

Stakeholder Event on the Module 1 Report of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry: Summary Document

January 2025



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About the Committee

The Committee was established on 16 May 2023. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddCovid

Current Committee membership:



Co-chair:
Tom Giffard MS
Welsh Conservatives



Co-chair:
Joyce Watson MS
Welsh Labour



Mabon ap Gwynfor MS
Plaid Cymru



Rhianon Passmore MS
Welsh Labour



Sam Rowlands MS
Welsh Conservatives



Buffy Williams MS
Welsh Labour

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Co-Chairs' Foreword

The Wales COVID-19 Inquiry Special Purpose Committee was set up over 18-months ago and was given a very specific remit, which has committed the Committee to looking at the reports of each stage of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry. With the publication of the first report on the resilience and preparedness of the UK, in July of this year, the Committee is underway in its evidence gathering. We would like to acknowledge the possible frustration and concern that some stakeholders have had to this point, but are confident that the Committee's work will now develop at pace.

To identify the gaps in preparedness for and response of the Welsh Government to the pandemic for further examination, the Committee has compiled a comprehensive engagement strategy which consists of a gap analysis being undertaken by civil contingency experts from Nottingham Trent University, a public consultation and a stakeholder event where we heard invaluable views, experiences and insights from key stakeholders that are summarised in this report.

All of the evidence gathered from the gap analysis, public consultation and stakeholder event will be considered and used by the Committee to agree on any gaps.. These gaps will then be proposed in a motion to the Senedd.

Subject to the approval of these gaps by the Senedd, we will then begin holding public oral evidence sessions with relevant witnesses and the Welsh Government.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. On the left is the signature 'Joyce Watson' and on the right is the signature 'Tom Giffard'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joyce Watson

Tom Giffard

Co-Chairs, Covid-19 Inquiry Special Purpose Committee

1. Introduction

1. The Wales Covid-19 Inquiry Special Purpose Committee (the Committee) has been established by the Senedd to look at reports at each stage of the UK COVID-19 Inquiry and propose to the Senedd by motion, any gaps identified in the preparedness and response of the Welsh Government and other Welsh public bodies during the COVID-19 pandemic that should be subject to further examination.
2. The UK Covid-19 Inquiry published its first report, “Module 1: The resilience and preparedness of the United Kingdom” on 18 July 2024¹.
3. At its meeting on 4 November 2024², the Committee announced its approach to engagement and evidence gathering for consideration of Module 1 of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry. This included hosting a hybrid roundtable stakeholder event on Monday 2 December 2024, in order to hear views on the Module 1 report, and to identify any potential gaps.
4. In addition to hosting the stakeholder event, the Committee agreed that it would launch a public consultation to hear the views of the public on the Module 1 Report, and commission a gap analysis of the Module 1 report by expert academics at Nottingham Trent University.
5. The views gathered at this stakeholder event will feed into how the Committee identifies any gaps that require further scrutiny. In accordance with the Committee’s remit, a motion will be proposed to the Senedd seeking approval for any gaps identified to be examined further. Subject to the agreement of the motion by the Senedd, the Committee will hold oral evidence session in the New Year and will report.
6. The Committee would like to thank everyone that has contributed to its work at this stage.

¹ UK Covid-19 Inquiry, [Inquiry Module Reports](#).

² Wales COVID-19 Inquiry Special Purpose Committee meeting, [2 November 2024](#).

2. Stakeholder Event

Background

7. The Committee's stakeholder event took place on Monday 2 December 2024, at Tŷ Hywel, part of the Senedd estate in Cardiff.³

8. Invites were issued to key stakeholders. 10 organisations participated in the event, from a range of sectors, all of which had valuable experience and evidence on pandemic preparation and preparedness. Information for the event was circulated to participants in advance of the session. A list of the organisations that were represented can be found in the Annex.

9. It is important to note that the following is a summary of views shared with the Committee and are not the views of the Committee. All information shared with us will be carefully considered and used to inform our scrutiny. Our own views will be published in a report in due course once we have completed our work.



³ Wales COVID-19 Inquiry Special Purpose Committee Stakeholder Event, 2 December 2024.

