

Thursday, 20 March 2025

1
 2 (2.00 pm)
 3 **LADY HALLETT:** Mr Sharma.
 4 **MR SHARMA:** My Lady, the next witness is Dawn Matthias.
 5 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you.
 6 **MS DAWN MATTHIAS (sworn)**
 7 **Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY**
 8 **MR SHARMA:** Ms Matthias, you have helpfully provided the
 9 Inquiry with a witness statement, the reference for
 10 which is INQ000475069. Would you please confirm that's
 11 true to the best of your knowledge and belief.
 12 **A.** That's correct.
 13 **Q.** Just by way of background to begin, you are a civil
 14 servant; is that right?
 15 **A.** Yes.
 16 **Q.** You currently work as the commercial deputy director at
 17 the Crown Commercial Service?
 18 **A.** Yes.
 19 **Q.** Between around 23 March of 2020 and July of 2020, you
 20 were seconded from the Department of Education to the
 21 Department of Health and Social Care; is that right?
 22 **A.** That's correct.
 23 **Q.** And your role was as a case worker working in PPE
 24 procurement?
 25 **A.** That's correct.

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1 So, from that date onwards my role as a caseworker
 2 would be to receive, on a daily basis, referrals that
 3 would be emailed to me at various points during the day,
 4 and those would be referrals of offers of PPE that were
 5 being offered from a number of different sources, some
 6 UK based, some globally based.
 7 **Q.** Thank you. So we're in the Opportunities team, we are
 8 in the HPL; is that right?
 9 **A.** That's correct.
 10 **Q.** And there's a particular category of referral which I'd
 11 like to ask you about, please, and they're labelled VVIP
 12 referrals. Could you help us, please, with VVIP. What
 13 is that a reference to?
 14 **A.** Okay, probably prudent to advise that, from my
 15 perspective the terms "HPL", "VIP", "VVIP", were all
 16 used very interchangeably, and I think from a lot of
 17 caseworkers' perspective in the HPL team we didn't
 18 personally have any distinction, ie, there was no
 19 difference in how either a VIP, an HPL or a VVIP
 20 supplier would be processed. So I think, to answer your
 21 question, apologies, the term "VVIP" would have been
 22 a designation that caseworkers would have given to
 23 a very high-profile or senior referrer.
 24 **Q.** They've also been referred to in your evidence as
 25 category 5 referrals. Are they one and the same, VVIP

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1 **Q.** You are a member of the Chartered Institute of Purchase
 2 and Supply?
 3 **A.** Yes.
 4 **Q.** You have worked in procurement for more than 25 years,
 5 both in the public and private sectors?
 6 **A.** That's correct.
 7 **Q.** Is it also right that you volunteered to assist in the
 8 pandemic response because of your experience in
 9 procurement?
 10 **A.** I did, yes.
 11 **Q.** To begin, please, with your role as a caseworker, could
 12 you talk us through precisely what sort of
 13 responsibilities that entailed, involving your contact
 14 with suppliers and accumulation of documents for the
 15 next stage in the process that the Inquiry has already
 16 heard about.
 17 **A.** Yes, of course.
 18 So in the initial stages from being seconded on
 19 23 March, for a period of seven to ten days I was
 20 a caseworker who was triaging offers of supply of PPE
 21 only, not ventilators or test kits, from what we would
 22 call "every supplier". Around early April, I was asked
 23 to support a smaller team, and that team were the team
 24 which have been referred to as the HPL, to do the exact
 25 same role only for a different subset of suppliers.

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1 and category 5?
 2 **A.** Yes.
 3 **Q.** Could we have up, please, on the screen INQ000565104.
 4 This is an email from you on 28 April. You refer to
 5 them here as:
 6 "They are 'Very Very Important People' Basically
 7 suppliers who have made contact with us directly via
 8 [an] MP, Lord, Lady, PM private office, etc. [And]
 9 Cabinet Office are keen that they [have] a speedy
 10 response ..."
 11 Does that effectively summarise the position?
 12 **A.** Yes, I would say so. I think this particular
 13 correspondence is me giving a -- I guess describing,
 14 sorry, the expectation of the referrers to a relatively
 15 new recruit who had been seconded into the team.
 16 **Q.** Could I ask you, please, turning to your experience,
 17 your day-to-day experience with referrers and suppliers,
 18 in your witness statement page 4, paragraph 13, you
 19 describe them as "being very robust and assertive" with
 20 you, but you had experience in procurement. How was
 21 that for you, on a day-to-day basis, dealing with those
 22 referrers and those suppliers being in contact with you?
 23 **A.** Okay, so typically the majority of the contact I would
 24 have would be with the supplier not the referrer, with
 25 the exception of one case. And I think, yes, it's true

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1 to say that, you know, I've had experience of quite
2 robust, assertive suppliers in the past. I think the
3 big difference in this instance, in my experience, in
4 supporting the efforts to secure PPE, would be the
5 extreme persistence and the volume of that extreme
6 persistence, which is relevant and kind of correlates
7 with the number of cases that I'd be dealing with at any
8 one time.

