

Thurrock Council, Civic Offices
New Road, Grays
RM17 6SL

29th May 2020

Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Re: Support for Care Homes

Dear Helen

On the 14th May 2020, you sent a letter to Council Leaders regarding 'Support for Care Homes'. Your letter referred to the £600 million being made available to local authorities for the purpose of 'supporting adult social care providers to reduce the rate of transmission in and between care homes and support wider workforce resilience'.

Your letter required local authorities to review or put in place a Care Home Support Plan and to provide an assessment of care home resilience through the completion and submission of a template and a letter 'that sets out a short overview of their current activity and forward plan'.

This letter provides an overview of Thurrock's current activity in relation to preventing infection and preventing the spread of infection at Thurrock's 29 CQC registered adult care homes.

1. Joint work to ensure care market resilience locally, and that support is in place for care providers as set out by the Government in its letter (14th May 2020) – including confirmation of daily arrangements in place to review the local data and information on the state of the market locally.

Maintaining market resilience has been a key focus for partners for some time. As such, Thurrock has a good record of working with its providers to identify any issues and to provide additional support – e.g. via uplifts and resilience payments as well as the provision of additional wrap-around clinical support.

During the current pandemic, Thurrock has put the following arrangements in place to maintain care market resilience:

- Daily contact with care homes;
- A situation report detailing care home capacity carried out three times a week;
- The establishment of a Thurrock Covid-19 Care Home Hub – where contact is made with providers two times per week and an infection control action plan is

in place to prevent and control the spread of the Covid-19 virus (please find attached the Thurrock Care Home Covid-19 Outbreak Management Model);

- Additional 'step up' and 'step down' capacity through Community Health providers and Council accommodation;
- Additional Protective Personal Equipment stocks made available by the Council to reduce any short-fall;
- A team of carers available to provide support to any residents with Covid-19;
- Additional resilience payments – in addition to uplifts and resilience payments provided through the Better Care Fund;
- Support for providers previously agreed through Thurrock's Better Care Fund – which includes financial and clinical support; and
- Regular sharing of government and public health guidance for professionals, and easy read guidance for service users.

In addition, IPC training is being carried out at all Care Homes, with local trainers visiting the homes. Training will be completed by the 29th May. This includes basic handwashing, the donning and doffing of PPE and the correct swabbing procedure. Training is being cascading throughout each home via a 'train the trainer' approach.

Homes have also been provided with a digital solution to help staff to identify declining health as early as possible and to identify the response that might be required. Homes are being provided with Whzan, a digital solution that includes a blood pressure monitor, thermometer and oximeter. Linked to the cloud, the technology allows homes to connect directly to GPs.

A number of the actions put in place have been over and above those required by Government guidance – for example enhanced testing for staff working in homes.

Homes themselves have taken additional actions such as limiting access just to those that work in them and to ensuring staff do not work across different sites. Homes have also created isolation areas where they are able to do so and where they do not have the space, they have been able to keep residents isolated in their rooms.

2. Your system's collective level of confidence that these actions are being implemented or plans are in place to urgently implement, briefly setting out any areas where there are concerns and what support you might need.

We are confident that the actions we have put in place to ensure care home resilience during the pandemic are working well. For example, the Thurrock Covid-19 Care Home Hub led by the Assistant Director of Public Health and including key officers and partners across the CCG, NELFT and LA has worked to ensure that outbreaks are minimised or contained and are acted on at speed. Proactive interventions to prevent the occurrence of an outbreak are also in place such as whole home testing and enhanced IPC.

The Covid-19 Outbreak Management Plan contains four clear objectives with supporting actions enable this to take place (please refer to the appendix to this letter). A further protocol is being issues this week to ensure high standards of infection control are implemented and maintained.

The provision of step down facilities and isolation beds has also provided the capacity to support care homes when they have not been able to support residents following discharge from Hospital, and step up facilities for those who are ill or frail but who do not require an acute hospital bed.

In addition, the Primary Care offer available to Thurrock care homes has recently been enhanced through a Local Enhanced Service (LES) agreement. This ensures that Thurrock's four Primary Care Networks provide enhanced support to all residents in care homes. The LES is attached to this letter for information.

