

Response to Helen Whately MP
Minister of State [Minister for Care]

May 2020

Dear Minister,

Thank you for the opportunity to report on the support and capacity of the care market within Stockport with particular emphasis on care home provision within the borough.

Along with many other local authorities, we have been working hard to support our care providers to continue to provide a strong continuity of care and resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, our system-wide partnership has risen to the challenge and has been able to meet the demands and pressures that we have seen on the entire health and social care system.

Partners across Stockport have been working on a daily basis to ensure the care market is able to remain resilient and sustainable throughout the current crisis and beyond. We are confident the oversight and systems we have put in place provides partners with the ability to respond to issues and problems early, and to maintain the crucial care being delivered.

Provider Engagement

The response to COVID-19, and subsequent support for care homes, is being delivered via the Commissioning and Infrastructure Service. Provider engagement has continued with regular video calls giving an opportunity to raise questions regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), testing for COVID-19 and any other problems arising. This is supplemented by regular formal communication including the latest guidance from Public Health, responses to FAQs and specific COVID-19 related information, such as that issued by Dementia UK, Skills for Care and NICE. Given the operational challenges experienced by care providers and their staff teams, we have ensured that we have shared resources and training in relation to mental health, wellbeing and bereavement support. Information has been circulated from the Greater Manchester Health & Social Care Partnership, along with details of our local offer through the Stockport Support Hub and voluntary and community sector. This has been proactively shared with care providers to ensure that they are aware of the local offer in relation to mutual aid.

Profiles of each provider are compiled with regard to staffing, PPE stock and supply and access to food supplies on a weekly basis so that the team can anticipate and

Pam Smith
Chief Executive

offer support with any problems. We have supported care homes on issues relating to PPE supplies and staffing due to self-isolation.

The value of developing an informal support network to providers cannot not be underestimated. We have received daily e-mails from providers requesting support or raising queries on a wide range of COVID-19 related issues including PPE, infection control, hospital discharges and admissions. We have provided responses on the same working day, which has supported providers with their planning and decision-making.

A comprehensive twice-weekly sitrep is completed to the GM Health & Social Care Partnership to ensure that the necessary oversight is available to address concerns, particularly in relation to stocks of PPE and infection control. Stockport has nearly 100% compliance with this process.

Every two weeks, the Council hosts a quality oversight and governance meeting, with representation from the CCG, Public Health and CQC to address any immediate issues or concerns in care provision.

Tablet devices have been distributed to all care homes in order to facilitate video conferencing for professionals and to enable residents to communicate with their families. The Council has received positive feedback from care homes, residents and relatives who have described this as a lifeline during this challenging time.

Primary Care Support

Primary Care support is being delivered through weekly GP care home ward rounds, either in person or remotely. Stockport CCG have also commissioned the rapid management of all patients testing positive for COVID-19 through Viaduct Care and Mastercall (out of hours), with practices also referring patients for priority assessments.

All care homes (including assisted living homes) have been supplied with thermometers and pulse oximeters to support remote consultations. Meanwhile, the Stockport Integrated Pharmacy Service (via Viaduct Care) supports GP practices and community teams to provide management and delivery of medicines for care home patients. There is also a dedicated Care Home Team consisting of a pharmacist and two technicians.

A single point of access for urgent care is provided through the Mastercall helpline triage and clinical assessment for care homes, whilst most care home staff have downloaded an app on their mobile to allow quick access to video consultation.

Infection Prevention & Control

An Infection Prevention & Control Strategy for COVID-19 in Care Homes in Stockport is being developed, with seven key areas to be included;

1. Prevention (including advice and guidance)
2. Admissions into care homes (hospital discharges / community admissions)

3. Controlling the spread of infection / Outbreak Management
4. Testing
5. Contact Tracing
6. Workforce
7. Communications

A number of key actions have already been completed and the strategy is accompanied by an Assurance Framework Tool for use in care homes, in addition to home care and extra care. This is supported by a comprehensive Risk Register for COVID-19 Outbreaks in Care Homes, setting out key risk factors and the current approach in Stockport.

In addition, Infection Protection Control (IPC) training is being provided by the Local Authority Health Protection Team based within Public Health, together with senior CCG nursing clinician advice to roll out IPC training across the homes in Stockport. These have been a series of well-attended webinars for care home staff training to gain practical knowledge on best practice, specific procedures and a chance to ask question / seek advice.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Council has established a central distribution point for PPE for colleagues in the care sector to ensure equipment is prioritised to where it is needed most. Care homes and care homes with nursing are advised, in the first instance, to purchase PPE through their usual supply arrangements. However, in some cases, this is proving challenging and disruptions have occurred. In such instances, the Council is able to provide a rapid response and provides PPE seven days a week in an emergency.

