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Scrutiny Panel**

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Ask for Paul Radcliffe
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Dear Liz,

Healthwatch Tameside Covid-19 Survey

I write on behalf of Tameside Council's Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel. Members have remained suitably informed of health implications and impacts associated with Covid-19. This includes a range of local measures and decisions aimed to support residents as part of the borough's coordinated response.

The Scrutiny Panel seeks to submit a formal response to the Healthwatch Covid-19 survey. This letter therefore aims to provide a summary of collective discussion points and feedback received from local communities. I would be extremely grateful if on receiving this letter you are able to take the appropriate action to ensure the collective response is suitably recorded and submitted.

Scrutiny of health services at a local level is driven by strong and effective partnerships working together to inform, influence and strengthen decision making and provision. Activity is routinely planned to review information, performance data and substantial development or variation in health services to minimise the impact on patients. There is also an ongoing need to consider how the views and experiences of residents are captured and best used to improve outcomes.

The Scrutiny Panel considers engagement with relevant health services, commissioners and health providers to be a continuous process. In order to address the significant and far-reaching impacts of Covid-19, scrutiny must adapt accordingly to consider appropriate matters with a keen eye on recovery, as well as community resilience.

Work priorities are agreed in line the development of an annual work programme for 2020/21. This will remain under continuous review with activity is to be planned and conducted in a way that is timely, supportive and proportionate. Scrutiny will consider how well partnerships are working; oversee the systems that contribute to smooth effective decision making and bring influence to find positive solutions.

A significant number of Tameside residents have been directly impacted by a range of economic and health inequalities, which have been further exacerbated by Covid-19 and ultimately increase an individual's level of vulnerability. In particular, those linked to long-term respiratory conditions and diabetes. In addition to the governments shielding programme, a large scale assessment was undertaken to identify 'at risk' residents by using a number of indicators. These included people who may already have been receiving a level of formal or informal support, plus those who had contacted the Council and partners directly to inform of a basic need for food, medication and/or wider support.

When collating feedback from communities it has been important to reflect on some of the local challenges, with attention drawn to the following areas (3 July 2020):

- A total of 1,952 households have been supported with food parcels and 446 with prescriptions. Residents in need of support is reducing on a daily and weekly basis.
- The number of GP appointments made in April 2020 was at its lowest level in 2 years; with an associated reduction in GP referrals.
- A sharp drop in A&E attendances, levels are starting to rise.
- Reporting a proportionately high number of deaths in care homes (44% higher than same period in 2019). Over 80 deaths related to Covid-19.

Panel members have recently submitted feedback and lived experiences from communities based on the impact and response to Covid-19. This has proved timely and coincides well with the Healthwatch survey. I have listed relevant points below which I hope you will find useful for the future planning of healthcare services.

Responding to Covid-19

- The Council's response and speed in which the Humanitarian Hub was established, along with support from volunteers and businesses has been a real accomplishment and something to be proud of.
- The crisis has helped generate a resurgence and increased levels of solidarity and sense of community.
- Positive outcomes and innovations, such as online support groups offering help and advice to residents.

Health Systems

- There are a number of future concerns linked to a range of possible impacts that Covid-19 and lockdown measures will have on the mental health and wellbeing of residents.
- A consensus that assessing and supporting the mental health of residents must remain in place as a future priority for the commissioning of health services. To overlook this would be detrimental to both the health and economic recovery of the borough.
- Concerns were raised with regards to the avoidance of Primary Care, reduction in routine appointments and cancer referrals. It is accepted that while Covid-19 has somewhat alleviated aspects of non-urgent demand, the future pressure on key services due to delayed diagnosis is likely to have significant implications on health outcomes for residents.
- Some work may be required in order to understand the equality impacts of Covid-19. Emerging evidence reported nationally has presented an understandable cause for concern within BAME communities and those undertaking key worker roles. It is also unclear as to how the future assessment of risk for disproportionately affected groups can be planned and delivered at a local level. This includes safety measures for all work places and public transport.

- With a significant number of older and vulnerable residents having been shielded for at least 3 months, there will be a need to consider issues associated with loneliness, social isolation. In addition to any ongoing worries around future access to food and medication should a second phase emerge.

If further clarity is needed on any of the above points, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Teresa Smith
Chair – Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel