

Initials & Surname of Witness: S Rankin  
Statement No: 1  
Number of Exhibits: 1  
Date Statement Made: October 2023

**UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY MODULE 2B**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT  
OF SUZANNE RANKIN**

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**I, SUZANNE RANKIN**, of Cardiff & Vale University Health Board, provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Enquiry Rules 2006 dated 18 May 2023:-

- 1** I am the Chief Executive of Cardiff & Vale University Health Board - Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Caerdydd a'r Fro (CVUHB) and have been since 1 February 2022. I was formerly Chief Executive of Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.
- 2** I started my career in the Royal Navy, Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service, qualifying as a Registered General Nurse in 1990. Following attendance at Britannia Royal Naval College I served at home and overseas including a number of operational deployments.
- 3** I graduated with an MA in Defence Studies following Advanced Command and Staff training from the Joint Services Command and Staff College in 2005 and was appointed to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) within the Defence Medical Services Directorate. I provided staff support and advice to the Defence Nursing Advisor and the Surgeon General on nursing strategy, leadership and professional matters.

- 4 In 2008, I left the Royal Navy to embark upon a career in the NHS and joined NHS South Central Strategic Health Authority as Deputy Chief Nurse within the Clinical Standards Directorate. I joined Ashford and St Peter's NHS Foundation Trust as Chief Nurse in 2010 before becoming Chief Executive in 2014.
- 5 I attach a copy of the Job Description for the role of Chief Executive of the Cardiff & Vale University Health Board as exhibit **INQ000281112**. The Chief Executive is the Accountable Officer for the Health Board with full responsibility for the continued development and management of the Health Board. The Chief Executive provides top level leadership, vision, inspiration and strategic direction and management across all aspects of the Health Board's activities. My role is to ensure that all required decision making, control, delivery and development systems are in place. The Chief Executive is accountable for providing advice to the Board on all elements of Health Board business and specifically on matters, relating to probity, regularity and administration. I have statutory responsibilities for the health and wellbeing of the population I serve, as well as a duty of care to CVUHB employees.
- 6 My role was obviously affected by the pandemic, although I started in post on 1 February 2022, the virus was still circulating and we were still having discussions about infection control and issues such as mask wearing. We were also delivering the Covid-19 vaccination programme to our eligible population and vulnerable populations, including residents of care homes and our staff. The Test, Trace and Protect Programme was still operating, and we had a responsibility to deliver that. People were still presenting in our hospital settings with Covid-19 and we had a responsibility for meeting their ongoing healthcare needs. We also had a responsibility to provide healthcare for those not presenting with Covid and to protect them from the risk of hospital acquired Covid infection, including monitoring and reporting that. We reviewed deaths associated with Covid and reported to Welsh Government. We were involved in taking care of our employees by way of testing and safety at work and managing wellbeing, including consequences such as long Covid and mental health difficulties. One or

two members of the team had passed away and we were supporting their families and co-operating with Coronial Inquests.

### **Engagement with Welsh Government**

7 There were numerous interactions between myself and Welsh Government from when I started in post on 1 February 2022, until the end of May 2022. These included:

- NHS Wales Leadership Board Meetings - These were chaired by Judith Paget (Director General for Health and Social Services in Wales and NHS Wales CEO) and attended by her senior leadership team or their representatives and the NHS Wales Health Boards' and Trust's CEOs (including myself). The meeting covers NHS Wales performance, financial and policy position as well as more developmental aspects.
- CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up meetings – These were catch-ups between Judith Paget and the NHS Wales Health Boards' and Trust's CEOs (including myself).
- JET meetings – These were meetings of the Joint Executive Team – chaired by Judith Paget and attended by representatives of Welsh Government, NHS Wales, and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board Executive Team. The meetings covered organisation performance and delivery.

8 I did not attend meetings whose purpose was to generate policy or to make decisions in that regard, but I know that members of my team did. Where relevant, these meetings will have provided context to my decisions and actions even though I was not present.

9 I am also aware that the Chairman of the Health Board had meetings with the Welsh Government. The nature of the relationship between us does not require him to feedback to me on the content of such meetings although it would be his normal practice to do so. Any feedback he did share I would use as further context and insight to decision making and actions. Other members of the Executive Team also had meetings with representatives of Welsh Government.

