages from Public Health Wales and from the TAG subgroup on Childcare and Education. Where significant changes to the guidance were made, Ministerial clearance was sought before publication. Copies of the various different iterations of the guidance and the associated Ministerial Advices can be provided on request, if required.

Exemption from restrictions for those fleeing VAWDASV or at risk of harm

251. Enforced isolation can be used as a tool for coercive control or as an excuse or opportunity to inflict violence on victims. For this reason, the periods of lockdown were a particularly challenging time for the VAWDASV sector. The increased time spent at home increased the risk for victims of violence and abuse, and also made it harder for those victims to seek help outside the home.

252. For this reason, those fleeing VAWDASV or otherwise at risk of harm were made exempt from the regulations requiring people to stay at home. Communications campaigns were launched during periods of restrictions that were aimed to reassure

victims that specialist services were still operating and ready to provide support. I exhibit, by way of example, the statements of the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip issued on 1 April 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-297/INQ000282192** and on 16 April 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-298/INQ000282199**.

253. The VAWDASV branch provided regular contributions to the 21-day review process regarding the impact of the restrictions, and the likely impact of any proposed restrictions, on the victims of abuse, as well as potential mitigation measures. I exhibit, by way of example, feedback from the VAWDASV branch provided for the review on 29 March 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-299/INQ000281996**; for the review on 18 June 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-300/INQ000281733**; and for the review on 1 October 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-301/INQ000281857**.

Development of guidance for the VAWDASV sector

254. Policy officials in the VAWDASV team regularly produced guidance throughout the specified period for service providers in the sector, to assist those providers in understanding the steps they needed to take to keep victims and their own staff members safe during the pandemic. All such guidance was shared with the VAWDASV Covid-19 Strategic Group (referred to above) and public health colleagues for any feedback or contribution, prior to publication. I exhibit the key pieces of guidance as follows:

255. On 1 April 2020, guidelines on VAWDASV accommodation provision were published, **WG/CTPD/01-302/INQ000080926**. These guidelines were intended to support the management of domestic abuse accommodation settings during the pandemic, including emergency safe accommodation. The guidelines suggested measures to reduce the transmission of Covid-19 in those settings, amongst both residents and staff members. Updated guidelines were published on 18 May 2020 which can be provided on request, if required.

256. New guidance for VAWDASV service providers on adjusting to the easing of Covid-19 restrictions was published on 13 August 2020, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-303/INQ000282258**. This included the need to plan for a potential increase in demand. Updated guidance was published again in October 2020, during the Firebreak lockdown, and I exhibit this as **WG/CTPD/01-304/INQ000282258**.

257. In April 2020, Covid-19 guidance for services for perpetrators of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence was disseminated within the sector, to assist those organisations in continuing their operations safely. I exhibit that guidance as **WG/CTPD/01-305/INQ000282257**.

Ask for Ani – code word scheme

258. “Ask for Ani” (Action Needed Immediately) was and is a scheme developed by the Home Office during 2020 that enables victims of domestic abuse to signal that they require immediate help in participating pharmacies and Jobcentres across the UK, by asking for “Ani”. This was in response to concerns that victims of VAWDASV should have easily accessible locations, that remained opened throughout the lockdowns, where they should be able to seek help. During the development of the scheme, Welsh Government officials from the VAWDASV team raised a number of concerns about the operation of the scheme. These concerns were discussed by email and at meetings with representatives of the UK Government, which I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-306/INQ000282204**, **WG/CTPD/01-307/INQ000281692** and **WG/CTPD/01-308/INQ000282284**.

Communications and campaign meetings with UK Government

259. VAWDASV officials also met informally and on an ad hoc basis with Home Office and Ministry of Justice colleagues, to discuss campaigns and to ensure consistent messaging across the UK. I exhibit, for illustrative purposes, notes of meetings that took place on 18 December 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-309/INQ000282212**), 19 January 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-310/INQ000282222**) and 12 April 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-311/INQ000282224**).

