

WIRRAL COUNCIL

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
25 MARCH 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES

Severe Weather Response

Executive Summary

This report details the actions taken to maintain services to the vulnerable people of Wirral during the recent severe weather conditions and is provided at the request of the Chair of this committee.

This item falls within the Social Care and Inclusion portfolio.

1 Background

- 1.1 On the afternoon of Tuesday 5 January, Wirral as with much of the country experienced sudden and very heavy snowfalls, on top of already icy conditions. Public transport was badly affected, with many train and bus services being cancelled. Road conditions were extremely difficult; most major roads were gridlocked and many minor roads were impassable. Pavements were also covered by ice and snow, making any journeys hazardous.
- 1.2 These conditions developed very quickly, and left many people stranded away from their homes.

2 Departmental Response

- 2.1 A meeting with members of the Strategic Leadership Team and senior operational staff was convened on Tuesday afternoon to consider the implications for services and put plans in place should the severe weather continue. These meetings were held regularly each day until the weather eased on Monday 11 January. Valuable information regarding weather and road conditions was regularly received from the Health, Safety and Resilience Manager throughout the period. Departmental arrangements were linked to those of colleagues in the Health service.

3 Directly Provided Services

3.1 Transport

Adult Social Services transport staff worked late into Tuesday night in difficult driving conditions to ensure that people from day care services and children with Special Needs attending Special Schools got home safely. The last bus returned to the depot at 11pm. It was decided that due to the

condition of side roads, which were not being gritted, transport to day services would be suspended until conditions improved. However, transport staff remained on call to respond to any emergency situations, and ensured that they kept people who usually used their services informed of the situation. Regular transport for day services resumed on Monday 11 January.

Several 4-wheel drive vehicles were lent to DASS Transport by colleagues from Technical Services, to be used at the weekend in case of emergency.

Day Centre Managers and carers spoke very highly of the professionalism and commitment of the DASS Transport Service drivers and escorts on the Tuesday evening, who worked flexibly in arranging routes to ensure that everybody who needed transport arrived home safely. Several letters praising departmental staff were received.

3.2 Day Care Centres

Day Services remained open on the Tuesday until all people who use services had left. Several Centres offered refuge for people from other services who had become stranded. Centres opened for the remainder of the week to provide a service for those people who wished to make their own way to the Centre. Staff from the Centres also provided an outreach service where possible for particularly vulnerable people during the rest of the week, and liaised with family members and neighbours if they could not visit in person.

One centre arranged overnight accommodation for two people who could not get home on the Tuesday evening.

3.3 Residential Units

Residential Units continued to provide a service as usual; major problems were ensuring that the buildings were warm enough as some heating systems had difficulty in coping with the extreme temperatures, and organising rotas to ensure adequate staff cover. A number of staff stayed at the units for several days and others walked long distances to report for duty. There were no instances in which safe staffing levels were not maintained. Several short term stays were arranged to save people having to travel in the bad weather where there was felt to be an unreasonable risk involved.

4 Fieldwork and General Staffing Response

After the initial difficulties caused by the sudden and heavy snowfalls and consequent transport difficulties on the Tuesday, the majority of staff managed to get into work for the remainder of the week, and fieldwork services were maintained throughout the period of severe weather. Central Advice and Duty Team (CADT) services and local offices remained open. The reablement service was able to ensure that all

people receiving services were supported throughout this period. If travelling caused major problems, staff were asked to report to the office or establishment nearest to their home. School closures created some difficulties for staff with school age children.

Staff in general displayed a willingness to work flexibly to ensure that people were supported. Several staff who had 4-wheel drive vehicles worked late into Tuesday evening, assisting with taking people home.

More than 50 members of staff volunteered to remain on call over the weekend, without financial remuneration, in case people needed extra support.

Social Work staff at the hospital also worked extended hours to ensure that the needs of patients who were being discharged home were met.

Out of Hours services were supplemented with additional staff and Senior Managers covered a 24-hour rota to support colleagues during the whole of this period.

5 Contracted Services

The Contract Section remained in close contact with the Department's contracted services. All services liaised closely with each other as well as friends and relatives to ensure that no one was left in need. Domiciliary Care services combined staff rotas on an interagency basis in order to ensure continuity of service delivery, and worked closely with the ICare service to provide meals for those people whose usual service was reduced. Once again many people commented positively on the very considerable efforts made by staff in the agencies

6 3rd Sector Agencies

Voluntary sector day centres provided skeleton staffing and kept in touch with those who would normally attend and liaised with families to ensure everyone was kept as safe as possible.

Offers of help came in from all areas of the Voluntary Sector - including the Red Cross, the Scouting Movement and the Womens Royal Voluntary Services (WRVS).

7 Community Response

Several offers of help were received from the community, including the use of 4-wheel drive vehicles.

8 Partner Agencies - including media support

NHS Wirral and Wirral University Teaching Hospital worked closely with DASS to implement emergency plans and maintain service continuity.

The hospital opened additional beds and provided extra orthopaedic clinics and theatres to treat the significant increase in patients who presented with fractures. In order for that to happen, out-patient clinics were cancelled for one day and some elective operations were cancelled. The Trust ensured that cancellations were kept to a minimum where possible.

NHS Wirral worked with the Hospital to support discharge for patients and where appropriate divert patients from Accident and Emergency Department to Primary Care Services. There were many examples of staff walking to work and Hospital staff staying overnight which demonstrated a real commitment to maintaining services throughout this period.

Wirral Partnership Homes made guest rooms in sheltered housing available should it be required for older people with no heating etc.

Local media both broadcast and press provided tremendous support at this challenging time. Websites provided crucial information whilst radio offered reassurance and essential contact details.

9 Debriefing Exercise

Following the period of severe weather it was felt that it would be appropriate to undertake a debriefing exercise to ascertain from managers what they felt went well and what went less well. What was clear was that managers thought that the response of their staff was excellent, with staff going the 'extra mile' to ensure that vulnerable people continued to receive a service or a regular check on their welfare. The transport section received particular praise for their efforts on the Tuesday evening. The recruitment of over 50 volunteers who were willing to be called upon to help provide support to vulnerable people over the weekend was also seen as a positive. Of the things that were less positive was the lack of clarity for staff regarding when they could go home or plans for getting people into work for the remainder of the week.

10 Financial Implications

Some staff worked extra shifts to cover for colleagues who could not get into work. This will have a small impact on staffing budgets; many staff agreed to take 'time off in lieu' instead of payment.

11 Staffing Implications

No staffing implications.

12 Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment

There are no equal opportunities / health impact assessment implications.

13 Community Safety Implications

There are no community safety implications.

14 Local Agenda 21 Implications

There are no local agenda 21 implications.

15 Planning Implications

There are no planning implications.

16 Anti Poverty Implications

There are no anti poverty implications.

17 Social Inclusion Implications

There are no social inclusion implications.

18 Local Member Support Implications

There are no local member support implications.

19 Health Implications

There are no Health implications.

20 Background Papers

Results of DASS Severe Weather Debrief.
DASS "FOCUS" Newsletter February 2010.

21 Recommendations

That Members note the content of this report.

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