9 So it could -- it wouldn't be uncommon for me to
10 have, you know, five or six hours' worth of phone calls
11 in any one day with up to 10 to 20 suppliers, and for
12 those suppliers to be bearing their frustrations on me.

13 **Q.** You, in common with a number of witnesses who have given
14 evidence to this Inquiry, describe in your witness
15 statement working 12-15 hours a day, seven days a week.

16 **A.** That's correct.

17 **Q.** Could we have up, please, on screen INQ000565319. Thank
18 you.

19 This is an email you sent on 31 March of 2020.

20 **A.** Yeah.

21 **Q.** Just if I could -- please, if you could provide some
22 context to this email, you refer here to being "promoted
23 ... to the VIP Supplier Team" --

24 **A.** Yeah.

25 **Q.** "... allocated to dealing with the suppliers who feel it

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1 know, involves working with a smaller number of
2 suppliers on maybe one or two projects, and this
3 situation, in comparison, was working with hundreds of
4 suppliers who were offering to supply to the government
5 anything from nutritional advice to knitted goods to
6 fabric to really credible offers of PPE.

7 And in that context, it was a really bizarre
8 situation, and I think also in the context of that being
9 a continuation, it's the 12-16 hours a day, seven days
10 a week that, you know, we're dealing with all of that --

11 **Q.** Forgive me if I interrupt. That expression, "jumping
12 through hoops", suggests that some of the tasks that
13 were being performed were pointless tasks. Have I got
14 the wrong end of that?

15 **A.** They weren't, in terms of the activities that we carried
16 out as caseworkers. Those specific tasks weren't
17 pointless. Some of the offers which we did triage were
18 pointless, ie, nutritional advice or a simple roll of
19 fabric.

20 **Q.** And those sorts of offers, were they coming in through
21 the VIP Lane, as well?

22 **A.** My understanding is they were coming in through all
23 channels, VIP and non-VIP.

24 **Q.** Thank you. Could we have up on screen, please,
25 INQ00565309. And the final paragraph, please. This is

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1 is important for them to contact Boris, Matt Hancock,
2 Gove, Gareth & other Minister[s] ... directly."

3 And this part, if you would focus on, please:

4 "So now basically jumping through hoops to get quick
5 responses to them before they complain that we are not
6 taking it seriously."

7 Just breaking that down, please, "jumping through
8 hoops", what did you mean by that?

9 **A.** So, again, I think I referenced this in paragraph 41 of
10 my witness statement, so again, just against the
11 backdrop of the extreme pressures that we were working
12 under as well, at the time, not terminology that I would
13 normally use. This is an exchange between myself and
14 who -- a person who was at the time a member in my team
15 in the Department for Education.

16 **Q.** Yes.

17 **A.** So I'm not directly linked to the efforts to procure.

18 And it did feel, you know, often at times that we were
19 jumping through hoops in the context of, I guess, the
20 sheer workload and the diverse nature of what we were
21 doing and who we were dealing with. And, you know,
22 again, in the context of -- I think it references
23 further up "looney bin", yeah, it does, and that was in
24 the context of what we saw and witnessed.

25 So typically my role on a day-to-day basis, you

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1 an email from you on 20 April. Again, I'd be grateful
2 if you could provide some context to this, because it's
3 important that the Inquiry understands precisely what
4 you mean here. You describe that the -- you have been
5 assigned VIP Suppliers team:

6 "... the ones who believe they are too important to
7 complete a survey, as they have a link to a minister, or
8 know Matt Hancock/Michael Gove, Jeremy Hunt, etc, and as
9 such Cabinet Office ask us to contact them within
10 24 hours ..."

11 A piece of evidence the Inquiry has heard before.

12 What was this like? It sounds here as though you're
13 exasperated with what you're being asked to do. Could
14 you help us, please, with that?

15 **A.** Of course. I wouldn't say I was exasperated. We were
16 very tired and sometimes frustrated, but equally, we
17 were quite proud of what we were doing in terms of our
18 efforts to secure PPE. This is an email that I sent to
19 a colleague, again in DfE, who wasn't involved with the
20 PPE procurement, who had enquired with regards to how
21 a supplier may be able to, you know, offer PPE.

