

ADULT CARE AND WELL BEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 22 SEPTEMBER 2020

UPDATE ON RESIDENTIAL AND NURSING CARE PROVISION

Summary

1. The Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel is to receive an update on residential and nursing care provision, including quality, staffing, market resilience and capacity for people with dementia.
2. Senior Officers from the Directorate of People and the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care have been invited to the meeting.

Background

3. Care and nursing home provision is part of the Panel's work programme. The recently completed scrutiny task group review into the Council's quality assurance of residential care and nursing homes (which the previous Panel Chairman participated in and is referenced in the background papers) recommended regular updates for the Panel on care home provision and the areas set out above.
4. Additionally, at its 11 June meeting, the Panel was briefed on the Council's COVID Care Home Support Plan, which the Government had asked all councils to put in place with local system partners by 29 May 2020, to help combat the spread of the virus in care home settings.

Residential and Nursing Care Provision - Update

COVID-19 and Infection Control

5. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, intensive work has taken place to support care homes to put in place effective infection prevention and control measures. The "Worcestershire Care Home Hub" was established in March 2020 to strategically lead, co-ordinate and facilitate action across the system to support care homes and prevent infection during COVID-19. The joint working across Adult Social Care, Worcestershire Public Health, Public Health England, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and other health partners enables pooling of capacity and resources, using a proactive and supportive methodology, in order to minimise the number of homes experiencing an outbreak and reduce the absolute number of cases and deaths.
6. The Care Home Huddle meets daily to review the state of the care home market locally, using a risk-based assessment approach to target support to care homes. Discussions are underpinned by analysis of national capacity tracker information

(see below) and local data obtained from proactive engagement calls made to all care homes across the county on a regular basis (at least weekly with more frequent contact if required). Escalation pathways are in place to ensure any issues identified are addressed. When required, multi-agency Incident Management Team meetings are held with individual homes, to seek assurance, target support and formulate service-specific action plans.

7. As at the end of August, 69 care homes in Worcestershire had experienced outbreaks since the start of COVID-19, with outbreaks remaining ongoing at that time in four homes. The [national guidance](#) defines an outbreak in a care home as “two or more confirmed cases of COVID-19 or clinically suspected cases of COVID-19 among individuals associated with a specific setting with onset dates within 14 days”. New positive cases are generally now being found as a result of the regular whole-home testing which is ongoing in homes for older people and those with dementia and just re-commencing for all other homes. Staff are tested weekly and residents monthly. Recent testing has found that the staff found to be positive are generally asymptomatic, so their weekly tests are invaluable in identifying active COVID-19 cases.

8. Once identified, a thorough process commences to assess risk and manage the situation. This involves the undertaking of a robust risk assessment by either Public Health England, the Local Outbreak Response Team (WCC Public Health) or the CCG Infection Control Team. The risk assessment explores every aspect of COVID-19 management in the home to ensure there are no breaches which would enable transmission between staff or from staff to residents (or vice versa). It covers, for example, PPE usage, cleaning, social distancing, visiting arrangements, staff breaks, social activities of staff outside work hours including with each other, interactions between homes if any and admission protocols etc. This proactive process allows subsequent risks to be managed effectively and significantly reduces the risk of onward transmission.

Quality and staffing

9. As well as working at the core of the Care Home Hub and Huddle, the Council’s Quality Assurance Team has also continued to proactively quality assure services throughout the COVID-19 period and continues to maintain a close relationship with the Care Quality Commission, with daily conversations to discuss and address any quality concerns arising.

10. The number and level of high-risk issues being identified or notified have increased over recent weeks. Although restrictions due to COVID-19 have reduced the number of visits which can be made by regulators, the Care Quality Commission is now visiting homes where high-risk concerns have been identified. The Council’s Quality Assurance Team has also visited where deemed to be necessary, and with appropriate infection control measures in place such as full Personal Protective Equipment etc. The Council’s Provider Concerns process is implemented where required to ensure quality concerns are addressed with robust action plans, working across all partner organisations.

