

UK Covid-19 Inquiry Business roundtable

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Edinburgh and online

Participants

Caroline Hacker, UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry

Martin Hogg, Citizen Coaching and Counselling

Alastair Ross, Association of British Insurers

Leon Thompson, UK Hospitality Scotland

John White, Bacta

Gregor Scotland, Confederation of British Industry, Scotland

Martin McTague, Federation of Small Businesses

Rachel Bradburne, National Association of Funeral Directors

David Chapman, UK Hospitality Cymru

Diane Lightfoot, Business Disability Forum

Catherine Chan, UK Covid-19 Inquiry

Caroline Hacker: [00:00:30] Good morning, everybody. Thank you all so much for joining us today. My name is Caroline Hacker and I'm the Chief Operating Officer at the UK Covid-19 Inquiry.

I'm sure you know this is an independent inquiry. It's Chaired by Baroness Hallett, who is a retired Court of Appeal judge. And it's been set up to look at the UK's response to the pandemic.

We recognise that everyone here today will have a personal as well as a professional response to the pandemic and today's meeting may be difficult for some of you. So, I have my colleague, Martin here from Citizen Coaching and Counselling. Martin's available to anyone who might need support during the meeting, or afterwards. Martin's details are on the first page of your agenda. I'm just going to hand over to Martin to say a few words about what Martin can offer today.

Martin Hogg: [00:01:49] Thank you. The service that we're providing with Citizen Coaching and Counselling is completely confidential and nothing will be fed back to the Inquiry, anything that you say. All you would need to do is to either send a message through the chat today. I'm here online as 'Martin, counsellor' or follow up on the numbers that you already have for us. And even if that's on reflection in the next couple of days, if you just want to have a chat or a debrief in a confidential setting.

Caroline Hacker: [00:02:29] Thank you, Martin. So, over the coming weeks, we'll be meeting bereaved families and organisations that have been affected by the pandemic throughout the UK. These meetings at the moment are specifically to consult on the draft Terms of Reference, which we sent out to you ahead of this meeting.

I need to be really clear that these sessions are not about giving evidence to the Inquiry. That will come when the Inquiry starts properly, once the Terms of Reference are finalised. So, organisations have been invited and grouped according to themes or sectors that have been impacted, for example, equalities, business, local government, health and so forth.

What we did is we scheduled the equalities roundtable at our first meeting, as equalities cut across all the themes and all the sectors. But we would, of course, welcome views on equalities as part of your response if that would be something that you want to raise as well.

The public, just to say, can also give their views. So, what we have is a consultation online. And I would encourage you, your members and the people you represent to take part in the consultation. So please, if that's one ask of you today that we could make is if you can encourage the people you represent to fill that in because we want to get as many views as possible.

Just to let you know, the meeting is being recorded. And a transcript of the meeting will be made available on our website at the end of the consultation period. We will use this, and the Chair will use this to inform her recommendations to the Prime Minister about the final Terms of Reference.

At the end of the session, I will attempt to summarise the key points. But please be reassured that the transcript will be properly analysed to ensure that all the views are fed into the Chair's thinking.

As I said, we will be publishing the transcript at the end of the consultation process. So, your contribution and your name will be included. If for any reason you would like not to be named, then please do let us know. Please feel free to drop us an email and let us know.

The main discussion today will be focused on answering the four questions that are contained in the consultation document that was sent to you. I'll try to keep us all to time and ensure that everybody gets an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

We also have the chat function open on the Zoom call. Because of time, I won't be able to respond to the points made in the chat function but please note that we will make sure that those are all captured and written into the overall account of today's meeting.

Just a small plea from me as well is that for those of you joining from UK-wide organisations, we're really keen to hear your reflections on any issues specific to Scotland but, of course, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. So, any views from a devolved perspective are very welcome.

Before we get into the discussion properly, just a couple of housekeeping points. For those of you online, if I could ask you, please stay muted unless you are speaking. And then if I could ask you just to raise your virtual hand on Zoom, that would be really helpful and come off mute when I call you in.

And for those in the room, you've got the microphones in front of you. So, if you just want to raise your hand or catch my eye, it's as simple as pressing the button on and off to speak. So, thank you very much.

I should mention as well, particularly for those in the room, we're not expecting any fire tests. If we hear the fire alarm, then please do follow myself or Catherine or Martin to the exit and we will lead you to the congregation point.

So, before we get on to the four questions, it'd be really great if I could just go around and ask you to introduce yourselves and just tell us the organisation you're from and maybe just in a sentence or two, what it is that your organisation does and who it represents. So, I will start in the room if that's okay. Could I go to you, please, sir?

Alastair Ross: [00:06:57] Hello, everybody. My name is Alastair Ross. I'm with the Association of British Insurers and we represent the majority of the insurance providers across long-term savings and also general insurance products within the UK market.

Caroline Hacker: [00:07:13] Good to meet you, Alastair. Thank you.

Leon Thompson: [00:07:16] Good morning, everybody. I'm Leon Thompson. I'm an Executive Director for UK Hospitality Scotland and we're a trade body representing the interests of hospitality businesses across the country. That's anything from bars, hotels, restaurants, right through to nightclubs and indoor leisure settings, coffee shops and sort of everything else.

Caroline Hacker: [00:07:39] Thank you, Leon. Welcome. And if I could just go to the room, John White from Bacta, please.

John White: [00:07:47] Good morning, everyone. John White from Bacta, Chief Executive here. We're the trade association for the amusement machine industry. So, our footprint extends across hospitality, leisure and tourism and into gambling.

Caroline Hacker: [00:08:03] Thank you, John. I've just had a message saying that it's quite hard to hear us in the room. I'm just going to look at colleagues from RTS, our support company. Is it possible to turn us up? Okay. I'm conscious I'm wearing a mask, which I just want to keep on just for safety reasons for colleagues in the room. So, I'll try and speak up a little bit. Is that helpful? We'll see how we go. Let me move this a bit closer as well.