22 So that's the context of that.

23 In terms of ones believing to be too important to
24 complete the survey, I think it is fair to say that the
25 nature of the suppliers that were being triaged through

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1 the HPL team were senior contacts within the supply
2 chain who wouldn't be, I guess either adverse to, or
3 used to being advised to complete a form. You know, it
4 wouldn't be -- it would be inconceivable, I think, for
5 them to be asked to do that so that is in respect to
6 that context.

7 The contact within 24 hours, it was an aspiration of
8 the HPL team to try to endeavour to make contact within
9 24 hours.

10 **Q.** From your perspective, how frequently was that
11 aspiration met?

12 **A.** Unfortunately I don't have any statistics that would
13 kind of give an accurate view on that, but I know from
14 my perspective I didn't always meet that target because
15 of the volume, and sometimes if I did meet that target,
16 it would be via way of what I would term a holding email
17 back to the supplier to say, "We have your offer, please
18 be assured we will, you know, be considering it in due
19 course."

20 So sometimes within a day, I could. It just
21 depended on the caseload and the volume.

22 **Q.** Thank you. Just to give an idea as to the volume of
23 cases that you were handling, could we have up on
24 screen, please, INQ000575149, and page 1.

25 Again, an email from you, 30 April 2020. And you
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1 **A.** Okay, so I think the email chain will provide some
2 broader context and I think it's paragraph 54 of my
3 witness statement. This was in relation to my --
4 I guess my curiosity in terms of how fruitful the work
5 that the HPL team were doing, in terms of, I guess, in
6 crude terms, return on effort. You know, the 12,
7 15 hours a day, seven days a week, lots of triaging,
8 lots of processing, lots of difficult stakeholder
9 conversations. And because of the, I guess the hectic
10 environment that we were working in, caseworkers didn't
11 always get to understand if a case that we had been
12 dealing with earlier had actually converted into an
13 order because we lose sight of it as it gets handed off
14 through the various stages.

15 So it was curiosity in terms of the percentage of
16 cases we've triaged, in terms of what that would mean,
17 in terms of order conversion. The language, "based on
18 what I've seen going on", was simply in the context of
19 simply seeing how many cases were coming through the
20 HPL.

21 **Q.** Forgive me, Ms Matthias, you seem, at least in this
22 email, to have expressed a view that it would be based
23 on the high side, based on what you've seen going on.
24 How and why did you form that view?

25 **A.** Okay, so on the high side in the context of the -- not
11

1 provide an example, a snapshot, if you will, of your
2 workload:

3 "... juggling 37 VIP cases (and more coming in) 6
4 non-VIP cases, 2 new NHS starters [your words] totally
5 swamped, and despite doing 12-15-hour days [you] can't
6 keep up with the volume of emails ..."

7 Does that fairly reflect not only a snapshot in your
8 day but your experience in the VIP team as a whole?

9 **A.** It does, yes.

10 **Q.** You refer in your witness statement and in an exhibit
11 which you produced to connections with political
12 parties. I wonder if we could bring this up.

13 It's INQ000565246. Thank you.

14 12 May 2020, so a little further into the
15 chronology. Emailing somebody again at the Department
16 for Education.

17 **A.** Mm-hm.

18 **Q.** And you say this:

19 "I would love for an FOI to be put in after all this
20 to see the % of orders for PPE raised within the VVIP
21 suppliers/those with party connections. I suspect it
22 would be on the high side based on what I've seen going
23 on."

24 What had you seen going on, and what was it that led
25 you to that conclusion?
10

1 all, but certainly a large proportion of the cases that
2 were being sent from referrers and processed at least to
3 the point of technical assurance stage, were of high
4 volume, and therefore a high quantity, which would
5 naturally lend itself to being a high-value contract,
6 compared to, again in my experience, at the early stages
7 of processing non-HPL cases, typically some of those
8 offers of supply were much smaller in terms of quantity,
9 therefore would be much smaller in terms of volume and
10 value.

11 **Q.** You don't identify, in this email at least, a particular
12 political party, but did you have one in mind or was
13 this just a general observation across the board?

14 **A.** It was a general observation.

15 **Q.** All right. Could we have a look, please, at some of the
16 kinds of referrals which you and those working within
17 your team were receiving, just to see the range of
18 individuals and parties and locations it was coming
19 from.