3. Summary of the discussion

Whether the Module 1 recommendations address the most important actions needed to improve Wales's preparedness and resilience as part of the UK

10. There was a general consensus from participants that the recommendations made in the UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 report are comprehensive and appropriate, but there were concerns about the lack of clarity and specificity for Wales. It was noted that the recommendations are a 'one size fits all' that are directed jointly to the UK and devolved governments to respond, which will be challenging. There are no specific actions for the Welsh Government and the Welsh element has been lost. More specific concerns are detailed below:

- It was noted that because the recommendations are broad and UK focused, they are not clear and specific enough to Wales and local arrangements. It was felt that the recommendations do not focus enough on the role of or give sufficient direction to Local Resilience Forums (LRFs), who have a significant role to play in resilience planning. At the local level, multi-agency LRFs operate within the four Police Force areas: South Wales, North Wales, Dyfed-Powys and Gwent, which all operate differently. Therefore, participants said there needs to be greater consistency and clarity in their roles and responsibilities within the wider structures. However, it was noted that there is good collaborative working between LRFs.
- Participants highlighted the benefit of Wales being a small nation, with the ability to respond flexibly and quickly due to the close relationships with public services in order to draw up their own plans to respond to the pandemic. However, the pandemic also exposed the complexities in the Welsh NHS governance arrangements and the difference between the four devolved UK nations. Participants felt that communication was challenging, and the complexities of devolution sometimes made it unclear where information was coming from and how it applied to Wales.
- Participants also felt the Module 1 report could have included a recommendation for clearer governance structures.

- Concerns were also expressed that the UK Covid Inquiry Module 1 had not considered the informal communication channels that exist in Wales and how beneficial these had been in responding to the pandemic.
- The importance of a UK-wide approach to resilience planning, and the need to avoid any silo working between the four devolved governments was a key issue that participants wished to see going forward.
- There was a view that local knowledge in resilience planning needs to be drawn on and listened to, rather than a 'top down' approach from government.
- Better reporting and sharing of data between LRFs and each of the four devolved nations is needed. Participants also emphasised the importance of capturing 'blueprints' of actions during the pandemic and lessons learned to improve on future resilience planning and ensure institutional knowledge is maintained and not lost with staff churn.
- This 'blueprint' should capture how Wales approached the pandemic from start to finish and reflect on how a pandemic could be responded to in the future.
- It was also felt that Module 1 of the UK Inquiry had not focussed on the well-being of those involved in working in resilience and preparedness for civil emergencies. The experiences of those who showed goodwill, personal sacrifice and bore the cost of responding to the pandemic needs to be recognised as this level of willingness to respond in this way may not exist should there be another pandemic.
- Specific concerns were raised in relation to recommendations 9 and 10. In recommendation 9, it was felt that clarity is required on the remit of the 'red teams', including the resource that will be required. In relation to recommendation 10, it was highlighted there is a risk that a statutory body would be able to set its own terms and standards.
- The Welsh Government Task and Finish Ministerial Advisory Group NHS Wales Accountability Review was noted but participants were unclear whether the Module 1 report recommendations have taken any of this into account.

- The Wales Resilience Forum (chaired by the First Minister) was also noted. One participant said this is a credible forum that is making improvements, such as streamlining governance structures, and considering a range of risks and their consequences.
- Many participants were also of the view that other reports need to be considered in terms of identifying gaps for further scrutiny by the Committee. For example, there were many reports published by Senedd Committees during and after the pandemic that scrutinised the Welsh Government's approach to preparedness and resilience

If the recommendations are realistic and achievable within the timeframe set in the report. The challenges and barriers when implementing the recommendations.

11. Participants repeated their view that the principles in the recommendations are valid and said that strong leadership will be required to set out a new vision for structures in line with the recommendations. However, they were concerned that there is not sufficient funding, capacity or the expertise required to implement them. Participants also felt the timescales were ambitious and it was difficult to assess whether they are reasonable until the Welsh Government's response to the Module 1 report is available.

12. It was also noted that there have been significant changes in personnel within the Welsh Government, with three First Ministers taking office since the pandemic, which participants felt had not been communicated well. There is a draft Welsh Resilience Framework which is currently waiting to be signed off by the First Minister. However, it is thought that the draft is being reviewed to take account of the Module 1 report recommendations. Further comments included:

- Wide scale exercises take a lot of resources and time. It was noted that LRFs are not resourced as well as their counterparts in England, so implementation of recommendation 6 might be challenging. There has to be sufficient resource to undertake the exercises but also to share and implement the learning from them.
- Most resilience planning is bolted on 'to the day job', and can be pushed to the back of the priority list.
- In relation to recommendation 5, participants noted that England are ahead in terms of public sector bodies collecting and sharing data.

Whilst NHS Wales collects a huge amount of data, it is unclear whether that data is use effectively and is shared with other public sector organisations.

