

Dear Minister,

I am writing in response to the Government requirement that adult social care authorities should publish what we are doing to support local care homes through the pandemic and what our future plans are. This includes care homes that are run by private companies, charities, the independent sector or by the council itself.

Derbyshire County Council and all our partners across the health and social care system welcome this opportunity to set out the considerable amount of work that has taken place to support the county's care homes since the advent of coronavirus. In this letter we also reflect openly on the challenges faced by the care home sector, both now and in the future.

There is no doubt this has been an extremely challenging time for care home providers and colleagues working in the sector. We, and the people of Derbyshire, are enormously grateful for the huge effort made to support the county's older and vulnerable people and their families, and on behalf of Derbyshire County Council, Derby & Derbyshire CCG and all our NHS partners I sincerely thank every colleague who has worked tirelessly to support our people at this time.

1. Introduction: the Derbyshire model of care

The county of Derbyshire has a mixed model of care provision serving local people. This includes care support provided through direct payments to eligible clients, private, independent and voluntary sector care as well as care provided directly by the council.

There are a number of care homes within Derbyshire: 171 residential homes and 89 nursing homes.

The council has contracts in place with 96% of care homes within the independent, voluntary and private sector. There are also 115 homecare providers, 15 supported living providers and 1619 of people receiving direct payments within Derbyshire.

2. How health and social care in Derbyshire has responded to the pandemic

Strong and positive relationships were already in place with care providers across the sector prior to the pandemic in terms of commissioning and contract engagement and support, our mutual training offer and close working relationships with social work and health staff working in the localities.

To safeguard the health and wellbeing of our care home residents, their families and staff, the care and health system in Derbyshire responded rapidly and collectively to the unprecedented pressures brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

The situation has brought many challenges, but it has also further strengthened the relationships between the health and care sectors. Many providers across the county have risen to the challenge and taken further steps to operate collectively and collaboratively.

A Derby and Derbyshire multi-agency COVID-19 Care Homes Group was quickly established including the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This brought together colleagues from different organisations to focus on practical support for care home providers, their staff and home residents.

In addition, a Strategic Care Homes Group was established in mid-May under the Joined-Up Care Derbyshire (JUCD) system planning arrangements to:

- Provide assurance and support for the COVID-19 Care Homes Group on preventing and controlling the spread of further infections within homes, including agreeing any local interventions that need to take place.
- Provide oversight to ensure there is a good quality, safe and effective care home sector in Derbyshire to meet the needs of the local population.
- Develop an approach for the restoration phase that builds on the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England directions and also the support needed for care homes in line with the expectations set out in the Minister's letter.

The Strategic Care Homes Group is made up of senior executives and the membership includes community health, primary care, public health, the acute sector, local authorities and Derbyshire GPs through the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The group is committed to having care home representation and we are currently seeking representation from care home providers.

3. How the county council and health partners monitor the care system

Following support from the county council and other organisations, 92% of care home providers within Derbyshire are now actively using the national capacity tracker system and all homecare providers are using the CQC tracking scheme. The tracker requests a range of information from care home providers concerning bed occupancy, staffing and access to personal protective equipment to allow national monitoring. The tracker has recently been updated to include more areas of reporting.

This, alongside local relationships with the local authority and CCG commissioners, has ensured oversight of the care market in Derbyshire.

The county council has maintained regular contact with the care provider market and has recently moved to a process that provides daily oversight through the introduction of a locality-based model and clear escalation processes for providers and local managers to follow, which also links to the system-wide approach described below. This daily oversight group comprises a member of the senior leadership team, a group manager, a contracting link manager and link social workers to ensure, alongside the data received from the national capacity tracker, further local indicators can be gathered to ensure the quality of care received by people in residential homes.

4. Financial support for care homes

Derbyshire County Council, in line with advice from the national body for Directors of Adult Social Care ADASS and the Local Government Association, has distributed the additional funds provided by the Government during the COVID-19 outbreak.

At the time of publishing this document, this has resulted in the following extra funding to the private, voluntary and independent sector in Derbyshire:

- Home care providers received a cash advance on 25th March totalling £3.777m. (equivalent to 4 weeks payment).
- From 1st April 2020 an extra payment of 10% on top of their standard fee was made to care home providers. This has been paid up to 24th May 2020 and will be paid again up until 30th June 2020 and will total £2.065m.
- From 1st April 2020 an extra payment of 10% was made to home care and supported living providers on top of their standard fee. This has been paid up to 31st May and will be paid again up until 30th June 2020 and will total £2.164m.
- Day care providers have continued to receive full payment.
- Those who receive direct payments have continued to receive full payment with clear processes in place to request additional funding if required.

