

Witness Name:

Statement No:

Exhibits:

Dated:

## UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF HANNAH MURPHY

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I, **HANNAH MURPHY**, will say as follows: -

1. I confirm that I have written this statement, the facts stated are all known to me, or believed by me to be true and the opinions stated, and inferences drawn are mine and mine alone.
2. Since February 2021 I have been working as a Staff Officer in the Covid Strategy, Recovery, and Inquiry Division of the Executive Office (TEO). During this time, my responsibilities have changed as the demands of the post have evolved. When I joined the Division [**Exhibit HMU/01 - INQ000470867**], we were in the midst of the second lockdown and my duties were focused on supporting the Executive Office's response to and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Key duties included supporting the work of the Executive's Covid Taskforce through their various workstreams and providing necessary support to senior staff within the Division. This work involved supporting Ministerial and Assembly Business, by drafting good quality and accurate briefing and responses to invitation cases, correspondence cases, written and oral Assembly questions and draft submissions/speaking Notes within agreed deadlines. My duties also included responding to Treat as Official (ToFs) and email queries on Covid matters through the shared TEO Covid 19 Cases and Covid Recovery mailboxes ensuring that responses were provided within the timelines set by Private Offices/HOCS office or other commissioning channel.
3. Throughout the late spring and early summer of 2021 my work also focused on the development and implementation of the Covid Recovery Plan, including the provision of secretariat support to the Covid Recovery Taskforce from September 2021 onwards. This

work involved providing key support to the Covid Recovery Taskforce (including the secretaryship of meetings, hosting meetings on Zoom or other platforms, recording minutes and action points and circulating in a timely manner). Key duties also included the drafting of reports and papers to communicate key information to the Taskforce and to help inform the decision making for the group and producing planned quarterly progress reports to provide updates to Permanent Secretaries Group/ECT/TEO Committee/NI Executive. This involved commissioning requests for information, tracking, and collating returns, analysing information, and drafting reports. This work remained my main focus until the team moved into Covid Inquiry work when I then split my time between Covid Recovery work and preparations, disclosure, and statements for the Covid Inquiry.

4. I have completed training in areas relevant to this statement [**Exhibit HMU/02 - INQ000470868**]:

- On 15 March 2021 I completed online training in the Secretaryship of meetings.
- On 16 March 2021 I completed online training entitled Effective Writing.
- On 23 March 2021 I completed online training entitled Introduction to Content Manager.
- On 26 July 2022 I attended an online classroom-based training session in relation to minute taking.

5. My current duties are primarily focused on contributing to the Divisional and Departmental response to the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry. This involves preparing documents for disclosure to the Covid Inquiry, sifting large volumes of documents for relevancy and considering potential redactions. I am also involved in contributing to the preparation of Corporate and Witness statements through the provision of exhibits, including the drafting of exhibit indexes and the checking of hard copy files for approval by Senior Managers. I attend witness consultations and provide witnesses with documents they have requested as well as advice as required. I have line management responsibility for a number of staff, and I have oversight of their work including the management of team trackers and the shared mailboxes.

6. During the time period in question (11 May 2023) I was working on Covid disclosure for Module 1, exhibits for the Module 1 Corporate Statement and the preparation of the Fourth Progress Report for Building Forward: Consolidated Covid-19 Recovery Plan. It was a remarkably busy time and I note from my calendar that I set a reminder to take the note of the 11 May 2023 Compliance and Assurance Group meeting.

7. Maria Hannon is the Head of Branch for the Covid Strategy, Recovery, and Inquiry Division. In terms of line management responsibility, Maria Hannon was my counter-signing officer on the 11 May 2023 and remains in this position today. Jane Holmes is the Director of the Covid Strategy, Recovery, and Inquiry Division. The Staff Officer who usually provided secretariat support to the Compliance and Assurance Group was a colleague and as such there was no line management relationship.

### **Compliance and Assurance Group**

8. The Compliance and Assurance Group was established within the NICS Covid-19 Inquiry Oversight and Assurance Framework in June 2022 [**Exhibit HMU/03 - INQ000409593**]. The framework established three levels of oversight:

- a HOCS Reference Group, chaired by the Head of the Civil Service.
- a Public Inquiry Compliance and Assurance Group, chaired by Karen Pearson.
- a NICS Preparedness and Coordination Group, chaired by Jane Holmes.

