

News story: Infected Blood Inquiry Terms of Reference published

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington and Chair of the independent Infected Blood Inquiry, Sir Brian Langstaff have published the [Terms of Reference](#) of the Inquiry.

On 8 February this year, I announced the appointment of Sir Brian Langstaff to Chair the Infected Blood Public Inquiry.

From the outset, Sir Brian has been clear that he is determined to put people at the heart of the Inquiry, and to ensure an inclusive and transparent process. Sir Brian and his team conducted a public consultation on the proposed terms of reference for the Inquiry, which ran from 2 March to 26 April.

They invited contributions via an online questionnaire, by email, written correspondence and telephone. The Inquiry team also held 15 meetings with groups and individuals across the UK, something that Sir Brian is keen for the Inquiry to continue to do as it moves forward.

The Inquiry received almost 700 responses to its consultation, and Sir Brian wrote to me on 7 June, having reflected on those consultation responses, advising me of the outcome and his recommendations for the terms of reference. The Terms of Reference are comprehensive and reflect the key points made in the consultation.

The geographical scope of the Inquiry is UK-wide, looking at issues relating to the whole of the UK as well as regionally.

Sir Brian expects the Inquiry team to hold regular meetings across the UK. And so I have consulted, as I am required to do under the Inquiries Act 2005, with the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales, and in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive, with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who in turn consulted the Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Department of Health.

The Governments of Scotland and Wales, and my Right Honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland were content with Sir Brian's recommendations, and I am happy to accept his recommendations without amendment. I have written to Sir Brian to confirm this.

The terms of reference have been published and deposited in the Libraries of both Houses today. The Inquiry can now formally begin its work, and will start today, 2 July 2018.

Sir Brian proposes to use groups of experts to assist the Inquiry. The groups would cover all the material fields relevant to the Inquiry. Their evidence would be public, transparent and subject to scrutiny.

People affected, and other participants to the Inquiry, would be able to propose experts and put forward questions to the expert groups.

During the Inquiry's public consultation, views were expressed both for and against the appointment of additional panel members. Some, noting the complex and difficult issues to be examined by the Inquiry, wanted a panel of many experts to assist the Chair.

It is Sir Brian's view that his proposal for expert groups will achieve the objectives of those who have been in favour of panel members, by providing legitimacy and transparency; a diverse range of expertise and importantly, speed.

Sir Brian's view is that experts will be able to progress work in parallel in a way that co-determining panel members could not and that very importantly everything the expert groups will do will be public.

Sir Brian plans to discuss this approach with those who will most centrally participate in the Inquiry, particularly survivors and the groups representing them, and ask them whether, in the light of the proposed approach there remains any significant wish for him to be joined by a decision-making panel.

Sir Brian has asked me to defer a decision now on panel members until core participants have been appointed and have had the opportunity to consider the proposed approach.

I am aware that when my Rt Hon Friend, the Member for Ashford met many of those affected before Christmas last year there were many who supported the Chair sitting alongside other panel members. I have not lost sight of this, but I think it only right that I allow Sir Brian time to consult core participants. I therefore do not propose to appoint other panel members at this time, but will consider the issue once core participants have had an opportunity to look at Sir Brian's proposed approach.

Of course, Section 7 of the Inquiries Act 2005 allows me to make further appointments to the inquiry panel during the course of the inquiry with the consent of the Chair.

Speed is of the essence and I have asked Sir Brian to report back to me as quickly as possible, and I will then make my decision on panel members.

Many thousands of people from across the United Kingdom have been affected by this terrible tragedy. Sadly, a number of people affected have died since the Inquiry was announced.

One of the clearest messages from the Inquiry's consultation was the need for speed; in his letter to me Sir Brian noted that one respondent to the consultation had said "I really hope this Inquiry does not drag on as I would like to live long enough to see the result".

So it is extremely important that the Infected Blood Inquiry can complete its work as quickly as a thorough examination of the facts allows, and this is

something that Sir Brian and his team are very aware of.

This Inquiry is a priority for Government, and I have assured Sir Brian that the Cabinet Office will provide all the resources and support the Inquiry needs to meet the demanding timescales that are essential in order to meet the expectations of the people affected by this tragedy, who have already waited so long for answers.

The Inquiry will have much to do over the coming months and I'm sure will waste no time in getting started.

The first stages of the Inquiry will be critical in obtaining evidence including witness statements from people who have been infected and affected. The Inquiry will use this evidence to help uncover what happened and why. It will hold its preliminary hearings in September at Church House, London, where core participants will be able to set out their priorities for the Inquiry.

My exchange of correspondence with Sir Brian and the full terms of reference have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and I commend this Statement to the House.