20 Could we have INQ000565128.

21 This is just one example, and there are a number
22 I am going to put to you and ask you about. This is an
23 example of a referral coming in from a Labour peer, and
24 this says that:

25 "... a Labour peer on its board who is making waves
12

1 at very senior levels ... There are two offers ... in
 2 Mendix ... looks like nobody has picked [them] up.
 3 Could we take them into VIP as VVIP cases, please."
 4 This was a referral from Salamanca. Could you help
 5 us please with whether you were given any guidance or
 6 steer about how you and your team were not only to deal
 7 with offers from ministers but also from offers from
 8 opposition party ministers or opposition party
 9 politicians?
 10 **A.** Apologies, was that question in the context of how we
 11 would respond or how we would process the opportunity?
 12 **Q.** Well, both, but if you would deal first with how you
 13 would respond?
 14 **A.** Okay, so I think it's fair to say that the team of HPL
 15 caseworkers were versed in dealing with or were capable
 16 of conducting an acceptable level of stakeholder
 17 management. So --
 18 **Q.** Unpack that for me. What does that mean?
 19 **A.** So, typically, it would have been manned by resources
 20 who had had experience of dealing with ministers or
 21 senior officials or senior people within the supply
 22 chain.
 23 **Q.** Could we have a look, please, at another example.
 24 INQ000565127. Again:
 25 "Category 5. VIP. Note there's a Labour peer
 13

1 to deal with ministers or people of that level of
 2 seniority?
 3 **A.** I wouldn't necessarily say I would allocate based on who
 4 I felt was able to deal with a minister or, you know,
 5 someone of seniority because, with the exception of one
 6 particular case, the contact between the referrer, which
 7 would be that senior minister or official, would cease
 8 at the point where we would be handed over or we would
 9 then make contact with the supplier directly.
 10 I think what I would be cognisant of is when the
 11 senior stakeholders, ministers, were seeking updates,
 12 would the caseworker who was allocated that offer be
 13 capable of providing that communication with regards to
 14 progress in a timely manner, in a factual manner, and
 15 using the language that would be appropriate?
 16 **Q.** Thank you.
 17 If we could turn, please, to INQ000565130.
 18 Again:
 19 "Category 5, VIP."
 20 The Inquiry has heard a little bit of evidence about
 21 this before in relation to referrals that were made
 22 in -- by Rachel Reeves MP. It says:
 23 "No ideas if this has priority -- but it's one of
 24 the 40 companies that [have been] raised.
 25 "We don't have details of their offer ..."
 15

1 involved who implied he'd go to select committee ..."
 2 The Labour peer, I think down at the bottom, is
 3 Lord Triesman:
 4 "... if we didn't quickly progress the company he's
 5 on the board of.
 6 "I should flag that while it's [category] 5 VIP,
 7 I don't think it has legs. We should still properly
 8 kick the tyres, though."
 9 This is an email from Mr Cairnduff that the
 10 Inquiry's heard about. Is this the kind of email or
 11 offer that would be processed by somebody who was more
 12 senior in the team? How would it be done?
 13 **A.** I think it would have been done by Max, from memory, and
 14 from my understanding, would provide a lady called
 15 Wendy Burdon in the team --
 16 **Q.** Yes.
 17 **A.** -- the list of referrers or offers, and then Wendy would
 18 disseminate them within the wider caseworker team. In
 19 that situation, I would receive what Wendy was sending
 20 to me, for example, and then I would make a judgement on
 21 which members of my team I felt were able to adequately
 22 deal with that particular offer.
 23 **Q.** I see. So you had in your mind, and as these cases are
 24 being allocated, that there would be people within your
 25 team that you considered would be capable and equipped
 14

1 And so on.
 2 So, again, similar sort of processing.
 3 Did it matter -- the Inquiry has heard about
 4 processing of referrals from the Conservative Party, but
 5 I ask this neutrally: did it matter that a referral came
 6 in from somebody in the Labour Party?
 7 **A.** As far as I'm aware, and I didn't have that kind of
 8 level of exposure, given the role that I was doing at
 9 the time, the priority was based on the product in need,
 10 and that was the primary, you know, consideration.
 11 I think, to your point, that would have been
 12 a secondary factor and I don't -- really don't think --
 13 and certainly I didn't see evidence of it having any
 14 impact, either negative or positive.
 15 **Q.** Could we have a look, please, at a slightly different
 16 category of referrer.
 17 INQ000565172. Thank you.
 18 If we zoom into the one at the bottom, this comes in
 19 from a journalist, from the BBC health editor.
 20 Again, is there a different -- is there a different
 21 way or means by which offers from people with access to
 22 journalists would be handled, or was that of no
 23 consequence to you and your team?
 24 **A.** Not that I'm aware of. I would say it was of no
 25 consequence. It would be the priority of the actual
 16

1 PPE --

2 **Q.** Did you or anyone in your team receive training about
3 how conversations with people such as this, journalists,
4 opposition party MPs, ought to be conducted before you
5 engaged with them? Or did you think that was
6 unnecessary?

