



Off and Running

Lady Hallett opened the preliminary hearing of the Covid Inquiry in front of quite a large audience and an even bigger internet audience by holding a one-minute silence for the bereaved.

The Inquiry will be broken down into a series of modules. The first will examine "preparedness and resilience". She had

set her team a challenging timetable [2 years?]. The objective was to get to the truth about what had happened and see what could be learned for the future. Patients would be at the heart of her Inquiry.

Lady Hallett, a former Judge, comes across as a formidable, engaging character with a ready smile and a steely charm. I doubt she will stand any nonsense or political posturing.

Hugo Keith, Counsel to the Inquiry sets out the rules and procedures. Core participants had been identified for the first module including Families for Justice, many government departments and professional bodies, the BMA and the TUC. These groups would have access to papers and submissions and the right to raise questions, via Counsel, or their legal representatives.

Hugo Keith's polished presentation of the Covid story so far is crisp and clear. He makes it plain that the Inquiry will not be restricted

to public health issues but will want to examine the social and economic consequences of the response as well. Did poor health and existing inequalities make some people in the UK particularly vulnerable.

Did the restrictions that were imposed lead to unmet health needs, damaged educational prospects and financial insecurity?

The Inquiry would examine how good the forecasting was as well as looking at international comparisons and the impact of the UK departure from the EU.

The objective, he repeated, was to get to the truth, reveal the full facts, and expose culpable conduct or plainly poor decision making or significant errors of judgement.

Next some of the core participants make opening statements pledging support for the Inquiry. The Public Health profession argued that the role local authorities played needed to be firmly included. The TUC, in quite a long statement, insisted that the death of so many NHS and Social Care staff must be looked at very carefully and views expressed about safety at work in the future.

The only discordant note came from Families for Justice. Whilst they had welcomes Lady Hallett's willingness to meet and listen

to victims and relatives, they were concerned that a planned parallel “listening exercise” would marginalise the view of patients and relatives. It was, they understood, set up to be outsourced to a commercial company and therefore not at the centre of the Inquiry.

Lady Hallett swiftly rejected this interpretation of events. Patients, victims and families would be at the heart of the Inquiry.

The next hearings will be in the Spring, Meantime records will be obtained from government departments and statements taken from anybody who had a role to play.

care leaders will be waiting with bated breath for the call. This Inquiry will have worldwide interest and shape public health policy for years to come.

The legal profession will be well rewarded for their involvement!



Many civil servants,
politicians and NHS and social