

NR

Module Lead Solicitor
UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry

By email to: Irrelevant & Sensitive

28 November 2022

Dear Tim

RE: UK COVID-19 Inquiry: Module 2 - Rule 9 Request to Samaritans

Reference: M2/R9R/SAMARITANS/TJS

Please find the responses to the questionnaire below.

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.

Samaritans is a registered charity founded in 1953. As an organisation, we have a clear vision: that fewer people die by suicide. Every 90 minutes, someone in the UK or Ireland takes their own life. Every single one of these deaths is a tragedy and everything we do at Samaritans is helping us work towards achieving our vision. With more than 20,000 volunteers in over 200 branches and Hubs across the UK, the Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, we provide support to people who have nowhere else to turn.

Samaritans is governed by a voluntary Board of Trustees of between 10 and 15 members, of which at least half are branch or Hub volunteers. The Board is supported by both staff and volunteers serving as Directors of Branch Operations, Regional Directors, Regional Officers and Functional Leads. Regional councils, comprising of the Branch Director and Regional Director from each region, advise and guide the Board. Although the Trustees are accountable for directing the affairs of the charity, much of the day-to-day operational activity is delegated to our 300 staff.

Samaritans is a federated charity, with 56 branches coming under the umbrella of the 'central charity' and 145 'affiliate' branches, which are separate legal entities with their own constitutions and governing documents (based on model documents provided by central charity).

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

Samaritans exists to support anyone experiencing emotional distress and suicidal feelings. We support anyone that needs us, in a variety of settings. We respond to people who need us on the telephone, email, online chat and through letters. We work in prisons, with veterans, with the rail network and in numerous other outreach settings. That support is primarily provided by our network of branches across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales. Founded in 1953 by the late Prebendary Dr Chad Varah CH CBE. Samaritans is a charity registered in England & Wales (219432) and in Scotland (SC040604) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales (757372). Samaritans registered office is located at The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF.



Irrelevant & Sensitive



admin@samaritans.org



samaritans.org

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 of (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive.

Overall, our approach was to keep our service operational throughout the pandemic for those in need. We adapted our service, including more of our activity to be delivered online (recruitment, training, induction of new volunteers) and some limited amounts of service from home too. Our (in development) self-help app was deployed during this period. Our core telephone helpline remained open in our branches (with controlled risk assessment in place). We put in place a dedicated helpline for NHS staff during the pandemic, with the support of government funding. Samaritans' volunteers being deemed 'key workers' and therefore able to travel during the height of the pandemic was a helpful supportive step from government.

(a) UK: Samaritans was a member of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group's sub-group on covid and suicide for England which was convened during the pandemic. We regularly fed in views on a wide range of topics during this time. Samaritans also hosts the National Suicide Prevention Alliance, a cross-sector alliance of over 1500 individuals and organisations which provided regular insights from people with lived experience of suicidal thoughts or behaviours into these meetings.

We also undertook a significant amount of media advisory work to try to ensure responsible reporting of Covid-19 and how it relates to suicide.

(b) Scotland: Samaritans Scotland was represented at meetings of the National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group of Scotland throughout the period from January 2020 to Spring 2022. At these meetings, representatives engaged with the Scottish Government on issues in relation to Covid-19 as they arose.

(c) Wales: Samaritans in Wales continued to attend the National Advisory Group on suicide and self harm to Welsh Government. The group regularly discussed issues relating to Covid-19, particularly from a public mental health perspective. We also worked with the Human Resources team at Welsh Government and Welsh Parliament to send out briefings and training information to all MPs and Members of the Senedd.

(d) Northern Ireland: Samaritans in Northern Ireland is a member of the Protect Life 2 (Suicide Prevention Strategy) Steering Group which was set up to drive the direction of the Strategy. During Covid lockdown we continued to meet online to work together to raise awareness of our helpline. We also continued to feed into the Belfast Protect Life Group, Helplines NI to raise awareness of our helpline and the other helplines in Northern Ireland. In terms of policy and direction, we attended the All Party Groups on Suicide Prevention, Mental Health, Addiction and Dual Diagnosis, Reducing Harm Related to Gambling and Preventing Loneliness.

