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20 May 2020

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department of Health and Social Care  
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Sent via e-mail

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing regarding a matter of urgent concern to social care workers currently working so hard to look after the elderly and vulnerable during the Covid-19 pandemic.

On Monday in Parliament you confirmed that the additional £600m being allocated to social care should, in part, be used "to ensure that when social care staff need to be away from work for infection control purposes, they are not penalised for doing so."

Financial pressure on low-paid, but highly skilled, social care staff to attend work against public health advice is an issue UNISON has been raising for months. So this new commitment, although belated, is welcome.

UNISON understands that the government is proposing to use local authorities as a payment agency to pass these funds on to care providers within their geographic area, whether or not they contract care services to them.

However, many local authorities are in a perilous financial state and simply don't have the resources to take on these extra responsibilities. I would be grateful if you could confirm that additional funding will be made available to enable them to do this.

We also understand that no mechanism will be made available to local councils to enforce or monitor how the money passed on to social care providers is used. Instead, local authorities will simply be asked to withhold further payments if they 'believe' the initial tranches of funds are not being spent on infection control.

This raises the serious possibility that public money will enter the accounts of employers – some of whom have a long track record of behaving irresponsibly and unfairly towards their staff – without any means to direct how that money is spent. Many social care workers could therefore lose out and be left with no means of redress.

Some care workers have been off work shielding vulnerable family members for many weeks now, having to get by on statutory sick pay rates of just over £95 a week. I would

be grateful if you could clarify that retrospective payments will be made to them going back to the start of this crisis, so their family finances are not left in a dire financial state.

We would also be grateful for guidance on how the government intends to ensure that payments make it to care staff and don't simply sit in the company accounts of care providers.

Finally, care workers will appreciate clarification that the scheme is sufficiently adequate in size to cover all of the sector and not just residential care homes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Prentis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'P'.

Dave Prentis  
UNISON General Secretary