

Coronavirus – Chair of Covid-19 inquiry appointed

The Hon Lady Poole QC has been appointed chair to the public inquiry into the handling of Covid-19 in Scotland.

The Deputy First Minister John Swinney confirmed to MSPs at The Scottish Parliament that the terms of reference for the inquiry have also been laid down.

Mr Swinney published the terms of reference for the inquiry covering 12 areas of investigation, each covering a strategic element of the handling of the pandemic, to identify lessons to be learned and recommendations as soon as practicable.

[The terms of reference](#) were arrived at by public engagement and are subject to a period of reflection by the chair, who will be able to suggest adjustments, which may include taking the remit of the UK-wide Covid-19 inquiry into account.

The period covered by the inquiry will be from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2022, but it will also consider pandemic planning undertaken prior to this.

The chair will now begin the process of appointing staff so the inquiry can begin considering evidence without delay.

Mr Swinney said: “I am announcing the establishment of a statutory inquiry under the Inquiries Act to examine the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland.

“I am grateful to everyone who has shared their views on what the inquiry should look into, in particular bereaved families and those who have lost friends and colleagues. Their input has been key in developing the inquiry’s terms of reference.

“From my own and the First Minister’s interactions with Lady Poole, I am in no doubt that she has the necessary leadership skills, integrity and deep technical knowledge to undertake this inquiry. Her expertise in administrative and human rights law is exactly in line with our expectations of a human rights-based approach to the inquiry.

“We are committed to working with the UK Government to develop the approach to the UK-wide inquiry and expect the chair of the Scottish public inquiry to coordinate with the chair of the UK-wide inquiry.”

Lady Poole said: “I am honoured to chair this independent public inquiry examining the strategic response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland. We have all been affected by this pandemic. There has been a major impact on every aspect of all our lives. The death of so many as a result of Covid-19 is a tragedy, and others have suffered in many different ways.

“The inquiry will work independently to establish the facts in an open and transparent way in order to determine what lessons can be learned for the future. There is a great deal to be done in a short space of time. I will continue to give considerable thought as to how best to conduct the inquiry to ensure it fully achieves its aims, including a careful and thorough examination of the terms of reference.

“My immediate focus will be on getting the right people in place to support me and establishing the necessary systems, processes and information flows needed to allow the inquiry to function efficiently and deliver as quickly as possible. Work

has already begun on this.

“It is too early to be any more specific about how the inquiry will carry out its functions, other than to say that the arrangements for providing both written and oral evidence will be set out in due course once the initial establishment phase is completed. A bespoke website will be created, to provide information and publish updates as the inquiry progresses.

“I look forward to collaborating with my counterpart on the UK Covid-19 inquiry once that inquiry is established.”

Scottish Labour’s Health spokesperson Jackie Baillie said: “This inquiry is a chance to learn the lessons of the last two years and get the answers we all deserve. It is crucial that we get it right.

“The number of deaths in care homes was a shameful low point for Scotland, and including this in the remit was the right decision.

“It must also look at the tragedies we have seen unfold across our wider health and social care system as a result of the pandemic – including stark rises in non-Covid deaths, the suspension of screening programmes, and the thousands of people who had their care packages stripped away.”

Lady Poole is a First Class Honours graduate from Oxford University. She was appointed Standing Junior Counsel to The Scottish Government in 2002 and after qualifying as an advocate in 1998, she took silk in 2012.