

Pre-hearing webinar with members of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK, Scottish Covid Bereaved, Northern Ireland Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice and Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru (2023-06-08) – Transcript

Attendees: Ben Connah (Secretary to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry), other members of the Inquiry secretariat, Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK, Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru, Scottish Covid Bereaved, Northern Ireland Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice

Transcript

Ben Connah: I'm going to hand over to my colleague for the first topic in our webinar, where she's going to talk us through about some of the ins and outs of an inquiry and what to expect.

Member of the Inquiry team: Thank you, Ben. And hi everyone. Yes, I'm just going to talk briefly about what to expect from the Inquiry and then myself and my colleague are going to go into more detail about the hearings that are coming up. We're aware that many people would not have attended an inquiry hearing before. Today we just wanted to give an insight into what to expect and the way an inquiry is run. It may look and feel like a court case and you'll have legal representatives, asking questions and witnesses giving evidence. But there are important differences, namely that an inquiry is established to examine the facts and to find out exactly what's happened. You may hear this referred to as an inquisitorial process which is different from what you might hear referred to as an adversarial process, which is when, for example, one party is suing another.

Member of the Inquiry team: Decision makers and other witnesses will be questioned to understand how or why decisions are made as opposed to prosecuting them. The Inquiry will make recommendations to try and prevent anything that's gone wrong from happening again. It therefore serves a wider public interest than an adversarial trial. If appropriate inquiries will include identifying those at fault, however, the law does not allow an inquiry to make findings of criminal or civil liability. In terms of where we are up to on this Inquiry we launch our first public hearing on the 13th June and it'll be the first time the Inquiry starts to formally hear evidence. This first module or investigation is about pre-pandemic resilience and preparedness for the pandemic. There will be six weeks of hearings.

Member of the Inquiry team: These will be taking place between 11 am and 4 pm on Mondays. And between 10 am and 4 pm Tuesdays to Thursdays. The Inquiry will generally not sit on Fridays with a few exceptions.

Member of the Inquiry team: Just to pause and say that it's already been mentioned but there will be a full transcript. So all these details will be sent around to you after the event today, so don't worry about missing anything as we go through this today. The Inquiry will start by asking what happened, collecting evidence, examining witness testimonies and analysing documents. They can then move on to asking why it happened and what can be done to prevent it from happening again. This Inquiry will produce regular written reports with the Chair's findings and her recommendations and the lessons learned to inform

preparations of future pandemics across the UK. It's also important to note that Every Story Matters, which we will be talking about in more detail in today's session.

Member of the Inquiry team: Every Story Matters is an integral part of the Inquiry's investigations and it will provide the opportunity for everyone in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to tell the Covid-19 Inquiry about their pandemic experience.

Member of the Inquiry team: The Inquiry will base its findings and recommendations on the totality of the evidence before it which includes that provided by Every Story Matters. I'm going to hand over briefly to my colleague who will talk more about how you can get involved with the Inquiry.

Member of the Inquiry team: Fantastic. Thanks very much and just to echo what my colleague has said we will be providing a transcript. So we recognise we're telling you quite a lot of information here and there will be a break. And so, how do you get involved in the Inquiry? So all of you on the call today are affiliated with Core Participant and Core Participant organisations that have legal representation. So at hearings, Core Participant lawyers and their clients, which is you, will be present and are able to participate in the proceedings and just so that you're aware, you don't need to be a Core Participant to provide evidence to the Inquiry. The Inquiry will ask for evidence from many different organisations and individuals.

Member of the Inquiry team: Just to touch on Every Story Matters, which my colleague mentioned before. Every Story Matters is designed to hear from people directly in their own words about their experience of the pandemic. It's designed to enable individuals to contribute rather than organisations. During the public hearings any person or relevant organisation can be called as a witness to give evidence if the Inquiry legal team believes that they have evidence that may be useful to a particular investigation. So witnesses can be asked questions by the counsel to the Inquiry or by legal representatives of Core Participants, with the Chair's permission. In terms of watching and following the hearings, anyone can watch our hearings subject to a three minute delay on our YouTube channel and evidence referred to during hearings will be published on the Inquiry's website.

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Member of the Inquiry team: There is also limited space in our public gallery and viewing room for individuals to attend the public hearings in person. So the legal teams of Core Participants, such as yourselves, are able to book a limited number of spaces for those that they represent if they're travelling long distances or have accessibility requirements. Individuals can also contact the Inquiry directly if they would like to attend the hearings in person and have accessibility requirements. Following this, the seats will be allocated on a first come first, served basis.

Member of the Inquiry team: Some of you may want to watch the hearings with other members or groups that have been through similar experiences, or with family and friends. We'll be sharing some advice on how to set up watching rooms so that groups of people can watch the hearings together. We'll send that round when we send the transcript around after this call. If you miss the hearings or are unable to watch online, then there will be a transcript of every hearing available in the documents section of our website. And again, we can hyperlink to that in the follow-up email after this call. Within that document, you'll be able

to easily search for particular words, so you can easily find a particular topic of interest that's been discussed on that day.

Member of the Inquiry team: The public hearings won't only be based in London. My colleague in a minute is going to take you through arrangements at Dorland House, which is our hearings centre, in London, where the hearings will begin next week. Modules 2A, 2B and 2C focus on core political and administrative governance and decision making in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. So it follows that we'll be holding hearings for each module in the respective devolved nations in the New Year and these locations are yet to be confirmed, but we will be announcing these on our website, social media and via our Inquiry newsletter. As part of our efforts to recognise and acknowledge the human impact of the pandemic, and to ensure that it remains at the heart of all the Inquiry's proceedings, those present at the hearings centre will be able to view the first panels of our commemorative tapestry installation, which will be displayed on in the main corridor leading up to the hearing room.