9. The Terms of Reference for the Compliance and Assurance Group [**Exhibit HMU/04 - INQ000470869**] state that:

*'The COVID-19 Public Inquiry– NICS Compliance and Assurance Group has been set up to monitor and report on Compliance the NICS preparedness and response to the UK Covid Inquiry.*

*The purpose and responsibilities of this Group may change in response to the Inquiry's requirements. The TOR and associated governance documents will be reviewed and updated as appropriate.'*

10. I was asked by Maria Hannon to take the note of the 11 May 2023 meeting of the Covid Assurance and Compliance Group as the Staff Officer who usually provided secretariat support to the Compliance and Assurance Group was going to be on a training course. This was not an unusual request as we frequently covered tasks such as these for our colleagues when they were unavailable. I cannot recall whether this request was made via email or in person. Emails have been searched however I have been unable to locate a record of this request. I had no role in relation to the Covid Assurance and Compliance

Group other than occasionally filling in for a colleague to take notes. I did not normally attend these meetings in any capacity either as an observer, participant or note taker.

### **Compliance and Assurance Group Meeting Note - 11 May 2023**

11. Due to the busyness of our team and a personal desire to ensure that I am as prepared as possible I will routinely open a Microsoft Word template of the meeting note [**Exhibit HMU/05 - INQ000470870, Exhibit HMU/06 - INQ000470871**], save this into Content Manager, add in any known details such as expected attendees or apologies and have this ready in advance of the start of the meeting (if time allows). Content Manager (CM) is the NICS Electronic Document and Record Management system (EDRMS) we use to manage electronic records. TEO staff (End Users) use CM to save and store business area documents, emails, and records. It has been my normal practice since joining this Division to record the notes of meetings by typing directly into the Microsoft Word template that is normally set up and saved in Content Manager in advance of the meeting. If I have not had the opportunity to save a template into Content Manager in advance as outlined above, I immediately save the document into Content Manager as a new record at the start of the meeting.
12. For the 11 May 2023 meeting note I followed my normal procedure and opened a template in Content Manager in advance of the meeting. Meta data shows that I created the Content Manager record at 1.29pm on 10 May 2023 [**Exhibit HMU/07 - INQ000452562, Exhibit HMU/08 - INQ000470873**] in preparation for taking the meeting note the following day. This record was then amended once on the 10 May 2023 at 1.33pm [**Exhibit HMU/09 - INQ000452593**], during the meeting and as part of the normal checking process following the meeting.
13. I can confirm that I do not hold any handwritten notes of this meeting as I did not take a handwritten note. The only note that I took was the one recorded directly into Microsoft Word. This Microsoft Word document was pre-saved into Content Manager in advance of the meeting and then updated during the meeting.
14. When taking a meeting note I will update the attendees column and record a summarised note of what is being discussed. We are not asked or expected to take verbatim notes of TEO meetings, and this is confirmed by the draft note taking template issued on behalf of the TEO Permanent Secretary on 13 December 2021 and shared with our Team by Jane Holmes on the same day [**Exhibit HMU/05 - INQ000470870, Exhibit HMU/06 -**

**INQ000470871**]. Accordingly, the record of the meeting I took on the 11 May 2023 was not a verbatim minute of the meeting but a summarised note of the meeting.

15. During the meeting, a revision will be recorded when the I use the check in function on Content Manager. *'A revision of a document is created every time you make changes to and save an existing document in HPRM (TRIM). These revisions can be viewed at any time and if necessary, an earlier revision can be promoted to become the main and current document'* [**Exhibit HMU/10 - INQ000470875**]. It is my understanding that a revision will remain and cannot be altered, the revision would only be deleted if the entire record was deleted from Content Manager. I can confirm that the 11 May 2023 meeting note was not deleted from Content Manager and that therefore its revision history has remained and is unaltered. Information Management & Central Advisory Branch (IMCAB) can delete Content Manager documents subject to approval at Staff Officer level or above. A record will only be deleted subject to a comprehensive business reason for why it should not remain within Content Manager (for example duplicate documents, documents saved in error, or documents that should not be saved in the system). I do not recall ever having made or formally approved such a request with respect to any document saved into Content Manager.
16. Using the check in function on Content Manager is in effect the same as using a save function on other IT systems. As a matter of routine, I use the check in function frequently during meetings to ensure that as little information as possible is lost if there is an unexpected IT failure of any kind during the meeting. It is this use of the check in function that creates the different revisions. I used this function for the 11 May 2023 meeting note and it is this action that created the revisions on the 11 May 2023 before the notes were amended by Maria Hannon on 15 May 2023 creating the final revisions, the last being when it appears that I removed a page break before hitting check in thus creating the last revision thirteen which is the final record. All twelve revisions and the final meeting note have been provided to the Inquiry. Previously I have only ever needed to access a revision on a document saved into Content Manager when an IT failure has occurred, corrupting the current revision, and I therefore needed to restore the previous revision.
17. I have noted that there is a change between revision six of the 11 May 2023 meeting note [**Exhibit HMU/11 - INQ000452597**] which states: *'Noted that WhatsApp messages from Former Ministers phones have been wiped as the phones have been returned to a factory reset position. Maria is discussing this issue so that we can inform the Inquiry that all reasonable steps have been taken in relation to this information'* and revision seven

