



Darren Tierney
Director General, Propriety & Ethics
Cabinet Office

By email

20 January 2022

Dear Darren

UK Covid-19 Inquiry - record retention

Last June you wrote to Permanent Secretaries asking them to take steps to ensure that their departments will be ready to meet their obligations when the UK Covid-19 Inquiry gets underway. In particular you asked them to ensure that no material of potential relevance to the Inquiry is destroyed.

Baroness Hallett has asked me to write to request that you reiterate that message, following her appointment as Chair. A wide variety of organisations at central, devolved and local levels will need to comply with the Inquiry if asked to do so. I would ask that each department and Devolved Administration takes steps to ensure that the same approach to record retention is communicated throughout all relevant bodies, including arm's-length bodies and any other bodies exercising public functions. Namely that they ensure that a full and clear record of their part in events exists, is accessible, and that they apply a precautionary principle by retaining all material that could be relevant - including emails, text or WhatsApp messages and other communications.

As you know, the Chair has agreed that once the Prime Minister's consultation with the Devolved Administrations is complete she will undertake a public consultation on the draft terms of reference. Although we do not yet know the detail of those terms of reference, we must plan on the basis that they may be wide-ranging.

We will mention on our website the offence of altering, destroying or preventing relevant documents from being provided to the Inquiry that is contained in section 35 of the Inquiries Act 2005. You may wish to remind departments not only of the importance of preserving all relevant documents but also of the existence of this offence and the related criminal sanctions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Connah'.

Ben Connah
Director