

Dear Mr Suter,

You have asked for a brief summary – if Baroness Hallett should invite us to become Core Participants we would be delighted to expand on this submission and provide further details.

**1. A brief overview of the history, legal status and aims of the organisation or body.**

**Please explain whether the work of the organisation or body is UK wide, or is instead confined to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland only.**

**History**

[As contained within our application]

*"The organisation is a support group named Clinically Vulnerable Families ['CVF'] led by Lara Wong and Dr Cathy Finnis.*

*For the purposes of this [request for evidence] and to avoid any confusion we will be referring to the group throughout as 'CVF' and any reference made to 'clinically vulnerable families' within the application will have the meaning of those families, whether or not they are part of CVF, who are considered to be clinically vulnerable and their households in the more general sense in the UK at large, rather than meaning the specific organisation that is 'CVF'.*

*CVF was founded in August 2020 and currently represents those who are Clinically Vulnerable, Clinically Extremely Vulnerable persons and the Severely Immunosuppressed; and their households across all four nations with its concentration initially on education but very quickly broadened its focus to other wide-ranging issues such as on healthcare / work / risk mitigation / scientific information. CVF's website is: <https://www.clinicallyvulnerable.org/>.*

*At present, the combined membership and following of CVF is approximately at 39,000 and is continuing to grow. The group have a significant online presence, through which most of their work is achieved and there are approximately 2,350 members of CVF's private Facebook group, 9,550 Twitter followers and 1100 Mastodon followers. Each member/follower tends to represent a family/household and we can therefore reasonably assume that CVF's reach is at least three times the number of actual members and followers to account for multiple occupancy households.<sup>1</sup> Whilst there are a vast number of clinically vulnerable people in the UK, CVF is sufficiently representative of that community."*

For the purposes of this request for evidence we will refer to 'CV' meaning all 'Clinically Vulnerable' people which includes all those who were considered either

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<sup>1</sup> Mason, H & Cornish, D 2022, 'Coronavirus and clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) people in England: 4 April to 23 April 2022', Office for National Statistics, sec 6, para 3, accessed 18 January 2023  
<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronavirusandclinicallyextremelyvulnerablepeopleinengland/4aprilto23april2022>>



Clinically Vulnerable, Clinically Extremely Vulnerable or Severely Immunosuppressed.

**Legal status**

CVF is a grassroots organisation primarily run by 2 volunteers.

**Aims**

Our mission : To support, inform and advocate for those in Clinically Vulnerable households as they face an ongoing threat posed by Covid-19.

Our vision : That one day we will have sufficient protections in place to restore the freedoms of our most vulnerable.



**2. A brief description of the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents.**

[As contained within our application]

*"CVF represents a group of vulnerable individuals who have underlying conditions, many of whom are immunosuppressed, that leave them at high risk from contracting Covid and [edit: at high risk of severe outcomes from the disease and] therefore in many cases, continuing to shield to this day."*

Our support group is limited exclusively to those in Clinically Vulnerable households. Entry questions are used to determine whether applicants / household members meet the criteria as outlined in "Covid-19: the green book, chapter 14a" (or those with household members who have qualifying conditions).



**3. A brief overview of the work of the organisation or body in supporting or representing the relevant group(s) between January 2020 and Spring 2022 as it relates to the response to Covid-19**

Although our group was not founded until August 2020, we are the sum of our members. Virtually all of our members were identified as vulnerable since the start of the pandemic and from those early stages represented the needs of the broader group through our many and varied roles as individuals and then, subsequently, CVF have also acted as an organisation in response to government decision making.

We have acted in a number of ways:

**(a) the UK Government;**

**Letters / emails / phone calls / meetings with government MPs**

On the following topics :

- Shielding  
Impact on quality of life
- Food  
Supermarket slots  
Food boxes
- Testing  
Changes to the availability of testing for Covid-19  
How to identify spikes and new variants without testing
- Healthcare rationing  
DNR  
Frailty scores
- Workplace issues including:  
Risks to clinically vulnerable employees  
Risk to businesses  
Lost jobs
- Schools issues including:  
Return to the classroom  
Masks in schools  
Home education  
Risks in schools and specific needs of vulnerable families  
Exam years  
Fines and prosecutions  
Online provision  
Removal of protections for vulnerable children