So, thank you very much, John. That's really helpful. We'll bring the microphones a bit closer so, I think that's okay now. So, if I could go to Gregor, please?

Gregor Scotland: [00:08:50] Thank you, Caroline. Good morning, everybody. Hi, I'm Gregor Scotland. I'm Head of Policy for the Confederation of British Industry in Scotland. I'm also representing some colleagues from Wales and Northern Ireland today. The CBI is a membership body that represents businesses of all different sizes and all different sectors across the economy.

Caroline Hacker: [00:09:08] Great. Thank you, Gregor. And Martin, if I could come to you, please.

Martin McTague: [00:09:15] Hello. I'm Martin McTague. I'm the National Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses. We're a UK-wide organisation representing the interest of SMEs. We currently have 150,000 members.

Caroline Hacker: [00:09:28] Thank you, Martin. Rachel, if I may come to you.

Rachel Bradburne: [00:09:33] Thank you. I'm Rachel Bradburne. I'm from the National Association of Funeral Directors. We are the largest trade body for the funeral sector. Our members include funeral homes and suppliers of funeral and death-management-related products as well. And we're a UK-wide organisation.

Caroline Hacker: [00:09:50] Great. Good to meet you, Rachel. David, if I could come to you, please?

David Chapman: [00:09:56] Yes, good morning. I'm David Chapman. I'm the Executive Director for UK Hospitality Cymru, which is UK Hospitality's arm in Wales, the equivalent of Leon in Wales and we represent the hospitality sector right across the country.

Caroline Hacker: [00:10:09] Great. Thank you. And Diane?

Diane Lightfoot: [00:10:16] I'm Diane Lightfoot. I'm Chief Executive of the Business Disability Forum and we are a charity and membership body. And we work with 450 businesses across mainly private and public sectors.

Caroline Hacker: [00:10:33] Great. Good to meet you. Well, welcome everybody. And as I said, thank you so much for spending the time with us today. It's very much appreciated.

I'm going to start us off on the first question in the consultation, which is do the Inquiry's draft Terms of Reference cover all the areas that you think should be addressed by the Inquiry? So, just thinking about those Terms of Reference and if you think there's anything missing or anything that's not required. Who would like to kick us off? John, over to you.

John White: [00:11:19] Thank you. Get the conversation going. I thought the draft Terms of Reference actually were very comprehensive and nothing particularly leapt out at me as absent. However, I think there is one thing that it would be worth being slightly clearer about and that is the impact of the differing approaches to the pandemic, both from a business point of view and a health point of view in the devolved administrations.

Now, I know we'll be looking at that but I think we need to be clear that actually, the very fact that there were devolved approaches had an impact on the way, particularly from my perspective, business was able to respond to the pandemic. And I think we should be looking at the benefits and disbenefits of devolution in that regard.

Caroline Hacker: [00:12:05] Thank you, John. David, over to you.

David Chapman: [00:12:11] Yes. I'd like to echo what John has just said. I think it's essential that this is looked at particularly with an eye to future possible occasions when the four nations will have to work together through Government processes and with the information that they have individually at their disposal and collectively at their disposal.

But I think the thing I wanted to say at the outset, and I'm sure Leon will come in to support this, is that because our industry was so significantly affected during the course of the two years, it's our request that we have a significant session dedicated to our industry alone where we're able to go into depth about the repercussions not only as was just mentioned in the Westminster scenario but in all four of the nations that are involved and the territories that are involved. I think that's our wish broadly. I'm absolutely sure that would be the wish of our members who, during the whole course of this, went through every single emotion and reaction that you could possibly think of in the terrible two years we've all been through. So, I'd like to request that at the outset because I think that's the main for us but I support John in saying that the Terms of Reference generally are quite comprehensive. That's the one thing we'd ask for.

Caroline Hacker: [00:13:39] Thanks, David. If I can come to Leon in the room.

Leon Thompson: Yeah, thank you. And I absolutely support what's been said already, particularly the comments and sentiments from David. I think the four nations analysis is actually going to be pretty helpful here. The difference in approach was quite marked at a number of points generally, but also particularly when it came to hospitality. And I think it would be helpful to have that teased out and set out in the narrative.

In terms of the Terms of Reference, I mean, they are very broad. So, you know, going back to what Dave was saying, I mean, if we are able to have something which focuses on the impact of hospitality, that would be incredibly valuable, I think.

In the Terms of Reference, it talks in terms of closure and reopening of hospitality and other sectors. In reality, for hospitality, it wasn't quite as simple as that. There were a lot of nuances in there where we were sort of open but only partially open or we had various restrictions in place.

And I think it would be helpful for the Inquiry to look at those and to see whether they were helpful, useful, whether the damage was greater than the benefits, which they brought because, certainly from our members' perspective when they were trying to keep up with the guidance and the rules that were coming out from the Scottish Government, it was very, very difficult and it put a lot of strain on them in terms of managing the business, how they communicated with their workforce, how they communicated with customers as well.

So, they were very much on the frontline of relaying Government rules, guidance and advice to members of the public. So, I think, that's an important point that we'd certainly like the Inquiry to take into account and to look at. And we can certainly provide access to member businesses that can describe their experiences around these issues, which I think will be incredibly, incredibly helpful.

I think a couple of other things, just going back to the devolved issues and then in Scotland, we had the Scottish Government producing a strategic framework, which went through various iterations at various points. And again, going back to the idea of a very nuanced approach to reopening, we had 32 local authority areas in Scotland and some of them were open and businesses were operating one way and businesses in the neighbouring local authorities were operating in other ways as well.

And we had travel restrictions based on local authority areas too. And I think that it'd be helpful to actually unpack some of that as part of the narrative for the Inquiry. And again, actually, looking well, did this actually make any kind of real difference.

