

## Care Home Support Plan Cover letter

Dear Helen Whately MP

### **Darlington Care Home Support Plan**

There are 32 registered Care Homes across the Borough of Darlington, which includes homes for older people, people with physical sensory impairments, learning disabilities and mental ill health.

Darlington Borough Council has worked in partnership during the COVID-19 emergency. The Care Home Support Plan has been developed in consultation with the care home sector, including care homes where we do not have contracts in place, and our local NHS partners: Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT) and the Tees Esk and Wear Valley Trust (TEWV).

As requested in your letter dated the 14 May, the detail below outlines the current and future position across Darlington. The Care Home Support Template is also attached.

### **Summary of Current Activity**

#### Monitoring and Quality Assurance

Residential care homes have daily contact with Council Officers to monitor the impact of the COVID - 19 pandemic. Data is collected and analysed daily, enabling us to provide effective, prompt support to providers. This includes:

- Actual and cumulative resident symptomatic cases
- Actual and cumulative number of residents tested
- Actual and cumulative number of residents with positive test result
- COVID -19 deaths tested positive originating from a care home
- COVID-19 suspected deaths
- Actual and cumulative number of staff tested and results
- Daily staff absence levels

The Director of Adult Social Services is assured of our continued delivery of core duties in terms of basic safety, maintaining human rights and safeguarding through the daily monitoring we undertake with care homes as well as the quality assurance work officers undertake with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as part of the new national Emergency Support Framework.

#### Personal Protective Equipment

- The Director of Public Health (DPH) and her team have established local support arrangements regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and testing.
- Relevant national, regional and local COVID-19 related guidance, information and advice has been circulated in a timely way to all care providers.
- Providers are supporting each other through mutual aid and sharing PPE where they need to. A central stock of PPE has been made available to providers through the Local Resilience Forum, which has been used to address emergency shortages as they arise.
- A list of verified PPE suppliers used by Local Authorities in the North East has been shared with providers.

### Testing and Infection Prevention Control

All care homes in Darlington have access to locally delivered COVID-19 PCR testing for symptomatic staff and residents:

- All symptomatic care home staff are able to request testing at a local NHS site within Darlington in addition to the national testing programme offered at regional and mobile testing sites.
- COVID PCR testing is available locally to symptomatic residents provided by the Public Health England Health Protection team for those initially affected and County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) for those subsequently symptomatic.
- Darlington Borough Council is supporting care homes to access whole care home testing.

An Infection prevention and Control Service is commissioned by the Council from the local NHS provider, giving advice and support to our local care homes. This includes online Zoom sessions adopting the NHS “super trainer” approach.

### Workforce

Significant oversight of workforce in the sector has been developed between the providers and the Council, with mechanisms in place to support care homes should the need arise.

- A Darlington Volunteer Hub, operating 7 days per week, has been established. A number of these volunteers have been deployed into extra care housing schemes to assist with low level tasks, thereby increasing staff capacity to support the Rapid Response service, which further supports hospital discharge arrangements.
- Local staff deployment arrangements have been developed to support the whole care system and have also supported.
- A regional “Deployment Hub” has been created. Homes experiencing staffing issues, and have exhausted their own Business Continuity Plan arrangements, can access these arrangements when required.

### Financial Assistance

Financial assistance has been given to providers as part of the COVID-19 response:

- In addition to the usual cost of living uplifts, the Council has in place 2 weeks in advance payment arrangements on all commissioned care packages (including providers who are Out of Borough).
- A 5% compensatory uplift on existing care homes fee rates from the 1<sup>st</sup> April for a period of 12 weeks up until the end of June.

### Clinical Support

Care homes can access clinical support as and when required through:

- A single point of contact for health commissioning.
- Information on wrap around clinical support available from Community Health teams has been circulated to all care providers.
- Enhanced support from Primary Care and Community Health Teams is in place, with an identified clinical lead, a daily check in, and support with personalised care planning.
- There is a Meds Optimisation offer available to homes 7 days a week in order to support new admissions or discharges from hospital as well as any general medication queries.
- Psychological support is available to Care Home staff, residents and families provided by TEWW Care Home Liaison Team.