11. Staffing remains a key issue for care homes, with issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 situation and high vacancy rates. In some cases, this has led to reduced staffing levels and redundancies. The ongoing impacts continue to be monitored

proactively both by the Quality Assurance Team from a quality perspective, and in relation to the resilience of the sector (see below).

Care home resilience

12. Since May 2020, all care homes have been required to complete the Department of Health and Social Care's "National Capacity Tracker". As well as information about COVID-19 infections and infection control measures, the tracker also includes information about vacancy rates in care homes. As at 7 September 2020, the tracker was showing an overall vacancy rate of 20% in Worcestershire care homes, although with significant variation from home to home. 36 care homes were 100% occupied, and a further 40 had vacancy rates of less than 10%. However, 26 homes were reporting vacancy rates of over 30%.

13. Work is ongoing to analyse the resilience of the care home sector in Worcestershire and to plan appropriate support and mitigate risks identified. The West Midlands Regional Commissioning Network is co-ordinating a significant piece of work over the coming weeks, based on regional and national datasets. The "West Midlands Market Risk and Recovery Toolkit" will enable commissioners to analyse the market position in both a local and regional context and enable the signalling of clear commissioning messages to the market. The tool starts by using existing care data sets, which are supplied to each council, with data mapped against the emerging international evidence of key COVID-19 risk factors, for example the people living in the home and their experience of care, the quality of life in the home, the workforce etc.

14. The regional work will be informed by the Council's own financial resilience programme which has been initiated by the Commercial Team in response to the current economic climate that has been impacted by COVID-19. The objective is to protect the Council's services that are reliant on suppliers and providers for delivery. The key activities are to monitor and survey the supply base, report on trends and changes in supply base and to act.

15. The Council and Worcestershire Children First together buy from 2,500 suppliers, 1,000 of which are of interest as there is an annual spend of over £25k. These "at interest" suppliers are being followed by reference to Companies House, financial reporting results and credit rating. Suppliers and providers that are at a high financial risk (low liquidity & medium /high credit risk) or have a high credit risk assessment are identified and the Commercial Team works with the service areas to undertake an impact assessment and agree mitigation activities, should any of the suppliers cease trading. The most recent analysis flags up five Worcestershire care homes as high risk, but due to the volatile state of the market the situation is being kept under constant review.

Capacity for high needs dementia

16. As reported previously, it has been identified that meeting the needs of the growing number of people with dementia in Worcestershire will be a significant and increasing challenge. The current estimated number of people in Worcestershire with dementia (diagnosed and undiagnosed cases) is 9,560, with over 6,500 cases in those aged over 80. The total is projected to increase to 13,076 by 2030.

17. The cost of providing care within residential and nursing homes is rising, due to inflation, national living wage increases and workforce shortages. The cost of care is also rising significantly because of increasing complexity and life expectancy of people, particularly to care for those with behavioural issues linked to dementia. Increasingly the market is unable to meet the needs of individuals that require highly skilled dementia care and the individuals are placed in nursing homes due to the higher numbers of staff per resident when their need is for specialist residential dementia care. This is not appropriate and also takes up valuable capacity in nursing homes which is better suited for people who have physical health conditions which require nursing care. Alternatively, people could be placed out of the county which can be difficult for families and friends to visit leading to further deterioration of the person's quality of life.

18. An outline business case was produced in March 2020 exploring a proposal for Worcestershire County Council to build a residential care home specialising in high needs dementia care. While progress with this project was put on hold due to COVID-19 pressures, this is now being revisited with a view to assessing whether this project should be progressed to the next stage. Given the long-term nature of this project, options are also being explored in parallel to engage with and develop the external market, with a view to going out to tender in the coming months for a block contract for high needs dementia beds.

Purpose of the Meeting

19. Members are invited to consider and comment on the information discussed and agree:

- whether any further information or scrutiny work is required at this time
- whether there are any comments to highlight to the relevant Cabinet Member

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agendas and minutes from the Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 11 June and 27 July 2020 - [Agenda and minutes](#)
- Scrutiny Report 'Quality Assurance of Care and Nursing Homes in Worcestershire' - [scrutiny report](#)