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ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP,
First Minister of Scotland,
Bute House,
6 Charlotte Square,
Edinburgh.

Dear First Minister,

I write to you to express concerns which are being raised by constituents on a regular basis regarding the effect current visiting restrictions are having on people who live alone, especially those who are elderly, disabled or housebound. I would like to make it clear from the outset that my first and foremost priority is to ensure that those who are at highest risk from coronavirus are kept safe and the concerns I raise with you should be read within that context.

People are beginning to get confused by what is often viewed as contradictory guidance in relation to public safety. They cannot comprehend how it is safe to meet vulnerable people in a pub where they have no control over who else is in close proximity to them, whereas it is currently considered unsafe to visit those same people within their own homes, a place where they can exercise a greater degree of control over the premises and those who are visiting.

By way of example, when permitted to do so, my own family have visited other family members who fall into these categories. My family all wear face coverings when we enter communal areas and when we go into the house itself. We wash our hands as we enter the property and only remove the face coverings once we are in the living room where there we can safely social distance. The process is repeated when leaving and there have been no hugs since March. My family are happy to go the extra mile knowing that our loved ones will be protected from harm. I know of many others who are doing likewise. This is an example of what safe visiting procedures could look like, though I'm sure your expert advisors could offer additional recommendations on how to further reduce risk in these settings.

Similarly, however well intentioned the extended family group was meant to be, it works very well for couples who do not live together but, sadly, it works directly against the elderly, disabled and housebound. Please allow me to elaborate.

You may only form one extended household. My own family has four individuals who fall into the at risk categories and have been self isolating for different reasons. We are not unusual in that respect. To form an extended household or "bubble" would immediately exclude three of those individuals, resulting in them becoming even further isolated during times of additional measures or local lockdowns. It's also worth stating that forming an extended household with an at risk person puts them at higher risk of infection than practising safe visiting procedures as you are permitted to dispense with

social distancing, the wearing of face coverings and you can hug each other. This is not just my view but that of many people who have contacted me. People cannot understand why visiting people in their own homes (with appropriate guidelines in place) is currently prohibited yet forming an extended family group with at risk relatives is still permissible within the guidelines.

This brings me on to the proposal I wish to put to you. It takes account of the views of a large number of constituents, both those who are missing the contact with their elderly and disabled relatives but also those individuals themselves who are in effect being put under “house arrest” every time a spike is caused. The Scottish Government says it is being done to keep them safe, and nobody doubts that intention. However, these people feel they are being punished for the actions of others who refuse to wear face coverings and refuse to observe social distancing, clearly actions they themselves cannot be guilty of as they are either housebound or self isolating.

At present those individuals who are housebound or self isolating for health reasons are getting no visits as they are unable to meet up with others outdoors. For those who can go out, with winter approaching, they too will lose that contact, especially the frail and elderly who tend to stay at home for fear of falls.

The current policy of banning indoor visits is adversely affecting the mental health of the whole nation and surely there must be a better way to do this whilst carefully managing risk. Some have expressed the view that they are facing discrimination by denying them the social interactions the rest of us take for granted. I share that view whilst understanding the reasons behind the policy. However, all are agreed this isn't about blame, it's about finding a managed solution towards doing things better.

My request to you is to consult with your medical and scientific advisers and come up with guidance on how people living alone can receive visitors whilst minimising their risk of infection. I appreciate this is a big ask but I do not expect it would be an impossible task. I'm not for one minute suggesting a free for all. There will need to be some restrictions for everyone's sake but I believe people could live with that, grudgingly, if they could once again see their loved ones. It would also demonstrate that politicians from across the political divide are listening to them, as those I've spoken with do not believe their voices are being heard.

It may well prove necessary to consider a limits on numbers visiting at any one time, the number of visits over a given time period and the issuance of clear guidance on how to minimise risk to others when conducting visits. Hopefully this is something you can support with your medical and scientific advisors taking the lead on the detail. I'm sure such changes (even with restrictions) would be welcomed by most people as we're all agreed on the need to protect those at risk from harm. However, their emotional needs also need to be considered as their isolation is indeed causing harm, especially to those who may not have many years ahead of them.

Whilst I fully accept that a minority may not abide by any such guidance on home visits, these are likely to be the very same people who are flouting the visiting ban as it currently stands, so I don't see the idiot factor resulting in any increased risk and, as you know, there's no cure for stupidity.

I honestly believe that, given clear, concise guidance on how to conduct home visit safely, the vast majority of people will indeed adhere to such guidance. This is not because it's the law, but rather because we all want to ensure our loved ones are kept

safe so we can continue to visit them and enjoy their wisdom, humour, good company and, dare I say hugs, long after this horrible pandemic has left us.

For lack of better words, we don't want to kill Granny. She means too much. Grandad too of course, but since I am one I don't wish to be promoting my own best interests!

I will close by saying that indoor transmission is primarily being caused by house parties and your Government are right to clamp down on these. However, Granny isn't really into house parties. It's not quite her cup of tea! The chance to catch up with family members is all she wants. Please, please lift Granny's "house arrest", but ensure you do it safely!

Yours sincerely

Steve Delaney