7 **A.** I don't recall any formal training in that regard, and
8 I think I would deem it to be -- not unnecessary, but
9 not required, given the experience of the caseworkers.
10 So, you know, it's just a given that we -- we just don't
11 talk to journalists and divulge. And, you know, we all,
12 kind of, are versed in how we handle information and how
13 we communicate.

14 **Q.** Would there not have been any particular risks in
15 engaging in communications, even with somebody who is
16 a journalist, to the way in which the PPE team was
17 operating? If you think not a factor, then do say so.

18 **A.** I don't believe so, no. I mean, it was commonly
19 broadcast on a daily basis, certainly in the early
20 stages of the pandemic, early stages of lockdown, that,
21 you know, it was no secret that the country was in dire
22 need of much needed PPE. It would have been outside the
23 realms of the caseworker team to, I guess, even make
24 a decision, let alone consider whether a communication
25 with broadcasting authorities would be appropriate or

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1 in, they would come in to Max's team, and then Max would
2 make a judgement call on whether he felt he should
3 retain that, because of whatever reason he felt, or
4 whether he wanted to allocate it to an experienced
5 caseworker who, I guess, he would have trusted were
6 capable of handling such high-profile opportunities.

7 **Q.** Another category, if we may, please.
8 INQ000565284. Three paragraphs down.
9 A reference to having links to people in China, to
10 rulers, to senior bank officials and diplomats who might
11 be "able to secure us [with] production capacity".
12 So, again, another potential link, high profile,
13 this time internationally. No training or particular
14 caseworker allocated to deal with those connections?

15 **A.** No.

16 **Q.** INQ000565432, please. Thank you. Just over the page.
17 Again, an email from you. An offer from an overseas
18 royal family. Was there any particular means by which
19 those people in your position and in your team were
20 guided or instructed to deal with these very
21 high-profile senior referrers in positions of power?

22 **A.** Again, there was no specific training or guidance
23 provided. The allocation -- sorry to repeat, but the
24 allocation of these such cases would have been allocated
25 to -- you know, such as Max would retain it or

19

1 not. And I'm conscious that the daily briefings were
2 being provided from Number 10 as that kind of way of
3 communication. So I don't think it's relevant, sorry.

4 **Q.** All right. Another category, if we may, please.
5 INQ000565162.

6 Again, if we could zoom into the email, the second
7 email down:

8 "As John mentioned, the Duchess of York has been in
9 contact with Lord Deighton to try and help source PPE."

10 Was there any training or guidance about dealing
11 with people who were senior or high up or connected, for
12 example, with the Royal Family?

13 **A.** Not specifically, no.

14 **Q.** Was there any person in the team who would be allocated
15 to handle such referrals from people in positions of
16 power or with particularly high profiles?

17 **A.** From memory and from my understanding, royalty was
18 sensitively handled by very senior people. So ... but
19 it was never -- it was never a -- it was never an issue.
20 I don't recall it ever being an issue. And I don't
21 recall it ever being widely discussed or ever receiving
22 any direction that if I, for example, was ever directly
23 approached by the Duchess of York, for example, I was
24 forbidden, you know, to deal with that or not.

25 So I guess it was a case of when the referrals came

18

1 Chris Hall or Darren Blackburn or myself, or Dennis or
2 Richard. So I think it would be fair to say that
3 between those individuals that I've just mentioned
4 within the HPL lane, team, it wasn't -- it wasn't
5 written. It was just an understanding, I guess, of the
6 capability, the commercial acumen, and trust, that we
7 would deal with it in a -- I guess in a timely manner,
8 in an efficient manner. But there was no specific
9 training. It was just an allocation based on capability
10 and competency of the caseworkers available.

11 **Q.** And based on what you're saying, you're indicating, if
12 I may put it in these terms, that you had confidence in
13 the ability of the team to allocate and deal with
14 appropriately these sorts of senior referrals?

15 **A.** Yes.

16 **Q.** Could we have up on screen, please, finally
17 INQ000565322.

18 And again, this is an email from you, 31 March:

19 "Oh my word! I have just had an email via
20 Lord Agnew via Michael Gove via some Royal in Dubai with
21 links to what appears to be the most senior and wealthy
22 people possibly in the world, offering to help.
23 I didn't take in the detail of the email, I was
24 overwhelmed with the OBEs, the Sheiks and various
25 different titles."

