



## Liverpool City Region All Party Parliamentary Group

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Ian Byrne MP

### **Covid-19: Taking Stock - Assessing the urgent action needed to support the Care Sector, supply of PPE and more**

**Non-Verbatim Minutes of Virtual Zoom Meeting, 12:30 to 13:30, Friday 1st May**

#### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

**Alison McGovern, Chair of the APPG** gave a short introduction to the first 'virtual' Liverpool City Region (LCR) APPG meeting the group has had and stated it is important, and the right thing to do, to attempt to keep going with the meetings of the group at this important time.

#### **CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PANELLISTS**

**Lynne Morris, UNISON Regional Manager** began by explaining and outlining the Unison NW survey launched across the region, which over 2,700 care workers – from over 1,000 care settings including residential homes care homes and learning disabilities - completed. The survey found that two thirds of the care workers said that their employer was not doing enough to keep them or the people they cared for safe. 66% of the care workers surveyed said they were concerned about a lack of PPE and 78% said they were concerned about infecting the people that they actually cared for.

Ms Morris said that in the Liverpool City Region specifically, there were examples of staff being told not to wear masks because it would scare some of the dementia residents and of staff having to buy their own PPE equipment, even when they were coming into contact with COVID-19 cases. Additionally, the survey found that 8 out of 10 workers stated they would not be paid their full wages if they became ill or if they needed to self-isolate; instead they would get statutory sick pay of £95 a week, which is inadequate to support them and their families. As a result of that, care workers said that, although they realised, they shouldn't go into work if they had symptoms of the virus, they would anyway.

She summarised the survey's findings by stating that working conditions have been systematically undermined in the privatised social care sector in order to maximise the profits for the care home they work in. Ms Morris added that increasingly Unison have seen more casualisation of work and a decline of carers' wages. Many carers receive less than the living wage, are not paid for over time and don't receive occupational sick pay.

She outlined UNISON's campaign 'Care Workers vs COVID-19' - launched after the survey - which she said has have a really good response across Merseyside so far. The campaign has four main demands:

- Protect our care workers health with priority testing, essential training and PPE for the frontline staff
- Protect our carer's pay including full normal pay for those who required by Government guidance to self-isolate due to COVID-19 including the staff on zero hours contract
- Protect our carer's employment to ensure no one is dismissed or laid off for staying at home due to COVID-19
- Protect care workers who have dependents or cannot get into work due to childcare problems

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Sefton and Halton Councils have both signed the agreement, and Liverpool City Council has agreed a £6.2 million financial resilience package for social care that includes a commitment around guaranteeing full normal pay for care workers who are self-isolating due to COVID-19. Knowsley Council have agreed a similar package at a cost of £1.4 million. Unison NW are calling on all local authorities across the Liverpool City Region to sign up to their campaign and to call for all social care providers to pay the money they get to the frontline workers.

Lynne concluded that Unison NW want to make permanent improvements and move towards insourcing social care, as they believe weaknesses of the system have been badly exposed by this health crisis. Her final point was that COVID-19 have really brought all these issues to a sharp focus and nationally MPs need to lobby the Government and the Department of Health for fundamental reform of the social care sector.

**Lauren Douglas, Care worker**, detailed her personal experience working in community care for a private company, a franchise of a larger American firm. She goes into up to 15 homes every day and the majority of her clients are private. All employees such as herself are on zero-hour contracts and normally have 30-40 hours a week. However, since the COVID-19 outbreak that has reduced massively for her personally to 6 hours.

Lauren told the APPG of how she approached her employer to say she can't survive on 6 hours a week pay, asking for more hours and the possibility of being furloughed, however she was denied four times. Lauren was given a 35ml bottle of hand sanitiser by her employer and one box of gloves and told to make it last for the foreseeable future. Additionally, she has been given no other forms of PPE including masks and have had to seek those resources for herself.

Lauren detailed how she is still being told to take clients out shopping in her personal vehicle, as the company earn more from that the provision of that service. She also knows of other carers who have showed signs of COVID-19, such as a cough, who have had no other choice but to go into work to earn their wage. She finished by stating she felt personally there was no accountability for the private care sector during this health crisis.

## **Q&A AND DISCUSSION ON PRIORITIES FOR THE CARE SECTOR IN THE LIVERPOOL CITY REGION**

**Paula Barker MP** informed the group of her Private Members Bill that seeks to close loopholes in the national minimum wage with specific emphasis on travel time. The PMB will be read on the 11th of September and she welcomed support from Parliamentary colleagues. She stated that she believes insourcing is the way forward as profits should not be getting made off the back of vulnerable people in our society or the incredible care worker, who provide those services and go above and beyond every single day.

**Kim Johnson MP** said complaints should go directly to the Commissioners so that the Councils get to find out what's happening with the private care service providers. She also agreed with Paula Barker MP that Liverpool should look at insourcing, so that public services are delivered by the public sector.

**Ian Byrne MP** raised a point from the Labour Party's manifesto that there should be a National Care Service like the NHS, as the work the care workers should be fairly represented.

**Cllr Steve Munby** agreed with the comments made and explained how he has been chairing a scrutiny panel with Councillors and reps from Unison since Autumn last year, looking at insourcing adult social care. He explained they had evidence from care workers before the COVID-19 crisis started about the awful situations they faced and said social care is a real case of market failure. In terms of insourcing, he made the following points: if Councils give more money to care providers, there should be conditions on that extra funding; secondly, travel costs and travel time payment for the carers need to be considered, and finally that there should be a re-evaluation of the carers' workforce, who are not unskilled workers and needs and deserves new kind of qualifications and training. He stated the major difficulty is the fragmented market and not just in terms of the providers but in terms of the customers.

