



Position Statement

A statement on the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in Scotland

**Scottish Commission for People
with Learning Disabilities**

July 2021



Near the beginning of the pandemic, in March 2020, SCLD produced a human rights statement which acknowledged what was a “deeply unsettling time” for people with learning disabilities and their supporters as they faced the need to stay indoors and take extra precaution to avoid the spread of Covid - 19. At that point there was a series of wider impacts on people with learning disabilities and their supporters, including support packages being withdrawn or reduced.

Now, well over a year later, we are in a very different phase of this pandemic. A range of effective vaccines for Covid-19 have been developed, with nearly 70% of the Scottish population having received their first dose. Yet against this backdrop, Scotland has recently recorded high case numbers, whilst the lifting of restrictions is planned. We are aware that this situation is deeply unsettling for some people with learning disabilities and their supporters, and the purpose of this statement is to acknowledge and set out some of these concerns.

People with learning disabilities are not a homogenous group. They have different characteristics and qualities and feel differently about the lifting of restrictions. Some are enjoying the opportunities to meet friends, enjoy food and drinks, travel and shop. However, many individuals feel deeply concerned by the current situation.

The rationale for lifting of restrictions is that vaccines mean the link between new cases and serious harm to health is weakening. Although

this is the case, for many individuals it is difficult to fully understand the shift in a strategy from seeking to eliminate cases of Covid-19, to living with cases of Covid-19.

In particular, individuals have expressed confusion about exactly what the levels of community transmission will be, or put in another way, just how much of the virus will be out there as they live their lives. People with learning disabilities face barriers in accessing information which is accessible to them. It is not clear that enough has been done to clearly communicate the current strategy for living with the virus in the long term.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that whilst many adults have been vaccinated, this is not the case for children and young people. The parents of children and young people with learning disabilities, including those with Down's Syndrome, have significant fears about the risks posed by high levels of community transmission of the virus.

Fears about high levels of community transmission are also significant for family carers, including for those with profound and multiple learning disabilities. An infection that is severe enough to keep someone in bed, but out of hospital, has different implications depending on the responsibilities for that person. Many family carers are deeply concerned that they could become too ill to be able to fulfil their caring responsibilities. This is at a time when they have been dealing with

either the suspension or reduction of support services since the onset of the pandemic.

There is a need to recognize that the large-scale events taking place this summer which symbolise hope for many, also provoke anxiety and even anger for others. It is incomprehensible for many family carers to see sporting arenas and stadiums being quickly restored to their full capacity, whilst their support remains limited.

Moving forward, the implementation of the Feeley Review offers a long-term vision for the future of adult social care in Scotland that is hugely positive for many. However, a long-term programme of reform does not offer reassurance to family carers that remain in a state of ongoing crisis.

Finally, early indications of a booster vaccination programme creates new questions for people with learning disabilities and their supporters. The benefits and purpose of a booster campaign need to be clearly communicated. Clear guidance about the inclusion of all people with learning disabilities within this programme can provide reassurance and clarity about any vaccinations that take place in Autumn.

This is a profoundly difficult and challenging time, and there are no simple answers in how to balance our collective risks and rights.

Yet moving forward, an approach which purports to consider human rights and equalities considerations cannot simply place the needs of those who can tolerate risk in their day to day lives, over those who cannot.

At SCLD we believe there are some specific actions that can be taken to address some of the concerns addressed in this statement.

We call for:

- 1.** Renewed efforts to fully restore the system of social care support, including respite and day opportunity services, to at least pre-pandemic levels with meaningful milestones about when this will be achieved.
- 2.** Clearer and fully accessible messaging about the rationale for the current strategy, including the provision of easy read materials.
- 3.** Urgent clarification on the status of people with learning disabilities within any vaccination booster roll-out, and on the vaccination of children and young people.
- 4.** Clarity regarding plans to keep some protective measures in place given increasing levels of public anxiety.



The Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities

Suite 5.2 Stock Exchange Court 77 Nelson Mandela Place

Glasgow G2 1QY

E: admin@scl.d.co.uk T: 0141 248 3733 Tw: [@SCLDNews](https://twitter.com/SCLDNews) Fb: [@ScotCommission](https://www.facebook.com/ScotCommission) IG: [@scl.d.news](https://www.instagram.com/scl.d.news)