

29 May 2020

Sent via email to
CareandReform2@communities.gov.uk
MSC@dhsc.gov.uk

Neil Davies
Chief Executive
Medway Council
Gun Wharf
Dock Road
Chatham
Kent ME4 4TR
Email: neil.davies@medway.gov.uk

Dear Minister,

COVID19 continues to be an unprecedented event that has presented significant challenges to all care providers, including care homes.

Medway Council provides support to just over 2700 residents with care and support needs, of which just under 30% are supported in nursing or residential care homes. Medway Council's strategic approach to the delivery of adult social care has been to support people to maximise their independence, and as a result the majority of people are supported in their own homes in the community.

Because of this, Medway Council's approach, supported by partners, has been to ensure all providers have been supported to manage the challenges of COVID-19. As well as care homes, this includes supported living providers, domiciliary care providers and personal assistants who are employed directly by individuals with care and support needs.

Support for all care providers have been in collaboration with our health partners strategically and operationally.

Our strategic response has been led through the Kent and Medway Health and Social Care Cell, which is a strategic response cell within the Local Resilience Forum, chaired jointly by the Directors of Public Health in Kent and Medway. This is a strategic group made up of partners from Medway Council, Kent County Council, Kent and Medway CCG (KMCCG) and Public Health England. This group has ensured that the strategic response has been well co-ordinated across the Integrated Care System for Kent and Medway.

Our operational response has been co-ordinated at a local level and has included daily calls with system partners across the Medway and Swale Integrated Care Partnership to escalate provider concerns and request mutual aid.

Operationally we have daily direct communication with all Medway social care providers through daily e-mail bulletins and an interactive Provider Portal which highlights any new guidance or information that requires the attention of providers. The portal offers providers easy access to national guidance and local health and social care information, advice on accessing PPE, advice on workforce issues, and details of Medway Council's

financial support offer. Survey data from our providers has confirmed that the majority of providers have found this information useful and they are mostly happy with the amount of information being shared.

We have held a virtual provider forum meeting during the pandemic, and direct feedback from our providers has been positive about the support that has been provided. We have been in regular contact with the regional CQC lead to ensure that intelligence is shared and acted upon as appropriate. Our local Healthwatch contacted a number of local Care Homes to check how they were coping during the pandemic, and reported a summary of their findings on their website, which confirmed that those they spoke to felt well supported by the Council. The link below outlines their findings:

<https://www.healthwatchmedway.com/news/2020-04-24/great-see-support-medway-care-homes>

We have established a situation report (sit-rep) mechanism to gather information on status of all care providers and have redeployed Council staff to establish a provider hub to support care providers to address any issues or concerns, including issues relating to PPE or workforce. The provider hub responds proactively to any issue raised through the sit-rep or via any other route, and also proactively contacts providers who have not submitted returns. Returns from providers are monitored and acted upon 7 days a week. The data from returns is analysed to identify priority support areas. The Council are also monitoring data returns from providers through the national Care Home Tracker and the CQC domiciliary care tracker and responding to issues raised through these routes. We have maintained our own local data collection because this route is well established, is working well and to date has seen a higher response rate. We will keep these arrangements under review.

The availability of PPE has been a significant challenge for a number of providers, with many at some point reporting that their normal supply chains have been unable to supply sufficient or timely PPE. Despite these challenges, the Council has supported all care providers to access urgent stocks of PPE where their own supply chains have failed. Prior to the establishment of mechanisms to access PPE through the LRF, Medway Council worked with local system partners to secure access to urgent PPE through Mutual Aid from local health providers. This meant that we were able to ensure that all providers had access to sufficient PPE whilst waiting for supplies through their own supply chains. We now have well established mechanisms for providers to access emergency stocks through the LRF route. Medway Council has confirmed to all providers that we will cover the full cost of any additional PPE that has been needed through the course of the pandemic.

Medway Council also made arrangements for redeployed Council staff to be trained to undertake front line social care roles in support of the care sector, should they be unable to maintain appropriate staffing levels. This support was offered to all providers, and although no provider required this support, it demonstrates that plans were in place to support providers directly to manage staffing challenges if they were unable to resolve them themselves. Medway Council has confirmed to all providers that we will cover any additional staffing costs that have been incurred through the course of the pandemic. This would include the cost of additional staffing to cover staff absences and costs relating to the recruitment or training of additional staff.

Medway Council has ensured that our core statutory duties into care homes continue to be delivered. This included the appropriate investigation of any safeguarding concerns, and also resident care and support reviews. This activity has been undertaken

proportionately, being mindful of the need to reduce non-essential professional visits to homes to support infection control arrangements.

Local intelligence and data has been used to prioritise staff and resident testing, particularly to support care homes that are struggling to contain an outbreak or have had difficulties with infection control. A local action plan has been developed to support the prevention of COVID-19 infections in care home/residential settings which will inform the development of the Council's Outbreak Plans. It includes promoting the use of Table 4 of PPE guidelines and routine use of masks to protect residents from staff/visitors, ensuring that care homes are aware of the need to notify PHE at the first sign of relevant symptoms, ensuring the implementation of enhanced cleaning regimes and making sure that any new outbreaks are communicated with the local infection control team at the KMCCG so that they can offer the care home appropriate support.

