

## Preparing for the winter pressures ahead recommendations

### Practical ways to protect your service 2022 / 2023

Skills for Care asked frontline managers to share their recommendations of how to best prepare for this year's winter pressures. Their advice included:

#### Working with others

- Do not be too proud to seek help and support.
- Look to build strong relationships across the Integrated Care System.
- Connect with as many services as possible and discuss how you can work together on common issues.
- Establish formal arrangements with other services to share responsibilities / cover each other. Keep all partners regularly updated.
- Establish close links with your commissioners and housing providers.
- Ensure you have pre-agreed contracts with commissioners with clear expectations for all parties.
- Connect with local and national charities. Review their guidance and advice.
- Share costs and processes with other services in your community (recruitment initiatives, transport etc.)
- Agree flexibility from funders, including local authority for situations where other services cover your clients and vice-versa.
- When drawing on support of others in the community, check what can be covered free of charge but agree payment where necessary.
- Find out what other local resources are available, including potential funded support.
- Use bridging packages.
- Share what works and ideas with other local services.

#### Recruitment and safe staffing levels

- Only take on enough care packages that you can handle.
- Continually recruit, avoid pausing recruitment due to workload.
- Plan a significant recruitment drive in the lead up to winter (i.e., October). Fill as many vacant places as possible before the winter.

- Do not drop your recruitment standards – ensure all new recruits are suitable to provide quality care.
- Benchmark what you pay with other local services, ensure you are competitive.
- Discuss staffing challenges with your team, come up with a solution together.
- Minimise duplication of effort across your staff team, simplify processes and procedures.
- Develop ancillary / housekeeping staff to be able to provide care where needed.
- Plan to overstaff by minimum of 15%, including recruiting more temporary / bank and part time staff.
- Keep a team of carers available on standby – ensure they are willing to work at short notice, in poor weather and over holidays.
- Strengthen your relationship with recruitment agencies.
- Invest in a good and easy to use rota management system.
- Effectively resource your team managing rotas, train others to cover.
- Protect time for essential training and assessment.
- Ensure Christmas staffing is finalised two-months before.
- Extending notice periods to book planned annual leave.
- Promote staff taking majority of holidays in spring / summer.
- Encourage staff to carry over holidays or offer to pay in lieu.
- Pay a bonus in March to encourage staff to stay through the winter.
- RAG rate staff availability.
- Keep people and staff informed of industrial action and how it could impact staffing (e.g., travel).

### **Protect from sickness and infection**

- Recognise that COVID-19 is still an issue. Ensure people, families and staff understand that.
- Promote flu and COVID-19 vaccination, minimise impact this could have on staff sickness.
- Develop or update your vaccination plan. Vaccinated as early as possible.
- Check vaccination records of staff and people you support.
- Ensure vulnerable people and staff are vaccinated first.
- Continue COVID-19 testing where possible, access or invest in testing.
- Ensure all visitors and staff are symptom free from coughs colds and illness.
- Carefully manage PPE stock levels.
- Maintain high IPC standards.
- Promote practical ways to minimise risk of cold and flus.
- Review cleaning protocols, learn from previous breakouts and protections.
- Invest in cleaning services.

### **Wellbeing of managers and staff**

- Stay on top of any health concerns.

- Invest in wellbeing of managers and staff.
- Promote positive physical and mental health to staff.
- Provide regular opportunities for staff to discuss concerns.
- Create a culture that looks for solutions not problems.
- Treat staff well regardless of the impact of wider pressures.
- Regularly monitor staff and check that they have the support they need.
- Increase the levels of support you give to staff; ensure they have supervisions and can always contact colleagues.
- Protect manager wellbeing - share responsibilities by using deputies and delegating more to wider team.
- Ask for help when you need it – look to the owners of the service, your peers and other professionals to manage your own needs.
- Build/maintain resilience and morale - discuss with team what they value.
- Provide winter packs for staff to include items to remain well during the winter.

### **Cost of living**

- Budget for increased costs.
- Secure increased investment from owners, review pricing.
- Be upfront with funders about the impact and why costs may need to increase to maintain high levels of care.
- Increase wages where possible.
- Insulate premises to save energy costs.
- Keep informed on cost-of-living crisis and recommendations (e.g., Money Saving Expert etc.).
- Keep people and staff well informed, provide advice on how to protect from the cold.
- Promote warm clothing options to people and staff.
- Research how to lower energy consumption, provide advice to people and staff.
- Look to promote and encourage use of local initiatives, community projects (e.g., healthy holidays for children, public buildings, food banks).
- Create a cost-of-living champion role.
- Minimise wastage - make sure all appliances are turned off when not in use and that the boiler is in optimal use mode.
- Buy equipment before prices increase further (electric blankets etc.).
- Research what grants, benefits and pension credit may be available.
- Research cheapest supermarkets and price comparisons.
- Stockpile food with long sell-by dates.
- Arrange Blue light cards for staff.

### **Weather**

- Create a special weather Contingency Plan or section.
- Ensure you have the personal equipment for bad weather.

- Be as preventative as possible (e.g., ensure boiler serviced early etc.).
- Ensure care team vehicles are prepared for winter (e.g., de-icer, winter tyres, etc.).
- Identify who in the community has and is willing to support the use of 4x4 and other vehicles appropriate for winter access. Have replacement drivers on standby.
- Identify high priority clients and start to plan with family or representatives.
- Manage expectations, be open and upfront on challenges with people and families.
- Plan double-up community appointments carefully, avoid adding to logistical problems.
- Plan what staff can walk to each customer / residential service.
- Work with other agencies to provide hard to reach locations in bad weather.
- Monitor weather reports – adapt plans and staffing accordingly.
- Store foods that are non-perishable.
- Plan indoor activities.

## Resources to help

Skills for Care has several resources to help you develop and maintain an effective Contingency Plan and mitigate against challenges, including winter pressures. Our resources include a recorded webinar, checklist, template examples and FAQs.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/rmwebinars](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/rmwebinars)