In addition, all care required when patients are discharged from hospital is being paid through the additional COVID-19 NHS discharge funding.

Plans are already in place to transfer the additional funding recently announced to care homes, both contracted and non-contracted with the county council, and other providers of social care in accordance with national guidance.

In addition, a significant quantity of personal protective equipment (PPE) has been provided free to care homes in Derbyshire via both Derbyshire County Council's PPE hub and the Local Resilience Forum. To date 162,980 separate items have been supplied to care homes, including 57,390 masks.

5. Practical support for care homes provided by the county council

The COVID-19 Care Homes Group alongside other COVID-19 cells has operated a number of task and finish groups based on an assessment of issues within the care system and looked to provide supportive interventions as required. This has included:

- Establishing a multi-disciplinary COVID-19 Care Home Support Service providing support via video link, with a dedicated inbox and phone number. The team includes input from nursing, occupational therapy and physiotherapy practitioners hosted by Derbyshire Community Health Services. 48 requests for support have been received so far.
- Leading the drive towards a 100% care home sign-up rate for the national capacity tracker system and proactive support to ensure homes are regularly updating the tracker.
- Developing a local report for COVID-19 outbreaks that also shows care home occupancy levels and staffing data to enable support to be targeted and risks understood by senior executives across the sector.
- Aligning communications through the development of a microsite hosted by Derbyshire County Council which the NHS, Derbyshire County Council and Derby City update and contribute to. This website hosts all local and national guidance in one place.
- Providing dedicated access to emergency PPE from the start of the pandemic, 7 days a week and free of charge. The local authority has and will continue to be the last resort for PPE, provided free of charge.
- Producing and distributing a dedicated COVID-19 end of life good practice guide. iPads have been provided to care homes, by the Clinical Commissioning Group, where needed to enable residents to maintain contact with family members. An end of life advice and support line is available 24/7 providing access to nurse specialists. There have been 268 calls to date. Each home also has a named clinical lead for end of life care with communication taking place at least on a weekly basis.
- Providing emotional support services for home care staff from two hospice providers, particularly for homes that have been affected by fatalities.
- Promoting the new enhanced 111 service to enable homes to have direct access to a clinician without navigating the 111 systems. A new condensed version of the Derbyshire HealthCare Summary (personalised care plan) also has specific guidance for 111 to manage calls from homes appropriately.

In addition, there is a dedicated infection prevention and control (IPC) team in Derby and Derbyshire which is supporting care homes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team receive outbreaks notifications from Public Health England and proactively contact the homes to provide IPC support and advice and continue to provide support as required.

Councils are also notified of infection outbreaks so that follow up actions can be undertaken. The IPC team also signpost to other sources of support, including accessing PPE and testing. During the pandemic the team have supported 144 homes to date across Derby and Derbyshire.

6. Support for care homes from primary and community health partners

There has been significant support made available from primary care and community health partners, supported by the CCG and councils.

GP practices and community health services are working together in networks to rapidly put in place the national requirements to support all CQC registered homes with a consistent, weekly 'check in' to review patients identified as a clinical priority for assessment and care by a multi-disciplinary team. This includes the introduction of remote monitoring of COVID-19 patients by medical professionals using different forms of technology.

In line with national expectations, each care home has a named clinical lead. Out of hours provision is clear and consistent and there is a clear process in place for referral to secondary care as appropriate. An acute geriatrician care home support service has also been put in place.

Implementation is taking place to ensure each resident has a personalised care and support plan, and that there is adequate provision of pharmacy and medication support to care homes. For example, face to face and virtual support has been made available for using syringe drivers.

In addition, the CCG is also working with NHS England and NHS Improvement and primary care clinical directors to:

- Recruit additional general practitioner leads (for the next three months) to establish and lead multi-agency work at a primary care networks or pan primary care network level to provide extra senior clinical capacity.
- Ensure that all homes have the IT that they need to be supported remotely, for example laptops and Wi-Fi.
- Ensure a supply of pulse oximeters for general practitioners so they can identify care home residents who may benefit from oxygen monitoring. Training and support for care home staff is included in these plans.
- Implement the procedure to enable homes to safely reuse medicines to support access to essential prescribed medicines.
- Rapidly deploy anticipatory medications and COVID-19 drug administration charts that can be signed electronically and sent from the general practitioner's email address.

