

## **FOI: 23129141 Care Home deaths FOI**

My understanding is that 40 of the 75 residents at Aspen Court Care Home in Poplar died of Covid-19 during the first two months of the coronavirus pandemic. The scale of the deaths was only made known during a webcast of Tower Hamlets Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 22 June. At 1h 26m of this webcast [https://towerhamlets.publici.tv/core/portal/webcast\\_interactive/488475](https://towerhamlets.publici.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/488475) Dr Naureen Bhatti, a GP whose Gough Walk Surgery looks after Aspen Court, talks about a local care home which normally has 75 residents but now only has 35. The other 40 residents passed away during the pandemic, meaning that over half have died.

**Please provide me with:**

**Full details of these deaths**

**What date did LBTH become aware of this incident?**

**What was the LBTH response to these deaths?**

**Tower Hamlets Local Context**

There are 10 care homes registered with the Care Quality Commission in Tower Hamlets of which 5 provide residential and nursing care for older people, supporting up to a maximum of 308 people at any one time.

The borough has experienced infection outbreaks in the residential and nursing care homes; from 20 March to 30 June the care homes have reported:

- 37 deaths that have been attributed to Covid19 of which 9 people died in hospital.
- 24 deaths which were not related to Covid 19, 4 people having died in hospital.
- Of the above, 34 deaths related to Aspen Court of which 21 were related to Covid 19.

From the onset of the pandemic the council and a broad range of partners have worked together to support the care homes. Details of the support offer are outlined below.

### **Direct provider support - advice, information and guidance**

Tower Hamlets has an Integrated Commissioning team across the Local Authority and the CCG. All communication and planning with care homes is therefore joined up and can be reported back into both organisations. An integrated support offer across community & primary health and social care has been provided to care homes during the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation has been monitored daily during the week and an emergency control was staffed 7 days per week to respond to providers needs outside of normal working hours.

A significant number of initiatives have been undertaken to support the care homes through this time including weekly virtual meetings / teleconferences. This has expanded and now includes colleagues from a broad range of agencies supporting the care homes. We have also developed a standard operating procedure for the care homes and ensured that a range of training has been provided to the staff working in these settings.

### **Clinical 'wrap around' support**

All older peoples' care homes in the borough now have access to an enhanced GP service. The offer was initially for the two nursing homes, and has been extended to

include the three residential care homes during Covid19. Key facets of this include delivery of a weekly 'check in', to review patients identified as a clinical priority for assessment and care, in-hours urgent care where GP input is available within 2 hours of a request being made and the ongoing review and updating of personalised care plans. Alongside this, from June MDT have recommenced, in virtual form, with input from GPs, community health services staff, community geriatricians, mental health specialists and medicines management by way of providing additional and ongoing clinical input.

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

The borough set up a dedicated team of staff with effect from 27 March to ensure that sufficient supplies of PPE are available to those who need it during the pandemic. The Council recognised the challenges faced in obtaining appropriate levels of PPE and introduced a mutual aid request scheme for PPE in early April. The scheme supports providers where they have been unable to obtain PPE through usual supply chains and where stock levels are such that care, and support services will be affected i.e. they have less than seven days' supply of any item of PPE. The use of the NHS emergency supply scheme forms a backup to the Borough's own arrangements should this be needed.

### **Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)**

All providers have confirmed that staff are up to date in respect of IPC training and to supplement this, we have circulated a wide range of information to them, including guidance, access to webinars and on-line courses in respect of PPE and IPC. Two IPC nurses have been specifically recruited by the Clinical Commissioning Group and have delivered a series of training sessions focusing on

- Personal Protective Equipment
- Testing
- Principles of Infection Prevention and Control

**Workforce and recruitment** Care home providers have taken steps to minimise the transfer of staff between agencies. Many have their own banks of staff, and those that share an agency ensure that they use a different 'pool' of staff from within that agency where at all possible. For example, one nursing home has consistently used one agency nurse as a member of staff to ensure continuity of provision and minimise the spread of infection.

### **Staff Wellbeing**

We acknowledge that Covid19 has the potential to impact on staff wellbeing. To support those care homes run by smaller private companies who do not have access to employee assistance programmes we have arranged access to the council's programme as an alternative. In addition, East London Foundation NHS Trust have arranged for care homes staff to be fast tracked in line with NHS staff to access their psychological therapy services. In the longer term we are reviewing options for group support as things begin to settle.

### **Testing**

Given the difficulties in accessing testing kits, the borough developed a local offer which commenced mid-May offering bi-weekly testing to all care home residents and staff. Testing is also undertaken for all of our care home residents that go into the Royal London Hospital, and where a service user tests positive for Covid19, we have procured additional beds in the community, in partnership with Waltham Forest and East London Clinical Commissioning Group (WEL CCG), such that they can be discharged into these settings, until they have fully recovered, before onward transfer into the care homes.

### **Financial support**

We recognise the care homes are experiencing cost pressures caused by Covid19. As such, in line with recommendations, the Council is providing a temporary 10% uplift, with effect from 1st April 2020 and is keeping the situation under review.

### **Going Forward**

We continue to work in partnership with the care homes and are supporting them to open up in a phased and safe way, whilst ensuring they maintain the safety of current residents and staff. We recognise that this has been a challenging time for residents, family members and staff and wish to ensure that all and any actions that can be taken, are, to promote the health and safety of our community. Further detail can be found at:

[https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/health\\_social\\_care/Support\\_for\\_care\\_homes\\_in\\_Tower\\_Hamlets.aspx](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/health_social_care/Support_for_care_homes_in_Tower_Hamlets.aspx)