

Cabinet

16 June 2021

COVID-19 Commissioning of Designated Settings



Ordinary Decision

Report of Corporate Management Team

Jane Robinson, Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services

Councillor Paul Sexton, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To update Cabinet on the commissioning of Designated Settings during the Covid-19 pandemic following the Government requirement for the Council, along with all Local Authorities (LA), to commission Designated Settings within care homes to provide a safe alternative for people who are temporarily unable to return to their usual place of residence due to their covid status.
- 2 To outline a delegated decision taken by the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services (AHS), to commission such beds given the urgent timescales required by the pandemic and Government direction.

Executive Summary

- 3 The report outlines updated Government guidance on hospital discharge during the covid pandemic and the requirement to commission unitised Designated Settings beds with dedicated staffing to support people who are unable to return to their usual place of residence due to COVID-19 positive status.
- 4 The report sets out the commissioning approach across County Durham and the instances when people may need to access this provision. Designated Setting Beds were jointly commissioned with County

Durham CCG (CDCCG). The units have dedicated staffing, entrances, and exits that can temporarily support people who are COVID positive.

- 5 Specific hospital discharge funding allocated to CDCCG covers the costs of the beds. The report describes how the requirement for beds may need to flex over time and how contracts have been developed to ensure that the number of beds commissioned can change in line with need.

Recommendation(s)

- 6 Cabinet is recommended to note the delegated decision dated 17 November 2020 taken by the Corporate Director for Adult and Health Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services, in accordance with the Officer Scheme of Delegation, Part 3, Table 1, paragraph 12 of the Constitution.

Background

- 7 On 13 March 2020, initial guidance from Public Health England (PHE) encouraged residential care homes to review their visiting policy, asking people not to visit if they were unwell and emphasising hygiene measures.
- 8 On 17 March 2020, NHS England and Improvement instructed trusts to urgently discharge all medically fit patients from hospital as soon as it was clinically safe to do so. This rapid implementation of the 'discharge to assess' model aimed to free up 15,000 acute beds by 27 March 2020 and maintain this model thereafter, so that hospitals would have capacity to care for the anticipated influx of patients who were seriously ill with COVID-19.
- 9 County Durham residents predominantly receive acute care at University Hospital of North Durham, Darlington Memorial Hospital, University Hospital Hartlepool, University Hospital North Tees Sunderland Royal Hospital and Gateshead Hospital.
- 10 Acute providers put processes in place during the pandemic to ensure that patients were tested, and results known / shared with care homes where applicable prior to discharge from hospital. This is an NHS responsibility.
- 11 Some community hospital sites have appropriate configuration to support isolation. In some community hospitals, additional wards were opened to provide cohorted provision, however there were significant challenges in staffing additional wards.
- 12 It is recognised best practice that patients who are medically fit do not remain in hospital for longer than is necessary due to the well

evidenced detrimental impact this can have on their health and recovery. It is therefore important that there are contingencies in place to ensure that patients can be discharged to the most appropriate setting for their needs although this may be on a temporary basis, until they can return to their usual place of residence (which may be a care home).

Designated Settings

- 13 The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) published national Designated Settings guidance in the week commencing 12th October 2020 as a response to concerns about the risks of infection in care homes from COVID positive discharges. All LA's were asked to identify / commission designated settings for hospital discharge of COVID-19 positive patients as soon as possible.
- 14 Commissioners in AHS worked quickly to understand the Designated Setting guidelines and the implications locally in County Durham.
- 15 A series of conditions were attached to designated settings to promote effective infection control, in particular the need to have a dedicated entrance / exit in place, separate staff team and arrangements for separate laundry facilities etc. In effect, Designated Settings units are designed to be completely separate from the existing care home therefore ensuring mitigation of infection control risks.
- 16 The Care Quality Commission (CQC) was given the responsibility to inspect and authorise use of designated settings.
- 17 AHS commissioning carried out an Expressions of Interest exercise with first nursing care, then residential care providers in October and early November 2020. It was recognised that given the detailed requirements specified by DHSC, in order to incentivise the market a block booking arrangement was required to allow providers to make the investment needed to bring unitised spaces into use.
- 18 Two expressions of interest were received from care home providers. One for nursing care (Parklands, Seaham – 13 beds) and one for residential care (Abbotts Court, Wingate – 12 beds). Funding was agreed through CDCCG utilising specified hospital discharge funding provided to assist with the pandemic response.
- 19 Negotiations with providers were successful and the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services agreed a Delegated Decision to enable services to be made operational as a matter of urgency, given the Government requirement to commission the beds as soon as possible.