Provision of additional and specialist VAWDASV training

260. The National Training Framework on VAWDASV is a statutory framework under which mandatory training is provided to key public and third sector services that may be accessed by victims experiencing VAWDASV, such as housing, healthcare, and education services (known as “relevant authorities”). The Framework is intended to ensure that individuals working within those relevant authorities are able to act as effective referral agencies to connect victims with the support that they may require.

261. In recognition of the fact that there was a rise in the number of complex and higher risk VAWDASV cases during the pandemic as a result of enforced isolation, the VAWDSV branch identified the need for additional, specialist training to be provided to personnel who may come into contact with victims and perpetrators in their working roles (both within relevant authorities, and more widely).

262. The VAWDADV team worked to commission such training during the specified period. For example, between January and March 2021, 20 free virtual ‘roadshows’ were launched which provided training to professionals working across Wales, focussing on honour-based abuse and forced marriage. These were attended by 657 professionals and 120 organisations.

263. In addition, in April 2020, the VAWDSV E-learning module (an introductory level course, previously provided only to those working in the public sector, which promotes a basic awareness of what VAWDASV is, how to recognise it, and the help available to victims) was made available online to anyone wanting to access it.

CTP’s role in identifying at risk and vulnerable groups

264. As I set out earlier in this statement, CTP coordinated the cross-Government response to non-shielding vulnerable people and vulnerable children and young people. That work included identifying those vulnerable groups:

Definition of ‘vulnerable child’

265. As I addressed earlier in this statement, the VCYPs workstream led on the development of the definition of ‘vulnerable’ child, for the purpose of determining which children continued to have access to school during the periods of closures. Reference should be made to the statement that I provided on education and childcare, M2B-EPSC-01, for further detail on this topic.

Definition of non-shielding vulnerable people including the economically vulnerable

266. I also addressed earlier in this statement, CTP’s involvement in relation to the provision of support to NSVs.

267. At a Ministerial meeting on 10 April 2020, three main groups of people who were considered vulnerable or “at risk” due to Covid-19 were identified: people who were vulnerable as a result of their financial position; vulnerable adults; and vulnerable children. At the meeting on 10 April 2020, there was a discussion about how these cohorts should be defined and identified.
268. The intention was to identify broad cohorts of people and the particular issues relevant to them to inform an appropriate response, rather than create a hard-edged categorisation. This was important because there were significant overlaps between groups, for example a person might be economically vulnerable but also clinically vulnerable and/ or they might have protected characteristics.
269. I exhibit an email setting out the actions agreed at the meeting in relation to all three groups as **WG/CTPD/01-312/INQ000281671**, and the action plan that was prepared by CTP setting out the progress made as at 23 April 2020 in relation to those actions **WG/CTPD/01-313/INQ000282233**.
270. Other relevant papers and Ministerial advice related to the identification of these groups are exhibited earlier in this statement and I have provided details of how support was developed in response to these needs.
271. In addition, the work undertaken by the Socio-Economic Subgroup of the First Minister’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic COVID-19 Advisory Group and similar work on the Locked Out report by the Disabled Persons Forum, further articulated at risk groups. These reports, the evidence that supported them and the action taken in response is set out earlier in this statement.

Data modelling and use of data by CTP

272. I have been asked to comment on whether CTP made use of data modelling as part of its response to the pandemic, including in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on at risk and vulnerable groups. CTP made use of a range of data and evidence sources, including data modelling and more broadly, to inform decision making during the specified period. Most data relied on by CTP was produced or collated internally by officials in the Welsh Government’s Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS).

Non-shielding vulnerable people including economically vulnerable people

273. In particular, KAS undertook analysis to identify how many people were part of the non-shielding vulnerable group and/ or were economically vulnerable. The output of this analysis formed an Annex to the paper of 14 April 2020 referred to earlier. I exhibit the Annex as **WG/CTPD/01-314/INQ000271856**.

