



Wales COVID-19 Inquiry Special Purpose Committee

19 September 2024

Dear Joyce Watson MS, Tom Giffard MS,
Cc. Fay Bowen

Following the publication of the UK Covid Inquiry's Module One report members of the Covid Committee Observation Group met to discuss what opportunities we felt there could be for the Wales COVID-19 Inquiry Special Purpose Committee to consider 'gaps' which require greater attention from a Welsh perspective.

We appreciate that what defines a 'gap' is a matter which the Committee as well as ourselves have been seeking to define. Having read the module one report we have found it necessary to interpret the term both with regards to what the report was assessing that has happened in the past as well as when looking at the recommendations proposed. I have set out some of the 'gaps' we believe require consideration below.

Action taken on emergency preparedness reports/exercises

The module one report references recommendations made in a 2012 report by the Wales Audit Office (now known as Audit Wales) which focused on civil contingencies in Wales. It made several observations surrounding accountability and efficiency of emergency planning frameworks. It was noted that the current structures and systems in place in Wales could lead to gaps or overlaps. These observations were found to be as true in 2020.

It is the view of the Covid Committee Observation Group that understanding why the Audit Wales report was not acted upon is a 'gap' which requires further investigation.

A related matter which we also feel constitutes a gap is with regard to what actions were undertaken following Exercise Shipshape. This 2003 preparedness exercise considered a SARs outbreak with warnings about Wales' readiness for

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an infectious disease and documented a need for plans for PPE and care homes to be prepared. Were these recommendations acted upon and if so, how were the lessons from this exercise developed to support the response to the Covid-19 pandemic?

Gaps in relation to recommendations

While we welcome the recommendations brought forward by the Inquiry, it is felt that there is an inherent gap related to these until clarity is provided over who will be accountable for taking forward each recommendation.

The recommendation for better data collection and sharing is welcome but it is important to identify what 'better data' will actually look like and how accessible and comparable such information will be across four different UK health systems. The Observation Group also felt there had been a relative paucity of data from Wales during the inquiry to date and wondered if this constituted a gap due to data publication.

Beyond simply the issues around data, there is a need to have clarity on who from Wales will have ownership of responding to the recommendations and how responsibility for implementing the changes will be determined in a manner that allows for auditing of progress.

Healthcare preparedness

Finally, we note that healthcare preparedness was de-scoped from the first module. Clearly, it is an important consideration, and we anticipate that it will be covered in subsequent modules. Nonetheless, we think it important that this current 'gap' is not overlooked, should it not be fully addressed for Wales in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Nicolas Webb

On behalf of the Covid Committee Observation Group

Notes:

The Covid Committee Observation Group includes representation from predominantly health and care sector organisations along with colleagues from other sectors affected during the pandemic. The group is currently Chaired by Nicolas Webb, Policy & Public Affairs Manager, Royal College of GPs.

Terms of Reference: Covid Committee Observation Group

1. Background: The Covid Committee Observation Group is formed to actively engage with the Senedd Covid-19 Special Purposes Committee. This group, hereinafter referred to as the "Observation Group," comprises health and care policy specialists dedicated to providing constructive insights and recommendations to support the committee's efforts in addressing the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Objectives: a. To observe and analyse the proceedings, discussions, and decisions of the Senedd Covid-19 Special Purposes Committee. b. To offer expert opinions, evidence-based insights, and policy recommendations on matters relevant to health and care in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. c. To facilitate open and constructive dialogue between the Observation Group and the Senedd Covid-19 Special Purposes Committee and other relevant stakeholders.

3. Membership: a. The Observation Group shall be comprised of health and care policy specialists including those representing professional bodies and condition specific organisations. b. Nicolas Webb will serve as the interim Chair until the first meeting, where a chairperson will be elected.

4. Roles and Responsibilities: a. Conduct regular observations of the Senedd Covid-19 Special Purposes Committee meetings and related activities. b. Provide timely and informed feedback, recommendations, and analyses to the committee based on observed proceedings. c. Collaborate with the Senedd Covid-19 Special Purposes Committee in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. d. Ensure active participation and engagement from all Observation Group members. e. Elect a chairperson at the first meeting to provide leadership and coordination for the group.

5. Meetings: a. Meetings shall be scheduled to discuss observations, findings, and strategic initiatives. b. Meetings may be held virtually or in person, depending on prevailing circumstances. c. Additional meetings may be convened as needed to address emerging issues or respond to committee developments.

6. Duration: The Covid Committee Observation Group shall operate for the duration of the work of the Senedd Covid-19 Special Purposes Committee plus one month to allow for concluding administration. There will also be scope to review the Observation Group's continued relevance at regular intervals.

7. Confidentiality: Members must adhere to confidentiality agreements and guidelines to ensure the responsible handling of sensitive information discussed within the group.

8. Review and Amendments: These terms of reference may be reviewed and amended as necessary, with input from group members and approval from the Covid Committee Observation Group.

9. Approval: These terms of reference are hereby approved by the interim Chair, Nicolas Webb, and the founding members of the Covid Committee Observation Group on [date].

Signed:

[Interim Chair's Signature] [Nicolas Webb] [Names and Signatures of Founding Members]