# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **Care Homes Action Plan – final report** |
| **DATE**  | **24 March 2021** |
| **BY** | **Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services** |

Our Care Homes Action Plan, published in July last year, set out our high-level actions to ensure the care home sector was well supported ahead of what we knew would be an extremely challenging winter. Today, I have published the third and final update, reflecting on lessons learnt during the pandemic and next steps:

[https://gov.wales/care-homes-action-plan-final-update](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fgov.wales%2Fcare-homes-action-plan-final-update&data=04%7C01%7CAlison.Wood%40gov.wales%7C49c72f9205ce4f05774b08d8eeb73e71%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C637521818078316324%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=OenwHWP2leaMbwA9u%2FT7pGqAMZERwOj4q7zTyTPCyjo%3D&reserved=0)

The past 12 months have been like no other. Our health and social care services have been under enormous strain, yet throughout they have remained professional, resilient and heroic. I want to pay tribute to you all for the care and compassion you have shown. There have been many extraordinary examples of our social care workforce going above and beyond during the first and second waves of this pandemic. Early evidence has highlighted the flexibility and agility of the workforce which have been critical in our response.

We know staff fatigue and burn-out are major concerns across the sector. In the same way you have supported those in your care, we need to ensure your health and well-being are also considered. We have made some real progress in this area over the winter through the introduction of an Employee Assistance Programme, the establishment of a well-being network and of course most recently, the announcement of a second bonus payment of £735 that will be payable to all care home staff. However, the long-term impact on well-being and mental health in particular is expected to be significant and this must continue to be a key priority for us.

In the update I released in December last year, I acknowledged the way in which health boards, local authorities and their third sector partners had worked together. This strong partnership working between the services has continued to flourish. I have also valued the opportunities for shared learning between the Welsh Government and its partners as we have implemented this action plan. Working together as an integrated, whole system is not only consistent with ‘A Healthier Wales’, it is also necessary as we recover from this devastating pandemic.

Protecting the vulnerable and reducing the risk of COVID-19 from entering care homes have been crucial. Robust infection prevention and control, adherence to the hospital discharge guidance, the introduction of the Covid-19 Statutory Sick Pay enhancement scheme, the roll out of increased testing for care home staff and visitors, have all played their part, alongside the public health measures to suppress community transmission.

We are aware that restrictions on visiting have been extremely difficult for people living in care homes, and their loved ones. Decisions to restrict visiting have not been taken lightly, but have been considered necessary to protect people from the risk of COVID-19, particularly during the peaks of the pandemic. I am grateful to all in the sector, but in particular to care home staff for their work to maintain contact between people and their families, and for their support as we re-introduce indoor care home visits by a single designated visitor.

Effective use of testing, PPE and infection prevention and control practices have seen a noticeable and welcomed drop in the number of positive test results within care homes.

The vaccination programme, whilst not removing the need to ensure these practices remain in place and are adhered to, has also been seen as providing a glimmer of light at what has been a very long tunnel.

Financial sustainability of the sector remains a significant challenge. COVID-19 has had an impact on the financial position of many care providers due to the additional cost pressures surrounding additional infection prevention and control activity and staffing constraints, alongside a reduction in income. The funding we have made available through the Local Government Hardship Fund has played a role in enabling services to continue operating but the pandemic has given additional impetus to considerations around the future shape of social care and the commissioning process in particular. These have been embodied in the ‘Rebalancing Care and Support’ white paper, currently out to consultation [Rebalancing Care and Support Consultation](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-01/consutation-document.pdf).

We know we cannot look to eradicate COVID-19 in the near future, so we must learn to live and work alongside it. Our commitment to continue working in partnership with, and supporting, the care home sector was made clear on 22 March, with the publication of [Health and Social Care in Wales - COVID-19: Looking Forward](https://gov.wales/improving-health-and-social-care). Supported by an initial £100m funding, this plan will underpin the recovery of our health and care system in Wales.

The challenge is by no means over but by learning the lessons from the pandemic and capitalising on the opportunities and changes we have seen during the last year, we can transform how we deliver health and care services in the future.