



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Dr Donald Macaskill
CEO
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Via email only

Health and Sport Committee
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Dear Donald,

Health and Sport Committee consideration of the impact of COVID-19 in care homes

Thank you for your letter of the 8 May 2020 in relation to the above inquiry in which you express reservations at the Committee undertaking any Covid-19 related scrutiny involving care homes.

As a precursor, the Committee's work of COVID-19 focuses on scrutinising the actions of the Scottish Government and the impacts arising from its response to the pandemic. That scrutiny is necessary, designed to be forward looking and inform future actions, while being proportionate given the unprecedented impact on the country.

You raise three specific areas of concern, the first relating to the purpose of the inquiry. On purpose all of our work has been designed to identify what actions could have most benefit should a second wave of the virus occur, what can be learned from experience to date and also what social restrictions might best be required. More specifically on care homes the committee want to understand why, given the shielding approach in force from the outset, the numbers infected and dying are so high.

Helpfully you provide a little background in that context in relation to developments in guidance, support and directions. You also indicate as the representative body for independent social care services you have your own views and we look forward to your response on the limited range of questions we have asked.

In relation to our communication with different audiences we have been at pains to ensure we have provided an opportunity for staff, families and residents to respond along with responses from managers and owners. I am grateful for your observation that some guidance is “at best confusing and at worst contradictory” and would welcome elaboration of this criticism including crucially what actions require to be taken to resolve this and avoid a recurrence.

Committee staff spoke to care homes preceding this inquiry and being mindful of possible impact it was only once there was a degree of support being received did we agree to undertake this work. This is further reflected in ongoing dialogue with a range of care providers during which we have heard some indicate they don't feel their voices have been heard. Others have provided good news stories and asked that they be shared in the face of the largely negative press they are receiving.

One area where we are not being so successful in obtaining views is from private care homes, and although we currently have 15 responses from the sector a number of others have refused to become involved many indicating this is on direct instructions from head office. Anything you are able to do to encourage responses would not only be gratefully appreciated but would assist in ensuring the independent voice is heard alongside the other sectors.

Finally on duplication of reporting, we do not want to create additional work for people and where as you indicate there might be duplication we would be more than content to receive the original responses that have been made.

I do hope the independent sector will engage with this piece of work, it is only through contribution and co-operation across all sectors that this Committee can effectively scrutinise the actions of the Scottish Government and crucially add value as we enter future phases of the pandemic.

I look forward to receiving a detailed response from Scottish Care on behalf of your members together with input from as many of your members as possible.

Yours sincerely

Lewis Macdonald
Convener, Health and Sport Committee