Member of the Inquiry team: The tapestry will consist of a number of framed panels, which have each been created from an illustration by different artists working with a different community and/or group of individuals impacted by the pandemic. I just want to take the opportunity now to thank those of you on the call that have got involved in this and spoke to an artist about your experiences during the pandemic to feed into that artwork. So thank you very, very much. Further panels will be added over the lifetime of the inquiry and the tapestry will be travelling around the country. As Inquiry hearings take place in different parts of the UK, the tapestry will be available digitally, so people will be able to view the tapestry on the Inquiry website.

Member of the Inquiry team: There will also be some photos of pandemic memorials from around the country in the public areas of the hearings centre. These include the National Covid Memorial Wall in London, the Scottish Covid Memorial Walk and Pollock Park in Glasgow, the Memory Stones of Love in Northern Ireland and the Yellow Heart Memorial in the Rhonda Valley in Wales. Thank you very, very much again to those that submitted images of those memorials around the country and again, really, really appreciate your support. The opening of the public hearing will be showing an impact film. This will be around 15 minutes long and it will feature people from across the UK. Speaking about the devastating impact that the pandemic has had on them and their lives, which includes people talking about bereavement and loss.

Member of the Inquiry team: This will include some people on the call today. So, again, thank you so much for sharing your story to camera and with everybody that will be watching the hearing next week. The film will be broadcast via the Inquiry live stream on YouTube, which as I mentioned before, will be subject to a three-minute delay and it will come with a trigger warning. Those attending in person will be given the option to leave the room if they would prefer not to see it. The purpose of the film is to ensure that our hearings are grounded in the experiences of those most impacted by the pandemic and that those who suffered hardship and loss remain at its heart.

00:10:00

Member of the Inquiry team: In terms of ways to keep up to date with the Inquiry's work, the best way to do this is to sign up to our newsletter. So, when I finish speaking, I'll pop a link

into the chat that explains how you can do that. That contains the most recent updates on our work including information from the hearings and updates from other module investigations. As I say, I'll pop the link in the chat to that and, as we mentioned before, we'll be publishing transcripts of each hearing and also all previous newsletters in the Documents section of our website in case you want to catch up that way. When the hearings begin, we will be sending a weekly roundup to interested organisations, which will give an overview of what's happened during the hearings that week, again, please do let us know if you'd be interested in receiving this roundup and we can send around a form for you to sign up to receive that. So I'm now going to hand back to Ben.

Ben Connah: Thanks very much for that. There's quite a lot in this, I'll grant you. And I said we'd have a break in a little while and I'll stand by that. Before I do [Member of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK], I can see, you've got your hand up. Is this a question or a technical issue?

Bereaved Families for Justice UK: As a question. Yeah.

Ben Connah: I don't know if you were here at the start when I asked people to just hold their questions until the end unless it's very pressing.

Bereaved Families for Justice UK: Well, I was expecting to do that but it's relevant to the section we've just had so I can wait or ask it now. It's up to you.

Ben Connah: Would you mind waiting? I suspect quite a few people will have questions that are relevant to that section. So if you don't mind, I'll come back to them just on the off chance that we cover them later on in proceedings. Thank you. I'm going to ask my colleague to please give everyone on the call a look at the new hearing centre at Dorland House.

Ben Connah: Yes, my colleague is going to give people a look at Dorland House. I know that some of you will have been there already, perhaps for our early preliminary hearings. It's changed a bit since then, we've done quite a lot of work to make sure that it works for the Covid Inquiry. We'll be able to say a bit about how it looks and something about the accessibility as well. So I think we're going to show a quick film shortly but why don't you kick off?

Member of the Inquiry team: Thank you for that. And so the best way to give you a look at Dorland House is to show it to you. We have a short video to show you that will give you an insight in what to expect and I'll get my colleague to do that for me. Thank you.

[Video plays]

Member of the Inquiry team: So the Inquiry is making its hearings open and accessible to everyone and has been designed to meet the needs of the participants in mind. For example, we have public seating, hearing loops, accessible toilets and a step-free entrance. We have just completed an end of the build accessibility audit to see if we could improve our current provision now or as part of our additional works over the summer and we're hoping that that report will be with us within the next week or so, so that we can take any actions forward. We also have ventilation systems. We have a mechanical ventilation system, which is in operation throughout the ground floor of the hearings centre. And in addition to this, two

air purification units with HEPA filters will be placed in the hearing room and one will also be placed in the viewing room as well.

Member of the Inquiry team: This will help with the removal of airborne contaminants such as viruses and particulate matter, and try and make the building Covid secure, we will also be placing CO2 monitors in the hearing room, and the viewing room as well. Because of the limited space, social distancing will not be possible. However, masks will be made available should people wish to wear them.

Ben Connah: Terrific. Thanks very much indeed. As promised, we're going to give people a little break to process what they've heard. Maybe think of some questions. As I said, there'll be a couple of ways to add your questions. Either by popping your hand up or, once we get to the Q&A by typing it in the chat. I'm going to suggest that we break just for five minutes now. So we will return at 5:43 by my clock. So we'll see you back here at 17.43. Please feel free to turn your camera, turn your microphone off. Have a cup of tea, do whatever you need to do. Thank you.

00:20:00

Ben Connah: Hi there, everybody. Thanks for coming back to us. And thanks again, especially those of you who missed my opening. Thank you so much for sparing your time. I was going to say this afternoon. It's more like evening now, isn't it, to spend some time with us and hopefully understand a bit more about the Inquiry. But also we're really keen to hear from you at the end of this.

Ben Connah: And I'm just going to say a little bit now and show you some things about Every Story Matters. So you will know that Every Story Matters is the means by which we hope to hear from the many, many, many thousands of people who were affected in all sorts of ways by the pandemic. But of course, we are very, very keen to hear from those who were bereaved members of the public as a whole, but it's a really important one because it means that we will be able to hear from many thousands in a way that a public inquiry normally simply cannot.

