

SCOTTISH COVID-19 INQUIRY

OPENING STATEMENT

on behalf of NHS National Services Scotland (“NHS NSS”)

in advance of the Hearing commencing on 24 October 2023 on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on Health and Social Care

1. NHS NSS welcomes this Inquiry to establish the facts of, and learn lessons from, the strategic response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland. The toll that the pandemic took was a significant one. In advance of the impact Hearing, NHS NSS extends its sympathy to the witnesses who will give evidence at the Hearing. NHS NSS has arranged to be represented at the impact Hearing and will pay close attention to the evidence given.
2. NHS NSS is conscious that, although the Inquiry team is aware of the organisation NHS NSS, the wider public watching and listening today may not know what NHS NSS is or does or why it is a core participant in this Inquiry. This opening statement, therefore, contains a brief introduction to NHS NSS, explaining its roles and its interest in the Inquiry.
3. NHS NSS is a Non-Departmental Public Body accountable to the Scottish Ministers. It was created in 1974 under secondary legislation derived from the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1972. It was established to provide national strategic support services and expert advice to Scotland’s NHS. Its headquarters are in Edinburgh, but it has staff based at a number of locations in Scotland.
4. Services currently provided by NHS NSS include those given by the following units: National Procurement and Logistics; Practitioner and Counter Fraud Services; Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection Scotland; Central Legal Office; Digital and Security Services; Health Facilities Scotland;; National Screening Division; Programme Management Service; Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service; and NHS Scotland Assure. Prior to 1 April 2020, NHS NSS also provided a service called Health Protection Scotland (HPS) – parts of that service became part of a new organisation Public Health Scotland on 1 April 2020. The Antimicrobial Resistance and

Healthcare Associated Infection team (part of HPS prior to 1 April 2020) remained in NSS and would later become known as Antimicrobial Resistance and Health Associated Infection Scotland. While within NHS NSS, Health Protection Scotland planned and delivered specialist national services aimed at protecting the people of Scotland from infectious and environmental harms.

5. Although it is not primarily a public facing organisation, all services provided by NHS NSS have had a role in the pandemic response. NHS NSS' roles during the pandemic response included the following:

- Programme management services to a range of programmes including the commissioning and decommissioning of the Louisa Jordan Hospital, Test and Protect and Covid-19 vaccination programmes
- Leading the mobilisation of construction partners including the contracting, design, construction and equipping of the Louisa Jordan Hospital. Providing technical oversight on mechanical, electrical and water systems at the Louisa Jordan facility.
- Development of therapeutic convalescent plasma treatments
- Procurement and logistics of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Procurement, development, and operation of digital platforms for Test and
- Protect and Covid-19 vaccination and COVID-19 status certification programmes including publicly accessible apps and web platforms
- Procurement and logistics for Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing consumables, equipment and laboratories
- Procurement and logistics for Lateral Flow Devices and Point of Care testing consumables and equipment
- Commissioning and operation of the National Contact Centre (NCC) (originally the National Contact Tracing Centre) providing support to Test and Protect, Covid-19 vaccinations and Covid-19 status certification
- Operational delivery of the UK national and local Testing Programmes in Scotland working with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), local

authorities, health boards and Scottish Ambulance Service to ensure access to appropriate Covid-19 testing for the population

- Working with other bodies on the production of Infection Prevention and Control Guidance.
6. NHS NSS is grateful to the Inquiry for providing on 2 October 2023 the document entitled FAQs in respect of Restriction Order 1 – Health and Social Care (“FAQs document”). NHS NSS hopes of course that lessons will be learned from the Inquiry, but is also concerned that its employees (and NHS and care sector employees generally) should not be criticised publicly without being afforded an opportunity to consider and reflect on any criticism, and respond if appropriate. The unqualified confirmation in the final paragraph of the FAQs document, that when a witness gives evidence during the impact Hearing criticising an individual, the criticised individual’s name will not be disclosed to core participants or to the public, provides considerable reassurance.
7. NHS NSS looks forward to playing an active and useful part in the Inquiry. NHS NSS will wish to learn from the issues that the Inquiry examines. If there are recommendations made by the Inquiry, NHS NSS may be involved in facilitating the actions required by some recommendations. As a public body, NHS NSS understands the responsibility it owes to the Inquiry and to the people of Scotland, and it will support the Inquiry’s work in any way it can.

12 October 2023