



NOTICE OF DETERMINATION
CORE PARTICIPANT APPLICATION
MODULE 2 - SOLACE WOMEN'S AID, SOUTHALL BLACK SISTERS, WOMEN AND GIRLS
NETWORK, LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS SERVICE AND STAR SUPPORT

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 31 August 2022, the Inquiry opened Module 2 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 23 September 2022.
2. On 23 September 2022 the Inquiry received an application from Solace Women's Aid, Southall Black Sisters, Women and Girls Network, Latin American Women's Rights Service and Star Support LGBTIQ+ CIC ("the Applicants") for Core Participant status in Module 2. This Notice sets out my provisional decision on the application.
3. The Inquiry has published the [Provisional Outline of Scope](#) for Module 2, which states that this module will examine the decision-making by the UK Government during the Coronavirus pandemic. Further modules will be announced and opened in due course, to address other aspects of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

Application

4. 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.

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

Summary of Application

6. Solace Women's Aid states that it is one of the single largest providers of services for survivors of violence against women and girls in the UK. It works to prevent violence and abuse and provides services to survivors, particularly women and children. The application is made on the basis that SWA played a direct and significant role throughout the pandemic, in that SWA safeguarded and supported over 10,000 survivors of domestic abuse through front-line advice, advocacy, policy work and litigation. It is also made on the basis they have a significant interest in matters relating to Module 2, including the extent to which domestic abuse survivors were considered by the Government when making decisions relating to lockdown and other NPIs.
7. Southall Black Sisters is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 1979 to meet the needs of black and ethnic minority women. SBS is involved with challenging domestic and gender related violence locally and nationally and has campaigned for the provision of proper support services to enable women and children to escape violent relationships. The application is made on the basis that SBS played a direct and significant role throughout the pandemic, as the leading provider of front-line advocacy and support to black and ethnic minority women facing gender based

violence in the UK. It is also made on the basis that they have a significant interest, given the fact that the impact of Covid-19 on black and minority women experiencing gender based violence was acute. In particular, SBS asserts a significant interest in assisting the Chair to consider any disparities in the impact of the pandemic on different categories of people, including those relating to protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and specifically the disparate outcome experienced by black and ethnic minority women.

8. WGN is a black-feminist women-only organisation that supports women across London who have experienced violence against women and girls or are at risk. The application is made on the basis that WGN played a direct and significant role throughout the pandemic, in supporting about 8000 survivors of violence, through front-line services. The application is also made on the basis that WGN has a significant interest in the reasons for which domestic abuse survivors were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, in guidance given to social care providers, whether domestic abuse survivors were assessed as being an at risk and vulnerable group and whether decision making in relation to lockdown and other NPIs included consideration of the impact of these decisions on this group.
9. LAWRS is a feminist human rights organisation founded and run by Latin American migrant women. LAWRS supports the needs of Latin American migrant women and BME migrant women nationally facing intersectional violence and discrimination shaped by their race, class, gender and immigration status. LAWRS offers case work support, counselling, emotional support and advisory services in a number of areas. The application is made on the basis LAWRS played a direct and significant role throughout the pandemic, because migrant domestic abuse survivors were disproportionately impacted by Covid-19, confined to abusive homes and less able to access limited services. It is also made on the basis that they have a significant interest in assisting the Inquiry to establish why the Latin American and BAME women communities were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The application provides further detail about how LAWRS played a direct and significant role and the significant interest that is asserted.
10. Star Support is a domestic abuse organisation focusing on the needs of experiences of LGBTIQ+ survivors of domestic and sexual violence, with a specific focus on their accommodation related support needs. The application is made on the basis that Star

Support played a direct and significant role throughout the pandemic, in supporting and representing the interests of LGBTIQ+ survivors of domestic and sexual violence, who were seriously impacted by the government measures introduced in response to Covid-19. The application outlines a number of ways Star Support offered support to this group of people in response to the pandemic. The application is also made on the basis that Star Support has a significant interest in addressing the causes of the acute impacts LGBTIQ+ survivors of domestic and sexual violence experienced as a result of the pandemic, with a view to ensuring the protection of these communities in the event of a further public health emergency. The application provides further detail about the significant interest that is asserted.

