

Oxfordshire County Council
County Hall
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**To All Service Providers Contracting with
Oxfordshire County Council**

**Stephen Chandler
Corporate Director for Adult
Services & Housing**

16 July 2020

Dear Colleague

**COVID-19: Supporting Social Care Services to Maintain Capacity and Viability
(Adult Social Care) – Arrangements for 1 July 2020 onwards**

As we move towards the next phase of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic I felt it important that I write to you to explain the situation regarding future financial support to our care providers, and to let you know about some of the steps we are taking with our funding to ensure a safe and effective recovery for social care services within Oxfordshire.

Before doing so I would like to again reiterate my gratitude and appreciation for the hard work and dedication shown by care providers and staff throughout the last few months. We know that the continuation of care for vulnerable people in Oxfordshire is appreciated enormously by people who use your services and their families as well as by the council.

I hope that this letter now helps to explain some of the steps we are taking to help support the social care sector and how we are moving towards the next phase in our pandemic response.

Support to the social care sector in Oxfordshire from March to June 2020

Our support to the social care sector has brought together a number of strategies including leadership, information and advice, signposting and practical support, including the provision of emergency personal protective equipment, to ensure the safe and effective continuation of service delivery.

Reflecting on the approach advocated by the Local Government Association and Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Council has utilised funding made available by central government and has paid contracted providers and people with direct payments an additional 10% on top of business as usual contracted payments to support costs arising from COVID-19.

The council has also paid for home support services on a planned basis rather than actual time taken to provide assurance about minimum income levels and opened a sustainability fund for exceptional claims from any provider who believe they are at risk of failure.

Alongside this the council is continuing to distribute the £7.4m Infection Control Fund to providers across adult social care that operate in Oxfordshire.

As we have moved through the different phases of our response to COVID-19 we have compared our response to other councils and have sought information about how they are responding to the current challenges we all face. I have taken the opportunity to consider the support arrangements that are operating within Oxfordshire, that operate locally within the Thames Valley, those that are in place across the South East Association of Directors of Adult Social Services region, and information that I have heard nationally about how local authorities have supported providers in their area. I do believe that in Oxfordshire this council has supported its providers in a measured, constructive and reasonable way during this initial phase.

With this in mind I am now writing to confirm the arrangements that I am putting in place within Oxfordshire for the period from 1st July 2020 onwards as we move into more of a recovery phase in our response to COVID-19.

- **Home Support - Paying on Planned Hours:** In March we advised our contracted providers that we would move to a situation where the council paid for services on a 'Planned' visit time basis effective from that current pay period. The aim of this move was to ensure that home care providers were supported financially with an assured level of income from the council. This in turn has meant that providers could retain their workforce and could continue to deliver essential services to those most vulnerable when service users and staff may be self-isolating.

I believe that this initiative has helped to achieve its objective and indeed, in the case of home support services the council is currently purchasing an increased level of service than that at the beginning of this calendar year and would hope to continue to do so and build further on that. In this respect, our intervention to maintain income levels has reduced to a relatively small monthly figure and one which suggests that the support is no longer required.

- **Additional 10% payment:** We know that this payment has helped to support key service areas within Oxfordshire through a very challenging period. However, as we move into the recovery period, I believe that it is now the right time to cease this payment so this will take effect from and including July 2020 onwards.
- **Infection Control Fund:** On 14 May 2020 the Government announced the Infection Control Fund, that was available to support social care providers, and which provided a focus on reducing the rate of COVID-19 transmission in care homes and between one care home and another; and to support other workforce actions necessary to deliver infection control for the period to September 2020.

Oxfordshire's allocation from the Infection Control Fund is £7.3m. 75% of the total is available to support care homes with the cost of infection control measures. Local councils are also able to use the remaining 25% to support other pressures. Locally these include workforce pressures in relation to the domiciliary care market and external home support and other initiatives.

The Infection Control Fund is available through to the end of September 2020 – the current position is as follows:

- **Care Homes** – 97% of our care homes have taken up the offer of funds to support and improve infection control within their services. This is important to us as we have invested resources in promoting and supporting this initiative, and we are pleased that our providers involved in care delivery are wishing to work with the statutory organisations in Oxfordshire to promote and maintain the very best practice in the area of infection control.

- **Domiciliary Care Agencies** – We are in the process of disseminating additional funds to our domiciliary care agencies (home support, extra care housing services, and supported living services operated by CQC registered provider). We would encourage all providers to respond to our communication about this and make use of the funding available to you.
- **External Daytime Support** – We have just agreed to utilise a proportion of the Infection Control Fund to help support our building-based day centre providers to reopen their services to those that attend from Oxfordshire.
- **Service Sustainability Fund:** Throughout this period the Council has continued to operate the Service Sustainability Fund to respond to very exceptional circumstances, including where a provider is experiencing significant issues with on-going financial viability and is deemed to be 'at risk' of failure. This fund remains in place and I would ask you to alert us at an early date to any significant financial issue or concern within your organisation, so that we can respond accordingly and in good time.

In such a case we will work with the relevant provider on an open book accounting basis to agree what action can be taken to support them. This is something we have done in the past and it is something we will continue to do in the future.

Should you wish to discuss such arrangements with us you can do so by contacting the Quality & Contracts Team using asccovid19@oxfordshire.gov.uk or by telephoning your usual contact in the Quality & Contracts Team. All communications will be dealt with in confidence.

- **Personal Protective Equipment:** As I have stated in my previous correspondence the Government expects providers to secure PPE through normal 'business as usual' routes and has taken steps through its PPE Portal to ensure access to available equipment for social care providers.

Where the council needs to assist with the provision of PPE my previous letter noted that a charge would be deducted from future payments. This arrangement will continue and if providers have received PPE from the council and the total value is above a de-minimis level of £50, this amount was offset against the payments you received in April, May and June. The cost of on-going PPE provision will continue be offset against future payments or invoiced to the relevant provider where that is not possible.

Please e-mail urgentppe@oxfordshire.gov.uk if you require emergency_PPE supplies. We have logistic arrangements in place to respond to requests on a same day or within 24 hours Monday to Friday.

I hope the above helps to explain the support arrangements that will be in place from this month onwards. I would like to once again thank you for the fantastic work you and your staff have delivered throughout this period to date, and I would ask that you pass on my thanks to them.

As we move into the recovery phase of the pandemic response, we will continue to work collectively with our care associations and social care providers to respond to local and national issues. In this respect I know that my staff look forward to working with you to achieve a satisfactory and safe recovery.

Should you have any enquiries or need general support and advice regarding the above then please do not hesitate to contact us using the ascovid19@oxfordshire.gov.uk email.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen T Chandler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'S'.

Stephen T Chandler

Corporate Director of Adult and Housing Services

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