

## Scottish Covid Public Inquiry Establishment Feedback

### Scottish Association of Social Work

The Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) is part of the British Association of Social Workers, the largest professional body for social workers in the UK. BASW UK has 22,000 members employed in frontline, management, academic and research positions in all care settings. There are over 10,000 registered social workers in Scotland around 1,500 of whom are SASW members. This comprises staff working in local government and the independent sector, across health and social care, education, children and families, justice services, as well as a growing number of independent practitioners.

SASW's key aims are:

- Improved professional support, recognition, and rights at work for social workers,
- Better social work for the benefit of people who need our services, and
- A fairer society

SASW welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence on the Aims and Principles paper, and broadly supports the approach outlined. We particularly welcome the intended focus on a person-centred, human rights-based approach, to ensure that every person and organisation that has been affected by the pandemic taking part can meaningfully participate, be treated fairly, and be empowered to share their views and experiences.

The “one-size fits all” global approach to the Covid-19 pandemic has been a public health one, with the impact of lockdown and other associated measures leaving people unable to access services or be assessed unless they have a diagnosis. The absence of a social model and with it a failure to take a holistic view on the impact such measures would have on a person's whole life in context during the pandemic was problematic. It is essential that the inquiry examines the impact of the pandemic, and of associated public health measures, through a social lens moving forward, considering the impact of poverty, deprivation, of food insecurity, fuel poverty, digital exclusion and what it takes for a person to live a full and happy life day to day.

SASW suggests that international human rights treaties provide a useful framework by which to explore people's experiences of how their rights were impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular the right(s) to life, liberty, and security, to respect for private and family life, the right to an adequate social security safety net, the right to accessible and affordable food, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to digital and information inclusion, the right to the highest possible standard of physical and mental health, the right to cultural life and the right to education. The inquiry must be open and transparent, and the public must be kept informed on who is being spoken to and engaged with on a regular basis.

## What do you think the Inquiry should cover?

SASW suggests the following areas be covered within the inquiry:

- Delays and lack of PPE, in particular the impact this had on frontline staff, including social workers who were forced to make do with DIY face masks and hand sanitisers
- The impact on child and adult protection and on professional's capacity/ability to undertake this work for the duration of the pandemic, how risk was managed and inconsistent approaches across local authorities to this, the impact on people who were experiencing/not experiencing support at that time; it's important that this issue is explored sensitively so as not to breach confidentiality, consideration must be given to how best to address this in the context of the inquiry
- The impact of services being reduced or changed, e.g., care packages being withdrawn or reduced, non-essential surgeries, mental health services/drug and alcohol treatments being paused
- The impact on care homes, including the impact on staff, residents, and family members, people being moved from hospitals into care homes without adequate testing
- Increase of risk levels in relation to domestic abuse incidents, and impact on mental health
- The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women, many of whom assume most of the caring responsibilities for children and other family members
- Inequity in relation to Self-Directed Support dependent on which of the options an individual had; national guidance on 1 and 2, and not on option 3 or aspects of option 4
- The impact of the pandemic on those in prison and their families, including prisoners being kept in solitary confinement for long periods of time
- Impact on carers, parents and families, lack of respite or any other arrangements, including day services
- The impact on those who were shielding, particularly on their mental health
- The disproportionate impact on black and minoritised ethnic communities
- Impact on transitions, for example, in a school context or transition(s) between services
- Impact on looked after children, family contact, children in residential care, foster care, kinship care and adoption processes
- Isolation in relation to home care services, abandonment of people who had low level support requirements
- Eligibility criteria and assessment and disconnect between informal, semi-formal then formal services, up to statutory high-end cases
- Exacerbation/impact of poverty – financial situation, employment, benefits, and economic impact,
- The impact on education, including on social work education, and young people missing out on this during Covid-19
- The disproportionate impact on people with disabilities, including learning disabilities
- Digital exclusion, and how this impacted on marginalised communities and families
- Impact on children and young people, particularly in relation to their mental health e.g., rise in eating disorders during this time. Impact on babies and young children, many of whom have spent the first year(s) of their lives in a lockdown setting and missed out on early socialisation

## **Is there any type of evidence that you think is essential for the Inquiry to obtain?**

Engaging with and exploring the impact of the pandemic on people with first-hand lived experience, particularly of social care, and what this experience was like for them day to day is essential. Evidence should consider the impact the pandemic had on people in context, in a holistic way. Undertaking a true participatory approach to information gathering, with evidence gathering feeling informal, flexible, and non-intimidating. Efforts should be made to engage people within their own environments/local communities and spaces where they feel comfortable – efforts should be made to go and visit places and people, and not expect people to go and visit them, for example in care homes. Equally, should it be easier or more appropriate for an individual or group to participate digitally, e.g., over zoom or Microsoft teams, then this should be explored. It's important the inquiry considers different levels of ability and support needs and explores different formats and ways of asking questions. SASW suggests that advocacy organisations and lived experience organisations be engaged with to facilitate and explore how best to enable participation for harder to reach communities, particularly black and minoritised ethnic communities. There must be a trauma informed approach to evidence gathering for the duration of the inquiry. Consideration must be given to the differences felt by those from poor and wealthy communities and the vast inequalities felt by people from these groups and/or backgrounds. The views and experiences of young people should form a key part of the inquiry. Consideration should be given to a long-term study looking at how the trauma of the pandemic might influence the "covid generation" as they move through their lives.

It's important that the accumulative, lived experiences of workers are given consideration and space in the inquiry. Many social workers felt pressure to negotiate organisational instructions and political decisions, some reported concern about the impact reductions to packages of care on people experiencing significant challenges and distress, particularly early on in the pandemic. This, whilst balancing significant changes to their home lives and increased personal safety concerns.

SASW suggests that evidence should be gathered to reflect the different stages of the pandemic experience. Whilst people may have been coping early on, as time went on this may have become more difficult. A timeline approach would be helpful.

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