

Briefing – care homes support and resilience plans

22 May 2020

Introduction

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) issued a letter and support pack detailing the support on offer to care homes during the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes details of the £600m infection control fund.

The LGA and ADASS welcome national support and resources to the care sector. In recognising the priority social care is for the government, we have counselled on approaches to achieve best results, securing a lighter touch and more flexible process, as well as an extension to the original deadlines.

We are, however, dismayed at the way the ask on local government has been framed and communicated over the past week. We are communicating our concerns to government, being very clear that the timescales will impact on the ability of councils to produce comprehensive and well-co-ordinated plans. We have stressed that the deadlines are unrealistic and that this is compounded by piecemeal and incomplete advice on completing the exercise.

Nonetheless, we continue to encourage you to use the plans as an opportunity to demonstrate the excellent work being done with care providers and between local authorities and the NHS while also identifying the financial and operational challenges (some beyond our control), in managing staff groups and residents to keep them safe. We continue to be clear that the aspects of care homes which councils do not have direct control over, such as the long-term future of the care home market, need to be met by the government.

To support you fulfil the responsibilities on you, below is a short checklist of the key actions we recommend councils take immediately, plus a summary of the information published to date about the ask and process, as well as our best understanding of further detail which has not yet been released. Some of the information in this briefing may change as it is finalised, so please bear in mind we are sharing to help you prepare to complete this exercise.

Our Care and Health Improvement Programme can provide support in brokering conversations or completing the return. Please contact it via your ADASS regional office, LGA care and health improvement adviser, or by emailing adass.lga.covid@local.gov.uk

The ministerial letter, its annexes and the data return template are available via this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-care-homes>

Slides from a webinar on implementation, detailing more information about the processes, are available here:

https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Support%20to%20Care%20Homes_Local%20Plans_webinar%20v003pm%20%28002%29.pdf

Overview

- Local authorities are responsible for producing a local care home resilience plan by 29 May
- These plans:
 - o Comprise a covering letter and a data return (see below for details)
 - o Cover all care homes in your footprint

- Council CEO responsible for sign off, with lead role of DASS and DPH expected, and input from CCG (nursing director and AO), care providers and other partners
- The infection control fund is to be allocated to care home providers in your footprint; we understand that it will be as follows:
 - Issued to councils via a s31 grant
 - 75% to be passported directly on a per bed basis (as per their CQC registration); the criteria on which the funding can be spent are yet to be finalised
 - The remaining 25% to be shared according to local need, which can include domiciliary care providers
 - The funding will be paid to the council in two tranches in June and July
 - Both payments are contingent on providers completing or committing to complete the care capacity tracker; this second payment is likely to also be contingent on the council submitting a local resilience plan
 - We believe a grant determination letter which will detail the final criteria is due imminently
- These plans need to be published
- The plans will be reviewed at a regional and national level. The LGA and ADASS have been asked to be involved in the regional review, and we expect this to identify common support themes/issues for action by appropriate body, as well as good practice and learning; this process is not expected to award judgements such as pass/fail marks

Key actions and expectations for submission

Covering letter

- We expect this to be required to include:
 - Joint work to ensure care market resilience locally
 - Your system's collective level of confidence that these actions are being implemented or plans are in place to urgently implement
 - Short description of the approach that commissioners (LAs and CCGs) are taking to address short-term financial pressures
 - Approach agreed locally to providing alternative accommodation
 - Local co-ordination for placing returning clinical staff or volunteers into care homes
- We know, and have raised frequently at national level, that councils, the NHS and providers are working very hard to support care home residents; and that this exercise must recognise this and be about addressing issues, including the well-known ones around PPE, testing and workforce capacity
- The covering letter is therefore an opportunity to highlight the support and good work locally, as well as to highlight the ongoing challenges out of local control. We continue to hear of ongoing issues around testing, workforce and clinical input.
- Despite feedback to include the whole care market, this support is tailored to care homes; the mention of domiciliary care as eligible for some of the 25% of the infection control fund feels an afterthought
- Within the very short timeframes, there is a need to engage care providers, including those not commissioned from, quickly; there will also be an expectation of engagement from the Health and Wellbeing Board and Local Resilience Forum chairs, Healthwatch, care provider forum or wider engagement, and local disabled or older persons' advocacy organisations
- The submission should be published, so it is likely that local political sign-off will be needed

Data return

- This asks 13 questions across five themes: infection prevention and control; testing; PPE and equipment supply; workforce support, and clinical support

- For each of the questions, there are three sections to the answer:
 - o Summary of information from care capacity tracker, which providers must complete by Tuesday 27 May
 - o Any support needs arising from providers' answers
 - o Any other issues you wish to highlight
- The updated care capacity tracker with the additional questions to cover the areas for the data return has now been released
- If your council has not done so already, please ask your DASS or suitable alternative to email adass.lga.covid@local.gov.uk detailing 'Approved users for COVID-19 reports' in the subject heading and who they would like to approve within their council for access to these reports. If you are not already registered with LG Inform you will also need to register at <https://signin.esd.org.uk/register.html?app=esd>.

Funding allocations

- The grant determination letter will detail the final criteria. At present, further to the details above we believe:
 - o Councils have been funded for the care home beds in your footprint, regardless of who commissions them
 - o The funding cannot be used to offset any fees uplifts distributed with earlier Covid-19 funding
 - o Councils will be expected to passport funding to all care homes, including those with which there is no existing contractual arrangement
 - o DHSC will expect reporting on the expenditure in the autumn

Immediate actions

- Encourage all care home providers in your area to complete the care capacity tracker
- Sign up to LG Inform to access the care capacity tracker information, by emailing adass.lga.covid@local.gov.uk detailing 'Approved users for COVID-19 reports' in the subject heading
- Bring together all other sources of local information on care homes, to support completion of the spreadsheet and covering note
- Prepare financial systems to issue funding to all care homes once mandated to do so
- Prepare political leadership for publication of submission
- Ensure NHS partners are equally primed, and collating necessary information
- Seek initial views and support of key stakeholders including Health and Wellbeing Board and Local Resilience Forum chairs, Healthwatch, care provider forum or wider engagement, and local disabled or older persons' advocacy organisations
- If you would like our support, please contact your ADASS regional chair or LGA CHIA