

Scrutiny Committee Report



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Care Homes – Covid-19

Report Sponsor

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Exempt/confidential/not for publication	No
Council Plan reference	
Wards affected	All wards

Executive Summary

This report outlines the response from Milton Keynes Council to the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic in relation to care homes.

Milton Keynes has had for several years a relatively stable care home market in terms of the availability and number of places and providers. There is an awareness, however, of the increasing numbers of older people, the largest customer base in our care homes, and a recognition of the need for more care home providers to enter the local market.

The Covid 19 pandemic has seen a major impact on care homes with a high mortality rate, high levels of infection, an increased national profile and a burgeoning economic impact. Milton Keynes Council (MKC) has been at the forefront of the response to the pandemic working closely with the care home sector to advise, inform, provide additional resources and support their ongoing sustainability.

In the weeks to come there will be an increased focus on developing a strategic position to maintain sustainability and provide appropriate levels of response to economic difficulties and unfortunately any future care home closures.

What are we asking the Scrutiny Committee?

1. To review the support to care homes during Covid 19 and conformation to government guidance
2. To consider the economic impact of Covid 19 on care homes
3. To assess the potential closure of care homes, the impact on residents and the potential for in-house provision

Background

Over recent years a number of studies and reports have analysed the care home market in England. The Competition and Markets Authority, 'Which', the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the Lancet all concluded that the demand for care home beds over the next 10 years, especially for older people, will outreach supply. Conversely at a national level the care home market has over a five year period contracted, with the number of care homes reducing (CQC The State of health and adult social care 2017/18). Since 2015 four care homes have closed in Milton Keynes with the loss of 132 beds.

In Milton Keynes we are aware of the data that tell us that locally there will be an increase of 77% for the over 65 population by 2030. For the over 80 population this increases to 128% for those 80-84; 104% for the 85-89 population; and an increase of 140% of those 90 and over (Milton Keynes Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2018).

The latest CQC data indicates that there are 47 Residential and Nursing Homes in Milton Keynes offering 1469 beds (1331 older people beds/138 learning disability beds). All care homes in Milton Keynes are run by private companies, charities, and the independent sector. 60% of beds are in nursing homes. CQC analysis indicates that compared with similar local authorities, Milton Keynes has an above average proportion of nursing care beds.

Milton Keynes care homes are the following types:

- 29 older people (of which 15 are nursing)
- 17 learning disability
- 1 physical disability (some care homes are registered to provide care to several different client groups)

MKC currently commissions 385 permanent placements for adults in Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes Clinical Commissioning Group (MKCCG) commissions 109 beds and other local authorities also commission places in Milton Keynes, in addition to a large number of people who pay privately. Of the 47 care home providers in Milton Keynes, MKC currently has a contract with 42. CQC inspections show that the quality of provision in Milton Keynes is above average for care

homes nationally. 87% of homes are currently rated as Outstanding or Good and 13% are rated as Requiring Improvement (6 homes), and none are rated Inadequate.

MKC has its largest contract for care home beds with Excelcare, who provide 250 beds on a block contract, across five care homes. Designated for older people's care, this contract has been in place since 2003. It is due to expire in 2033.

The response to Covid 19

The effects of Covid 19 in Milton Keynes' care homes are mirrored nationally. But this does not detract from the concerted effort to ensure that Milton Keynes' care homes have received advice, information, financial support, provision of resources and more to enable them to deliver services. This is whilst they have faced increased infection and unprecedented mortality rates.

From a local authority perspective MKC's Commissioning team has been very involved in this work:

- Since March care homes have been contacted on a daily basis due to the high level of infections and deaths
- Each care home is RAG rated based on a number of key factors including:
 - Service Users – high numbers who are symptomatic, those tested positive, number in hospital, number of deaths
 - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) levels – those with less than two days supply
 - Staffing – sickness levels, covid19 related self isolation and shielding
- Any immediate risks are actioned to ensure the provider continues to deliver services e.g. shortage of PPE item
- Care homes have received regular information and support, especially when in crisis, signposting to relevant agencies as required.
- A Buddy system was introduced from the outset to allow providers to support each other within their own vicinity
- There has been an ongoing distribution of information and guidance from Dept of Health and Social Care, NHS England and Public Health e.g. PPE guidance, PPE suppliers and national disruption line, Covid19 testing arrangements etc.
- Ongoing support with distributing and sourcing PPE. For example, over thirty providers have either collected or had a delivery of PPE. This includes face masks, gloves, aprons, eye protection etc.
- The Community Resource Team (MKC social care brokerage) have worked to prioritise decanting from hospital beds, including the retention of twenty care home beds. These have either been utilised or stood down as the acute hospital has become more stable.
- We have ensured additional financial support to the care home sector. We have awarded a 10% fee increase for MKC commissioned care home places, for a period of twelve weeks from May 1st to July 31st. This amounts to approximately £320k extra funding. We have also awarded a one-off contribution to care homes in respect of PPE costs. This equates to £200 per registered care home bed and totals approximately £250k.
- The new government Infection Control Fund, worth £2m, is also being managed by Milton Keynes Council. This equates to £1000 per bed for care homes. The requirement

for care homes to meet the conditions of the fund is being administered and overseen by the Commissioning team.

