



Dear constituent

Thank you for contacting me about the impact of COVID-19 on people living with dementia and for sharing the open letter.

Whilst I did not have an oral Health Question on 23rd February, I recognise the disproportionate effect the pandemic has had on people with dementia and their families. Despite the best efforts of care workers, NHS staff and unpaid carers, this pandemic has exposed the underlying problems with our social care system. For too long, it has lacked the priority, attention and funding it deserves, and care workers have been undervalued and underpaid.

The Government said it acted early in the pandemic to support people with dementia and their carers. Yet I am concerned that mistakes have been made: care staff were left without personal protective equipment (PPE), thousands of older people were discharged from hospitals to care homes without tests, and Ministers did not ensure that social care was given the focus it needed.

The way out of the pandemic has been provided by our amazing scientists. The vaccine rollout is making incredible progress and our NHS deserves huge congratulations. However, I recognise the concerns that around a quarter of care home staff have still not been vaccinated. Ministers should work with care home providers and local councils and do everything possible to improve uptake and ensure the easiest possible access to jabs in the local community.

On visiting arrangements in care homes, the Government has announced that residents will be allowed one regular indoor visitor from 8 March 2021. To have any confidence that things will really change, I support calls for legislation to enshrine residents' rights to visits and end the practice of blanket visiting bans. This is particularly important for care home residents with dementia - whose health can deteriorate quickly if their routines and family connections are lost.

Finally, our social care sector entered this pandemic after a decade of cuts to local government, with £8 billion lost from adult social care budgets. Councils now face £6.6 billion in extra costs due to the pandemic, yet the Government has repeatedly delayed setting out its plan to fix social care. Indeed, there was no mention of social care in the Chancellor's recent Budget.

I agree with you that we need a long-term plan of far-reaching reform to establish a properly funded social care system. People who need care, and those who provide it, cannot afford to wait any longer.

Yours sincerely,

Mary