20

1 And with some self-deprecation:
 2 "... Cabinet Office think it is a good idea to give
 3 this to a Geordie to manage!"
 4 **A.** Yeah.
 5 **Q.** Reflecting back on your experience of the High Priority
 6 Lane, and in particular of these sorts of referrals from
 7 people in positions of power, not only domestically but
 8 also overseas, do you think there was a case for some
 9 sort of guidance or some sort of specific process by
 10 which these kinds of referrals could have been triaged
 11 by somebody of greater seniority?
 12 **A.** I think, yes, and no. I think, reflecting on where we
 13 were in March and early April 2020, we were endeavouring
 14 to secure PPE, and that was our primary aim.
 15 The high priority -- if I can just use the crude
 16 term "the high priority referrers and offers" --
 17 **Q.** Of course.
 18 **A.** -- were in my opinion triaged by the most appropriate,
 19 most experienced caseworkers available, or at our
 20 disposal.
 21 **Q.** And if I may ask, who were they?
 22 **A.** So obviously you are aware of Max and his role.
 23 **Q.** Yes.
 24 **A.** And the people which reported to Max. Max was more than
 25 able to make a very well-informed decision on which of
 21

1 those who are overseas and who may have connections to
 2 people that could help us with acquiring PPE. Is that
 3 that team, that carved-out team, is that where you're
 4 suggesting that those kinds of offers should be triaged?
 5 Or is it something different that you're suggesting?
 6 **A.** No, that's what I was suggesting. And the difference
 7 between what was -- crude, sorry -- carved out in 2020,
 8 in terms of the caseworker teams, the Technical
 9 Assurance teams, the Closing teams, each one of those
 10 functions performed activities. We could give
 11 consideration to a carved-out team to handle those
 12 reactive call to arms, if that makes sense, but actually
 13 not do any of the activities. So ie, not initiate
 14 a technical assurance process, not to initiate further
 15 financial due diligence, not to initiate the awarding of
 16 a contract.
 17 And my opinion, had that been in place, the
 18 caseworkers and the Technical Assurance team and the
 19 Finance team would have possibly been able to work more
 20 efficiently.
 21 **MR SHARMA:** Thank you, Ms Matthias. I don't have any
 22 further questions.
 23 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you.
 24 I think Ms Morris has questions now.
 25 Ms Morris.

23

1 these cases were allocated to the various caseworkers at
 2 his disposal.
 3 I think, looking forward, and looking at how we
 4 could possibly approach it in five years' time, ten
 5 years' time, and this is just my opinion, my suggestion,
 6 based on this experience, would be for a more proactive
 7 response, which is difficult when, you know, it's -- an
 8 epidemic just lands, I get you can't be that proactive
 9 but when I say that, I mean that from the perspective of
 10 applying what I would call a standard or a generic
 11 procurement approach to procuring anything.
 12 We didn't have that luxury at the time. But
 13 specifically, from the latter, in terms of the proactive
 14 approach, it could be that we give consideration to
 15 carving out a bespoke team to process, triage, deal
 16 with -- whichever terminology -- offers that weren't
 17 being or couldn't be dealt with in a proactive manner.
 18 And possibly for those individuals in that carved-out
 19 resource to be not commercial.
 20 **Q.** It's a theme of the evidence from those who have come to
 21 the Inquiry and told my Lady about their experience in
 22 the High Priority Lane that it is inevitable, within
 23 a Parliamentary democracy, that people will get in
 24 contact with their MPs, get in contact with ministers,
 25 also that it's inevitable that help will be offered from
 22

Questions from MS MORRIS KC

1 **MS MORRIS:** I do. Thank you, my Lady.
 2 Good afternoon, Ms Matthias. I ask questions on
 3 behalf of the Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK.
 4 You mentioned a moment ago the technical assurance
 5 process, and I've a few questions for you about that
 6 process, please.
 7 **A.** Okay.
 8 **Q.** And just so you understand, I am seeking to explore
 9 whether being referred through the HPL conferred
 10 a benefit to those in the HPL, in terms of its
 11 prioritisation within the technical assurance process.
 12 Okay? That's my theme.
 13 Mr James, Richard James, described in his written
 14 evidence that the HPL had a dedicated contact in the
 15 Technical Assurance team with whom the HPL team had
 16 regular liaison about the progression of offers. Is
 17 that something you're familiar with?
 18 **A.** I'm aware that there was a contact. I would question
 19 whether that contact was dedicated to HPL.
 20 **Q.** Okay.
 21 **A.** And I would also add that every caseworker, regarding of
 22 lane they were working in (sic), also had that access to
 23 the Technical Assurance team.
 24 **Q.** Okay. He goes on to say that there was a process by
 25

24

1 which the Technical Assurance team would communicate
2 feedback on the progress of offers and, if relevant,
3 reasons for rejection. He says, as a result of this
4 feedback, the HPL caseworker could resubmit the offer to
5 the Technical Assurance team.

