



## Northern Ireland organisations forum summary

**Date:** 29 September 12.00 - 13.00

**Attendees:** Disability Action NI, Cruse Bereavement Support NI, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Youth Forum, Mencap NI, Age NI, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

### **Background**

The purpose of this meeting was to share information about the Inquiry's plans for Every Story Matters events, which will enable the Inquiry to listen to people's experiences in the communities that they live in. To this end the Inquiry also sought advice from attendees on the approach to implementing these events in Northern Ireland. The Inquiry further provided an update on [Module 2C](#), which will investigate core decision making and political governance in Northern Ireland.

### **Executive summary**

- The Inquiry will be organising Every Story Matters events across the UK to raise awareness of its listening exercise, [Every Story Matters](#).
- These will enable people to share their stories in the communities that they live in.
- A 'test and learn' pilot will take place from Autumn 2023 and feedback from this will inform our long term approach.
- Mix of targeted events with those that have suffered hardship or loss as a result of the pandemic, and events open to the general public.
- Some targeted events will resemble community outreach, where the Inquiry will have a presence at spaces and events where communities are already gathering.
- Safeguarding and taking a trauma informed approach are central to implementation of these events.
- Inquiry will consider carefully which groups to target in the pilot phase, with attendees suggesting that disabled and young people should feature.
- Experiences of rural communities and/or communities on the borders are particularly relevant to Northern Ireland - there are community organisations that can help Inquiry to reach these audiences.
- Locations recommended to target include Derry/Londonderry and Enniskillen.
- Important to not underestimate challenges posed by (lack of) transport links.
- Expenses for impact filming was raised - the Inquiry has acted on feedback and is now able to reimburse travel expenses for impact filming participants.
- Paying travel expenses for events should be explored to enable people to attend events without financial barriers, especially where transport links are poor. This needs to be balanced against value for the public purse.
- Public hearings for [Module 2C \(core decision making and political governance in Northern Ireland\)](#) will take place in Belfast from 30 April 2024 at the Clayton Hotel.

## **Notes**

### **Response to feedback from previous forum meeting**

- In response to feedback provided at our previous Northern Ireland forum in March regarding the use of Irish Sign Language (ISL) in Northern Ireland, we can confirm that information in ISL is available on request by emailing [contact@covid19.public-inquiry.uk](mailto:contact@covid19.public-inquiry.uk).
- A British Sign Language and ISL video relay service will be launched later this year, allowing participants to share their experiences in these languages.
- The Inquiry will consider the experiences of children and young people (CYP) via a bespoke research project to ensure that we hear the voices of CYP who were most impacted by the pandemic.
- The approach will consider the experiences of CYP across the UK, including NI. This will inform the findings and recommendations made by the Inquiry.
- The CYP approach is being discussed in an ongoing separate forum for that sector ([summary notes of the last CYP meeting](#)). CYP organisations in NI are very welcome to join that forum.

### **Module 2C (Northern Ireland-specific investigation)**

- The Inquiry will hear evidence about core decision making and political governance in NI during [Module 2C](#).
- Module 2C will examine issues from a Northern Ireland perspective. The Inquiry will investigate key groups and individuals within the government in Northern Ireland including the First Minister, deputy First Minister and other Ministers. It will be looking at:
  - The relationships and communication between the NI government, local authorities within NI and the UK government.
  - The initial response to the pandemic by the NI government.
  - Non-pharmaceutical interventions in NI, including lockdowns, local restrictions, working from home, reduction of person to person contact, social distancing, the use of face coverings and border controls in Northern Ireland.
  - Use of expertise, public health communications and legislation.
- Public hearings for Module 2C will start on 30 April 2024.
- The hearings will take place at the Clayton Hotel in Belfast.
- There will be a public gallery in the hearing room in the Clayton Hotel, and members of the public are welcome to come to watch the Inquiry in person.
- A seat reservation system will be in place, as per the [process for the hearing centre in London \(Dorland House\)](#).
- Those with accessibility requirements will be able to inform the Inquiry in advance via the reservation form. All hearings in Belfast, London, Edinburgh and Cardiff will be streamed live on our [YouTube channel](#).
- As with all other modules, a report of findings and recommendations will be published following the conclusion of the investigation, so there will be no need to wait until the end of the Inquiry for this.

