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By email only

19 March 2025

Dear First Minister,

UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry (“the Inquiry”) Module 1 Report on Resilience and Preparedness (Ref: 2500011689)

Thank you for your letter of 16 January and for publishing the Welsh Government’s response to my Module 1 report on Resilience and Preparedness within six months of my findings, as requested.

In my first report, I determined that the civil contingency structures within the UK government and devolved administrations and civil services failed their citizens at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. I set out ten recommendations that, when implemented together, would significantly reform how the UK government and devolved administrations prepare for whole-system civil emergencies.

I am pleased that the Welsh Government has accepted the principles behind many of my recommendations and I welcome the commitment to learning lessons and implementing the necessary changes within the specific context of the devolution settlement across the UK and the functions and powers of the Welsh Government.

I recognise the progress made by the Welsh Government to date on improving resilience and preparedness. The steps taken within the Wales Resilience Framework and delivery plan show encouraging signs of progress in incorporating several of my recommendations, including in areas of simplified structures, a bespoke risk register for Wales, better collection of data to inform decision-making, local exercises, and commitments to transparent reporting.

However, as identified in the response, additional action is required across a range of my recommendations to embed the lessons learned and implement the necessary improvements. The commitments outlined in the response, and any future commitments made to the Inquiry, must translate into specific action that will strengthen preparedness for Wales and the rest of the UK for the next pandemic.

The aim of recommendation 2 (establishing the Cabinet Office as the lead Government Department to respond to Tier 1 emergencies) sought to ensure clear and centralised cross-departmental leadership and collaboration. Although recommendation 2 is for the UK Government, I note that the lead Government Department model, drawing on the advice of the Risk and Preparedness Committee, is also operational in Wales and that you recognise there are flaws in such an approach for responding to prolonged, whole-system emergencies. I therefore urge you to move to the most appropriate model in the event of such an emergency.

Recommendation 10 proposes a UK-wide independent statutory body for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience. This recommendation is founded on my firm conclusion that the UK government and devolved administrations' systems of emergency preparedness, resilience and response failed in large part because there was no independent body that was responsible for advising on and assessing preparedness for whole-system civil emergencies.

I note that the Welsh Government agrees with the need for independent strategic advice to the civil emergency preparedness and resilience system and considers that external scrutiny, challenge and assessment would be beneficial to help strengthen Wales' resilience. I welcome the commitment expressed by the Welsh Government to work with the UK Government to develop a function which serves the whole of the UK.

However, there remains significant work to be done in establishing an independent UK-wide function to provide the independent challenge, direction and advice envisaged by my report. I have therefore written to the UK Government outlining my expectation that the upcoming publication of the UK Government Resilience Review and updated Central Government Concept of Operations for Emergency Response and Recovery (HMG CONOPS) will set out firm progress towards meeting the aims of my recommendations, including recommendation 2 and recommendation 10.

Finally, I trust that all four nations of the UK will continue to work together to ensure the 'joined up' approach that will be necessary to deliver the radical reform required in the areas of planning and resilience.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heather Hallett', with a horizontal line underneath.

The Rt Hon Baroness (Heather) Hallett DBE