

29th May 2020

RE: Brent Council and CCG response to the Covid-19 pandemic in care homes

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing in response to your letter dated 14 May outlining our joint Brent and NW London response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the support provided to our care homes and residents. The support provided to care homes has been and continues to be one critical part of our wide ranging and whole system response to the pandemic.

Brent has a diverse population, with 61 care homes covering residential, nursing, learning disabilities and mental health and with a total capacity of 1,189 beds. Of the people placed in care homes in Brent, only c. 30% are funded by Brent Local Authority, with the remainder being a combination of self-funders and individuals placed by other local authorities or health partners. We also have 7 extra care schemes. Brent has a relatively high proportion of care facilities than other boroughs, and is a net 'importer' of care residents from central London Boroughs. Brent therefore has had a significant responsibility in supporting residents funded through other boroughs.

As you know, Brent has been one of the hardest hit areas nationally in terms of Covid-19 incidences and deaths. Despite the high level of early incidences, we have responded quickly and comprehensively from the initial outbreak, working with care homes and extra care schemes to protect our vulnerable residents. As a result, we have been able to minimise the uncontrolled expansion of infections through our homes. Recent data suggests that despite Brent having the second largest number of deaths in London, and also having seen the impact of Covid-19 earlier on in the pandemic than the rest of London, our care homes have fared proportionately far better than many other London boroughs with a lower number of Covid-19 related deaths.

From a London perspective, COVID-19 has provided an unprecedented challenge to adult social care. The challenge has been significant due to the early and rapid spread of the virus, local patterns of deprivation, high levels of air pollution and the high proportion of ethnic minority populations in most London boroughs.

Across the Capital, London local authorities responded to the challenge and our responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act by working together as London ADASS and Chief Executives, alongside NHS partners to identify issues, galvanise responses and lead several pan-London initiatives. We brought our co-ordinated response together through the Strategic Co-ordination Group and joint governance with NHS London.

Using data and evidence we developed a comprehensive understanding of the London adult social care markets (home care and care homes) during the spread of COVID-19. Our commissioners used this as a key part of their daily interaction to support providers. It has underpinned and strengthened relationships with providers locally and provided information on care homes across

borough boundaries, which has streamlined the work and reduced the burden on providers. Since mid-March this has supported local operational responses: prioritising active delivery of PPE, ensuring appropriate staffing levels and providing Public Health infection control advice and support.

Being alert to emerging issues in the system which led to care home challenges and our early response (we started reporting care home deaths and COVID cases from 23rd March) allowed action to be taken to respond in London and provided early warning nationally via the SCG of issues that would develop across the country.

A summary of the work across London and issues for the future are captured in the attached **London Region Appendix**, alongside a **NW London NHS support Appendix**.

The key elements of the additional support provided to care homes in Brent is summarised as follows:

- **PPE** - Local and sub-regional procurement and distribution of PPE, funded through the funding provided to councils, distributed to homes on an equitable basis to ensure that no care home was short of essential personal protective equipment. Purchase and distribution of PPE by Brent Council started on the 27th March, with Brent being the first borough to distribute PPE directly to all providers. To date £1.5m of PPE has been purchased by Brent local authority and distributed to care providers on a weekly basis and 100% of respondents to the care home survey reported they felt they had sufficient PPE as a consequence. We are forecasting that we will be spending £6m per year on PPE going forward. None of these costs have been passed onto any care providers in Brent. However, clarity of funding for PPE is required given that we anticipate that all care providers will require an ongoing supply until an effective vaccine has been developed and deployed.
- **New accommodation** - Establishment of a new council commissioned 11 bedded extra care facility to support people being discharged from hospital who are Covid+ or are needing to self-isolate due to vulnerable individuals at their usual place of residence for up to 14 days, and to minimise additional outbreaks in homes. This facility at Peel Road was set up within a week and was open to accept patients from 9 April. This included fitting the building out with hospital beds and other required equipment, and sourcing, training and commissioning a care provider to provide care over a 24/7 contract. This has cost the council £86k to set up and furnish the facility as well as ongoing care costs.
- **Staffing** - Support in providing and co-ordinating agency staff to care homes where there are staff self-isolating or shielding, including management capacity, to ensure that care provided remained high quality and safe throughout the pandemic. This included establishing a dedicated team within the local authority that operates 7 days a week, and out of hours, and both sources and co-ordinated agency staffing and deployment of council employed carers. This ensured that wherever possible staff were allocated consistently to a single place of care, minimising the risk of cross infection and improving the consistency of care. The team began working with providers on 4 April and have placed 41 staff in 8 homes covering 1476 hours of care to date.
- **Daily monitoring of pressures or support needs** - Daily calls through Provider Relationship Officers to all care home provider Registered Managers directly to monitor Covid-19 incidences, infection control procedures, staffing levels, testing utilisation, access to GP or NHS support. This is recorded in a daily record and escalated to senior leaders within both the council and CCG, and appropriate actions are put in place as required. Each care home

