



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

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Service Area	Adult Social Care
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To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Impact of the Pandemic on Care Homes for Adults

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report outlines the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the care home sector.
- 1.2 The report outlines the support that has been provided to the sector during this time.
- 1.3 The report indicates the current position across the sector in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and future actions.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The scrutiny committee discusses and comments on the issues set out in the report.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The care home sector provides accommodation and support to those individuals who, following an assessment of their individual needs, have been identified as requiring a higher level of care and support than can be met in their own home.
- 3.2 In order to provide care to individuals, care homes are required by law to register with Care Inspectorate Wales, which is the organisation that regulates care.
- 3.3 Although there have been amendments to the regulatory arrangements to registration the requirement to register the types of care provided remain. These are categorised as:

- Residential Care
- EMI Residential Care
- General Nursing
- EMI Nursing
- Younger Adults
- Learning Disability

- 3.4 Care homes can be registered as being able to provide care under more than one of these categories. Of the care homes within the geographical boundaries of Merthyr Tydfil there is a mix of care homes that are registered for one category only and others that are registered for more than one.
- 3.5 There are currently 8 older people's homes and 3 learning disability homes in Merthyr Tydfil with various registration arrangements. These homes can accommodate between 4 and 120 people in each, however the smaller homes tend to be those providing support to people with a learning disability with the larger homes supporting older people or a mix of older people and younger adults.
- 3.6 At the end of May Merthyr Tydfil CBC were commissioning care home placements for 180 people across the different categories, though these will not all be commissioned from homes situated within the Merthyr Tydfil area. In addition, the Local Authority directly manages two care homes for Older People and one learning disability home.
- 3.7 The number of people that we support in care homes changes throughout the year and during the year 2021 we commissioned 85 new placements and there were 92 people who left the care home.
- 3.8 The payment to care homes is paid on an individual basis based on the assessed category of care that the individual has been assessed as requiring. Funding can be via the Local Authority, Health Board or the individual where they have been assessed as having the financial means to fund their own care. There are also occasions where the funding is made up of a combination of these.
- 3.9 Of the care homes within the Merthyr Tydfil CBC area, although it would be anticipated that these provide care for people who have lived in Merthyr Tydfil prior to requiring care in a care home, this is not the case and there are people placed in these homes from other Local Authorities and likewise we place people in care homes outside Merthyr Tydfil.
- 3.10 By virtue of their need for care and support in a care home, the majority of people living in care homes would be classed as vulnerable in terms of their susceptibility to contracting COVID 19. This placed significant emotional strain on staff working in care homes where there were sometimes several deaths within a week. There was also the emotional pressures on families who were unable to be with loved ones at the end of their lives.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 At the beginning of the pandemic the implications for the people living in care homes was not truly recognised and the guidance issued by Welsh Government and Public Health Wales was changing constantly causing considerable confusion across providers of these services.
- 4.2 This was particularly evident in respect of advice for people moving into a care home from hospital, the use of PPE and visiting arrangements.
- 4.3 In order to address some of these issues regional partnership arrangements were put in place to provide as much support as possible in terms of providing information and advice and a regional discharge guidance document was developed so that there was clarity for both health and care home staff in respect of the testing arrangements that needed to be in place prior to discharge to a care home. This group reported to the Silver and Gold governance arrangements that were in place with Local Authority and Health Board partners in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region.
- 4.4 Despite the considerable efforts of care homes, unfortunately there were occasions where there were significant outbreaks and sadly people living in care homes contracted COVID 19 and lost their lives to the virus.
- 4.5 In order to try and protect residents, care homes became closed environments to limit the potential of people that they came into contact with. This had a significant effect on the wellbeing of people who lost face to face contact with their loved ones. The care home sector quickly adapted to using digital solutions to enable people to meet virtually through electronic means and window visits where this was not possible. However, it was recognised that these did not meet the need for social contact and was particularly difficult for people with dementia who could not understand why their relatives were not coming to visit them.
- 4.6 As the pandemic progressed further, support was provided to care homes such as the provision of PPE via Welsh Government which is distributed via the Local Authorities. Testing of staff and residents in care homes on a weekly basis and financial support through the Welsh Government hardship fund which recognised the financial stability of care homes was at risk.
- 4.7 During the early stages of the pandemic testing was not undertaken and staff self-isolated where they were either symptomatic or had come into contact with someone who was displaying symptoms. Whilst this led to staff shortages, it did not identify those staff who had the virus and were not displaying symptoms. Whole home testing was implemented which included testing both staff and residents on a weekly basis. This on occasion resulted in significant numbers of staff having to self-isolate at the same time and there was an occasion in one of the local authority managed care homes where 13 staff who were non-symptomatic tested positive and needed to self-isolate.
- 4.8 Overall the care homes in Merthyr Tydfil were able to continue to provide sufficient staff cover, which was down to the dedication of the staff working in this area.