And I think in particular, the impact on our cities as well is pretty critical. We had Glasgow, for example, face restrictions for a much longer period of time and had a pretty detrimental impact on activity in cities which we're still experiencing now as well. So, I wonder if there's something in there as well about the particular impact on geographical areas, particularly cities but maybe some of our more rural communities as well, which would be useful because we've got islands in Scotland with large communities, which are dependent on hospitality and tourism. So, it would be helpful to look at that as well.

So, I am thinking of the Terms of Reference, there's a lot in there. And it's probably not missing anything. It's probably more about actually trying to drill down into some of the specifics and to have that opportunity to look at things in a bit more detail so that we don't just skim across the surface.

Caroline Hacker: [00:18:0] Thank you.

Leon Thompson: [00:18:01] Thanks.

Caroline Hacker: [00:18:02] Thank you, Leon. Okay. I'll go back to those online. Rachel, could I come to you, please?

Rachel Bradburne: [00:18:10] Thank you. And so a couple of points, I mean, the Terms of Reference are quite broad. Just picking up on that point about picking and drilling down into areas. So, resilience and preparedness there is detailed but that's an absolutely enormous area. With regards to death management, we have good relationships with the coroner's office throughout the pandemic. But because the definition of key worker and also the definition of health and social care was quite fluid at different points during the pandemic and it impacted things like access to PPE, access to lateral flow testing, all of that needs to be looked at in terms of the future and future legislation, so reform of the Civil Contingencies Act as well.

So, with regards to death management, which is not just funeral directors but is also palliative care and leading on to funeral directors and then crematoria and burial authorities as well. Any kind of increase in the death rate, which is what we saw during Covid-19, suddenly becomes an active situation that needs to be managed. And if it's mismanaged, then it very quickly becomes a public health issue.

We were dealing with things with the Government, with the coroner's office, with the MoJ on a piecemeal basis, which was not good. We managed the situation but there are key lessons there to be learned for the future.

And so really, we would like to see death management as a standalone issue to be looked at. But also, that resilience point in the first section within the terms really needs to be picked apart. And also, looking at the definitions as well of key workers and health and social care and how fluid they were and how appropriate they were at different points.

To pick up on John's point about the devolved, different approaches in the nations, that was very, very problematic with regards to death management and attendance at funerals. There were different things going on all the time. It became very difficult to get accurate information and to get that out to members, who could then pass it on to consumers, who were, at the time, both vulnerable because they had suffered a bereavement but also restricted from doing what they needed to do in terms of attending funerals, viewing their deceased, all sorts of things. It was a very, very difficult time.

I'm disappointed that there's nobody from the bereavement sector here because I know, I've spoken to colleagues at bereavement organisations and they're extremely concerned about the lack of support that was available during Covid for people who were bereaved and also, the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the support available now.

So all charities have suffered funding cuts and most of the bereavement support in the UK is provided by the third sector. But also, there's a lack of volunteers on the ground. People are still reluctant to go out and meet face-to-face. And while there's been this big technological revolution, if you like, and more things are available online, there are lots of bereaved people who are elderly and/or vulnerable and/or had access needs. That didn't work. And in fact, they were bereaved to the point where they were isolated from people, legally isolated from people. That has had not just an individual impact on people and it's great that the second part of the Inquiry will hear voices and hear those experiences. But there's a national experience as well of bereavement that we would really like the Inquiry to look at. I mean, that's a huge thing but it's really significant.

For example, we are aware, and our colleagues in the bereavement sector as well, that there's a whole generation of young children who have learnt about death and dying at a much younger age. So, a key stage is one, all those kids were at home with parents and the radios were on and we were reporting on numbers of death daily. That was an unusual situation. Everything was being reported with a level of anxiety.

Bereavement support in schools is inconsistent across the UK, normally provided by overstretched, SEN services. We know there was a problem with that anyway but now, we have an increased level of anxiety, we believe, amongst very young children because they have been exposed to some of these issues.

So, I've jumped around a bit there but, yeah, that's what we will feed back to the consultation.

Caroline Hacker: [00:22:29] That's really helpful, Rachel. Thank you. Just to reassure you that although there's not representatives here from bereavement support organisations, what we're doing in parallel during the Terms of Reference consultation is we are meeting with bereaved families and representatives from bereaved families every day so we can get their views on the Terms of Reference. And the Chair is very committed that once the Inquiry starts properly – I need a better phrase for that – but once we actually get our official Terms of Reference and we start taking evidence, we'll be having an extensive listening programme in terms of how we engage with people across the UK because I think, as you rightly say, everybody has been affected by the

pandemic. And it's important that we learn from people. So, that's definitely in the plans. Thank you.

Rachel Bradburne: [00:23:18] That's great. Thank you.

Caroline Hacker: [00:23:20] Gregor, can I go to you? You've been very patient. Thank you.

Gregor Scotland: [00:23:23] No problem. Thank you very much. And firstly, I would echo a lot of the comments that have already been made and there's just a couple of additional points that I wanted to make.

Firstly, I think it's understandable, obviously, that the focus is very much on how we could do better, how we could improve resilience for the future. But one aspect worth mentioning we don't lose sight of is what went well. And I think that includes the agility and the resilience that businesses and many individuals showed throughout the crisis. And I think with that in mind, one gap worth exploring would be looking at how firms stepped up during the pandemic. So, not only in specific challenges such as the national ventilator mission but also just more generally in supporting their employees, their customers, their communities over the course of the pandemic.

And from our conversations with businesses across the country, I think there are three key areas that we'd like to make sure are properly captured in the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry. And that sort of boils down to the process, the policy response and the communication. Those are the three key aspects from our view.

On the process, I think it would be really helpful for the Inquiry to seek input on things like how business input was sought by the different Governments across the UK and how it was utilised in the decision-making process. And I think that also could include the effectiveness of the various forums that were established. I know we were a part of some. There were many others that we weren't a part of. So, I think an assessment of the effectiveness of those forums would be helpful.