- There needs to be local involvement in the new structures, something that the recommendations fail to take into account. Participants were concerned how the work and planning already being undertaken by organisations will be incorporated into the recommendations. It was noted that it is difficult to know if any new structures / plans will work.
- It was agreed that the recommendations, despite their best efforts to take into account the devolved governments, looked more at a “what will work for everyone” approach, but in practice this does not really work when dealing with a global pandemic. The point was raised that research data needs to be done in Wales.
- It was suggested that the Welsh Government should look at Scottish Multi Agency Resilience Training and Exercise Unit as an example of good practice

The individuals, organisations or bodies that should be responsible for implementing the recommendations

13. Participants said there needs to be ‘clear ownership’ and accountability for implementing the recommendations and that the Welsh Government should take the lead on implementing the recommendations in Wales. However, there were concerns about who precisely has ownership of the recommendations made in the Module 1 report given they are directed at all of the governments within the UK Participants stressed the need for clarity on who in Wales is responsible for implementation given the complexities of the structures around civil contingencies.

14. Good intergovernmental relations between the Welsh and UK governments will be essential, as well as robust consultation with key stakeholders and bodies that will be delivering the recommendations, including category 1 and 2 responders, and the third sector. Further concerns included:

- A view that legislative change is needed across the UK to create more uniformity locally, with participants questioning whether the Civil Contingency Act 2004 is still fit for purpose. Participants agreed with the recommendations that whole scale civil service changes are

needed but someone needs to look at how LRFs support that, which may require legislation.

- The pandemic brought a very different set of challenges to usual resilience planning and there needs to be a discussion about how it all fits together with clarity on the role of LRFs.
- During the pandemic, LRFs spent a lot of time waiting for the UK and Welsh governments to give direction, guidance and answers that held up their work. The responsibilities of the UK and Welsh governments need clarifying so LRFs can be better prepared in future. Effective working relationships between the UK and Welsh governments can be complicated because there is an imbalance in the capacity and levels of expertise between the two.
- A framework needs to be developed that sets out how Welsh Government will monitor and assure the performance of LRFs in Wales.
- Participants suggested ways to monitor implementation of the recommendations including the creation of a “Resilience Commissioner” or as a role for a Senedd Committee.
- Following the establishment of the [NHS Wales Executive](#) in 2023, participants felt it is the obvious choice to adopt command and control, and could have a role to play in implementing some elements of the recommendations.

The role of key stakeholders in implementing and monitoring the recommendations and ways to keep stakeholder and the public updated on progress

15. There was a general consensus that there should be a single repository, hosted by the Welsh Government that has all the information the public need to assure themselves about resilience planning. However, it was noted that some information about preparedness needs to be kept confidential for security reasons. Other issues raised included:

- consideration is needed to combat mis/disinformation on social media. An official, reliable source of information would help with this.
- It was noted that recommendations from the Manchester arena bombing inquiry have been implemented, which have had significant

impact on LRFs and the blue light services. Whilst lessons have been learnt and policies and practices have changed, this has not been communicated well. Doing so may help to give the public more confidence that things would be handled differently if it happened again. Participants felt the same applies to the Module 1 report recommendations.

- The recommendations from the Grenfell Tower inquiry were also mentioned and the importance of a duty of candour/ trust in public bodies.
- Some participants called for better interoperability and clarity in any amended civil contingencies planning, with a suggestion that having fewer organisations and stakeholders involved might streamline the process. Going forward, it needed to be clearer which organisations would be the lead bodies and which would be implementing any changes.

Whether the recommendations address the unique needs and circumstances of Wales within the UK context

16. Some participants felt that while efforts were made to consider Wales in the recommendations, the focus was predominantly on England. Participants emphasised the importance of a UK-wide approach to civil emergency resilience and planning but noted the different funding available to the UK and devolved governments. Some participants noted that the report did not cover the resourcing in Wales.

17. The issue of the Welsh Language was raised as a potential barrier to providing evidence to the inquiry and that the UK Covid Inquiry has completely overlooked the use of Welsh language.

The resources required to implement the recommendations in the report

18. Generally, participants did not feel that the resources required to implement the recommendations were adequately considered in the report. Participants raised the on-going challenges faced by local government, with resources already being stretched, even before beginning to think about implementing the recommendations. It was unclear to most participants whether any further resources would be provided to implement the recommendations.

19. The significant personal sacrifices made by staff to maintain public services during the pandemic were highlighted. This was often at great personal cost, and raised the question of whether staff would be willing to make similar sacrifices in the future.

Annex - List of stakeholder event participants.

The following organisations participated in the stakeholder event on 2 December 2024.

No	Organisation
1	Carmarthenshire County Council
2	The Covid Committee Observation Group
3	Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service
4	Newport City Council
5	North Wales Fire and Rescue Service
6	Public Health Wales
7	The Royal College of General Practitioners
8	Transport for Wales
9	The Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust
10	Welsh NHS Confederation