### Hospital Discharge

In order to facilitate accelerated hospital discharge arrangements, in accordance with the “COVID-19 Hospital Discharge Service Requirements (8a.m. to 8pm – 7 days per week)”, supported by the NHS £1.3bn grant allocation:

- Appropriate Commissioning, Contracting and Brokerage on-call and operational cover has been established.
- An additional 450 Hours Domiciliary Care Hours has been commissioned.
- The number of “Rapid Response” care hours has been doubled.
- Overtime costs, including on call cover for social workers and other key staff, has been established.

### **Forward Plan**

The Care Home Plan will be central to Darlington Borough Councils response going forward, in partnership with the CCG. The key elements of the plan consist of:

#### Testing

- Working with the Tees Valley CCG and CDDFT to continue to provide timely and accessible local COVID-19 testing for symptomatic care home staff and residents whilst also supporting care homes to access and implement whole care home testing.

#### Alternative Accommodation

- Working closely with the Tees Valley CCG to explore alternative accommodation to support the hospital discharge requirements and step up provision in the community, including care home providers’ community hospitals, including independent sector hospitals, and repurposing CCG commissioned short stay intermediate care and nursing beds.

#### Market Resilience

- Undertaking work, both locally and regionally, to understand the implications of COVID-19 on the care sector market, both in the short and longer term, with a view to developing a series of measures to ensure the stability and longevity of a sustainable care market. We are currently completing a review of the financial assistance package to all commissioned care providers in partnership with North East Local Authorities.
- Local Authority Commissioners review the occupancy levels across care homes on a weekly basis to identify where there has been a reduction of the occupied beds, as this could result in possible future financial difficulties for providers, and we will continue to work with the care sector to support workforce resilience through our clinical and volunteer offer schemes.

#### Information, Advice and Support

- Continuing to work with statutory partners, including NHS England, Public Health England (PHE) Health Protection Team, Acute and Mental Health Trusts to provide comprehensive support and advice to care homes. Daily contact with care homes will be maintained to understand and respond in a timely manner to any areas of concern.

- Continuing to provide a high level of safeguarding assurance during the COVID-19 emergency period by working with partner North East Authorities and the CQC to further develop the care home monitoring framework.
- Developing a data and information dashboard, including data from the NHS capacity tracker, which tracks the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as the care system moves into recovery phase. Business continuity planning will be refreshed to reflect the challenges of providing care within all settings during the recovery phase and we will continue to provide information, guidance and support to all care providers as the recovery phase develops momentum.

### **Levels of confidence**

The Director of Adult Social Services for Darlington is assured that our core duties around basic safety, human rights and safeguarding are still being delivered throughout this period of emergency and the Council, and partners across the system, are confident that the support provided as part of the plan represents a significant mitigation of the COVID-19 risk.

The impact of COVID-19 is so complex, as such it cannot be resolved by any individual organisation, and therefore there are areas that are influenced by others that we will rely on to maximise the impact of all our collective efforts in tackling the virus. These include the following:

#### Testing

We are committed to the testing of residents and staff within our care homes and other appropriate establishments and have played an active role in the North East testing cell.

The government has committed to testing all residents and staff in Care Homes by the 6th June 2020, with 30,000 tests per day being available for the sector and Care Home managers to be informed of the results of tests.

The North East Testing Cell considers that working towards weekly testing of residents and staff of Care Homes who have not previously tested positive with results being received in a timely manner would be the best use of testing capability to reduce transmission within Care Homes. Because of the need for timely test results this would be best achieved by local rather than national testing.

#### Hospital Discharge

The change to the NHS discharge policy in March 2020 which was made to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on acute hospitals had a significant impact on Care Homes.

The NHS has now committed to testing patients before they are discharged but they will still need to be quarantined on discharge. While the discharge of those who are not medically fit will be relaxed while there is capacity in hospitals, there is a risk that should capacity in hospitals reduce, the policy may be reapplied, which could result in sicker people being discharged to Care Homes, effectively reducing capacity in the sector. This will be monitored across the health and care system locally.

### Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is a key part of the strategy to reduce community transmission as lockdown eases. If this is not adequately resourced, then Care Home staff could be vectors for infection within Care Homes. Although good infection prevention and control will help, robust contact tracing is essential.

There has been little information made available to local authorities to date in relation to test results. Contact tracing will result in more information flowing throughout the system. Local Authorities will need more timely and relevant information to support measures to reduce community transmission.

I trust this response from us as the Local Authority, strongly supported by the CCG and our partners representing the whole system across Darlington, provides you with the information you require.

Kind regards,

Paul Wildsmith