

21<sup>st</sup> July 2020

Helen Whately MP  
Minister of State for Care  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA



By Email: [helen.whately.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:helen.whately.mp@parliament.uk)

Dear Minister for Care,

### **Social Care Workforce**

GMB, the Union for social care workers, has contacted you on three occasions during Covid-19 and has yet to receive a response.

To remind you of the concerns we raised in our communications:

- 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020

GMB contacted you to discuss what protections were being put in place for social care workers as the numbers of deaths in care homes was increasing significantly. We believe there were serious failings by Government and employers at this time as GMB members were not being provided with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and were also being denied access to Covid-19 testing.

GMB holds some of the largest union membership in some of the biggest care sector providers and despite having weekly talks with BEIS, Cabinet Office and the Department of Health, we struggled to get a dialogue started with you as the Minister for Care.

- 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020

GMB contacted you again to raise our concerns that the social care workforce, residents, service users and their families, had been completely let down by the Government throughout Covid-19. The NHS had been prioritised time and again, at the expense of care homes and domiciliary care. There can be no doubt that the lack of PPE and testing in social care at the start of the Pandemic allowed the Covid-19 virus to run through the social care sector unchecked.

Social care workers were originally excluded from Public Health England (PHE) Guidance on PPE. GMB worked to ensure these key workers were included and guidance was eventually amended. However, what remained were huge issues with access to PPE as well as differing guidance issued dependent on who the social care provider is. GMB also had concerns regarding inconsistencies between Government guidance for care homes and testing and that of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

- 3rd June 2020

GMB contacted you to raise concerns about the Government's Track & Trace Programme. The limited information on this programme that was published at the time stated '**workers who are informed that they must self-isolate for 14 days will be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)**'.

GMB believes that any worker following a Government instruction to self-isolate should not suffer any financial detriment. SSP is set at £95.85 and is not in any way sustainable for individuals. Therefore, it is highly likely that staff will be forced to ignore your Government's advice and attend work anyway. This would completely defeat the objective of the track and trace programme.

During Covid-19 within the NHS, health trade unions including GMB, successfully secured Covid Special Leave for all staff that have to take time off work due to Covid-19 related reasons, including track and trace. Covid special leave entitles them to full and normal pay during the absence and has no impact on non-Covid sickness absence records. This should have been extended to all workers, including social care workers, but it was not.

Most of the social care workforce were completely abandoned by their employers and your Government when it came to sick pay. After pressure from the GMB, SSP was extended to be payable from day one, but this is still unacceptable to us and our members. To reiterate again, GMB does not believe any worker should suffer a financial detriment for following Government advice. We continue to lobby yourselves and private care providers on this crucial issue for our members.

There is no end to Covid-19 in sight. Therefore, there is the potential for an increased risk of exposure to Covid-19 on the social care workforce due to travelling on unsafe public transport and the continued difficulties accessing appropriate PPE and testing. This will no doubt lead to further financial impacts of Covid-19 and this is a real and continuing fear for our members.

The Government made an announcement of extra funding for social care providers to help them manage Infection, Prevention and Control. This money should have been allocated from local authorities to care providers to pay full pay for Covid-19 related absences. However, we have serious concerns that this money is not reaching the social care workforce. We have reports from care providers about the difficulties in accessing the money. We also have reports of where this money has been accessed and is not being used to provide full sick pay for the workforce.

The social care workforce are predominantly under paid and overworked and were already working with 120,000 staffing vacancies prior to Covid-19. Many of our members have been forced to make the unbearable decision between following Government advice to self-isolate and only receive Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or go to work and put the very people they care for every day at risk because they simply cannot afford not to go to work.

GMB believes that the social care workforce should be entitled to a real living wage and should they have to take time off work they should be entitled to at least their full and normal rates of pay as they would have received had they been employed by Local Government or the NHS.

There can be no return to business as usual after the crisis. We now have no choice, it's time to turn the tide and put people before profit. It's time for the social care green paper. We need to fix decades of broken promises and fix social care.

It is a matter of value and recognition. The social care workforce has continued to work throughout this pandemic, putting their lives on the line as they were let down on PPE, testing and pay. It is time that the true value of the social care workforce was recognised

Once again, the GMB is requesting a meeting with you to discuss all of the issues raised above and understand what you and the Government are going to do to restore the faith of the social care workforce, residents, service users and their families.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Harrison', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rachel Harrison  
GMB National Officer

[Rachel.harrison@gmb.org.uk](mailto:Rachel.harrison@gmb.org.uk)