**[Exhibit HMU/12 - INQ000452574]** which states: *'Noted that WhatsApp messages from Former Ministers phones have been wiped as the phones have been returned to a factory reset position and Maria is discussing this issue.'*

18. This was a routine meeting note taken almost a year ago and I cannot fully recollect the reason why I amended this part of the sentence. It is my normal practice to amend notes during the meeting as attendees are speaking. It is my recollection that I changed the line as I did not feel that it accurately reflected the discussion that followed after Maria Hannon had made the initial comment informing the group of the position of the mobile devices. This is perfectly normal for me as I am typing as people are still speaking and others are replying and if I feel that I have not correctly captured the discussion I will make an immediate amendment, tidy up the sentence either as the meeting is drawing to a close or as soon as possible following the meeting. It is my belief that this is what happened here. I can confirm that I was not asked to alter the line during the meeting.

19. The discussion about the mobile devices occurred alongside and was interlinked with a more general discussion on the position of the Cabinet Office and WhatsApp messages at that time and it is my recollection that the later omission of the reference to informing the Inquiry was linked to this discussion, therefore the meeting notes also recorded the following above and below the lines recorded noting the position of the mobile devices:

*'Section 21 notice has been issued to the Cabinet Office. The Inquiry has requested that all messages are provided in a non-redacted form regardless of whether they contain personal information. If released these messages may attract significant media attention.'*

*'Noted that the Cabinet Office is being investigated by the Information Commissioner for the Government use of WhatsApp messages for official business. The NICS position in relation the use of WhatsApp is currently being investigated.'*

20. In late November/early December 2023 I started work on the Informal Communications statement. From this work I am now aware that the reference to Maria Hannon 'discussing the issue' reflects email correspondence with Private Office colleagues on 9 May 2023 **[Exhibit HMU/13 - INQ000409608]**. To the best of my recollection at the time I took the note of the meeting on 11 May 2023 I was not aware of the existence of the 9 May 2023 email correspondence.

21. Once I am satisfied that the meeting note I have taken is accurate to the best of my knowledge I then share this with the relevant manager. In this case it was shared with Maria Hannon for her approval. It is my normal practice to share the draft notes as soon as possible after I am content with the draft, and it is my recollection that I emailed the notes to Maria Hannon for her consideration and approval. Searches for this email have been undertaken however to date we have not been able to locate it. I do not always email using the document saved in Content Manager (by right clicking and choosing 'send to' and 'mail' and including the Word document), I often simply use the Content Manager, 'attach record' function in my Microsoft Outlook email account to email a link to the document. The fact that I would not routinely extract and email the Word document but only the Content Manager link when sending a document for approval within our Division may explain why the emailing of the 11 May 2023 notes does not appear in the Audit Events and Revision History [**Exhibit HMU/07 - INQ000452562**].
22. It is then normal practice for the notes to be returned with track changes which I can accept or discuss with the relevant manager. In this case I can recall no objection to the changes made to the notes by Maria Hannon. It was my understanding that the changes to the line in question were made as it was a sensitive issue that had not yet been widely discussed or understood and for that reason a shorter and more formal line replaced my original sentence. This was especially important as the note was to be shared outside our team and we would have no knowledge or control over who may also have access to the notes after they had been shared with attendees. This was explained to me verbally by Maria Hannon at the time (15 May 2023) and caused no concern as it was completely normal practice to amend draft notes and the line as amended did not omit reference to the issue discussed. In my opinion it should have been obvious to all attendees of the 11 May 2023 meeting that the final line used in the agreed meeting notes *'The meeting noted the position of TEO Former Ministers and SpAD phones'* referred to the wiping of the mobile devices as the position noted by the meeting was that they had been wiped. For the avoidance of doubt, I was not placed under any line management pressure in relation to this note at any time in the drafting or approvals process. The changes to this line were not the only changes made to the draft notes and it is normal practice for meeting notes to be reviewed prior to issue by a more senior official in attendance.
23. Revision twelve [**Exhibit HMU/14 - INQ000452579**] of the 11 May 2023 meeting was amended as part of the approvals process. It is my assumption that the line was amended to include SpAd phones for complete accuracy. As I did not make this change, I cannot

comment further on why revision 12 contained the amendment to include reference to SpAd phones. Again, its inclusion caused me no concern.