- Mental health
- Vaccines
  - Access
  - Vaccines for children
  - Vaccines for asthmatics (parliamentary question)
  - Authorisation
  - Vaccine only policy
- Antiviral access
- “Living with Covid”
  - Removal of protections e.g. free lateral flows and mask use
  - Legal obligation to protect vulnerable lives, Requested Covid control and safety prevention health measures.
- Evusheld:
  - Request approval

#### **All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)**

Our members have submitted evidence to :

APPG Vulnerable Groups to Pandemics - Members submitted evidence

APPG SEND - Members submitted evidence

APPG Coronavirus

Financial Impacts – Members submitted information

2 Feb 2021 - Schools (at which 2 of our members invited to attend: Sughra Nazir & Caroline Lea)

Layla Moran MP (chair) subsequently asked a question in the house to Gavin Williamson MP (then Education Secretary) and she then spoke to Nick Gibb MP (then Schools Minister) after calling on us for further evidence.

13 July 2021 - The Impact of lifting Covid restrictions on schools, Long Covid and the Clinically Vulnerable (at which 1 member was invited to attend : Rachel Winter Jones)

#### **Parliamentary petitions**

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/556586>

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/587194>

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/611884>

**Freedom of Information requests**

Vaccines for children 12-15

Request via Labour Party on Equality Impact Assessment – Living with Covid

**Requested meeting with Children's Commissioner - Denied**

**Contacted Department for Education via email / phone - Re: masking**

**(b) the Scottish Government;**

**Letters / emails / phone calls / meetings with MSPs**

- Schools
- Safety measures
- Vaccines
  - Access in hospitals for long term patients (led to parliamentary question)
- Antivirals
  - Widening access

**COVID-19 Recovery Committee 17th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Thursday 23 June 2022**

**COVID-19: communication of public health information**

Written evidence In support of oral evidence session 23 June 2022

Dr Sally Witcher (also a CVF member) p36

<https://www.parliament.scot/~media/committ/3675>

Minister's response

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/committees/current-and-previous-committees/session-6-covid19-recovery-committee/business-items/covid-19-communication-of-public-health-information>

**(c) the Welsh Government;**

**Letters / emails / phone calls / meetings with MSs**

- Vaccines
  - Wales had different rules to identify immunosuppressed people for third doses than England
- Freedom Day concerns
- Masks public transport

**Children's Commissioner Wales**

Phone conversation on school mitigations specifically masking

**(d) The Northern Ireland Executive**





**4. A list of any articles or reports the organisation or body has published or contributed to, and/or evidence it has given (for example to Parliamentary Select Committees) regarding the impact on the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents of the response to Covid-19 by**

**(a) the UK Government;**

Please find all of the articles that we have contributed to can be found on our website:

<https://www.clinicallyvulnerable.org/news>

**(b) the Scottish Government;**

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/covid-in-scotland-badge-scheme-failing-to-help-the-vulnerable-53hng3mt>

Dr Sally Witcher OBE (also a CVF member) p36

Covid-19 Recovery Committee Inquiry: Communication of Public Health Information Written evidence In support of oral evidence session 23 June 2022

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**(c) the Welsh Government;**

N/A

**(d) the Northern Ireland Executive.**

N/A

**5. The view of the organisation or body as to whether the group(s) it supports or represents was adequately considered when decisions about the response to Covid-19 were made by**

**(a) the UK Government;**

No, the UK government did not engage with CV people at times of reopening of schools, starting and stopping shielding and incremental removal of protections. Department of Education documents described Clinically Vulnerable and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people as 'anxious' when schools reopened pre-vaccines in 2020.

'Freedom day', which was ultimately rebranded, was mismanaged and is an example of where the vulnerable were exposed by the abrupt withdrawal of measures, without a clear plan on a predetermined 'one way roadmap' despite no evidence that the emergence of new variants would abate or lead to a lower mortality. Covid-19 decision-making was ideologically politicised and a public transition from the reliance on expert advisors to government, presumably no longer following that advice, did not instil confidence in the vulnerable community.

**(b) the Scottish Government;**

No, although a more gradual approach was taken in Scotland, the Scottish government did not engage with CV people at times of reopening of schools, starting and stopping shielding and incremental removal of protections. Education Cabinet Secretary department documents were similar to the Department of Education documents, as above, pre vaccines in 2020.