Decision for Solace Women’s Aid and Southall Black Sisters, and provisional decision for Women and Girls Network, Latin American Women’s Rights Service and Star Support

11. I acknowledge the specific impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and children, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds. I wish to repeat my ongoing commitment, as set out in the Terms of Reference and repeated in my Opening Statement, that inequalities will be at the forefront of the Inquiry’s investigations. This will include a focus on the disparities evident in the impact of the pandemic on different categories of people. Having considered with great care everything that is said in the applications, I am minded, in my discretion, to designate Solace Women's Aid and Southall Black Sisters as Core Participants in Module 2. This is on the basis of a joint grant, noting that the organisations will be jointly represented. However, in the exercise of my discretion I am minded to decline to grant Core Participant status to the Women and Girls Network, Latin American Women’s Rights Service and Star Support LGBTIQ+ CIC.
12. I consider that none of the Applicants satisfy Rule 5(2)(a) and did not play a direct or significant role in high level core political and administrative decision making. I do accept that each has a significant interest (Rule 5(2)(b)). The Core Participant Protocol provides that while I am bound to consider the factors set out in Rule 5(2), it is also open to me to take into account other relevant matters. I am also not obliged to designate a person or organisation that meets the criteria set out in Rule 5 of the Inquiry Rules as a Core Participant. It further explains that I particularly invite applications from groups of individuals and organisations with similar interests, rather than from individual persons and organisations and that the designation of Core

Participant status to groups representing the interests of more than one person would assist the fair and efficient running of the Inquiry. I additionally have regard to my duty to act with fairness and with regard to the need to avoid any unnecessary cost to public funds.

13. I have considered with great care everything that is said in the application. For a number of reasons, I consider that Solace Women's Aid and Southall Black Sisters jointly, are well placed to assist the Inquiry as to whether the interests of women were considered as part of the process of core political and administrative decision-making in response to Covid-19 without considering in detail any individual cases. However, I do not consider that the Women and Girls Network, Latin American Women's Rights Service and Star Support LGBTIQ+ CIC are sufficiently representative to meet those aims bearing in mind the aforementioned considerations. I note the assistance that they believe they can provide. It is not necessary for an individual or organisation to be a Core Participant in order to provide evidence to the Inquiry and I consider that their assistance is better achieved in that way, if they so choose.
14. The Inquiry will also listen to and consider carefully the experiences of those who have suffered hardship or loss as a result of the pandemic. I made clear in my Opening Statement that this listening exercise is a significant and important task which will lead to summary reports of the impact of the pandemic on those who come forward to be used as evidence during the Inquiry's module hearings. It will be run in such a way that as many people as possible who wish to share their experience may do so.
15. As I am minded to decline Women and Girls Network, Latin American Women's Rights Service and Star Support LGBTIQ+ CIC's applications, I will offer these organisations an opportunity to renew their applications. If they wish to renew the applications, they must do so in writing to the Solicitor to the Inquiry by **12pm on 20 October 2022**. Renewed applications should not repeat information provided in the original application but should provide any additional information that may assist me in considering the renewed application. I intend to determine any applications on paper without oral submissions, other than in exceptional circumstances. If the application is not renewed, I will confirm this Provisional Decision has become final.

16. I will keep the scope of Module 2 and the designation of Core Participants under review. My decision not to designate Women and Girls Network, Latin American Women's Rights Service and Star Support LGBTIQ+ CIC as Core Participants in Module 2 does not preclude them from making further applications in respect of any later modules. I will consider any future applications these organisations may wish to make on their merits at the time they are made.

Legal Representation

17. Applications for designation as the Recognised Legal Representative of a Core Participant are governed by Rules 6 and 7 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, which provide:

6.—(1) Where—

- (a) a core participant, other than a core participant referred to in rule 7; or*
- (b) any other person required or permitted to give evidence or produce documents during the course of the inquiry,*
has appointed a qualified lawyer to act on that person's behalf, the chairman must designate that lawyer as that person's recognised legal representative in respect of the inquiry proceedings.

7.—(1) This rule applies where there are two or more core participants, each of whom seeks to be legally represented, and the chairman considers that—

- (a) their interests in the outcome of the inquiry are similar;*
- (b) the facts they are likely to rely on in the course of the inquiry are similar; and*
- (c) it is fair and proper for them to be jointly represented.*

(2) The chairman must direct that those core participants shall be represented by a single recognised legal representative, and the chairman may designate a qualified lawyer for that purpose.

(3) Subject to paragraph (4), any designation must be agreed by the core participants in question.

(4) If no agreement on a designation is forthcoming within a reasonable period, the chairman may designate an appropriate lawyer who, in his opinion, has sufficient knowledge and experience to act in this capacity.

18. I am satisfied that Solace Women's Aid, jointly with Southall Black Sisters, have appointed Paul Herron of Public Interest Law Centre as their qualified lawyer in relation to this Module. I therefore designate Paul Herron as the recognised legal representative for Solace Women's Aid and Southall Black Sisters, in accordance with Rule 6(1).

19. Directions will be given in relation to applications for an award under section 40(1)(b) of the Inquiries Act 2005 of expenses to be incurred in respect of legal representation, at the forthcoming preliminary hearing. I will determine any such applications in accordance with the provisions of section 40 of the Inquiries Act 2005, the Inquiry Rules 2006, the [Prime Minister's determination](#) under section 40(4) and the [Inquiry' Costs Protocol](#).

Rt Hon Baroness Heather Hallett

Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry

13 October 2022