

**West Sussex County Council Exceptional Pressures Briefing 15
December 2020.**

Priority issues

- a) National and Local Outbreak Management (para 1 - 42)**
- b) Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and Community Hub update (para 43 – 59)**
- c) Schools reopening and attendance - update (para 60 - 64)**
- d) Care Homes update (para 65 – 82)**

a) National and Local Outbreak Management

COVID-19 Winter Plan

1. On Monday, 23 November, the Prime Minister announced the COVID-19 Winter Plan, the UK Government's Plan for managing COVID-19 through to the end of 2020 and into the start of 2021.
2. Vaccines are at the heart of the Government's plan, with over 350 million doses secured for all four nations. The plan emphasised that from December 2020, the Government would be ready for the UK-wide vaccination programme to start, on the condition that regulators approve the vaccines. The first vaccine has received the necessary approvals and the CCG is leading the roll out with the County Council in support. The Government has determined the priority order for the rollout of the programme.
3. It is recognised, however, that scientific advances in treatments and vaccination should reduce the requirement for social and economic restrictions from Spring 2021, but until then, other tools will need to be relied upon to suppress the virus. 'Hands Face Space' will continue to play a crucial role in our fight against the virus.
4. On Tuesday, 24 November, the Government published guidance on "Making a Christmas bubble with friends and family." Recognising that the festive period is an important time for many people of all faiths and none who come together over the holidays, the UK Government and Devolved Administrations will change some social contact restrictions between 23 and 27 December allowing the formation of 'Christmas bubbles' composed of people from no more than three households. Further Government guidance on 'Christmas Activities' was published 29 November.

Local Restriction Tier System

5. England moved back from national restrictions to the regional tiered approach on Wednesday, 2 December. The following restrictions were eased:
 - The stay-at-home requirement ended.
 - Non-essential retail, gyms, personal care reopened. The wider leisure and entertainment sectors also reopened, although to varying degrees.
 - Communal worship, weddings and outdoor sports resumed.
 - People are no longer limited to seeing one other person in outdoor public spaces, where the rule of 6 will apply.
6. Nationally, there are three tiers (Medium Alert, High Alert, and Very High Alert), but following advice from SAGE, tiers have been strengthened to keep the virus under control, to prevent the epidemic from growing. This approach targets the toughest measures in areas where the virus is most prevalent and where there are sharper increases in the rate of infection.
7. On Thursday, 26 November, the Government announced which areas are in which tier. West Sussex, East Sussex and Brighton and Hove are in Tier 2.

8. Decisions on movement between the tiers will be based on the criteria set out in the COVID-19 Winter Plan. These are:
- Case detection rates in all age groups
 - Case detection rates in the over 60s
 - The rate at which cases are rising or falling
 - Positivity rate (the number of positive cases detected as a percentage of tests taken)
 - Pressure on the NHS.
9. The indicators have been designed to give the Government a picture of what is happening with the virus in any area so that suitable action can be taken. These key indicators need to be viewed in the context of how they interact with each other as well as the wider context but provide an important framework for decision making – assessing the underlying prevalence in addition to how the spread of the disease is changing in areas. Given these sensitivities, Government has taken the view that it is not possible to set rigid thresholds for these indicators.
10. The regulations require the Government to review the allocations every 14 days, with the first review complete by the end of 16 December.

West Sussex Data

Recorded Cases

11. **Scale** - On average for the 7 days between 21 November and 27 November there were approximately 78 new cases a day across the county.
12. The **seven-day incidence** rate varies among the districts and boroughs of West Sussex:
- Over the period 21 November to 27 November, Mid Sussex had the highest rate at 92 per 100,000 population, Worthing the lowest rate at 29.8 per 100,000.
 - Overall, the county rate was 63.1 per 100,000. The rate for the South East region was 140.1 and for England the rate was 157.6 per 100,000.