There do however remain areas of concern that could impact the ability of homes to remain resilient and to control the virus. These include:

- The ability to pay the wages of staff isolating and shielding;
- The ability for homes to access sufficient PPE stocks without needing to rely on the LA; and
- The ease of access, turnaround time and reliability of testing.

3. A short description of the approach that commissioners (LAs and CCGs) are taking to address short-term financial pressures experienced by care providers, taking into account local market context and pressures. This should include reference to any temporary or longer-term changes to fees paid by commissioners.

The care market has been fragile for some time and as such the Council working with the Clinical Commissioning Group has sought to reduce the risk of provider failure and falling quality of care. To date, support to reduce the risk has been delivered through the Better Care Fund. This has delivered:

- Uplifts and resilience payments to all providers;
- Additional enhanced clinical support for residential care homes through the creation of an Older Adults Health and Wellbeing Service – including access to community geriatricians, pharmacists, physiotherapists, falls, and community nursing;
- Dementia Crisis Support Team;
- The availability of a Rapid Response Assessment Service (RRAS) containing prescribing nurses and social workers and designed to prevent crisis; and
- A quality and safety nurse.

In addition, the Council, CCG and partners are developing and delivering a system redesign programme known as Better Care Together Thurrock which includes test and learn pilots designed to change the current shape, diversity and function of the market. This has included establishing market conditions that has seen the establishment of a significant number of micro-enterprises - broadening the market and offering greater choice; and a pilot that explores a completely new design for support in the home – known as Wellbeing Teams.

As a result of the recent Covid-19 pandemic, further support has been provided to address financial pressures through additional resilience payments. We have a good relationship with providers and liaise with them frequently to identify any issues at the earliest opportunity.

4. The approach agreed locally to provide alternative accommodation where this is required, and care arrangements for people who need to be isolated or shielded, where their normal care home does not have capacity to provide this. Costs of providing this accommodation are covered by the £1.3 billion COVID-19 discharge funding via the NHS.

Thurrock has been extremely proactive in ensuring that it has capacity where people need to be isolated or shielded but cannot do so within their normal care home. We have provided additional accommodation through the re-provision of beds (Oak House) and also through freeing up accommodation at one of our extra care facilities (Piggs Corner). We have also been able to create an isolation unit at our existing residential care home (Collins House) and have plans in place should additional capacity be required over the coming weeks and months.

In addition, our NHS partners have created significant step-down and step-up capacity where residents may be discharged from hospital but not well enough to return home or who are too ill and frail to stay at home but who do not require an acute hospital bed. All partners work extremely closely to ensure they are aware of capacity in the system at all times and that no one partner is creating a system blockage. To date, this has worked extremely well.

5. Local co-ordination for placing returning clinical staff or volunteers into care homes, where care homes request this support.

To date, returning clinical staff or newly qualified clinical staff have provided additional capacity for acute and community health trusts. Also, CCG staff have been redeployed to areas of most need including to the integrated rapid response assessment service (RRAS), which supports care homes in crisis and provides proactive advice and support. This has included the relocation to the RRAS team of paramedics who normally work with local Primary Care hubs. A need for clinical staff or volunteers to be placed in Thurrock Care homes has not been identified by the homes. Additional clinical support is in place by each home being allocated a lead clinician, and support is already in place through the Better Care Fund's Older Adults Health and Wellbeing Team. Thurrock's Rapid Response and Assessment Service has also been available to provide immediate support and advice where required and during the Covid-19 period. In addition, the Dementia Crisis Team has been on hand to provide advice to homes struggling to keep residents with dementia isolated and community nurses have provided proactive calls and have also made daily contact with the homes.

Through Thurrock's Voluntary and Community Sector, a successful local volunteer scheme has been established, and volunteers are available to provide support to any individuals in Thurrock requiring support. Council staff have also been asked to complete a skills audit and are available for redeployment should additional support be required.

We will continue to work closely with providers and with our partners to ensure that homes are provided with the support they require to keep residents safe.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Lyn Carpenter
Chief Executive