24. It is also normal practice that the final revision is the one that is shared with the group - in this case the Compliance and Assurance Group. On that basis the email that issued to the Compliance and Assurance Group in advance of the 18 May 2023 meeting contained the final note **[Exhibit HMU/15 - INQ000466319, HMU/16 - INQ000409609]**. We have never shared revisions of meetings notes with attendees. It is completely normal practice to share the final note. Therefore, I assume that other members of the Compliance and Assurance Group would have been unaware of the previous revisions and the fact that the line in relation to the mobile phones had been amended.

25. I have no recollection of sharing the draft 11 May 2023 meeting note with anyone other than Maria Hannon between 11 May 2023 and 17 May 2023. It is possible that if requested I may have shared it with the Staff Officer who usually provided secretariat support to the Compliance and Assurance Group when he returned from his training course, but I have no memory of sending such an email. I did not share the revisions of the draft note with anyone as I had no reason to access the revisions in May 2023.

26. The note was shared with the Compliance and Assurance Group by the Staff Officer who usually provided secretariat support to the Compliance and Assurance Group on 17 May 2023 **[Exhibit HMU/15 - INQ000466319, HMU/16 - INQ000409609]**. The papers including the 11 May 2023 note were shared with:

- Jayne Byrne
- Junior TEO Official
- Maria Hannon
- Jane Holmes
- DSO Lawyer
- Chris McNabb
- Emer Morelli
- Karen Pearson
- Catherine Shannon

27. I cannot speak specifically as to why the Staff Officer who usually provided secretariat support to the Compliance and Assurance Group accessed the 11 May 2023 meeting note on the occasions identified namely the 12, 15, 16 and 17 May 2023. It is my assumption



that he viewed the notes in preparation for the next meeting of the Covid Assurance and Compliance Group due to be held on 18 May 2023 and to update himself on activity in his area of responsibility following his absence. No amendments to the 11 May 2023 meeting note were made or requested following the occasions identified above when Staff Officer who usually provided secretariat support to the Compliance and Assurance Group accessed the document.

28. This was a routine meeting note taken months before anyone raised an issue or mentioned a disagreement with the notes. As noted above the 11 May 2023 meeting note was shared with the Compliance and Assurance Group in advance of the 18 May 2023 meeting. I am aware from checking the note of the meeting on 18 May 2023 [**Exhibit HMU/17 - INQ000409610**] that the 11 May 2023 meeting notes were agreed as the formal record of the meeting:

*'Note of previous meeting agreed by the group.'*

29. I did not attend this meeting on the 18 May 2023 so I can offer no other comment on whether any member of the group questioned the line in the notes that referred to the mobile phones. As the notes were agreed without further comment and no issue was brought to my attention in May 2023, I believe that it is reasonable to assume that all members of the meeting were content and that no issues were raised. I can also confirm that the Staff Officer who usually provided secretariat support to the Compliance and Assurance Group did not raise any issues with me in relation to the content of the note of the meeting. The only conversation I can recollect was one in which I confirmed that I had taken the note and that it had then gone to Maria Hannon for approval as normal and where the Staff Officer who usually provided secretariat support to the Compliance and Assurance Group offered his thanks for covering the note in his absence.

30. I am now aware that there was disagreement between the DSO solicitor in attendance at the meeting and some of the officials about the recollection of the meeting on 11 May 2023 as to whether and in what terms the issue of the mobile phones was raised. I am very clear that the issue of the mobile phones was raised at the 11 May 2023 meeting, my notes were typed as attendees were speaking and I would not have recorded the fact that it was discussed if that had not been the case. Any amendments I made to the line I used or that were made in the final note as issued to the Compliance and Assurance Group on 17 May 2023 do not alter this position. It is my view that all attendees of the Compliance and

Assurance Group meeting on 11 May 2023 were informed that the devices had been wiped.

