

PE1841/Q

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport submission of 3 March 2021

Thank you for your letter of 18 February advising me on the Committee's deliberation of this petition. I am grateful to the Committee for considering this matter and for sharing their concerns regarding the discrepancies in the interpretation and implementation of the Scottish Government guidance on visiting loved ones in Scottish care homes.

You will be aware by now that revised guidance recommending gradual increases to meaningful contact between care home residents and loved ones was published on 24 February. At present, 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.

Safeguards and protections have been developed considerably in recent months alongside the evidence about how to protect against the Covid-19 virus. With multiple layers of protection now in place, 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 was developed with input from relatives, care home staff, managers and providers alongside clinical experts. It sets out a clear expectation that providers will put in place arrangements to enable regular visits to resume from early March. I believe a collective and supportive approach to re-introducing meaningful contact 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. My officials have established an Oversight Board with representatives from all that contributed to the development of the guidance. This group, which will meet weekly in the early days, will 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. A set of workshops for Care Home managers and staff has been put in place to support implementation. We also are 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.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to comment and address the Committee's concerns.