Ben Connah: I'm just going to take you through some of the images that we are going to be using in the campaign that will launch shortly to tell people about Every Story Matters and hopefully to encourage them to get involved. Now these images, and I'm showing you the first one here, have been designed with the help of a great many people to help us speak to a really broad range of people affected by the pandemic. You'll see that this one shows a collage with all sorts of people on it and hopefully a great many people will kind of see a little bit of themselves within this one. Now I want to be clear. There are two main reasons why I'm showing you these pictures, one is that we tested them really extensively including with some of you and I wanted to show you the fruits of those labours, but also to say thank you for that. Second, because I don't want anyone to be surprised when you see them on bus stops or your local area, or hear the radio adverts or the press adverts that are going to accompany them.

Ben Connah: Because this was and continues for many people to be an incredibly difficult time and anything that brings back the pandemic is likely to trigger emotions that perhaps you weren't expecting when you're waiting for a bus. So we just want to do what we can to let people know what's coming before the campaign starts.

Ben Connah: Throughout the campaign we tried to incorporate feedback from all sorts of organisations, I'll ask my colleague to show another of the posters. Now, this is one where we worked in particular, with some organisations that helped us to understand what might work for young people. We've also worked of course with organisations, including all of yours representing bereaved people, but also some others and organisations that represent people from different ethnic minority backgrounds. We've also worked with healthcare workers, because of course, their story is very important to the overall story of the pandemic too. This one is another one showing us a slightly different perspective on it.

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Ben Connah: I know that's a powerful perspective and then finally, we've got one for healthcare workers. So there's a whole bunch of different ways in which we're hoping that people will see a bit of themselves in these posters and feel moved to share their story. You'll see on this one that this is a bilingual poster. In Wales, we will be making sure that we are providing bilingual posters and adverts.

Ben Connah: We are launching these images from the 13th of June. The first day of the public hearings and you'll see them out and about over the course of the summer up until the end of August, for the first phase of the Every Story Matters advertising campaign.

Ben Connah: I'm really, really grateful to everyone that has had a hand in this and everyone that has supported their development, their design, and their production. I'm also incredibly grateful to anyone who feels able to share this with their friends, with their families and with other people that they know who might have a story to tell about the pandemic. There's one for those of you who are a bit more social media savvy than me, these are the sorts of things appearing on people's Facebook pages and the like, again, it's very much intended to draw people into helping the chair to understand the full magnitude of people's experiences during the pandemic.

Ben Connah: So we'd love to hear from you, of course through Every Story Matters but we'd also love to hear from you, if you've got any ideas about specific types of material, pictures, whatever it is that may work. For the bereaved, we strike that really difficult balance between engaging people and educating people about what's happening and hopefully encouraging them to be involved, but without that compounding the trauma that so many so many of us have felt for one reason or another as a result of the pandemic.

Ben Connah: And if you've got anything at all that's prompted by this that you'd like to share with us then, please drop us an email. I think you've got the engagement team's details (engagement@covid19.public-inquiry.uk). We are on the home stretch now, just one more short piece from a member of the team before we move on to the Q&A. I'm going to ask my colleague, having shown you what would be out there in the real world, to bring us to a cyber world. [To Inquiry colleague] can you just show us where the website that's supporting Every Story Matters has got to please?

Member of the Inquiry team: Thanks Ben. I've shared my screen now so hopefully you can see the webpage that I have in front of me, if you can't and you're just listening today to the audio, I'll describe as I go. Anyone who's viewing as well, should be able to see the introductory page to the Every Story Matters web platform. Some of the imagery you're seeing here, you'll recognise from what you saw a moment ago. This is the page within the

Inquiry website where we introduce Every Story Matters. So we've got the header area with our logo and some of the imagery that you've seen in the introductory information, about what Every Story Matters is all about. And some information about taking part and how that works and why we want to encourage people to do it as well as some frequently asked questions.

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Member of the Inquiry team: There's important information about support services because we understand that, not only living the experiences but recounting them is likely to be challenging for many people. And so there are a range of support services to which we post from here and a few other places throughout the process. And we've got some information about alternative formats and that's something that we're improving all the time and there's going to be some great improvements on that front over the next few days.

Member of the Inquiry team: There are a couple of buttons that say 'Share Your Experience' and then if I click on one of those I'm taken to the first page of the Every Story Matters platform itself and that sits sort of outside of the main Inquiry website. So there's a bit more information about taking part and some signposting to some other relevant places. For example, the Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry is running a listening project and there's a link to that. There's more detailed information about the sharing process for Every Story Matters. And again, same posting to support services. And then there's some important information about safeguarding that we include at the start and at the end of this and again, the information about asking for a different format, and some guidance about if you change your mind after you go through this process and you decide later that you want to withdraw your story, the facility to do that is there.

Member of the Inquiry team: It just depends on a response code that is issued at the end of the process. That you have to hold on to and then you can withdraw your story if you choose to do that at a later stage. So there's a button at the bottom that says 'Start', so I'll just briefly take you through the process. There's a lot of text. There are a few different questions and you won't have time to read it all as I'll scroll fairly quickly, so forgive me. But I'd like to just give you the general overview of the questions it begins by asking about a category or categories of experience.

Member of the Inquiry team: So you might choose to go through the form once or more than once. You might want to talk about one story or a set of stories. Maybe there are a lot of experiences that you've had and they are interlinked and overlapping. So you're invited to select multiple categories or just one if you wanted to and by checking boxes on this first page. Once you've identified the categories of experience you want to talk about, you can then click on Continue at which point we ask about the experience or experiences themselves and you're given a reminder of the categories you selected on the previous page, just as that sort of prompt to remind you about what you intended to talk about. And there are three main text areas on this page that have quite a large capacity and that's not prescriptive at all.

Member of the Inquiry team: You can choose within that how long you want to go on with the account of your experience. The first of the boxes asks about the experience itself. The second one asks about the effect of that experience on you and the people around you. And

finally, of those three main text areas, we're asking about what lessons you think could be learned.

