

29 May 2020



**East Berkshire**  
Clinical Commissioning Group

Helen Wately  
MP Minister of State for Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
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Dear Minister

**Re: Care Home Support in Slough**

In response to your letter dated 14 May, Slough Borough Council welcomes the opportunity to outline the council and system partners' current activities and a forward plan to support the care homes located in Slough.

**Local Context**

Slough has 16 care homes located in the borough, primarily catering for over 65s. Slough Borough Council funds 301 residents to live in care homes, including 190 residents who live in the borough. This compares to 860 individuals who are supported to live at home independently, either through a commissioned home care package or through a direct payment. This is better than the national average.

According to data provided by Public Health England, there have been 8 outbreaks in Slough care homes since the beginning of the pandemic. The Care Home Capacity Tracker shows that 2 care homes are currently affected by COVID-19, and 2 care homes are currently 'closed', either for shielding purposes or due to being dormant. There has been one notification via Public Health England of suspected cases in one care home since the beginning of May 2020. Where care homes have experienced an outbreak, support has been provided through collaborative arrangements outlined below.

**Joint work to support care homes across East Berkshire and Thames Valley LRF**

The East Berkshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and 3 Local Authorities (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Bracknell Forest Council and Slough Borough Council) are working together as the East Berkshire Commissioning Group to deliver a range of measures to support care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The East Berkshire Commissioning Group is accountable to the East Berkshire Directors Group, which provides overall strategic direction and is comprised of Directors of Adult Social Services (DASSs), Directors from East Berkshire CCG as well as the Director of Public Health for Berkshire.

Collaboration across health and social care is strong and evolving during this unprecedented time. The Council's DASS provides weekly briefings to the Council's Lead Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing. The Chief Executive also provides weekly briefings to all Council Members, including information on care homes in the borough, ensuring that there is strong political oversight of any issues concerning the sector.

Slough Borough Council is an active participant of the Thames Valley LRF, which is taking a collective approach to understanding provider pressures and financial impacts of COVID-19 to inform on-going support to the market. The LRF has also agreed a protocol for mutual aid to cover a range of scenarios, and is sharing positive practice on recovery planning, mental health and workforce initiatives, amongst other areas.

**Commissioning:** The East Berkshire Commissioning Group, chaired by Slough Borough Council, meets twice weekly to share learning and intelligence and coordinate our response to the care home market. This has included: implementing a shared approach towards commissioning additional bed capacity in response to national guidance; facilitating joint approaches towards care governance and the provision of care home quality support; agreeing principles for market management including addressing any capacity issues, and adopting common approaches towards providing short term financial support.

**Care home quality support:** At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the East Berkshire CCG Care Home Quality Team set up an extended hotline telephone number for care home managers to call in the event of support or advice being required. The line provides information and advice on areas such as infection control and PPE, and escalates other issues within the CCG concerning access to medicines in the community. The line is also used by other organisations when they need guidance or support on matters concerning care homes. In addition to the telephone line, further support is provided through a dedicated Care Homes Quality inbox, where care homes can email questions, problems or concerns. The East Berkshire CCG Care Home Quality Team also provides support where there are issues requiring escalation within the health system, such as issues relating to hospital discharge.

The East Berkshire CCG Care Home Quality Team have organised and disseminated a number of bespoke Health/ Infection Prevention Control related training courses and resources for care homes in East Berkshire, for example a Standard Operating Procedure on Walking with Purpose. The CCG has worked with the local Mental Health Trust for a health and wellbeing package. The CCG Care Home Medicine Optimisation Team has also provided support and guidance to care homes, with regular communication with each home.

A clinical lead has been identified for each home and a Clinical Care model led by Primary Care Networks has been developed to support the Framework for Enhanced Health in Care Homes.

The CCG has also implemented a project, which started in May, for a nurse in-reach service to care homes. Primary Care has been undertaking video consultations and there is also a digital project looking at the infrastructure, shared care records and analytics. There has also been training for both care homes and primary care on advanced care planning.

**Care Governance:** Slough Borough Council has maintained a strong oversight of safeguarding and quality issues through its Care Governance Board. In addition, an East Berkshire Care Governance Group has also been established through the East Berkshire Commissioning Group to provide support around COVID-19 outbreaks. The group reviews concerns or challenges being faced by any particular care provider within the area; such as notifications of COVID-19 outbreaks, deaths or staff resourcing which might impact on sustainability and continued safe operation within the home. These are then followed up with tailored support. Monitoring of care homes has continued using a variety of information sources and working closely with partners, in order to replace traditional monitoring methods with feedback being provided to Care Governance meetings on progress.

