

## **Sara Hayter – Written Evidence (LBC0111)**

I am a wife, mother and a passionate advocate for equality. My submission of evidence does not reflect any organisation, but merely my own personal opinions. I am submitting my thoughts on the implications of the COVID pandemic and the aftermath of this, as I fear it will have devastating consequences for generations to come, especially those that are already marginalised in society already.

The pandemic, as difficult as it was for many people, did prove one thing; work environments can be flexible. This is indeed a positive. Many people were able to work from home and did so throughout the pandemic. This needs to be acknowledged going forward. The appreciation of our healthcare staff was very heart warming and after years of being undervalued, and the NHS being underfunded and understaffed, it was nice to see healthcare workers being celebrated.

Despite the looming and real threat of the virus, I was wholeheartedly touched by the BLM (Black Lives Matter) protests that were happening across the country. This needed to happen, and proved that people will unite and stand up for what is right in spite of extraordinary circumstances.

However, I have grave concerns going forward. As much as key workers were celebrated by words and claps, this does not translate to actions or any noteworthy form of appreciation going forward. NHS staff will not have a much-deserved pay rise, despite them risking their lives and working tirelessly to keep people safe during the pandemic. Healthcare staff NEED to see that the government values them. While others were granted a pay rise for their notable contributions during the pandemic, nurses and healthcare workers were left out. This has far-reaching consequences for the NHS and the healthcare profession. Healthcare workers were feeling demoralised and undervalued before the pandemic hit. The government's refusal to properly reward healthcare staff will have an impact going forward. Nurses and other staff will leave their profession. We can not afford to have more professionals leave. Value staff and give them the acknowledgement they deserve, or they will leave.

Before the pandemic hit, around 52,000 women faced maternity discrimination. I fear the that the pandemic has had devastating consequences for women, and this will be felt for many years to come. Evidence has already shown that women are the ones more likely working in the sectors that have been shut down during the pandemic. Furthermore, mothers are more likely to have quit or have lost their jobs in the wake of this virus. One in four women who was on maternity leave during the pandemic, or who were pregnant have experienced unfair treatment at work (for instance, being made redundant or furloughed). This is a huge concern as the virus seemed to have exacerbated the gender inequality gap further. This needs to be addressed urgently. Furthermore, the overwhelming presence of male voices during the pandemic has been equally problematic. More female voices need to be heard and included in discussions, otherwise females will be at a further disadvantage as life beyond COVID progresses.

The death rates in the BAME community from the virus is of particular concern and needs to be addressed, otherwise racial inequalities in healthcare will continue. The pandemic showed us that we need to prioritise the needs for the most vulnerable in our society, and by ignoring this, inequalities in social class, gender and race will continue and have a devastating impact on those groups.

Similarly, as we are now in a recession, I fear that those on low incomes and benefits will be hit hard. When a recession hits, it is always those that rely on public services and local services that will be hit the hardest. We need to ensure that the vulnerable are protected by cuts to public services, otherwise levels of material and social deprivation will soar even more than they are now.

I hope going forward, when we analyse all the evidence, the stories and experiences of a diversity of voices, that we strive for a more equal and inclusive society. The pandemic has shown the resilience of people, the kindness, the solidarity, but it has also shown that we were not all in this together. That certain groups suffered more than others, and that will be felt for many years to come in terms of widening the already existing inequalities further. We cannot afford to leave people behind. Now more than ever, we need to unite and address these inequalities that COVID exposed and widened.

*21 August 2020*