

**County Hall
New Road
Oxford
OX1 1ND**

29th May 2020

Dear Minister for Care

Support to Care Homes in Oxfordshire

Care homes are a vital part of our health and social care system, and provide essential care and support for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Supporting care homes during the COVID-19 pandemic is of crucial importance, and Local Authorities have been asked to confirm the support plans in place for Care Homes within their local areas.

In Oxfordshire, there are 123 care homes registered to provide support for adults and older people, providing care for approximately 5400 people. Oxfordshire County Council purchases approximately one third of these beds, the remainder are purchased primarily by people who fund their own care.

Details of the support offer in place for Oxfordshire Care Homes is available on: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/coronavirus-covid-19/adult-social-care-providers>

This site is regularly updated and includes links to partner sites and relevant documents.

This letter contains summary information regarding the support that has been put in place to support care homes during the COVID – 19 pandemic.

1. How the Oxfordshire system has responded to support all care homes in Oxfordshire.

1.1. The Oxfordshire system has structured our emergency response to the COVID – 19 pandemic in a series of ‘cells’; bringing together partners to focus on specific priority areas. In recognition of the challenges affecting care homes, a *Care Home Cell* has been meeting twice per week since April 17th. This is lead by Oxfordshire County Council and includes NHS partners, CQC, Public Health, Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers and Oxfordshire Care Homes Association. The cell shares information in order to understand issues and develop our plans.

- 1.2. It is essential that *care home providers* form part of these conversations. For this reason both of Oxfordshire's Provider Associations are members of the Care Home Cell and play an essential role in discussing issues and communicating with care home providers, including via bi-weekly briefings issued by Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers and the County Council.
- 1.3. In addition, the County Council is operating a *Provider Cell* which is providing strategic oversight of issues affecting the Council's contracted suppliers. This includes management of contractual issues and queries to ensure there is a strong understanding of the issues affecting contracted care providers.
- 1.4. In partnership with NHS colleagues, the County Council has maintained frequent contact with care homes throughout the pandemic, daily where this is required. This has enabled emerging themes to be identified early; and to support individual services which may be experiencing challenges. We have now strengthened this process using information provided via the *Capacity Tracker* with daily follow up with services who are reporting issues.
- 1.5. A *dedicated email address* has been established and is used for communication with care providers. This email address is managed 7 days per week and provides a central point for queries.
- 1.6. *Safeguarding* remains of primary importance during this period, and local arrangements for oversight of care governance are now taking place on a weekly basis. This includes input from CQC and a review of local service pressures, including triangulating issues from the Provider and Care Homes Cells, to identify which services may benefit from additional support.
- 1.7. In order to monitor pressure within the system, particularly relating to discharges and system capacity, a daily call is held with all system partners. This has included oversight of the additional 88 *Discharge to Assess beds* put in place during March. These beds provided additional capacity to support people being discharged from hospital and we are currently reviewing ongoing usage of these beds.
- 1.8. The Oxfordshire approach has been to work closely with provider representatives and health partners to develop, implement and oversee support for all care homes including those that support County Council funded residents and people who fund their own care. This included distribution of £1.8m *additional funds* from the County Council directly to care homes in April and May 2020. Whilst this funding and the Infection Control Fund is welcomed by the sector we understand from providers that cost pressures remain as we continue to care for vulnerable people.

2. Infection prevention & control measures; and access to PPE

- 2.1. *Infection control is a key area of focus* in our work with care homes and we have been working closely with care homes to implement national guidance regarding isolation and distancing within services. This has included a series of webinars for Oxfordshire providers; easy read guidance circulated to care

homes and available on our website to support clinical care; and bespoke training for services.

- 2.2. Oxfordshire's Care Home Support Service, established in 2010, is a key service providing specialist nursing, mental health nursing and therapy support for care homes regarding resident care and has established relationships in place with care home providers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Care Home Support Service identified named specialist nurses for each care home and provided support focused on areas including infection control, and has been providing bespoke support for services requiring additional support. *Infection control champions* are being established in care homes as a key mechanism for ensuring high standards of infection control measures.
- 2.3. "Train the trainer" training is currently being rolled out across all care homes in Oxfordshire regarding the correct use of PPE. This builds on the information that is available on the Council's website and has been provided via webinars and training. It is expected that 100% of care homes will have received this training by the deadline
- 2.4. Information provided by Public Health England regarding *local outbreaks* is triangulated with other information about care homes, to ensure that our local offer can be tailored to support services who may be experiencing challenges. This includes 7 day support via our provider hub.
- 2.5. As part of our regular communication with providers we have not been made aware that services are not able to comply with isolation or shielding requirements and have required alternative accommodation. In cases where there have been particular challenges regarding individual residents, guidance and support is provided by clinical and Council staff.
- 2.6. The County Council established a route for emergency PPE emergency supplies for care providers earlier in April via the *PPE cell*, to support the supply of PPE purchased by the sector directly. This cell is closely linked with the Local Resilience Forum. In our regular contact with providers PPE levels are checked, and information from the Capacity Tracker is now used to enhance this. As a result, the Council has supplied emergency PPE supplies throughout the sector and we have secured additional stock in order to continue to supply this.
- 2.7. The provider hub is available *7 days per week* for contact regarding emergency PPE.
- 2.8. We are currently working to prioritise the distribution of pulse oximeters across the County; and will be supporting the distribution of these with clinical training to support services in the correct use of these.

