

Emergency Workforce Team

Blackpool Council

The early impacts of the pandemic were close to catastrophic for a number of care providers, with staff members shielding, self-isolating and facing additional childcare responsibilities. Simultaneously, many care providers desired to reduce the use of agency staff in short term deployments, in order to reduce the risk of cross-infection. As a direct response, Blackpool Council (BC) put in place an Emergency Workforce Team. This team is managed by the Provider Support Hub – an in-house team – with an external provider commissioned to undertake a large portion of the practical work.

BC has a budget to provide 587 hours of work through the Emergency Workforce Team each week. To date, the Emergency Workforce Team has supported 31 care settings in Blackpool, providing a total of 15,209 care hours, of which 75% supported critical business continuity risks. In addition, BC has deployed staff from the Council's catering and cleaning services to support care providers' business continuity. Critically, the Emergency Workforce Team ensures that funding need not become a barrier to providing a good service for care providers that may be struggling financially throughout the pandemic.



“Many care homes have been extremely grateful for this service, citing that they may have toppled over if they didn't have input from the Emergency Workforce Team. Not only is it beneficial for the care home residents and staff for us to support homes in this way, but it's also in the Council's interest that homes remain up and running.”

Jo Humphries
Divisional Commissioning Manager (Adults), Blackpool Council

BC started by putting out an expression of interest to the network of domiciliary care provider agencies with which it already had contracts, to gauge interest in the provision of staff for the Emergency Workforce Team. Domiciliary care providers were well placed, as their staff were already trained carers and, and had capacity due to a pandemic related reduction in demand for care at home packages. This had a knock-on benefit of supporting employment for domiciliary care workers and shifted this resource in line with demand.

All costs are covered by BC through their Covid-19 spend, with the host agencies being paid the same rate they would be paid for care at home staff plus a 10 per cent premium.

BC put a contract variation in place with the three agencies that decided to partake, to provide dedicated staff and pre-determined hours for the Emergency Workforce Team. In order to maintain the integrity of the Emergency Workforce Team, the agencies were asked to identify specified members of staff and availability within their work pattern. This integrity has been further enhanced by including selected staff members in a regular testing programme. BC holds weekly meetings with all three agencies to pick up any issues that may arise.

Staff within the Provider Support Hub initially made daily contact with local care providers to assess staffing needs. The Provider Support Hub now RAG (red, amber, green) rates care

providers to indicate the level of emergency demand a home is experiencing, with 'red' indicating an absolute emergency. The level of contact the Provider Support Hub makes with a care provider depends on this rate. Care providers are also able to contact the Provider Support Hub directly when in need.

When a care provider indicates they need support, staff within the Provider Support Hub work through a list of questions to ensure the care provider has exhausted all other possible options, and then deploys staff from the Emergency Workforce Team to the care homes, giving each carer a weekly rota.

The hours within each rota are also RAG-rated, meaning that carers working 'red' hours are in a home that needs a great deal of support, whilst carers working 'green' hours may be deployed to an emergency elsewhere either mid-shift or mid-rota. Categorising homes in this way ensures that support is always available to homes that need it most. Where there isn't capacity, BC refers care providers to staff agencies, with whom BC maintains strong relationships through weekly updates.

BC experienced a number of learnings in refining this process to make it run as smoothly as possible. A few examples are as follows:

- To provide clear information to care providers on what was expected from them, such as what level of induction they should provide for emergency staff
- To clarify the types of information care providers were expected to give to emergency staff, such as signalling whether they wanted emergency staff to arrive at work in uniform or change into their uniform on arrival, and providing information on line-management within the home
- To reiterate expectations to the domiciliary care agencies on training and reliability
- To ensure that the Provider Support Hub and the host agencies were providing sufficient information and support to emergency staff being deployed to homes experiencing a Covid-19 outbreak

An additional challenge arose when carers within the Emergency Workforce Team chose to become full-time carers at the home at which they had been deployed, but this level of staff turnover is seen as negligible compared to the overall ongoing success of the project.

Prompted by the success of the Emergency Workforce Team, the Provider Support Hub has used this model to deploy other emergency support staff to care providers, such as cleaners and chefs.

Top tips for creating an Emergency Workforce Team



Contract agencies that already employ trained carers in order to reduce the need for pre-employment checks and training



Keep in regular contact with the host agencies, the care providers and the emergency staff throughout, to ensure clear communication and swift resolution of any problems that may arise



Regularly RAG-rate all care providers using the service in order to accurately prioritise the deployment of emergency staff

For more information, please contact Jo Humphries, Divisional Commissioning Manager (Adults), Blackpool Council via jo.humphries@blackpool.gov.uk