

Witness Name: Victoria Lloyd

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Dated: 24/04/2025

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY -MODULE 6

WITNESS STATEMENT OF VICTORIA LLOYD, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, AGE CYMRU

I, Victoria Lloyd, of Age Cymru, will say as follows: -

1. Age Cymru is the national charity for older people Wales. It was formed in 2009 by the merger of Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales. We have offices in Cardiff and Mold and staff located across Wales. We also work closely with our five Age Cymru local network partners, Age UK, Age Scotland and Age NI.
2. Our mission is to improve the lives of older people by delivering trusted advice, support and services and to use our knowledge, insight and experience to influence policies and decisions affecting older people.
3. Our vision is a society that offers all people in Wales the best of later life. Older people are valued, included and able to shape decisions affecting their lives.
4. Together with our local partners we provide information and advice, deliver wellbeing programmes, provide independent advocacy, support carers, we campaign and research.
5. In March 2020 Age Cymru had 30 members of staff and 100 volunteers (volunteers at that time were engaged primarily in leading walking groups and fitness classes which were put on hiatus in March 2020).
6. I have had the opportunity to consider the statement provided by Ms Abrahams [INQ000509808] on behalf of Age UK, on the impact of the pandemic on the adult

social care sector which comprehensively outlines the issues and concerns that we experienced, and I have no additional reflections to add in relation to these issues. Pre-pandemic, the social care sector in Wales was evolving somewhat differently to England with different structures and the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. However, the challenges that are outlined in Ms Abrahams' statement are broadly the same, namely, the decline of social care spending per head of the population aged over 65, increasing demand and an unmet need for support among older people, coupled with challenges of capacity and recruitment and retention of staff.

Isolation and Loneliness

7. From early March 2020 I was engaged in discussions with Welsh Government on the potential impact of shielding and restrictions on older people. This was largely in the context of isolation and loneliness and the potential increase in numbers of older people experiencing loneliness if contact with others was restricted or shielding put in place, given the numbers of older people who live alone. The conversations focussed on older people including those who were recipients of care.
8. I then took part in a telephone conference on 16 March 2020 with Helena Herklots, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales; Sally Rees of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action and Albert Heaney, the Deputy Director General for Health and Social Services, with a follow up call on 19 March 2020. These focussed on the potential impact of isolation and loneliness on older people that may result from the proposed restrictions.

Advice

9. Age Cymru provides a Wales-wide, bilingual telephone advice service on issues affecting older people. From mid-March 2020 we recognised the importance of being able to provide older people, particularly those who were not 'on-line', with correct information and advice; this was reinforced by the significant increases in our inbound call volumes from mid-March 2020.
10. Messaging around shielding evolved during the early weeks of the pandemic and we found it was not well understood; many people were left confused as to whether over 70s were all expected to shield. We were inundated with calls from people who thought they should have had a shielding letter and didn't, and others seeking to find out how they could get a shielding letter.

11. People were asking us to interpret what the covid guidance meant for them in a range of situations, including advice around accessing food, medicines and cash. The situation drew into sharp contrast the gap between those of us that get our information online and those of us that don't.
12. Age Cymru worked with the Older People's Commissioner's team ensure we could provide consistent and clear information to older people; we liaised with Welsh Government regarding content which took into account the types of queries we were receiving. On 17 March 2020, we issued a joint statement with the Commissioner that stated
13. "Over the past few days, older people have been given inconsistent advice and information on what action they should be taking and what they should be preparing for in relation to the Corona virus outbreak. This has led to understandable confusion and concern amongst older people and those that care for them. It is vital that information is clear and consistent and provided in a way that people can understand in order to be able to make decisions about what action they need to take. The UK and Welsh Governments must show leadership at this time and take responsibility for ensuring that older people are provided with timely information that is clear, accessible and provides enough detail to enable older people to take the appropriate action. The Older People's Commissioner and Age Cymru are working together throughout this time to provide support and information to older people and will be engaging further with the Welsh Government to ensure that they are communicating effectively with older people. "
14. Age Cymru maintained close contact with Welsh Government departments and was offered insights into the information and advice being provided to older people. This included having sight of letters issued by the Chief Medical Officer regarding shielding guidance, having the ability to pass concerns from individuals about shielding to the dedicated Welsh Government shielding team, receiving and sharing information on automatic eligibility for priority supermarket delivery slots in Wales and advising those struggling to access them, and receiving detailed information regarding arrangements for Welsh Government-organised weekly basic food parcels.

