

**BROOK HOUSE INQUIRY**

**PRELIMINARY HEARING 14 DECEMBER 2020**

**CHAIR'S UPDATE**

Good morning. Welcome to Core Participants, along with their legal representatives, and I would also like to welcome those members of the public and the press who are observing this hearing via the Inquiry's livestream.

This is the second preliminary hearing of the Brook House Inquiry. Regrettably, we remain in a public health situation which necessitates this hearing being conducted virtually, as was the case with the first preliminary hearing. Again, I am grateful to the Inquiry team and technicians working behind the scenes to facilitate this hearing and to ensure its smooth running. On that note, can I please briefly remind all those participating to keep in mind the housekeeping guidance issued by the Inquiry team. Please ensure that you are on mute unless invited to address the hearing by myself or Counsel to the Inquiry, Ms Cathryn McGahey, Queen's Counsel.

I will shortly turn to Ms McGahey to provide a brief progress update on the Inquiry's work, after which I will hear submissions from Core Participants or their legal representatives. Before I hand over to Ms McGahey, I would like to make a few brief comments. Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to update that the Inquiry has in place a free, independent and confidential Witness Support Service from crisis support charity Hestia, to support witnesses through the process of giving evidence to the Inquiry. Please do visit the "Witness Support" tab on the Inquiry's website for details, in a number of languages, of the support they offer and how you can contact them.

Today's hearing was convened to allow adequate time to hear submissions in relation to the Inquiry's scope. I am grateful to Core Participants for the written submissions I have received on the Inquiry's scope and my interpretation of its Terms of Reference. I have read all of these submission in full, along with the note from Counsel to the Inquiry which was sent to Core Participants on 7 December 2020. Today's hearing will allow me the opportunity to listen to any supplementary oral submissions, and I will do so with care. To the extent that it may be helpful to Core Participants and their legal representatives, I can provide

an initial steer regarding the matters upon which I am particularly interested to hear their views.

As I set out in both my opening statement in April and at the first preliminary hearing in September, it is my view that this Inquiry must build upon and add to the findings of previous inquiries and investigations into events at Brook House. Again, as I have previously outlined, this Inquiry's fundamental role is to address the questions of 'what was happening in Brook House between April and August 2017?' and 'how can such events be prevented?'. I will also say again that it is my view that the principal focus of the Inquiry will be the treatment – and mistreatment – of detainees once they had arrived at Brook House.

However, I also want to reiterate my view that any recommendations made as a result of this Inquiry must be capable of bringing about change to prevent mistreatment in IRCs now and in the future: they should not be recommendations that only have relevance to the specific place and time of the mistreatment shown on Panorama.

I therefore consider that the determination I will reach on scope will answer the question of the *degree to which* events or systems outside Brook House and before or after April to August 2017 are relevant to answering the central question for this Inquiry: what happened and how can it be prevented in future? I will listen carefully to each of the submissions and suggest that they will be of particular assistance if that overall question can be kept clearly in mind.

That concludes my introductory comments. Ms. McGahey, I will now turn to you and ask that you please provide an update on the Inquiry's progress.