

Action needed to protect older people and workers in care homes in Wales

Statement from Heléna Herklots CBE, Older People's Commissioner for Wales:

"Older people and their families continue to raise significant concerns about the issues currently facing care homes, such as access to NHS treatment and services, testing for staff and residents, and the availability of vital PPE. It is an extremely worrying time for those living and working in care homes and their friends and family. It is vital that more is done to protect older people and to support those who work with them.

"I am therefore calling on the Welsh Government to ensure that:

- PPE is delivered effectively and consistently to care homes, and that they have adequate supplies of other infection control materials such as hand sanitizers;
- Testing is available for residents showing symptoms of Covid-19 so that appropriate care and treatment can be provided safely by care staff and others;
- Residents are able to access NHS services and treatment that they may need (including for Covid-19) and that there are no blanket policies applied excluding care home residents from receiving hospital treatment if their condition warrants it;
- All care homes are able to quickly access healthcare support and guidance including any need for training, for example, on infection control;
- All available staff are able to work through ensuring testing for staff who may be self-isolating because of symptoms they, or other members of their household, are experiencing;
- Emergency funding reaches care homes quickly for increased costs of agency staff to fill gaps; to meet needs there may be for higher staffing levels; and to meet additional costs such as infection control; and
- Information is captured and published about levels of infection and deaths, so there is transparency and so that the data informs decisions including on resource allocation.

"I have called on the Welsh Government to urgently publish a specific action plan that sets out what will be done to protect older people and care workers and minimise the spread of Covid-19 in care homes in Wales, based on the above measures.

"With coronavirus cases now suspected in nearly a third of care homes in Wales, immediate action is needed or older people living in care homes will be left significantly exposed to this virus, putting their lives and the lives of care home staff at risk.

"I would like to thank care home staff across the country for all of their vital work, so much of which goes unseen, to support older people at this difficult time as they face unprecedented pressures.

"To make sure that this vital support can continue, it's crucial that the Welsh Government leads and delivers the action needed to ensure that older people living in care homes, and the people caring for them, have the support and equipment they need to keep them safe and well."

ENDS