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; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please include links to those documents where possible.

The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales. Founded in 1953 by the late Prebendary Dr Chad Varah CH CBE. Samaritans is a charity registered in England & Wales (219432) and in Scotland (SC040604) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales (757372). Samaritans registered office is located at The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF.

 Irrelevant & Sensitive
 admin@samaritans.org
 samaritans.org

(a) UK: Samaritans submitted 20 responses to consultations or calls for evidence during this period, of which the following included mention of Covid-19. These are all available on request.

Consultation responses	Date
Comprehensive Spending Review 2020	Autumn 2020
Health and Social Care Inquiry into Children and Young People's mental health	26/03/2021
Reforming the public health system response	23/04/2021
Health and Social Care Inquiry into Children and Young People's mental health	06/05/2021
The Law Family Commission on Civil Society	10/05/2021
Justice Committee: Mental health in prisons May 2021	21/05/2021
Women's Health Strategy	11/06/2021
Comprehensive Spending Review 2021	30/09/2021
Expert Panel Review of mental health services	04/10/2021
UK Commission on Bereavement	02/02/2022
NICE consultation on draft guideline: self-harm assessment, management and preventing recurrence	28/02/2022
Health Disparities White Paper	06/04/2022
Women and Equalities Committee - men and boys mental health Inquiry	22/04/2022
EFRA Committee - Rural Mental Health	31/05/2022
UK Commission on Bereavement	July-22
Dormant assets spend consultation	04/10/2022

We also published a range of data and insight into the impact of the pandemic including:

How it affected wellbeing and suicide risk

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/coronavirus-and-suicide/one-year-on-data-on-covid-19/>

The impact of economic disruption on young adults

https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Samaritans_EconomicDisruptionReport_2021.pdf

Improving the availability and quality of support after self-harm in England

https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Samaritans_-_Pushed_from_pillar_to_post_web.pdf

(b) Scotland:

10/2020: Research report on self-harm in Scotland, written during the pandemic. Hidden Too Long:

https://media.samaritans.org/documents/HiddenTooLong_uncoveringself-harminScotland.pdf

The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales. Founded in 1953 by the late Prebendary Dr Chad Varah CH CBE. Samaritans is a charity registered in England & Wales (219432) and in Scotland (SC040604) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales (757372). Samaritans registered office is located at The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF.



Irrelevant & Sensitive



admin@samaritans.org



samaritans.org

23/10/2020: Samaritans Scotland response to the Social Renewal Advisory Board's call for ideas on how to ensure the Covid-19 recovery can build a fairer and more equal Scotland:

<https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Web - Social renewal advisory board.pdf>

09/10/2020: Samaritans Scotland response to Mental Health Transition and Recovery Plan outlining the Scottish Government's commitment to addressing the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on mental health: <https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Ministerial Statement - Scotlands response to the mental health recovery.pdf>

04/03/2021: Samaritans Scotland's manifesto asks for the 2021 Scottish Election. Six Priorities to Help Save Lives: <https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/news/samaritans-scotlands-6-priorities-help-save-lives/>

(c) Wales: We responded to the Welsh Parliament inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak, and its management, on health and social care in Wales. (04/20). We responded to the U.K. Government inquiry on the Welsh Benefits System. (08/21). We responded to the Health and Social Care Committee (Welsh Parliament) inquiry on Mental Health Inequalities. (01/22)

(d) Northern Ireland: Samaritans in Northern Ireland continued to share the number of callers who were phoning the helpline in relation to concerns regarding Covid-19. These statistics were shared with MLAs and civil servants within the Department of Health.

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; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please also explain the reasons for the view expressed by the organisation or body in this respect.

(a) UK: We were included in discussions through the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group and its sub-group specifically on Covid-19 and suicide which met regularly during this period. We understand the Chair of this group also sat on wider mental health related groups.


(b) Scotland: We were fully included in discussions within NSPLG (National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group) about the approach that should be taken, and our views were considered throughout.