An example of some of the work we have been doing:



Throughout the pandemic we have worked closely with partners and colleagues including Public Health England, MKC Public Health, MKCCG and MKC Emergency Planning to ensure ongoing support into care homes. This has been invaluable in relation to sharing intelligence, good practice, minimising duplication and developing solutions to issues. For example, regular dialogue has been in place with the Infection Control team at MKCCG and this has ensured a consistent approach to PPE, training, information and advice.

To further develop this work we have now established a Milton Keynes Care Home Group, to provide a social care and health system response to ongoing concerns and issues as we move into the next stage of the pandemic. Made up of social care and health partners from across Milton Keynes, it will provide an additional co-ordinated layer of support to care home providers. For example in relation to infection prevention and further outbreaks in care homes.

Economic impact

The economic impact across the whole of the social care sector is currently being assessed, with the recognition that it continues to be a rapidly changing environment. There is little doubt though that the care home sector has been severely affected and is now experiencing its most serious challenges (see Annex).

As at 9.6.20 care homes in Milton Keynes had 264 vacant beds, 20% of their total capacity. The vast majority of these are in older people's care homes. This is an unprecedented level of vacancies, where previously we may have had approximately 20 vacancies at one time. It is across council funded and privately funded beds that the vacancies have arisen. At the same time MKC is experiencing minimal levels of demand. For several weeks now the MKC Community Resource Team, who manage care home placements, have not made any referrals to care homes. Whilst speculative at this stage, there is now some consideration being given to a loss of confidence in care homes across the wider population, and a reluctance to opt for this form of care and support. Evidently a loss of income to care homes is affecting their ability to be sustainable. We have seen a number of care homes already furloughing staff, mothballing areas of the home and indicating the potential for closure.

There has been a notable impact on the staff working throughout the pandemic. Through discussion with providers we have had reports of higher levels of staff sickness, recruitment issues and an ongoing need for increased pastoral support. We have seen staff in a relatively short space of time being required to increase working hours, at times self-isolate and on a number of occasions themselves contract the virus, all whilst care homes provide necessary care and also end of life support to many residents. These issues and more have undoubtedly had a further economic impact. The high costs of PPE have also had a significant impact on the costs of care homes. In some cases we have seen evidence of over 4 times the amount normally spent on PPE for care home staff. This is clearly a result of higher prices reflected in supply chain issues, but more significantly the extra levels of precaution and safety that care homes are now employing.

What next?

MKC recognises that we are still very much in the throes of the pandemic and at a vulnerable stage in the efforts to control the virus. This has meant that care homes have continued to utilise their own forms of lockdown, ensuring that the only visitors are essential visitors, that residents and staff are increasingly able to access routine testing, that symptomatic residents are isolated and that strict infection control is observed. This is not a return to normal business. As such MKC has begun to look at a strategic view to help shape and support the care home market moving forward.

A Care Home Strategy Group has been established to develop ways to further provide the help needed to deal with the economic impact. This is being viewed as the beginning of the wider council's response. Currently the Care Home Strategy Group is developing a baseline of the number of vacancies, ongoing infection rates and the levels of demand for care home support. It is looking closely at those care homes that have been assessed as severely impacted by the virus

and their potential for sustainability. It is looking at developing ways to reconfigure the use of longer term care home beds for, certainly in the short term, additional 'step down' beds from acute hospital care. It will also begin to investigate ways that MKC can provide additional resources to, for example, support recruitment and develop training opportunities.

This group will, however, be faced with the reality that some care homes will be unsustainable. Whilst we have long established procedures to manage this situation, MKC will have to be even more able to respond to the needs of residents, staff and relatives during these challenging times. We are now making plans to deliver the appropriate level of social work support, clinical leadership and suitable alternative care provision. This is of course work that we will do with our system partners, not least MKCCG.

As we come to terms with the effects of Covid 19 in adult social care, and in particular on care homes, we will keep reviewing our actions and improving our understanding of the impact. This will be through measures we have already taken and the lessons learnt. It will also be through work now commencing, especially our strategic approach, to ensure the sector remains as sustainable as it can be whilst adapting and changing to meet new and different needs. This is in the context of the expected increase in the older people's population, where the virus has had most effect.