274. The analysis was developed into a slide pack that was regularly updated and provided insight into the cohorts and issues faced by that cohort. A slide pack for external use, which did not include data that we were unable to share, was also prepared and regularly updated. This provided a resource to inform decision making. I exhibit one of these slide packs by way of example as **WG/CTPD/01-315/INQ000282221**.

275. I have referred above to the Data Units that were established by the Welsh Government in early 2022. I have also referred to the use of data that was collated by for the purpose of the Socioeconomic Subgroup, and for the purpose of the “Locked Out” report.

Data modelling for the Self-Isolation Support Scheme

276. KAS also undertook modelling to inform the development and costing of the SSSI in order to provide estimates of the numbers of individuals likely to be eligible in Wales, which enabled officials to forecast the likely costs of the scheme. I exhibit the paper that was produced by KAS dated 4 September 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-316/INQ000282069**.

277. Also in the context of the SSSI, I referred earlier to the work undertaken by Beaufort Research, commissioned by the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales, to qualitatively and quantitatively assess people’s experience of self-isolation, and I exhibited the report published on 23 March 2022. This work was also informed by the collection of data by Beaufort Research. As I stated earlier, that research informed the work being undertaken by CTP in relation to the SSSI; in particular, the report informed decisions made as to the level of payment under the scheme.

Projections of impact of Covid-19 on poverty and child poverty

278. Officials responsible for the implementation and management of the Childcare Offer for Wales relied on quantified projections of the impact of Covid-19 on poverty and child

poverty. This information was also used by other teams in CTP, for example to inform the approach to flexibilities in the Discretionary Assistance Fund and additional funding for advice services. This data came from outside Welsh Government; in particular, officials used reports published by the Institute for Public Policy Research; by the Institute for Fiscal Studies; and by the Resolution Foundation. Officials also used data from partners like Citizens' Advice about the volume and nature of support they were providing. This data was a mix of publicly available reports and management information shared to inform the response.

Volunteer response

279. CTP officials were provided with data from the Wales Council for Voluntary Action which enabled monitoring and analysis of the number of volunteers signing up to support the general Covid response. CTP worked in conjunction with local authorities and Local Health Boards to assess whether there were sufficient numbers of volunteers in each area or whether targeted campaigns were required to increase support.

"Live Fear Free" helpline

280. The Live Fear Free helpline is a free, 24/7 service for all victims and survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and those close to them.

281. During the specified period, CTP's VAWDASV branch established the weekly provision of data regarding the number and type of calls being received by the Live Fear Free helpline manager to the branch. The team relied on this information to identify any patterns in activity, which included a marked decrease in the number of calls during periods of restrictions, followed by a significant increase when restrictions were lifted. The helpline also reported that the calls that were received during the pandemic were more complex and assessed as higher risk.

282. This monitoring of data assisted the VAWDASV branch with their communications strategy and planning during the specified period. For example, where calls were lower than average, the team would increase its public communications and messaging.

Public communications

283. Earlier in the statement I set out the role CTP played in establishing an Accessible Communications Group and developing guidance to inform the approach the in this area

across Welsh Government. I have also explained how the Protect Task Group provided feedback on accessible communication and explained the development of the Triage Tool, which sign-posted people to available support. In addition, CTP was involved in the following:

Communication with asylum seekers and refugees

284. The Sanctuary website - <https://sanctuary.gov.wales/> - ensured up-to-date public health messaging was made available in over 100 languages (including 40 languages as text-to-speech options) for refugees and asylum seekers, as well as information on a range of information about staying safe in Wales.

285. Investment was made to ensure the asylum accommodation internet project enabled asylum seekers to receive and adhere to public health messaging; participate in remote integration activities, such as English language courses; and maintain contact with loved ones. We asked the Home Office accommodation provider covering Wales to ensure details of our Sanctuary website were supplied.