**Provider Support from Berkshire Care Association (BCA):** Berkshire Care Association meets twice weekly for zoom calls with providers. The meetings are provider led and are held in partnership with representatives from Local Authorities, the CCG and IPC teams. Clinicians attending have included a Community Geriatrician from the Rapid Response and Treatment (RRAT) service for care homes, the Associate Director for Nursing from the CCG and the Care Home Quality Support Team. Meetings focus on sharing best practice, reviewing national guidance, dispelling myths and encouraging confidence. Important areas which have been covered include: understanding atypical presentations of COVID-19 in the elderly, managing isolation for dementia patients, using PPE effectively and safely and reducing hospital admissions, as well addressing staff fears and concerns. Information regarding communication with families has been discussed and shared. Providers have been given confidence to effectively reduce infection spread and this has prevented other patients and staff getting infected. Many homes with COVID positive patients shared their experience in meetings and reassured others that it is not a death sentence for all. The BCA believe that this is reflected in local numbers, in comparison to what they might have been, and given the frailty of the patients cared for locally.

## **Daily arrangements to review local information**

### Tracking and monitoring

In addition to intelligence gathered at frequent calls with care homes, Slough Borough Council uses the national COVID-19 ASC Tracker to monitor the status of care homes and the challenges they face. Information is also drawn from ONS, LG Inform and Public Health England, and is used for on-going risk and issue monitoring three times a week at the Adults Social Care Task Group (part of the Council's Command and Control structure). Reports on the care provider market are produced on a weekly basis for the Council's SILVER/GOLD group and Council Members, to ensure appropriate governance during this time.

### Daily Contact

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Council undertook daily supportive calls with care homes. Calls have become more targeted, at the request of care homes (who have been faced with significant challenges and multiple competing priorities), and the Council's Commissioning Team is available throughout the week, including at weekends, to respond to any urgent requests for advice or support. In addition, the Council's COVID-19 Operations Room is virtually staffed 7 days a week and can also field any relevant incoming queries to the Commissioning Team, should these arise.

### Other engagement

The Council is in regular correspondence with care homes and also circulates a weekly newsletter, providing information on testing, PPE, training, workforce, webinars and financial support and changes to national guidance.

### **Managing short-term financial pressures**

Slough Borough Council has welcomed the support from central government around funding for discharges from hospital and social care at this challenging time. The council has worked collectively with its East Berkshire partners to agree a common set of principles to guide payments to care providers – drawing largely on ADASS and LGA guidance. Providers have been actively encouraged and supported to make contact with the council to claim for additional COVID-19 expenses and the process has been kept as straightforward as possible to enable swift payment whilst maintaining transparency. The table below sets out payments to date. We are anticipating additional claims from providers who have told us that they have been ‘too busy’ to request this given other pressures.

<b>Support to providers that the local authority has contract with</b>			
	<b>Domiciliary Care</b>	<b>Residential Care</b>	<b>Other Provision</b>
<b>Support being offered</b>	Additional Pay - Current workforce e.g. overtime and enhancements  Agency and Temporary Staff  Recruitment  Training  Equipment and PPE  Other COVID-19 associated costs.		
<b>Total Spent to date since on supporting providers the local authority has contracts with in response to COVID-19</b>	25,755.93	114,859.50	12,166.38

<b>Support to providers that the local authority does not have contracts with</b>			
	<b>Domiciliary Care</b>	<b>Residential Care</b>	<b>Other Provision</b>
<b>Support being offered</b>	Additional Pay – Current workforce e.g. overtime and enhancements.  Agency and Temporary Staff  Recruitment  Training  Equipment and PPE  Other COVID-19 associated costs.  Self-funders and DP packages.	Additional Pay – Current workforce e.g. overtime and enhancements.  Equipment and PPE.	-
<b>Total spent to date since on supporting providers the local authority does not have contracts with in response to COVID-19.</b>	11,215	888	0

We will allocate the ASC Infection Control Grant to eligible adult social care providers according to the formula below:

- Only locations operating within Slough will be eligible to claim the funding.
- 75% of the Local Authority grant allocation will be distributed to all eligible CQC Registered care homes in proportion to the number of registered beds at the care home and the total care home market, regardless of their occupancy levels.
- If any care homes decline the funding or are unable to confirm they are able to comply with the grant conditions then this money will be distributed to those who accept the funding and confirm they will comply with the grant conditions.
- 25% of the Local Authority grant allocation will be distributed to eligible CQC registered domiciliary care, and eligible CQC registered supported living providers. This will likely be on the basis of a proportion of the number of service users to whom they directly provide services and the total number of service users supported within all of these organisations.

