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Chief Executive

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John J Taylor
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Date: 15 June 2020

Dear Mr Taylor,

Re: Care and Nursing Home and Domiciliary Sector in Worcestershire

Thank you for your letter of 30th April 2020. I apologise for the delay in responding, which was due to a technical issue in relation to the email received. I can confirm that we are also in receipt of your second letter in response to the recently published Care Home Support Plan and will respond to this shortly, to meet your deadline of 3rd July.

I am pleased to respond to your questions as below.

1. Can you confirm how arrangements are being made by the Local Authority, and its partners, to ensure that PPE is available to care and nursing home and domiciliary care staff, and that supplies are sufficient to meet Government Guidance and ensure the safety of residents, patients, service users and staff?

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent guidance issued by Public Health England, demand for PPE dramatically increased placing unprecedented demand on the existing UK stock and distribution network. The Council had to step into the normal supply arrangements and secure items from other sources to ensure that care services and other key worker activities could continue safely.

As a first and immediate response to the issue, the Council sourced and procured external (non-government source) PPE stock (masks, gloves, aprons, eye protection, hand sanitizer) in order to support demand from WCC staff and care providers. A storage and distribution hub was set up and an online request system implemented providing either same day or next day delivery of emergency PPE where requests were validated. Emergency PPE is currently being provided free of charge. Over 500,000 items have been distributed to date.

To date, we have had 123 individual requests from 84 care homes and 144 individual requests from 85 providers and continue to provide a safety net of supply where providers are unable to source PPE.

Central government have also recently launched a PPE National Portal which is currently open for small residential care providers (24 beds or fewer) and small domiciliary care providers (99 clients or fewer) to order emergency amounts of PPE.

The Council will continue to support all providers who have urgent PPE needs and where they are unable to purchase from commercial suppliers.

2. What alternative, appropriate accommodation has been put in place for people who have tested positive for Covid-19 who require isolation on discharge from hospital, or other circumstances, where this cannot be achieved by local care providers?

During the period of peak demand on services earlier in the COVID-19 situation, additional accommodation and care arrangements were commissioned to meet demand and provide alternative options for accommodation and care, for example an increase in Community Hospital capacity and block-booked accommodation in hotels. This has been gradually reduced and stepped down in line with need but is under constant review in order to respond to any changes in the epidemiology.

Alternative accommodation and care are currently being targeted as required on a case by case basis, for example through the provision of additional 1-1 staffing support for up to 14 days in homes so that residents can isolate with guidance. It is intended that this offer will be extended and offered more proactively moving forwards.

3. Has this provision been used yet in Worcestershire? If so, how many times to date?

As above, Worcestershire's initial response to the COVID-19 situation was to repurpose provision such as Community Hospital capacity to meet demand where individuals could not be accommodated by local care providers. This increase in capacity was used during the peak demand period but has since been gradually reduced and stepped down. Needs are now being met within care provider settings rather than through alternative accommodation, for example by supporting the provision of additional 1-1 staffing.

4. Can you confirm that the current arrangements for testing meet the latest Government guidance that tests will be available for all care and nursing home residents and staff, whether symptomatic or not of Covid-19? If not when will this provision be in place? Can you also confirm the current average time for homes and operators to receive the results of these tests?

A key feature of the Care Home Support Plan relates to the development of diagnostic testing capacity for all care home residents and staff. The CCG, adult social care and Public Health have worked together to implement a testing programme for all Worcestershire care homes. This includes implementation of testing of both symptomatic and asymptomatic residents and staff in all homes, which are being targeted in order of prioritisation.

The time to receive the results of tests varies with the route taken to access the testing. As testing is now available for all staff and residents of care homes, whether symptomatic

or not, and to the general population including those in other types of service, a number of different arrangements may be implemented including via a national portal, through the national telephone line (119), through WCC HR team, staff independently visiting drive-through sites, undertaken by CCG in response to potential outbreak etc. Whichever procedure applies, the tests, **on average**, are generally reported to the staff member / home manager (for residents) and then shared with CCG and Public Health within about 2 to 4 days.

5. How are residents in care and nursing home settings being provided with additional support for their mental health and emotional wellbeing, given the additional strain generated by the Covid-19 pandemic?

Support for mental health and emotional wellbeing is being provided in a number of different ways by different providers. All homes now have access to iPads which have been rolled out across the county. As well as enabling online GP consultations, the iPads and associated technologies are also being effectively used to reduce social isolation and enable contact with family members.