15. We also shared feedback with Welsh Government on issues raised by older people in real time including general concerns around shielding and what or what was not permitted, concerns about others not following rules and potentially spreading the virus asymptotically, concerns about care home residents lacking stimulation and uncertainties around visiting, and calls from older people for mandatory face masks to boost confidence among vulnerable groups. We felt that our contributions were being listened to, however, given the numbers of organisations and individuals contributing we are unable to provide clear attribution of our input.

16. This engagement ensured that key concerns we heard from older people were fed into government and that we received accurate, up-to-date advice in response to the rapidly evolving situation.

Friend in Need

17. We were in contact with Welsh Government from mid-March 2020 regarding the impact of Covid-19 on older people living in the community who may need have needed to isolate and may not have support for shopping, picking up prescriptions and other tasks out of the home. This group would include those in receipt of care. Dr Gillian Richardson championed work to develop what became Age Cymru's Friend in Need project which provided information and resources for people who were providing informal volunteer support in the community and a telephone friendship service for those at risk of isolation and loneliness as a result of shielding and lockdowns. Work was ongoing on the resources and information from March 2020 and the telephone friendship scheme formally launched on 1 June 2020. The Age Cymru staff team provided an interim service while the volunteer scheme was being developed making daily, weekly or fortnightly calls as required to individuals throughout the first lockdown on a seven-day weekly rota. Welsh Government funded the volunteer scheme until March 2022. Age Cymru has continued to provide this service in subsequent years.

Tell Me More

18. On 27 October 2020 we were contacted by Welsh Government to discuss how we could support them with work on care home resident wellbeing that arose from the Care Home Action Plan.

19. This led to Age Cymru holding a series of conversations with a group of care home residents through November and December 2020 to understand their experience of living in a care home at that time and to feed back the findings of those conversations to Welsh Government. We heard how the residents were lonely and missing their families, the onset of winter had stopped window visits, and that while residents had valued window visits, they weren't *'the same as seeing her in my room'*.
20. The conversations also revealed how the residents valued the efforts being made by care staff. *"There are always things going on here, it keeps me busy. You can stay and join bingo after this if you like? I am glad I live here, it is much better than being lonely. They (care staff) are so good. They care. It's a nice place to be. This thing (Covid) is making it so hard; you can't do what you used to do. I can't get out, that is such a loss to me. I like to walk and I miss that."*
21. A series of weekly telephone conversations with eight care home residents highlighted that residents were missing visits and being able to go out. A resident said, *"I'm looking forward to hugging my husband, Humans need social contact."*
22. Loss of close friends in the care homes was having an impact. The effect of the deaths in care homes has been very tough. One resident said, the worse thing was *'seeing all the empty chairs'*.
23. Spirits have been eroded: There was a definite sense that residents' spirits are being eroded by the length and severity of the changes that have necessarily been made in homes at this time. One resident (aged 99yrs) said that *"if people were truthful, they would admit that it's getting them down"*. Another reflected that, *"It's been a very difficult time for me. More recently I have lost some optimism"*.
24. Fear: One resident feared reports on her mobile phone about an *"even worse virus"* on its way. Another wondered if the world would ever be the same again. One lady said, *"We just can't relax"*.
25. Resident's usual wellbeing routines have been broken. Access to regular outdoor walks, church services and outlets for creative productivity e.g. selling handmade cards and knitted items to visitors, have largely stopped. Wellbeing and sense of self have been eroded.

