

REPORT OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD COVID-19 - CARE HOMES AND THIRD SECTOR TOPIC GROUP

BACKGROUND

At its meeting on 13 October 2020, the Overview & Scrutiny Board commissioned a number of Topic Groups to review the impact of the COVID pandemic and the Council's response to it.

The terms of this review related to the impact of the pandemic on local care homes and on third sector organisations that were commissioned to provide care services on behalf of the Council.

The Group established a timetable to hold meetings with Council officers and representatives of care homes and third sector providers.

The membership of the Topic Group consisted of Councillors Michael White (Chairman) Philippa Crowder, Sally Miller, Nisha Patel and Christine Smith and Darren Wise.

The Group met on four occasions and has now concluded its review; identifying recommendations and findings which are detailed in this report.

THE SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The Overview & Scrutiny Board recognised that the scope of the pandemic was such that commissioning a single Topic Group to assess its impact and the preparedness of the Council in responding to it was unrealistic. It therefore established three separate Topic Groups charged with exploring specific areas of interest.

The focus for this Topic Group concerned the operators of local care homes and Third Sector providers of services on behalf of the Council. It therefore concentrated on the following key areas:

- To understand the impact of Covid-19 on care homes in Havering.
- To consider the viability of local care home operators during the pandemic period.
- To investigate the resilience of care home staff and how regularly they are tested for Covid-19.
- To consider how care services delivered by the third/voluntary sector have been impacted by the pandemic.
- To investigate what back-up facilities would be available should a care provider be unable to provide care services contracted by the Council.
- To ascertain the support available to local residents who may be shielding but do not have a formal care package in place.

METHODOLOGY

The Group agreed that the list of people to be interviewed would comprise the following members of staff and external colleagues:

John Green, Head of Joint Commissioning Unit, London Borough of Havering (LBH)

Ben Campbell, Commissioning Programme Manager, Joint Commissioning Unit, LBH

Mike Armstrong, Director, Havering Care Homes Limited

Hilary Ryan, Manager, Ravenscourt Care Home

Jerry Haley, Senior Community Development and Resilience Officer, LBH

Sarah Balsler, Chief Executive Officer, Havering MIND

Norma Busby, Manager, Havering Outreach Support Service, Peabody Trust

Clare Kelly, Havering Association for People with Disabilities

Tony Lowe, Chief Executive, Tapestry Havering

Paul Rose, Chair, Voluntary and Community Sector, Havering

Ian Buckmaster, Director, Healthwatch Havering

TIMETABLE FOR REVIEW

Members were hoping to complete the review within as short a timescale as possible but the impact of the pandemic, on all parties, of course made this challenging at times.

Members were however grateful for the commitment of staff and witnesses to the review, many of whom were integral to the pandemic effort and still allocated time to speak with the Topic Group.

THE REVIEW

The notes of the topic group meetings and discussions are attached to this report. Set out under the heading **RECOMMENDATIONS** are the key issues that emerged from the topic group's scrutiny.

MEETINGS

The Topic Group met virtually on four occasions.

The first meeting held detailed discussions with a senior Council officer on the support provided to care homes during the pandemic period.

At the second meeting, representatives of several local care homes gave their perspective on the pandemic period and the support received from the Council.

Representatives of a number of local Third Sector organisations met with Members at the Group's third meeting and discussed their experiences during

the pandemic and the assistance received from the Council.

At its final meeting, the Topic Group met with a director of Healthwatch Havering who gave feedback from Healthwatch members of this area of the Council's pandemic response.

FINDINGS

1. Financial resilience of care providers

Both Members and Council officers shared concerns over the potential impact on services should a care provider no longer be able to operate or provide its services within Havering. Members were pleased to be advised that resilience testing of care providers was undertaken and that business continuity plans were sent to the Council but the sheer number of care homes within Havering did make this challenging. Members felt that more scrutiny of the resilience of the local care homes market would be beneficial (see recommendation 1).

Similar concerns were found among Third Sector care providers commissioned by the Council. Whilst organisations had their own recovery plans, there was little prospect of their being able to step in, should another provider fail.

2. Commissioning Arrangements for Care Homes receiving pandemic-related support

Discussions with Healthwatch Havering indicated that Covid issues were particularly difficult to deal with in facilities where residents suffered from dementia and did not understand the need to wear masks, maintain social distancing etc. Members felt that this should be considered more in contracts the Council established with care homes (see recommendation 2).

The Topic Group also felt that consideration should be given in commissioning arrangements to care homes providing technology and IT support for residents and the facilitation of face to face relative visits (subject to national guidance).

3. Facilitation of more regular contact between Care Homes and local businesses

The Topic Group heard that care homes were keen to increase their IT facilities for residents but that this could be expensive. Members felt that the Council could perhaps assist by approaching local companies to donate IT equipment for residents as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes (see recommendation 3).

Discussions with Third Sector representatives indicated that a number of

donations of IT equipment had been received from local companies and Charitable Trusts. The Topic Group was delighted to be advised of this and felt that the Council should encourage care homes and the Third Sector to continue to make contacts of this kind direct (see recommendation 4).

4. Clinical Commissioning Group support to Care Homes

Feedback given to the Group by several different parties was that the level of support provided by the Council to care homes during the pandemic had been excellent. Evidence was received however of a more difficult relationship between care homes and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) although there were signs that the CCG was now addressing this.

The Topic Group felt that this area required further investigation and that the Health and Wellbeing Board should therefore be asked to investigate the level of support the CCG provided to care homes etc (see recommendation 5).

5. Impact of the Pandemic on the Mental Health of Care Home Residents

Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic had led to a rise in mental health problems nationally, the Topic Group did hear concerns raised about the effect of the pandemic on the mental health of residents of care homes in particular. This was a complex area and the Topic Group felt that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees should scrutinise this area in more detail. Additionally, consideration could be given to asking Havering MIND to investigate the issue of mental health in local care homes (see recommendations 6 and 7).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That the Individuals Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee receive an annual report monitoring the financial resilience of care providers.**
- 2. That clear outcomes are specified in commissioning arrangements for care homes that will continue to receive Council pandemic-related support.**
- 3. That Cabinet arranges more regular contact with local businesses with a commitment to corporate social responsibility in order to seek the donation of laptops and other IT equipment to local care homes.**
- 4. That the Council encourages care homes and the Third Sector to also approach local businesses directly in this regard.**
- 5. That the Health and Wellbeing Board be asked to investigate and monitor the level of support provided to care homes etc. by the local Clinical Commissioning Group.**

6. That the mental health effects of Covid-19 on care home residents be referred to the Health and Individuals Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees for possible addition to their work programmes.
7. That Havering MIND be commissioned to undertake a study on mental health in local care homes.

Background Papers

Topic Group meeting notes:

5 November 2020

3 December 2020

7 January 2021

18 February 2021

Financial Implications

If the work by Havering MIND mentioned in recommendation 7 is to be a paid commission, this would need to be fully costed and an appropriate budget identified where possible. There are no implications of recommendations 1-6.

Legal Implications

None.

HR Implications

None – any support required to Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees etc. would be met from within existing Democratic Services resources.

Equalities Implications

None directly although the successful adoption of the recommendations in the Topic Group's report would serve to reduce any health inequalities among care home residents.