Also, a look at how the economic data was utilised alongside the public health data and reaching policy decisions. And as has obviously been mentioned by, I think, just about everybody so far, the implications and the potential drawbacks of the different approaches across the devolved nations.

On the policy side, I think it would be really helpful to seek some input on how business insight was used including how the Government adapted its approaches based on that feedback and on that business insight. And also, the impact of the Government Act and at such speed by co-design and policy with business and then having to do different iterations of policy based on that speedy process.

And just a final point I'd say would be on the communication side of things and in general, the effectiveness of communication with business, the impact that businesses felt from policy announcements with that speed, including many announcements that required them to make tactical adjustments to their operations often at very short notice. And also, the effectiveness of the support and guidance that was produced. I think Leon or somebody touched on this area.

There was a lot of guidance produced for business, whether that was done in the most effective manner, I think, would be open to scrutiny and questions so, just an element that looked at the guidance as well. So, just some additional thoughts there. Thanks.

Caroline Hacker: [00:26:04] Thank you. Martin, I think you are next, please.

Martin McTague: [00:26:11] Just a couple of key points, I think. The first one is that although it's right that you look at the economic measures that were undertaken, we also think it's very important that you have a look at those that were rejected. The classic one is that there seemed to be a value judgement made about small business owners in sole trader or sole director businesses. So, any business that had a single director or maybe only two directors, they were left in a position where they couldn't claim any of the help being given to the self-employed and also conventional larger businesses. And I think there needs to be some validation of the judgments made by those people that decided that that group was not worthy of support.

The second thing, I think, is there were all sorts of non-medical measures taken including lockdowns, restrictions, surfaces, surface cleaning, ventilation, umpteen different things. But it was never really that clear how many of them were making much of an impact and whether they would. There was an enormous amount of money spent on trying to implement a lot of those measures. And it isn't really clear from any of the evidence we've seen so far which ones were particularly effective.

I'd give you just one example. When we queried the [inaudible] being used for hospitality, that was suddenly changed and the self-isolation period was suddenly changed. So, it seemed like any kind of evidence underpinning these measures was pretty flimsy to say the least.

Caroline Hacker: [00:28:10] Thank you very much, Martin. Diane, over to you.

Diane Lightfoot: [00:28:15] Thank you. And I think I'll pick up on a couple of points that Gregor made and Martin. So, I will try not to repeat myself.

So, the first thing for us was including an equality impact analysis in there. So, how did the Government make decisions that affected everyone and how did they assess who would be effective and minimise the impacts and consequences for people as much as possible in different groups.

Related to this, we also think the Inquiry should cover data that is used to make those decisions. And coming from a disability perspective, we know that the Government knows that the data about disabled people's lives is patchy. And I think we really want to see, being really honest, what was used and what's missing. So, the action being to try and get it to improve situations in the future. There are various that are already addressing that so I think being honest now about what's missing and what we need to have could really help with those data projects.

I totally agree with Gregor's point about the effectiveness of internal and public communications. There's a piece in there around inclusion and accessibility. Easy Read and BSL were not apparent.

And in terms of businesses being able to support all their workforce, information on how to support disabled colleagues, how to support people who are clinically extremely vulnerable, that

might also may not be the same group of people in the workplace but also in furlough, around any decisions about redundancy and redeployment and about reintegration into the workplace as well.

Caroline Hacker: [00:30:08] Great. Thank you. Thank you very much, Diane. I'm just going to come to Alastair in the room.

Alastair Ross: [00:30:14] Thanks very much indeed. Sorry, can I just check? Can the people online hear me okay now? Fantastic. Thank you very much. Sorry for not putting my microphone on earlier. So, the previous contributions have been very comprehensive. I don't think I've got anything I can usefully add to that.

What I was just wanting to ask is how far back will the Inquiry be looking because, obviously, there were decisions taken at the outset. You know, we had the anniversary of lockdown, I think, it was yesterday. But there were several sets of decisions that were taken in advance of that. You could actually take that further back to some of the previous resilience exercises and how effective they were in terms of contributing to our preparedness.

And I appreciate that's maybe not a decision that's been taken yet but is there any date or time period in mind beyond which going back the Inquiry would not be inclined to look at?

Caroline Hacker: [00:31:15] No, it's a very good question. And at the moment, what the Chair is doing is obviously we've got this process of determining the Terms of Reference although I should state it's the Prime Minister who will determine the Terms of Reference. What we will do is advise on what we think they should cover.

In terms of the dates, that's something that the Chair will determine, taking advice from counsel and legal counsel. So, I think, obviously, depending on what the Terms of Reference cover, it will then indicate how far back the Chair wants to go. So, at the moment, we don't have an answer to that, I'm afraid, but it's something that she's certainly thinking about.

Okay. Does anybody else have any other points on the draft Terms of Reference and if there's anything you think is missing or that's not required? David, you've got a hand up.

David Chapman: [00:32:09] Yes. Just to add a little to this sort of holistic approach, I think, we're all advocating for the Inquiry and the drilling down element at the same time. It's about not only the variation from the different nations about how the medical evidence was interpreted and then developed into an industrial plan, if you like, but it's also about how that evidence related to the economic damage that such actions were taken but also other health aspects that those set of restrictions, enclosures were impacting on the people that were involved. And I'm thinking particularly of mental health and wellbeing and how that was adjudged and evaluated alongside the clearly obvious medical elements with Covid-19 directly because we had a lot of members who basically called it five winters.

Because the pandemic began in earnest in March, we'd already been a fairly heavily seasonal industry, gone through a winter and quite often, significant premises in that pre-seasonal period to invest in their businesses. So, they would be expecting to recoup the returns on that investment that they've made between November and say February and March over the summer period.

So, a lot of outgoings went into businesses in the four or five months before the pandemic and then we had four successive winters, because we were locked down and we went into another year of closures and it went on and it went on. So, that led to a lot of people expecting to economically be comfortable that were very uncomfortable immediately from the March lockdown onwards. And I think that's something I've been trying to major on in Wales over the period that we've had hardship because we have a Future Well-being Act here and that is a significant element of Government policy. And obviously, the two things have got to be adjudged side-by-side when those sort of decisions are made. And I think the members would want to hear that. So, I'd like to raise that one.

