

COVID-19 Recovery Committee

5th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Thursday 2 March 2023

Long COVID inquiry

Introduction

1. The aim of this inquiry is to scrutinise what action the Scottish Government is taking to address long COVID and post COVID syndrome. The inquiry will focus on the following three main themes—
 - Awareness and recognition
 - Therapy and rehabilitation
 - Study and research
2. This is the third formal evidence session of the inquiry, in which the Committee will focus on comparative approaches to long COVID services. The Committee will take evidence from the following panel of witnesses—
 - Claire Jones, Advanced Clinical Practitioner and Long COVID Therapy Lead, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board;
 - Dr Melissa Heightman, Clinical Lead, Post Covid Service, University College London Hospitals and North Central London Respiratory Network, National Specialty Advisor, Long COVID Program, NHS England; and
 - Dr David Strain, Senior Clinical Lecturer, University of Exeter Medical School, Lead on Long-Covid, British Medical Association, Member of the NHS Long-COVID Taskforce.

Background

3. In July 2021, SPICe published a [blog on long COVID](#) which set out what is long COVID, how many people were affected at that time, and how it is being treated and managed in Scotland. In February 2023, SPICe produced an updated blog, [Long COVID: where are we now?](#) to support this inquiry.

Scottish Government position

4. In advance of launching the inquiry the Committee [wrote](#) to the Scottish Government seeking an update on its current position regarding long COVID. The Committee requested information on the following—
 - Further information on the £2.5 million supported nine research projects commissioned by the Scottish Government into long COVID;
 - Details of funding allocations of the £10 million long COVID support fund to date and future investment plans for addressing long COVID;
 - Further details on the £370,000 supported national programme of improvement work led by National Strategic Network
 - An update on the implementation of the recommendations of the National Strategic Network on the initial priority areas for improvement in relation to long COVID
 - Details of those people who have accessed Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland’s ‘long COVID support services’
 - Clarification on its position on long COVID clinics and information on which, if any, health boards have established them;
 - Further details on the expert group set up to identify the capacity needs of NHS Boards and staff in supporting people who have long COVID;
 - Whether the Scottish Government believes long COVID should be treated as a disability under the Equality Act 2010;
 - How the Scottish Government is meeting the recommendations of NICE around long COVID service provision
5. The Scottish Government’s [response](#) has been published on the website.
6. Following this response, the Committee then [wrote](#) to all the health boards, the Thistle Foundation and NHS National Services Scotland seeking further information in relation to long COVID services within their organisation including—
 - details on the current services available including information on how the Scottish Government funding has been used;
 - any barriers to service development and provision;
 - any examples of good practice; and
 - details of future plans for long COVID service provision in the short and medium term.
7. Responses received have been published on the [website](#).

Engagement

8. The Committee was keen to speak to people with lived experience of long COVID at the outset of the inquiry. On 12 January 2023, the Committee spoke with participants, who were contacted through Long Covid Scotland as part of the launch of its inquiry into long COVID. A note of the discussion and a briefing paper from Long Covid Scotland can be found on the [website](#). On 2 February,

the Committee held an informal online discussion with participants from Long Covid Kids, a note of the discussion can be found on the [website](#).

Evidence

Oral evidence

9. At its meetings on 9 and 23 February, the Committee took evidence on the first two themes of the inquiry on awareness and recognition and therapy and rehabilitation respectively. The papers and transcripts from those meetings can be found on the [website](#).

Written evidence

10. The Committee issued a call for views on 12 January 2023, which ran until 10 February 2023 and was then extended until 19 February 2023. The Committee received more than 500 responses, which can be read on the [website](#). The Committee's call for views asked the following questions —

Awareness and recognition

- Do you think there is enough awareness and recognition of long COVID by the general public, medical professionals, employers and / or policy makers in Scotland?
- What more could / should be done to raise awareness and recognition of long COVID?
- What are your thoughts on the use of long COVID assessment clinics?

Therapy and rehabilitation

- Do you consider that the correct mix of services are in place to help people who have long COVID?
- What support could or should be available for people who are supporting or caring for people with long COVID?

Study and research

- What should be the main priorities for study and research into long COVID?
- Is sufficient data publicly available on the prevalence of long COVID in Scotland?
- Do you have any other comments?

11. Dr Melissa Heightman highlighted the following NHSE documents on the commissioning guidance for post COVID services (updated in July 2022) and the plan for improving long COVID services—

- https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/C1670_National-commissioning-guidance-for-post-COVID-services_V3_July-2022-1.pdf
- https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/C1607_The-NHS-plan-for-improving-long-COVID-services_July-2022.pdf

Next steps

12. The Committee will continue to take evidence on the inquiry at its meetings on 9 and 16 March 2023.

Committee Clerks
February 2023