

PE1808/B

Scottish Government submission of 7 October 2020

In consideration of the request from the Petitions Committee for further information, the following response is provided.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted reinforced the crucial role of social care, for supporting wellbeing and independent living and as a critical part of our integrated health and social care system. Before the pandemic we had already begun work to address the considerable issues highlighted in the Fair Work Commission report into Social Care. A key strand of this is how we achieve Fair Work for all of our social care workforce. The pandemic has brought many of these issues into sharper focus.

The Fair Work in Social Care Group was paused due to the pandemic earlier this year but re-started in June. Membership includes trade unions, COSLA and social care representatives, and the group is working to develop and implement proposals to embed fair work principles that will lead to better terms and conditions and more rewarding roles for the social care workforce. This covers people working in social care, including care homes, care at home, housing and other support. An interim report of the Fair Work in Social Care group is currently being developed with full proposals by the end of 2020.

The work of this group builds on the joint Scottish Government and COSLA policy that all adult social care workers are paid at least the independently calculated Real living Wage, currently £9.30 per hour. This is higher than the National Minimum Wage of £8.72 which applies to many social care workers in England and Wales.

While the Scottish Government is not an employer of care staff, we are clear that social care workers should not suffer financial hardship because their employer terms and conditions do not meet fair work principles. Throughout the pandemic there have been regular engagement meetings with stakeholders, including trade unions. This has led to a package of measures for the social care workforce including establishment of the Social Care Staff Support Fund. The purpose of the Fund is to ensure that social care workers receive their expected income should they be off ill or self-isolating due to COVID-19.

We recognise that the effects of the coronavirus crisis is impacting on all aspects of our lives and those working in the care home sector, perhaps more than most, will be feeling an added strain on their mental health and wellbeing. The Minister for Mental Health is working closely with partners across the health and social care sector, including NHS Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships and local employers, to ensure a range of psychological and wellbeing support is in place for the workforce.

We launched the National Wellbeing Hub on the 11th May for the whole health and social care workforce and unpaid carers. Based on a Psychological First Aid approach, the Hub provides advice on self-care and services to promote emotional and psychological wellbeing and address practical concerns. It also provides access to a bespoke digital coaching service to support health, wellbeing and resilience.

The Independent Review of Adult Social Care will have a particular, but not exclusive focus on the views of those with lived experience about what needs to change to make real and lasting improvements. This will include the experiences of those who work in social care and the independent review will be considering employment arrangements, opportunities for training and progression, relationships with other professions across health and social care, and the work already underway around Fair Work.

The safety, protection and wellbeing of residents and staff in our care home sector has always been a top priority. The Scottish Government has stepped in to provide both top up and emergency provision of PPE to care homes and social care organisations. The Care Home Rapid Action Group was established to take action at a local level where needed. A key success of this group included the development and rolling out of a strategy for testing for all care home staff. To ensure appropriate planning across the whole of social care this has now transitioned in to the Pandemic Response Adult Social Care Group.

The independent Chair of the review, Derek Feeley, has already met with trade union representatives and will continue to meet with them on a monthly basis. Along with an extensive programme of stakeholder engagement, this will ensure that those who work in social care and their representatives are able to fully participate in the review.