

**Title of meeting:** Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing & Social Care

**Date of meeting:** 7 July 2020

**Subject:** Adult Social Care Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Report by:** Innes Richens - Chief of Health & Care Portsmouth

**Written by:** Andy Biddle - Assistant Director, Adult Social Care.

**Wards affected:** All

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## 1. Purpose of report

An initial request was made for a summary of the Adult Social Care, (ASC) response to the COVID-19 Pandemic at the March 2020 portfolio holder decision meeting. Given the pandemic, the business of the Council moved to business critical services from March to June 2020 and the Council continues to be in response to the pandemic whilst moving into recovery. During the period, the Council exercised its powers vested in the Chief Executive in the absence of the normal democratic public meetings of the Council. A March 2020 Decision making meeting therefore did not occur.

This report will summarise some of the key issues and work undertaken by ASC in relation to COVID-19 from March to June 2020. These issues will be divided according to the main themes of response priorities for ASC during the pandemic.

### 1.2 Context

The focus for the ASC response to COVID-19 has been governed by the release of government guidance, as adult social care in England is governed by statutory duties contained in the [Care Act 2014](#), [Mental Health Act 2007](#) and [Mental Capacity Act 2005](#).

The ASC business continuity plan for COVID-19 focussed initially on maintaining staffing in core provided and purchased services and identification of those with the highest priority need should shortages mean a rapid reprioritisation was required. In addition, ASC reduced or closed non-critical services and redeployed staff to support both care homes and the emerging work in working with people who were 'shielding' in response to government guidance, where food and medication needs were identified.

## 2. Response priorities

### 2.1 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Emerging shortages in March 2020 around the use of Personal Protective Equipment, (PPE) caused ASC to work with the Locality Resilience Forum, (LRF) and the establishment of a 'strategic reserve' at regional level for urgent supplies. This moved to PCC appointing an officer and a team to oversee establishment of a city reserve for PPE. The team was able to make proactive as well as reactive support to providers of care and support and, working with procurement, establish a strategic reserve in Portsmouth. The PPE reserve has been able to meet all needs for supply in Portsmouth even in the face of supply shortages.

### 2.2 Hospital Discharge

[Government Guidance on Hospital discharge](#) published in March 2020 directed ASC to work with NHS partners to enable rapid discharge from Hospital, so that the NHS could manage the impact of those who needed acute care due to COVID-19. The guidance directed that people were discharged more rapidly to care home beds or their own homes with care and support.

The [Coronavirus Act](#) became law in England on 25th March 2020 which contained the ability for the Local Authority to apply 'Care Act Easements' if this was required. This would have meant prioritising some needs and not meeting others and would have required notification to Secretary of State and local Members of Parliament in addition to local Councillors. To this point, Portsmouth City Council ASC has not had to apply the easements.

### 2.3 Care Homes

Sadly, across the country, many care homes have experienced the death of residents with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. This was no different for care homes run by PCC and other care homes in the city. The fact that this is not unexpected in a pandemic from an airborne disease that is easily spread does not take away from the impact that every death has on family, the care home community and PCC staff. PCC care homes focussed on Infection Prevention and Control, (IPC) measures, following government and Public Health England guidance to try and manage the spread of infection.

In April 2020, the [Social Care Action Plan](#) was published by government, covering four main areas:

- a) Controlling the spread of infection in care settings - through cleaning; use of PPE; managing outbreaks; discharge from NHS acute settings to care homes
- b) Supporting the workforce - Testing for care workers; returning social care workforce to work; employment of people new to the sector; volunteering; wellbeing support to workers.
- c) Supporting independence - supporting people at the end of their lives and responding to individual needs, guidance for informal carers, the application of the Mental Capacity Act.
- d) Supporting local authorities and the providers of care - funding committed to and a requirement for care homes to complete a national 'Capacity tracker'.

The action plan obliged the Local Authority to secure alternative accommodation for people who needed care in isolation on discharge from hospital where their own care home could not provide this. The care home estate (locally and nationally) is variable in its age and suitability; this is particularly so for Portsmouth, with many care homes being adapted from a previous non-care home use. This makes it difficult for some care homes to care for people in isolation, whatever the outcome of the pre-discharge test. Given these factors, without an isolated care solution at a local level, the spread in care homes could be far greater. Any solution therefore needed to be able to provide appropriate facilities.

Portsmouth City Council and its partner organisations considered several options in the provision of this resource. The option pursued was to open a unit at Harry Sotnick House. The building design enabled people to be cared for individually in isolation until the post-discharge period has elapsed. A specific staff group was recruited to work in this unit, a separate entrance created and a lift dedicated to the use of the unit.

The Social Care Action plan also detailed a Care Home Support plan required from the Local Authority, focusing on support provided around Infection prevention and control, testing for COVID-19; Personal Protective Equipment; workforce support and clinical support. Portsmouth ASC worked with local NHs colleagues to return a letter, a template and a plan to the Minister for Social Care. This was published on the Portsmouth City Council website;  
<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/dhsc-29may20-let.pdf>  
Part of the Care Homes plan was distribution of a grant to care homes to enable funds for IPC related needs.

#### **2.4 Provider Support**

In terms of support for providers of care and support in Portsmouth, ASC has established a provider portal to publish links to national guidance and local information for providers. Additionally, care homes have a weekly virtual meeting with local NHS and ASC representatives. Providers of domiciliary care have a virtual meeting fortnightly and providers of day services and supported living have regular virtual meetings. These meetings are focussed on providing information, answering questions and queries and understanding the challenges to the sector.

Additionally, PCC offer a package of financial support measures to the sector focussing on increased costs for PPE and increased staffing due to COVID-19. A minimum income guarantee has also been established to ensure financial stability for providers of social care during the pandemic. This will begin to taper down between July and October 2020.

#### **2.5 Testing**

Testing for COVID-19 has been an emergent issue throughout the pandemic. Initially, limited testing was available if a care home had 2 or more residents with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. The local Hospital, Queen Alexandra, then made testing available to staff who could get to the Hospital. The drive in Tipner site development enabled staff to drive to be tested. Subsequently postal testing kits were available and whole care home testing for non-symptomatic staff and all

residents was enabled at the beginning of June. Portsmouth ASC also participated in a pilot for domiciliary care worker testing in the city. As of 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020, the government has directed that whole care homes testing of staff should take place weekly and of residents monthly. ASC are in the process of understanding how to support this in the local area.

Signed by:

**Appendices: None**

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

| Title of document | Location |
|-------------------|----------|
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The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

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Signed by: