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Dear Colleague,

Scotland's social care support response

We are writing to you following the statements made last week in Parliament on the COVID-19 emergency. May we reiterate the comments of the First Minister in thanking you and everyone working in local authorities, Health and Social Care Partnerships, social care providers, personal assistants and unpaid carers for all their work and effort during these unprecedented times. Social care support is absolutely critical in ensuring Scotland's effective response to COVID-19.

This will also be a demanding and challenging time for the social work profession and we continue to work closely with Chief Social Work Officers to ensure that we collectively support the most vulnerable people in our communities. We are as committed as ever to supporting people who access support, whatever the reason – mental ill-health, frailty, disability – and recognise your role in supporting vulnerable families, in child protection and in adult support and protection. This work must continue.

Key workers

Scotland's social care support workers are unequivocally key workers. Social care support workers have diverse roles working in care homes, caring for people in their own homes, and providing essential support to many vulnerable people and families whether employed by the authority, a provider, or directly as a personal assistant. All of these workers must be regarded as key workers and have access to childcare if necessary to enable them to carry out their critical role, this includes social workers. They will also be able to access the appropriate level of personal and protective equipment (PPE) if required, for the people they support. Details for this are in the Annex to this letter.

Flexible workforce

Considerable efforts are being made nationally and locally to rapidly increase workforce capacity across health and social care. For example, NHS Education Scotland is developing a national web-based recruitment platform to support local efforts to enable those with relevant skills and experience to come forward and support health and social care services at this time of national emergency. People returning to, and entering, the workforce will be deployed where they are most needed.

There is already flexibility in the registration system for social services staff to move to another service or start to work in another type of registered service, but more is being done to clarify and implement minimum training requirements and enable redeployment of staff as necessary. The SSSC is working with NHS Education Scotland to develop a minimum training package for social care for redeployment and volunteers, who will play an essential role in the delivery of day-to-day services.

Emergency legislation

These are unprecedented times and difficult decisions are being made every day. Emergency legislation will allow local authorities the ability to focus their resources on meeting the most urgent need, protecting the lives of those who are most vulnerable while ensuring effective safeguards. We will 'switch on' and 'switch off' these provisions to deal with short term and localised pressure and they will only be used when absolutely necessary. Local Authorities will still be expected to do as much as they can to meet people's needs, with appropriate safeguarding measures in place.

Public protection during the current emergency

The rights of children and adults do not alter during this health emergency nor do professional responsibilities in relation to child and adult protection. We are aware that leaders responsible for the protection of children and adults locally have already made, and continue to make, complex decisions about managing risk on an ongoing basis within the context of the evolving response to the pandemic. The protection of children and adults must continue to be prioritised during this period. Further guidance will be issued in the next few days to support the leadership already demonstrated in this area.

Our integrated approach

What is evident in the current challenge that we face is that the work we are carrying out now reinforces the importance of an integrated approach to health and social care. We have asked Local Authorities to increase support for care homes and care at home as a critical component of reducing delayed discharges and freeing up acute hospital beds. We are seeing great progress in reducing delays in hospital – a clear indication of how well our integrated teams of social care, social work and health staff work together, and we are grateful to them for these efforts. And not just because they are freeing up hospital beds for people who will need them for acute care, but also because it remains a key goal of health and social care system in Scotland to ensure that people are well supported in their daily lives, during this critical time and beyond.

The plans to increase the pace and scale of social care support are being captured in the local mobilisation plans that health boards are co-ordinating. That mechanism gives us a clear governance path for the allocation of additional resources required for this important work. We have also asked Integration Authorities to explore how they can support even greater co-operation across our primary care and social care workforce. We are actively working with the Chief Nurse and colleagues to increase the clinical leadership and oversight of community workers.

Social care and third sector funding commitment

As you know, Local Authorities have been assured that the additional financial support they need to scale up services to meet the clear additional demands arising from the current situation will be met by the Scottish Government, aligned to local plans already in place. Funding has also been made available for the third sector at this critical time.