Member of the Inquiry team: So that's the final free text area here. It's not the end of the form but it's the last of the main free text areas. We ask where in the United Kingdom, the experience took place primarily or you could select more than one of these. Many of the questions in the form are completely optional, but I can continue. Perhaps before I do, I'll point out one new feature since we first soft launched this service in an earlier version. If I click on a button, it says, 'Save your progress to continue later'. I'm given a unique link. A hyperlink that I can save. I can copy it to my device. I can download a document that contains the link so that it's saved on my device and I can return to it later. That's really keeping in mind that it might be difficult to return to a difficult story. And so you might want to pause and come back to it after minutes or even days.

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Member of the Inquiry team: If I were to later return to that link, I'm taken back to where I left off, which was here. If I had entered anything into any of these text boxes, it would be waiting there for me, and I could return to it later. Then I set the demographics questions. These are completely optional but we do hope that people will help us with this information by providing it and it helps us to see the full picture. We want to understand how different people are affected in different ways. And so we ask about age, gender identity, ethnicity, religion. We also ask about postcode and we first of all, ask if you have a fixed UK postcode, and if you tell us that you do, we invite you to tell us what it is.

Member of the Inquiry team: You can tell us your postcode in full or just a partial postcode, whatever you feel comfortable sharing. But we emphasise that you do not need to enter any personal contact details to complete this form. Providing us with your postcode, helps us understand how experiences of the pandemic vary between people in different areas. So we do ask the question and we hope that people will fill that in as well. But we don't have to. So I could choose 'Prefer Not to Say' or I could leave it entirely blank and not select anything and I can continue. Then, on the next page we're asking about employment, similar reasons for the other demographics questions. If I were to select any of the first three options to say, I'm either full-time employed, part-time employed or self employed, a couple of follow-up questions will appear and ask whether I was a key worker.

Member of the Inquiry team: I'm asked about my job title. The last set of questions asks about, do I have any caring responsibilities when the experience took place, did I have any health problems or disabilities?

Member of the Inquiry team: The final question is about shielding, the question is phrased because we want to understand whether or not you were advised by the NHS or in the case of Northern Ireland, HSC, to shield.

Member of the Inquiry team: At the end of the process, before I press the finish button to complete my submission, I'm given the opportunity to review my answers and I can change any if I decide to go back to it. If I had entered my experiences here, which I didn't for the demonstration, if I did it would appear here and if I wanted to change any of my later answers, I could just click on the change button and I'm taken to the page where the question appeared and then I could I could change my answer and make sure I've got it

right. And then at the top or the bottom, I can click on the finish button which I'll do now just to demonstrate. On the last page there's what we feel is quite an important thank you message. We're emphasising the importance of all of this and thanking people for taking part, acknowledging that it's a difficult process in many cases. Then on some practical points, we're offering the option to save a copy of what you've entered.

Member of the Inquiry team: Then you're invited to keep up to date with the Inquiry by following our various social media channels. We encourage you to share the web platform on social media accounts of your own if you want to do that. I mentioned that if you want to withdraw your story, you are given a unique reference code that you would quote to the team if you wanted to do that. And the contact information for this purpose. We invite feedback through a feedback survey and at the end of the process and then again, some important support and safeguarding information. All that remains is a button that says 'Submit another experience', which I'm welcome to do.

Member of the Inquiry team: Before I hand back I would like to explain that everything I'm just showing you has been designed and developed to ensure compliance with web accessibility guidelines and requirements. There are certain standards that we have to comply with, but wherever possible we go above and beyond those so users of assisted assistive technologies such as screen readers, for example, will find that the service is completely compatible with those types of technologies so that it's open and available to anyone. Any user of the Internet that is.

Member of the Inquiry team: On the advice of our experts that we have in the Inquiry, we've also developed a new feature. If a session is idle for 10 minutes, meaning, if you haven't entered anything or you haven't clicked any buttons for 10 minutes, then a little pop-up message will appear. It doesn't interrupt someone who's typing or affect anything that's been entered and it doesn't interrupt the process in any other way but it has some information about support services that are available.

Member of the Inquiry team: It begins with the question, 'Are you OK?' reminding the user that it can be a difficult process to recall what can be a traumatic experience. It also reiterates the same posting to support services. It has a link to a page on our website with a whole list of support services for different purposes. And so we feel that this is quite an important feature. One among many that we've built into this new version of the service that has support and safeguarding at its core. I will hand back there.

Ben Connah: Thank you very much, indeed. Now There's something that occurred to me as we've been talking today in particular, as we were going through the web form. There were many different experiences during the pandemic but none of us doubt the gravity of losing someone. Although we talk in terms of an experience, please don't read that as being anything other than a serious attempt to understand what happened and what the impact was on the pandemic on everybody who chooses to to engage with that.

00:40:00

Ben Connah: We're just about at six o'clock and I promised half an hour for questions and answers, we've had a few questions submitted prior to starting by email so I know we'll want to get to them. [To Inquiry colleague] Can I ask you to tell us about how this is going to work? So please pop your questions into the chat.

Member of the Inquiry team: We've now got just about half an hour for questions on the things that we've covered. In the interest of giving everybody an opportunity to ask their questions, we won't be able to take follow-ups. But if you do have a follow-up question, once you've received an answer to your question and please pop it in the chat and we'll see if we have time for it later on.

Member of the Inquiry team: If not, you will receive an answer to your question by email, when we send around the transcript. The only other thing to mention is just to reiterate something that Ben mentioned at the beginning. We are unable to answer legal questions today and these are the best asked to your legal teams. So if we note that your question is a legal question, then we'll ask you to speak to your legal team. I hope that all makes sense and just just to say, please do let us know your name when you're talking, particularly if it's not the name that's on the screen next to you. So if you could pop your questions into the chat I'll then come to them chronologically and go first to Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK and then I'm going to take the questions that we submitted in advance. So would you want to take yourself off mute?

Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK: On a serious note, given the scale of the Inquiry. You know, the number of people who have a direct interest. I'm curious as to why a venue has been selected with such little public gallery space. I obviously know nothing about those that are going to be used in other parts of the country.

