

GOVERNANCE: PRIME MINISTER COMMITTS TO A FUTURE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO UK GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS (UK)

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Legal Briefings

Following demands from the opposition and various campaigning groups, the Prime Minister has now committed to an independent inquiry into the handling of the coronavirus pandemic. In previous weeks, the Government had been reluctant to publicly commit to an inquiry, but this pledge in the House of Commons was the first clear statement on the issue. The Prime Minister did not commit to any specific timeline for an inquiry, but noted that “*now in the middle of combatting...a pandemic*” was not the right time for an investigation. The structure of the inquiry is also unclear at this stage, although the Prime Minister has been urged to confirm that the inquiry would be under the Inquiries Act 2005. Downing Street has suggested that the remit would be set out “*in due course*”.

The issues which any inquiry will examine – which will be framed by the inquiry’s formal “terms of reference” – will depend in large part on the developing political landscape, and on how matters develop over the coming months. Some of the possible issues that we see an inquiry covering include issues around the supply of PPE, supply chain issues, the impact of the crisis on BAME individuals, and the Government’s actions in light of the scientific advice from groups such as the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (“**SAGE**”). Some discrete aspects such as possible issues with the reporting of coronavirus deaths are already being reviewed by the Government internally, but that would not stop a future inquiry from looking at these issues.

From the perspective of commercial organisations, the inquiry could cover a very wide range of sectors and industries. For instance, pharmaceutical companies may be called on to give evidence in relation to the development of a vaccine and treatments. If the inquiry looks at the economic aspects of the crisis, large banks and financial organisations may be approached for evidence. The inquiry may also look at the role of independent advisors and organisations who are members of SAGE.

In a recent episode of our [public law podcast](#), we discussed the possible establishment of a public inquiry into the handling of the coronavirus pandemic. The episode looked at some of the key risks to organisations, and touched on some practical learnings from HSF's involvement in other high-profile inquiries such as the Leveson Inquiry and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

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KEY CONTACTS

If you have any questions, or would like to know how this might affect your business, phone, or email these key contacts.



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