



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care*

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Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your letter of 15 March 2021 on behalf of the Women and Equalities Committee about the effects of the temporary provisions in the Coronavirus Act on disabled people. I wanted to write back to you as soon as possible to assure you that we are planning to expire the Care Act easements provision.

As you know, the Care Act easements provision was a temporary measure to help local authorities continue to meet the most urgent needs in the face of COVID-19 when local authorities were experiencing extraordinary pressures; it was never the intention that people with care needs would have their care reduced or taken away. This is reflected in the fact that the easements were only used by eight local authorities, and none have done so since 29 June 2020. This also shows us how hard local authorities have worked to continue to support their local populations and their strong desire to not fail in delivering their statutory duties but continue to undertake assessments and care support planning.

We have continued to work with groups representing a wide range of people who use care and support services throughout the pandemic to ensure that all voices are heard as we worked to save lives and protect those who are clinically vulnerable to COVID-19.

For the latest two-monthly review of the Care Act easements provision in March, we sought the views of these groups, as well as professional groups and local authorities who are doing their best to manage services during the pandemic. Those responsible for managing services have said that whilst COVID-19 presents an ongoing risk, they favour suspension over expiry as a cautionary approach. However, those representing people who need care and support have raised concerns about the anxiety the provision has caused and have shown strong support for withdrawing the provision.

While the views from the different groups we have spoken with have been divided, and there are still many uncertainties about how the COVID-19 situation will develop over the coming months, on balance, we are keen to address the concerns raised by people who use services and expire the Care Act easements provision.

Local authorities have coped with significant pressures over the winter using the existing Care Act flexibilities and are in a better position now in terms of planning, support and use of mutual aid, than they were when the easements provision was first introduced.

We appreciate that COVID-19 continues to present challenges for the Adult Social Care sector and for disabled people, and we are working hard to continue to support people with disabilities, their carers and their families during this challenging time.

The one-year debate on the temporary provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020 will take place on Thursday 25 March 2021, and regulations to expire the Care Act easements provision will be laid after the Easter recess. Following this, the Chief Social Workers will write to Directors of Adult Social Services and Principle Social Workers explaining the

decision in more detail and outlining the support and guidance available to local authorities to help them ensure they have workforce crisis management plans and escalation arrangements in place to mitigate the ongoing risks of COVID-19.

I hope that this addresses the concerns of your committee,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Helen Whately', with a large, sweeping underline.

HELEN WHATELY