Ben Connah: Thanks. It's a really good question and it's a question that the Chair tried to address in her comments at the hearing on Tuesday and we have tried to create a hearings centre that is as good as it can be for this Inquiry and necessarily we haven't been able to do absolutely everything. For some modules, the legal teams will be a bit cramped because there are more Core Participants. On some days, it's quite possible that the public gallery will be full. What we have done is to make sure that proceedings can be viewed online, at any time. We've also created an overspill room which is also in the hearings centre, but down the corridor where people can watch proceedings in slightly more comfort than the hearing room itself.

Ben Connah: People can relax a bit more. There are some soft seats, some tables that people can use. There's another 20 or 30 seats in that room. So to that extent within the hearing centre, we've got around 70 seats that people are able to use in different ways. I'm not going to pretend that on every single day that will definitely be enough. We don't know for sure whether it will or it won't, but I suspect there'll be some days with some witnesses where we're full and to an extent, that is par for the course in any kind of legal proceedings. You know, we saw Prince Harry in court earlier this week. I'm fairly sure that the public gallery would have been full and people would have been queuing outside to get into that.

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Ben Connah: I don't compare the experiences of being Prince Harry with the experiences of suffering in the pandemic of course. But we know that on most days, we probably won't have huge numbers of people coming through the door. And we had six or seven people attend the preliminary hearing this week, sitting in the public gallery. We've done our best to make sure that on most days. We've got enough seats and where we don't, we're going to make sure that people are well looked after and if necessary, booked in advance. Legal teams can request that some of the reserved seats are provided to their clients, if people are

travelling from a distance or they've got accessibility needs. I can't promise you that on every single day we'll have enough room for absolutely everyone. But we'll do our best to make sure that people are as comfortable as possible. And as many people can get in as possible.

Member of the Inquiry team: Thanks Ben for your response. I'm now going to pass over to Scottish Covid Bereaved, who has submitted two questions in advance. I don't know if you want to take yourself off mute and speak to your questions that you submitted in advance, if you don't have them, I've got them in front of me if you'd rather read them out.

Scottish Covid Bereaved: I actually have them. It's something that I said, basically the same theme. Perhaps you said this on the video but of course we couldn't hear the audio. How many public seats will there be in the hearing venue?

Scottish Covid Bereaved: Recently, it was only 41 in the public gallery yet on the video, it looked far more than 41. And that was certainly my experience back in October. The opening preliminary hearing.

Scottish Covid Bereaved: So that information was not correct on the day. So really, from the 13th, how many public seats will there be? That was question one, do you want to answer that first before I go into two?

Ben Connah: And that would be great, thanks. And I'm going to pass over to my colleague to give you an answer on that and I think that they can also answer the question that you put in the chat about the additional viewing room capacity in there.

Scottish Covid Bereaved: Right. Yes, yes.

Member of the Inquiry team: Hi. So there are 41 seats in the actual hearing room itself and then there's an additional 18, but that's in the viewing room with some additional extras like soft seating as Ben said, it's a bit more comfortable there so in total, 41 in the actual hearing room and 18 where it's almost like a theatre style. 59 in total and then there's an additional about eight to 10 seats that are relaxed kind of seating areas as well within the viewing room itself. So if anybody wants to come out of the hearing room and this space available in that viewing room, they can go into there and feel a bit more relaxed, have a cup of tea and just view the hearing in a bit more comfort. Does that answer your question?

Scottish Covid Bereaved: Yes, but I did find it disappointing as per comments earlier. On the second question. It was really my point to say, we're asking people to come over, from Scotland, to the hearings. It's at least a four hour rail journey between Edinburgh and London, for example, and you get to the venue and you're told, sorry, there's no room, you'll have to go somewhere else. The question is, where does he go? Is there a satellite venue close by where they can at least go and sit with other like-minded people and view the proceedings? Are you just on the street? Do you have to make your own arrangements?

Ben Connah: Should I answer that? We're not intending that anyone should be out on the streets and we are going to do everything we can to make sure that people can be accommodated. The answer to your question is no, there isn't a satellite venue nearby, but there is the viewing room that has enabled us to expand the capacity in the hearings centre itself. That said, the situation you've just described is exactly the reason why we've worked with the legal teams of the bereaved families in particular to reserve some seats. So if you

know, for example, you were coming down on a particular day and you wanted to know that there would be a seat available, I would ask you to get in touch with your legal team and ask them to book one for you.

00:50:00

Scottish Covid Bereaved: Okay.

Member of the Inquiry team: Thanks very much and we've now got another question that's been sent in advance from Scottish Covid Bereaved.

Scottish Covid Bereaved: Yes, hello.

Member of the Inquiry team: You are there. Fantastic. Thanks very much. And do you want to speak to your question?

Scottish Covid Bereaved: Yes, the one I submitted was, how can we help the Inquiry? When we have ideas for things that can be improved, I'll give you an example. I lost my wife to Covid. The hospital actually asked my opinion of things afterwards and one of the things I said to them, if you're moving patients around the hospital, surely the patient should wear a mask too, and they put that in place. So there's some simple measures that we can suggest from our own experience. I think the one I gave you was information about Do Not Resuscitate orders and why CPR is not always appropriate. How can we get that information to you?

Member of the Inquiry team: I think when we received that question, we interpreted it slightly differently, but I can provide an answer to part of that. So I think where there are things that you want to input on that are to do with our work on Every Story Matters and commemoration and things that the Inquiry secretariat, which we work in, deal with then webinars like this are a fantastic place to bring those up. I think my colleague mentioned in the ESM Web form that when you get to the end, there's a feedback section where you can give us your feedback on Every Story Matters and in general our door is always open for feedback via engagement@coronavirus19.inquiry.uk. If you ever have any feedback, please do get in touch.

Member of the Inquiry team: As Ben said at the beginning, every single time we do one of these events, every time we meet with people, we learn more and it enables us to, you know, address the things where we're not doing so well and get better at them. So please please always provide your feedback. It's always welcome. I think on the second part of your question, things that are about the content of modular investigations, that should be directed towards your legal teams.