Unpaid carers

The Scottish Government absolutely values the support provided by Scotland's unpaid carers. They are dealing with pressures that are already great, and will be experiencing added pressure at this time. We continue to work alongside carer organisations to make sure that carers have access to the right advice to help protect them and their loved ones, for example the public health advice on how to protect themselves from infection and putting plans in place for what happens if they are unable to care for a period.

We also know that some carers and personal assistants may require protective equipment should the person they are caring for be symptomatic of COVID-19. We are currently working with partners to identify the most effective routes to direct them to the support they need. We will need your help with that, and hope to have an update in the coming days. We are also working with our third sector partners to ensure that carers have access to breaks, with support provided through the Short Breaks Fund and the Young Scot package for young carers.

Information and guidance

You will see in the Annex a summary of all that has been and is being done to support the social care sector, including links to useful information and guidance.

We want to reiterate that social care support workers are key workers and integral to the success of our response to the COVID-19 emergency, and again to express our thanks to you and all the work you are doing to reduce delays and deliver social care support despite the clear challenges that we face.

Care and support is valued always, but never more than now. We would like to encourage more people to step into caring roles. Together we will focus our efforts to achieve our shared objective – the protection and support of Scotland's people during and beyond these unprecedented challenges.

Yours faithfully,

Jeane Freeman

Cllr Stuart Currie

ANNEX

Public commitment

The Scottish Government and COSLA have issued a joint news release about key workers with links to supporting Guidance.

<https://news.gov.scot/news/supporting-coronavirus-key-workers>

Guidance for commissioners

COSLA has published guidance for commissioners in the Documents section of its website: <https://www.cosla.gov.uk/documents> titled 'COSLA guidance for commissioners during Covid-19 response'.

Guidance for unpaid carers

Guidance has been published on the Scottish Government website and NHS Inform, and circulated via carer organisations. It prompts carers to put plans in place for what happens if they are unable to care for a period, and familiarise themselves with the public health advice on how to protect themselves and the person they look after from infection.

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-unpaid-carers-march-2020

Current SSSC flexibility regarding registration and redeployment between services

Scottish Social Services Council's current approach to registration means that people working in social service roles in nurseries, care homes, care at home and housing support services, residential childcare services and school care accommodation service can currently work for six months without being registered. Workers registered to work in one kind of service can be immediately redeployed to work in another kind of service without any need to change their registration status with the SSSC. They currently have six months in which to register to work in a different service.

Further changes to regulation are being made through UK emergency legislation, and the SSSC will publish guidance on these at the earliest opportunity. Further information can be accessed via the SSSC website: <https://www.sssc.uk.com/>

SSSC and NHS Education for Scotland (NES) are also producing guidance for care settings that may require use of volunteers and redeployed workers due to staffing challenges as a result of the spread of COVID-19. It will set out what employers need to think about and put in place to support the safe delivery of services. SSSC and NES will shortly launch an online recruitment portal to encourage staff previously registered to return to practice. The portal will be live this week.

Inspection and registration of services

The Care Inspectorate's approach to the regulation of care (all service types, statutory and non-statutory inspections) is set out in its Intermediate Response document.

Scrutiny and assurance activity has been scaled down and a decision taken to cease all joint scrutiny activities, while non-essential scrutiny and assurance activity has been postponed. It is also applying flexibility to its registration practices. Priority will be given to registration work to support the national response and the sustainability of services.

The Care Inspectorate has created a COVID-19 page on its website, which it updates frequently. This provides further detail on the Care Inspectorate's approach:

<https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/coronavirus-professionals>

Care Inspectorate's response to the COVID-19 situation in the following message:

<https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/A message from Care Inspectorate CEO 17 March.pdf>

Emergency legislation

The emergency legislation will include provisions which, when they are brought into force, allow for a softening of social care assessment duties in relation to adult social care, carer support and children's services. They allow local authorities not to comply with particular assessment duties where complying would not be practical or would cause unnecessary delay in providing support to people. Local authorities will still have duties to provide support to meet need. These measures will allow Local Authorities to focus their resources on meeting the most urgent needs, thereby protecting the lives of the most vulnerable members of society.

