

Poverty and Inequality Commission response to COVID-19 Public Inquiry Aims and Principles

October 2021

Aims

The Commission would like to see the aims of the inquiry include explicit reference to the impact of the pandemic on poverty and inequality and the actions taken in response. We would note that dividing harms into societal and economic impacts, and actions to address these, risks ignoring the way that these factors interact and combine to exacerbate poverty and inequality.

The inquiry aims should also be explicit that the inquiry will look at which groups have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, particularly those with protected characteristics and those experiencing existing inequality. It should look at how the actions taken so far have aligned with the needs of these groups, and how existing and emerging policies can now be aligned to ensure that the long term impact is not to deepen these inequalities.

The inquiry should look at how lessons can be learned from the response to the pandemic, which can be applied to other major societal issues, including treating poverty as a public health emergency. This should include looking at how organisations worked together and cut through red tape to deliver what was needed quickly, and the important role played by local community groups and third sector organisations. It should look at how funding was allocated, to whom, and to what extent it got directly to those in the greatest need.

More specifically, the inquiry should make sure that the impact of the pandemic on unpaid carers is considered as a specific area of focus to ensure it is not overlooked. This should include the impact on health and mental health, finance, employment and wellbeing. It should also look at the impact on all aspects of the lives of children and young people, not just the educational impact.

How the inquiry will work

The inquiry must work with those who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic to ensure that they can shape the inquiry and make sure their voices are heard. There should be a panel of members who work with the Chair, which should include members with experience of inequality, who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The inquiry should be as informal as possible and support people to participate in a range of ways, so that it is as accessible as possible. It should listen to advice from Disabled People's Organisations on how to achieve this, and also consider other barriers to participation such as transport, childcare or digital costs. Inquiry materials should be made available in Easy Read.