Date covered: **November 21 2020 to November 27 2020**

Area	Cases	Rate per 100,000	Rate of cases per 100,000 for people aged 60 and over
Adur	30	46.7	10.6
Arun	89	55.4	29.8
Chichester	84	69.3	72
Crawley	80	71.2	38
Horsham	90	62.6	45.4
Mid Sussex	139	92	62.9
Worthing	33	29.8	38.1
West Sussex	545	63.1	44.9
South East region	12.865	140.1	94.4

13. Most cases are attached to residential postcodes and are single cases, this is widespread community transmission.

14. **Positivity Rates** – Mid Sussex has the highest positivity rate in West Sussex; at 3.5% this is lower than the South East positivity rate of 5.3%. Worthing has the lowest positivity rate (1.0%). The positivity rate of England over the equivalent period (21 November to 27 November) was 6.3%.

Age-Specific

15. Age is an important factor in the severity of disease and likelihood of needing hospital treatment, so changes in older age groups are especially concerning. Of the 545 people who tested positive between 21 November and 27 November, **21% were aged 60 years or over.**

Deaths

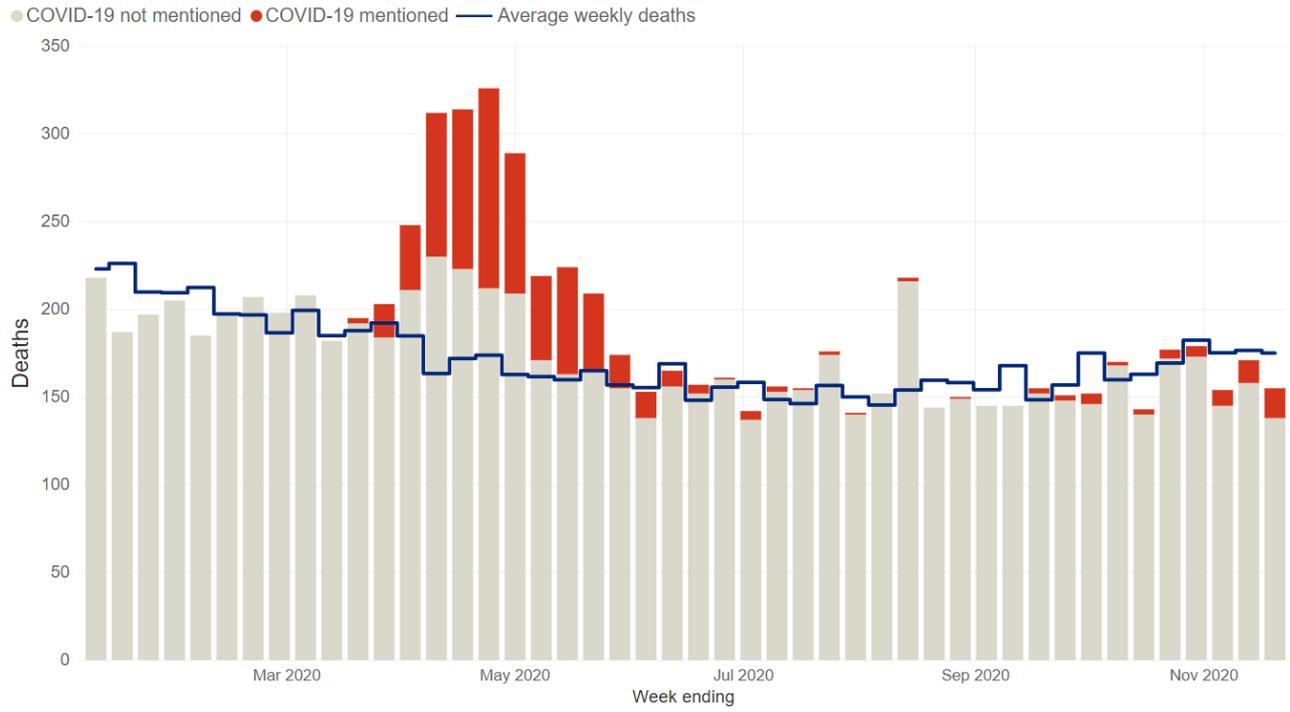
16. The Office for National Statistics publish, on a weekly basis, data relating to deaths where COVID has been mentioned on a death certificate. Data are provided down to lower tier local authority level. Up to week ending 20 November (for deaths registered by 28 November), **there were 710 deaths where COVID was mentioned on the death certificate.** Of these, 315 were in care homes

Excess Deaths

17. With regards to all deaths, that is where COVID was and was not mentioned, it is clear that for weeks in April and May, the total number of deaths far exceeded the number of deaths observed for the equivalent weeks, using a 5-year average.