- 10** I did not have any meetings with the First Minister or other Welsh Ministers about Covid. However, when I started in post, I had an induction meeting with the First Minister, and introductory meetings with some Members of Senedd and Members of Parliament with local constituencies.
- 11** I do not believe that I played any role in core decisions taken by the Welsh Government during this period of the pandemic, except for providing feedback and recommendations as a member of the Regional Leadership Board (see below). Government made the policy decisions, and it was then up to us to make decisions about how to implement these operationally. I was not involved in the preparation and/or provision of advice to the Welsh Government over this period regarding the management of the pandemic.
- 12** The Welsh Government issued the Local Choices Framework which was a policy framework to help us make local choices, balancing plans/elective care and emergency care in Covid scenarios.

Specific meetings with Welsh Government

- 13** The following meetings have been identified from my diary:

Dates in 2022	Meeting
4 February	MS & MP Covid-19 Briefing Session
14 February	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
22 February	NHS Wales Leadership Board
28 February	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
4 March	MS & MP Covid-19 Briefing Session
7 March	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
14 March	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
16 March	JET meeting
21 March	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
29 March	NHS Wales Leadership Board
1 April	MS & MP Covid-19 Briefing Session
4 April	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
11 April	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
19 April	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up

26 April	NHS Wales Leadership Board
3 May	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
9 May	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
16 May	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
24 May	NHS Wales Leadership Board
29 May	MS & MP Covid-19 Briefing Session
30 May	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
7 June	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
13 June	CEOs & Judith Paget Covid-19 Catch Up
21 June	NHS Wales Leadership Board

#### Cardiff & Vale Regional Leadership Board – Covid-19/Winter Pressures

- 14 The Cardiff & Vale Regional Leadership Board – Covid-19/Winter pressures (as it was called from January 2022), met regularly and was chaired by the Chair of the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. The Leadership Board included the Chief Executives and Leaders of Cardiff Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Council, the Chief Executive and a number of Executive Directors from CVUHB; Shared Regulatory Services (the Director of Public Protection); the Surveillance Lead (Consultant in Public Health Medicine) for Cardiff and Vale; and South Wales Police. I generally attended these meetings from when I started in post on 1 February 2022, until April 2022. The Regional Leadership Board met after the regular regional Incident Management Team/Test Trace Protect (IMT) meetings, usually the following day, to receive an overview of the information discussed at the IMT meeting and discuss and formally agree any recommendations before they were sent to the Welsh Government. The Regional Leadership Board signed off the situation, background, assessment, recommendation “SBAR” report, using a template provided by Welsh Government, which included a space for making recommendations or asking questions of Welsh Government. This was then emailed to the Welsh Government health protection email inbox.

#### Provision of statistics to Welsh Government

- 15** I am aware that the Health Board collected and provided data and statistics to the Welsh Government during the Covid pandemic but I was not directly involved with this. The statistics were provided to the Welsh Government in reports known as “situation reports” – sitreps. The National Welsh Informatics Service (later Digital Health Care Wales (DHCW)) received sitrep submissions from all Health Boards and collated the statistics for reporting to the Welsh Government. Statistics were also included in the SBAR report submitted through the Incident Management Team (IMT) mechanism described above.
- 16** Sitreps were usually submitted every weekday. From 13 February 2023 the submission reduced to once a week.
- 17** The data collected and submitted changed throughout the pandemic as new measures were added and others stood down based on assessments with key stakeholders (such as Welsh Government and other Welsh national forums such as the national critical care group) to identify those that still had a purpose. The current version of the template is version 16, implemented on 9 January 2023.
- 18** During the pandemic there were national weekly sitrep meetings attended by representatives of the Health Boards, DHCW and Welsh Government. The forum discussed issues, proposed changes, and agreed definitions to ensure that all Health Boards were consistent in their approach to reporting the measures.

#### Other communications

- 19** I did not have any informal communications (WhatsApp or other) with Welsh Ministers, senior advisors, or other civil servants about the Welsh Government’s response to the pandemic.

### **Test, Trace and Protect**

- 20 Prior to the start of my role at the Health Board, a Regional COVID-19 Prevention and Response Plan had been prepared, and is described in the statement of Len Richards, who was Chief Executive from June 2017 until September 2021.
- 21 The first version of the plan was dated 21 August 2020, the second version was dated 4 June 2021, and it was then refreshed to take account of winter planning in January 2022, just before I joined in February 2022. The plan included Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan and by January 2022 it was led by the Regional Leadership Board (Covid-19/Winter Pressures), described above.

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court 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 in its truth.

Signed

Personal Data

Dated

6.10.23

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**Hempsons LLP | London**

100 Wood Street

London EC2V 7AN

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