

**Collaborative working with providers**

**Purpose of Report**

1. This report analyses the impact of support that has been provided to the adult social care market in partnership with Wiltshire Care Partnership and the Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group (now ICB). The pandemic saw a One Council approach involving officers in Public Health, commissioning and adult social care operations working closely with the wider health system.

**Background**

2. At the start of the COVID pandemic, a collaborative approach was established with Wiltshire care providers, building on existing work and relationships. The benefits of this approach have been numerous, including the development of improved commissioner/provider relationships leading to open, transparent working that supports joint oversight and allows early intervention and support where appropriate. Furthermore, relationships have enabled meaningful coproduction to develop a variety of initiatives, including:
  - payments to providers
  - moving to gross payments to providers rather than net
  - the distribution of government grant funding
  - workforce recruitment and retention support measures
  - COVID outbreak related closure strategies
  - the development of the Provider Oversight and Support Team.
3. These close working relationships are key to the ongoing success of these and future initiatives, such as the cost of care and market sustainability. In the summer of 2022, the Council will coordinate the national cost of care frameworks for care home and home care and the development of a Market Sustainability Strategy that will be reported at the October Cabinet meeting.
4. It is fair to say that, while there was high level agreement between commissioners and care sector leaders to move towards a more open approach to coproduction, the COVID pandemic gave this impetus and dictated a faster pace, which can only be seen as an unintended positive resulting from the pandemic.

## Main Considerations for the Council

5. In March 2020, the COVID support team was established as part of the Wiltshire Council market support strategy. The team worked closely with providers and other stakeholders to develop a standardised supportive approach, including the facilitation of COVID advice and guidance, a risk identification system and related support offers. The team provided a one stop shop for providers, ensuring integrated health and care communications and support. This included a helpline (operating 7 days a week during outbreaks), regular webinars and a weekly health and care newsletter.
6. The team conducted regular engagement with the 303 care home, supported living and domiciliary care providers. This engendered good levels of trust between the team and providers, allowing providers to share rich information and intelligence and enabling them to feel confident to freely ask for support and help. Each provider received a welfare check call at least once every two weeks. The frequency of the welfare checks varied and could increase to weekly or daily depending on level of identified risk. This level of data sharing allowed for early intervention and the prevention of situation escalation. The team was able to identify where there were potential risks such as significant outbreaks, staff shortages, lack of access to appropriate PPE, and provide advice, guidance and support that was customised and specific to the situation. Furthermore, the early intervention by the team in outbreaks ensured that services were fully informed and working within current guidance and therefore reduced the risk of significant COVID spread.
7. Analysis of data e.g. rates of infection by home, deaths due to COVID etc by the Public Health team enabled a targeted approach for support and market development and enabled an informed approach by the Council. Reports were presented weekly (this has now reduced to fortnightly) and enabled the Corporate Leadership Team to have risks escalated. All providers that had a COVID outbreak were offered an infection prevention and control (IPC) video call, and in serious cases a face-to-face care home evaluation. The COVID team also facilitated a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) approach to managing safe discharges from hospital, safe admissions from the community and from other care homes during COVID outbreaks, supporting the assessment on a case-by-case basis. Where issues were identified across the system or by the providers, the team organised webinars with appropriate specialists and experts to allow for in depth guidance and support in key areas.
8. The team received the following feedback by providers or on their behalf.
  - The COVID team “are skilled at responding to the support requests identified by Providers. They may not know the answers, but they have direct access to those who do and who can.”
  - “Without the support you have been providing us we wouldn't have been able to continue service as safely as we are.”
  - “The provider was singing the praises of the staff who are making the welfare calls and have said that at times they wouldn't have got through some of the situations without their help.”