And I think in terms not only of the devolved variations but also on alignment and what I'd be interested to know is what efforts were made to align policy where it could have been done and to make available information across borders about the different national impacts so that we had a lot of people coming from England to Wales that just didn't understand the difference. And that's partly communication, but that impacted on our front-of-house staff wherever they were because there's a lot of hostility and people thought it was a personal decision quite often rather than a Government decision.

So, it's about trying to look at this in a really holistic way. And I believe that particularly for our industry, that would mean that we would need to have that separate, not a separate forum, but a separate session or at least where we could actually sort of do a bit more for those issues that were directly relevant to us.

Caroline Hacker: [00:35:53] Okay. That's really helpful, David. Thank you very much. Okay. I think if we're okay with question one, I'm going to move on now just to understand a little bit more and get your views on which issues or topics do you think that the Inquiry should look at first. Diane, over to you.

Diane Lightfoot: [00:36:19] Thank you. We weren't really sure whether different sections would be looked at by different people and so, where the strands could be addressed simultaneously. But one thing we thought should be a priority was, again, going back to that data piece and how Government made decisions, what were the processes, what was the data used, who was involved because it feels that is fundamental about key principles of how to respond to a public policy process that then maybe would inform the others.

Caroline Hacker: [00:36:52] Thank you. Rachel, over to you.

Rachel Bradburne: [00:36:59] Thank you. Just from a practical point of view, so the Government consulted late last year on a new national resilience strategy and the Civil Contingencies Act is due to be reviewed. And I think that's supposed to happen by the end of April although it's all gone a bit quiet on that front.

So, just in terms of urgency, I suppose, for us, it would be that resilience and preparedness point, certainly to take advantage of the policy developments that are happening right now. But certainly around key workers, what's the definition of a key worker? Some of the people have touched on support that was available and just taking a fresh look at all of the civil contingency arrangements in light of what's happened.

Caroline Hacker: [00:37:45] Thank you. Just checking if anybody in the room wanted to comment at all at this point. Yeah, Leon, over to you.

Leon Thompson: [00:37:52] Yeah. Thanks. I think the point on readiness is absolutely key. And again, just bringing it back to hospitality we all, before lockdown came along, we already had businesses that were seeing footfall dropping away. Customers were falling away. There was a real sense that businesses were left in limbo where they were open but customers weren't coming out because the messaging was already one of 'Don't go out. It's dangerous and we don't want to spread the virus.'

So, I think an absolute priority is that examination of readiness and also sort of linking in with how that was then communicated out because there was a real, an extended period where people were literally left wondering, what's actually going to happen here? And that seemed to go on for a number of weeks, certainly. So, I think that would certainly be a priority to look at and sort of fits in with the flow of the narrative as well.

Caroline Hacker: [00:39:01] Great. Thank you. John, you have your hand raised.

John White: [00:39:09] If I may just link back to the previous conversation. I think as part of the Inquiry process, it will be helpful if there were some in-depth detailed case studies to illustrate and support some of the more general points.

Looking in depth at the hospitality sector, our sector, and there'd be other sectors out there as well that I'm sure have got very, very detailed experiences, which will inform the Inquiry in a way that more general discussion would not be able to do. So, I would certainly recommend that as part of the process.

Turning to the question about priorities, yeah, I agree with what's been said. I think you might be surprised to hear this from a business organisation but we have to put public health front and centre on this. And our preparedness and resilience for something like this happening again in the very near future, because we just do not know what's going to happen, new variants may emerge that throw us back, God forbid, to 2020. So, we've got to crack on with that as quickly as we possibly can.

And I think in saying that, it seems to me that actually, policy development and how decisions are arrived at is a very key point to determining our preparedness and resilience for something happening again. There are huge lessons to be learned on that particular point, I think. And it's been alluded to in some of the previous conversations, we kind of fired a shotgun at this and hoped that some of the things that were fired would stick, not particularly helpful. I think it becomes confusing. It becomes difficult to understand. Things get done which are not impacting in a positive way. Things get done, which might be impacting in a very negative way. So, I think actually, the way in which we develop our policies is the key part in those initial stages.

Caroline Hacker: [00:41:02] Okay. Thank you very much, John. Okay. Did anybody else want to comment on what we should look at first? No? Martin, yes.

Martin McTague: [00:41:15] Just on one point of emphasis, really. I think it's only repeating to some extent what my colleagues have said. But it seems to me that another pandemic is not

something that is likely to be another hundred years away and that having a much more rational approach to this, something that we're much more prepared for, I would think, is a priority. So, instead of reacting to a public health emergency on the hoof, we have at least learned some lessons and can respond more effectively.

Caroline Hacker: [00:41:56] Thank you, Martin. Okay. I'm going to move us on now to a question around the proposed end date. So, this might feel like an unusual question but this is around whether the Inquiry should set up a proposed end date for its public hearings. The reason we're asking around that is that, obviously, for any public inquiry, there are choices that we have to make about how much depth the Inquiry will go into on a given issue and what that means for the overall time scale. So, it's a bit of a balancing act really in terms of depth and timeliness. So, we've asked the question really to get your views on where you stand on that question. So, the question is really around, do you think we should set a proposed end date for its public hearings to help ensure timely findings and recommendations but recognising the impact that might have on the depth in which we can go to in our investigations? So, I'll throw that open to you all if that's okay. Hello, Alastair.