6 So do you agree with his description of the
7 relationship between the HPL and the Technical Assurance
8 team? He says "dedicated contact".

9 **A.** Okay. Thank you. So I've addressed the dedicated
10 contact because I don't necessarily agree with that.
11 However, I do agree with the ability for caseworkers to
12 communicate to and from, between themselves and
13 Technical Assurance, if -- in the event that a product
14 had failed the technical due diligence and needed to be
15 resubmitted.

16 I would add to that, that in my experience and based
17 on my experience, that was no different to general
18 suppliers versus HPL.

19 **Q.** I'll come to that, if I may. I'm going to ask you now
20 to look at an email, please, sent on 23 April 2020 to
21 the Technical Assurance team, and that's INQ000565074,
22 please.

23 That's just at the top there. Thank you very much
24 indeed. You say:

25 "Hi

25

1 Finance and Closing. So it could have been -- I'm not
2 suggesting it was, because I don't know the context of
3 this email, but it could have been I was applying some
4 pressure on the Technical Assurance team to process
5 a particular offer because it was for a dire piece of
6 PPE. If that makes sense.

7 **Q.** All right. Mr James goes on to say in his statement
8 that, he says:

9 [As read] "I don't believe that the general
10 Opportunities teams had a dedicated contact in Technical
11 Assurance like we did on the HPL. Moreover,
12 I considered that having this contact provided two
13 potential advantages for the offers that we were
14 processing on the HPL. First, we were able to
15 communicate our priorities to that team to request that
16 the highest priority offers in the HPL be processed more
17 swiftly than other HPL offers of lower priority.
18 Secondly, if we wished to obtain clarity on the reasons
19 for a rejection, we could request the contact details of
20 the relevant caseworker from the team and therefore
21 communicate with them more directly and effectively than
22 we could through Mendix."

23 So I hear what you say about whether there was
24 a dedicated contact in the TA, but would you agree with
25 Mr James that there was two potential advantages to the

27

1 "I spoke to Adrian last week and he was making some
2 noise in relation to Lord Feldman as a result of the
3 length of time it was taking to get his offering through
4 TA [Technical Assurance] hence the chasers to MoD and
5 giving [X] the heads up. I have today spoken to [X] in
6 the TA team and he agreed to process their offering
7 ASAP."

8 So my question is, is it an example of escalating or
9 expediting the technical assurance process of a VIP Lane
10 offer, in this case one connected with Lord Feldman?

11 **A.** I don't disagree with any of the text there I think the
12 context is important. So -- if I address it in this way
13 and then you can tell me if it is answering your
14 question.

15 So the caseworkers, whether HPL or not HPL, were
16 aware that there was an ability to conduct what we
17 referred to as a rapid response process. And the rapid
18 response process was established by a means of being
19 able to prioritise a particular item of PPE that was in
20 the most need. So, for example, at any one point in
21 time, if we were really, really desperate to secure
22 gowns, for example, we, both HPL teams and non-HPL
23 teams, would look within our cases to try and establish
24 if we had an offer for that priority product and we
25 would bring together caseworkers, Technical Assurance,

26

1 HPL versus non-HPL offers?

2 **A.** I wouldn't, no.

3 **Q.** Professor Sanchez-Graells, who has given evidence to the
4 Inquiry, said in his evidence that it's not accurate to
5 say that all offers were treated the same from
6 a technical assurance perspective because Technical
7 Assurance was taking time, and having a dedicated person
8 for technical assurance of VIP offers, would have
9 accelerated things.

10 Do you accept his view regarding the benefit of
11 faster consideration by the Technical Assurance team?

12 **A.** No, not based on my experience.

13 **Q.** According to Mr James, again from his written evidence,
14 the HPL would chase up technical approval, including if
15 the TA team didn't respond within 48 hours and chase
16 more frequently for updates than the general
17 Opportunities team -- and that's paragraph 126 of his
18 statement -- and would contact the Closing team for
19 updates on the referrer or offerer's behalf if
20 requested.

