

Dr Richard Harling
Director of Health & Care
Staffordshire County Council
No 1 Staffordshire Place
Stafford
ST16 2LP

ascincidentmanagement@staffordshire.gov.uk

Enquiry telephone details: 0300 111 8050

Postal Address:

Staffordshire Place 2, Tipping Street, Stafford, ST16 2DH

Our Ref: RH/TMF

17 March 2020

Dear Provider

Re: CORONAVIRUS COVID-19: Adult Social Care in Staffordshire

As you will be well aware from the Prime Minister's briefing yesterday afternoon (16th March), it is looking increasingly likely that coronavirus Covid-19 will place a very large strain on health and social care services over the coming weeks.

Up to now, we have asked you to: follow national infection control advice; prioritise support for urgent care as much as possible; and to make sure that your Business Continuity Plans are up to date, particularly in relation to being able to identify the greatest and most urgent needs in your service, and how you could mitigate the impact of staff absences. All of this has been an important part of overall planning for the impact on adult social care.

However, given the Prime Minister's announcements yesterday, we know that you will be very anxious about how your services will be able to manage during these unprecedented times. We have asked you, and continue to ask you, to use your service and provider level Business Continuity Plans for as long as possible. But given the likely challenge facing health and social care services over the next weeks, we also want to set out how we want to support you if it is no longer possible to respond to the impact of the disease at an individual service level.

We have invoked emergency planning systems in the Council, which are part of our joint responses with the NHS and other partners under the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). This allows us to take urgent action under the County Council's constitution to enable us to respond to the challenges of coronavirus Covid-19. As Director of Public Health, I chair the Strategic Co-ordinating Group within the LRF arrangements, which includes the NHS and other partners. I can assure you that the challenges facing adult social care – sourcing PPE, accessing any nursing staff that the Government is able to bring forward, and so on – are being tackled alongside and through the same arrangements as the NHS, linking with national emergency planning arrangements.

We absolutely understand that you are very likely to experience increased staff absences during the outbreak due to illness, self-isolation and caring responsibilities, just at the time when the challenge presented by the virus is increasing. Given the scale of impact, we will simply not be in

a position to take back care packages from providers. And at the same time the NHS needs us to support more people, as hospital beds need to be freed up for those who need them most.

So, we are creating a Mutual Aid programme to help providers ensure care capacity is used as effectively as possible. This includes the Council taking extraordinary actions to do everything we can to increase the level of staffing available for social care provision. As a start, we are asking staff from across the Council to volunteer to be trained urgently to take on personal care tasks – not all tasks, but those in which they can be trained in the time available. We will also ask them to volunteer to backfill roles in critical Council services, if some of the staff in those critical services take on personal care tasks. We have developed training materials and talked to some providers to test out how this additional staffing could best be used to support the sector.

As part of this Mutual Aid programme, we will also work with national and local schemes to increase volunteers and staffing to support the sector as part of the national effort to support the most vulnerable, and to increase the care workforce as far as possible.

We are also asking you to provide as much mutual support to each other as possible – including sharing resources, key staff and training where appropriate.

From today, we will cease a range of non-urgent, non-critical tasks, including much of our normal training, quality assurance work and lower priority social work tasks, and focus our resources on the critical tasks and the key training that is required to address the challenge right now – for example, face fit testing for face masks.

During this period, we will support you, where you need that support, to prioritise your staffing and delivery patterns to ensure that vulnerable people's highest priority needs are met. We anticipate that a national framework for care delivery during this pandemic will be published before the end of the month, and that this will provide the context to allow individual care needs to be prioritised in a structured manner, allowing us to formalise how you can deviate from people's care plans during the period of the pandemic.

Locally, we are reviewing how much flexing (e.g. in home care) we will delegate to providers without you having to get case by case agreement by the Council throughout the period of major impact from the pandemic – we are, of course, looking to do this in the context of the expected national framework. At a case by case level, we would expect this to be done with appropriate discussions with people and their families. Through the Council, we will be in regular communication with the Care Quality Commission so that CQC will know how you are being asked to act at every stage; and we know that the CQC will be flexible during this time, provided that we all take actions in a structured and reasonable way.

We are urgently reviewing our approach to financial sustainability in the sector, and will be setting out this week how we will try to reduce risks to your cashflow.

We will also be increasing our staffing for provider advice and information this week, which will be accessed through the helpline (0300 111 8050) and email (ascincidentmanagement@staffordshire.gov.uk). While we have been planning for as many potential scenarios as possible, we need to make sure that our actions locally are flexible, respond to national changes, and that our decisions and advice are consistent with the NHS and others. That does mean that we may not be able to answer every question immediately, but we are able to connect with people or organisations who should be able to give us an answer to pass through to you.

In short, we will:

- take extraordinary measures to increase the social care workforce in Staffordshire through a mutual aid approach
- support you in taking structured, reasonable variations in care provision to prioritise care interventions for the most vulnerable
- link with regulatory bodies to ensure that you are not penalised for doing the right thing during the course of the pandemic
- ensure that the needs of the adult social care sector are addressed within the Local Resilience Framework response in the same way as those of the NHS and other bodies
- change some of our normal payment terms to improve financial sustainability for the sector over this time
- do everything we can to reduce duplication of information requests between us and the NHS

And we need providers:

- to give us enough information to allow us to support you with a mutual aid approach
- to keep your services operating, prioritising care tasks in line with your existing Business Continuity Plans, and working with us to continually achieve the best prioritisation as national frameworks may be brought in, and the circumstances may change depending on the level of impact from the virus over the next few weeks
- to continue to take on new placements and packages as far as possible, so that our hospitals are free for those who will need them most (which may, of course, be some of your current service users in the future)

Today, tomorrow and throughout the week, we will be setting out more information about all of these actions, replying to the detailed questions that some of you have already sent us, and summarise that information through our ascincidentmanagement@staffordshire.gov.uk email. Please can we ask you, if you have not already done so, to make sure that the contact email we are using for coronavirus Covid-19 is the right one for your service.

I know that these are going to be extraordinarily challenging times for all of us, and I would like to thank all of you, including those who have already been assuring us that you will do everything in your power to deliver priority care tasks, work flexibly with each other, and help the NHS respond to this disease. I can assure you that the efforts of the whole Council, not just the adult social care teams, will be doing exactly the same during the period of this pandemic.

Yours sincerely



Dr Richard Harling
Director of Health & Care