There has been a significant local response from care homes to the offer of training in infection prevention and control, use of PPE and testing. All care homes have been contacted and to date 161 care homes have accepted the training offer.

7. How the council and partners have supported testing in care homes

Derbyshire County Council and partners have set up a number of measures, in conjunction with the national care home testing portal to ensure all care homes receive testing kits and are included in the testing programme.

Managers of care homes can either apply for swab testing kits to test asymptomatic residents or staff, themselves through the care home testing portal, informing Public Health, or contact a Derbyshire County Council colleague who will do this on their behalf. Priority is according to national guidelines.

Once the manager of a care home receives their testing kits, there is an additional offer of support to undertake the testing if required. The care homes are then asked to inform Public Health when the test kits are returned and when the results arrive back at the homes. The care homes on receiving results should put into place measures to safely isolate those residents, who have tested positive and ensure staff testing positive are sent home for at least 7 days.

Public Health collate the results. The care homes are contacted by Adult Social Care and the NHS Infection and Prevention Control Teams if there are residents with positive results to ensure any necessary arrangements to safely isolate people, in line with government guidance, can take place and to ensure staffing numbers are adequate within the home. Daily Public Health and Adult Social Care leadership oversight also takes place.

8. Supporting people who cannot be safely isolated

Derbyshire County Council, in introducing the new guidelines for hospital discharge, supported the safe discharge and care of those recovering from COVID-19 and those who do not have the virus but required community bed support.

The county council has created a number of facilities in its own care homes where people who require a period in isolation can be appropriately cared for with dignity.

Initial discussion with the private, independent and voluntary sector has also confirmed that they would have capacity to support this initiative. Whilst moving an older person from their care home must always be a last resort, these facilities can be used if no other options are possible to safely care for someone who requires isolation.

All efforts will be made to return people to their own care home once this period is over. Care homes will be continued to be paid during this period with funding from the NHS COVID-19 discharge funding used to support this.

9. Current areas of focus and looking to the future

Overall, there is a level of confidence that the health and social care actions being taken are preventing further spread and transmission of COVID-19 and that care homes are being supported by health and social care agencies where outbreaks are suspected or confirmed.

Nationally the care home sector was already facing challenges prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, with staffing shortages and lowering occupancy rates as people chose different forms of support such as Extra Care, supported living or care at home. These challenges have been further compounded during this pandemic period.

As more has been learnt about the virus understandably the guidance has changed several times, the demands on care home providers have come from numerous directions and the initial national scarcity of PPE has placed additional burdens on the care home providers who are working hard to manage the impact of COVID-19 on the ground.

Plans are in place to ensure improved communication between partners including the development of a care homes newsletter.

Occupancy levels have continued to fall, with several care home providers now concerned about their financial viability. Whilst additional funding is being made available, the fall in admissions and demand for care home places may result in an unknown number of providers being unable to sustain their service.

Care staffing remains problematic and this pressure is likely to increase as the testing rolls out. All care homes providers have put business continuity plans in place and a number are working with agency staffing providers to ensure that they retain the same agency staff to avoid staff working across a number of care homes.

We welcome the national campaign to raise the status of care work and the national recruitment campaign which is now under way. Whilst clear plans are in place to offer mutual aid across Derbyshire (by supporting the returning clinical staff or volunteers into care homes where care homes providers request this support) there is a real risk that this additional staffing resource may not be sufficient and we would welcome any regional or national learning around this area.

The Strategic Care Homes Group will continue to meet at least twice a week, moving forward on these key areas that will focus on establishing:

- Which care homes require support and then agree with these homes which additional interventions, including funding, may be needed.
- The medium to longer term sustainability within the care homes market and where the impact of COVID-19 may be most felt. This will include using a range of data and intelligence, as well as working directly with homes around their future intentions and plans.
- Where the quality of care needs improving and the wider support that can be provided. We would welcome any examples of innovative practice regionally or nationally to draw from.
- How key workforce gaps (e.g. nurses) can be resolved to provide a more sustainable basis for the sector into the future.

The enhanced arrangements described in this document for working in partnership with care homes will continue across health and social care during the remainder of the pandemic.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Alexander', written in a cursive style.

Emma Alexander
Executive Director - Commissioning, Communities and Policy and Head of Paid Service