31. I am also now aware that Jayne Brady as the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service asked Tracey McCavigan to look into the matter and that she provided a report on 24 January 2024 **[Exhibit HMU/18 - INQ000409611]**.
32. In my work I seek to abide by the Northern Ireland Civil Service values of integrity, honesty, impartiality, and objectivity. I can confirm that the 11 May 2023 meeting note was not tampered with by me in any way. The changes made to the 11 May 2023 meeting note followed normal approval practices and caused me no concern when they were discussed in May 2023. Clear evidence has been provided to the Inquiry that the note has not been amended since 15 May 2023 **[Exhibit HMU/07 - INQ000452562]** long before any disagreement with the DSO lawyer in attendance emerged. I was unaware of any issues with this note either before or following its approval by the Compliance and Assurance Group as the formal record on 18 May 2023 until 10 January 2024.

#### **Work on the First Informal Communications Statement**

33. Jayne Brady, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, received a Rule 9 Request regarding Informal Communication on 14 November 2023 **[Exhibit HMU/19 - INQ000470880]**. I was part of the team assigned to support Ms Brady in drafting her response primarily through researching relevant documents and gathering them into folders set up on our Covid Inquiry shared drive, identifying appropriate exhibits from the text of the statement, arranging for hard copies of these exhibits to be made available in folders for checking by Jane Holmes and sending the final approved exhibits via Egress **[Exhibit HMU/20 - INQ000470883, Exhibit HMU/21 - INQ000470885]**.
34. As a team we were asked in December 2023 to conduct searches of Content Manager containers for documents that may speak to the issue of when DSO became aware of the mobile devices issue. The 11 May 2023 meeting note was identified by a fellow Staff Officer as being significant to this chronology and I was later asked verbally by Jane Holmes if I had also taken a handwritten note of the meeting; I confirmed that I had not.
35. As part of my work gathering exhibits, the report completed by Tracey McCavigan in January 2024 **[Exhibit HMU/18 - INQ000409611]** following her investigation of the 11 May

2023 meeting note was shared with me on 30 January 2024 [**Exhibit HMU/22 - INQ000470886**].

**Reviewing the 11 May 2023 Meeting Note on 9 or 10 January 2024**

36. I am aware that a meeting took place on 9 January 2024. I was not an attendee at that meeting and therefore I cannot comment on the specifics of what was discussed [**Exhibit HMU/23 - INQ000470905**]. I am now aware that the meeting of 9 January 2024 was for the purpose of Jayne Brady obtaining legal advice on her draft Informal Communications statement.

37. An invitation to attend this meeting was issued to:

- Jayne Brady
- Senior Counsel
- Junior Counsel
- Karen Pearson
- Jane Holmes
- Maria Hannon
- DSO Lawyer
- Neill Jackson

38. As part of my job role, I have responsibility for the staff who manage our shared mailboxes. As is my normal practice on the morning of 10 January 2024 I checked the shared Covid Inquiry mailbox, and I noticed a number of emails that I later learned had arisen out of the meeting held on 9 January 2024. These emails made reference to the meeting note of 11 May 2023 and referred to revisions. An example of one such email is exhibited at [**Exhibit HMU/24 - INQ000470906**].

39. I also made a phone call to Maria Hannon on the morning of 10 January 2024 to discuss my concerns about these emails. Maria advised that they arose out of the meeting held on 9 January 2024 and that she could not discuss the details as we may have to give statements as part of an investigation. I was not asked to give a statement for the subsequent internal audit conducted by Tracey McCavigan (Group Head of Internal Audit and Fraud Investigation Services).

40. I was surprised and concerned that such attention was being placed on a meeting note taken nearly eight months earlier and by the fact that so much emphasis appeared to be being placed on the revisions of that document as this was extremely unusual. It is for this reason that I accessed and viewed the meeting note of the 11 May 2023 and its revisions on the 10 January 2024 as outlined in the Audit Events and Revision History document **[Exhibit HMU/07 - INQ000452562]**. This document provides a record of the underlying metadata confirming the dates and times upon which they were created/amended and who accessed each of the revisions. The Audit Events and Revision History document is a download from Content Manager of the actions undertaken in relation to the 11 May 2023 meeting note. It confirms that I made no amendments to the meeting note after 15 May 2023. I had full access to this meeting note from when it was first placed into Content Manager to today, this is perfectly normal access required for undertaking my duties as an official within the Division. I am permitted to access and view a record such as this at any time and without asking for any line management permission or direction. There is nothing untoward in my having viewed the record of the 11 May 2023 meeting note in Content Manager on the 10 January 2024.

41. I have checked my emails and I have no record of an email being sent at 10.18am on the 10 January 2024. I believe that line 76 of the Audit Events and Revision History **[Exhibit HMU/07 - INQ000452562]** document shows that it was Maria Hannon who emailed the 11 May 2023 meeting note at 10.18am.

### **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**

Date:

12 April 2024