

Unite Focus on Workers in Social Care

Summer 2020



Whilst the Prime Minister blames hard working care workers for the thousands of lives lost in care homes during Covid-19 it is no wonder that those who work in health and social care are rightfully angry and upset. The PM's comments were a slap in the face for the very workers who have given and sacrificed so much during the pandemic.

"Our project is in a criminal Justice setting which is an alternative to custody. Most residents have serious addiction issues and subsequent poor health. Issues highlighted include lack of hand gel, residents not adhering to 2mtre distancing therefore putting themselves and staff in danger. Residents being admitted from the community without being pre isolated thus potentially bringing in the virus. Lack of consistent direction from management."

Unite member

Health and social care workers make up the largest proportion of key worker occupations, (31%) and because of the nature of their roles, workers have had no choice other than to continue working in close contact with patients and other employees. The health and social care sector have the highest levels of staff continuing to work at their normal place of work. Clearly, there is no option to work from home.

"Staff still haven't been equipped with appropriate PPE, staff work 48-72 hours (with sleepover)."

Unite member

Unite's health and social care members work in a variety of settings and for a range of employers from the NHS to local government, for the voluntary sector and the private sector and despite these differences have all been affected by the huge mistakes made by government in relation to the lack of PPE provision, adequate testing and funding, as well as letting hospitals discharge patients into care homes without tests. (Until 15 April there was no requirement to test patients being discharged from hospitals to care homes for Covid-19 in England.)

"PPE is being sought by the organisation but it is unclear if we have enough. As people can be asymptomatic, staff would prefer to wear it at all times when providing care close-up but there is not remotely enough to do this so staff are directed to only use it when someone being cared for has symptoms."

Unite member

What they also have in common is that although these workers have all spent months risking their lives to protect other people's loved ones, their work has historically been seen as being low value, with little status, lowly paid and with precarious working conditions.

"Organisation is allowing managers to work from home, but still insist that local offices remain opening despite there being no need for this as the job can be done from home. This is against government advice and putting people a risk."

Unite member

In Wales, Social Care workers were promised the £500 social care bonus payment by the Labour Welsh Government. Though the UK Tory Government have frustrated this by insisting this bonus would be taxed. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-5330047

"We work in the hospital site, although not with patients at the moment and have no access to PPE - only hands sanitizer in the public corridors. Our care staff have not only paper masks and disposable aprons. This is after waiting weeks for this to arrive. I don't think this is enough, but I also see ambulance staff wearing the same so don't feel that we can complain."

Unite member

The Scottish Government have set up the coronavirus social care staff support fund to help top up pay for workers who may only be entitled to statutory sick pay if they are self-isolating or off work during pandemic. The full details are here www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-social-care-staff-support-fund-guidance/pages/overview/

While we have seen inaction from national government with tragic consequences for so many, Unite has been campaigning, lobbying and supporting members throughout the pandemic.

Unite has been here for you.

Back in May, **Unite called for a public enquiry into the COVID19 Care homes scandal** following the ONS publication of its findings on COVID-19 deaths by profession which showed that the highest number of deaths were recorded in the social care sector with a total of 131 deaths recorded. Within those figures there were a total of 86 deaths of female workers (9.6 deaths per 100,000 workers) and 45 deaths (23.4 per 100,000) among male workers in the sector.

Unite has drafted guidance for reps on health and safety in social care and has engaged with Government over **social care health and safety guidance**. Unite has repeatedly scrutinised government **calling out the government's continued lack of PPE for front line workers as a 'national scandal'**.

National officer for health, **Colenzo Jarrett-Thorpe** condemned health secretary Matt Hancock about his litany of broken promises and called on Hancock to consider his position in the light of the shameful broken promises.



Colenzo Jarrett-Thorpe was talking to BBC News' Kate Silverton on Saturday April 18th

Unite has worked with the TUC to put together a survey and short report coupled with a demand for a joint taskforce of unions, commissioners, providers and government to manage the ongoing crisis in social care.

Unite worked with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) on a **joint statement on PPE in the Care Sector** highlighting the critical lack of PPE and testing of social care staff and service users and the growing evidence that Covid-19 was sweeping through social care with devastating results.