Alastair Ross: [00:43:01] Thank you, Caroline. I'm happy to kind of lead off on this one and maybe give colleagues a chance to consider that point in a bit more depth. But what I was interested in is, is there any experience from previous inquiries? And I'm thinking in particular, because I was talking to one of your colleagues, the likes of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse or the previous inquiries into infected blood products because I think understanding what has gone on in the past would be useful for this group and for the Inquiry more generally because while the pandemic itself is a unique situation, this isn't the first time we've had a public inquiry when you've determined things like the duration and potential end dates for hearings and stuff like that. So, understanding the experience from previous inquiries and maybe what kind of parameters that would set out would be useful.

Caroline Hacker: [00:43:54] Okay. Thank you. That's helpful, I think, just to look at those others, what have they learned. Thank you. Leon, over to you.

Leon Thompson: [00:44:03] Yeah, absolutely agree that there's obviously a lot of experience out there, which hopefully, we can draw on, I suppose perhaps to balance the need for in-depth look versus pace. I mean, there's looking at an interim report, would that be an option here as well sort of pulling out the initial results or findings from the Inquiry and then perhaps going a little deeper. So, that's a suggestion.

Caroline Hacker: [00:44:37] Thank you. Martin, over to you.

Martin McTague: [00:44:42] Yeah. I would endorse that. I think there is probably a need for an interim report because there is a real suspicion and this affects the credibility of the Inquiry that this is kicked into the long grass and there's no real intention of coming up with something meaningful in a realistic timeframe. And obviously, there is a trade-off between how much depth you go into and how many issues you can cover and the speed of the response. But I do think that there is a need for probably an interim report that gives the overall view before you go into a lot more depth.

Caroline Hacker: [00:45:25] Thank you. That's really helpful. Anybody else got any comments on that question around putting an end date? Diane, over to you.

Diane Lightfoot: [00:45:42] I won't comment on the depth or length thing but I think knowing when it's going to get finished so that people know what's going to get covered and know that it isn't just going to ramble on, I think, is really important. But it also depends on the approach of whether things are going to happen simultaneously or it's going to be linear. And I think if it's section-by-section, then it's really important that recommendations are published and implemented as soon as they're made rather than waiting for the end date.

Caroline Hacker: [00:46:12] Thank you. John, you've got your hand up.

John White: [00:46:20] Just almost a rather facetious point but we can't ignore the fact that there will be an election and it could be sooner rather than later. And whatever the Inquiry does, I think it's got to get its report out before the next election, if at all humanly possible.

Caroline Hacker: [00:46:36] Thank you. Okay. If there's no more comments on that, I'm going to move us on to our final question. So, we've touched upon this a little bit as we've gone through the discussion around ensuring bereaved people have a voice and how we're engaging with bereaved people. So, what I really wanted to ask was if you had views on how the Inquiry should be designed and run so that we can ensure bereaved people who've suffered as a result of the pandemic have their voices heard. And in particular, I'm really keen to understand if you think that approach should vary or if there's a rationale for varying that between the four nations. Rachel, over to you.

Rachel Bradburne: [00:47:29] Yeah, there's definitely a need to vary it between the four nations because the restrictions were different at different times. And so, different people's experiences were different and there are also, with regards to funerals and funeral customs, there are differences culturally between the nations as well.

Caroline Hacker: [00:47:48] Okay. Thank you. John.

John White: [00:47:52] Yeah. Thank you. I'm sure there's going to be lots of voices on this and I think it will be extremely difficult to manage that and to manage expectations about those who've been bereaved either directly from Covid-19 or in my case, my mother-in-law died of natural causes during Covid-19 but the Covid-19 restrictions had a massive impact on the way in which we were able to manage her end of life and ultimately, her burial.

And it occurred to me that there may be a separate parallel process that the Inquiry could establish, which allows just voices to be heard. People want to feel, they want to vent their experiences and know that somebody is listening to that. It may not necessarily be a massive contribution to lessons learned but I think it's a very important, almost national exercise to allow that to come to the surface and to be public.

It's a bit like I mean, it's a different scale but the truth and reconciliation type processes that have taken place in countries where there's been conflict. Just allowing those voices is very important for individuals and for the nations in the United Kingdom, I think.

Caroline Hacker: [00:49:14] Thank you, John. Diane, if I can go to you.

Diane Lightfoot: [00:49:20] Thank you. It actually builds on what Rachel was saying about the different nationalities but also different groups of people and obviously, bereaved people are not a homogeneous group, so different races, different religions, different disabilities, different ways of living, different views towards death and loss. So, I think it needs to be divided like that rather than a blanket approach.

And one of my colleagues pointed out to me that there might be people who are not able to speak out about it because they have a ritual or a religion's grieving process, which means they have to wait a time before they're allowed to speak. So, I think being mindful of that is really important.

Caroline Hacker: [00:49:59] Thank you. Leon, did you want to come in?

Leon Thompson: [00:50:03] Yeah, I can do. I mean, I think on the issue of ensuring that people who have suffered harm have an opportunity to be involved and, again, I would encourage the Inquiry to seek input from people working in hospitality and the impact that they experienced. So, this is obviously above and beyond any bereavement issues. But we know that for a lot of our workforce, it was a very challenging, difficult time. Obviously, businesses were closed. A lot of people obviously suffered with the sense of isolation as well. I mean, that's obviously not exclusive to hospitality but I think that's a key thing that the Inquiry should be looking at.

We had a number of members who opened their businesses for takeaways, yes, so that they could make some money over that time but also, because they had workers who were in touch with them saying, 'Look, I need to work. I need to come in. Is there something that I can do?' And I think that that's an important area to look at as well.

And Dave touched on the challenges that the hospitality workforce had in terms of managing the expectations of customers, explaining the guidance and the rules at particular times. And we know that there was a lot of abuse of hospitality. Staff throughout the pandemic during the period that businesses were open and I think that that's something, which could be looked at and explored as well.

Caroline Hacker: [00:51:45] Okay. Thank you. Gregor, I think you are next.

