

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Department of Health

### APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR TO THE PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE AT MUCKAMORE ABBEY HOSPITAL

*Published at 12.00 pm on 30 June 2021.*

**Mr Swann (The Minister of Health):** In my oral statement to the Assembly, on 8 September 2020, I advised Members of my intention to establish a Public Inquiry, under the Inquiries Act 2005, into the allegations of abuse at Muckamore Abbey Hospital. It remains my belief that a Public Inquiry offers the most appropriate method to ensure that the full extent of the concerns are identified and for the patients and families affected to be confident that matters are being pursued in a transparent and independent manner.

I am pleased to confirm that I have appointed Mr Tom Kark QC as Chair of the Inquiry, with the aim of getting the inquiry fully underway by autumn 2021. Mr Kark QC is a highly experienced Queen's Counsel with significant involvement in medical regulation work and public inquiries. He acted as Senior Counsel to the Public Inquiry into the failures at the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust under the chairmanship of Robert Francis QC. In 2019 Mr Kark was also instructed by the Minister for Health (England) to examine the working of the Fit and Proper Person test as it was applied to senior executives in the NHS. Mr Kark has sat as a part time Judge (Recorder) since 1999 and has authorisations to hear Appeal cases from the Magistrates Court, cases involving serious sexual offences and also to sit at the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey). He has undertaken training in dealing with and questioning vulnerable witnesses. I believe that his professional expertise and participation in public inquiries, alongside his training in dealing with, and questioning of, vulnerable witnesses equips him to chair the Muckamore Public Inquiry.

In September 2020 I made a commitment to the families and patients at the centre of this that I would engage with them to influence the terms of reference. Engagement events took place between December and February, facilitated by the Patient and Client Council (PCC), and the final report was received in the Department. That report will also be published today with those families for whom the Department and PCC hold email contact details receiving a copy in advance of publication. The next steps will include finalising the terms of reference for the inquiry with Mr Kark.

The patients and families affected remain my focus as we move to establish the Public Inquiry. I trust that the actions taken here will go some way to addressing their concerns and I will endeavour to ensure that they obtain the appropriate treatment, support and the care that they need.