- 4.9 In order to monitor the overall position of the prevalence of the virus within care homes across the region, a joint group was established led by Public Health Wales. The group monitored the results of the weekly testing in care homes and the 28-day period where homes were unable to accept any admissions following a positive test of a resident or staff member.
- 4.10 In addition to the 28-day restrictions to admissions following a positive COVID test, advice from PHW was that all new residents admitted to a care home were required to isolate for a 14-day period even if they had 2 negative COVID tests.
- 4.11 The impact of these measures to limit the potential for outbreaks in the care homes meant that capacity across the sector was significantly reduced, resulting in people remaining in hospital or the community as they could not move into the care homes. The limitations to admissions also meant that people were not accessing respite and additional pressures were placed on carers who were not having a break from their caring role.
- 4.12 The restrictions to admissions also meant that care homes were financially detrimented as they were operating at levels that meant that they were not financially viable and were subject to additional costs due to staff absences though people either contracting COVID or needing to self-isolate. Welsh Government recognised the potential for homes being unable to operate which would place additional pressures on the fragile care home sector and introduced support through the Hardship fund which is administered by the Local authority.
- 4.13 Initially payments were paid based on the occupancy levels of the home utilising the baseline that a home needs to have occupancy levels of 90% to ensure that they are financially viable. In addition to the payment of voids in care homes, a standard additional £50 per week per resident is now being paid.
- 4.14 In January 2021 a vaccination program was implemented and care home staff and residents were given priority for the vaccination. This was a significant organisational challenge for the Health Board as the only vaccine available was Pfizer which needed specific planning for its transportation and to ensure the limited supply was utilised appropriable to prevent any waste.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 The care home sector has faced a challenging period, the likes of which they have not experienced before and hopefully will not experience again. I am glad to say that they have responded to the challenge incredibly over this period adapting to new ways of working which is a tribute to the staff that work in this area and their continuation of being able to continue to support some of the most vulnerable people in our society cannot be fully appreciated.
- 5.2 Staff and residents have in the main been vaccinated unless they have chosen not to take up the vaccine or have been unable to be vaccinated on medical grounds and arrangements are in place for any new residents or staff to be vaccinated if they have not been vaccinated via other arrangements.

- 5.3 Thanks to the revised working arrangements and the success of the vaccination program, we are now seeing a significant decrease in the number of cases of the virus in care homes and are now seeing periods where all the care homes in Merthyr Tydfil have had no positive cases.
- 5.4 Although the prevalence has decreased in the wider community, staff working within care homes continue to be tested weekly using the PCR test that is checked by the laboratory and staff also test themselves twice weekly using lateral flow tests. At this time there are no plans to reduce this level of testing within the care homes.
- 5.5 The prevalence of the virus continues to be monitored via the joint care home group which has now been stepped down to 2-weekly as the incidents have decreased significantly.
- 5.6 Welsh Government continues to provide PPE to the care sector and this is distributed via a regional arrangement with the Joint equipment stores and again we have not been advised that this will cease in the near future.
- 5.7 Financial support continues to be provided via the hardship fund based on the number of voids and the additional payment of £50 per week. Whilst we are seeing a number of homes that continue to receive the void payments these are reducing as people are being admitted to the care homes. There is no anticipated end date for this financial support and it is recognised that if it were to cease in the near future there are care homes that would cease to be financially viable and this includes the home operated by MTCBC. To date care homes with Merthyr Tydfil have been provided with £1.5 million of support through this scheme. The breakdown of payments is illustrated below:

Void Funding Support

	20/21	21/22 (Apr & May)	Total
Independent Sector	£583,904.06	£79,419.14	£663,323.20
Own Homes	£171,038.00	£54,670.80	£225,708.80
Annual Total	£754,942.06	£134,089.94	

National Fee Uplift (£50pw)

	20/21	21/22 (Apr & May)	Total
Independent Sector	£418,410.91	£76,386.64	£494,797.55
Own Homes	£92,516.16	£13,285.87	£105,802.03
Annual Total	£510,927.07	£89,672.51	

- 5.8 As referenced earlier in the report, MTCBC also places people in care homes outside of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough area and work is currently being undertaken on a regional basis to identify the care homes within the Cwm Taf Morgannwg boundary that will be a significant financial risk if the funding were removed. This work will form part of an overarching Market Stability Report and is nearly finalised and the outcome of this work will be reported via the Adults Service Group to Transformation Program Board.
- 5.9 The restrictions to care homes have been lifted to some extent and at this time 2 visitors can now visit at the same time though have to have a negative Lateral Flow Test (LFT).

5.10 The Older Persons Commissioner has produced a report based on experiences of Older People in care Homes titled “Roundtable Report: Older People in Care Homes Roundtable - 23 April 2021”. The report has made a number of recommendations focussing on actions required of Welsh Government and the regulators (CIW).

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

6.1 Ultimately we would want to return to the pre-covid position in respect of the care homes, though realise that whilst there has been a significant improvement in the position, there are still further areas that need to be resolved.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 Until such time that the risk of the virus is lifted, then our priority is to ensure that people living in care homes are kept as safe as possible whilst recognising the impact of any further restrictions will have on the emotional wellbeing of the individuals.

7.2 We need to complete the analysis of the financial risks that care homes are facing in the near future should the hardship fund be discontinued.

7.3 We need to continue to monitor the position in respect of the virus and utilise the learning from the past 15 months to provide the appropriate response should the position require future actions.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 The work we are undertaking around care homes links with the Living Well wellbeing objective.

LISA CURTIS JONES
CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)

COUNCILLOR CHRIS DAVIES
CABINET MEMBER FOR
SOCIAL SERVICES and
DEPUTY LEADER

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No