- If any eligible providers decline the funding or are unable to confirm they are able to comply with the grant conditions then this money will be distributed to those who accept the funding and confirm they will comply with the grant conditions.

In addition, the council is processing requests for annual fee uplifts. Each request is considered on an individual case-by-case basis upon submission of a brief business case and is negotiated directly with the provider.

All domiciliary care services commissioned by the borough have been paid on weekly planned time rather than actual time spent in an individual's home on a per minute basis

Concerns around long term funding and sustainability remain, particularly given the high number of vacancies in care homes and overarching shock to the sector.

### **Alternative accommodation**

The East Berkshire Commissioning Group has been proactive in commissioning additional bed-spaces in accordance with the discharge to assess guidance and in anticipation of increased demand. Slough Borough Council commissioned 136 additional beds on behalf of the East Berkshire Commissioning Group, which were funded by the CCG. Contract negotiations have been undertaken to review and revise available capacity whilst ensuring value for money and address any gaps in the market.

The East Berkshire Commissioning Group has overseen a Market Task and Finish Group to review market capacity, demand and challenges and to determine the type of additional capacity, which might be required.

The East Berkshire Commissioning Group has also undertaken preparatory work to enable a hotel to be converted into CQC registered provision at short notice, should this be required.

In addition, the mutual support offer across the Thames Valley region provides the mechanism for exploring further alternative accommodation offers.

Initially there were challenges to the Discharge to Assess process as patients were being discharged from hospital to care homes with COVID status unknown. On 6 April 2020, the Slough DASS escalated this concern to the CCG, the Acute Trust and the Council's GOLD group. Since that time the situation has improved, with test results being provided prior to discharge for patients who tested negative upon admission. There remain some difficulties with patients who test positive upon admission, and care homes will only accept admissions upon confirmation of COVID status, length of stay, medical indicators such as temperatures checks and O2 saturation upon exercise.

The Council is also working with East Berkshire CCG's Infection Control Team to support the admission of recovering COVID-19 individuals into care homes, with appropriate preventative measures such as the ability to isolate affected individuals and adequate provision of PPE.

The infection control team is working with the East Berkshire local authorities to produce a risk assessment template for consideration whether it is safe from the provider's perspective to accept someone into their home following a COVID-19 positive test on admission to hospital.

## **Workforce and local coordination of returners and volunteers**

The Frimley Health and Care System Workforce Bureau Multi-disciplinary Team aims to coordinate the deployment of such workforce across the Frimley system. The workforce monitoring undertaken by the Council and the Workforce Bureau acts as the conduit between national workforce initiatives and the system, which includes receiving system allocations of returners and national volunteers.

Care Homes have been requested to input data onto NHSE Bed Capacity Tracker in respect of workforce and any absences of nurses, care workers and non-care workers due to sickness. The Commissioning Team is following up information inputted onto the Tracker in respect of workforce. Demand for workforce through this route is minimal.

In addition the System Volunteers Bureau has also been established to facilitate access to NHS Volunteer Responders. The Frimley ICS Workforce Bureau holds thrice weekly calls with system partners from health and care to monitor staffing levels and needs across the system and to flexibly deploy staff, returners and volunteers where needed. So far, the take up of volunteers has not been considered necessary by care homes.

Slough Borough Council is participating in pilot with partners from Frimley ICS and NHSE/I to reduce the risk of harm to BAME staff who are disproportionately represented in COVID-19 deaths.

## **Other good practice**

### **Support online**

The Council has added a section to its website specifically concerning coronavirus. This provides information on a range of key areas, including accessing PPE and support from local community volunteers. Public Health information is available through a specialist Public Health website.

### **Coordination and provision of emergency PPE supplies**

Where providers have been unable to source PPE through their usual routes, they are able to apply to the Local Authority to access a limited emergency stock sourced from the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) or purchased by the Local Authority. Each Local Authority is the local contact point for the LRF and has facilitated a contactless collection or delivery service. Where needed, the LAs also continue to support providers to register with the National Supply Disruption Response.

In Slough Borough, a PPE team has been set up to identify need and co-ordinate stocks of PPE to ensure that they reach providers in need of emergency supplies. If emergency supplies are needed an online request form has been created for homes to complete and request the required items, an emergency email address has also been set up. This is monitored over 7 days. On receipt of a request for emergency supplies a member of the PPE team will review the request and arrange for collection of the necessary items.