18. This excess peaked in week ending 24 April. In this week there were a total of 326 deaths, compared with the 5-year average for this period of 174 deaths. Of the 326 deaths in that week 114 had COVID mentioned on the death certificate.

West Sussex - Deaths and 5 Year Average



19. Since June, deaths have returned to a level closer or below that of the 5-year average. One week of excess death was noted in August, this may have been related to high temperatures.

20. For the whole period, that is from week ending 10 January to week ending 20 November, we observed 9% more deaths than the 5-year average. This differs according to the place of death. In this period there were 24% more deaths in care homes than the 5-year average and 9% fewer deaths in hospital.

Local Tracing Partnership

21. On Monday 23 November, the Local Tracing Partnership launched across East Sussex and West Sussex to support the national NHS Test and Trace system, with the first cases received on 26 November.

22. Working from West Sussex County Council's COVID-19 Community Hub, the service has responsibility for contacting individuals across East Sussex and West Sussex who have received a positive COVID-19 test result, but were unable to be contacted by the national NHS Test and Trace team within 48 hours.

23. Contact will be made by the service to affected individuals in one of three ways:

- Text – **COVID TRACE** (you cannot reply to these text messages).
- Phone – **01243 642153** (inbound calls can be made to this number).
- Email - **West Sussex County Council Local COVID Tracing Partnership** (you cannot reply to these messages).

24. The local service will also be on hand to:

- Provide advice regarding positive test results and requirement to self-isolate;
- Collect details of the individuals' contacts during their infectious period and enter them into the national NHS Test and Trace system for the national team to get in contact with;
- Offer additional support as required, including the wide range of help and advice available from the Community Hub service.

25. The service operates between 8am-8pm seven days a week, including public and bank holidays.

26. If the service are unable to contact the individual within 48hrs a letter will be sent to their home address.

Testing

27. Testing forms a key part of the Government's COVID-19 Winter Plan to suppress the virus, alongside vaccines and treatments. Their ambition is that mass testing will be available for the whole of the UK. The four nations are in

ongoing discussions as to how these new technologies can best be deployed to meet the needs of the UK.

28. Lateral Flow Tests have a high indeterminate rate and a high false negative rate which limits the value of these tests. Positive Lateral Flow Test results cannot be entered on to the NHS National Test and Trace database unless they are validated using the more common Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test.
29. The Government announced on 9 November, the introduction of lateral flow testing and the offer to Directors of Public Health of a weekly allocation of tests, equivalent to 10% of their population for testing priority groups, building on existing partnerships between NHS Test and Trace and local leaders. The value of taking up this offer locally is being kept under review.
30. In preparation for the potential roll out of mass community testing across the local population, the Interim Director of Public Health has been in discussions with Directors of Public Health across the South East region. However, it is recognised that an additional large-scale workforce will be required to implement this approach successfully, as seen in the Liverpool pilot, which also involved a huge amount of military personnel being deployed to enable the successful roll-out of this approach.

COVID-19 Vaccine Preparations

31. The Government has asked the NHS to be ready to deliver a COVID-19 vaccination programme for England from December 2020, so that those who need it most will be able to access vaccinations as soon as they are available.
32. In Sussex, the NHS (West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group) is working closely with Local Resilience Forum partners and West Sussex Public Health, on the logistics and development of these plans.
33. In October 2020, the COVID-19 Mass-Vaccination Programme Board was established with stakeholders across Sussex. The County Council will have an important role to play in the rollout of this programme, as such, the Interim Director of Public Health is a key member of this overseeing Board.
34. On Tuesday 1 December the Government authorised the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine on the independent advice of the medicines regulator.
35. On Wednesday 2 December, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) published their final advice for priority groups to receive the vaccine. In Phase 1, this includes care home residents, health and care staff, the elderly and the clinically extremely vulnerable. This advice will continue to be updated as more information becomes available on vaccine effectiveness, safety and clinical characteristics. This will in turn be reflected in the NHS's plans.
36. Detailed planning has been underway, building on the expertise and strong track record the NHS has already in delivering immunisations like the annual

flu vaccination programme, to ensure that a COVID-19 vaccination programme does not impact on other vital services.