Unite continues to lead the call for **more funding for the charity sector** and joined forces with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) to make some key demands for the sector.

Unite is calling for **Collective Bargaining in Social Care** so that the voices of all workers in health and social care can be heard and respected. Collective bargaining provides a mechanism for negotiating standards of pay, pensions, terms and conditions and ensures fair and equal representation for employers and trade unions, ensuring a fairer share of productivity gains, better pay and terms and conditions and working practices. Unite will continue to work with employers to achieve fair remuneration and terms and conditions for their members that go beyond the sectoral agreement.

Unite has **opposed a public sector pay freeze** arguing that it would be totally at odds with what the general public wants. Unite's own **survey** of the general public found that 71 per cent wanted increased taxes of the wealthy rather than a return to austerity.

Unite has **negotiated death in service payments** for social care workers and following the rejection of a **disappointing pay offer** of just 2 per cent made by the local government employers, it has launched its campaign for local government pay for social care.



As a Unite member what should you be asking for?

Unite members working in the social care sector recognise they are essential workers and want to play their part in this time of national crisis, however we must ensure safe working methods in the exercise of their duties.

It is therefore vitally important that these key workers' lives are not put at unnecessary risk.

Unite is therefore demanding the following minimum standards for all care workers on social distancing and protective arrangements:

1) Travel to work and for home visits

- There must be arrangements for workers to use their own vehicles to attend work and visits, including lifting parking restrictions, allowances paid for mileage.
- Those workers without their own vehicles must have the option to use taxis rather than public transport and the cost must be covered by the employer.

2) Correct PPE for care homes and home visits

- All workers must have access to appropriate Masks, Gloves, Eyewear, Body covering/aprons and Sanitiser in order to conduct their rounds.
- This equipment must be well maintained in date and staff must be trained properly how to use and store it. Face mask's used as PPE/RPE must be at least FFP3 standard and face fitted.

3) Washing and changing facilities

Facilities must be in place to allow workers to wash and change out of work clothes before travelling home. These facilities must meet the same high levels of social distancing and cleanliness as other areas these workers are expected to work.

As a minimum:

- Introduce staggered start and finish times to reduce congestion, 2 metre rule.
- Enhanced cleaning of all facilities throughout the day and at the end of each day.
- Based on the size of each facility, determine how many people can use it at any one time to maintain a distance of 2 metres.
- Provide suitable and sufficient rubbish bins in these areas with regular removal and disposal.
- Extra soap, sanitiser will need to be ordered and made available due to enhanced hygiene.

4) Storage

PPE must also be stored, cleaned and disposed of safely. This must include:

- PPE storage in the workplace in individual lockers.
- Re-usable PPE to be thoroughly cleaned after use and not shared between workers
- Single use PPE should be disposed of so that it cannot be reused

5) Disposal

- PPE must be disposed of after each home visit
- Workers to use a double bag for PPE that has been used and there must be a hazardous waste refuse site allocated for disposal.

6) Safety of clients

- An urgent system of track and trace must be in place for workers and service users who have been found to have Covid 19 symptoms.
- All cases and deaths in care homes must be rapidly logged and immediate support must be given to workers and other residents within the care home.

7) Pay and working time

- Care workers must be paid for any additional time accrued due to putting on PPE, disposal and washing.
- Workers must be paid when self-isolating
- Workers must be paid for travel time
- Workers must be paid for sleep ins

8) Testing

- All Social care staff must be tested before being able to attend work
- This must include agency workers

9) Redeployment

- Redeployment issue of council employees into the provision of care in the community
- Who are these workers managed by?
- Redeployment must be voluntary
- There must be training
- There must be essential PPE

10) Workers right to leave work on health and safety grounds

If employees reasonably believe they are in serious and imminent danger, under the Employment Rights Act 1996 section 44 they can leave the place of danger and not return if the danger persists.

Further information will be available on the Unite website alongside existing resources and guidance for workers in social care and which can be found on a dedicated web page for workers across the sectors who work in social care.

