

Support for Care Providers

Firstly, I would like to express my continued thanks for the support and dedication that care providers and their staff working in Stoke on Trent have shown over the last two months which has ensured that our most vulnerable residents have continued to be supported and cared for.

While we may have seen the peak in the numbers of confirmed cases in care homes, care providers are still facing significant challenges and the City Council is committed to continue working with the sector and our NHS partners to provide support (both financial and in kind) to mitigate against the pressures as a consequence of Covid-19.

Our dedicated Care Home Support Team is the cornerstone of the City Council's support to the care sector. Established in April as part of our response to the pandemic, the Care Home Support team have reviewed every Care Home in Stoke on Trent against a series of criteria to identify any concerns with COVID-19 including:

- Outbreaks
- PPE
- Infection Prevention and Control
- Movement of staff and agency workers
- Testing
- Staffing levels and sickness rates and
- Accommodation segmentation

The team have provided Care Homes with advice and guidance on all matters relating to Covid-19 and ensured that any concerns identified have been resolved through MDT discussions and a whole systems approach to responses. This has included providing training on PPE, bringing in Infection Control specialists, Swabbing, Clinical Resources and utilising cross Council departmental support including deep cleaning for Care Homes with infections and logistics to enable accommodation separation.

We have been pleased to see the positive responses received over the last few weeks to the range of support on offer locally, including a Provider Helpline available 7 days a week to provide support, share intelligence and give up-to-date comprehensive advice to local care providers. Many providers have commented very positively on the direct help received from the Care Home Support Team and we believe this has significantly improved relationships.

We are finalising our care home resilience plan which sets out the support that the City Council and the NHS are providing to care homes in line with the national coronavirus (Covid-19) care homes support package. The government has made available an additional £600m in ring-fenced grant support for care homes to tackle infection control, the allocation for Stoke on Trent £3.14m has been based on CQC registered bed numbers.

The Plan will be published soon.

We have 85 care homes and 2, 449 beds in Stoke on Trent and it is expected that 75% of the funding will be given to care homes in two parts, with the second part contingent on the care providers completing and updating the national Capacity Tracker. The funding must be used by the homes to support infection control and cannot be used for PPE. Homes will need to account for how they have spent the money.

The remaining 25% must be used for infection control measures, and this may involve support for home care. Home Care Providers have already received financial support from the City Council to contribute to the additional costs they face with PPE, as well as a range of other measures to support their cash flow – quicker payments, paying on planned hours rather than actual for example.

Financial sustainability

The additional COVID-19 Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund allocation for support to Care Homes £3.14m needs to be seen in the context of the support already given to the sector by the City Council to deal with the additional costs associated with the coronavirus pandemic.

As can be seen from the table attached the City Council has already committed over £6M of funding directly or in kind to the Care Sector and this does not include the £3.14M Infection Control Fund mentioned above.

The Council has increased care home fees for all placements by 3.7% in 2020/21, an additional £1.9m recurring funding. This was followed by non-recurring funding of £2.845m to support the additional costs incurred by care homes in Stoke on Trent as a result COVID-19, specifically additional staff costs and increased PPE costs

Deep Cleaning for care homes to support Infection and Prevention and Control has been provided by the Council at no cost to the homes, £0.042m.

Other support to the sector has included the establishment of £0.5m Sustainability Fund to enable one off grant payments for providers who are adversely impacted by the pandemic and are increasingly financially unsustainable.

In addition, financial support through grant funding is in place for SMEs and Charities locally and the Council is signposting voluntary organisations that provide care to additional sources of funding.

PPE

We responded early to the PPE supply challenge and to supplement emergency provision as a “Provider of Last Resort” we have been able to establish a significant supply of PPE to support both internal and commissioned services providing more than 80, 000 items of PPE to date to local care providers at a cost to the Council of £0. 236m.

Smaller local providers who have not previously required the level of PPE that they now need as a consequence of the pandemic are being supported financially through non-recurring funding as well as being able to apply for Sustainability funding if they are facing serious financial instability as a consequence of COVID-19.

Workforce Support

The regional West Midlands employers and Association of Directors of Adult Social Care #Time to Care campaign, aims to match job seekers keen to explore a number of different roles in the care sector (from care worker to maintenance and cooking for example) to available jobs in the area.

We are supporting this campaign, helping job applicants to identify their experience, skills and behaviours to add value to their applications in this sector and helping them find jobs being advertised in the areas they are able to work in Stoke on Trent.

Testing

The Council and the CCG have supported the national approach to testing of asymptomatic residents and staff by prioritising and referring all eligible care homes through the new national portal. The category of care home that can access the national portal is currently limited to older people and dementia; we will support rollout across all care homes as the national arrangements are extended.

In Summary

Support to the sector will be reviewed and amended as required as the national situation changes. I hope the additional funding and in-kind support we are providing will help to continue the incredible care and support that agencies in Stoke-on-Trent have provided to our most vulnerable residents during this challenging time.

Dr Paul Edmondson – Jones MBE

Director of Adult Social Care, Health Integration and Wellbeing

Stoke on Trent City Council