

Covid Inquiry text message scandal leads to resignation of top official

EXCLUSIVE

The furore over deleted text messages at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic has claimed its first victim, The Edinburgh Reporter can reveal.

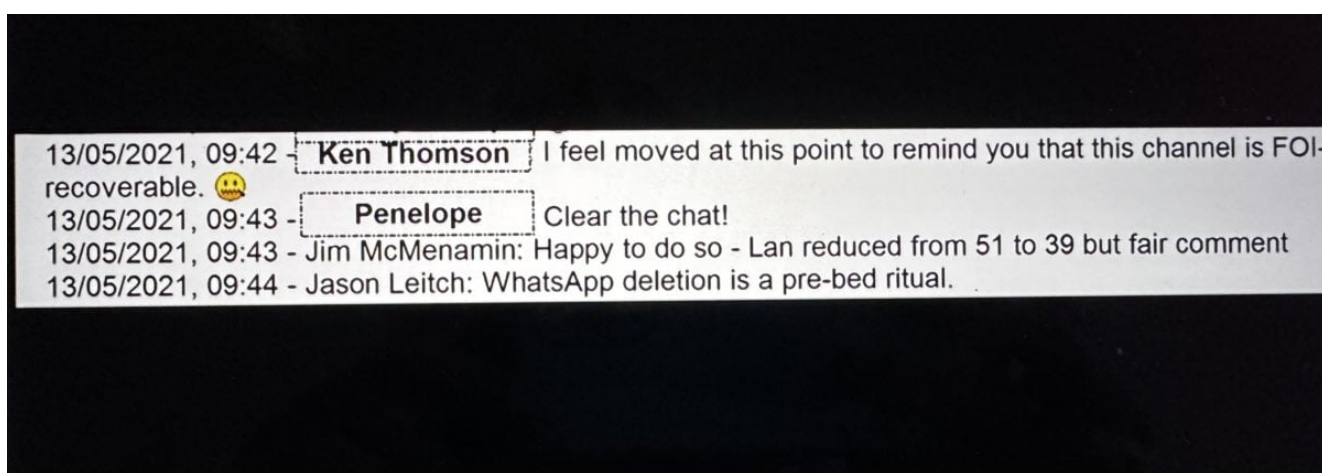
Ken Thomson, who only two months ago was appointed as regulatory chief of the global chartered accountancy body The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS), has resigned. He only took up office on 1 January, pledging to promote trust in the accountancy profession through excellence in regulation.

His resignation, said to be for “personal reasons” comes after messages sent by Mr Thomson during the pandemic revealed he advised Scottish Government officials to delete messages – and in one exchange he boasted that “plausible deniability are my middle names”.

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry sitting in Edinburgh heard evidence that Mr Thomson, who was head of the Covid co-ordination directorate at The Scottish Government, told the deputy chief medical officer Lesley Steedman: “Just to remind you (seriously), this is discoverable under FOI [freedom of information]. Know where the “clear chat” button is...”.

Scotland's national clinical director, Jason Leitch, was also included in the group chat to which Mr Thomson added: 'Plausible deniability are my middle names. Now clear it again!'"

Mr Thomson denied the advice was an attempt to defeat requests for information and documents under FOI laws.



The Edinburgh Reporter understands ICAS appear to have acted following complaints from grieving relatives who were furious about the text disclosures and challenged if Mr Thomson was a fit and proper person to hold the position of Chair of the Regulatory Board

One relative said: "ICAS's code of ethics claims that upholding high standards and promoting ethical leadership is at the heart of everything they do and quite frankly continuing with Mr Thompson as its regulatory chief is laughable.

"I am glad ICAS has acted swiftly on this important issue but really they had little choice given the evidence which emerged at the Covid Inquiry."



At the time of his appointment ICAS CEO, Bruce Cartwright said: “Ken is a valuable addition to the Regulation Board and brings with him a wealth of experience. Upholding high standards and promoting ethical leadership is at the heart of everything we do at ICAS. I know Ken will play an instrumental role in maintaining and enhancing our efforts.”

However, ICAS revealed the latest development in a low-key short statement on its website, stating: “ICAS will shortly begin the process of appointing a Chair of the Regulation Board. This follows Ken Thomson’s resignation as an ICAS Public Interest Member of Council and Chair of the ICAS Regulation Board, for personal reasons. His resignation has been accepted with effect from 31 January 2024.”

Mr Thomson spent 12 years as the Director General for Strategy and External Affairs for the Scottish Government and his contributions are said to have been instrumental in executing numerous Scottish Government programmes, including navigating the constitution, spearheading the Covid-19 response, and handling intergovernmental relations, external affairs, and major events.

He also oversaw “Operation Unicorn”, the ceremonies in Scotland following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022.

Beyond his government service, he had several stints in Ministerial private offices, engagement in public health

initiatives, legislative management, and diverse experiences in sectors ranging from the Scottish Prison Service to the financial services sector.

He was also former First Minister Donald Dewar's principal private secretary between 1997 and 1999, and prior to 2005 worked on preparing Scotland for devolution. From 2005 onwards he was a senior advisor to Scottish ministers on constitutional policy, including working on the 2014 independence referendum.