

Fourteenth Report of Session 2019-21

Department of Health and Social Care

Readying the NHS and social care for the COVID-19 peak

Introduction from the Committee

In England, the Department of Health and Social Care (the Department) has overall responsibility for health and social care policy while NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) leads the NHS, providing oversight and support for NHS trusts and foundation trusts. Local NHS trusts provide hospital, community and mental health services, alongside GPs, while local authorities assess care needs and commission social care and public health services. In March this year, NHSE&I was given temporary emergency powers to lead and organise all NHS services directly as it responded to COVID-19.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (the Ministry) has responsibility for the local government finance and accountability systems. Public Health England, working with local authorities and NHS partners, provides health protection services and public health advice, analysis and support to government and the public. This includes monitoring of, preparing for and responding to public health emergencies such as COVID-19.

Relevant reports

- NAO report: [Readying the NHS and adult social care in England for COVID-19](#) - Session 2019-21 (HC 367)
- PAC report: [Readying the NHS and social care for the COVID-19 peak](#) - Session 2019-21 (HC 405)
- [Treasury Minutes](#): November 2020 (CP 316)

Update to the Government response to the Committee

There were seven recommendations in this report. As of the last Treasury Minute (CP 316), five recommendations have been implemented and two recommendations remained work in progress, as set out below.

2: PAC conclusion: *Discharging patients from hospital into social care without first testing them for COVID-19 was an appalling error.*

2a: PAC recommendation: *The Department and NHS England and NHS Improvement should review which care homes received discharged patients and how many subsequently had outbreaks, and report back to us in writing by September 2020.*

2.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: Summer 2021

Original target implementation date: Spring 2021

2.2 Although the department agrees with the Committee's recommendation, it disagrees with the Committee's conclusion.

2.3 The department provided an update to the Chair on [7 October 2020](#) and [16 November 2020](#). NHS England and NHS Improvement wrote to the Committee on [30 October 2020](#).

2.4 The department formally commissioned the SAGE subgroup on care homes on 10 November to produce a consensus statement on the association between the discharge of patients from hospitals and COVID-19 in care homes.

2.5 Having reached interim conclusions, the next stage of this work is for SAGE to consider relevant analysis by PHE and NHS England and NHS Improvement in Spring.

3: PAC conclusion: *This pandemic has shown the tragic impact of delaying much needed social care reform, and instead treating the sector as the NHS's poor relation.*

3: PAC recommendation: *After years of promises and false starts, we expect the Department to set out in writing to us by October 2020 what it will be doing, organisationally, legislatively and financially, and by when, to make sure the needs of social care are given as much weight as those of the NHS in future. We will be challenging them on this at future sessions.*

3.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: The Government has committed to bringing forward plans for reform in 2021.

3.2 The department provided an update to the Committee on [7 October 2020](#) and its focus has not changed substantially since then. The government's current priority for adult social care (and the focus for the department) is that all recipients of care receive the support they need throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the winter period, giving equal attention to the NHS and care sectors.

3.3 The Adult Social Care Winter Plan sets out the actions the government will be taking at a national level; and actions that every local area and care provider must be taking to keep COVID-19 at bay.

3.4 The department recognises the pressures on the care system. The government has made the manifesto commitment to £1 billion extra of funding every year for more social care staff and better infrastructure, technology and facilities, to stabilise the system.

3.5 The department is also acutely aware of the long-term challenges to the social care system in England. Putting social care on a sustainable footing, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, is one of the biggest challenges society faces. There are complex questions to address, to which the department wants to give full consideration in light of current circumstances.

3.6 The government remains committed to reform, is actively considering a range of proposals, and will bring forward a plan this year that address long-term challenges in the adult social care system.