



HOUSE OF LORDS

PUBLIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Rt Hon. The Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top
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6 April 2022

Dear Heather (if I may),

Please accept my congratulations on your appointment as Chair of the public inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the draft Terms of Reference for that inquiry are currently out for consultation, I am writing to draw your attention to two substantive pieces of work undertaken by the Public Services Committee, which I Chair. The Committee's reports should be of interest to you, both in agreeing the inquiry's remit, and in achieving the difficult task of identifying the lessons learned from the pandemic.

Our report, "Children in crisis: the role of public services in overcoming child vulnerability" included a crucial section on the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable children. COVID-19 has likely increased vulnerability by exacerbating existing causes such as food poverty, domestic violence and parental mental health. Likewise, existing cracks in the delivery of public services have expanded, which has disproportionately impacted "left behind" groups; including vulnerable children. Covid has affected our ability even to ascertain the numbers.

Your inquiry aims to establish the impact of the pandemic. The draft Terms of Reference rightly include consideration of homelessness, prisons, and restrictions on attendance to places of education. I would urge you to consider our report carefully as you determine whether "vulnerable children" should, as the Children's Commissioner has urged, be mentioned specifically within the Terms of Reference.

Your second strand of work aims to identify the lessons learned from the pandemic and the response. A formidable task. It will necessarily consider the role of public services (a broad term which encompasses health, social care, education and much of the justice system), in preparations for future pandemics. The Committee's first inquiry identified that the pandemic created an opportunity for reform – the very spirit in which your inquiry was established. We crafted eight key principles to shape this reform. They can be found in our report, "A critical juncture for public services: lessons from COVID-19".

As the terms of reference of your inquiry take shape, I hope you will consider these reports and their findings carefully.

I wish you the best of luck in the important task you have ahead of you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Hilary Armstrong". The signature is written in a dark ink on a light-colored background.

Baroness Hilary Armstrong of Hill Top