Procurement rules allow for a variation to be made to existing contracts and arrangements were therefore made in respect of the two homes.

- 20 Block bed fee rates were agreed using the precedent set through the established commissioning model for block beds already in place for intermediate care as a starting position. Increased rates were required to cover additional staffing costs required in Designated Settings and to reflect that Parklands agreed to remove from use 3 bedrooms to allow for the unit to meet the required standards for separate services, i.e. staff changing spaces, cleaning, and hygiene stations etc. Costs are in line with other LA agreements regionally and nationally.
- 21 Both Designated Settings passed the required CQC inspections in November 2020 and were able to start receiving patients discharged from hospital quickly. This ensured that the Council were compliant with the DHSC requirement to ensure infection control risks were mitigated. All individuals in Durham requiring a designated setting placement since the care home beds were commissioned have been able to access one.
- 22 Pathways have been developed to aid patient / service user flow, particularly in terms of moving people from designated setting beds who require a further or long-term care home placement.
- 23 The majority of care homes are now confident and competent in appropriately managing patients with COVID-19 thanks to a robust program of training and support in infection prevention and control which is ongoing. Additional controls have also been put in place:
 - All patients are COVID-19 tested prior to moves from a designated setting to another care home
 - There is clear guidance on managing new admissions in a non-designated care home, and all patients are isolated for two weeks regardless of test results
 - Care home staff / residents are subject to regular testing in line with national guidance
 - Multi-disciplinary meetings are held with providers and partners across the health & social care system to ensure safe care

Current Position

- 24 Occupancy and patient flow have continued to be monitored on an ongoing basis. During recent weeks, the number of individuals requiring a Designated Setting bed has diminished, mirroring the general declining trend in COVID-19 infections.
- 25 Consequently, a decision was taken to decommission the beds at Abbots Court in early April 2021. The nursing beds at Parklands are

currently retained to ensure that the Council / CDCCG remain compliant with the national guidance, though the position is kept under review.

- 26 A short timescale for giving notice to end block arrangements has been built into the commissioning model (14 days). This ensures flexibility in terms of the service and allows commissioners to react quickly to changes in demand.

Conclusion

- 27 The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a number of significant challenges across the health and social care system. The measures outlined to commission Designated Setting beds in Durham, together with the full range of additional support arrangements that the Council and CCG have put in place have and continue to support delivery of safe and sustainable care.
- 28 It was critical that DCC was able to quickly support the national requirement to provide alternative placements for residents that cannot safely return to their usual care home. The Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services agreed a delegated decision to commission urgent block purchase care home Designated Setting beds jointly with CDCCG for this purpose.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Under the Council's Constitution, Chief Officers are authorised to take urgent action where it is impracticable to obtain authorisation from the Council body with responsibility for the function (in this case the Cabinet) provided that such action is within legal powers and is necessary in the interests of the Council. Such action must be reported for information to the next convenient meeting of the relevant Council body.

Finance

County Durham CCG is able to meet Designated Setting costs through specific funding provided to assist with efficient hospital discharge.

Consultation

All existing residents / family members in care homes with a designated setting attached were informed of plans by providers, before opening of the specified beds.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Considered under arrangements for individual placements.

Climate change

Not applicable.

Human Rights

Considered under arrangements for individual placements.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable.

Staffing

Providers that agreed to set up designated settings identified dedicated staffing for these units. This was essential to meeting the national DHSC criteria.

Accommodation

As outlined in the body of the report

Risk

There are a number of risks in relation to designated settings and delivery of safe and sustainable care during the pandemic. The approach set out is designed to support delivery of safe care in accordance with national Government policy.

Procurement

An appropriate procurement approach was utilised to ensure that providers were selected for delivery of the unitised designated settings beds based on their ability to meet a range of criteria designed to deliver care in line with the latest Government requirements. DCC procurement regulations were complied with in full.