286. The work of the Cohesion team had to pivot to address rising tensions such as anti-Chinese hate in the early phase, English-Welsh disputes arising from travel restrictions in the mid-period, and far-right / anti-vax activity in the latter period. Weekly tension monitoring meetings were established with Cohesion teams to ensure we had clear understanding of the tensions and issues arising. Cohesion teams' work necessarily had to focus on Covid-19 related impacts. Underspends contributed towards vaccine equity communication work. This included work on the vaccine hesitancy toolkit and targeted engagement work to promote vaccine take-up amongst migrant communities in Wales. A film was produced, featuring those working on equality issues in Wales, to reassure community members and encourage community cohesion during the first wave of the pandemic.

Provision of Community Centre Guidance

287. Officials in CTP co-produced, with the support of the voluntary sector as well as representatives from the WLGA and One Voice Wales, guidance for community centres operating during the pandemic. This included ensuring that the Welsh Government's Covid-19 public health communication were accessible to individuals with protected characteristics.

Income maximisation initiatives

288. I have explained above the work carried out on income maximisation initiatives and the increase in capacity of the Welsh Government's Single Advice Fund (SAF) during the pandemic. As explained, part of the additional funding provided to the SAF was for the purpose of a multi-media communications campaign which encouraged people to find out what financial support they were entitled to.

Financial information booklet

289. CTP developed and published a financial information booklet, accessible on the Welsh Government's Covid website, which contained full details of all changes to the welfare benefits that were available to claim during the pandemic, along with information about housing and employment rights, and where to seek advice and support.

VAWDASV Communications Group

290. The VAWDASV Communications Group has existed since 2017 and continues to operate. It met throughout the specified period. The purpose of the VAWDASV Communications Group is to ensure coherent and consistent messaging in relation to VAWDASV, and to contribute to Welsh Government campaigns on VAWDASV matters. It is and was chaired by policy officials from the VAWDASAV branch of CTPD's Communities Division. Membership comprises representatives of external organisations from the Criminal Justice System, the Health sector, local government, and the Police and Crime Commissioners.

291. During the specified period, the Group's membership expanded to include more representatives from specialist and at-risk sectors, including disabled people and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. I exhibit the Terms of Reference for the VAWDASV Communications Group as **WG/CTPD/01--317/INQ000282272** and the minutes of the meetings that took place on 23 March 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-318/INQ000282238**); 14 April 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-319/INQ000282228**); 20 July 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-320/INQ000282230**) and 21 September 2021 (**WG/CTPD/01-321/INQ000282225**).

“Live Fear Free” website during the specified period

292. I have explained the Live Fear Free helpline above. Throughout the specified period, information about how to stay safe during the pandemic was developed by the VAWDASV branch and made available on the Live Fear Free website.

“Home shouldn’t be a place of fear” campaign

293. The VAWDASV branch launched a multi-media public awareness campaign called “Home shouldn’t be a place of fear” in May 2020, in anticipation of the increase in violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence during the pandemic, particularly as a result of increased isolation. The campaign was intended to ensure that victims knew that services were continuing to operate and offer support during the pandemic, to encourage bystanders and concerned others to access help and information, and to direct people to the Live Fear Free helpline and the emergency services as needed.

294. The campaign was developed by the VAWDASV team, working with officials in the Welsh Government’s Communications Directorate and supported by the VAWDASV Communications Group, which I referred to earlier. The VAWDASV Covid-19 Strategic Group also contributed.

295. The campaign ran until March 2021. It was effective in stopping the downward trend in the number of contacts to the Live Fear Free helpline which had initially been observed at the start of the pandemic, with contacts during each phase of the campaign increasing by up to 37%. In addition to the “Home shouldn’t be a place of fear” messaging on the Live Fear Free website, the campaign was also broadcast on television, radio, national and local news and press, and with the support of community networks such as pharmacies, supermarkets, and police forces, where campaign posters were displayed in stores and other venues, and the Live Fear Free helpline number was featured on till receipts. Campaign material was also shared in Covid-19 testing and vaccination centres, following a lengthy approval process between Local Health Boards, the Department for Health and Social Care, and local authorities. All this helped to ensure that the campaign message was able to reach the widest possible audience, including the most vulnerable and isolated, who might not have access to the internet.

