

FOR TRUTH BEHIND TRAGEDIES

they care?



“There has been something wrong from the start”
 MARK BRESLIN
 YESTERDAY



MUCH LOVED
 Care home resident Elizabeth Breslin



dents and staff. The chief executive of the PHA explained to MLAs 500 people had been recruited to conduct contact tracing when in fact they had not. “And they also want to know why did the RQIA suspended its inspection of care homes and why the Chief Medical Officer and the Department directed the RQIA to reduce its inspections, including at care homes. “An inquiry needs to clearly establish what happened in circumstances where facts have been disputed. “We must learn from what happened here and we must be enabled to use that information to prevent their recurrence and this includes identifying shortcomings in law or regulations. An inquiry



CONCERN Mark Breslin

must also be allowed to establish accountability so people and organisations can be held to account.” Care homes campaigner Julieann McNally said: “This is worse than the RHI scandal in which no one lost their lives or their jobs. “To date nearly 400 people have died in Northern Ireland’s care homes with reported links to Covid-19. “We have no idea if others have died with or from Covid-19 without post mortems or having been assessed as such. “And I feel that many of the deaths could have been prevented had proper processes or safeguards been put in place. It is like every last shred of regulation and oversight intended

to make sure residents are safe, were removed. “Who knows if there are homes with care being provided by very small numbers of staff due to sick leave or exhaustion? “Who knows if cleaning duties are not being carried out properly because they don’t have the time or the staff? “And who knows if the abuse safeguarding cases are increasing in care homes because of all the attention diverted to Covid-19 matters? “We demand a public inquiry to establish the truth and determine if the most vulnerable in Northern Ireland have been failed – because we believe they have.” A spokesman for Runwood Homes said: “The testing regime is co-ordinated by the Belfast HSC Trust who

have full responsibility for the testing and re-testing of residents. “We urge the Belfast Trust to ramp up their testing regime for all care facilities across their locality as a matter of priority. “The testing of residents is co-ordinated by the Department of Health. “The virus status of individual residents are released to the next of kin and due to potential identification of other residents we cannot release additional information without appropriate consent. “The management and staff at Glenabbey Manor have worked in a very positive partnership with colleagues from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and continue to deliver compassionate care to all who share our home.”



PLAN First Minister Arlene Foster

Executive ‘very conscious’ of homes crisis

BY MICHAEL MCHUGH
 MINISTERS are “very conscious” of the coronavirus crisis facing care homes, First Minister Arlene Foster said yesterday. More than half of all Covid-19 deaths in Northern Ireland have occurred among frail and elderly residents of nursing facilities. Mrs Foster told the BBC’s The Andrew Marr Show on Sunday: “If we have a low number of deaths in the first place, then you are going to have a concentration where there are old and vulnerable people. “We are very, very conscious of the difficulties in care homes. “There will be plenty of time to look back at how we dealt with this.” She said Northern Ireland’s infection rate has been below that in England and Scotland because of a lower population density. She added lockdown restrictions were introduced earlier in the outbreak in Northern Ireland.

TOLL

Yesterday, the Department of Health said one more person had died from Covid-19-related illness, bringing the overall toll to 523. Another seven infections brought the mainly hospital-related tally of cases to 4,716. In the Republic, 1,652 have died. Health Minister Robin Swann has announced £6.5million in additional funding for care homes and expanded testing in those facilities. The money is intended to help facilities increase the level of cleaning and bring in any additional staff required to support the isolation of residents. Mrs Foster said care home leaders will recognise what the Department of Health has done to help, as she cautioned everyone is grappling with a novel virus. She also defended our manual contact tracing system, which is following up about 30 positive cases a day. Aps are expected to be used in the Republic of Ireland and Britain which are not compatible with each other, posing challenges for Northern Ireland. Mrs Foster said: “We are dealing with this without a rule book. We are making good progress.”