The lived experience of the CV (who were never identified) and highest risk list were not consulted. When rates started to climb again there was a failure to consider strategies to protect CV people.

On the emergence of the Omicron strain, Scotland reimplemented certain measures which helped to protect vulnerable lives.

**(c) the Welsh Government; and/or**

No, although a more gradual approach was taken in Wales, the Welsh government did not engage with CV people at times of reopening of schools, starting and stopping shielding and incremental removal of protections. Education department documents were similar to the Department of Education documents, as above, pre vaccines in 2020.

In Wales lateral flow testing was generally kept going for longer with extended support beyond England to immunocompromised households.

Public transport and healthcare retained mask months beyond living with covid. This enabled CV people more freedom due to increased protection. Unfortunately, compliance was poor due to UK media repeatedly reinforcing UK government politicians' views that the pandemic was over and Covid was now endemic.

Mark Drakeford showed consideration for the CV in his regular broadcasts. Slogans included "Wear a mask, test, to keep Wales safe".

Communication to shielding patients list was kept in place for longer than in England.

On the emergence of the Omicron strain, Wales reimplemented certain measures which helped to protect vulnerable lives.

**(d) the Northern Ireland Executive.**

No, although a more gradual approach was taken in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive did not seek to engage with CV people at times of reopening of schools, starting and stopping shielding and incremental removal of protections.



The main way CV people could communicate was through the Patient Client Council and to the deputy CMO, but this was reportedly not fair and accessible process.

The NI Direct page was not updated frequently enough which potentially was misleading and consequently through misinformation could have increased the risk to vulnerable groups.

Northern Ireland was seemingly impacted by decisions differing between both the Republic of Ireland and the UK government.

**6. Whether the organisation or body raised any concerns about the consideration being given to the group(s) which it supports or represents with  
(a) the UK Government;**

30/11/20 Email to: Boris Johnson – petition sent and risks posed to CV parents and teachers in schools

30/11/20 Automatic response from Boris Johnson

30/11/20 Email to: Keir Starmer - petition sent and risks posed to CV parents and teachers in schools

30/11/20 Automatic response from Keir Starmer

12/12/20 (date of website blog not of the letter) The Public Interest Law Center (PILC) represented a number of our members and wrote to the government:

[https://www.pilc.org.uk/blog/school-attendance-for-cev-households-in-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR3e0SmZIX2LZorWRIPoMujXF\\_DHz9H7t17NO-wFmNc2aehTu1MT0ZHE\\_Gw](https://www.pilc.org.uk/blog/school-attendance-for-cev-households-in-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR3e0SmZIX2LZorWRIPoMujXF_DHz9H7t17NO-wFmNc2aehTu1MT0ZHE_Gw)

Briefing note:

<https://www.pilc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/20121214-Notice-to-Parents-School-and-Local-Authorities-1-1.pdf>

9/12/20 Response available here:

<https://www.pilc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/20121209-Response-to-PAP-redacted .pdf>

02/02/21 - APPG Coronavirus – schools

25/02/21 - Layla Moran asked a question in the HoC to: **Name Redacted** (Education Secretary) regarding our member, Sughra Nazir.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-02-25/debates/0DB48325-8299-4AE9-8E20-3E7FE35D8C2D/EducationReturnAndAwardingQualificationsIn2021#contribution-77CB4EC0-F57E-402E-A531-E52BC8C872B3>

11/03/21 Layla Moran met with **NR** (Schools minister) and presented an array of evidence regarding the issues in schools faced by vulnerable families. CVF briefed Layla on this and our members were encouraged to share their stories with her.

24/03/21 In an email sent to CVF Layla told us that in her meeting with **NR** he stated that "it was wrong to forcibly off roll students that weren't coming to school for CEV/CV relative reasons". He suggested headteachers granted a "leave of absence". Again, pointing to an absence with no access to teaching and learning offered to healthy children isolating for Covid related reasons.

26/04/21 Phone call to **NR** parliamentary office. Explained the situation facing clinically vulnerable families asked to email the same information.

26/04/21 Email to: Nick Gibb – detailed risks posed to CV parents and children in schools, withdrawals, fines and prosecutions

26/04/21 Automatic response from Nick Gibb.

26/04/21 Phone call to : PHE but they only read out govt docs and could not assist.

