

Witness Name: Christopher William Morgan

Statement No: 1

Exhibits: 3

Dated: 18 October 2023

## **UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY**

### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER WILLIAM MORGAN**

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

I, Christopher Morgan, will say as follows: -

#### **Preface**

1. I extend my deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones during the pandemic.

#### **Background**

2. I have worked in the Welsh Government and (before Devolution) the Welsh Office since October 1996.
3. During this time, I have worked my way up through the grades within the Civil Service, starting in administrative roles in HR, Environment and Countryside Divisions. I then joined Strategic Policy Unit, as an EO, and then transferred to Cabinet Secretariat in 2003 to provide the secretariat to Cabinet and Cabinet Committees. I have been

drafting Cabinet and Cabinet Sub-Committee minutes since then, and I am now head of Cabinet Secretariat.

4. This statement relates to the period 21 January 2020 and 30 May 2022.

#### **Structure of Cabinet Secretariat**

5. The Unit, within Cabinet Division, provides the secretariat (explained in paragraph 6) to Cabinet & Sub Committee meetings, manages the Government's Plenary Programme, which includes scheduling and commissioning oral statements and debates, processing oral and written questions, tabling Government amendments to opposition dates, and issuing Written Statements to Senedd Members. The Unit also co-ordinates Government's interaction with Senedd Committees, provides the official car service, manages Government correspondence, such as commissioning responses to letters from Senedd Members and the public and issuing replies, and has oversight of the Division's corporate business, which includes IT provision.
6. The secretariat is responsible for producing the official record of Cabinet meetings, the administration of Government business and facilitates the transaction of business between Ministers officials and the Senedd.
7. An organisational structure chart of the Cabinet Secretariat is exhibited at **M2BWGCM01/01-INQ000227550**.

#### **Role, function, and responsibilities in Cabinet Secretariat in response to Covid 19 (between January 2020 and May 2022)**

8. Besides providing overall management for the unit, I specifically draft the minutes of Cabinet, and this continued to be my main task during the pandemic. In line with usual procedure, once these minutes had been ratified by Cabinet any handwritten rough notes were destroyed.
9. There is a guide to minute taking produced by the UK Government in 2001, which I exhibit at **M2BWGCM01/02-INQ000227561**.
10. During this period, I produced somewhere in the region of 110 sets of Cabinet minutes. To provide context in the year up to January 2020, I produced around 20 sets of

minutes. I believe the Welsh Government COVID-19 Inquiry team has provided the minutes of all these meetings to the Inquiry.

11. In terms of preparing the minutes, I followed a long-standing process. During the meeting I took handwritten notes of the discussion, which would invariably follow the issues and recommendations, as set out in the supporting paper. When drafting minutes, again I followed the usual process of producing an introduction of the item, which outlined the issues that Ministers would need to consider. This would be followed by a brief summary of what had been discussed ending with a conclusion setting out what Cabinet had decided.
12. This is in line with the guide to minute taking (M2BWGCM01/02-INQ000227561) and specifically section IV – The Discussion and Summing Up. This section also explains why the minute should be impersonal and this reflects the need to maintain collective responsibility, which is outlined in paragraph 6.1 of the Welsh Government Ministerial Code, which I exhibit at **M2BWGCM01/03-INQ000066055**.
13. I had no role in providing advice to Ministers or taking policy related decisions. The only decisions I took related to the management and supporting of staff in Cabinet Secretariat, and this continues to be the case. For example, in summer of 2020, we completed the process to recruit a team support for the team that supported Cabinet meetings. I decided, given the substantial increase in written questions being submitted to Ministers, to allocate the new member of staff to the Plenary team.
14. The First Minister also established a COVID-19 Core Group, which was open for all Ministers to attend, if they were able. It met on Wednesday mornings between March and July 2020. This was an opportunity for Ministers and officials to share information and provide updates on the major issues relating to the emergency. Opposition party leaders were also invited to these meetings, along with representatives from Local Government and the Third Sector. Other non-regular attendees included the Police, the Military, Ministers from the Wales Office, and representatives from the Wales TUC. I provided the notes for 20 of these meetings. From September 2020 this changed to technical briefings for opposition party leaders, which was supported by one of my team.