- “Without the COVID team, the situation in Wiltshire would have been a lot worse. I think that the joint working between providers and the Council has reduced the impact of COVID in the County, particularly in Care Homes.”
9. Furthermore, Wiltshire Care Partnership (WCP) independently carried out a survey of their members. A number of providers responding felt that a dedicated helpline would be useful going forwards, with a comment made that “the COVID team at the council have been excellent - they have really taken time to understand. They have been invaluable.” Consequently, it was determined that the COVID support team should transition to a permanent Provider Oversight and Support Team that would continue to be a key contact point for providers and maintain a proportionate oversight approach.
  10. The team has used a collaborative approach to coproduce key strategies including the agreement of the distribution of over £17.5 million of grant funding in a manner that provided maximum impact for the market. This included the collation of agreements and key data that informed the allocation of funding to each provider, the provision of advice and support on the boundaries and limitations of the grant related expenditure and the development, collection and analysis of the spend to enable reporting to government.
  11. The team was also instrumental in the development of a multi-agency infection control strategy that supported care homes to safely manage COVID outbreaks whilst maintaining financial viability and released much needed capacity to provide support to the wider system. Homes previously closed whole locations after 2 cases and extended the outbreak further every time a new case was discovered within the set time frame. For homes of significant size this meant that they were “closed to admissions” or “in outbreak” for sustained periods of time. This had a significant impact on system flow from the local acute hospitals and impacted on the health care system as well as increasing the risk of financial unviability for the provider. This also had a significant impact on the care home residents and their families who faced long periods of homes being closed to visiting or having visiting restricted. The new protocol changed the approach to outbreak management within care homes. Homes were asked to carry out closure assessments and, where safe and manageable, encouraged to manage outbreaks on a cohort basis rather than as a whole home. Each assessment was reviewed by a Multi Disciplinary Team, including CQC, to agree with the home whether partial opening would be safe. This freed up much needed capacity and supported informed decision making and the sharing of risk and accountability. Furthermore, with the benefit of cohorting being realised, homes maintained cohorts despite guidance changes which reduced the risk of transmission within the home and therefore sustained and significant outbreaks reduced. The new protocol reduced home closures across the county from an average of sixty care homes being closed to admissions due to outbreak, to only five care homes being closed to admissions within 8 weeks of implementation.
  12. The multi-agency Wiltshire Care Home Advisory Group was also established as a response to the COVID pandemic in May 2020. This group was established to:
    - engage with and listen to providers, residents, families, and carers

- ensure that the health and care system understood the needs of care home providers
  - ensure support offers met the needs identified
  - help with the interpretation of national guidance and advise on local implementation (e.g. use of technology)
  - ensure quality and safety were at the heart of decision making
  - provide local expertise on any issues relating to care home resilience
13. This group was chaired by a Wiltshire GP and membership represented all key partners from health and social care including CQC, AWP, Community Health, Public Health and WCP in addition to the local authority and CCG. This group has met regularly and used its shared knowledge and expertise to address a number of issues of importance to the care sector including supporting care home resilience and identifying appropriate care home support offers.
14. This group has only recently stood down due to the COVID situation but there remains the ability to reinstate if required.
15. Wiltshire Council has worked with Wiltshire Care Partnership (the trade association for the adult care sector) to steadily and sustainably build better and more effective relationships with providers since WCP was formed in 2013. Relationships have matured, with respect and recognition that it is important to work through differences and it is fine to disagree sometimes, although the vast majority of the collaborative work is undertaken with mutual agreement. This has resulted in a joint approach between the council, providers, and NHS partners towards:
- Workforce recruitment and retention
  - Development of commissioning strategies
  - Development of delivery plans
  - Longer term planning of services and direction of travel
  - Cost of care and other national and regional strategies
  - Long and short-term front-line delivery improvements
  - A better approach to safeguarding by all partners
  - A united voice to advocate for social care in Wiltshire
  - Recognition that the aims and objectives of Wiltshire Council and providers are essentially the same, i.e., to deliver better, more sustainable, and effective care for people in Wiltshire.

## Next Steps

- 16.
- The POST team will continue providing support and oversight of Wiltshire adults care market, including being a single point of contact for provider financial related enquiries. This is intended to mitigate the risk of provider failure or viability issues and reduce the risk of overall relationship breakdown with providers who are seeking remuneration for services delivered.

- Two cost of care exercises (one for home care and the other for care homes) will be undertaken in the summer. A Market Sustainability Strategy will be co-produced with providers
- The Council and providers will continue to work together, and with NHS partners, to develop long-term strategies for the delivery of health and social care that bring together and deliver more integrated, outcomes-based services.

## Recommendations

17. It is recommended that:

- Health Select notes the progress to maintain and build relationships with Wiltshire providers as well as the future programme of work

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**The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:**

None

## Appendices

None