26/04/21 Phone call to : DfE re: masks on Coronavirus helpline. Escalated after a few calls

29/04/21 Response – DfE- Quoted Dr Susan Hopkins. "Not advisable for primary school children to wear face coverings." Guidance silently updated later to allow all children to wear masks but CVF was not informed.

04/05/21 - Open letter to Secretary of State for Education regarding the need to continue wearing face coverings as a mitigatory measure against Covid in schools -

<https://covidactiongroup.net/open-letter-to-secretary-of-state-for-education>

07/05/21 Email to: Nick Gibb -Detailing the need for prioritising vaccines for vulnerable children, ongoing risks, parental choice on masks, optional remote education. Request to communicate directly with him or the DfE.

29/07/21 Response on behalf of Nick Gibb (DfE) – Masks protect other people not the wearer and primary pupils are less able to wear them, reiteration of the vaccine guidance, headteachers have the discretion to grant a 'leave of absence'.

24/01/22 Children's Commissioner – requested meeting regarding attendance and off-rolling

24/02/22 Response - Children's Commissioner – Request for further information

24/02/22 Response – CVF – Information supplied

08/03/22 Response - Children's Commissioner – Unable to meet, due to capacity and priorities

05/12/21 Sent to - Nadhim Zahawi – concerns about risks in schools to clinically vulnerable including the different needs of this group, lack of catch up learning via the National Tutoring Programme, fines and prosecutions, Covid orphans, request for remote / hybrid learning. Request for a meeting.

05/12/21 Nadhim Zahawi – Automatic response

11/01/22 Response - Robin Walker – repeated government guidance

01/02/22 Response - Nadhim Zahawi – repeated government guidance and could not arrange a meeting due to diary.

20/06/22 Schools Bill – CVF briefing note supplied case studies:

1) [Amendment 97: 20 Jun 2022: House of Lords debates - TheyWorkForYou](#)

2) [Debate: Schools Bill \[HL\] - 20th Jun 2022 Baroness Brinton extracts from Schools Bill \[HL\] \(20th June 2022\) \(paralleparliament.co.uk\)](#)

3) [Schools Bill \[HL\] - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

Good Law Project worked with CVF to clarify DfE guidance regarding vulnerable households. GLP received a letter from the government reiterating that a 'leave of absence' could be granted by headteachers in 'exceptional circumstances'.

Timeline below:

10/09/21

<https://goodlawproject.org/update/unlawful-school-covid-guidance/>

12/10/21

<https://goodlawproject.org/update/schools-must-support-cev-families/>

12/11/21



<https://goodlawproject.org/update/cev-families-school-attendance/>

01/12/21

<https://goodlawproject.org/update/mixed-messages-cev-school-absence/>

03/12/21

<https://goodlawproject.org/update/education-secretary-cev-children/>

11/12/21

<https://goodlawproject.org/update/education-secretary-cev-guidance/>

**(b) the Scottish Government;**

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**(c) the Welsh Government;**

N/A - CVF focused attention on the UK government.

**(d) the Northern Ireland Executive,**

N/A - CVF focused attention on the UK government.

**7. A brief summary of the views of the organisation or body as to any lessons, if any, that can be learned from any consideration which was given to the group(s) that the organisation or body supports or represents by  
(a) the UK Government;**

There was no consultation with vulnerable groups. There was inconsistency within the UK and regionally when local regulations were implemented leading to confusion and increasing the risks to CV. There was also an appalling lack of communication to those of greater risk.

The ongoing needs of the vulnerable community were not considered at the terminus 'Learning to live with Covid' policy, leaving the most vulnerable to fend for themselves under the pretext of 'personal responsibility'.

**(b) the Scottish Government;**

Inconsistency in use of terminology by the Scottish government compared to the UK government led to confusion.

Scotland was unable to uncouple major decision making from Westminster.

**(c) the Welsh Government;**

Inconsistency in use of terminology by the Welsh government compared to the UK government led to confusion.

Wales was unable to uncouple major decision making from Westminster.

Letters with guidance for those high risk continued after the UK 'Learning to live with Covid' policy.

**(d) the Northern Ireland Executive when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19.5**

Inconsistency in use of terminology by the Northern Ireland Executive compared to the UK government (and the Republic of Ireland government) led to confusion.

Northern Ireland was unable to uncouple major decision making from Westminster.