296. I exhibit the relevant Ministerial Advices, dated 9 April 2020, as **WG/CTPD/01-322/INQ000103894**, and dated 29 September 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-323/INQ000281856**; I also exhibit the Campaign Plan dated 14 May 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-324/INQ000282237**.

Work on the Coronavirus Act 2020 and regulations

297. I have been asked to comment on the extent to which CTP was involved in work on the Coronavirus Act and regulations.

298. CTP's Childcare, Play and Early Years Division provided advice and guidance on the inclusion of provisions of the draft Coronavirus bill that related to childcare (which became sections 37 and 38, and Part 1 of Schedule 17, of the Coronavirus Act 2020). These allowed for the issuing of Temporary Closure Directions and Temporary Continuity Directions, as well as noticed to disapply or modify certain statutory provisions relating to childcare and education for a limited period of time.

299. Once the Act was in force, the Childcare Play and Early Years Division co-ordinated the initial actions to consider the use of the provisions on Temporary Closure Directions and Temporary Continuity Directions in relation to schools and childcare. I exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-325/INQ000097631** the Ministerial Advice, dated 3 April 2020 and cleared by Nicola Edwards, recommending the making of a Temporary Closure Direction in relation to all registered childcare providers in Wales, and schools, other than for the care of children of critical workers and vulnerable children. I also exhibit as **WG/CTPD/01-326/INQ000104010** the Ministerial Advice, dated 24 April 2020 and cleared by Nicola Edwards, recommending the issuing of notices to disapply and/ or modify certain statutory requirements with which childcare settings and schools were struggling to comply, due to the restricted conditions in which they were required to operate at that time.

300. Outside of the Childcare Play and Early Years Division, officials working on equality policy raised issues around arrangements for burials on 19 March 2020 ahead of meetings of the Wales Faith Forum and Wales Race Forum. These questions were referred to health officials in connection with provisions in the Coronavirus Bill. Subsequently, the views of the Funerals, Burials and Cremations Sub-Group were sought on the draft chapter of the statutory guidance prepared under Schedule 28 of the Coronavirus Act 2020. The statutory guidance covered Part 4 of Schedule 28, which related to having regard for the deceased's wishes. The guidance was intended to assist local authorities to understand,

and if needed use, the powers available to them under Section 58 and Schedule 28 of the Act regarding the transportation, storage and disposal of dead bodies. If evidence indicated that the number of people who might die from Covid-19 was likely to significantly exceed the capacity to locally or nationally manage the deceased and other contingency measures had been deployed, local and national government would have the ability to take control of a component or components of the death management process. The powers created a legal obligation for local and national authorities to have regard to the deceased person's wishes, religion and belief, where known, of the method used of their final committal (i.e. burial or cremation), when carrying out functions under Schedule 28 or under the legislation listed in paragraph 13(3) of Schedule 28. Ministerial Advice (MA-JJ-1338-20) was agreed and is exhibited as information as **WG/CTPD/01-326a/INQ000145191**.

Liaison UK Government and the Devolved Governments

301. As I have explained, in normal times CTP has a relatively high level of contact with UK Government and the Devolved Governments. This remained the case during the specified period.

Engagement in relation to refugee and asylum seekers

302. The community cohesion team within Equality's branch worked with the Home Office to ensure the implementation of the pause on asylum cessations and removal in Wales; to ensure that regular welfare visits were undertaken to asylum seekers in accommodation, and that those subject to removal did not need to 'report' physically to the Home Office. The team also worked with the Home Office to ensure a clear message was made that immigration enforcement would not be undertaken against anyone with insecure immigration status if they came forward for treatment or vaccination.

303. In addition to work to minimise public health risks arising from the use of the Penally army training camp as asylum accommodation (of which further detail is provided later in this statement), the team worked closely with the Home Office, Cardiff Council, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and Urdd Gobaith Cymru, to ensure reception arrangements for evacuated Afghans minimised and mitigated public health risks.