has also been given a dedicate officer to be their single point of contact allowing for the building of a two way relationship and communication and not just data and information reporting requirements for homes. A consistent and named officer to support all homes was already established in Brent, allowing us to move immediately to a system of daily contact and communication. Therefore, this has been in place since 16 March, and support provided has ranged from advice and guidance, to resolving very practical issues at the beginning of the crisis such as officers going out to get groceries and personal hygiene supplies for homes an residents, and sourcing hard to get items such as thermometers so that homes had sufficient basic equipment to manage infection.

- **Support and guidance** - Weekly care home forum (hosted virtually) for all providers to ensure all providers are sighted on the latest guidance, support and best practice from national and local partners. These calls have had regular attendance of around 40 people each week. Additional training and support includes bereavement and mental health support, infection control, medications management and a range of other national offers. Further, the local authority has funded, commissioned and is managing a Positive Behaviour Support worker to support providers to manage individuals with mental health issues, dementia or other conditions that mean that they are struggling to comply with social distancing requirements or infection control measures in both care homes and in Extra Care and psychologists from CNWL are providing bereavement and loss support to care home staff and residents.
- **Infection control and training** - Additional training has been provided for infection control, swabbing and other support through local public health and through a NW London NHS team. This has included daily virtual training, access to public health advice on weekly calls and visits to homes from clinical NW London support team. Public Health colleagues in Brent have developed and are delivering weekly web based training in infection control and have undertaken visits to specific homes where there are concerns to train staff in person. 95% of care home report through the care home survey that they have accessed training delivered by Brent in infection control and proper use of PPE. They have also provided risk assessments for care home staff to support and encourage staff to return to work where they have been concerned about the risk of infection, and they have provided on going advice to care homes around infection control.
- **Clinical support** – expansion of existing Enhanced GP care home support to cover all care homes, in addition to further support provided through a NW London clinical nursing support team to advise on infection control, shielding residents and good practice and nursing requirements. This is in addition to the existing support provided by GPs and the NHS 111*6 services. Coverage of the NHS 111*6 service and nominated clinical leads have also been extended to Extra Care providers.
- **Testing** - Local co-ordination of testing through the Provider Relationship Officers, to try and ensure that testing provided through the myriad of routes (local, sub regional and national) is targeted at care homes with the highest risk or with Covid-19 incidences, with the ambition to move towards regular testing to ensure more effective prevention of further outbreaks. Many homes in Brent have been supported by the NWL Care Home Support Team, working with the local authority PROs, to co-ordinate and undertake testing and at the same time train and support care home staff to be able to administer the tests themselves in the future accurately. As the survey responses show this has been both effective and valued. The ability for local commissioners to share local knowledge, prioritise homes to test and to work with local health partners to deliver a responsive services has

worked well. In contrast, survey responses highlight ongoing issues accessing testing kits via the portal or other centralised routes.

- **Cost pressures** - Inflationary uplifts in both the council and Funded nursing care (FNC) rates went live from 1 April, in line with modelled underlying cost bases in care homes. Additional pressures around staffing and PPE have been supported directly through the council. All providers have been paid in advance up to June 2020 and the offer has been made to providers for the council to fund loans to support cash flow if required.

In addition to the new support provided to care homes, the council and NHS partners have continued to maintain core services including safeguarding, without any significant disruption and have provided a range of other services to support the wider community such as a telephone Wellbeing helpline that has arranged for the delivery of weekly food parcels, medication and put people in touch with commissioned VCS services to support people feeling socially isolated.

As you correctly identify, the response to support care homes is not the responsibility of any one part of the health and social care system, although it has been led locally in Brent, as in most other areas, by the local authority, supported by health partners. We especially welcomed the offer of greater primary care and community care input to the care home sector.

Therefore this submission has been shared with all of the system partners in Brent via the local Health and Care Transformation Board, and Appendices 1 and 2 (attached) set out other support that has been provided by system partners and aligned with local authority support. A further appendix (3) sets out how London local authorities' Departments of Adult Social Care have worked together in a collaborative way to support the care sector. Appendix 4 sets out the responses of Brent Care Homes to the survey seeking feedback from providers, much of which is referred to throughout this letter.

I trust that the information provided here and in the attached template gives you the assurance you need, but please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any further questions or would like to understand more about some of the initiatives and support we have provided to care homes at this challenging time.

Kind regards



Carolyn Downs

Chief Executive, Brent Council