Scottish Covid Bereaved: Thank you. Can I be cheeky? I also put one in the chat. All the supplementary questions on Every Story Matters seem to relate to the author, rather than the deceased person. Would it be possible to have the same sort of questions in respect of the deceased?

Ben Connah: I think that's a really good thought. I mean, I think my colleague probably said that the web form will continue to develop as we get more and more suggestions. [To Inquiry colleague] do you want to say something about that?

Member of the Inquiry team: Yes, I think it's a really valid question and it makes me think of a couple of things about the form and the way it's been designed. It is intended to be a way to hear from people directly in the first person and I'll begin to spend a second talking about a couple of the questions on it because they're really important. But first about the format of the content there are, you may have noticed, a couple of different, maybe three pages of demographics questions. These give us a reasonable picture of the authors of the stories we are receiving, we would want to ask many more than that.

00:55:00

Member of the Inquiry team: But we had to be really disciplined about how long the form goes on because people would get fed up, quite frankly, going through a form like that and we use a phrase called cognitive overload. Cognitive burden is another one. If you've ever had that experience going through any kind of web form, we want people to complete the thing and for us to get high quality data, it's not going to be perfect on that basis. But on a couple of specifics on the questions and this also ties into another question in the chat regarding the postcodes and should it be his own or other people's.

Member of the Inquiry team: We're counting on people taking the questions, literally. So in the example of a postcode, it would be the postcode of the author. But what really matters to me is in the experience section of the form. We're asking about your experience, and then the second question is, tell us about the effect on you and people around you. Now, it doesn't mean we're going to be capturing those demographics details at scale for the reasons I've mentioned. But that question is where we want to hear about you, and the people close to you, including the people that you've lost.

Member of the Inquiry team: As Ben says, it's an ongoing process for us, but we have tried to keep much of that in mind as we've gone along. I hope that that to some extent answers the question.

Member of the Inquiry team: Thanks. What I'm going to do is I'm going to take the next question from the chat and then I'm going to come to Northern Ireland Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice and Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK, who put their hands up around this kind of time and then go back to the questions in chats. This question has come from an anonymous asker. It's about the pen portraits idea and what happened to it, the idea of people being able to speak about your deceased loved one and share a brief life story about them. So we can get through as many questions as possible, I'll just ask Ben to speak to that one.

Ben Connah: Thanks very much indeed for that. So, there are a few ways that we've mentioned already today, in which we are making sure that people can have their loved ones commemorated in one way or another. None of those though is specifically pen portraits and that was one of the things that was discussed very early on in the legal proceedings and the Chair made a ruling at that point that she would keep the matter under review. She was keen for the Inquiry to get a sense of the scale of loss, to make sure that everybody had the opportunity to provide their story through something like Every Story Matters. That said, there will be a very powerful impact film that we mentioned earlier, a different film will be played at the start of each module that will feature some individuals talking about their loss and the impact that it's had on them. So not pen portraits, but an account of loss that some

people have provided and we will need to seek contributions to those films over the life of the Inquiry. So please do get in touch if you're interested.

Member of the Inquiry team: Thank you. Fantastic. Thanks very much Ben and I'm now going to pass over to Northern Ireland Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice. Do you want to take yourself off mute?

Northern Ireland Bereaved Families for Justice: Good evening, everyone. As, you know, both Ben and colleagues, I do have an issue with the Every Story Matters format. I've already stated that I don't believe it fully fits with the bereaved. I fully understand that you can't hear everybody, but at the same time, I have concerns. One of the things is, how are you going to ensure the authenticity of the input of data? The other one is who is analysing this and summarising it?

Northern Ireland Bereaved Families for Justice: I just don't understand how somebody's experience of losing a loved one can be matched up with somebody who missed out on getting a wedding or, you know, even schooling because those are things that can be pulled back again. When you come to loss of life that can't happen. How are you going to ensure authenticity? And then who does the analysis?

01:00:00

Ben Connah: Thanks. I'm going to answer half of that question. And I'm going to ask my colleague briefly to answer the other if I may.

Ben Connah: First thing to say is I completely agree. There is no comparison between losing a loved one and missing out on some opportunity that the pandemic led to you missing out on, whatever that was and all of those things happened during the pandemic. We know that some of those things will be relevant to some of the Chair's investigations. It's really important that we hear about those but nobody is suggesting that there will be a comparison between the two or all that all that they'll somehow be given the same sort of consideration. They won't be and the different experiences will feed into the investigations where they are relevant to it. Of course bereavement is relevant right throughout the Inquiry, certainly the first modules that have been opened, and it will continue to be.

Ben Connah: That's the first thing to say, in terms of who's going to be doing this, we're going to be working with some experts in gathering and analysing and collating information in a way that really brings out common threads and the key points are that, rather like we did for the Terms of Reference consultation, where we heard from 20,000 people and produced a report that I think really did manage to bring bring out the different viewpoints and experiences, but also common themes. So that's what will be happening. [To Inquiry colleague], can I just ask you? It's a very technical answer to this and I'll ask you to be very brief because we've got very little time here. But how are we making sure that these are real people?

Member of the Inquiry team: Very briefly, there are two sides to that. It is a bit technical. But there are a number of different security measures in place that deal with different types of potential malicious usage of the form.

Member of the Inquiry team: Whether that's what we call programmatic or Human. That one side of it. The other side though, is about the research that's conducted with this information

and all I can really see in the time that we have is that we're working with qualified researchers from a research and analysis supplier who do a number of different types of analysis on the information that we're given.

Ben Connah: If I may, I'm so sorry. I'm going to suggest that we don't dwell for too long. [To Northern Ireland Bereaved Families for Justice] we can certainly let you know about the kind of technical features, but I'm really keen that we give time to others with us.

Northern Ireland Bereaved Families for Justice: I agree, my main concern and I'm sure it will be a shared concern is that you don't end up with a load of nonsense. That people are just using it inappropriately.