26. Technology helped: Those residents who were able to get on-line found that their devices supported their wellbeing during this period. One reported being able to live-stream church services and talk to relatives via Zoom. Another resident said, it was strange using Zoom to start with, but she was getting used to it now.
27. Sense of purpose has helped: Those who have a sense of purpose found it easier to weather the pandemic storm: One resident said, *"I make myself content"*.
28. Strengthened staff and resident relationships: staff and residents have relied on each other for support and have created stronger bonds.
29. The role of the activity coordinator for raising moral: staff have tried to help with the uncertainty and chaotic nature of this time by giving residents activities to look forward too. One resident said, *"If you're feeling a bit down you can occupy your mind with activities, quizzes and things"*.
30. I am unable to quantify the specific actions that Welsh Government took as a result of the work that took place between October 2020 and December 2020 as the report coincided with the roll out of the first vaccines to care home residents. Following this initial work, Welsh Government commissioned Age Cymru to speak with 100 residents in 20 care homes across Wales to hear and share their perspectives, indicating that the views of residents were valued and being considered. The Tell Me More project provided a report detailing the key themes that featured in the conversations. The report reflected a range of perspectives on living with the restrictions of regulation, guidance and care home policy. The project recorded the residents' voices through Zoom. The conversations were made into a film.
31. The themes and findings from the conversations were all shared with Welsh Government [Exhibit VL/01-INQ000509356]. An event was held on 3 March 2022 to launch the video that was produced of the conversations with a wider audience across the care sector, which was supported by Julie Morgan MS, Minister for Social Care [Exhibit VL/02 -INQ000596319].

Care Home Volunteering Project

32. In January 2021 I was invited into conversations with Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Care Inspectorate Wales and Welsh Government to explore the potential

for volunteers to assist care home providers to facilitate care home visiting, for example by meeting and greeting visitors, escorting visitors to visiting areas or helping to organise visiting rotas.

33. This resulted in the development of a proposal to pilot an approach to the development of volunteering in care homes to facilitate and support visiting and social contact between residents and relatives where volunteer recruitment, training and support would be coordinated by Age Cymru. This led to an ongoing dialogue and work between Age Cymru and Welsh Government to support development of volunteering in care homes as a way of supporting resident wellbeing.

34. Welsh Government approved the pilot proposal, and the project started in May 2021 and ran till March 2022. Seven care homes for older people in Wales participated in the project, located in Swansea, Aberdare, Neath, Cardiff, Newport and Anglesey. Volunteers drawn from the local community were recruited, inducted and trained to support care homes to meet and greet regular visitors. We provided guidance for volunteers and care home managers and relatives. Care homes reported that they found the project useful, however, as one manager pointed out

35.

'The project has been useful but came at a time when there had been changes in the regulations. It would be really, really useful if it had started in previous times! But even though there have been changes to restrictions, for the relatives who are coming in, having someone to help them with PPE, tying of the apron and things like that has been really helpful.'

36. An extension to the pilot took place from July 2022 to further develop the care home volunteering model and develop a creative approach to meaningful conversations which care home activity coordinators and volunteers could use to engage residents. This second pilot worked with a further 8 care homes and with voluntary agencies in Pembrokeshire, Gwynedd, RCT and Gwent to support care home volunteering in 20 of their care homes. We also produced a bilingual toolkit for volunteering in care homes that was made available through the Age Cymru website for care homes not participating in the core project, to recruit and manage their own volunteers.

Covid Social Care Planning and Response Group

37. Members of the Age Cymru staff team attended the Welsh Government Covid-19 Social Care Planning and Response Sub-group from 20 October 2020. Meetings attended were 3 November 2020, 17 November 2020, 1 December 2020, 15 December 2020, 26 January 2021, 15 February 2022, and 15 March 2022. There was a break in attendance between February 2021 and February 2022 due to staffing capacity. Some themes discussed included; testing, supporting care homes, care home visitation, PPE, deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), and supported living guidance. Age Cymru is unable to quantify whether the issues raised were appropriately resolved or addressed.

Cross Party Group on Older People and Ageing

38. Age Cymru provides secretariat for the Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament Cross Party Group (CPG) on Older People and Ageing, chaired by Mike Hedges MS.

39. Between 1 March 2020 and 28 June 2022, we held nine meetings taking place on; 10 March 2020, 23 June 2020, 24 November 2020, 9 February 2021, 15 June 2021, 19 October 2021, 8 March 2022, 26 April 2022, and 7 June 2022.

40. The CPG meeting on 23 June 2020 included presentations from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, Heléna Herklots and the chair of the Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA), Steve Milsom followed by a question-and-answer session with members. The presentations focused on effects of Covid-19 on older people in Wales, and actions needed. The COPA chair called for a wide-ranging survey of older people on how Covid 19 has impacted upon them and what support they need to recover from the lockdown and its many challenges [Exhibit VL/03 - INQ000584937] .

