

Local Members Interest
N/A

Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Monday 31 January 2022

Care Home Update

Recommendations

- a. I recommend that the Committee consider the challenges and support to care homes during the Covid pandemic, as well as longer term commissioning initiatives.

Report of Cllr Julia Jessel, Cabinet Member for Health and Care

Summary

1. Care homes have faced a number of challenges during the Covid pandemic, and the Council has provided a range of support. Longer term the Council has a range of commissioning initiatives underway in order to achieve our strategic objectives. This report provides Overview and Scrutiny with an update on the care home sector. Further detail is available in the report to Cabinet of September 2021.

Overview

2. There are 251 care homes registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) with 8011 beds in Staffordshire. A relatively high proportion at 20% are rated by the CQC as "requires improvement" or "inadequate".
3. The Council funds 3242 care home placements, just over 2,202 in residential homes and 1,220 in nursing homes, and around 80% within Staffordshire. The remaining beds in county are commissioned by the NHS, other local authorities, or occupied by self-funders. A breakdown of Council funded placements by client group and location is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Council funded care home placements

Location	In county	Out of county	Total
Older people	2,212	423	2,635
Physical disability	79	41	120
Learning disability	237	158	395
Mental health	61	31	92
Total	2589	653	3242

Challenges during the Covid pandemic

4. Care homes and their staff have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to maintain care for some of the most vulnerable people in the county. Overall, they have provided the best possible care under incredibly challenging circumstances. Care homes have had to introduce new infection and prevention control measures, including isolation and restrictions on visiting, and despite these many have had outbreaks of Covid. The impact on the mental and emotional well-being of residents and staff has been considerable. Care homes are currently experiencing a fresh wave of cases due to the Omicron variant.
5. Care homes have faced a range of challenges to maintaining care and financial sustainability during the pandemic:
 - a. **Management of Covid outbreaks.** In the event of outbreaks care homes are required under Government guidance to place restrictions on activities, visiting, and new admissions, typically for 14 days. This affects quality of life for residents and the home's ability to take hospital discharges.
 - b. **Recruitment and retention of staff.** This was a challenge prior to the arrival of Covid and has been exacerbated by the pandemic, as well as by national workforce shortages. There were concerns that the requirement for vaccination as a condition of deployment would lead to a reduction in the number of staff. However, in Staffordshire this has been well managed and there has not been a significant net loss. 98% of care home staff have had two doses of vaccination as required by regulations, with 48% having had a booster dose. Recruitment and retention does however remain challenging, with care homes reporting few applicants for posts.
 - c. **Reduction in staffing levels due to the requirement to isolate.** When Covid cases rates have been high, such as currently, a significant number of staff must isolate because they have symptoms and/or test positive. This is on top of underlying high vacancy rates. This leaves care homes reliant on agency staff and on occasion having to seek assistance from the Council to maintain safe care.
 - d. **Reduced occupancy.** By September 2021 average occupancy in Staffordshire had fallen to 77% compared to the 85% on which providers typically base their planning and financial forecasting. This has now risen to 83% following a surge in demand over winter.
 - e. **Increased operating costs.** Care homes face increased operating costs due to inflation, the need to pay competitive wages in the contact

of recruitment and retention challenges, and enhanced infection prevention and control standards. During the pandemic these have been met by a series of non-recurrent grants from Government, as set out in Table 2, with further grants expected during the remainder of 2021/22.

Table 2: non-recurrent funding from Government grants (sums paid sums to care homes at January 22)

Grant	Amount (£m)
Emergency funding	7.276
Infection Control Fund 1,2,3 & 4	14.811
Community Testing Fund	0.001
Rapid Testing Fund 1,2,3	4.573
Workforce Capacity Grant	0.772
Infection Control Fund 5	0.881
Rapid Testing Fund 4	0.625
Vaccination Grant	0.059
Recruitment and Retention Fund	0.165
Total	29.163

Support for care homes during the Covid pandemic

6. The Council has supported care homes throughout the pandemic with:
- a. Advice and guidance, including to support management of outbreaks;
 - b. Supplies of personal protective equipment;
 - c. Infection control expertise and training;
 - d. Recruitment resources;
 - e. Emergency staffing;
 - f. Support to improve quality from our Quality Assurance and Provider Improvement and Response Teams;
 - g. Access to mental well-being support; and
 - h. Distribution of Government grants.

Longer term commissioning initiatives

7. The Council's overall strategic objectives from commissioning care homes are:
- a. Improving the quality of care homes in Staffordshire. This is primarily measured by the proportion of care homes rated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as 'outstanding' or 'good' with a target to reach the England average within the next 3-5 years.

- b. Ensuring timely access to care home placements when required. This is measured by the proportion of placements sourced to timescale with a target of 85% overall.
 - c. Ensuring affordability of care home placements, such that Council is paying a fair price, achieving value for money, and that overall expenditure does not exceed the budget. This is measured by the average price of placements with a target that this increases only by the cost of inflation and that variation in price is reduced.
8. A range of commissioning initiatives are underway in order to achieve these:
- a. **Development of additional Council owned nursing home capacity.** The Councils continue to explore the business case for building two new Council owned nursing homes with a report
 - b. **Quality improvement.** The Council is continuing and strengthening quality improvement work, including support for recruitment and retention, working closely with the NHS. Where care homes are repeatedly identified by CQC as below regulatory standards and unable to demonstrate a capacity for sustained improvement despite support, the Council will consider whether it can continue to make new placements as well as moving residents where this is in their interests on a balance of risks.
 - c. **Guide prices.** The Council will develop guide prices to give a clear indication of the price it is prepared to pay for care home placements. These will assist implementation of the Fair Cost of Care required by *People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform white paper*. The expectation is that these will reduce variance in care home prices.
 - d. **Procurement and contracting.** The Council will continue with a dynamic purchasing system (DPS) to make individual placements. However the expectation is for a phased increase in the number of block booked beds and for the volume of placements made by DPS to decrease. Options for procurement and contracting of complex residential and nursing home placements will be considered.
 - e. **Use of technology.** The Council continues to promote innovation including:
 - i. **Reminiscence Interactive Therapy Activities** which improve the experience of people with dementia and frees-up staff time.
 - ii. **Oxevision** which allows monitoring of multiple rooms at one time, reducing infection risk and freeing-up staff time.

- iii. **Others** such as pressure and falls mats, iPads, video-calling platforms, electronic care records and electronic assessments.

Link to Strategic Plan

9. Be healthier and independent for longer.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

10. Considerations of demand pressures on the NHS.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

N/A

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