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THE PRIME MINISTER

23 November 2021

Thank you for your letter of 12 November regarding the public inquiry into COVID-19.

The inquiry will play a key role in identifying the lessons of this pandemic for the whole of the United Kingdom, and there is significant value in us learning many of those lessons together. Although the inquiry should respect and, crucially, not duplicate any inquiry set up to look at devolved issues, I intend to establish the public inquiry on the principle that its remit is UK-wide so far as is possible.

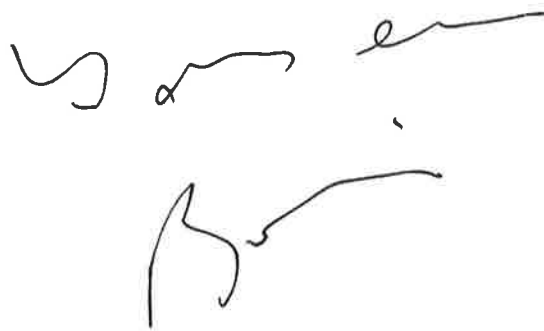
As I said when we spoke, the leaders of the devolved administrations will be consulted on the inquiry's terms of reference. I will set out more on the timing and process of this consultation shortly. Under the Inquiries Act, the chair of the inquiry must also be consulted on its terms of reference. As you know, I have committed to making this key appointment by Christmas.

Like you, throughout the pandemic I have met families and individuals bereaved as a result of this terrible virus and have heard their powerful and painful accounts of how they lost their loved ones. This inquiry should ensure that the bereaved are able to play their proper role. That is why I have, as a first step, made a public commitment that bereaved families and other groups will be consulted on the inquiry's remit before it is finalised.

The Government and all public bodies should cooperate and support the inquiry in full. Indeed, this will be vital if it is to effectively identify lessons for the future. In addition, I have already confirmed that the inquiry will be established on a statutory basis, with the full range of formal powers – of compulsion, and with evidence taken under oath – provided for by the Inquiries Act.

Finally, your letter raises a number of questions relating to the inquiry's detailed approach, including its staffing and approach to hearing evidence. You will understand that an Inquiries Act inquiry is independent of Government, and that these matters rightly fall to the independent chair to consider. However, I am sure that the chair will want to ensure that the inquiry is best placed to fully understand the experience in Wales, and will understand the importance of the inquiry being visible and properly accessible to the people of Wales.

Thank you, once again, for writing on this important subject. I am copying this letter to the First Minister of Scotland and to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Drakeford', written in a cursive style.