Gregor Scotland: [00:51:51] Thank you. Not much to add to what's already been said. I would just link your fourth question pretty much to your third question. And I think particularly for bereaved people and those people who have suffered harm, which is obviously quite a broad term and Leon touched on some of the wider harms there, I think the idea of an end date is a very important one because I think it would be a source of huge frustration to those people who'd take the time to engage with the Inquiry and put themselves through what's perhaps a difficult reliving of challenging experiences if they think it's going to run and run.

And I actually think it matters less probably what the end date is than having an end date generally just to give that sense of certainty and stability to the process so that those people who have suffered and are engaging with the Inquiry know exactly what's coming and when it's coming.

Caroline Hacker: [00:52:39] Thank you. David, over to you.

David Chapman: [00:52:42] Just a couple of points to add to what people have already said on this. One is that throughout the process, it became clearly evident – I was always a champion of this but how much more it became evident that the hospitality industry is at the centre of community and that integration – that was alluded to then by Leon is one small example where takeaways were not only a commercial activity and not only for staff but they were for community as well. And so that there was a continuation of that social integration that a lot of our members provide particularly in remote rural communities and in areas of that type.

And I think the other thing is inclusion. And it's difficult because you've got a very difficult job to try to harvest all of this and to make it happen in the time that will be relevant to society, really, which is important.

But I think one of the things that we should be looking to do and I'm a communication professional, and I feel that there will be so many people who want to tell their stories as part of their own release from Covid-19 as well and to feel that they've contributed into this that you could perhaps consider the widest possible communications involvement to do this. And I'm thinking about video booths or whatever could be done, things of that type where language wouldn't be so much of a barrier and where there wouldn't be an official obstacle or administration obstacle and it would be something that's relatively easy for them to do but that they'd be encouraged to be able to come forward and do that.

So, I think you're going to have a huge demand of people wanting to be able to tell their stories. And in fact, there's probably a historical value to this as well. So, but that's secondary. That's just an extra from what I'm here for. What I'm here for is to say hospitality has been proven to be much bigger than, perhaps it was compartmentalised into before Covid-19. And it's become a bigger element in the Welsh community and culture. And the protection of that is an important part.

And so, I'd just like to encourage this wider, holistic approach as we go forward and certainly, again, to ask that we might have that separate session where all of this could be contributed.

Caroline Hacker: [00:55:29] Thank you, David. Anything else in the room? Leon, yes, please.

Leon Thompson: [00:55:33] Yeah, just to add to that. I mean, I think there's a lot of important points in there and I think key for the Inquiry is to look at how communities responded as well and the steps that communities themselves took throughout the pandemic. And that, obviously, includes hospitality businesses who were sitting at the heart of communities there and some of the steps that they took to actually support the communities around them during lockdown and during restricted periods as well, whether it was assisting with getting food out to key workers, whether it was changing their operations from distilling alcohol to producing hand sanitizers and things like that. I think there are a lot of very positive stories in there which it would be good for the Inquiry to pull out as well because I think the response from communities was, obviously, unprecedented throughout the pandemic and there's a lot of continuation of that.

Caroline Hacker: [00:56:39] Thank you. Okay. Anything else from anybody on that point about how we engage with bereaved families and individuals? No? Okay. I think that brings us to the end of our four questions. But I just wanted to check in if there are any additional points that

people wanted to raise or didn't get the opportunity to say anything they want to bring up at this point? Diane.

Diane Lightfoot: [00:57:14] Thank you. It's just a point on language and terminology. There's a term in there about the protection of the clinically vulnerable. And we would advise not to say that people who are clinically extremely vulnerable because it's not a homogeneous group. And it sounds a bit like in the 1970s, people talked about the disabled. And I think it's also worth bearing in mind, if you get to this level of granular detail that there has been quite a lot of confusion between the term vulnerable people and around disability. And there is an overlap and there can be an overlap but they're not the same thing.

Caroline Hacker: [00:57:50] Okay. Thank you, Diane. That's really important. Thank you. John, over to you.

John White: [00:57:57] Thank you. Apologies for moving rooms. It's terrible.

Caroline Hacker: [00:58:03] It does look a bit like you're in the shower!

John White: [00:58:06] Yeah. Just a process question really from my point of view, there's no guidelines for us on communications and there's a lot of interest from certainly my members and indeed the trade presses to what's being discussed and what's going on. It'd be helpful just to know what the Inquiry is comfortable with us saying to the outside world and not saying to the outside world as we go through the process.

Caroline Hacker: [00:58:31] Thank you. That's a very good question. I think where we are at the moment is, obviously, this is going to be a transcript that's going to be available on our website. So, with that in mind the Chair is very, very committed to being as open and transparent as we possibly can. So, in terms of what you can and can't communicate, I think we'll probably leave that down to you at this point. As I said, the transcripts are going to be available on the website. So, we are very open about what's happening as part of this consultation process and we're very committed to that. That transparency is absolutely fundamental to what we're doing. So, please feel free to communicate freely.

Okay. Rachel.

Rachel Bradburne: [00:59:18] Thank you. It's just one quick question about capacity, I suppose, in your team. So, if we send out details of the consultation that closes on the 7th of April to members, you know, the membership of all the trade bodies here and you get tens of thousands of responses, is that something you can manage?

Caroline Hacker: [00:59:39] We would be delighted to get tens of thousands responses.

Rachel Bradburne: [00:59:40] Okay, good, okay.

Caroline Hacker: [00:59:42] Absolutely. So, the consultation is online and it follows a very similar format in terms of the questions that we've gone through today. And we have a fantastic team of analysts who will be doing all the data coding and analytics at the end. So, we're absolutely keen to get as many responses as possible. So, please do send it to your members. That'd be fantastic.

Rachel Bradburne: [01:00:07] Brilliant, will do. Thank you.

Caroline Hacker: [01:00:10] Okay. If there's no more comments. Oh, Alastair, over to you.

Alastair Ross: [01:00:14] Just following Rachel's point, which is really useful and thanks so much for that point. Have you got even a rough kind of timeline of when you'll be open for that consultation exercise?

