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THE PRIME MINISTER

4 February 2022

*Dear Baroness Hallett,*

Thank you for your letter of 10 January, setting out your views on the COVID Inquiry's draft terms of reference.

Your proposed changes aim to do three things. First, they aim to reinforce the Inquiry's independence - including by making you responsible for publication of the Inquiry's reports under section 25 of the Inquiries Act. Second, they aim to ensure that the remit of the Inquiry is clearly drawn, deliverable and will inform the process of learning lessons - including through interim reports. Third, they aim to ensure that people who have experienced hardship or bereavement as a result of this terrible pandemic may play their proper role in the process. I support each of these important aims and - with three caveats and a small number of clarificatory textual refinements which have been shared with your officials - I am content to adopt your detailed changes to the draft terms of reference and agree to the points of process outlined in your letter.

Those caveats are as follows:

- That your proposed cut-off date - which would have the effect that the Inquiry will only consider events and decisions that take place before its formal start in spring 2022 - is kept under review between now and the Inquiry's formal commencement to ensure that it remains the right position with reference to the progress of the pandemic.
- That - while I accept that identifying the right panel members may be challenging - I remain of the view that it would be prudent to properly consider the field of potentially appointable candidates before committing to a decision. I have asked Darren Tierney to finalise a list for my consideration, and that he consult with you in advance of providing me further advice.

- A reference to the Inquiry informing preparations not only for future pandemics but also for “other major risks” has been removed in your version of the terms of reference. I understand that this reflects your view that the original draft was excessively broad. Although I am willing to accept your proposed deletion on that basis, we should be careful not to miss the opportunity this Inquiry presents to identify lessons with a wider application. I have therefore set out a compromise wording in the draft, requiring the Inquiry to “highlight where lessons identified from the state's response to the pandemic may be applicable to other civil emergencies”.

I will now move forward with the next step, which as you know is to consult Ministers from each of the devolved administrations on the draft terms of reference. I look forward to sharing the results of that consultation with you in due course.

Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Baroness Hallett'.