15. The Unit also circulated relevant papers to Ministers and senior officials for Cabinet and the COVID-19 Core Group meetings.

16. I think I also attended one Ministerial call meeting – a less formal meeting of Ministers that took place on Thursday mornings, not supported by Cabinet Secretariat. I was not involved in any other meetings, internal or external.

17. I am also not aware of Ministers using WhatsApp or any other messaging platform and I do not use such methods of communications in either my professional or personal capacity.

### **Key Officials in Cabinet Secretariat**

18. Cabinet Secretariat, at the time, was split into two teams, under my leadership:

- a. [NR] team managed the Government's Plenary programme, statements to the Senedd and the processing of Senedd Questions.
- b. [NR] supported me at Cabinet and provided the secretariat to Cabinet Sub-Committee meetings. He also managed the Government's interaction with Senedd Committees, the official car service and Divisional corporate business.

19. The unit has now been divided into three teams as we took on responsibility for the management of Government correspondence, under [NR] in September 2020. During the pandemic, Huw, who at the time had responsibility for correspondence policy, helped process the large volume of COVID-19 related correspondence received by the Welsh Government. The role of staff in the unit is administrative.

### **Cabinet Secretariat relationship with UK Government and devolved administrations**

20. Cabinet Secretariat is an inward facing unit and has no relationship with the UK Government nor other devolved Governments.

### **Role of Cabinet in initial Welsh Government response to Covid-19**

21. Due to the decisions that needed to be taken, Cabinet met more often (as outlined above), and the outcome of these meetings are captured in the minutes. In line with

my role, I attended the Cabinet meeting during the Government's initial response to Covid-19, to draft the minutes of the meetings, and I continue to do so. I don't recall specific mention of the Stereophonics concert or a six nations rugby match.

22. In line with paragraph 11, I did not provide advice to the First Minister, Cabinet or its Committees.

#### **Non-pharmaceutical interventions**

23. I had no role in relation to non-pharmaceutical interventions, other than to record decisions in Cabinet minutes.

#### **Divergence of approach**

24. I had no role in relation to the divergence of approach, other than to record decisions in Cabinet minutes.

#### **Medical and scientific, expertise and data modelling**

25. I had no role in relation to medical and scientific expertise and data modelling, other than to record decisions in Cabinet minutes.

#### **Public health communications**

26. I had no role in relation to public health communications, other than to record decisions in Cabinet minutes.

#### **Public health and coronavirus legislation and regulations**

27. I had no role in relation to public health and coronavirus legislation and regulations, other than to record decisions in Cabinet minutes.

#### **Supporting core political and administrative decision making and its challenges**

28. As I provide the impartial secretariat to Cabinet, it would be inappropriate for me to offer comment on the decision-making process.

### **Lessons learned**

29. There were no formal lessons learned activity undertaken during the pandemic, however, the team responded to situations and changed processes when any issues were identified. For example, as highlighted in paragraph 11, during the pandemic there was a significant increase in written questions from Senedd Members, which the Unit allocates to drafting officials and sends replies to Members. To help take the pressure off a member of staff and to continue with the level of service expected by Ministers and Senedd Members, we asked a Team Support to help out with the processing. This has now become permanent.

30. In addition, during the pandemic Ministers needed to inform Senedd Members of decisions outside normal operating hours. This would normally be done via a Written Statement, issued by my team. However, given the need to avoid staff working late into evenings, we provided Private Offices with the training to issue statements themselves. They continue to do this should the need arise. The Unit will step up to support any future emergency.

### **Evidence at Senedd Committees**

31. I have not provided any evidence to Senedd Committees and the Secretariat would not be expected to do so.

### **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

Christopher W Morgan

**Dated:** 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023