Four Nations Group on impact of Covid-19 on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people

304. As I have referred to earlier in this statement, a Four Nations Group was established to share information regarding the impact of Covid-9 on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, and measures being taken across the UK.

Self-isolation support scheme

305. As I have referred to earlier, there was regular engagement with UK Government and the other Devolved Governments in relation to the development and implementation of the Self-isolation Support Scheme.

Contact Tracing Forum

306. The Protect and Vulnerable People team engaged with the UK Government and the other Devolved Governments most substantially through the Contact Tracing Four Nations Forum. The Forum, which was an officials' group, was established by UK Government in early 2021. Its primary purpose was to share policy and operational practice in relation to contact tracing and self-isolation. The Forum also addressed the provision of support for self-isolation (i.e. the Protect aspect, which as I have explained earlier in this statement fell within the remit of CTP's Protect and Vulnerable People team).

307. The Contact Tracing Forum met on a fortnightly basis, and was attended by members of the Protect and Vulnerable People team as and when the agenda included items that were relevant to the team and to Wales. I exhibit the initial email from the UK Government on 17 December 2020 that instigated the Forum as **WG/CTPD/01-327/INQ000281970**. I also exhibit, by way of example, agendas for the meetings that took place on 14 January 2021 **WG/CTPD/01-328/INQ000281972**; 11 February 2021 **WG/CTPD/01-329/INQ000281983**; 8 April 2021 **WG/CTPD/01-330/INQ000281999**; 6 May 2021 **WG/CTPD/01-331/INQ000282014**; and 29 July 2021 **WG/CTPD/01-332/INQ000282018**.

308. In addition to the formalised Contact Tracing Forum, there were other ad hoc meetings convened by the UK Government at official level to discuss self-isolation support, including pilot projects such as those I have already mentioned, and again, Welsh Government officials would attend those ad hoc meetings as and when required. At Ministerial level, there were Inter-Ministerial Group meetings that addressed shielding and NSVs, and officials attended those meetings to provide support to Ministers as and when required.

UK and Devolved Government Shielding and NSV Forum

309. Officials from the Welsh Government's NSV team participated in the UK and Devolved Government Shielding and NSV Forum, which was established by the UK Government in early April 2020, and chaired by officials from Cabinet Office, with attendance by representatives of MHCLG (as it then was), DHSC, and the other Devolved Governments. The purpose of the Shielding and NSV Forum was to discuss the support available across the UK, both for people at a high clinical risk from Covid-19 and the wider group who were not clinically at risk, but who were still vulnerable and potentially in need of support. It met on a monthly basis.

310. The forum tended to focus on the shielding rather than NSV aspect, but there was still some discussion and information sharing in relation to how the Devolved Governments defined the NSV cohort and what support was being made available to that group. In particular, in May 2020, the chairs of the Forum produced, based on the information provided by the four nations, a comparison table setting out the different types of support provided across the UK in relation to both shielding individuals and NSVs. I exhibit the original forms of these documents, which were updated regularly to reflect changes in provision, as **WG/CTPD/01-333/INQ000281711** and **WG/CTPD/01-334/INQ000281712**.

311. I exhibit, by way of example, readout notes of the meetings of the Forum on 7 May 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-335/INQ000281691**; 28 May 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-336/INQ000281719**; 25 June 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-337/INQ000281756**; and agendas for the meetings on 24 September 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-338/INQ000281848**; and 28 January 2021 **WG/CTPD/01-339/INQ000281981**.

Engagement with the UK Government in relation to Emergency Volunteering Leave

312. The Coronavirus Act 2020 contained a provision for the UK Government to pass secondary legislation permitting employees to take unpaid Emergency Volunteering Leave. In the early stages of the pandemic, Welsh Government officials from CTP liaised with UK Government colleagues to consider how the scheme could be implemented in Wales. Ultimately the legislation was not passed, and the envisaged scheme was superseded by the introduction of the furlough scheme.

