

An Leas-phrìomh Mhinistear agus Ath-shlànachadh
Cobhid
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid
Recovery
John Swinney MSP



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

T: 0300 244 4000
E: dfmcsr@gov.scot

Eilidh Dickson
Engender
Via email

3 February 2022

Dear Eilidh,

Thank you for the letter you sent on 25 January signed by a number of equality and human rights organisations. I remain grateful for the contribution of all the signatories to the establishment of the Scottish Covid-19 inquiry and I was pleased to meet with some of them during this period.

I agree with you about the importance that the Covid Inquiry recognises the unequal impacts of the pandemic. While the pandemic has touched the lives of everyone in Scotland, it has had very different impacts on different groups in society, as well as entrenching inequality for those experiencing it. The Scottish Government's overall commitment to equality and human rights underpins our approach to Covid recovery, and for this reason, our Covid Recovery Strategy focuses on the efforts we require to tackle inequality and disadvantage and is designed to address the systemic inequalities made worse by Covid.

I am reassured from my discussions with the Chair that the Inquiry will be undertaken in a way that ensures human rights and equality considerations are at the heart of it. Additionally, the terms of reference includes a specific reference to the rights in the European Convention on Human Rights (including the right not to be discriminated against).

I was pleased to appoint an independent chair for the Covid-19 Inquiry who has such direct and robust knowledge of, and expertise in, both human rights and equality. Lady Poole's strong record on human rights makes her very well placed to ensure human rights and equality considerations are applied appropriately and proportionately to the work of the inquiry. From my knowledge of her and the discussions we have had, I have absolute confidence that Lady Poole will pursue the inquiry in a way that is inclusive and fair. I am also reassured that with her background, not least as counsel to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Lady Poole is well aware of and experienced in considering the

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

Accredited
Until 2020



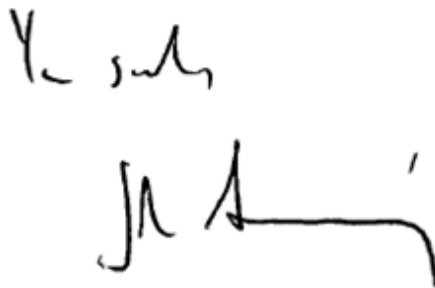
application of the Public Sector Equality Duty. The decisions and actions taken by Ministers and others, in handling the pandemic as in all matters, must of course take account of the duty.

In your letter, you ask that the inquiry adopts an intersectional gender, equalities and human rights lens to examining the pandemic. While the inquiry is independent in its operation, I am confident that Lady Poole will take a range of perspectives into account.

Our intention in designing the terms of reference for the Inquiry was to ensure that Lady Poole would not be constrained in her investigations, that she would be able to hear evidence on the fullest range of aspects of the pandemic and its handling, and would be able to follow the evidence wherever it led. For that reason the terms of reference do not explicitly specify any groups or characteristics. This means that any group can be considered in scope, and our intention in designing the terms of reference was that no group should be excluded.

When I met with Lady Poole last week, I took the opportunity to discuss the points made in your letter and I have reconfirmed the importance, as I set out to Parliament on 14 December, of the inquiry's considerations of equality and human rights. I am aware that Lady Poole has already met with some key stakeholders in this area, and she is keen to meet with you and the other signatories of the letter to discuss these matters further, and has already arranged a meeting to do so.

I hope that this response provides you with some reassurance on the matters you have raised, and I hope that you will engage with the inquiry as it takes forward its vital work.



JOHN SWINNEY