

**From:** Dan Watkins, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

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**To:** Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee – 13  
November 2024

**Subject:** **ADULT SOCIAL CARE PRESSURES PLAN 2024-2025**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Summary:** The report will provide an overview of the current pressures faced by Adult Social Care and Health and the mitigating actions in place to ensure service continuity and resilience. The report focuses on outlining the strategic and operational response to a range of factors including respiratory infection rates, vacancies in the health and social care workforce, waiting lists for care and support, winter pressures and budgetary pressures. The full Adult Social Care Pressures Plan 2024-2025 identifies the component elements of the directorate's response to the unprecedented pressures on the health and social care system and identifies owners for each of the response elements.

**Recommendations:** The Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the content of the report and the Adult Social Care Pressures Plan 2024-2025.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) Directorate has continued to operate in an extremely challenging environment throughout 2024, as it manages pressures associated with impacts of local authority budget pressures, cost of living impacts, increased demographic pressures of an ageing population and people living longer with more complex needs, alongside continued high workforce vacancy rates and turnover across the health and social care sector. Many of these are the same pressures faced by most other local authorities nationally, as a result of national rather than local factors.
- 1.2 The Adult Social Care Pressures Plan 2024-2025, attached as Appendix 1, identifies the factors which are likely to impact the operating environment in the coming months and beyond, and the strategic and operational actions which are being taken to ensure directorate resilience.
- 1.3 The plan will be maintained as a live document which will enable adult social care to continually review its business processes and escalation procedures, ensure that risks and issues are addressed at an early stage and implement appropriate mitigations to support service continuity.

## 2. Context

- 2.1 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. In 2024/2025 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.
- 2.2 Adult social care faces a significant budgetary challenge for 2024/25, as does the wider Council, and this will continue into 2025/26 whilst simultaneously having to manage increased demand and residents having to wait longer for assessments and services due to the workforce pressures which are being seen across multiple sectors but are particularly acute in health and social care.
- 2.3 The health and social care workforce and system remains under significant strain nationally. High vacancy rates produce environments of stress, which increases pressure on existing staff, and in turn encourages higher turnover and absence. Skills for Care figures for 2023-2024 indicated around 131,000 vacancies in adult social care services nationally, and a turnover rate of 30%.
- 2.4 More people are requesting support and there are now approximately 2 million requests nationally for support with social care services for new people each year. In 2023/2024 Kent had over 21,800 people receiving a service (for example Home care, or Residential) a 1% increase on the previous year. The impacts on people who have cause to draw on care and support are very real with too much unmet, under met and wrongly met need. The quality and consistency of services also remain a pressing issue that is compounded by local authorities having to deal with an increased number of people with complex needs that require support, creating high levels of unmet need. Kent had an 11% increase in 2023/2024 of those receiving a service who had a mental health need compared to the previous year.
- 2.5 The People at the Heart of Care, Adult Social Care Reform White Paper', published by the government in December 2021 acknowledged the historic challenges relating to social care funding pressures and sought to address some of the current disparity between funding for the NHS and social care. The white paper sets out the 10-year government vision for transforming adult social care within England. The three core objectives are that people have choice, control, and support to live independent lives; people can access outstanding quality and tailored care and support and people find adult social care fair and accessible.
- 2.6 In its Adult Social Care Committee report, a "gloriously ordinary life" spotlight on adult social care, The House of Lords stated that the Committee recognised that the Government had outlined a new vision for social care in its 'The People at the Heart of Care', Adult Social Care Reform White Paper and it applauded its ambition, however, that it falls short of providing a concrete and fully resourced programme of change, which is necessary to realise these ambitions. Many

have made the case that so far, the funding announcements made since the publication of the White Paper have reduced expectations that the full ambitions of White Paper will be realised.