Care homes have reported that they are still experiencing issues in accessing supplies of masks and hand sanitisers through their own supply routes. More than half of care homes do not have medical equipment on site, needed for COVID-19

Slough Borough Council is leading on the joint procurement of PPE across the three East Berkshire local authorities, to strengthen the availability of emergency supplies of PPE.

There is still some concern around PPE suppliers imposing high prices and minimum order amounts that are unaffordable for the smaller homes and other agencies such as domiciliary care. Data concerning PPE and other areas has been requested from care homes by the CQC, East Berkshire CCG, and local authorities. This duplication of request for information has not been helpful for care homes or the Council during a period of increased pressure.

### **Co-production**

Prior to the pandemic, our co-production network (comprising local carers and service users) was working with Healthwatch to develop an approach to 'enter and view' visits into care homes. The purpose of the visits was to gauge resident satisfaction, highlight areas of good practice and to feed back any possible areas of development. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Healthwatch have co-developed and piloted a new and virtual approach with one of our care homes. This involved working closely with family and staff and has provided rich and useful intelligence. This has included managing communication with families, maintaining relationships, creating ways of engaging with residents and keeping people safe. The intention is to work with our care homes and the co-production network to build upon this innovative approach. It will be rolled out more widely going forward to further strengthen the voice of care home residents and family members.

### **Local Covid-19 testing**

A [new online portal](#) to enable care homes to arrange deliveries of coronavirus test kits was launched by the Government on 11<sup>th</sup> May, so that all symptomatic and asymptomatic care home staff and residents in England are now eligible for testing, with testing being prioritised for care homes that look after the over 65s. However, prior to this announcement, through the work of the Frimley ICS, local testing facilities for COVID-19 were already available for East Berkshire keyworker staff and their household members at Ascot Racecourse as well as other sites across the Frimley ICS. Testing for Care Homes was also already available nationally, accessed through Gov.uk, delivered through Public Health. Frimley ICS has also commissioned bespoke testing for care providers via the GP out of hours service.

Public Health is leading on implementing the national prioritisation process:

1. The information to assess priority for all home testing will come from the care home capacity tracker; PHE outbreak information and future DHSC data feeds on testing and results.
2. Slough Borough Council social care and NHS care home leads; with support from public health teams will assess their local data to prioritise care homes appropriately.

Currently, Slough Borough Council is working to better understand local capacity of testing and engage directly with care homes to promote take up and offer advice and support. Concerns have been raised about: delays in providing test kits, lack of clarity around who should carry out testing, whether tests will be picked up or not, as well as confusion and having to keep up with changes about testing generally, as the guidance changes.

### **Collective level of confidence**

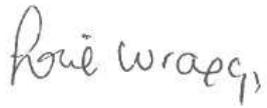
From the outset the local Health and Social Care system mobilised rapidly focusing on collective engagement and support across East Berkshire's care provision. This has

established a high degree of confidence across the system with plans in place and partners working collaboratively to share intelligence and learning. Our confidence is evident in care home providers' positive feedback for the support offered and the fact that infection rates in Slough have significantly reduced.

Some areas remain a challenge and corresponding actions to progress going forward are outlined below:

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Action</b>
Future and clarity of financial pressures and uncertainty over further funding available (especially with increasing vacancies)	Monitoring of market and financial pressures across East Berkshire. Escalating of council funding pressures for ASC
Surety of supply of PPE	On-going joint work through the LRF. Joint procurement of PPE emergency supplies across East Berkshire.
Joined up guidance from national health and social care sources	Work with East Berkshire partners to continue to understand, implement and disseminate guidance across health and social care from various sources
Effective and timely roll out of the test and trace and logistics of a rolling programme of testing	Continuing joint working with PH PH setting up and leading Test & Trace cell PH working with health colleagues to promote workforce transmission management
Supported Living / Dom care resilience	Further consideration of challenges and response to the sector both locally and through the East Berkshire Commissioning Group
Sustainability and responsiveness of the market during a sustained COVID-19 period	East Berks Market Task and Finish Group will be developing a longer-term plan for market engagement and management to address sustainability
Workforce in longer-term	Frimley ICS Workforce Bureau developing a longer-term plan around gaps and opportunities in the employment market Consideration of particular challenges and support to BAME care workers, including through Frimley ICS, NHSE/I, SBC pilot.
Experience of residents	Progressing work with Healthwatch and the Co-production network to understand resident and family perspectives.
Duplication in requests for information and difficulties in accessing and collating data from different sources.	Streamlining requests for information as far as possible.  Allocating resources to access and analyse data

Yours sincerely



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