**Neil McGonigle** briefly mentioned that Uber, as a company who transport and move people around, have been trying to lend a helping hand in the current situation by creating Uber Medics that gives a discount to any NHS workers taking a trip with them, and they would extend that to those who work in the care sector.

**Steve Rotherham, Mayor of Liverpool City Region**, said he and the rest of the M9 had been on a call with the Prime Minister earlier in the day to discuss how the City Region has been affected by the crisis. He went on to outline what the City Region has been doing and the campaign he has launched with Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, to Build Back Better, which he described as a genuine opportunity to create a better society. He emphasised that to build back better those people at the bottom of the economic socio-economic ladder need a boost - a pay rise. The City Region needs more resources and powers from Central Government to lead the economic recovery, and then hopefully things can be done differently in the Liverpool City Region.

**Cllr Paul Cummins** agreed with the comments by Lynne Morris of Unison and added that we need radical change at a national level and more powers to make changes at a local level.

**Lynne Morris**, asked about a national campaign for the sector, stated that the country must learn from this crisis. The break-up, and privatisation, of care has got worse and we need to look at ways to improve it. Care should be thought in the same way - and put on the same footing - as the NHS.

**Cllr Liam Robinson, Portfolio Holder: Transport and Air Quality, LCR Combined Authority** then provided an update on Merseytravel. He said this is a very unique time – numbers of passengers are down by about 85%. LCR are making sure all frontline workers who need to make essential journeys can with the help of the bus network.

The LCR have been working through a number of scenarios for when the lockdown is eased, focussed on the overriding priority of health and safety of the workforce and the travelling public. The key challenges are the requirements for social distancing and PPE. With the 2-metre distancing rule, LCR can only transport about 25% of its previous patronage. Cllr Robinson gave the example that a 3 carriage Merseyrail train that can normally take about 200 people, will only take 50 people with social distancing rules.

Cllr Robinson also stated that the LCR are very much focused on Steve's Rotherham's agenda of building back better and looking at how they can embed cycling, walking and the sustainable travel agenda which has been one of the few positives of this crisis. However, they also want to make sure that people are confident to get back on public transport and don't just go back to the private car – tackling the perception issue that in your own sealed environment you are safe and on public transport you aren't. He also stated there might be a further requirement for public support for the bus industry, but any kind of bailout fund should be decided and developed at the city region level.

He concluded with some key asks for Parliamentarians; to try and ensure a financial package for Merseyrail, more funding for sustainable travel and allowing LCR to collect more data to design the right services for the recovery period and beyond.

**Jay McKenna, NW TUC Regional Secretary** then raised a number of wider issues regarding essential workers and how the TUC is suggesting we should approach the recovery. He commented that there really is a need for unions to be involved in this crisis. The value of their work can be seen in what Unison are doing on social care and what the TUC have been doing nationally, getting involved with the Government and the future jobs fund.

He stated we need to ensure a safe return to work for all workers, more flexible furlough schemes and better sick pay all round or people will go back to work whilst being sick. There is a role for unions to help re-imagine and shape the recovery process to help get people back into work safely. In Merseyside and the Liverpool City

Region, trade unions represent around half of workplaces. the TUC including Unison and other trade unions will work with the LCR to ensure the right structures are put in place to help this transition back to work.

**Kim Johnson MP** asked Cllr Liam Robinson whether the LCR would be in a position to do something similar to the Liverpool City Council parks scheme closing this year that would help encourage more people to walk and cycle. In his response. Cllr Robinson stated the LCR are working with the City Council on this, but the initiative could extend further than the city into the City Region in the parts that lend themselves to cycle paths.

## CLOSE OF MEETING

**Alison McGovern MP, chair of the APPG**, thanked all speakers and contributors.

## ATTENDEES

Alison McGovern MP	MP for Wirral South and LCR APPG Chair
Lynne Morris	Regional Manager - Unison
Lauren Douglas	Care Worker
Cllr Liam Robinson	LCRCA - Transport Portfolio Holder
Jay McKenna	Acting Regional Secretary of TUC
Mayor Steve Rotherham	Metro Mayor of Liverpool City Region
Maria Eagle MP	MP for Garston and Halewood
Ian Byrne MP	MP for Liverpool West Derby
Paula Barker MP	MP for Liverpool Wavertree
Kim Johnson MP	MP for Liverpool Riverside
Bill Esterson MP	MP for Sefton Central
Conor McGinn MP	MP for St Helen's North
Deborah Caine	Office of Alison McGovern MP
Anthony Lavelle	Office of Peter Dowd MP
Catrin Owen	Office of Maria Eagle MP
Cllr Paul Cummins	Cabinet Member, Adult Social Care - Sefton Metro Council
Cllr Marie Wright	Health and Wellbeing Cabinet Member - Halton Borough
Cllr Steve Munby	Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods - Liverpool City Council
Matt Davies	Managing Director - Stagecoach Merseyside
Neil McGonigle	Head of Cities, UK & Ireland - UBER
Lynn Collins	Regional Secretary - TUC
Steve Coffey	Group Chief Executive - Torus
Victoria Salm	Care Services Manager Operations Team - Riverside
Charles Whitford	Head of The Manufacturing Technology Centre
Gill Morris, DevoConnect	CEO of DevoConnect
Steve Barwick, DevoConnect	Director of DevoConnect
Olivia Tyrrell, DevoConnect	Political Researcher - DevoConnect
James Ferguson, DevoConnect	Political Consultant - DevoConnect