



Department of Health & Social Care

39 Victoria Street
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To: Directors of Adult Social Services
Principal Social Workers

3 February 2023

Industrial action – further update

You will be aware that the adult social care sector faces managing the impact of more scheduled industrial action in healthcare and other sectors:

- RCN members in England are striking on 6 and 7 February;
- Ambulance staff belonging to Unite are striking in various regions across England on 6, 17, 20 and 22 February (dependent on region); GMB members on 6 and 20 February, and Unison members on 10 February;
- CSP members are striking in England on 9 February

I am writing to share the main feedback from a number of meetings held recently with representatives from local authorities and adult social care providers to consider lessons learnt from industrial action over the last two months:

- Most importantly, you have told us that the adult social care system has worked with partners to manage the impact of industrial action effectively. I want to thank you for your and others' continued work to deliver this.
- We have heard that resilience is best secured where local systems are fully joined up and have heard of strong examples of close partnership between local systems and providers. There have also been examples of ICSs offering support to neighbouring areas which find themselves under greater pressure, strengthening resilience further
- Such partnership at local level has been at its most effective where it is complemented by good communication with providers. Examples cited are basic information, such as opening hours and staffing plans for Urgent Community Response services is updated regularly, so that all providers can take the right steps in the right circumstances on strike days
- There has been a particular call for the small and medium size of much of the provider sector to be recognised in the way communications are devised and delivered. We have been told that small providers can feel overlooked when it comes to local engagement, and that a combination of direct communication to providers and use of provider representative groups may help address this.

I hope these messages are helpful to you as you continue to manage partnerships and services at local level. For our part we are sharing the feedback from the lessons learnt sessions with colleagues across the Department and NHS England so that they can contribute to ongoing resilience work at national level.

You may also find it helpful to have to hand the key messaging from NHSE about local level preparation for industrial action. This is attached to this letter.

We would welcome any further lessons learnt from forthcoming industrial action, which can be directed to ASCWinterPlanning@dhsc.gov.uk.

With best wishes

Claire Armstrong

Director for Adult Social Care Delivery, Department of Health and Social Care



Annex

We have provided once more here some key messaging from our NHS colleagues to this end and would ask that you consider cascading and supplementing them with preparations local to your areas.

Key messages

- Systems should continue to focus on freeing up hospital capacity in advance of industrial action through increasing levels of hospital discharge and keeping elective rescheduling to a minimum. Acute, mental health and community trusts, should continue to expedite the discharge of all patients who are clinically fit for discharge
- Local NHS teams should continue working with partner organisations to explore different approaches to Urgent Community Response, intermediate care, falls prevention or Enhanced Health in Care Homes to enable more patients leave hospital and receive the care they need closer to, or ideally, at home.
- ICBs play a key role in providing system-level coordination and leadership, especially in term of mutual aid and redirection within systems. This is especially important in areas not directly impacted by industrial action. ICBs can provide system coordination regarding discharge which is vital particularly working with social care providers. ICBs should therefore engage with social care (providers and local authorities) to advise how they could be affected and what contingency measures can be considered, or are already in place, to mitigate. The [NHS letter](#) of 16 December refers.
- On strike days, patients should only call 999 if seriously ill or injured, and there is risk to life. Ambulances will be dispatched where clinically appropriate. For all other health care needs support will be available through NHS 111 online, via the NHS 111 helpline or at your local GP or pharmacy.
- ICBs should engage with social care to advise how they could be affected and what contingency measures are in place to mitigate. System partners should be kept informed as well.
- Work closely with social care and other partners across the system to support rapid discharge of medically fit patients from acute, community and mental health settings, including through the use of additional discharge funding and personalised budgets where appropriate.
- Work across your system to implement system actions, including:
 - Ensuring your System Control Centres have sufficient clinical and operational input to be able to make real-time decisions
 - Ensuring your 8am-8pm falls response service is in place
 - Maximising support from your urgent community response service
 - Maximising utilisation of your existing virtual wards
 - Strengthening your Acute Respiratory Infection hubs where you have chosen to create one, or actively considering creating one to improve 'one stop' same day assessment of respiratory conditions.