Through the Public Health Team, comprehensive guidance has been developed with a set of simple to use frequently asked questions (FAQs) for our care providers and our own staff which clarifies what PPE should be used, when and how to obtain it. This has continued to be updated in accordance with new PHE guidance. The Public Health Team have also offered tablet-based PPE training to all care homes, which has been well received.

The Council has kept in regular contact with all care homes, through regular newsletters and emails providing the latest updates in relation to advice, guidance and all other matters COVID-19 related. We are working closely with providers to make sure that the right PPE is going to the right teams and settings for the right purposes.

Testing in Care Homes

Stockport has been working hard to ensure that testing has been available for the care homes in the Borough and we have been implementing the national and regional offers wherever possible. We will continue to review all of the available offers and see how we can improve on the process for our care homes accessing

testing. We have piloted a local model with one care home to learn from this with the intention to support all homes to access testing.

Stockport has a strong record of accomplishment in relation to supporting our care homes with testing. We enabled symptomatic care home residents to be tested from an early stage of this pandemic and, in particular, we were one of few boroughs that established and retained a community swabbing service. This service has enabled us to offer testing within the care homes for symptomatic residents from early/mid-March. This service remains in place and has evolved over time to include staff testing at the Mastercall site base, and we have been consistent in our offer to test symptomatic residents. This has enabled us to be responsive to the changing eligibility and other offers provided nationally.

We have also enabled staff testing through our locally developed service in addition to the nationally commissioned services that have become available. As the varying offers (commissioned nationally) have become more complex, we have established a project management function, to coordinate staff testing requests and to help direct symptomatic care staff (and other key workers) to a testing site.

We are confident as a system that we have the necessary oversight and established relationships to support implementation of the areas mentioned above. In Stockport, there is the necessary support available for partners to respond to issues and problems within the care market and we have done so already on several occasions. However, we are mindful that the challenges remain and the main priority at present is to reduce the spread of infection in care homes and provide the necessary means to do this.

Financial Support

The Council, through the funding from the government to support the additional expenditure incurred because of the COVID-19 situation, has established a robust process. In Adult Social Care, we are required to support the sustainability of the entire provider market, this includes all care providers that are located within Stockport, including those that are not commissioned and under contract to the Council. Also included is support to individuals who are in receipt of a direct payment.

We are supporting the provider market in several ways:

- The payment terms for all care providers is now immediate to assist with provider cash flow
- Homecare providers are paid based on planned hours of care delivered rather than actual hours of care delivered
- Letters have been sent to all providers inviting them to make applications to support additional expenditure incurred because of COVID-19

- Proactive action is being taken to contact any providers who have not made contact to check in with them and ensure that they are aware of the support the Council is able to provide.

A funding panel has been established to review the applications for additional expenditure; this ensures that funding provided is proportionate, transparent and consistent across the market. Both commissioners and accountancy staff meet daily to review the submissions that have been made to the funding panel. We have been proactive in contacting providers who have not submitted applications for financial support to ensure that all providers benefit from this support.

We have also recently agreed a process to ensure that homes that are experiencing occupancy rates below 90% are supported through a block booking arrangement. This will provide those homes with significant vacancies a guarantee of at 90% occupancy and allow for the necessary security of cash flow for the medium term. In addition, we are finalising the process of distributing Stockport's allocation of the £600 million infection control monies recently announced.

In relation to direct payments, these payments have continued as normal. The government guidance has been issued to all direct payment recipients along with a letter which summarises the issues and includes details of local support available.

Alternative Accommodation

Health and Social Care partners in Stockport have commissioned a new 71-bed facility, Bramhall Manor, to care for patients who are well enough to be discharged from hospital but need further assessment to identify their ongoing care needs.

The new state-of-the-art facility at Bramhall Manor is part of a joint borough-wide plan to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Patients who are medically fit to be discharged from hospital will either be discharged home or will be transferred to out-of-hospital facilities for further assessment and support, such as Bramhall Manor.

This has freed up vital beds at Stepping Hill Hospital for patients who will need more intensive care due to COVID-19.

Clinical Staff in Care Homes

In Stockport, there has not been the widespread need to place returning clinical staff or volunteers into care homes. However, on one occasion, we have in partnership with CCG and Council colleagues, provided support in one home that was under pressure due to clinical staff absences and management capacity.

CHC nurses alongside Council care staff provided short term support and cover within this home to ensure continuity of care and support for the management and staff within the home. This collaborative work facilitated the safe care and clinical support to over 30 vulnerable people.

A retired Senior CHC Nurse who recently returned to support the system's COVID-19 responses oversaw the clinical aspects of this work.

I trust this provides you with a good overview of the work being undertaken by system partners in Stockport and confidence in the plans and support we are putting in place to support care homes in the borough.

I will be pleased for Stockport partners to speak further with regional colleagues on the processes we have put in place and to understand our joint working to support the care sector. This will be particularly valuable to learn from best practice and identify potential areas of support Stockport could benefit from.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Smith', with a small flourish at the end.

Pam Smith
Chief Executive