



CHAIR'S UPDATE AND STATEMENT IN RELATION TO PLANNED HEARING SESSIONS

ISSUED ON 22 FEBRUARY 2022

I last issued an update as to progress on 14 December 2021. As we approach the next phase of this Inquiry, I would like to provide some further information and the plan for 2022.

The Building

We have now moved into our permanent offices at Corn Exchange, Cathedral Quarter in central Belfast.

The Inquiry has leased two floors which will provide one floor which has sufficient office space for the Inquiry team, and on another floor, a suitable space for a hearing room as well as a room to provide additional seating to any members of the public and press who wish to watch the proceedings over a live feed.

There are a number of further smaller rooms to accommodate Core Participants. It is unlikely that all Core Participants can be provided with a private room on every hearing day. Arrangements for the use of such rooms will be circulated in due course.

The Inquiry Team

I am now pleased to introduce the full Inquiry team who will be responsible for taking the work of the Inquiry forward.

Counsel to the Inquiry:

Sean Doran QC leads the counsel team which comprises the following barristers:

Denise Kiley; Mark McEvoy, Shirley Tang; Sophie Briggs and James Toal.

Solicitor to the Inquiry:

Lorraine Keown of Cleaver Fulton Rankin replaces Joan MacElhatton who was on secondment from the civil service. Lorraine is assisted by Leeanne Thornton and Orla Henderson. We are pleased that Cleaver Fulton Rankin has agreed to provide legal support services to the Inquiry.

Secretary to the Inquiry:

The Secretary to the Inquiry Jaclyn Richardson is now assisted by Steven Montgomery, Karen McGuigan and Finola Friel.

The Document Management System

'Box' is providing our document management system and the Inquiry team have now been fully trained to use it. Each Core Participant and document provider will receive a link and be able to upload documents to the system.

Core Participants will be given advance access to relevant material including statements as they become available. The system incorporates a number of features to ensure that confidentiality is respected and preserved.

Witness Statements

Over ninety-five individuals have now contacted the Inquiry to offer information.

Introductory letters have been sent out to all those who have contacted the Inquiry to provide information and the process of taking statements from the first phase witnesses will be commencing shortly.

All of the statement takers have been provided with vulnerable witness training from Professor Penny Cooper to whom we are very grateful. All counsel will receive training specific to their role with witnesses. The Inquiry has also engaged a number of intermediaries who will be available to assist in the taking of statements where necessary, and we have also engaged a number of counsellors who are available to provide assistance to anyone affected by the work of the Inquiry, whether through the process of the taking of statements, or later in the proceedings during hearings.

Core Participants

I have designated a number of individuals who are either affiliated to Action for Muckamore or to The Society of Parents and Friends of Muckamore as Core Participants.

The following organisations have also been designated Core Participants:

The Department of Health;

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority;

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

I expect some other organisations and individuals will also apply and each will be given full and fair consideration.

Document Providers

Fifty-eight letters have now been issued to identify those who may hold documents relevant to the Terms of Reference. A number of orders under S21 Inquiries Act have also been issued requiring the production of documentation to the Inquiry. The Inquiry team is engaging with a number of document providers to discuss the production of the relevant material to the Inquiry.

Future Engagement Session

A further virtual engagement session will be held on 9 March 2022 at 5pm over Zoom. We would encourage anyone who would like to know more about the Inquiry's work to attend that session. If you wish to participate, please send Jaclyn Richardson, the Inquiry secretary, an email at info@mahinquiry.org.uk or telephone her on 02890515462.

Hearing Days 2022

Although there is flexibility in relation to the following dates I hope it is helpful to provide a provisional indication of periods within which the Inquiry hopes to sit, a list of confirmed days will be issued closer to the hearing. On hearing days, the Inquiry will sit between 10am and 4.30pm with suitable breaks during the day. The Inquiry will not sit on Fridays unless exceptional circumstances arise. The Inquiry will not sit on Bank Holidays or special holidays such as the Queen's Jubilee (2 and 3 June).

2022:

- 9 May to 16 June
- 27 June to 7 July
- 5 September to 29 September
- 10 October to 27 October
- 7 November to 8 December.

Tom Kark QC

Chair

22 February 2022