

People • Cumbria House • 107-117 Botchergate • Carlisle
Cumbria • CA1 1RD •
T: 01228 226868 • E: john.readman@cumbria.gov.uk

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To carers organisations in Cumbria

Dear All

Responding to exceptional pressures on social care system in Cumbria

Background

The social care system in Cumbria is currently under exceptional pressure which is directly affecting carers and people in need of social care support. This letter provides you with background information and an overview of the actions we are taking in response.

The pressure the social care system is experiencing is due to increasing demand for support and people presenting with higher levels of need, in part due to the impact of the pandemic on the NHS. Alongside this are significant challenges with recruitment and retention of staff across the sector due to a range of factors including the pandemic, mandatory vaccination, wage increases in competing sectors and the loss of international staff.

As a result, the county is dealing with a range of issues:

- Increasing numbers of people remaining in hospital longer than necessary
- Increasing numbers of people in the community with unmet need
- Increasing number of people are being placed into temporary/short term residential beds pending support at home becoming available
- Premature admissions to residential care
- Increasing safeguarding referrals

For context, through the pandemic there has been a 30% increase in the overall volume of social care support commissioned by the council. And right now, the number of hours of 'support at home' care that we are trying to commission is more than double what it was last year. The situation is not unique to Cumbria, with many other Local Authority areas experiencing similar challenges, but the severity is unprecedented.

Response

At the start of the September, it was agreed by the council's Corporate Management Team that a threshold had been reached which required escalation to a multi-agency response via the Local Resilience Forum under the provisions of the Civil Contingencies Act, due to the potential risk to people's health and well-being.

Through that forum work is now underway to identify alternatives to formal care, delivered by volunteers or partner staff, that could support some lower level needs to be met in a different way – for example provision of a hot meal or social contact. Through this approach, formal care provision can be directed to meeting those needs that require a regulated social care response.

Working closely with our NHS partners, a wide range of other activity is also underway to support both the immediate short term need and improve sustainability in the longer term. This work is focused around three main areas and is currently being developed into a full action plan:

- **Workforce** – alongside partners in health and the independent sector working to improve recruitment, retention, well-being and career progression to improve the attractiveness of the sector to employees.
- **Market sustainability** – ensuring that there is sufficient capacity in the independent care sector and Cumbria Care, including market supplements in ‘hard to provide’ areas, incentives for providers, paying providers to maintain care packages while people are in hospital.
- **Alternatives to formal care services** – to allow formal care to be targeted at those most in need, including supporting community led micro-enterprises, increasing the use of assistive technology and delivering more Extra Care Housing.

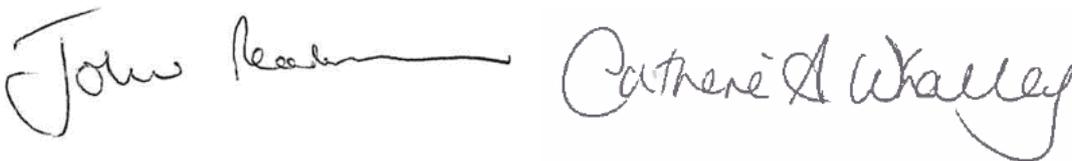
We will be closely monitoring the impact of this work with our NHS partners and will provide further updates. We are mindful that these challenges are significant and will certainly continue into the winter when demand for social care is likely to increase further.

Next steps

In the context of the national debate about social care we wanted to ensure you were aware of the situation locally in Cumbria. We are working hard alongside local and regional partners to ensure people’s needs are met, but the reality is that national support and investment is needed. We hope that the publication of the social care White Paper this autumn will provide a plan for a sustainable social care system.

We will keep you updated as the situation develops over the coming months, but if you would like further information now please get in touch.

Yours sincerely

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'John Readman' and the signature on the right is 'Catharine A Whalley'. Both signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Readman
Executive Director – People
(Deputy Chief Executive)

Cath Whalley
Assistant Director – Adults
(Deputy DASS)