

What is Sunak so desperate to hide?

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I set out the legal arrangements surrounding the demand for data made of the government by Lady Hallett, the former judge who is now heading the Covid inquiry, [earlier this week](#).

I suggested then that three things very strongly suggest that Lady Hallett should be given the data that she has demanded.

The first is that the government had created the demand that she review its decision-making. It cannot then say that she does not need relevant data that might help her do so.

Second, the Inquiries Act 2005 clearly makes an inquiry chair the arbiter of what an inquiry might require.

Third, whilst an appeal against the decision of an inquiry chair is permitted the person who decides on that appeal is very clearly stated in law to be the inquiry chair. That might sound perverse until you appreciate that the government appoints that chair precisely because they think that they are in possession of the required judgement to undertake this task.

The net result is that when the government announced yesterday that it planned to ask for a judicial review that might consider these very issues its behaviour was really rather bizarre.

That was partly because it is in effect saying it got the terms of reference for this inquiry wrong.

It is also because it is, by implication, saying that it appointed the wrong person to head this inquiry.

And it is also saying it does not like a law that it knew would be used when creating an inquiry under the unambiguous 2005 Act.

Hardly surprisingly, experienced lawyers are queuing up to say that the chance of the government even securing a judicial review is low, whilst the chance that they might get their desired outcome is still lower.

In other words, this appeal is the desperate act of a desperate government that is desperate to hide the truth. The obvious inference is that there is in the potential revelations something desperately damaging to someone still serving in government.

That someone can only be Rishi Sunak.

Sunak would happily throw Johnson under a bus.

The hopeless Matt Hancock was always retained in office to be the fall guy. How others must have regretted him falling too early on the sword of his own lust.

Gove is too peripheral, whilst ever-present.

So there is only Sunak who can motivate this concern by the current government.

What is Sunak worried about? I suggest at least three things.

First, we know from Matt Hancock's book that it was widely known in government that Sunak's 'Eat out to help out' scheme in the summer of 2020 that supposedly helped the restaurant trade did increase rates of Covid infection. What is more, we know this was known at the time because Hancock has said efforts were made to cover the Treasury's responsibility for the resulting deaths. Those deaths are Sunak's to account for. They might even be his fault. It's something he, no doubt, does not want to accept.

Second, Sunak was known by September 2020 to be the big Cabinet supporter of the far-right-inspired Great Barrington Declaration. Promoted by the American Enterprise Institute, but in part originating from Oxford, the British Medical Journal [noted this of the Declaration](#):

The authors ... said that because older people were 1,000 times more likely to die of covid-19 than younger people, an "age stratified" approach could allow resources to be focused on older and high risk patients, while allowing younger and healthier people to attend school and keep businesses open.

They argue that focused protection would reduce the "collateral harms" of lockdown, including deaths from suicides, reduced childhood immunization, and increases in domestic violence.

The reality was that the ideas were obviously absurd. It was, of course, impossible to stratify society by age. In that case, the suggested idea that the virus should be allowed to spread amongst younger people to supposedly create herd immunity was always the work of fantasists who were indifferent to the actual consequences for those who would

suffer.

That did not prevent Sunak from bringing the authors to Downing Street. And the ideas in the Declaration undoubtedly influenced policy in the UK as a result, including further delays in lockdowns and the disastrous Christmas reopening in 2020.

Johnson may then have supposedly said “Let the bodies pile high” but it was Sunak who argued for the policy that would guarantee that they did.

So, third, of course Sunak wants to hide data from the inquiry. He is worried about the personal, political, and even legal consequences for him.

Will those consequences arise? If they are appropriate, I hope that they do. Who wouldn't? Anyone should be held accountable for reckless irresponsibility in public office. My suspicion is that Sunak might just bring forward the date when his reckoning arrives by bringing this action now. If so, that's all to the good. If we have a man indifferent to human suffering because of his desire to balance the Treasury budget now in charge of the country as prime minister, we need to know. I hope Lady Hallett will tell us.