3. Testing

- 3.1. Access to testing for both care home staff and residents remains of crucial importance throughout this pandemic. Care home staff have been accessing a *local testing facility* provided by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. This has

been essential in helping care providers to manage staffing levels, and provide support to staff who are concerned about symptoms. The local solution for staff testing was able to operate whilst national arrangements were still being established.

3.2. Resident testing has been rolled out nationally via several routes. We are pleased to build on this via the local prioritisation protocol, which is considered jointly by County Council and Public Health colleagues and submitted on a weekly basis with input from system partners at the care home cell.

4. Workforce Support

4.1. A wide range of *training and support options* are in place to ensure care home management and staff have a good understanding of infection control and PPE issue. Further information regarding this is available via the Council's website, which is updated as further options are made available.

4.2. Staffing levels are a regular focus of conversations with care providers. Specific contingency plans have been developed and put in place with care homes where necessary. *Staffing options* available to support services includes staffing agencies with availability, sourcing of live in care, volunteers and NHS staff. These options have been utilised throughout April and May to ensure that services operate with correct staffing levels.

4.3. We have been in discussions with care homes regarding how volunteer capacity can be utilised, and are actively continuing these discussions as we plan for coming weeks and months.

4.4. To support ongoing staffing levels in the sector, Oxfordshire Association of Care Home providers has been leading a *local recruitment campaign* to encourage new entrants into the market. Plans are in place to continue this recruitment campaign as we move into the next phase of the COVID – 19 pandemic.

5. Clinical Support

5.1. Oxfordshire has an established scheme providing enhanced clinical support to care homes, including a proactive GP service, specialist nursing and specialist pharmacy. This scheme has been integral to our ongoing support to care homes with each care home in Oxfordshire having a named clinical lead, responsible for overall clinical oversight of residents including – but not limited to – advanced care planning, access to secondary care and overall treatment plans.

5.2. Across Oxfordshire we have 100% (123/123) of CQC registered Care Homes with a named Clinician Lead. Currently 90% of our homes have a weekly check-in by a clinician and we are working with the remaining care homes (mainly Learning disabilities and Mental health) and Clinical Leads to ensure that a weekly check in is in place for all our residents. We expect this to be in place by the end of May 2020.

- 5.3. The Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service (DES) has enabled our primary care networks (PCNs) to start engaging at scale on how to deliver the enhanced services to care homes. We are actively scoping and piloting the use of Multidisciplinary teams for support to care homes which enables us to bring together both our community care home support service and our GP practices.
- 5.4. Clinical representation is included within our care home cell, to ensure strong communication with primary care and a joined up approach to supporting care homes. Further information for primary care is provided via daily bulletins to practices.
- 5.5. Protocols regarding the emergency access to end of life / anticipatory medicines are in place and 25 pharmacies, across Oxfordshire, are commissioned by OCCG to take part in a 'Guaranteed provision of palliative care drugs scheme' to ensure that these medicines are available when required. Documentation to support care homes run a medicines re-use scheme are awaiting approval and will be circulated to care homes and made available on our website.. The Medicines Optimisation in Care Homes (MOCH) team are available to support care homes both with this scheme and other medication issues during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5.6. Guidance regarding care for residents during this time has been written specifically for care homes with input from care home representatives. This has been circulated and published on our website.

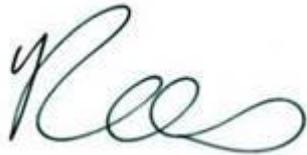
6. Future plans

- 6.1. Our system response to care home pressures during this time has strengthened existing relationships and increased existing dialogue with care home providers throughout our system. This is embodied by the signatories to this letter, shown below, who have each contributed to the system working described in this letter and support this letter.
- 6.2. In preparing this response we have also consulted with Healthwatch Oxfordshire who are in contact with care homes regarding their experiences and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of Healthwatch Oxfordshire's research will be reviewed and incorporated as we develop the support offer going forward.
- 6.3. During the next phase of our response, we plan to discuss with providers how best we can support care home staff in the recovery phase. This may include focused support for wellbeing in recognition that staff have gone above and beyond in providing support for residents and a focus on recruitment which is being led by Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers.

Support care home providers remains a key priority for the Council and I would like to express my personal thanks for the compassion, dedication and hard work shown by care providers and staff at this time.

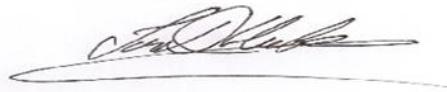
Oxfordshire has been able to deliver a strong response to support care homes through dedication to joint working, including with care home providers. I remain committed to ensuring that we continue to work closely with providers and partners in developing the support to care homes over the coming weeks and months, and as a system that we continue to build on the relationships that have been built through this joint approach.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvonne Rees', with a stylized, cursive script.

Yvonne Rees
Chief Executive
Oxfordshire County Council

Oxfordshire's Support for Care Homes and content of this letter is supported by the following organisations and representatives:



Ian Hudspeth
Leader of Oxfordshire County Council
Chair of Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board



Dr Kiren Collison
Vice Chair of Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board



Stephen Chandler
Corporate Director of Adult and Housing Services, Oxfordshire County Council



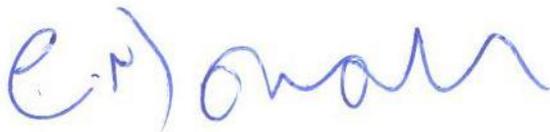
Cllr Lawrie Stratford
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, Oxfordshire County Council



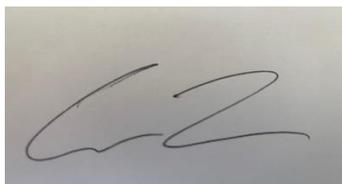
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