The powers will only be brought into operation for the shortest time possible when absolutely necessary. They can be switched on and off by regulations, invoked by Scottish Ministers. They will allow local authorities to prioritise and provide urgent care and support without delay. They will also be switched off by regulations when they are no longer needed.

In using these powers, authorities will have to have regard to statutory guidance from Scottish Ministers which is under development.

Infection control and clinical guidance for care homes and care at home services

Health Protection Scotland published updated infection control [guidance](#) for Social or Community Care & Residential Settings on 26 March.

In addition the Chief Medical Officer, Chief Nursing Officer and Chief Social Work adviser issued a [letter](#) on 26 March about clinical care guidance for social care settings which should be read in conjunction with the HPS guidance above:

1. Updated Guidance for Nursing Home and Residential Care Residents - this has been updated to take account of further advice from HPS on visiting and care home admissions and is at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-clinical-guidance-for-nursing-home-and-residential-care-residents>

2. Guidance on Care at Home, Housing Support and Sheltered Housing is at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-clinical-guidance-care-at-home-housing-support-and-sheltered-housing/>

Testing for key workers

Guidance for NHS Boards on COVID-19 testing capacity has been developed to enable key Health and Social Care workers to return to work:



NHS Boards are advised to prioritise testing symptomatic household members of health and social care staff in cases where the staff member has no symptoms but has to remain in isolation because a family member does. This means that where the household member tests negative, the health or social care staff member will not have to isolate for 14 days, and this will have the greatest impact in reducing working days lost. You should refer to the guidance for your own workforce.

The Cabinet Secretary's announcement on this guidance is at:

<https://www.gov.scot/news/covid-19-testing-to-get-key-workers-back-to-work/>

Training for key workers

The SSSC and NES have developed a core training package for social care for those who are being redeployed to care roles, and for volunteers. The guidance is at:

<https://news.sssc.uk.com/news/guidance-for-employers-on-core-training-for-redeployed-workers-temporary-workers-and-volunteers>

Personal assistants

Personal assistants will not have ID cards or SSSC registration cards they can show as evidence of key worker status.

If your key worker system requires proof of a person's status, then your local independent support organisation: <https://www.sdsscotland.org.uk/> or SPAEN: <https://www.spaen.co.uk/> or the Personal Assistant Network: <http://www.panetworkscotland.org.uk/> may be able to provide a letter of confirmation if the employer cannot.

Public protection guidance

We know that some children and adults will be more vulnerable and at risk of harm as a result of the impacts of the pandemic on families and wider society. The combination of new stresses arising from ELC, school and business closures, family confinement and isolation alongside physical and psychological health impacts could be a trigger for abuse and neglect. High stress home environments will also increase the likelihood of domestic abuse that children either experience or observe. Parents and carers who are self-isolating and/or ill may be unable to look after their children and children will be also be less visible to a range of professionals who are normally engaged with them. We must also all be alert to signs that individuals or groups are using the pandemic as an opportunity for criminal or sexual exploitation.

The Scottish Government is currently drafting additional guidance and this will be available in the next few days.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

NHS National Services Scotland (NSS) has set up a helpline for immediate and essential requests for additional PPE for registered social care providers during COVID-19.

The following contact details will direct providers to the NHS NSS triage centre for social care:

- phone: 0300 303 3020

The helpline is open 8am – 8pm, 7 days a week.

When contacting the helpline, providers will be required to:

- answer a series of short screening questions
- confirm they have fully explored business as usual procurement routes
- provide their Care Inspectorate registration number

The triage centre is currently in place to supplement local arrangements for procurement of essential PPE items. We are working to roll out the arrangements more broadly to adapt to changing circumstances.

Third sector funding

The Third Sector Resilience Fund is now open and information including an eligibility checker, guidance notes and FAQs are at:

<https://scvo.org.uk/support/coronavirus/funding/for-organisations/third-sector-resilience-fund>.

Hand Sanitiser

Working with Diagio, Scottish Government will shortly have access to hand sanitiser that will be deployed to the health and social care workers across Scotland.