(c) Wales: We were fully included and integrated in discussions on Covid-19 as part of the National Advisory Group on suicide and self harm to Welsh Government. We also discussed the focus of the Welsh Parliament inquiry into Covid-19 management with members of the Health and Social Care Committee.

(d) Northern Ireland: The Northern Ireland Executive, through the Department of Communities, established a Leadership Group which consisted of a range of actors from the third sector. While Samaritans did not sit on this group, several other large mental health charities were part of this. These meetings co-ordinated support between the third sector and individuals and dealt mainly with practical support. For example, providing food parcels, shelter for the homeless, and providing childcare for key workers. The provision of practical support was very much welcomed, however, what was missing was a focus on those with mental health issues and suicide ideation. By reaching out to us and having the Northern Ireland Executive share our helpline number could have ensured a population-wide approach and could have made a huge difference to those who felt they had nowhere to turn.

The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales. Founded in 1953 by the late Prebendary Dr Chad Varah CH CBE. Samaritans is a charity registered in England & Wales (219432) and in Scotland (SC040604) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales (757372). Samaritans registered office is located at The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF.

 Irrelevant & Sensitive

 admin@samaritans.org

 samaritans.org

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; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive, when the Government(s) and/or Executive were making decisions about their response to Covid-19. Please provide a list of any such correspondence or meetings with the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or the Northern Ireland Executive, including the dates on which the body or organisation wrote or such meetings were held, to whom the correspondence was addressed or with whom the meeting was held, and any response received from the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or Northern Ireland Executive addressing such concerns.

(a) UK: We were included in discussions through the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group and its sub-group specifically on Covid-19 and suicide which met regularly during this period. Several virtual branch visits were also undertaken during this time, providing an opportunity for our volunteers to highlight issues being faced by our callers.

(b) Scotland: We met with NR Scottish Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care, on 05/10/2021 where we discussed ongoing work on suicide prevention and self-harm including the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

The Minister then visited our Edinburgh Samaritans branch on 07/05/2022. The importance of connection while Covid-19 still hinders face to face interaction was highlighted. He asked volunteers how callers have been impacted by Covid-19 and if related issues have increased.

<https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/news/minister-hails-volunteers-for-offering-safe-space-to-chat/>

(c) Wales: We provided briefings to all MPs and MSs and also met with various members to discuss the Covid-19 response from a public mental health perspective. We also worked collaboratively with the Welsh NHS confederation Health and Well-being Alliance and the Wales alliance for mental health (WAMH) to raise issues with politicians and senior leaders. During this time, we were invited to co-chair the Welsh NHS confederation Health and Well-being Alliance Mental Health Inequalities sub group which was seen as a necessary way to address risk.

(d) Northern Ireland: We were in contact with civil servants within the Department of Health to share the number of callers raising issues of ill mental health and Covid-19.

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; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19.

(a) UK: It was helpful to have a regular on-going mechanism to feed in concerns and the economic support packages that were put in place were felt to be beneficial to those struggling.

(b) Scotland: The Scottish Government seemed to engage well with us and other third sector organisations. More consideration could be given to how organisations and people are supported to deliver and access support when face-to-face is not possible.

The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales. Founded in 1953 by the late Prebendary Dr Chad Varah CH CBE. Samaritans is a charity registered in England & Wales (219432) and in Scotland (SC040604) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales (757372). Samaritans registered office is located at The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF.



Irrelevant & Sensitive



admin@samaritans.org



samaritans.org

(c) Wales: We were pleased with the engagement from Welsh Government and Welsh Parliament. Overall, we feel there could have been a stronger focus from Welsh Government on a National response to the public mental health recovery of communities in Wales.

(d) Northern Ireland: consideration should be given to third sector organisations who provide helpline support and Government should share this information through their own social channels.


Yours sincerely,


Personal Data


Julie Bentley
CEO

The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales. Founded in 1953 by the late Prebendary Dr Chad Varah CH CBE. Samaritans is a charity registered in England & Wales (219432) and in Scotland (SC040604) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales (757372). Samaritans registered office is located at The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF.

 020 8394 8300 (UK)

 admin@samaritans.org

 [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)