

From: Diane Morton Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director Adult Social Care and Health

To: Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee – 12 November 2025

Subject: **Adult Social Care and Health Operational Pressures Escalation Plan 2025/2026**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides an overview of the Adult Social Care and Health Operational Pressures Escalation Plan 2025/2026. The Plan describes how the council operates within the NHS Integrated Operational Pressures Escalation Levels (OPEL) framework 2024 to 2026, building on local plans and practice which are well established and embedded through operational experience.

Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the content of the report and the Adult Social Care and Health Operational Pressures Escalation Plan 2025/26.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) Operational Escalation Plan 2025/2026 (Attached as Appendix 1)
- 1.2 The ASCH Operational Pressures Escalation Plan exists to ensure Kent County Council (KCC) responds appropriately to surges in demand across the Kent and Medway Health and Social Care System.
- 1.3 The Plan describes how KCC operates within the NHS Integrated Operational Pressures Escalation Levels (OPEL) framework 2024 to 2026, building on local plans and practice which are well established and embedded through operational experience.

2. Background

- 2.1 In December 2024, NHS England published the Integrated Operational Pressures Escalation Levels (OPEL) framework 2024 to 2026. The framework exists to support the management of operational pressures across NHS England's providers, including acute trusts, community health, mental health, and NHS 111 services.

2.2 The NHS framework aims to:

- enhanced oversight of patient safety and, patient-centred decision-making across the urgent and emergency care (UEC) pathway through clear and consistent identification of risk to access to care for patients
- increased efficiency across the UEC pathway through optimising use of resources, and enabling clinical and operational teams to monitor operational pressure and, identify patterns and interdependencies between operational parameters
- improved communication by providing a common structure for measuring operational pressures and standardised escalation processes, enhancing the speed of response
- a consistent response to changes in operational pressure by giving parity of esteem across those NHS providers covered by this framework
- improved transparency across all levels of the NHS to promote engagement of and collaboration between all stakeholders in managing operational pressures effectively

2.3 Adult social care has historically faced system pressure during the winter period due to its interdependencies with the NHS, the need to support hospital discharges and increased demand for care and support during winter. Adult social care continues to manage and navigate extreme pressures whilst continuing to operate in the context of high demand for services, budget pressures, market pressures and workforce issues both within our own social care workforce but also the wider care workforce across Kent.

2.4 The ASCH Operational Pressures Escalation Plan exists to ensure KCC responds appropriately to surges in demand across the Kent and Medway Health and Social Care System. The objectives of the Plan are;

- To provide information about the national operating frameworks and service requirements
- To describe the monitoring and reporting arrangements in place to provide early warning of surge pressure
- To inform staff about the national, regional, and local processes and procedures to be used to manage a surge in demand
- To identify roles and responsibilities for services, teams, and individuals
- To describe the actions required in response to surge in demand

2.5 Minor updates to this year's Operational Pressures Escalation Plan, were approved by ASCH Directorate Resilience Group on 2 October 2025, in anticipation of major updates in 2026 reflecting significant operational changes.

3. Supporting Hospital Discharge

3.1 Adult social care works closely with NHS partners in developing Hospital Discharge pathways and integrated community support services which provide better outcomes for people and are more sustainable for the health and social care system. There are a range of initiatives in place which highlight adult social

care's commitment to partnership working, innovation and continuous improvement, including:

- Kent Enablement at Home (KEAH) work closely with acute and community hospitals in West and North Kent to support timely discharge planning delivering a short-term assessment and enablement service through a person's recovery following acute health need.
- Home First Service in East Kent is delivered in partnership with Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT) supporting people discharged from hospital regain independence and transition smoothly back home from hospital.
- 'Transfer of Care Hubs' bringing together health and social care workforce to work together to ensure people return home from hospital safely and efficiently, with the right community support.

3.3 Adult social care is working closely with the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB) to implement a fully integrated brokerage service responsible for arranging services to facilitate hospital discharges on behalf of both health and social care. A joint brokerage team will be created to arrange support required to facilitate timely and smooth hospital discharges. The changes made will improve the person's experience, reduce costs, improve market management and better align with our strategic visions and national legislation around integration.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The ASCH Operational Pressures Escalation Plan exists to ensure KCC responds appropriately to surges in demand across the Kent and Medway Health and Social Care System.
- 4.2 The Plan outlines how KCC functions within the NHS OPEL framework (2024-2026), building on established local plans and operational experience.
- 4.3 The Plan is expected to undergo major revisions in 2026, incorporating both operational changes and reflect any changes nationally in health and social care.

5. Recommendations

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| <p>5.1 Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE the content of the report and the Adult Social Care and Health Operational Pressures Escalation Plan 2025/2026.</p> |
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9. Background Documents

None

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