41. The Cross Party Group meeting of 24 November 2020 received a presentation from Mr Steve Milsom, Chair of Cymru Older People's Alliance and Ms Heather Ferguson, Age Cymru on the 'Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the first Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery' report, which detailed the results of a survey carried out in partnership between five national older people's organisations in Wales and Age Cymru [Exhibit VL/04 -INQ000584940]. The feedback provided on the survey was wide ranging and covered issues experienced by older people in their

day to day lives and were presented as a contribution to the Welsh Government knowledge base.

42. The Cross-Party Group that took place on 26 April 2022 received a presentation on the initial findings in relation to social care from the third national survey of experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales of the Covid-19 pandemic from Ms Heather Ferguson, Age Cymru. Ms Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services, Mr Matt Jenkins, Welsh Government and NR Welsh Government, were present [Exhibit VL/05-INQ000584942] .
43. Ms Ferguson reported that 14% of those asked told Age Cymru that they had accessed or tried to access social care in the last three months (i.e. the three months to March 2022). Of those people, 30% said the experience had been a positive one, and 70% reported negative experiences. The key positive experiences of social care were being able to easily contact occupational therapists and physios by phone, support and dedication from carers, support provided by third sector agencies and district nursing support.
44. The key negative experiences of social care were staff shortages resulting in sporadic care, lack of person-centred care, poor communication between health and social care, poor communication with service users, lengthy delays in care assessment, and long waits for support at home.
45. Ms Ferguson also reported the experiences of unpaid carers highlighted in the research. Many older carers reported that they felt they were shouldering the burden where they haven't been able to get support from social care. 31% of people who completed the survey look after someone, and 55% of these unpaid carers had increased their caring in the last three months. The survey also reported the challenging experiences of the last three months; 18% of respondents noted that this had been caring for a spouse/friend/relative. Key themes impacting unpaid carers were; isolation, worries about infecting the vulnerable person they care for, challenging / difficult to look after, worries about employment and finances, and lack of respite.

Age Cymru's annual surveys on older people's experiences of the Covid pandemic

46. Between 1 March 2020 and 28 June 2022 Age Cymru published three annual survey reports on the experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the Covid pandemic. The surveys were undertaken in partnership with the five national older people's organisations in Wales; Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA), Welsh Senate of Older People, Active Wales, National Pensioners Convention Wales, and Pensioners Forum Wales. The surveys covered the broad experiences of older people from how they received communication during the pandemic to the challenges they experienced in daily life. The feedback from older people reflected some of the positive experiences people had through lockdown with people enjoying the help of family and friends or experiencing less pressure. The surveys also recorded the challenges people experienced across healthcare, physical and mental wellbeing, worries about engaging with the community and not seeing family and friends.
47. The first survey was published in October 2020 titled: 'Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the first Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery', [Exhibit- VL/06 [INQ000584945]. The survey was completed by 1114 people aged 50 or over in Wales. In the survey some older people reported that they had difficulties getting appropriate social care for themselves or their families. Issues included accessing home assessments after diagnosis, slow hospital discharge, limited contact from social workers, and care workers not complying with appropriate PPE. One respondent commented; *"My social worker left, and a new one was appointed but she has only been in contact once to say nothing can be done until all returns to normal and who knows when that will be. Now they are not returning my calls"* Female, aged 60-64, Swansea.
48. Another person told us that the council and the care company looking after their mother asked them to consider dropping her carer due to the lockdown. The family refused and the care continued. We also heard from an older person who was a personal assistant via the Direct Payment Scheme regarding their experience of providing support. *'I have been working 7 days a week keeping my clients who live with dementia safe at home. I have done this by supplying my own PPE and using people's strengths, capabilities and hobbies and interests to deter them from becoming scared and agitated. Really I have been left to use my own skills whilst working during Covid'*. Female, aged 50-54, Isle of Anglesey.