### **Every Story Matters events**

- Every Story Matters events are a way for the Inquiry to raise awareness of [Every Story Matters](#) and will enable us to listen to people's experiences of the pandemic in the communities that they live in.
- We will have a test and learn pilot of the events in Autumn 2023. We will visit around 15 locations across the UK to run smaller targeted events and larger public events. We will also have some virtual events. These will inform our longer-term approach.
- At the targeted events, we will capture the key themes discussed and these will then be shared with our research partner.
- People attending will receive a brief summary of the key themes discussed and be told what will happen with that information.
- In addition, the Inquiry will be attending events organised by organisations to help raise awareness and encourage participation.
- We want to work with partner organisations such as those represented at this forum to understand how best to run these events in Northern Ireland.
- To date we have attended the TUC Congress in Liverpool and (since the forum was held) have attended the Northern Ireland Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Conference.
- We will let you know once we have more information about these events via [our newsletter](#).

### **Open discussion (points made by external attendees in italics)**

#### **Inclusion of specific audiences in pilot**

- *Given the challenges that disabled people are facing in ensuring that their voices are heard and the fact that they were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, they should be included in the pilot phase. Online methods are more inclusive for disabled people.*
- *Young people should be targeted in pilot events. In particular, the experiences of rural young people are frequently overlooked and this group is of particular relevance in Northern Ireland.*

#### **Inquiry response**

- We can confirm that there will be targeted events for both disabled and young people. While we cannot confirm which groups will feature in the pilot phase we will certainly consider their inclusion during the pilot.
- There is a bespoke approach to capturing the experiences of young people (U18s) through a targeted research project so many of the most relevant experiences will be captured as part of this.
- It is useful to know that virtual events are more accessible for disabled people and will investigate the inclusion of targeted virtual events for this group in more detail.
- We are now in conversation with Disability Action Northern Ireland regarding running a joint event.



### **Location and local community groups**

- *Derry/Londonderry and Enniskillen would be suitable locations for community events.*
- *It is important to consider the experiences of those living in border regions of Northern Ireland.*
- *Do not underestimate the impact of poor transport connections on the ability of people to attend events.*
- *It would be useful for the Inquiry to link with groups such as the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network to facilitate outreach to communities in these locations.*

### **Reaching seldom heard audiences**

- *In addition to rural networks, link with groups such as Carers NI, the Independent Health Providers' Network and Patient and Client Council to reach carers and people in care.*

### Inquiry response

- Thank you for providing this useful guidance which we will use when planning events in Northern Ireland. If anyone has links into any of these groups please do let us know - we will be contacting NICVA as they hold a lot of connections but if others have contacts here, do email [engagement@covid19.public-inquiry.uk](mailto:engagement@covid19.public-inquiry.uk).

### **Expenses**

- *The cost of travelling to meeting venues will likely be a barrier to many seldom heard groups who the Inquiry would wish to reach via these events.*
- *Travel expenses for impact filming participants should also be covered.*

### Inquiry response

- We are pleased to confirm that in response to feedback raised in this forum, the Inquiry now has approval to cover travel expenses for impact filming participants.
- The policy on expenses for individuals attending targeted community listening events is under consideration. Encouraging participation does need to be balanced against costs.

### **Culture in Northern Ireland**

- *Food and refreshments at events are important so that participants feel valued.*

### Inquiry response

- This is something the Inquiry can consider going forward.

### **Emotional support**

- *It is important that we have bereavement specific emotional support at events.*

### **Q&A**

**Q:** *How many pilot events will take place in Northern Ireland?*



**A:** Pilot events in Northern Ireland in January/February will most likely include a maximum of four events over two days. However the time and location of these events is still to be confirmed.

**Q:** *How many public viewing seats will be available at the Clayton Hotel for the Module 2C hearings?*

**A:** At this stage, we are unable to confirm, but will provide an update following the Legal Operations' team visiting the property later this year.