

Witness Name: Nigel Harrison

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: NH/1

INQ000376141

Dated: 5th December 2023

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

CORPORATE WITNESS STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL POLICE CHIEFS' COUNCIL FOR MODULE 2B

I, Deputy Chief Constable Nigel Harrison, will say as follows: -

Introduction

1. This is a corporate witness statement on behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council (**NPCC**). This document has been drafted in response to a Rule 9 request for Module 2B dated 22nd November 2022 (**the Rule 9 request**), in order to assist the Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry.
2. The information in this statement is (a) drawn from my own knowledge and experience; and (b) provided by colleagues in the Welsh police forces, as well as documentary records.
3. I am Nigel Harrison, Deputy Chief Constable and I am a member of the Chief Officer Team in North Wales Police. I have over twenty-six years' experience of policing. I was responsible for the coordination of the All Wales operational response by the four Welsh police forces to the Covid-19 pandemic from 18th February 2020.

4. Any references to Covid-19 regulations are to the Covid-19 regulations in force in Wales at the relevant time (**the Covid-19 Regulations**), including the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Wales) Regulations 2020, the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020 and the Coronavirus Act 2020.
5. Save where otherwise indicated, all references to paragraphs by number in this statement are to paragraphs in the corporate witness statement made on behalf of the NPCC for Module 2 dated 29th June 2023.
6. In Wales, responsibility for criminal justice and policing remains with the UK Government. The Welsh Government has the power to legislate for offences in relation to devolved matters in Wales which includes public health regulations.

The NPCC's role, function and responsibilities

7. The NPCC is a national body. Its role, function, and responsibilities in Wales and the involvement of the four Welsh police forces in the NPCC are as described in paragraphs 4 to 21.
8. The National Police Coordination Centre is an arm of the NPCC. The role it plays in Wales and its operation are as described in paragraphs 22 to 25.
9. The College of Policing (**the College**) operates both in England and Wales. The role it plays in Wales and its operation are as described in paragraphs 26 to 30.

The scope and nature of Operation Talla

10. Operation Talla was run at a UK national level and therefore involved Wales. Its scope, nature and central command structure are described in paragraphs 31 to 43. Operation Talla within Wales was fully engaged with the NPCC throughout the pandemic and participated in the national meetings.

11. In addition, Wales had its own leadership for its local Covid-19 response to facilitate consistency in approach as far as possible. It had the following command structure:

- i. an All Wales Gold , which I chaired with ACC Valentine (then South Wales Police) as Deputy;
- ii. a Gold in each Welsh police force, responsible for the overall strategic command of the operation and providing police representation on SCGs; and
- iii. Silver(s) in each Welsh police force, responsible for managing the tactical implementation of the strategic direction given by Gold.

12. I attended a briefing by Public Health Wales on 29th January 2020. Superintendent Barrasford was Silver. I attended a national Operation Talla meeting on 3rd February 2020.

13. I represented Wales on the Operation Talla briefing on 10th February 2020, following which I chaired the first meeting of the All Wales Gold on 18th February 2020. Meetings were usually held remotely and were held regularly throughout the pandemic, with specific frequency changing over time to meet emerging threats or time-sensitive issues. All Wales Gold meetings were arranged to follow on from the Monday Operation Talla meetings so that updates could be provided to the rest of the Welsh forces. Action and/or decision logs from the All Wales Gold meetings were completed during the meeting and circulated via email after the meeting and/or attached to meeting invitations.

14. The National Gold Strategy was circulated to all Strategic Leads for Wales on 28th February 2020.

Relationship with the Welsh Government

15. The Welsh Government engaged with the four Welsh police forces in relation to proposed regulatory changes in Wales as follows:

- i. Through the Police Liaison Unit (headed by Paul Morris), which provided an opportunity for police forces to provide feedback (albeit that during the pandemic there were frequent and dynamic changes to regulations within Wales and, in that context, there was sometimes little opportunity for advance notice and consultation). The contact was informal in nature and no formal record of meetings is kept by the police;
- ii. Through formal contact between Senior Officials from the Welsh Government and the Chair of the Welsh Chief Officers Group. Often All Wales Gold were invited to provide a practical operational view on the issues under consideration. No formal record of meetings is kept by the police;
- iii. Through formal online meetings held between Welsh Ministers, Senior Officials, PCCs, Police Chiefs, Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives. These would usually be attended by Chief Constables on behalf of the police. I did not attend these meetings. The Welsh Government would hold accurate details of the dates and attendees of these meetings; and
- iv. Through attendance by the Police Liaison Unit at the Welsh Government “Birdtable” meetings (which provided a regular meeting point for policy, operational and communications partners). These meetings were held three times a day, at approximately 08:30, 14:30 and 19:30 (although these times were varied to cater for emerging circumstances) and seven days a week in the early stages of the pandemic. They were a Welsh Government construct, developed to draw together key partners (such as the police, the Welsh Ambulance Service, the Health Service, the Fire and Rescue Service, Public Health Wales and the military) and share timely updates in

