

PE1841/W

National Clinical Director submission of 4 March 2021

Thank you for your letter of 18 February concerning the Committee's consideration of the petition to allow a designated visitor into care homes. It was very helpful to receive an overview of the Committee's deliberations on this important issue.

Since you have written, you will be aware that we have published guidance to support care homes to provide meaningful contact between residents and their friends and families. This is available at [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): adult care homes guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/healthandcare/coronavirus/covid-19/adult-care-homes-guidance). I understand that the Cabinet Secretary wrote to you on 3 March outlining that the guidance sets out how indoor contact in care homes will gradually increase while minimising COVID-19 risks to residents, staff and visitors. It has been developed with input from relatives of care home residents, care home providers, clinical experts and others and it recommends up to two designated visitors per resident per week (visiting one at a time) for care homes that meet certain safety conditions, such as compliance with Infection Prevention and Control measures, regular staff and visitor testing and having a high level of vaccination coverage.

As the Cabinet Secretary set out, this is now possible as we have multiple levels of safeguards and protection in place and evidence about how to protect against the Covid-19 virus has also developed. With protection in place, that is maintained and rigorously sustained, we can now return to safe, indoor visiting. This means that everyone living in adult care homes, no matter their age, health, or otherwise, can have meaningful contact with their families and loved ones.

The guidance sets out a clear expectation that providers will put in place arrangements to enable regular visits to resume from early March. We firmly believe a collective and supportive approach represents the most positive and effective way to increase meaningful contact between residents and their loved ones with the ongoing fight against COVID-19. However, given the importance of this guidance, progress on implementation will be closely monitored. I would confirm that an Oversight Board with representatives from all that contributed to the development of the guidance has been established and it will meet weekly at the outset and review feedback and intelligence on the implementation of the guidance to provide recommendations for future guidance and support.

In addition to monitoring, we recognise that care homes need support to build in confidence in adopting the guidance. As the Cabinet Secretary confirmed, a set of workshops for Care Home managers and staff has been put in place to support implementation and we are also ready to provide direct support to individual care homes through local partners as necessary. We have worked with a range of partners including Scottish Care, local oversight teams and the Care Inspectorate to ensure their commitment to supporting staff and managers, residents and family, to make sure that these guidelines succeed in their aim of reconnecting individuals.

I am grateful to you for sharing the Committee's concerns and I hope this response is helpful in setting out how we are supporting the resumption of meaningful visits to care homes.