

Witness Name: Jo-Anne Daniels

Statement No: 2 in Module 2B

Exhibits: 0

Dated:

UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF JO-ANNE DANIELS

I provide this statement in response to a supplemental request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 6 December 2023 and referenced M2B-WG-JAD-02.

I, Jo-Anne Daniels, will say as follows: -

1. I have been asked to comment on the minutes of the "Transition to a New Normal following Coronavirus Programme Board" meeting that took place on 10th December 2021 and which has been allocated the following reference INQ000227564.
2. As the minutes indicate, item 4 on the agenda was consideration of an internal Welsh Government lessons learnt exercise.
3. The minutes are brief and I do not have any notes of the meeting so my reflections on these minutes, which I do not recall seeing at the time, and the meeting that they reflect, are from memory.
4. My recollection is that a member of the Covid 19 Project Team had been asked by the Director General for the Covid-19 response Reg Kilpatrick to consider conducting a lessons learnt exercise and led a discussion on how this might be taken forward. I have had experience of these types of exercises in a number of my previous roles in the Welsh Government and at various points in time we had undertaken 'stocktakes'

as part of the ongoing process of reviewing and refining Test Trace Protect policy and operations.

5. In my experience, sessions with staff where they are asked to review lessons learnt could, if not handled carefully, be a demoralising and negative experience for those involved. Lessons learnt should not shy away from things that could have been done better but also need to shine a light on things that went well and that we could build on and do more of in future. At periods of reflection, staff that I have observed, have a tendency to understate their successes, devoting a great deal of time focussing on those things they were less happy with. I think this is probably a familiar and common human response.
6. In December 2021, staff were generally feeling exhausted, many had been working, with little respite, on the pandemic response since March 2020. In early December, cases of the Omicron variant were being reported in the UK following its identification in South Africa in November. Colleagues were anxious about its implications, whether Christmas would again be 'cancelled' and the prospect of the timeline for transition to a 'new normal' being extended.
7. I clearly recall at this meeting expressing concern that in structuring any lessons learnt exercise we needed to be mindful of staff well-being and their resilience. I wanted, as far as possible, to ensure that the lessons learnt exercise was as positive an experience for staff as possible, enabling them to reflect fully on what had been achieved while of course acknowledging challenges. At the time of the meeting there were few details in the public domain relating to the forthcoming inquiry and staff had expressed some concerns and anxieties, for example about their own personal liability or the attribution of 'blame'. I was keen that we should try to assuage these worries to the extent that we could and that staff should not feel similarly anxious about any lessons learnt process.

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.

Full name: Jo-Anne Daniels

Position or office held: Director General, Education, Social Justice & Welsh Language

Personal Data

Signed:

Date: 09 January 2024