Four Nations Volunteering Group

313. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) established a Four Nations Volunteering Group, the purpose of which was to enable the sharing of information and concerns in this policy area. I attach the initial email received from the COVID-19 Volunteering Policy team at DCMS as **WG/CTPD/01-340/INQ000281855** and email trail that outlines actions from a meeting in December as **WG/CTPD/01-341/INQ000281969** as an example.

Covid-19 Victim and Witness Silver Command Group

314. The Covid-19 Victim and Witness Silver Command Group was established by the Ministry of Justice to provide advice and guidance in relation to the support of victims and witnesses of crime in response to Covid-19. The purpose of the Group was to identify developing risks and issues that might have an impact on victim and witness strategy or policy during the pandemic.

315. The Group met weekly and its membership initially comprised officials from the Ministry of Justice and other UK Government officials, as well as a range of representatives of stakeholder organisations. Members of CTP's VAWDASV branch were invited to attend meetings from 9 June 2020 onwards, primarily to learn about what was happening in services across the UK, and on occasion to provide a brief update on work being carried out in Wales.

316. I exhibit the Terms of Reference of the Group as **WG/CTPD/01-342/INQ000282269** (29 May 2020) and **WG/CTPD/01-343/INQ000282265** (March 2021, updated to include the Welsh Government as a member). I also exhibit, as examples, notes and actions from the meetings on 9 July 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-344/INQ000281765**); 13 August 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01--345/INQ000282056**); and 5 November 2020 (**WG/CTPD/01-346/INQ000281908**).

Unilateral decisions by UK Government

317. CTPD has been asked to consider whether UK Government made any unilateral decisions during the specified period that impacted on the work of CTP. I would highlight the following.

Definition of vulnerable children

318. I have outlined earlier in this statement the work of the CVYPS workstream in arriving at a definition of 'vulnerable child' for the purpose of determining access to schools during periods of closure.

319. I am aware that the UK Government published its own definition of 'vulnerable child' without any consultation with or prior notice to the Welsh Government.

Changes to Covid-related increase to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits

320. In April 2020 the First Minister and the (former) Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government wrote to the DWP Secretary of State to raise concerns over the increasing number of people applying to the Discretionary Assistance Fund for financial support because they had claimed Universal Credit but could not wait five weeks for their first payment of Universal Credit. The letter called upon UKG to reduce the five-week wait for the first payment of Universal Credit and offer people a one-off non-repayable grant when they first claim Universal Credit. The letter and response received is exhibited as **WG/CTPD/01-347/INQ000282196** and **WG/CTPD/01-348/INQ000282202**.

321. DWP made the decision to stop the £20-per-week increase to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits that had been introduced in response to Covid-19. Unfortunately, there was no engagement with Welsh Government officials or Ministers prior to these changes being made. Officials in DWP liaised with officials in CTP's Prosperous Futures Division after the amendments had been enacted, but this was by way of update rather than consultation. Concerns within Welsh Government about these changes were shared by the Devolved Governments, and on 30 August 2021 a joint letter was sent by the Minister for Social Justice, the Minister for Communities in Northern Ireland and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government in Scotland, to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions expressing those concerns. I exhibit a copy of that letter as **WG/CTPD/01-349/INQ000282107**.

322. A second letter on the Universal Credit £20 uplift payment from the First Ministers of Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland was sent to the Prime Minister and the DWP Secretary of State would be copied in. I exhibit the letter sent on 01 Oct 2021 as **WG/CTPD/01-350/INQ000282246**.

323. In January 2022, the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip sent a letter to DWP Secretary of State noting the impact that the loss of the £20 per week payment was having upon low-income households who were now struggling with the cost of living crisis, the letter is exhibited for information as **WG/CTPD/01-351/INQ000282270**.

GoodSam app

324. The UK Government launched the GoodSam app in March 2020, to enable volunteers to come forward and be matched with volunteering opportunities and needs. Under the Government of Wales Act, Wales already had a similar infrastructure in place, namely the Volunteering Wales Portal, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, and the 19 County Voluntary Councils.