37. Whilst we welcome the recent positive announcements on vaccine development, it should be emphasised that although a number of further vaccines are in Phase 3 trials, they are still required to go through the peer review process and regulatory approval. This process may be accelerated, but it is still anticipated to be considerably lengthy, and should therefore be factored into projected timescales.
38. As clinical trials progress and we understand more about the requirements of different vaccines – such as the storage, transportation and how it is administered, plans will be refined to ensure the right resources are in the right place. Currently, information on some vaccines, for example, the approved Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, indicate that they require -70°F cold chain transportation and two doses administered, which will need careful planning.
39. The NHS is currently working on ensuring the effective delivery of the programme, with a lead local provider being identified, and the government recently set out a new contractual arrangement for GPs and their teams that is currently being discussed through which they can support the programme.
40. For care home residents and staff and older people, the NHS is establishing a mobile vaccine delivery service in care homes and people's own homes, working with local councils and social care providers. When eligibility is extended to wider groups, this will be supplemented by specific 'mass' vaccination sites, which could be within existing NHS estates or temporary standalone services.
41. A national public communications campaign will commence shortly, focusing at first on the safety and effectiveness of vaccines in general. This will be supplemented by localised communications across Sussex and targeted engagement with communities who traditionally experience health inequalities.
42. As with this year's flu vaccination campaign, a national system will send invitations and reminders to eligible people at the right time. It will provide an online and telephone booking system so that people can choose a time and location to receive their vaccination.

b) Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and the Community Hub

Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

43. The National Restrictions guidance announced on 31 October sought to protect everyone, including those who have been deemed to be Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV), meaning that they face the highest risk of serious illness if they contract COVID-19. Residents in this group, received a letter from the NHS or from their GP advising them that they are assessed as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable or they may have been advised to shield in the past.

Community Hub

44. The Community Hub, launched in late March, has been available during the second Lockdown to provide a range of support and practical assistance for the more than 34,400 Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents across West Sussex.
45. Telephone lines remain open from 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week supported by website content and a series of e-forms to provide digital access. The core team has been increased in size to ensure sufficient capacity during the second Lockdown and the onset of winter and the Christmas/New Year period.
46. Outbound contact has been made to all individuals on the Shielded Patient List (SPL) who are identified as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable. In this round of contact three different communication methods were utilised based on available contact details with a total volume of 31,247. This was comprised of 14,631 emails, 4,890 letters and 11,736 text messages. In 2,519 instances there was a delivery failure from an email or text message so a follow up letter has subsequently been sent, therefore a total 7,409 residents were contacted by a letter from the Community Hub.
47. All correspondence provided contact details and opening hours for the Community Hub. The letter outlined the offer available from West Sussex County Council and encouraged registration via the national platform. The email included weblinks to information available on our website and a wide range of community-based support options.
48. Prior to this most recent lockdown we had already re-established proactive outbound calls to just over 4,400 of our most vulnerable residents who had been receiving the weekly government food parcel throughout the previous period of Shielding and did not have a local support network able to assist with access to essential food and supplies. These calls generated 107 referrals to the Prevention and Assessment Team for follow up as a possible Adult Social Care need was identified.
49. Outbound call activity has been supported by staff from the Goodwood Estate Contact Centre who are currently on furlough and the Prevention and Assessment Team (PAT). They have been following up with residents who previously had multiple contacts to the Community Hub requiring an urgent/same day response to address a critical need or required a referral to Adult Social Care
50. Written communication was not sent to those individuals who had already received an outbound phone call, hence the difference in the numbers between the total identified Clinically Extremely Vulnerable cohort and the outbound emails, text messages and letters.
51. Inbound call volumes saw a marked increase following the proactive correspondence, peaking at over 200 calls on one day, however the overall

volume is significantly lower compared to that experienced earlier in the year when Shielding was first introduced.

52. Clinically Extremely Vulnerable individuals, or their friends and family were encouraged to contact the Community Hub or use the new online registration service to:

- Request priority access to supermarket delivery slots (if you have already got priority supermarket deliveries, you'll keep them).
- Tell the County Council if they need support in order to follow this guidance that cannot be provided by friends, family or other support networks.
- Update details, for example, your address.