relation to the pandemic in order to keep up with the pace at which matters were unfolding. Information shared at the Birdtable meetings was shared internally within the key partners following each session. After the Welsh Government activated its Emergency Co-ordination Centre for Wales (**ECCW**), which can be brought into play at any time of civil emergency, and non-key workers were instructed to stay at home, many of those involved in the Birdtable meetings attended via Microsoft Teams. There was however a core of 'in person' attendees at the ECCW site, predominantly comprised of Welsh Government policy officials. Primary attendees at the Birdtable meetings on behalf of the police were Paul Morris and his deputy at that time, Temporary Superintendent Steve Thomas. To provide further resilience, they were also supported on a rota basis by Chief Inspector Dan Howe from South Wales Police and the then Director of the Wales Violence Prevention Unit, Jon Drake. The first record Paul Morris has of attending a Birdtable meeting was on 25th March 2020. The last record within the Police Liaison Unit on which date a Birdtable meeting was convened was on 10th July 2020. No formal record of meetings is kept by the police.

16. Whilst many meetings between the Welsh Government and senior officers from the four Welsh forces were formal, structured and agenda based, because of the dynamic nature of the pandemic there were also informal meetings and discussions with Welsh Government. Such interaction gave the four Welsh police forces an opportunity to highlight possible implementation and enforcement issues associated with certain aspects of legislation, including the potential impact (if any) of differences between the English and Welsh Covid-19 Regulations, and any potential operational issues arising as a result of the same. In practice and reality, few such issues arose. One example was the introduction on 28th August 2020 of the amendments to the Covid-19 Regulations prohibiting the organising of an unlicensed music event of more than 30 people. This change provided police in Wales with broadly equivalent powers to those being introduced at the same time in England, with the aim of avoiding the potential threat of such events being displaced from England to Wales. An area of general potential concern was presented by the geographical practicalities of two sets of national guidelines in

border areas. Again, this rarely presented real difficulty in implementation or enforcement. Thus a potential issue arose with Chester Football Club, which is on the border of England and Wales. Cheshire West and City Council, in England, are responsible for the licensing of the ground but one of the stands is located in Wales. On 26th December 2021 the Covid-19 Regulations in Wales were amended to state that sporting events had to be played behind closed doors. This inevitably caused some confusion. When the club hosted two home fixtures in front of fans, police officers met with club officials and explained the Covid-19 Regulations. There were no further issues after their intervention. I have been asked by the Inquiry whether the potential for displacement activity between England and Wales was sufficiently considered and/or addressed by those drafting the applicable regulations. Beyond my observations above, I consider this to be a question for the Welsh Government, who drafted the Covid-19 Regulations.

17. Whilst the short timescales and often rapid changes to the Covid-19 Regulations proved challenging at times, this reflected the difficult circumstances of the pandemic and the need to respond to an evolving situation. The example I referred to at paragraph 16 above, relating to Chester Football Club, highlights these challenges. The requirement to play sporting fixtures behind closed doors was announced on 20th December 2021 and was effective from 26th December 2021. On occasions the new Covid-19 Regulations were released the evening before they came into force and it was therefore challenging to ensure that front line staff had access to accurate guidance on those regulations. In general, the four Welsh police forces worked well with Welsh Government. There were frequent meetings and dialogue by e-mail and phone enabling issues to be raised as needed.
18. In the event of Covid-19 Regulation changes, corresponding guidance would be prepared or updated by Welsh Government to assist the public in their understanding of the same and the First Minister would provide a press conference prior to any changes. The four Welsh police forces adopted the national 'Four E's' approach which was to Engage, Explain, Encourage and Enforce. Enforcement was the last resort and as such the police would look to engage and explain to members of the public in the event of any apparent misunderstanding or confusion regarding the contents of the Covid-19 Regulations from time to time. I am not

aware of any specific complaints made to the police by members of the general public in relation to the Covid-19 Regulations.

The role, function and responsibilities of the NPCC in the enforcement of Covid-19 Regulations

19. The NPCC played no direct role in the enforcement of Covid-19 Regulations in Wales. Paragraphs 44 to 46 apply equally to Wales.