Concerns raised by CTP with key decision-makers regarding at risk and vulnerable groups

325. I have been asked to comment on whether CTP raised any concerns during the specified period with key decision-makers regarding consideration of at risk and vulnerable groups during the pandemic.

326. I am aware that concerns were raised by Welsh Government with UK Government on a number of occasions from September 2020 regarding the housing of refugees and asylum seekers at the military training site in Penally, in Pembrokeshire. Concerns were raised regarding the conditions of the site, which were said to be unsafe and putting the occupants at risk of Covid-19.

327. This issue was ultimately raised with the UK Government by Welsh Ministers, including the First Minister. Officials in CTP assisted with providing advice and guidance to Ministers on this topic. I exhibit a letter from the First Minister to the Home Secretary dated 18 September 2020 and a further letter dated 23 September 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-352/INQ000282256** and **WG/CTPD/01-353/INQ000282240**. I also exhibit a letter from the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip to Chris Philp MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, on 25 November 2020 as **WG/CTPD/01-354/INQ000282253**. The Penally site was ultimately closed in March 2021.

328. In general, a key role CTP played in the pandemic was to highlight issues or disproportionate impacts of key decisions on particular groups. A number of these have been outlined above but, by way of example, I exhibit feedback in relation to support bubbles in June 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-355/INQ000281760** and homes in multiple occupation in January 2021 **WG/CTPD/01-356/INQ000281975**.

329. Ministerial advice on whether parent and baby/ toddler and other pre-school groups should be permitted to take place following the fire break and impacts in relation to separated parents is also exhibited as an example (**WG/CTPD/01-357/INQ000136824**).

Lessons learned

330. There were a number of separate exercises carried out in relation to areas falling within CTP's remit that identified lessons learned from the pandemic, and recommended actions. I exhibit the following:

- The initial lessons learned session held by the Communities Division on 4 November 2020 **WG/CTPD/01-358/INQ000083271**.
- The Welsh Government's Internal Audit Service's report on the operation of the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme, published in January 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-359/INQ000022594**.
- The report following the review of the operation of the Flying Start, Families First, and Early Years Transformation programmes during the pandemic, by what was known as the Prioritisation, Longer Term Issues and Infrastructure Subgroup, on 12 and 25 January 2021 and 12 February 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-360/INQ000066559**.
- The report following the review of the operation of the Flying Start, Families First, and Early Years Transformation programmes during the pandemic, by what was known as the Platforms and Technology Subgroup, on 12 January 2021 and 5 March 2021, as **WG/CTPD/01-361/INQ000066554**.

The Senedd's report on the Impact of Covid-19 on the Voluntary Sector, published in February 2021 **WG/CTPD/01-362/INQ000083281**.

- The lessons learned in relation to identification of duplication of payments under the SSIS and the SSP Enhanced scheme, as **WG/CTPD/01-363/INQ000083281**.

- The report following the lessons learned exercise carried out in relation to local authority management of the CCG grant during the early stages of the pandemic, as **WG/CTPD/01-364/INQ000066551**.
- The Evaluation of the Early Years Integration Transformation Programme, published 31 March 2022, as **WG/CTPD/01-365/INQ000282283**.

331. Lessons learned were also addressed in the report formally closing the first and second phases of the VCYPs workstream, which I referred to and exhibited earlier in this statement. I have also referred to and exhibited a review and lessons learnt exercise in relation to volunteering.

332. The report on lessons learned in relation Childcare, Play and Early Years provision during the pandemic is exhibited to my statement on education and childcare structures, M2B/WG/ED/01.

Evidence to Senedd

333. I understand that the Minister for Social Justice will be providing a statement to the Inquiry, which should detail her attendance at advisory committees and any evidence she provided to UK Parliament and/or Senedd Select Committees.

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.

Personal Data

Signed:

Dated: 25 October 2023