

Convenor/ Health, Social Care & Sport Committee
Convenor/ Local Government, Housing & Planning Committee
Convenor/ Education, Children & Young People Committee
Convenor/ Finance & Public Administration Committee
Convenor/ Social Justice & Social Security Committee
Convenor/ Criminal Justice Committee
Convenor/ Delegated Powers & Law Reform Committee

By email

December 2022

Dear Committee Conveners

We are writing as members of the Social Covenant Steering Group (SCSG) to share our views about the importance of centring the voices of people with lived experience of accessing and delivering social care services as the National Care Service Bill progresses through Parliament.

The Social Covenant Steering Group has been set up to help the Scottish Government put the voices of people with lived experience at the centre of the development of the National Care Service, making sure that they are engaging with the right people in the right way.

If the National Care Service is to develop in a way that meets the needs of people, it is important that the widest possible range of voices of lived experience are heard in discussions. This means that institutions that hold power need to adjust their ways of working to make sure these voices are heard, amplified, and acted on.

Based on the experiences of the members of the SCSG and our networks, we are advising the Scottish Government on practical changes that can be made, in line with the social model of disability, to remove the barriers to participation for people with lived experience in official settings. It is vital that clear steps are taken to illustrate best practice in accessibility. Without some cultural change, we will not see meaningful involvement of disabled people and unpaid carers in decision making.

In practical terms, this includes:

- Holding meetings at times that allow people to arrange the appropriate care is in place to allow them to participate. For example, this may mean avoiding early meetings, or providing several weeks' notice for events.
- Holding meetings on platforms that are accessible for all, following discussion about people's communication needs and preferences. Platform decisions should be led by the requirements of attendees rather than default platforms for health and social care professionals and local or national government colleagues.
- Meeting people 'where they are' – in their own communities and in environments where they feel comfortable.
- Ensuring that accessible information and inclusive communications are in place, asking individuals explicitly what they need to be able to participate, and resourcing them appropriately. This may include communication support (e.g. Guide Communicators) or providing technology to enable people to join online meetings.
- Closing feedback loops, and reporting back to people on how the information they share has been used and acted upon.

We know that the Committees are hearing evidence from people with lived experience, and we recognise the challenges that all organisations face in adapting to working with the varied group of stakeholders who have an interest in the NCS Bill. We would like to offer our support and members of the SCSG would be happy to invite Committee members or clerks to one of our meetings to discuss how best to support and work with people with lived experience.

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Janet MacLugash
John Whitfield
Caroline Gould
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Tommy Whitelaw
(Members of the Social Covenant Steering Group)