53. This service can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-shielding-support>, but is now only available for active registration in Tier 3.

54. During the second Lockdown the Community Hub has been notified of 373 requests for support via the national registration service and followed up via telephone. In 51% of these instances no support was actually required but individuals are now aware of the Community Hub should their circumstances change. 29% have been signposted or referred to community-based support organisations. In total just under 2000 registrations were made during the 4 week period.

55. The County Council continues to utilise its own locally developed sustainable food and supplies offer available via the Community Hub, providing flexibility to support either a one off or ongoing requirement. Each food and supplies delivery is followed up by a call to minimise dependence by working on sustainable options where appropriate.

COVID Winter Grant Scheme

56. On 8 November, the Government announced extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period. West Sussex County Council is set to receive almost £2M (£1,989,591.80) from this COVID Winter Grant Scheme managed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

57. Designed to provide direct assistance to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals this grant covers the period from early December 2020 until the end of March 2021.

58. There is a requirement for the County Council to determine eligibility across the county and targets support within the scope of the grant conditions to provide direct assistance to individuals, vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic with meeting the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs. Included in the scope is the opportunity to provide support to families who have access to Free School Meals during term time.

59. Proposals are currently being developed with partners on how deliver this support which will require a blended approach to meet the grant criteria.

Discussions underway include the delivery model to support children and families in receipt of Free School Meals over the Christmas holiday and February half term and the utilisation of existing partnership arrangements and infrastructure. West Sussex County Council has flexibility in administering the funding within the confines of the scheme – which may include cash, the provision of food, vouchers, or funding through third party organisations.

c) Schools Reopening and Attendance – update

60. Almost all schools remain open, although there are increasing numbers of schools having to close learning bubbles for periods of time due to contact with positive COVID-19 cases. There were 414 new cases were confirmed in November with 144 staff and 270 students. West Sussex is not seeing the proportion of cases in secondary age students seen nationally, with the greater number of positive cases being in primary. During November, the spread of positive cases was as follows: Primary 184; Secondary 150; FE 29; Special 22; All Through Schools 29. Due to the numbers of positive cases, 9,043 students were self-isolating at points during November along with 788 staff.
61. Attendance in schools continues to remain above the national average with the gap widening as national attendance falls at a greater rate than in West Sussex. On 27 November, attendance was at 90.3% compared with a national average of 83.7%. For children with an EHCP attendance at the same point was 84.1% compared with a national average of 78.3%. For children with a social worker, attendance has risen to 86.4% were in school compared with a national average of 79%. Data is submitted by schools to the Department for Education on a daily basis and the proportion of West Sussex Schools submitting their data runs at 77.3% which is above the national average.
62. While our aim is to ensure schools remain open, every school will also have a plan for the possibility of a local or national lockdown, partial closure of a school owing to an outbreak in a 'bubble', 'class' or 'year group', and how they will ensure continuity of an education service should such scenarios occur.
63. We are assured our school leaders and governors, whilst operating with the national and local guidance we have provided, have been supported to take and make the very best decisions on behalf of children and families in their community.

Home to school transport

64. Home to school transport is working well overall. It is now being recommended that students of secondary school age travelling on school transport wear face masks as they do on public transport. This reflects a change in national guidance on the matter.

d) Care Homes - update

Care homes

65. There are 235 care homes for older people in West Sussex. The care homes provide around 8,608 beds. A third of these are commissioned by the County Council with the remainder commissioned through other local authorities, health or funded directly by residents.
66. For the week commencing 30 November 2020, 11 care homes for older people had a confirmed case among staff and/or residents. In the same period, 5 learning disability and one mental health service had confirmed cases.
67. For the same week, local data on care homes reports admissions are currently restricted in:
- 17 care homes for older people,
 - 1 extra care setting,
 - 10 care homes for mental health/learning disability,
 - 0 domiciliary care providers, and
 - 2 supported living settings.
68. Adult Services have developed an Emergency Care Setting Intervention Plan, which is being utilised to support providers when there are problems. The Council, working with Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning Group, continues to provide daily support for care services with confirmed outbreaks or identified cases of COVID-19.
69. Public Health England advice has changed on admissions following an outbreak. Previously the advice had been to close to admissions following an outbreak. Now care providers are advised that closing to admissions is on a risk-based assessment led by discussions with the local system, taking account of wider pressures. A process is being developed that will involve information from the care provider and assessment from Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning Group's Infection Prevention Control team to understand the risks, with a decision communicated to operational teams and commissioners.
70. On 13 November the Department for Health & Social Care (DHSC) published a proposal on regulation to stop movement of staff between care settings. The DHSC's opening paragraph states:
- "Stopping staff movement between different care settings and between health and care settings is critical to minimise the risk of infection of COVID-19. In our adult social care winter plan we committed to new regulations to enforce limitations on staff movement between care homes, and between care homes and other health and care settings, focused on care home providers".*
71. A key proposal is that care providers would "be required not to use staff to provide nursing or personal care who are carrying on, or who have carried on within the previous 14 days, a regulated activity in another setting and/or for