Caroline Hacker: [01:00:26] So, it's open now. So, it's on the website now, the consultation. I believe it closes, I think, on 7 April. I'm just looking at Catherine, who's at the back of the room there - is that correct, Catherine? [Nods] Yes, thank you very much. So, people have got say another couple of weeks on it to respond.

Alastair Ross: [01:00:46] But that's consultation on the Terms of Reference?

Caroline Hacker: [01:00:49] It's on the Terms of Reference, yeah. So, similar questions to which we've had today.

Alastair Ross: [01:00:58] So, if people are wanting to make a submission to the consultation to the Inquiry once it's up and running.

Caroline Hacker: [01:01:04] Yes. So, at the moment, it's very much on the Terms of Reference. Once we've finished that consultation exercise, the process is that the Chair will summarise and make recommendations to the Prime Minister about what she feels should and shouldn't be in the Terms of Reference. He'll then make a decision on that and we'll have our Terms of Reference officially published.

At that point, we become a proper Inquiry. So, at that stage, we can take evidence but what will happen is that the Chair will determine what the investigations should look like, the various modules and that will, obviously, take a bit of time working through with our legal advisors. And then we'll do a call for evidence later on. So, it will be a little while till that happens.

Alastair Ross: [01:01:52] Yeah, absolutely helpful. Thank you.

Caroline Hacker: [01:01:52] Yeah. Okay. And just to reiterate, the Chair is very keen to be very transparent about the process. So, the timeframes, milestones and so forth will be on the website so, definitely keep an eye on that. Okay. That has been incredibly helpful. I'm going to just pull up a couple of points that were raised today but I just want to reiterate that, as I said, we've recorded the meeting and colleagues will go through. We will analyse the transcript. So, everything that's been said today will be looked at in much more detail.

I think for me, just a couple of points that really stood out was on the draft Terms of Reference, it felt that there was a real need for a focus on the fact that there was a devolved approach and what were the differences between those approaches. And for me, there was something around what was the process, policy response and communication around those approaches – how did it differ, where did it come together, what was the thinking and the decision-making behind the difference in those approaches really stood out.

I think the other bit that I would highlight, just looking at death management, I think, that came through, Rachel, from you is about that active management of that death management process was certainly of interest for me.

We talked a bit about the impact on different communities. I think we talked about cities, rural, islands, communities, tourism and that kind of thing. So, recognising, I think, that when we're talking about devolved nations, obviously even within those devolved nations, we're not talking about a homogeneous group and we need to be really, really attuned to that.

Another thing that came up was about the measures that were rejected. I think that was a really interesting point around obviously when we're following and looking at how policies were determined, it's not necessarily just the policies that were implemented. It's what was rejected and why was that.

And again, a point around data, I think this came up, Diane, from your good self actually, about what was the data that was used to make some of these decisions. And I think having a really open and honest conversation about what was missing and we have an opportunity now to say in this decision-making process, we didn't have this data. Let's look at that going forward. How can we collect that so we're ready next time? So, I think that was an interesting point coming forward.

Another thing that came up for me as well was just around the point around the five winters and that actually, businesses felt the impact straight away because they'd obviously invested a lot the winter before the very first lockdown, getting ready for that season. So, it wasn't that the impact was felt later when things were shut down. It was almost instant. So, I think that's something that came through quite strongly.

In terms of what we should look at first, there is certainly something around readiness and resilience. I think this is something that we've heard on the other events we've done, which is a recognition really that we've experienced this pandemic and we'll possibly all experience another pandemic in the future. So, how ready are we and making sure that that's something that we really look at very early on in terms of the Inquiry.

There was definitely a sense in the room for me about setting an end date, not only because that's important for people to sort of have that closure point in the future and know that we're going to finish. We're not going to be kicked into the long grass. And the point around elections and making sure that we are very independent of that and clear about what our end date is. And recognising we need to balance the detail we go into with also making sure we finish and we don't go on indefinitely. And that learning that we can get from other inquiries such as the Infected Blood Inquiry and the Child Sexual Abuse Inquiry. And thinking about interim reports, I think, came through as well, which is very valuable. Alastair.

Alastair Ross: [01:05:59] Sorry, just a very small point but I think it has to be elections plural. So, obviously, we've got the UK general election at some point but we have got fixed dates for devolved nations' elections.

Caroline Hacker: [01:06:09] Definitely, definitely. So, it's all of that together. And I think that's very much about our independence - we can't get distracted by elections but recognising that they have an impact. So, that's important.

And then finally, we talked about the issue of how we engage with bereaved people. And I think the thing that came through to me was, it's very much recognising that bereaved people, as was really nicely pointed out, are not a homogeneous group. There's different implications for different sectors, different cultures, different religions and we need to be really attuned to that.

And I think also recognising not just about bereavement but broader than that, we talked a bit about abuse and mistreatment of people during the pandemic. I think that's a really interesting point to factor into our thinking. And also, recognising that there is a role potentially for the Inquiry and that sort of truth and reconciliation process. So, obviously as a nation, we've all been affected and what is the role of the Inquiry in helping us move on as a nation.

So, as I said, those are some of the take-home points that I scribbled down but we will be analysing the transcript. So, everything that you said, we will be taking into consideration. So, very much thank you all for that.

Just to say that, obviously, we will do the analysis. The Terms of Reference, by necessity, have to be kind of quite topline and bullet point level, I suppose. But the things that you've, obviously, shared with us today as well, please do not worry if they don't appear in the Terms of Reference because the Chair will use those to think about the detail that lies behind some of those. So, it's been a very valuable exercise for all of us here today, certainly. So, a huge thank you.

And finally, just to remind you all that we've got Martin from our counselling service. So, if you have been affected by anything we've talked about today, then please do get in touch with Martin afterwards and his details are on the agenda that was sent through. Other than that, thank you all so much for coming along and sharing your thoughts today. It's been incredibly helpful so thank you so much. Bye-bye everyone.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]