There are lots of individual examples of homes providing support in different ways; some examples are as follows:

- A Learning Disability home have made a beach with some sand etc for their residents to play/sit/relax in. They have also started a tuck shop shed, which opens at certain times and have reported that the service users really look forward to it and queue up outside!
- An Older People's home had in the very early stages before the lockdown trained several members of staff (including the manager) to wash, roller and style residents' hair – recognising the importance of this for sense of wellbeing.
- An Older People's home introduced an App called Gateway which enabled two-way communication between residents and their families – they are able to post photos, videos and messages to it as can the families. They are using it on tablets and laptops.
- An Older People's home has maintained contact with a local nursery – the children had visited regularly pre-lockdown and the two way communication continues now including sending cards, photos and pictures between them – this raises the residents' spirits.
- A Learning Disability home has listened to ideas from its residents and done many activities such as a Sunday BBQ roast, chippy tea, disco night, Quiz afternoon with prizes, pudding night, garden parties with teacups and posh sandwiches, karaoke, cinema afternoon, and Yoga.

6. How are people in receipt of domiciliary care, in particular those who are a. shielding and b. vulnerable being provided with additional support for their mental health and emotional wellbeing, given the additional strain generated by the Covid-19 pandemic?

Social work teams across all service areas have been carrying out regular welfare checks for people who are in receipt of services. This includes risk assessing and RAG-rating people, which takes into account both physical and mental health and vulnerabilities. Social work teams are also linking people into the Here 2 Help support offer and there are many examples of where this has worked very successfully in ensuring people get the support they need.

7. Under the Care Act 2014, local authorities have duties to shape local provision of care and ensure services remain sustainable and continuity of care is maintained. What steps have the Council taken to secure the current and future sustainability of the care and nursing home and domiciliary care sector?

Answered with (8) below.

8. Are there plans in place, or in development, to ensure this duty is met and continuity of care can be maintained?

Advice and support to providers is available via the dedicated CoronavirusASC@worcestershire.gov.uk email address, which has been set up as a single point of contact to deal with all provider queries during the crisis. This is staffed seven days a week and able to respond to urgent situations. Telephone support is also available via the Worcestershire's Here 2 Help access number on 01905 768053.

In relation to financial support a number of measures have been taken. The council wrote to providers of domiciliary care, supported living, extra care and day services on 17th March 2020 and confirmed that we would continue to pay providers even in cases where services cannot be delivered (for example where day services have closed due to COVID-19 or where homecare cannot be delivered due to individuals self-isolating or where staff are not able to work due to COVID-19 related issues). We stipulated that providers must continue to pay staff, including staff who may be themselves having to self-isolate and therefore unable to work temporarily.

In further recognition of additional cost pressures being faced by providers due to COVID-19, such as additional staffing costs, increased cost of Personal Protective Equipment etc., the council has awarded an additional temporary percentage increase to providers, from the beginning of April. The temporary nature of the increase will be reviewed in line with the developing COVID-19 situation.

For domiciliary care, supported living, extra care and shared lives providers this increase is an additional 5% on their fee rates. For residential and nursing care providers, the increase is 5% on Band 2 and Band 4 rates respectively. This equates to a cash value of approximately £24 on the weekly fee rate.

As it is likely that some providers will be incurring additional COVID-19 related costs over and above the costs already reimbursed, which will vary considerably from provider to provider, a process has been agreed to consider additional reimbursements for providers who apply to the council for further financial assistance.

Providers who approach the council will be asked to submit details of the further additional costs which they are incurring. These applications will be reviewed by

Commissioners and the Head of Finance on a case by case basis and payments made where costs are deemed reasonable and directly related to COVID-19.

The Council has also recently distributed allocations of Infection Control Grant to care home providers in line with the government's Grant Determination, which represent payments via two instalments totalling £962 per bed. This money is ringfenced for spend on infection control measures.

Could you please provide us with copies of all information sent to providers during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic so that we can be fully aware of actions taken and being planned by the County Council, and its partners, in the light of the increased pressures on these key services.

There are dedicated pages on the Worcestershire County Council website which contain copies of information which has also been emailed to providers. These pages are being constantly updated in line with any changes in government advice and guidance. Please see the following link to access this information:

http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20739/professionals_partners_and_providers/2190/covid-19_coronavirus_advice_for_care_providers

We have noted the Government's commitment to provide additional funding to support meeting the cost of Covid-19 to the social care sector. It would be useful to know how this additional funding has been used in Worcestershire.

In relation to the measures outlined in the response to questions 7 and 8 above, Worcestershire County Council paid £1.9 million of additional financial support to adult social care providers during April 2020. This includes contracted domiciliary care providers and Worcestershire-based residential and nursing care providers. It is forecast that this may total £7 million by the end of June 2020.

Yours sincerely



Paul Robinson
Chief Executive
Worcestershire County Council