49. In addition, 16% of older people who responded to the survey struggled with caring for a spouse, friend or relative during lockdown. Many older carers told us that they faced an increase in their responsibilities, caring for longer and needing to provide more personal care due to reduction in support from care agencies. *"No relief in any way for 24-hour care. I have cared for my husband without any help at all since 17 March 2020. The strain is immense"* Female, aged 85-89, Swansea
50. Many struggled with lack of respite from their role, ceasing of support and activity groups, and not having access to their usual support networks. *"My spouse has Alzheimer's; it gets to me as [I have] no free time"* Female, aged 70-74, Vale of Glamorgan. *"Carer for husband who has Parkinson's. All his interventions by phone only. Group activities not possible so pressure on me to come up with things to do. Felt isolated."* Female, aged 70-74, Conwy
51. Some carers told us that they were worried about being invisible to services and support, and the person they care for being missed. *"I look after my 98-year-old grandmother and I was terrified she'd be forgotten"* Female, aged 50-54, Neath Port Talbot.
52. The second survey report was published in May 2021 and was titled: 'Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery' [Exhibit VL/07-INQ000584946]. The survey was completed by 1216 people aged 50 or over in Wales. The survey asked about people's experience of accessing health or social care during lockdown. Of 1216, responses 73% answered this question. Respondents were free to concentrate on areas that mattered to them. As such these responses are indications of what matters most to older people in Wales. They expressed a wide range of experiences of accessing health and social care. Fewer people access care and support through social care services than health so social care wasn't mentioned by as many respondents in the comments. Seven told us of positive experiences of social care and 19 told us of difficulties. Of those positive experiences, at least one already had arrangements in place before the pandemic began. Negative experiences people told us about included difficulty meeting with social services, lack of respite care to allow carers to recharge and look after their loved one better, and lack of information and support for

- carers. *"Meetings are possible only when the professionals want them. [...] Covid is used as an excuse by social services."* (Female, 55-59, West Wales)
53. *"As the 'carer' I have relied mainly on internet for information. Whilst very grateful for excellent surgery and hospital treatment for my husband, the feeling of 'going it largely alone' has been quite stressful. I found that Drs only gave advice over the phone without seeing the patient. Carers came in but I was left coping on my own. My husband was taken into respite for me to have a break as I was worn out. Then I couldn't see him because of restrictions. In 5 days I was told he was on an end-of-life plan. I was shocked the following week he passed away"*.
54. Some respondents drew attention to how health services have continued to operate whilst social care has not operated in the same way: *"Impossible to get an assessment by social services Occupational Therapy. I can't get into my bath for a shower. I've spoken to them and am on the waiting list, they aren't doing routine assessments, and I've already waited a year. It feels like I will never have a shower again. I've been able to access my GP and hospital consultants by phone when needed and have seen GP and attended A&E with no issues during lockdown"* (Female 50-55, South Wales)
55. The third survey 'Current experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales of the Covid-19 pandemic, and views on the year ahead' was published in June 2022 [Exhibit VL/08-INQ000584943]. The survey was completed by 1169 people aged 50 or over in Wales. 14% of respondents told us that they'd accessed or tried to access social care in the previous three months. 70% reported a negative experience of accessing social care. People told us that staff shortages had caused sporadic or reduced care at home, with one person telling us that their support hours had been cut by more than half, and they can't support their own needs. *"The Domiciliary Care for my mum has been more variable with a greater number of carers coming to her home rather than a small team looking after her"*
56. Others told us about the impact of the lack of person-centred care. One respondent told us. *"Accessing carers for my dad and stepmother was straightforward and the agency was good. But the agency's limited staff left no choice on timings of visit. They could only call at 7am, my dad who was caring for my stepmother was exhausted anyway - the early wake ups (6am) after difficult nights further tired my*

dad cancelling carers which ultimately led to my stepmother being hospitalised. She is now in a care home”