21 Do you think these additional steps conferred
22 further benefits to HPL offers?

23 **A.** I don't recognise those steps from the work that
24 I conducted.

25 **MS MORRIS:** Thank you.

28

1 Thank you, those are my questions, my Lady.
2 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you very much, Ms Morris.
3 That completes the questions we have for you,
4 Ms Matthias. I'm really grateful to you. It must have
5 been so tough in what I think we can understand you
6 called the "looney bin". They were extraordinarily long
7 hours under pressure, so thank you for all you did at
8 that time. It must have been impossible to have any
9 kind of family life. And thank you for helping the
10 Inquiry.
11 **THE WITNESS:** Thank you.
12 **LADY HALLETT:** Very well, I think that completes the
13 evidence for this week, Mr Sharma?
14 **MR SHARMA:** Yes, it does, my Lady.
15 **LADY HALLETT:** In which case we shall resume for the final
16 week on Monday at 10.30. Thank you all very much
17 indeed.
18 **(2.47 pm)**
19 **(The hearing adjourned until 10.30 am on Monday,**
20 **24 March 2025)**
21
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<p>W</p> <p>what... [17] 10/22 10/24 10/24 11/16 11/18 11/23 13/18 14/19 15/10 20/11 20/21 22/10 23/6 23/7 26/16 27/23 29/5</p> <p>whatever [1] 19/3</p> <p>when [4] 15/10 18/25 22/7 22/9</p> <p>where [3] 15/8 21/12 23/3</p> <p>whether [8] 13/5 17/24 19/2 19/4 24/10 24/20 26/15 27/23</p> <p>which [19] 1/10 2/24 3/10 5/6 7/17 10/11 12/4 12/16 14/21 15/6 16/21 17/16 19/18 21/10 21/24 21/25 22/7 25/1 29/15</p> <p>whichever [1] 22/16</p> <p>while [1] 14/6</p> <p>who [29] 2/20 4/7 4/15 5/13 5/25 6/14 6/14 6/21 7/4 8/6 8/19 8/20 9/2 12/25 13/20 14/1 14/11 15/3 15/12 17/15 18/11 18/14 19/5 19/10 21/21 22/20 23/1 23/1 28/3</p> <p>whole [1] 10/8</p> <p>whom [1] 24/16</p> <p>why [1] 11/24</p> <p>widely [1] 18/21</p> <p>wider [1] 14/18</p> <p>will [5] 9/18 10/1 11/1 22/23 22/25</p> <p>win [1] 20/13</p> <p>wished [1] 27/18</p> <p>within [15] 8/9 9/1 9/7 9/8 9/20 10/20 12/16 13/21 14/18 14/24 20/4 22/22 24/12 26/23 28/15</p> <p>witness [7] 1/4 1/9 4/18 5/14 6/10 10/10 11/3</p> <p>witnessed [1] 6/24</p> <p>witnesses [1] 5/13</p> <p>wonder [1] 10/12</p> <p>word [1] 20/19</p> <p>words [1] 10/4</p> <p>work [4] 1/16 11/4 23/19 28/23</p> <p>worked [1] 2/4</p> <p>worker [1] 1/23</p> <p>working [8] 1/23 5/15 6/11 7/1 7/3 11/10 12/16 24/23</p> <p>workload [2] 6/20 10/2</p> <p>world [1] 20/22</p>	<p>worth [1] 5/10</p> <p>would [75]</p> <p>wouldn't [6] 5/9 8/15 9/2 9/4 15/3 28/2</p> <p>written [3] 20/5 24/14 28/13</p> <p>wrong [1] 7/14</p> <hr/> <p>Y</p> <hr/> <p>yeah [4] 5/20 5/24 6/23 21/4</p> <p>years [1] 2/4</p> <p>years' [2] 22/4 22/5</p> <p>yes [15] 1/15 1/18 2/3 2/10 2/17 4/2 4/12 4/25 6/16 10/9 14/16 20/15 21/12 21/23 29/14</p> <p>York [2] 18/8 18/23</p> <p>you [120]</p> <p>you're [7] 8/12 8/13 20/11 20/11 23/3 23/5 24/18</p> <p>you've [1] 11/23</p> <p>your [29] 1/11 1/23 2/8 2/11 2/13 3/20 3/24 4/16 4/17 4/18 5/14 9/10 9/17 10/1 10/4 10/7 10/8 10/10 12/17 13/6 14/23 14/24 16/11 16/23 17/2 19/19 19/19 21/5 26/13</p> <hr/> <p>Z</p> <hr/> <p>zoom [2] 16/18 18/6</p>			
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