Data and intelligence regarding care homes from all system partners is being collated and analysed centrally at a Kent and Medway level through a Care Home response cell and is used to support the identification of system issues/trends that require further action. System partners are working closely together to identify and support care homes requiring additional support. These homes, once identified have targeted support in areas such as medicine management, safeguarding, end of life care, PPE, IPC and swabbing. Using mutual aid agreements staff from the community providers, hospices and the KMCCG have also provided staff to work alongside their own staff during periods of increased challenge from staff self-isolating and illness.

Care Providers are regularly reminded how to access health and wellbeing support services that are offered by Public Health and KMCCG.

KMCCG offer a GP enhanced service to support nursing and residential homes and the Pharmacy Team are offering pharmacy reviews to all care homes.

Our care homes have clinical support from our GPs and Medway Community Healthcare (our local community health provider) and all homes that are on the list provided to them by NHSE/I have been informed who their named clinical lead is. The feedback on these two elements of support have been positive overall. The KMCCG has an Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) lead who provides training and support to care homes. A super trainer at KMCCG is providing swabbing and infection control training to staff and residents deemed more in need.

Care homes are also being trained in line with the national requirements after which they will be able to access testing kits via the portal on the government website. All homes have been offered training and as at 27th May 2020 this had been delivered to 14 Medway Care homes, with others booked in for training on future dates. Some homes have declined training because they have accessed appropriate training from other sources. In these instances the training materials have been shared with the home, along with contact details of the teams at KMCCG to contact if they wish to receive the training or have any queries that we might be able to support.

Medway Council wrote to all social care providers on 27th March 2020 confirming the financial support that will be provided to care providers during the pandemic. Our offer included the prompt payment of all outstanding invoices and a relaxed verification process, with payments made immediately on receipt of invoices to support providers to maintain cash flow.

In addition, we agreed to cover any additional costs incurred by providers as a result of COVID, including payments to cover the cost of additional PPE and other equipment, as well as any additional staffing costs. We also invited providers to advise us of any other costs that were being incurred. This approach was taken to ensure that we were supporting providers to meet actual additional costs, rather than providing a short term blanket fee uplift.

The following table details the support offered to each sector and the spend to date. The Council has responded positively to all requests for financial support from providers. We anticipate that the actual spend will increase as there are a number of providers who have not yet invoiced the Council for their additional costs, and we have not put a time limit on the submission of invoices.

Support to providers that the local authority has contracts with			
	Domiciliary care	Residential care	Other provision
Support being offered	Prompt payment of all outstanding invoices and a relaxed verification process, with payments made immediately on receipt of invoices to support providers to maintain cash flow. A commitment to cover any additional costs incurred as a result of COVID, including payments to cover the cost of additional PPE and other equipment, as well as any additional staffing costs	Prompt payment of all outstanding invoices and a relaxed verification process, with payments made immediately on receipt of invoices to support providers to maintain cash flow. A commitment to cover any additional costs incurred as a result of COVID, including payments to cover the cost of additional PPE and other equipment, as well as any additional staffing costs	Continued payment of day care providers even where services have not been operating as usual.
Total spent to date on supporting providers the local authority has contracts with in response to COVID-19.		£119,617	
Support to providers that the local authority does not have contracts with			
	Domiciliary care	Residential care	Other provision
Support being offered			
Total spent to date on supporting providers the local authority does not have contracts with in response to COVID-19.		£0	

The recently announced infection control funding will be passed directly to care providers in line with government guidance with 75% of the funding being passed directly to Care Homes. The majority of the discretionary element of the funding (25%) will be passed directly to other local care providers, for example domiciliary care providers and supported living providers, to ensure they are also able to fund infection control initiatives.

We have worked in partnership with the KMCCG to ensure that the CCG discharge funding has been used to support effective discharge arrangements, including arrangements that reduce the risk of infection. This has included the funding of homecare bridging services, including separate teams to support symptomatic residents, and those who are not. Some existing services, for example our Intermediate Care and reablement service, have also been modified to provide step down accommodation for those unable to return immediately to their own care home.

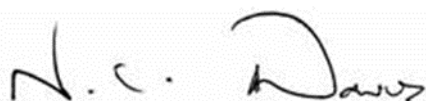
Additional community bed capacity has been commissioned, including the block booking of all beds in a local residential care home, which has been registered to take nursing patients. Our community health partner (Medway Community Healthcare) is supporting this home with advice guidance and direct booking of agency staff. An additional step down facility for COVID positive patients has also been made available by our community health partner.

KMCCG are looking to provide all Care Homes with iPads and improved internet connections in homes (available to homes who are on the NHS capacity tracker). Medway Council are working with KMCCG colleagues to ensure the ipads are able to facilitate social care assessments, as well as health assessments, and delivery of public health programmes.

Medway Council and KMCCG are committed to ensuring that all social care providers receive the support that they need during this very challenging period, and this letter confirms the arrangements that we have put in place. This letter has had input from, and been agreed by, Medway Council's Director of People (who holds the statutory Director of Adult Social Services role), the Director of Public Health and the KMCCG Chief Nurse.

These arrangements will continue to be developed and built on in response to provider need and to ensure they reflect all areas of government guidance.

Yours sincerely



Neil Davies
Chief Executive
Medway Council



Wilf Williams
Accountable Officer
Kent and Medway CCG