57. We also heard from people who told us that communication hasn't been adequate, both in terms of between health and social care and between social services and service users. One person told us that they've only had one brief call in two years regarding their brother who is living with a disability and receives 14 hours of care. Others told us that they've been waiting long periods of time for a care assessment with one person letting us know that they'd struggled the last two years with their assessment which was mislaid, meaning that they've had to start from scratch. Another older person told us that they waited more than a year for a community occupational therapy assessment.
58. We heard about the long waits for support at home after having an assessment. *“I am on a waiting list for an OT to come and assess me for a disability grant so we can improve our house to make it easier for me to use. I'm not sure if the wait is longer because of covid, but it's going to take about a year before I get my assessment”*
59. In terms of positive experiences of social care, people talked about being able to easily contact and be supported by occupational therapists and physiotherapists by phone. People also told us of the support and dedication of care workers in such difficult circumstances. *“Wonderful support! And were amazed how well they cope, considering the Covid difficulties”*
60. We also heard about the support from third sector organisations which had been vital, with one person telling us that they had a language barrier so accessing the organisation made it easier to access the care that they needed. People also praised the support from district nurses. Courses such as strength and balance courses were mentioned as useful, although it was noted that they'd be more useful if they were longer.
61. A third of older people who completed the survey were unpaid carers. Of these unpaid carers, 55% increased the amount of care they provided in the prior three months. 18% of overall respondents said that being an unpaid carer had been a challenging experience. When asked what impact the pandemic had on them, many unpaid carers told us of the isolation they experienced. For some this was as a result of the need to stay home because the person they care for is vulnerable to the virus,

or the 24/7 nature of the role. One person told us that they had been caring for their husband 24/7 for 18 months with no help. Another person mentioned the isolation they experienced after caring for a sick relative who then dies leaving them entirely on entirely on their own.

62. Some unpaid carers told us of the difficulties accessing social care. *'No respite care, no care assessment, no help at home'*. We also heard from people who are finding caring very challenging, and from a number of carers who were concerned about the cost-of-living crisis and the difficulties they had with employment whilst balancing their caring role, with some having to give up jobs. Many told us of the lack of respite and not having any break from caring. *"I work full time and am a full-time carer and am approaching retirement. I can't do this anymore"*

63. Some carers told us how they were so busy looking after others that they didn't have time to make appointments for their own health needs and that hospital discharge communication and follow up is lacking. Other carers also told us of long delays in getting information about how to care for their loved one themselves. *"Been waiting months for a district nurse to visit my father, even though 2 referrals have been made. Visited surgery so that they could show me what to do regarding dressings etc, so now I do it myself"* *'Semi-retired due to burnout from NHS and trying to care for elderly parent'*

64. Each survey report was shared with the Welsh Government Health and Social Care Department. The survey findings were also used throughout Age Cymru's work to support consultation responses, briefings to politicians, and relevant campaign work as well as informing our own delivery. Presentations on the findings were made to the Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing and the Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing illustrating the day-to-day issues being experienced by older people.

Key Correspondence

65. We wrote to the First Minister and the Counsel General to express disappointment at the absence of references to older people in the report Welsh Government published in October 2020 regarding plans to reconstruct Wales post Covid, given the significant impact of Covid 19 on older people (as evidenced by the number of contracted cases and subsequent deaths) [Exhibit VL/09-INQ000584947] .

66. We were concerned that older people have faced ageism and age discrimination from the outset of the pandemic despite the huge efforts that were taking place across Government at all levels. Older people were telling us of the guilt they felt because of the lockdown and feeling that they are to blame, which seemed to be driven by ageist rhetoric that was heard throughout the pandemic.
67. We had ongoing positive working relationships with officials particularly in the Health and Social Care Departments and felt that we had been able to share concerns and issues that we were gathering from our engagement with older people and service delivery on an ongoing basis. Our letter to the First Minister and Counsel General was prompted by the concern that older people were being overlooked in this official communication which was intended to signal priorities.
68. The Counsel General responded to the concern [Exhibit VL/10-INQ000584944] by noting that the *significance is not the naming of a group, but the substantive action we are taking to support older people* and went on to indicate measures such as *support for older workers, those older people furthest from the workforce; our commitments on lifelong learning; the planned support for public transport (including on-demand transport); action to improve housing and to tackle fuel poverty; support for the NHS for non-coronavirus conditions; support for other public services and the third sector; initiatives to tackle digital exclusion; and the revitalisation of town centres, including plans for town centre health and social care facilities. Each of these (and indeed a range of other interventions) will have an important impact on the lives of our older citizens.* We understood the Counsel General's position and recognised the work going on across Government to support older people. Our concern had been that Older People were not being clearly recognised by not being listed as a specific group in the plans for reconstruction. The Counsel General reassured us that they were.

