



## **IN THE UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY**

### **MODULE 7**

#### **OPENING SUBMISSIONS FOR SCOTTISH COVID BEREAVED**

1. We are instructed by Aamer Anwar & Company on behalf of the Scottish Covid Bereaved.
2. The Bereaved welcome the beginning of this Module, which examines the approach to testing, tracing and isolation adopted during the pandemic. The Chair has already, in Module 1, found that the UK was ill-prepared for dealing with a catastrophic emergency, let alone the pandemic which struck with such devastating impact in 2020. Our system of building preparedness for the pandemic was found to have suffered from several significant flaws. There had been, prior to the pandemic, a lack of attention to the systems that would help test, trace and isolate infected individuals. There was no system that could be scaled up to test, trace, and isolate in the event of a pandemic. Planning guidance was insufficiently robust and flexible, and policy documentation was outdated, unnecessarily bureaucratic and infected by jargon.
3. We do not highlight these matters in an attempt to revisit the matters considered in great detail in Module 1 but to provide context to the situation in which the country found itself in March of 2020. This failure to have in place the essential tools to combat any pandemic, never mind the pandemic which ultimately struck, meant that the UK entered 2020 far behind where it ought to have been. Pre-pandemic preparedness provides the proper context for the decisions taken during the pandemic.

4. The Bereaved understand that the Inquiry will consider the efficacy of the testing and tracing infrastructure, public health messaging and the support given to those who had to isolate. It is understood that during this Module, consideration will be given to whether appropriate regard was had to pre-existing inequalities and whether, and the extent to which, the Test and Protect, and its equivalent, schemes had regard to the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable, the most disadvantaged, and the most at-risk groups. The Inquiry will also look at the financial and practical support offered to those who were required to isolate. This is of particular importance in relation to care homes, where many underpaid staff may have felt a measure of financial compunction to attend work even while ill. The Bereaved welcome this focus and look forward to the evidence to be led during the hearings. Also of importance to the Bereaved is the Inquiry's intention to scrutinise the development of test, trace and isolate systems for future pandemics and to make recommendations for the future. While the Bereaved cannot bring their own loved ones back, they are determined that when the next pandemic comes no one should unnecessarily suffer as they did.
5. The Bereaved also look forward to hearing evidence in relation to the matters which are of the utmost importance to them. Those who lost loved ones in care home and hospital settings have concerns about a number of matters, including:
  - The failure to put in place proper processes and procedures for the testing of those being sent from hospitals to care homes;
  - The lack of routine testing in care homes for residents or staff;
  - Visitors to ill family members not being given any advice, far less being tested, when visiting;
  - Staff being moved between care homes without being tested;
  - Residents, carers, patients, and staff only being tested if they were symptomatic, with no consideration given to older people not always presenting with the so-called 'cardinal' symptoms;
  - The track and trace system being inadequate and unable to keep up with the virus, it too quickly becoming overwhelmed by the pandemic.
6. The Inquiry will hear evidence from a member of the Scottish Bereaved, Nicola Boyle, as well as bereaved from other nations. Sadly, the experiences of the Scottish Bereaved

are all too similar: there was an abject failure of testing and tracing, and as a result the most vulnerable amongst us suffered and, in the case of Scottish Covid Bereaved, died.

7. Scottish Covid Bereaved look forward to the evidence that will be heard by the Inquiry in this Module and are ready to assist the Inquiry in any way they can.

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