

Scrutiny Report

Quality Assurance of Care and Nursing Homes in Worcestershire

Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Services

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Task Group's report seeking reassurance about the effectiveness of the County Council's quality assurance systems of residential care and nursing homes. We would also want to thank the members of the Group for the work undertaken with a view to understanding the views of Providers and other key partners.

The terms of reference for the scrutiny exercise were 'to investigate how the Council carries out and monitors quality assurance of care homes in Worcestershire'.

We will respond to each of the recommendations in turn:

Clarity and communication of the Council's inspection criteria

Recommendation 1: The Task Group recommends that the Council provide greater transparency and clarity to care and nursing homes on the criteria according to which they are inspected, and ensure that a copy of the criteria is published on the Council's website.

Response

You have advised us that a number of the Care Homes you visited advised you that Home Managers were unsure what the Council criteria for inspection is and felt it would be helpful to know the criteria in advance of any visit. We advised you that the required standards' against which any inspection is undertaken are set out in the contract with the home. As discussed we have undertaken a one-off mailing to remind homes of the Council's expectations.

The Worcestershire Care Market

Recommendation 2: Task Group members were very concerned about the challenges and sustainability of the care market and heard that there was a shortfall of high needs dementia beds in the county. The Task Group was pleased to hear from the Cabinet Member that the issue of how best to manage the shortfall has already been considered and recommends that this is taken forward as a matter of urgency.

Response

In line with the requirements of the Care Act the Adult Services Commissioning Unit has undertaken extensive market analysis of the state of Worcestershire's Care Home market. As identified, some small homes could be at risk of closure when the current owners retire due to financial viability. As discussed there is a need to influence the process of planning permission which is currently seeing a significant number of applications being granted for large, new build care homes which are undermining the viability of small providers. We would ask for the continued support of all Councillors in influencing, where possible, the outcome of such applications to ensure we can maintain choice and value for money.

As we advised there is work underway to establish the viability of the development of a Council owned Residential Dementia Care provision. A full update will be given as part of the six month review process.

We are very aware of the national pressures in relation to the recruitment and retention of workforce and are working with regional colleagues to develop new ways of working. We have recently secured national funding to support Nursing Associates in Care Homes and hope this will support the development of a career pathway for care within the private sector.

We are very aware of the issues related to the funding levels available from the Council. We have an annual negotiation with all care providers to ensure we use available resources to best effect but clearly a national funding solution is urgently required to address the need to provide appropriate funding.

As requested the Quality Assurance Team and Lead Commissioner for Care Homes will ensure that a full update is provided to Scrutiny in July 2020 on the progress to mitigate the issues affecting the care market.

Assistive Technology

Recommendation 3: The Council should intensify development in the use of assistive technology for residents living in their own homes to assist them to stay independent for longer. We also encourage increased use of assistive technology in care and nursing homes to improve residents' experience.

Response

We were pleased that the Task Group recognises the importance of the use of assistive technology. Adult Services will be pleased to update Scrutiny on the progress and the significant range of projects underway which are keeping people independent for longer.

We appreciate that members have recognised the high proportion of people in care and nursing homes compared to our family group of authorities but would want to clarify that this is due to the high level of Hospital Acquired Functional Decline experienced by our older residents following an admission to hospital. This is indeed having a significant impact on the Adult Social Care budget. We would be happy to brief members on this matter.

Positive Intervention when a home closes suddenly

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Council documents and communicates its 'crisis response policy' to all stakeholders and care homes.

Response

As confirmed the Adult Services Provider function has a service which does provide a service of last resort if appropriate. This has been in place for many years and will provide an intervention if appropriate. However there are circumstances in which such an intervention is not appropriate once an assessment has been undertaken.

All Providers are regularly asked to update their emergency response plans and we are keen to ensure that we are clear with Providers that they should adhere to the notice period stated in their contract.

Opportunities for Networking and Sharing Best Practice

Recommendation 5: We recommend greater consistency of access to forums and networks for care and nursing homes, and that this includes events with outside speakers if relevant.

Response

Whilst we support the recommendation it has been the experience of Council staff that only a small number of Providers attend meetings when they are arranged. We will be engaging with Care Home providers over the next few weeks to gather responses related to the fee review and will take the opportunity to gather the thoughts of the care home market in relation to re-establishing a regular provider forum. It should be noted that Skills for Care facilitate a regular meeting for Care Home Managers in Worcestershire. We will confirm the level of attendance.

Scrutiny

Recommendation 6: We recommend regular updates on care and nursing home provision are incorporated into the work programme of the Council's dedicated scrutiny body for Adult Social Care (the Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel) – to include quality, staffing and market resilience. We suggest six monthly updates.

Response

In line with **Recommendation 2** we are very supportive of providing a six monthly update to ensure members are fully informed.

Promotion of Healthwatch Information in care and nursing homes

Recommendation 7: We recommend consideration is given to encouraging care and nursing homes to better communicate the role of Healthwatch to residents and families within their care.

Response

We will undertake to promote the role of Healthwatch to Providers and explore how we can amend the current contract. As the People Directorate are undertaking a review of its information and support offer we will ensure Healthwatch information is available and promoted.

Greater clarity about the role of each organisation in relation to inspection

Recommendation 8: We recommend giving clear information about the respective roles of each organisation involved in inspecting care and nursing homes to individuals and their families, and to the homes themselves. This could take the format of leaflets, posters and website information.

Response

We will consider how to build on the information already available for Providers, individuals and their families as part of the redevelopment of the digital front door and paper based materials.