

SESSION TEN OF THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

Pandemic Response and Recovery

Monday 12 December 2022, 5.30pm, Room S, Portcullis House

MINUTES

In Attendance: Rt Hon Esther McVey MP (Chair), Graham Stringer MP, Chris Green MP, Danny Kruger MP, Rt Hon Sammy Wilson MP, Viscount Camrose, Lord Strathcarron, Lord Robathan.

Apologies: Anne Longfield CBE, Miriam Cates MP, Baroness Foster of Oxtou, Sir Graham Brady MP, Henry Smith MP, Greg Smith MP, Philip Davies MP, Dawn Butler MP, Andrew Rosindell MP, Sir Charles Walker MP, Ian Paisley MP, Paul Girvan MP, Lord Moylan, Lord Leicester, Baroness Noakes, Baroness Morrissey, Lord Wrottesley, Baroness Fox of Buckley.

1. The Chair welcomed the APPG members to the meeting of the Group to discuss the Covid-19 Public Inquiry.
2. The Chair introduced the first speaker:

Arabella Skinner from the campaign group UsforThem

Ms Skinner began by outlining the structure of the Covid-19 Public Inquiry, what it will address and the stage it has reached, Module two, which will look at how the pandemic response was seen and what the UK would do in the future. Responding to concerns about the Inquiry which have been raised by Group members, Ms Skinner went through the list of accepted Module 2 core participants and highlighted areas where representative groups were rejected, such as care home residents, hospitality and children's groups that challenged government policy, or not asked to apply, such as small business, civil rights or teaching/education. She contrasted them with the accepted core participants, many of which were representative groups that supported government policy or wanted more restrictions. Ms Skinner concluded by raising concerns that the Inquiry would not investigate how policy was decided or that future models would continue to exclude key decision makers, areas or representative groups and individuals that may challenge government policy.

Kate Nicholls OBE, Chief Executive of UK Hospitality, the national trade body that represents hospitality businesses

Ms Nicholls explained that as an umbrella group, they applied for core participant status, in accordance with the Inquiry guidance. The group was still rejected from Module 2, with the reason given that there will be later modules that apply and a separate segment that looks at hospitality. She expressed her concerns that hospitality, as one of the sectors worst affected, may not get a sufficient or timely enough hearing. Ms Nicholls explained that as someone who had been involved in high level

discussions for previous emergencies, pre-pandemic planning before Covid and then planning for the first lockdown, she asked to participate in Modules 1 and 2 believing she more than met the Inquiry's criteria and her contribution important to stated aims of those modules. In conclusion, Ms Nicholls expressed her hopes that she may still be called to speak in Module 2 as an expert witness and that there will be a separate module that looks at the impact on hospitality. She also called for the impact on business to be brought further forward in the Inquiry and hoped that relevant and representative groups are encouraged to apply.

3. The Chair opened the meeting up to Members' questions and discussion, which touched on whether the Inquiry would look at the evidence that supported government policies and measures such as the tier system or the 10pm curfew. And whether the evidence showed that hospitality was an inherent risk or not. A question was asked whether individuals, be they scientists, economists or other experts, who disagreed with the government would be called as expert witnesses. It was also highlighted that the civil justice system was another sector where the impact of lockdowns and pandemic policy has had a disastrous effect.

4. The division bell brought the meeting to a close, the Chair thanked all who attended. The date of the next meeting was confirmed for 5.30pm, Monday 16 January 2023.