another health or social care provider subject to certain exceptions". This could have significant implications for both agency staff and care providers. The County Council notified care providers and agencies, encouraging them to respond to the consultation which closed on 23 November. The Council also sent a response to the consultation.

72. From 23 November weekly COVID-19 testing has started for home care (domiciliary care) workers employed by Care Quality Commission registered services. There will also be more frequent testing of staff and residents in care homes and regular testing carried out in supported living settings. Further guidance on the management of this is awaited.
73. The County Council continues to support care providers during the pandemic and is currently developing resources to support them to facilitate visiting by adopting a risk assessed, person-centred approach that takes account of mental wellbeing as well as physical and the wishes of the person living in the care home. The Council will support care providers to interpret and implement new guidance regarding visiting in care homes published on the 2 December 2020.
74. Alongside this the County Council's Care and Business Support Team are working with the Library Service and two care home pilot sites to develop an offer for families and care homes that supports the understanding of technology to support 'virtual' contact. This will also consider how families without technology could make use of socially distanced library environments and equipment.

Infection Control Fund

75. On 17 September the Government announced a second support package for adult social care providers backed by a further £546m infection control fund. The expectation from government was that 80% of the money be passported directly to registered care home providers and other Care Quality Commission regulated community care providers, which we have done. On 20 November a decision was published on how the remaining 20% will be allocated Ref: OKD45 (20/21). A range of care providers will receive funding for infection control measures, including supported living and housing providers, outreach services, carers and day services. Care homes will also receive funding to facilitate families visiting relatives in the homes, particularly over the Christmas period.
76. On 23 November West Sussex County Council submitted a return to the DHSC reporting on how West Sussex care providers have spent, or plan to spend, their allocation from the second round of the national Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund.

Commissioning

77. Care commissioning activity is underway to support additional demand for health and social care support in the county. This includes ensuring access to designated accommodation for people leaving hospital who are medically fit but remain COVID-19 positive. Further contracts will be awarded for:

- Additional domiciliary care hours.
- Additional Home First capacity across the county, focussed on densely populated areas. The target hours for the blocks are between 50 to 100 hours per week.
- Additional short-term beds for residential dementia, nursing and nursing dementia, anticipated to start at the beginning of December.

Mental health system

78. There continue to be pressures within the inpatient beds for people with mental health needs that warrant an admission, with a significant number of people requiring placement in beds outside those delivered by Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust. There are increased numbers of people presenting with complex mental health issues in the community and in A&E.

People with learning disabilities

79. The new guidance regarding those who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable now includes those with Downs Syndrome. This has resulted in a need to find alternative services.

80. It can be particularly difficult to manage the pressures of the current lock down restrictions within learning disability settings.

Hospital capacity

81. At the present time there is adequate acute hospital and community bed capacity in West Sussex. Hospital discharge hubs and a combined placement and sourcing team continue to operate, as well as working with the CCG to secure appropriate levels of domiciliary care, care/nursing home beds and voluntary services to support effective discharge. There are increased pressures within hospitals as they manage increased numbers of COVID-19 cases alongside the expectations to deliver other care. The number of care homes experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks and therefore being closed to new admissions is however having some impact.

82. The County Council's commissioned Hospital Discharge Care services are operating well since commencement in April 2020, supporting many people to return home following discharge from hospital. Demand for these services is increasing and there remains a focus on ensuring discharges from hospital as soon as patients are medically ready.