Ben Connah: Yes.

Northern Ireland Bereaved Families for Justice: That would be my concern and then the Chair gets the wrong information.

Ben Connah: So let me just reassure you that there are ways in which that will be spotted and filtered out. Thank you. In the transcript we'll provide more of an answer to that. I'm going to pass over to Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK.

Bereaved Families for Justice UK: What concerns me is the proportionate representation of bereaved families. All these images of healthcare workers in the adverts concern me greatly. Particularly for this Every Story Matters. Now, my understanding is as Ben alluded to at the start of this meeting, it's a public Inquiry. Why are the public in general, not those directly involved in loss, being denied the right to observe and provide witness testimonies. Why are they being excluded? It's a public Inquiry. As your colleague said at the start, the Inquiry is collecting evidence via witnesses' testimonies and I'll go back to that word that has been raised by counsel and Baroness Hallett.

01:05:00

Bereaved Families for Justice UK: I was one of the fortunate ones that met with the Chair last year, at the consultation meetings in Cambridge. She appeared to be very moved and she looked us all in the face and said, you will be front and centre. We're not. I'm sure many, many others will agree. We are being marginalised.

Ben Connah: Thank you. I really do not understand the point about those posters, I showed you a selection. There are a much greater number than that. Some of which feature healthcare professionals, many of which don't. I think I showed you one or two that do and please rest assured that they are not the target audience for this.

Bereaved Families for Justice UK: well, I think, if you want to be fair and representative of the bereaved families, a fair representation of what some of the families had to endure is important.

Ben Connah: So, as I say that healthcare workers are not the main people that are on these posters. But I did show you one that did feature them. That's true. If I may say, that's incredibly helpful to hear. As we develop more and more approaches to letting people know about this, we will continue to listen to people about what's going to work for them. On the point about being marginalised. The Chair has addressed that several times now. I've seen another question in the chat about legal teams being shut out from the Inquiry. I was at the

Inquiry hearing room on Tuesday, when all the legal teams for the bereaved spoke directly to the Chair on behalf of all of you and very many more people. As well as that, we are trying to make sure that as many people as possible can have their voices heard outside of the hearing room and that as many people as possible can get a seat in the hearing room when they want it and we were never going to find a room that was big enough for the potentially thousands of people who might wish to sit and watch this. But what we've done is the best that we can, both in terms of the hearings centre, but also making sure that people can watch it online, which isn't always done and which we thought was really, really important given the scale of this pandemic.

Bereaved Families for Justice UK: We've got a lot of factual evidence and information that can only assist the Inquiry. That's all we're asking for. But going through these are appointed agencies to collate and summarise, I don't think we're getting a very fair deal.

Member of the Inquiry team: I just wanted to add as I heard you mentioned that you've met with the Chair in Cambridge, I think you said, and I saw a couple of other people mentioned they'd met with the Chair in Exeter and in a couple of other places, for example, when we did our Terms of Reference consultation. When we held some round tables in November and December, we heard how much people got out of this experience, particularly bereaved people. We've got our community listening events which will launch later on this year as part of Every Story Matters and there'll be a range of public and targeted events. We will certainly be having targeted events for bereaved families.

01:10:00

Member of the Inquiry team: Just wanted to make that clear, and I think it speaks to the point that Northern Ireland Bereaved Families for Justice made earlier as well. Unfortunately, we are at time and one thing that's been very clear from this session is that we need a lot longer for the questions and answers. I'd like to personally apologise about that. We don't have longer today for questions and answers. However, and for those of you that have got your hands up and haven't put your question into the chat, if you could send your question, either to engagement@covid19.public-inquiry.uk or put it into the chat, then we will make sure that we answer every single question that is in the chat so that you get full comprehensive responses. I can see that there's also some comments in the chat which I haven't read and was focusing on the questions that we were answering. I will read the comments through afterwards and we'll be taking them into account. So thank you very much for that. I will leave it to Ben to wrap this up.

Ben Connah: Thank you everyone. I am really sorry that we haven't managed on this call to answer everybody's question, either the ones in the chat or people who've got their hands up and we will be taking a copy of this chat and we will answer every single question within it and circulate the answers to everybody that's on this call. It's a tricky balance. As I said at the beginning, I don't want to keep people here beyond half six, half past seven, because many of you will have other places to be. I appreciate that it doesn't work for everyone. It will work for some and not for others. As I said at the start, we're trying to make sure that we find the right balance between people's time, commitments, and the utter gravity of what we talk about, but we will answer every single question. I promise you that.

Ben Connah: Thank you all very much indeed for your time today and in particular, for your thoughts, your ideas and your questions. Because every single question we've had gives us

a bit more by way of feedback about how it feels for you and what you think we could be doing differently or we could be doing better. I hope you believe me when I say that we will reflect on every single point that's been made and where we can, we will make changes that make this set of things we've been talking about today as good as possible for all of those people who come to the Inquiry in all its different ways because they were bereaved by the terrible pandemic.

Ben Connah: Thank you very much indeed. And Just a quick reminder, if you'd like to stay as up to date as possible with the Inquiry's progress, then please do sign up to our newsletter and there's a page on the website that enables that (<https://covid19.public-inquiry.uk/newsletter/>). As I say, we'll follow up with notes from today and the answers to those questions. We'll be in touch from points in the Inquiry's life so that we can stay in touch with anyone that wishes to do so. Thank you so much for your time.

END

Further questions submitted via chat function

Every Story Matters:

Who will actually be reading the submissions to Every Story Matters and how will they be presented to the Chair?

The Inquiry team will be working with specialist researchers to listen and capture people's experiences directly on its behalf. This will be in addition to the stories people come forward to share online or at events. The research company will also conduct a small number of interviews over the next couple of years. This company will then bring together the stories from the online form and events, with the stories they gather directly through interviews, to produce Every Story Matters Reports for each module. These reports will be disclosed to the Chair and Inquiry legal teams and will inform the recommendations and lines of investigation taken by the Inquiry.

