



NOTICE OF DETERMINATION
CORE PARTICIPANT APPLICATION
MODULE 1 - THE COMMISSIONER FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND
(‘COPNI’)

Introduction

1. In my [Opening Statement](#) on 21 July 2022, I explained that Modules would be announced and opened in sequence, with those wishing to take a formal role in the Inquiry invited to apply to become Core Participants for each module. On the same day, the Inquiry opened Module 1 and invited anyone who wished to be considered as a Core Participant to that Module to submit an application in writing to the Solicitor to the Inquiry by 16 August 2022.
2. The [Provisional Outline of Scope](#) for Module 1 provides that this module will examine the resilience and preparedness of the United Kingdom for a Coronavirus pandemic. Further modules will be announced and opened in due course, to address other aspects of the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference.
3. On 15 August 2022 the Inquiry received an application from COPNI (“the Applicant”) for Core Participant status in Module 1.
4. I made a provisional decision not to designate the Applicant as a Core Participant in Module 1, thereby declining the application (“the Provisional Decision”), on 7 September 2022. The Applicant was provided with an opportunity to renew the application in writing by 4pm on 16 September 2022.
5. The Applicant did not renew the application by the prescribed deadline. Accordingly, this Notice sets out my final decision on the application.



Application

6. Applications for Core Participant status are considered in accordance with Rule 5 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, which provides:

5.—(1) The chairman may designate a person as a core participant at any time during the course of the inquiry, provided that person consents to being so designated.

(2) In deciding whether to designate a person as a core participant, the chairman must in particular consider whether—

- (a) the person played, or may have played, a direct and significant role in relation to the matters to which the inquiry relates;*
- (b) the person has a significant interest in an important aspect of the matters to which the inquiry relates; or*
- (c) the person may be subject to explicit or significant criticism during the inquiry proceedings or in the report, or in any interim report.*

(3) A person ceases to be a core participant on—

- (a) the date specified by the chairman in writing; or*
- (b) the end of the inquiry.*

7. In accordance with the approach set out in my Opening Statement and the Inquiry's [Core Participant Protocol](#), I have considered whether the application fulfils the requirements of Rule 5(2) in relation to the issues set out in the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 1.

Summary of Application

8. The application is put on the basis that the COPNI is a statutory office with the principal aim being to safeguard and promote the interests of older people in Northern Ireland under s.2(1) of the Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The application explains that the COPNI has certain mandatory statutory duties which relate to promoting the interests of older persons and to keeping under



review various matters relating to the interests of older people. The application further outlines the COPNI's involvement in various aspects of the pandemic as it related to the old and vulnerable, in particular in relation to the healthcare and care sectors.

9. The COPNI says that its function and involvement in relation to these issues means it played a direct and significant role in relation to the matters to which the Outline of Scope for Module 1 relates for the purposes of satisfying Rule 5(2)(a). It also says that it has a significant interest in an important aspect of the matters to which the Outline of Scope for Module 1 relates for the purposes of satisfying Rule 5(2)(b).

Decision for the Applicant

10. I have considered with great care everything that is said in the application. Having done so, I have decided, in my discretion, not to designate the COPNI as a Core Participant in Module 1. Whilst I appreciate the COPNI's statutory role in relation to safeguarding and promoting the interests of older people in Northern Ireland, the focus of Module 1 is on the resilience and preparedness of the UK for the coronavirus pandemic. I therefore do not consider that the COPNI's application meets the criteria set out in Rule 5 for designation as a Core Participant in Module 1.
11. In my Opening Statement I noted that I will publish more information about the issues intended to be covered by later modules in the coming months. I would encourage the Commissioner to consider applying for Core Participant status in relation to future modules likely to deal more directly with the UK's and Northern Ireland's response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the context of the healthcare system and the care sectors, and the impact of the pandemic on health inequalities and on the vulnerable.
12. It is also not necessary for an individual or organisation to be a Core Participant in order to provide evidence to the Inquiry. The Applicant may have relevant information to give in relation to matters being examined in the Inquiry and the Inquiry will be



reaching out in due course to a range of individuals, organisations and bodies to seek information, to gain their perspective on the issues raised in the modules and, where appropriate, to ask for witness statements and documents.

13. For all of those reasons, having considered all of the information provided by the COPNI, in light of the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 1, I consider that the COPNI did not play a direct and significant role in relation to the matters sought to be investigated in Module 1, nor does the COPNI have a significant interest in an important aspect of the matters to which Module 1 relates. I have therefore decided that the COPNI should not be designated as a Core Participant in Module 1 and I confirm that this is my final decision.

14. I will keep the scope of Module 1 under review. My decision not to designate the COPNI as a Core Participant in Module 1 does not preclude the COPNI from making any further applications in respect of any later modules. I will consider any future applications the COPNI may wish to make on their merits at the time they are made.

Rt Hon Baroness (Heather) Hallett DBE

Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry

29 September 2022