The ACRO Criminal Records Office

20. The role played by ACRO in Wales, including in relation to the administration of Fixed Penalty Notices (**FPNs**), and its operation are as described in paragraphs 47 to 56. The process established by ACRO was expanded to the Welsh police forces in the early stages of the pandemic.

Guidance and briefings provided to Welsh police forces in relation to the Covid-19 Regulations

21. Paragraphs 57 to 80 regarding the guidance and briefings provided to police forces, including in relation to the Four Es approach, apply equally to Wales.

22. Throughout the pandemic frontline officers in the four Welsh police forces received electronic briefings prepared at a force level containing pandemic related data and information regarding changes to regulations, legislation or guidance. On May 12th 2020, Karin Phillips, the Deputy Director in the Community Safety Division in Welsh Government received a copy of the internal briefing from the College and NPCC prepared to help policing in England and Wales respond to changes in Covid-related restrictions from 13th May 2020. These briefings aimed to summarise and explain the main changes effected by the revised restrictions announced that week, and included a sheet explaining the main differences in restrictions between England and Wales. On 14th May 2020 Karin Phillips identified to the Police Liaison Team some anomalies and inaccuracies in the summary prepared by the College as regards their application in Wales. This prompted liaison with the College via

telephone and Microsoft Teams and on 18th May 2020 Nicole Higgins from the College provided the first draft of Wales-specific guidance. This led to a process of consultation each time the Covid-19 Regulations were amended by Welsh Government, with both officials in Welsh Government and the Police Liaison Unit being asked by the College for views on the draft before circulation. Officials within the Welsh Government were therefore communicating any regulatory changes directly to the College, which led to Welsh-specific guidance being provided by the College (which can be downloaded from the College's website). In addition, the College, Welsh Government and the Welsh police legal departments worked together to develop PowerPoint slides, which were circulated to Welsh police officers and staff whenever amendments were made to the Covid-19 Regulations. The production of this national guidance ensured consistency, and meant that one version of the guidance could be translated into the Welsh language as required pursuant to the Welsh Language Standards.

23. The issues arising in respect of guidance and briefings described in paragraphs 81 to 90 were also observed in Wales, namely:

- i. Due to the frequent and dynamic changes to regulations in Wales, the notification and consultation periods afforded to make changes to operating practices were, at times, very short. The four Welsh police forces were sometimes required to make changes relating to enforcement at fast pace. In some instances, e-mails informing the police of the final published regulatory changes would be received after office hours or after changes had become effective. The approach adopted by the four Welsh police forces was to wait until the Covid-19 Regulations were formally published so that there was certainty as to the final content of any revision to the Covid-19 Regulations before providing any local guidance to officers. One example was the publication of the Covid-19 Regulations amendments late on 12th March 2021, which included the amendment from leaving the place where the person is living to the local area. These changes were due to have effect from Saturday 13th March 2021; and

- ii. There were some limited potential issues arising from the differences between the regulations and guidance for England and for Wales (see paragraph 16 above).

The extent and nature of NPCC liaison with key stakeholders

24. I confirm that, throughout the pandemic, the NPCC engaged and liaised with the four Welsh police forces, who are among the primary stakeholders for the NPCC, as stated in paragraphs 91 to 92, and that the Police Operational Briefings referred to in paragraphs 97 and 98, which were meetings held between key stakeholders in relation to policing matters, were attended by Welsh police chiefs, who shared contextual information regarding the situation in Wales.

Learning and reflection

25. The learning and reflection process described in paragraphs 103 to 147 (in the form of events, commissioned reports, the Ethics Committee and the Parliamentary Select Committees) also includes and/or applies to Wales.

C-19 Foresight Group

26. In addition, I wish to highlight the work of the C19 National Foresight Group. This was a cross-government, multi-agency group established in March 2020 to focus on foresight and issues relating to Covid-19. The group was chaired by a senior police officer and brought together stakeholders and academia. Its work included the commissioning of a series of Interim Operational Reviews during the Covid-19 Pandemic. These were intended to provide a real-time reflection from frontline strategic leaders in the midst of the Covid-19 response. The reviews were carried out by Nottingham Trent University and the Hydra Foundation, and published on the University website: [C19 National Foresight Group Outputs | Nottingham Trent University](#). The reviews identified a series of themes and resulted in a number of recommendations directed at UK Government, at LRFs, and others. Of particular relevance in this Module of the Inquiry is C19 National Foresight Group: Report –

Welsh Interim Operational Review, July 2020, which I exhibit as **NH/1**

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27. I confirm that Chief Constable Pam Kelly attended the Parliamentary Select Committee on 21 October 2020 as a witness.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed:

Personal Data

Dated: 5.12.2023