



## CABINET OFFICE

Catherine Little CB  
Civil Service Chief Operating Officer  
and Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary  
3 October

Dear Mr Cox,

I am grateful for your letter dated 31 January 2024 relating to the deaths of Michael Pender, Jan Klempar and Paul Mullen. Thank you also for the Regulation 28 Preventing Future Deaths report you prepared setting out your judgement following the inquests into the deaths and your concerns around the circumstances in which these deaths occurred.

I note from your letter dated 10 May 2024 that you are seeking a formal response to your Preventing Future Deaths report, following my letter acknowledging receipt of the same.

I have reviewed the concerns that you highlighted for the Government's attention in relation to the easing of Covid-19 measures in the first half of 2020, which served as the common backdrop for the deaths as detailed in your correspondence. I also acknowledge the concern you have raised in relation to the issue of beach safety policy more generally, and responsibility for it within UK Government.

Please find below the actions taken or planned action in relation to your recommendations relating to these issues, or an explanation where no action is being taken.

### Covid-19 measures

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry is ongoing and given they are also in receipt of your Preventing Future Deaths report, we await its recommendations from Module 2 of the Inquiry, focussing on decision-making and political governance during the pandemic. However, I believe it is appropriate to pass on your observations to the government departments most likely to influence future measures in a similar pandemic or national crisis and have addressed your concerns relating to Covid-19 measures as follows:

- On the issue of the RNLI lifeguards not being eligible for furlough, we have shared your concerns with HMT and HMRC given their oversight of the policy, which they have acknowledged receipt of. Covid economic support schemes, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, are being examined in Module 9 of the Inquiry, and we await the Inquiry's recommendations on this issue;

- On the RNLI receiving advance notice to allow them to recruit and train lifeguards, the Department for Transport and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency have advised they maintain a strong working relationship with the RNLI with regular communication with the organisation. Government communication is also a subject that was covered in Module 2 of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry so we await their recommendations in relation to this;
- On the concerns around the RNLI not having access to an adequate supply of PPE, we have passed your concerns onto DHSC, which they have acknowledged receipt of. The procurement and distribution of healthcare related supplies including PPE is being examined in Module 5 of the Inquiry, and we await the Inquiry's recommendations on this issue.

### Beach safety policy

I note your concerns in relation to beach safety policy more generally, including the calls for greater clarity for landowners and occupiers on their duties, and the lack of clear departmental responsibility within government. Government is currently considering these issues and we would be happy to provide your office with an update as this progresses.

You raised, in particular, the National Water Safety Forum's (NWSF) target to reduce drownings by half by 2026. When formed in 2004, the Forum brought together a broad range of existing groups into a one-stop-shop for the prevention of drowning and water safety harm in the UK. HM Coastguard (HMCG), part of the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA), is a member of the Forum and works with stakeholders to share information from HMCG incidents. The MCA communications team works with HMCG to highlight safety messaging to members of the public in attempts to try to reduce incidents around the coastline of the UK.

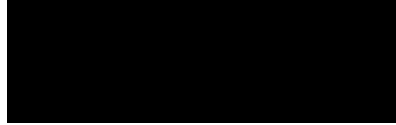
The MCA's surveyors and marine office teams ensure that vessels are safe for those working or travelling on board. Their navigation specialists support the team and wider services to protect routes taken. The fishing industry is important for the United Kingdom (UK), and we continue to work with this sector to reduce fatalities and support them in developing best work practices.

The data from the NWSF's Water Incident Database suggests the number of deaths caused by drowning have fluctuated in recent years. There has been a significant increase in water-based activity participation rates over the past four years, particularly stand-up paddle boarding, kayaking and open-water swimming. The Forum believes that a more defined reduction in drownings in relation to population and participation numbers would be evident were these factors fully analysed.

The NWSF are improving their data collection to enhance understanding of the data. They intend to broaden their risk assessment to include rescues to understand localities that require targeted prevention work. In addition, they plan to carry out a demographic analysis to assess the impact of reduced rates of swimming attainment in schools to assist in future plans to prevent drownings.

I am grateful to you for bringing the above issues to my attention. We remain committed to working with the Inquiry to facilitate its investigations into the pandemic, and we await any recommendations it may make in the areas you have raised, as well as any further questions or comments you may have on the above.

Yours sincerely,

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Civil Service Chief Operating Officer & Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary

**Email**

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