



# Consultation on Terms of Reference for COVID-19 Inquiry

## A RESPONSE FROM WCVA

1. [Wales Council for Voluntary Action](#) (WCVA) is the national membership organisation for the voluntary sector in Wales. Our purpose is to enable voluntary organisations to make a bigger difference together.

## **PLEASE EXPLAIN WHY YOU THINK THE DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE DO NOT COVER ALL THE AREAS THAT THE INQUIRY SHOULD ADDRESS**

2. The draft Terms of Reference make no mention of the incredible work of the voluntary sector and volunteering during the pandemic.
3. Volunteers, community groups and the wider sector were integral to supporting people and communities across Wales and the UK throughout the COVID-19 crisis. The voluntary sector's ability to work together – and with public bodies – to make a huge difference to people's wellbeing led to effective action in the face of the pandemic, from delivering prescriptions to transporting people to vaccination appointments – while during the crisis over 18,000 people signed up to Volunteering Wales to hunt for volunteering opportunities. This all took place despite a significant loss of income at a time of rising demand and service closures.
4. By overlooking the voluntary sector and volunteering in such a way, there will be a huge gap in the final inquiry. It will be near-impossible for the inquiry to show how the involvement of the sector and volunteers made such a positive impact during the pandemic, nor the invaluable role they can play in the recovery. It will also mean the inquiry will not be able to gather intelligence on how the voluntary sector should be involved – and it must be – in preparation for future pandemics.
5. The inquiry should also inform wider community resilience work and feed into preparedness for emergencies and problems of various kinds.
6. WCVA has much evidence about the impact of the sector during the pandemic that it could contribute to UK Government's final COVID-19 inquiry. We hope that the Terms

of Reference of the inquiry will allow us to do so.

7. We also note that the response form for this consultation is not available in Welsh (although the draft Terms of Reference themselves are). This prohibits Welsh speakers and communities from responding.

## **WHICH ISSUES OR TOPICS SHOULD THE INQUIRY LOOK AT FIRST?**

8. A suggested starting point would be to ensure preparedness, clear communication and effective engagement across all the country's governments, local authorities and civil contingency arrangements.
9. It should be noted that the voluntary sector was involved, impacted or both in so many of the areas listed – including closure of hospitality, retail, sport and leisure sectors; housing and homelessness; shielding; communication of public health decisions; the response of the health and social care sector; support for vulnerable people, and many more besides – that overlooking it entirely in the Terms of Reference for the inquiry is, as already stated, a huge mistake.

## **SHOULD THE INQUIRY SET A PLANNED END DATE FOR ITS PUBLIC HEARINGS TO HELP ENSURE TIMELY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS?**

10. The processes of the enquiry should be timely, as should communication of the findings and recommendations.

## **HOW SHOULD THE INQUIRY BE DESIGNED AND RUN TO ENSURE THAT BEREAVED PEOPLE OR THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED SERIOUS HARM OR HARDSHIP AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC HAVE THEIR VOICES HEARD?**

11. This is another area in which voluntary sector involvement is of huge importance. The sector is ideally placed to work with the people you cite above, as well as grassroots communities and harder-to-reach individuals, to help the inquiry hear their voices. In Wales alone, there are 43,994 voluntary sector organisations, the vast majority of which (38,975) work at that critical local level. (Source: [The Voluntary Sector Data Hub](#)) By ignoring the voluntary sector in the Terms of Reference, the inquiry is hamstringing itself.

12. The expertise of victim support groups and feedback from regulators and relevant ombudsmen could be useful to ensure these voices are heard.

13. We invite the inquiry to take a look at the Welsh Government-endorsed [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#), a set of principles that aim to encourage good quality, consistent engagement activity with the public and service users.