- 2.7 The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts Reforming adult social care in England report (March 2024), highlighted that “local authorities are having to plan and commission adult social care services against a backdrop of fragmented and uncertain funding”. It goes on to point out the short-term and multiple funding pots provided to local government and recommended that government explore ways to provide more confidence over long-term funding.
- 2.8 The Health and Care Act 2022 puts the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) assurance of local authorities on a statutory footing. The new duty on the CQC to assess local authorities' delivery of their adult social care (ASC) duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014 came into effect on 1 April 2023. In August 2023, the Department for Health and Social Care published its framework for adult social care intervention in local authorities. According to the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) Spring Survey 2024 the estimated national cost to local authorities of preparing for the CQC assessment is £43m.
- 2.9 As with previous winters, there is a high level of concern about the levels of pressure on health and care services this winter. Respiratory infection rates are likely to create higher levels of staff absences and the effects of the cost-of-living crisis on staff recruitment and retention will also be a key factor to consider in our efforts to provide the best quality services to our population.
- 2.10 The increasing pressure on unpaid carers is also recognised including financial, emotional and the physical breaking down of support. It is estimated that there are between 4.2 million and 6.5 million unpaid carers in the UK, with the actual figure likely to be much higher. In Kent there are an estimated 148,000 adults providing care every week.
- 2.11 The totality of the challenges outlined above mean that adult social care faces a period of sustained pressure and must be proactive and agile in managing its response. The Adult Social Care Pressures Plan identifies a range of activities which will support both the directorate's own staff and services and Kent's provider market to ensure they have appropriate business continuity plans and risk mitigations in place to sustain service delivery.

### **3. Components of the Adult Social Care Pressures Plan 2024-2025**

- 3.1 The Adult Social Care Pressures Plan 2024-2025 collates several component plans which outline the operational and tactical preparations and response to pressures, the strategic activities and the collaborative working being progressed with partner organisations and the provider market.
- 3.2 The Resilience and Emergency Planning section of the plan identifies a number of tools and mechanisms to support directorate resilience and business continuity, including the Operational Pressures Escalation Plan.

- As part of our continuing improvement cycle, lessons learnt from previous incidents and exercises have been included in our ongoing programme of work, both to inform our review of identified risks, and to strengthen the tools and mechanisms we already have in place.
- Service Business Continuity Plan testing is in place to test service Business Continuity Plans against planning assumption in readiness for the European Entry/Exit System.
- A Directorate Project Group has been established across service areas identified through threat and risk assessment to maintain timely two-way flow of information between meetings of the Directorate Resilience Group.
- Areas of risk for winter 2024/2025 and beyond have been identified and assessed to ensure appropriate controls and actions are in place.
- All service level Business Continuity Plans across operational services have been stress tested, Service Managers and their deputies have been exercised to ensure all key staff are aware of their responsibilities and are familiar with the tools and resources available to them.

3.3 The plans will be maintained as live documents throughout Winter 2024-2025 and the ASCH Senior Management Team will maintain oversight of their implementation and will escalate any concerns to the Corporate Director Adult Social Care and Health.

3.4 Adult social care is continuing to work in collaboration with system 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 care system. Across Kent there is an established Discharge to Assess approach to support people back to their own home as quickly as possible and assess their ongoing needs in their home environment. In 2022/2023 we developed a model for integrated Transfer of Care Hubs in East Kent which have demonstrated that a true multi-disciplinary approach to discharge planning supports people to go to the right destination on discharge with the right care and support. It continues to be a priority for 2024/2025 to further develop the Transfer of Care Hub model. The model has been rolled out across North and West Kent. The model is continually being reviewed and developed to support better outcomes for people accessing hospital discharge pathways.

3.5 Discharges from Mental Health Hospitals continue to be an area with ever increasing pressure. The increase in the level of complexity presenting in mental health services means there continues to be pressures on acute mental health beds in Kent. Additionally challenges in the provider market and limited specialism in-county within the provider market to support this cohort of people who have the most complex needs has a significant impact on numbers Clinically Ready for Discharge/delayed bed days. Adult social care continues to work closely with the Kent and Medway Social Care Partnership Trust (KMPT) in a collaborative approach to assessments and discharge planning and developing pathways to discharge.

