

FOREWORD

As the independent regulator and scrutiny body for social care, the Care Inspectorate is responsible for assuring the quality of care across Scotland. We are a scrutiny body that supports and drives improvement.

People are at the heart of everything we do, and our focus is always on the experiences, wellbeing and outcomes for people who use services. Everyone has the right to experience kind and compassionate care, and to be safe and protected from harm.

When the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in Scotland in early March, we galvanised all our resources to focus on supporting services to manage the crisis. In the early stages, we changed our routine inspection visits programme because of the risk of virus transmission and this was supported by advice from public health. But inspection is just one element of scrutiny and far from sitting back, we intensified our oversight of services and rapidly put in place a raft of robust measures to scrutinise, monitor and support care across Scotland.

We significantly increased levels of contact with care homes across Scotland, contacting every care home weekly to carry out checks, and sometimes daily depending on individual risk and support needs. Between 1 April and 26 July, inspectors made over 35,000 separate contacts with more than 6,700 individual services.

Early in March, we put an early warning system of enhanced notifications in place, requiring services to tell us about both suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19, and staffing levels affected by COVID-19. The Red, Amber, Green system was unique across the UK regulators and meant we were immediately alerted to issues and could provide scrutiny, guidance and support to services directly, as well as directing resources to services from other key agencies where needed.

We operated these oversight arrangements seven days a week to carry out scrutiny checks and effect swift solutions for care homes. We checked whether infection prevention and control measures were being followed, levels of PPE were adequate and staffing levels were appropriate. This oversight included contact with services by telephone and, for the first time, through Near Me video consultation and observation that enables us to examine services' environments, systems and practice.

We instituted a national COVID-19 team within the Care Inspectorate to support services around the emerging and changing national guidance. We enhanced our communication to providers with daily Provider Updates, a COVID-19 area on our website, and information on social media.

Working closely with NHS public health and Healthcare Improvement Scotland, we commenced onsite inspections for those services where risk was indicated as high. This allowed us to support improvement, to make and follow through with recommendations and where needed, take enforcement action.

We worked closely with all national groups, health boards and health and social care partnerships for a multi-agency approach, wrapping support around care homes. We are continuing this work as we make plans to ensure that the social care sector is prepared for possible further outbreaks.

This report sets out the detail of what we have been doing, what we found and what we will do as a result. COVID-19 has impacted care homes for older people disproportionately to other care service types and accordingly, this report has a focus on care homes for older people.

There have been many deaths in care homes for older people across Scotland. Each one a personal tragedy for families, loved ones, and the staff and services that cared for them. There have been deaths among care workers, too and we pay tribute to them and to all key workers who have shown such dedication throughout these toughest of times. There are lessons to be learned by all of us. We do not shy away from acknowledging the tragedy that has taken place and we are clear in our continued commitment to do all we can to keep people safe and well.

We have already begun reflecting on the decisions we made in the past months and making changes as a result. We have augmented our inspection framework to focus much more rigorously on infection prevention and control. We are looking at how we gather data and work with others to verify it, ensure its reliability and how best to then share it. We have worked closely with directors of public health in making decisions about what was required in individual services and what was required for inspection and we anticipate close, joint working like this will strengthen and develop as we all strive to manage and overcome the pandemic.

There is no doubt that transformation will be needed to uphold safe and compassionate care that supports people to live well in this new and deeply challenging era. It has been our absolute priority throughout this crisis to do all we can to support Scotland's care sector to deliver high-quality, safe services that make a positive difference to people's lives.

As well as our scrutiny and support role with services at individual and local area level, we have a national, strategic role in leading and informing the future for care. We continue to work closely with Scottish Government, national agencies and representative groups, care services and people experiencing care to ensure the rapid, effective, cohesive and comprehensive response that Scotland requires, and we must all deliver.




Peter Macleod
Chief Executive