

Draft Opening Statement
on behalf of
Public Health Scotland
in the Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry

Good morning, my Lord.

I represent Public Health Scotland (or “PHS” for short)

In these brief opening remarks, we thought it would be helpful to make some comments about FIRST who PHS is and what its role was in the pandemic – we are conscious that some of those watching and listening may not have heard of the organisation before now – and SECOND what its purpose is in attending at these impact hearings today and in the coming weeks.

Before I do that, at the outset, PHS wishes to express its gratitude to the Inquiry for being granted leave to appear at these hearings, and, of course, to recognise and acknowledge the incalculable loss and suffering that have been endured by the people of Scotland due to this awful pandemic. In our view, it is right, therefore, that the Inquiry has decided to begin the evidence by hearing from people across Scotland about the impact the pandemic had, and continues to have, on their lives.

Who then is PHS, what is its role, and what is its purpose at these hearings?

Since 1st April 2020, PHS has been Scotland’s lead national agency for improving and protecting the health and wellbeing of the Scottish public. Central to its responsibility are the areas of health protection, health improvement and health inequality in Scotland. It played a key role during the pandemic, particularly in the context of health and social care. It had a significant involvement in, for example: guidance, contact tracing, vaccines, and advising and supporting the Scottish Government in its public health messaging. Alongside this, and no less importantly, public health leaders within each of Scotland’s fourteen Territorial Health Boards took many of the practical steps at local or community level to

support the control of the pandemic. Unfortunately, since 2020, for most of us, terms like “contact tracing” have become part of common, everyday speech. In attending these hearings, PHS will benefit from hearing first-hand the impact that such measures had on ordinary people. PHS is committed to listening, and to learning the appropriate lessons – all with a view to doing better in the future.

PHS will also do everything it can to assist the Inquiry to fulfil its terms of reference. PHS is looking forward to playing a full role in the Inquiry as it proceeds. As a national public body, PHS keenly understands the responsibility it owes, not just to the Inquiry but to all the Scottish people, and it will do everything in its power to meet those responsibilities.