Statements

69. During the period covered by the Inquiry, we signed a number of statements with colleagues in the UK Network of Older People's Organisations as a result of shared concerns about the impact of Covid-19 on older people.
70. We signed a **Statement on the rights of older people** because of our shared concern, discussed at a meeting on 26 March 2020, about the ageist rhetoric which was being widely used in the media and on social media. The statement highlights

the importance of maintaining human rights principles when making decisions about treatment [Exhibit VL/11-INQ000584935] .

71. We signed a further **Statement on older people being pressured into signing do not attempt CPR forms** issued on 6 April 2020 following reports that older people were receiving communications, including a specific instance of a GP practice in Wales, encouraging them to agree DNACPR instructions. The statement called on governments to provide leadership in ensuring older people's rights were upheld. We were pleased to see the Welsh Government publish the Coronavirus: ethical values and principles for healthcare delivery framework statement on 14 April 2020 [Exhibit VL/12-INQ000584936].

72. On 16 April 2020, we signed a letter to Welsh Government as part of the **Wales Carers Alliance** sharing specific concerns that carers raised regarding the impact of the pandemic. These included clarity of guidance and carers rights, reduction in the availability of support and care planning, social isolation, distancing and shielding, Access to PPE and testing, and Access to Food and Medicines and Health care [Exhibit VL/13-INQ000222682]. We were content with Welsh Government's response emphasising that carers remained a priority for Welsh Government and a specific statement was made by Welsh Government on carers' rights [Exhibit VL/14 - INQ000584941] .

73. On 24 November 2020, we signed a statement about protecting **older people's rights in the next phase of the pandemic**. My recollection is that this was the result of conversations that had focussed on the impact of older people's rights in the pandemic to date and ensuring the impacts on older people were considered in decision making during the winter period [Exhibit VL/15 -INQ000584939] .
Through our work we continued to hear instances where older people's rights appeared to be compromised and our Survey, published in May 2021 *Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery* [Exhibit VL/07 -INQ000584946] indicates 12% of older people felt they were unable to exercise their rights.

74. On 2 November 2020 we responded to Welsh Government's consultation on **Rapid Engagement on the Retention or Suspension of Section 15 of and Part 2 to Schedule 12 to the Coronavirus Act 2020**. The Coronavirus Act was a UK Government Act which also covered Wales as legislation. Implementation by Welsh

Government of Section 15 of, and Part 2 to Schedule 12 to, the Coronavirus Act 2020 would mean easements of the duties already in place in legislation in Wales, under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 in Wales. These easements would involve prioritisation of resources by local authorities relating to assessments and meeting needs for care and support.

75.

76. We supported suspension of the provisions on the grounds we felt that if the easements were implemented, they would have a disproportionate and negative impact on the rights of older people. The provisions had not been applied for by any local authorities, yet intelligence gathered through our advice service and the work of our partners suggested that there had been an impact on assessment and support received during the pandemic. We felt that the provisions made unofficial lessening in the necessary assessment of care and support more likely and left open the potential for misinterpretation by both local authority staff and the public [Exhibit V/L16 - INQ000584938] .

Lessons learned and recommendations

77. I fully support the recommendations that Ms Abrahams has made in her submission. Much needs to be done across Governments and society to address the ageism and age discrimination which continues to permeate our lives, so that older people are not invisible or overlooked in decision making and they can be confident that this is the case.

78. Many of the issues we heard from older people related to poor communication, be that about shielding or access to care. People's mental health was impacted by anxiety of not knowing what was happening. Where were they (or someone they were caring for) were in terms of waiting for assessment, or where they were in terms of delivery of a care package or a vaccine. Ensuring timely and effective communication with older people, particularly those experiencing digital exclusion, is key.

Statement of truth

79. 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 a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed: **PD**

Dated: 24 April 2025

Schedule 1 - Exhibits

Exhibit		Paragraph number
VL/01	INQ000509356	31
VL/02	INQ000596319	31
VL/03	INQ000584937	37
VL/04	INQ000584940	38
VL/05	INQ000584942	39
VL/06	INQ000584945	44
VL/07	INQ000584946	49
VL/08	INQ000584943	52
VL/09	INQ000584947	62
VL/10	INQ000584944	65
VL/11	INQ000584935	67
VL/12	INQ000584936	68
VL/13	INQ000222682	69

VL/14	INQ000584941	69
VL/15	INQ000584939	70
VL/16	INQ000584938	71