- 3.6 Adult Social Care Connect (formerly the Area Referral Service) is now locally deployed across the four main areas of North Kent, West Kent, Ashford and Canterbury, and Thanet South Kent Coast. Social Worker resource has been added to the teams to ensure that referrals and safeguarding concerns are actioned appropriately at contact minimising the need to transfer to other teams. Following extensive research with other local authorities, and working alongside our community team managers, remodelling work continues as part of our continuous improvement and commitment to prevention and enablement.
- 3.7 Short Term Beds are used to facilitate people who are being discharged from hospital on a pathway 2 or 3 service for assessment reablement and recovery for people who are not able to return to their own home. There has been a significant increase in the number of referrals for those on a hospital discharge pathway compared to this period last year. Over a four week period between mid-September to mid-October in 2024, Short Term Pathways received 904 referrals compared to 618 referrals across the same period in 2023. So far this financial year the average length of stay in a Short Term Bed is 3.6 months, and for older people it is 4.2 months. The aim is 6 weeks.
- 3.8 The Operational Capacity Management Plan for Winter 2024-2025 identifies the recruitment activities, working arrangements and staff redeployment contingency arrangements that will be implemented for adult social care teams throughout the winter period. These arrangements will enable continuity of service and will also ensure that extended working arrangements support partners in the health system to manage demand on their services and hospital discharges.
- 3.9 Kent Enablement At Home (KEaH) aims to ensure people are able to remain at home with the appropriate levels of support with the emphasis on enablement and not for people to remain or move into long term placements. We are seeing increased demand for KEaH already, with an 8% increase in those receiving this service in 2023/2024 (over 5,300 people) compared to 2022/2023 (over 4,900) and in Quarter 2 this year we saw the highest number of people having KEaH for three years.
- 3.10 The plans for ASCH's Commissioned Services encompasses work with Kent's provider market to support their short-term preparedness and resilience and seek to encourage long-term sustainability through market development. Activities under the Commissioned Services offer are aligned to preventative actions to keep people safe and well at home, supporting safe and timely discharge from hospital and helping people to recover and thrive in their own home. The System-Wide Market Pressures Activities include a broad range of actions to reduce overall pressure on the market and system. The actions support demand management through utilising equipment and technology to manage lower-level needs and support a preventative approach.
- 3.11 The Adult Social Care Innovation and Partnership Team has led the development of the Registered Managers Hub, which supports the care sector to develop registered managers, improve quality in care, identify recruitment and retention solutions, provide training opportunities, and seek out innovation.

This activity ensures the social care market is of quality, sustainable and adaptive enough to change, as required by the Care Act 2014.

#### **4. Financial implications**

- 4.1 In 2024/2025 the financial challenge for the whole organisation was a £96m funding gap arising from the scale of spending growth of circa £210m, which is way in excess of the increased funding from central government and taxation, circa £114m. This gap had to be funded from identifying savings and use of reserves. The scenario is similar in 2025/2026 where we are forecasting £147m growth compared to £64m increase in funding.
- 4.2 Over half of this spending growth relates to adult social care, and savings had to be identified to offset this increased growth, as well as achieving previous years rolled-forward savings. The main financial challenges that we are seeing this year, are in relation to the continuation of increased demand, complexity and costs, meaning the achievement of those savings required to offset the growth is challenging and causing financial pressures.
- 4.3 The Joint Commissioning Management Group will continue to work collaboratively with Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (KMICB) to ensure best value for money and use of resources across the system.

#### **5. Equalities implications**

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 1b

#### **6. Other Corporate implications**

- 6.1 The delivery of the Adult Social Care Pressures Plan 2024-2025 builds on the 'Adult Social Care Pressures Plan 2023-2024' and the lessons learned from partnership working, joint commissioning and contingency planning in that period. Lessons learned from the delivery of the Adult Social Care Pressures Plan 2024-2025 will be owned by the owners of the component plans and will be shared corporately where appropriate.

## 7. Conclusions

- 7.1 Adult social care faces considerable challenges in the coming months in terms of the collective impact of financial, workforce and health stressors on the system. Whilst robust plans have been tested and put in place to manage pressures across the health and social care system, there is a high level of concern about the level of pressure that services will face. The directorate will need to maintain an agile, collaborative and creative approach to respond to this unique set of circumstances and will continue to work closely with its partners to prioritise the health and wellbeing of Kent residents.

## 8. Recommendations

8.1 Recommendation(s): The Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the content of the report and the Adult Social Care Pressures Plan 2024-2025.

## 9. Background Documents

[House of Lords - A “gloriously ordinary life”: spotlight on adult social care - Adult Social Care Committee \(parliament.uk\)](#)

[People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform white paper - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmpubacc/427/report.html>

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