Will we see the report that collates all the responses that go to the Chair?

The reports will be disclosed to all Core Participant legal teams at least three months in advance of a module's first hearing, so that they can see it before any evidence in that module is heard and are able to make submissions on it. After this, reports will be published online on our website.

If Every Story Matters experiences aren't being used in Modules 1 and 2, then why not?

The decision around where Every Story Matters feeds into the process was based on the modules that were developed by the legal team and Baroness Hallett at that time. The first two modules are about the systems and governance that were in place and the later modules are considered by Baroness Hallett as about impact that was experienced by people, meaning that it is appropriate for the experiences that people contribute to Every Story Matters to feed in at this point.

Although the reports will not be available for Modules 1 and 2, everything that comes through to the Inquiry will be fed into a relevant module, or more than one, and it will still be

counted. All experiences will receive equal consideration, regardless of whether they are in Module 3 or a later module.

Who are the actual experts analysing Every Story Matters - which company of experts please?

The Module 3 analysis is being undertaken by Ipsos. The procurement for future modules is not yet underway but the usual high standards of the qualifications those researchers and analysts need to have to be able to carry out this work will apply.

Which third parties will be managing my data and who are the data controllers who work for private companies? How can you assure us it's not going to be sold for profits?

Ipsos will be managing the data until we have a new supplier as mentioned above. Ipsos and the Inquiry are joint data controllers. We have also appointed an Ethical Advisory Group to ensure that Every Story Matters maintains the highest research ethical standards.

The Inquiry has a legal basis under data protection legislation to use personal data for the purpose of fulfilling the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. This ensures that:

- The collection of data is covered by the Inquiry's [privacy policy](#)
- The data is processed and retained in a GDPR-compliant manner
- The Inquiry identifies an appropriate legal basis to justify the processing of data in the first place
- The data is not sold for profit.

My experience involves two very different postcodes - is it best to leave it blank?

This question is actually not so much about location as it is about socio-economics. We want to understand how the pandemic affected people of different means, and postcode is an imperfect but helpful way to do this. When people change address, socio-economic position is unlikely to change drastically, and so to capture consistent data, we ask users for their current postcode, rather than trouble users to recall previous postcodes.

More information about how we are filtering out responses that are not genuine.

A variety of technical protections are in place that prevent automated submissions of various kinds. The systems used will also detect submissions that are not in any valid written language, or that include obvious test entries that include no text other than e.g. "test". Beyond those obvious examples though, generally, any submission entered by a human being will be accepted and included as part of the analysis.

Hearings:

Can you send me further information about the public Covid mitigations at Dorland House, such as masks and air filters. I'd feel more comfortable knowing exactly what's in place?

Measures include:

- A mechanical ventilation system is in operation throughout the ground floor of the hearings centre, in addition to this two air purification units with HEPA filters will be placed in the hearing room and one will be placed in the viewing room. This will help with the removal of airborne contaminants such as viruses and Particulate Matter and make the building Covid-secure. CO2 Monitors will be placed in the hearing room and viewing room. Clean air is dispersed in all directions. The ventilation is evenly spread out across the hearing room to ensure that air changes are effective throughout.
- Hand sanitiser and boxed tissues are available throughout the centre.
- FFP2 masks will be provided for those who wish to wear one.
- We are asking all staff to take a lateral flow test before attending the hearings. The government has stopped free lateral flow tests from 1 April 2022. For those people attending hearings, we will offer free lateral flow tests if required.
- Though the UK government now does not require people to self-isolate if they test positive for Covid-19, we will be asking those who test positive to stay away from the hearings.

Further details can be found in the [Inquiry's Covid-19 policy](#), which has been published on our website. We are grateful to Clinically Vulnerable Families for the support that they have provided in relation to our Covid safety measures at the hearing centre.

Could I ask how much money was spent to keep us safe with any Covid mitigations you have adopted?

We regularly publish our financial information and have rigorous governance processes in place to make sure we are delivering value for money when fulfilling the Inquiry's [Terms of Reference](#). This information can be found on the [documents page of our website](#).

We do not record specifically the amount spent on Covid mitigations - they form part of our accommodation costs.

What are the hearing timings in London please? Start time and finish times.

Hearings will take place between 11 am and 5 pm on Mondays and between 10 am and 4 pm Tuesdays to Thursdays. The Inquiry will generally not sit on Fridays with a few exceptions.

The [Module 1 hearings timetable can be viewed on our website](#).

Public information campaign:

How are the people chosen for these films or advertisements?

The images that we are using in our public information campaign (along with the name, logo and colours), have been selected following rigorous testing. This involves Inquiry staff speaking with people who have been bereaved, those from ethnic minority backgrounds and other groups most impacted by the pandemic to ensure that the images used resonate with

people while also minimising the risks of them triggering past trauma. This has been done by working with [Hestia](#), our emotional support partner.

Broader questions:

Several times on this call we have been told to ask our legal team if we have legal questions. However, we have found they are not able to answer all our questions as they have been shut out of the Inquiry. My legal team wants to be collegiate and support Baroness Hallett. They are very experienced having worked on Grenfell, Hillsborough, Manchester Arena amongst many others. Who made the decision not to allow them to participate fully and help advise the Inquiry?

All the legal teams representing the bereaved have been participating in the legal process of the Inquiry as Core Participants, including speaking directly to the Chair on behalf of bereaved groups in all four nations of the UK.

UK Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK, Northern Ireland Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice, Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru and Scottish Covid Bereaved all have Core Participant status, meaning that they have special rights in the Inquiry process. These include receiving documentation, being represented and making legal submissions, suggesting questions and receiving advance notice of the Inquiry's reports.

Baroness Hallett has reiterated on numerous occasions that she is grateful to all Core Participant legal teams including the four bereaved families groups and welcomes the support, evidence and challenge that they provide.

If you would like to raise any further concerns about the role of your legal teams in the Inquiry's legal process, please ask them to write to their contacts in the Inquiry's legal teams.