

Julie Morgan AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

To:

Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru, Welsh Local Government Association, Social Care Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Cymorth Cymru, Community Housing Cymru, All Wales Forum, Care Forum Wales, Red Cross, Older People's Commissioner, Children's Commissioner

Cc

Local Authority Chief Executives
Local Authority Directors of Social Services
Health Board Chief Executives
Directors of Primary Care and Mental Health
Directors of Nursing
Associate Medical Directors
Public Health Wales

30 July 2020

Dear colleagues,

Care home providers and their staff have faced unprecedented challenges, and have responded with commitment and determination in supporting and maintaining the well-being of their residents.

Human rights and equality legislation provides a framework to ensure everyone is treated with fairness, equality, dignity, respect and autonomy. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have sought to make decisions that uphold the rights of people living in care homes and comply with our legal obligations to protect and uphold the rights of everyone in Wales.

The protection of the most vulnerable people in our communities has been a significant priority during the COVID-19 virus outbreak. I am writing to update you on the action we are taking to support care homes, and those people who live and work in them, in preparation for the autumn and the potential for a second wave of infection.

I know sector leaders have been discussing the support needed, as well as formulating the solutions required for the sector through their membership of the COVID-19 Social Care Planning and Response Sub-group. Your contribution to these weekly meetings has been invaluable over the last few months and has assisted the identification of the key areas we will now focus on to ensure care homes are ready for the autumn.

I would emphasise that we are taking a dynamic approach. The purpose of our initial action plan is to enable us to consider 6 key areas during the summer months, reinforce support

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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

for any future wave of COVID-19 in the autumn and put in place measures to help mitigate the risk of exacerbating stress on already fragile services.

These key areas are:

1. Infection prevention and control

We want to ensure that care homes are supported so the whole care home team is involved in the steps to be taken in their specific home should a second wave of COVID-19 occur.

We will develop a clinical contingency template and will provide further advice and support for individual care homes to complete the template, to enable their whole team to prepare for the management of any further infections in the home. The template, which will include environmental and staff management (minimising staff movement), personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing of care home residents and staff will enable care homes to consider their own resident group, staff group, environmental layout and service delivery. We will continue to work with the Nosocomial Transmission Group, chaired by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, raising awareness and providing training, guidance and support.

We will set out the ongoing arrangements for testing care home residents and staff in line with scientific evidence as it emerges.

2. Personal protective equipment (PPE)

We want to ensure PPE is available for social care staff. The system we established as part of the initial response continues to supply free PPE during the pandemic. PPE is provided to community equipment stores for onward distribution to local authority, independent and third sector care homes with no charge. We have ensured staff are competent at receiving and distributing PPE and have provided training to community equipment and local authority store managers to improve recording and requisitioning. We are considering whether a digital recording system will aid the request and receipt of specific PPE items which will continue to be supplied at no charge to care home providers during the pandemic.

We are exploring the PPE procurement arrangements across the social care sector to better understand supply patterns and products to ensure longer term security of product availability.

3. General and clinical support for care homes

Recognising the crucial importance of local support for care homes, we have commissioned an independent rapid review of general and clinical support for care homes which will consider learning at a local, regional and national level to ensure that care homes are supported in the event of a further outbreak.

This work will include consideration of support provided to care homes including utilisation of professionals, arrangements for safe hospital discharge and admission to step-down and care home facilities. It will also consider how the psychological well-being of residents and staff was supported. Interviews will take place with key sector leaders, local authorities and health boards. Regional workshops will provide for reflection on what went well and what improvements need to be made to prepare for the autumn and will result in the development of 7 regional care home action plans. There will also be an overview report which will identify both good practice and what needs to be done differently. Both the regional care home action plans and the overview report will be published in the autumn.

4. Residents' well-being

We recognise the impact on the psychological well-being of both residents and staff as a result of rapid and unpredicted changes to arrangements in the care home environment and the day-to-day running of a care home.

Residents must have the opportunity to share their experience of living in a care home during the first phase of the pandemic. We will consider how we can complement activities that have already been undertaken by our partners to ensure residents help us to learn from their experience.

People living in care homes must be supported to maintain contact with friends and family in a meaningful way. We will continue to promote a range of alternative ways to support people to connect with their friends and families and gather examples of good practice where stimulatory and social activities have supported residents' well-being.

We will keep our care home visiting guidance for families, friends and professionals under review as new scientific evidence is made available. We will continue to work with the stakeholder group which helped develop the guidance to review feedback received by Care Inspectorate Wales on the impact of the guidance.

We will consider whether specific actions are required to support particular groups - for example people with a learning disability or people with dementia.

Care home residents must also be supported to maintain their physical well-being and receive care, support and treatment from professionals - for example, General Practitioner services and Allied Health Professional services via technology and physical visits where safe to do so. We will work with partners to identify and share good practice.

5. Social care workers' well-being

Care home staff are likely to have been worried and experienced anxiety in their workforce role. Staff may well have cared for people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infections. Some people will have been severely unwell and sadly others will have died. Social care workers must be supported to deliver good quality care now and during any second phase of COVID-19 by having access to a range of psychological support, including bereavement support.

We are continuing to develop a broad range of provision from online and virtual face to face support to suit the variety of ways that staff may prefer to seek support at this sensitive time. We will publish the range of support available to social care staff on the Social Care Wales website alongside the existing offer of learning and improvement resources. Materials for distribution at care homes will be included.

We are monitoring the implementation of the COVID-19 workforce risk assessment tool for social care workers providing seminars to support its use over the summer.

We will work with our partners to identify any further specific support required for our valuable social care workforce.

6. Financial sustainability

Commissioners and care home providers continue to highlight the financial pressure of operating care home services and, while not all care homes will have experienced an outbreak of COVID-19 in their home, increased expenditure on products and services is likely to have exacerbated this pressure on all businesses. A higher than usual level of vacancies in care home services at a time when admissions are likely to have slowed has further impacted on income for these valuable businesses. A range of financial and support mechanisms put in place include the creation of a £40 million resource for adult social care through the Local Authority Hardship Fund for local authority commissioners to support the sector.

We will review the range of support and funding made available to care home businesses through a variety of mechanisms across Welsh Government departments and the impact they have had on improving sustainability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

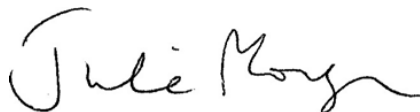
We will consider the specific costs care home businesses have incurred together with the measures and actions that were effective in alleviating financial pressure.

We will review the experience of organisations which established temporary services to provide additional social care surge capacity and identify lessons on issues such as cost and accommodation management.

We will consider the experience of any care homes that required contingency support to continue operating. We will develop a decision tree tool for those at risk of business failure or closure to assist in identifying and resolving key issues.

Thank you again for your continued efforts at this time; this learning will assist us in developing our winter planning.

Yours sincerely,



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