



Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister

[REDACTED]

12 November 2021

Dear Prime Minister

Covid Public Inquiry

I welcomed your assurances at the recent four-nations meeting on 18 October that there will be a significant Welsh dimension to the proposed UK-wide Covid inquiry and your agreement this will be important to ensure the whole of the United Kingdom is able to understand and learn lessons from our individual and collective experiences. I want to thank your Ministers and officials for the positive and constructive discussions we have had to date.

I remain of the view that a proper understanding of governmental decisions affecting each of the devolved governments can only be achieved by seeing them within the context of the wider UK legal and policy landscape. It is important that specific thematic evidence from participating Welsh individuals and institutions is considered alongside evidence relating to the same or similar issues which will be put forward by individuals and institutions from other parts of the UK.

However, other voices in Wales continue to argue for a Wales-only inquiry. It is very important to be able to demonstrate to them that a UK Inquiry will hear their concerns and address the issues which they raise. It would be helpful if the terms of reference set out an expectation that they include a distinct duty to investigate and report on decision making in Wales and the experience of the Welsh people during the pandemic.

Public confidence and trust in the process is vital. I hope we can agree on two overarching principles about the terms of reference and the way in which our respective governments will engage with the Public Inquiry.

Firstly, I believe it is vital that all families which have suffered loss and hardship as a result of the pandemic are placed at the heart of the inquiry process and that public statements are made that their interests will remain central throughout the Inquiry process. To support that aim, I hope we can agree that all necessary steps should be taken to facilitate full public access and public participation to the Inquiry processes. I hope that the Inquiry can signal this openness at the beginning by holding a meaningful public consultation on the terms of reference.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Secondly, I would invite you to agree that all public bodies engaging with the Inquiry are expected to consider themselves under a duty of candour. That duty should drive their culture of engagement with the Inquiry and should lead to prompt and comprehensive disclosure of all relevant material to the Inquiry. A duty of candour should also guide the way public body witnesses should approach the giving of evidence to the inquiry.

I confirm that the Welsh Government will be approaching the inquiry in this manner. We will do so in order to ensure that we are properly held to account for the decisions we made and to maximise the opportunity to learn lessons as early in the process as possible.

There are a number of specific aspects I also wish to see reflected in the operational arrangements and terms of reference.

It will be important to demonstrate that devolution and the context in which we operate is fully understood by all those involved in the inquiry.

Members of the Inquiry Team.

For this level of understanding to be in place, I invite you to agree that the wider inquiry team will include people who have demonstrable connections to Wales and recent and relevant experience and understanding of its governance.

Evidence hearings in Wales.

Public participation in Wales will only be effective the inquiry has a significant presence and visibility in Wales throughout the duration of the inquiry. It will be essential that resources should be made available for testimony to be given in the Welsh language, at the request of Welsh-speaking participants.

Participation in devising the draft the Terms of Reference

I welcome your commitment to the Welsh Government being fully consulted on the draft terms of reference. We look forward to the chance to have an input into the proposed Terms of Reference in advance of the wider public consultation. I would appreciate an update about the timescales for this exercise.

I am happy for my officials to work closely with your officials to provide support on the practicalities of the inquiry relating to Wales.

Addressing the actions I have set out in this letter around agreeing common overarching principles and terms of reference, which are consistent with those principles, will provide further assurances, particularly to families in Wales who have lost loved ones during the pandemic.

I am copying this letter to the First Minister of Scotland and to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD