

## **Report to the Economy & Skills Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

### **Concerns brought to Unison by members during Covid-19 Pandemic**

People in private care homes across Birmingham are acutely vulnerable to covid-19 but nothing has been done to help protect them. At the very beginning of lockdown UNISON was contacted by employees in private care homes who were raising serious concerns that they were being asked to admit patients who had been in hospital. Hospitals needed to free up beds in order to prepare for what might happen with the virus so it discharged patients to care homes. They were not tested prior to discharge nor were they tested once they arrived in care homes. Staff were also raising concerns with us that care homes were slow to stop visiting relatives who could have brought the virus into homes.

UNISON was inundated with calls where members were raising the fact that their employers were slow to provide protective equipment. Too many care companies have put profit before safety. Care companies are willing to fill beds and they don't mind at what cost. Care home staff were already running on a wing and a prayer with staffing ratios, it wasn't ever going to take much to tip the situation over the edge. Care companies make billions in profits but were slow to provide any PPE for staff. This is completely outrageous. As representatives it has been completely heart breaking to receive calls from our members who were openly sobbing on the phone because they were scared to go to work. They were fearful of catching the virus due to lack of PPE and they were scared of what they might take home to their families. Later on in lockdown we received many calls from members who were traumatised by deaths of residents in the homes where they worked.

We have also been inundated with calls from care workers who provide care for people in their own homes. These carers can see up to 20 clients a day which presents an even greater danger of spreading the virus in the evident lack of PPE.

A lot of members have contacted UNISON during the pandemic to ask for advice on isolation once they had come into contact with someone with the virus. They were following Government advice and staying at home in order to prevent the spread of the virus and yet only received SSP from their employers. This is also outrageous. Predominantly female employees, on zero hour contracts and minimum wage, as well as everything else they were facing, suffered severe financial hardship as a result of doing the right thing.

Early on in lockdown UNISON was receiving a high level of calls where concerns were being raised by carers who were being asked to work in various homes to cover absences increasing the risk of spread. Many care staff are on zero hour

contracts meaning they go wherever there is a demand for carers. Our recent calls also indicate that agency staff are now being used to cover people who are shielding or self-isolating. These workers are not being tested so further risk spreading the virus.

The Government has said that all care home staff and residents will be tested by 6<sup>th</sup> June but UNISON is advised that very few of our members have been tested.

In light of the fact that a quarter of all deaths in this pandemic were in care homes there needs to be a complete overview of private care and care workers need to be paid in accordance with the valuable service they deliver.

**Dawne Baker – Private Sector Caseworker**

**Tom Gallier – Private Sector Caseworker**