

Managing infection control and your workforce

We know care employers are being asked wherever possible to ensure permanent and agency staff are working in one setting. Ideally, health care staff supporting suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19 will not be caring for other patients. We understand the impact of this; an increase in staff absence and residents having additional needs, some care businesses are using agency staff to help support their workforce.

Did you know the Proud to Care Team here at West Sussex County Council now offer bespoke 1-2-1 support over the phone or by email for help with recruitment and retention? We may not be able to come and see you, but we are still available to support you with workforce deployment, recruitment, retention, reducing agency usage and supporting your staff.

Useful guidance

We have read the recently published national guidance around infection prevention and control through minimising movement of care workers between settings; and the increased importance of infection control in response to the pandemic.

We have summarised the key points from the government guidance for you, and included links so you may access the full version:

[**COVID-19: infection prevention and control \(IPC\)**](#)

As you are aware the transmission of COVID-19 is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets generated by coughing and sneezing, and through contact with contaminated surfaces. Measures to protect your customers and your workforce include correct use of PPE, effective cleaning and decontamination. Relevant guidance may be found in the following link:

[**COVID-19 personal protective equipment \(PPE\)**](#)

You have probably considered organisational measures to reduce the rate of infection within your service or across services and put these in place to reduce the risk of infection spreading. We can help with an assessment of your existing workforce to understand gaps in rotas (that need to be filled) and support your recruitment. To find out more about our support offer check out our web page:

[**Proud to Care West Sussex – Employers hub**](#)

Workforce planning

We hear that many existing staff are taking on extra shifts, particularly where other family members are furloughed and can support with childcare. When the government changes its financial position on supporting furlough, we know staff are likely to return to their pre COVID substantive shift patterns and that may leave gaps in your workforce and consequently staff rotas.

One way to help prepare for this and reduce the risk of infection spreading by (agency) staff movement, is to recruit your own bank staff or employ on temporary contracts. These will be staff with varying availability that will only be employed by your service. You will train and induct them as you would with permanent staff, but they may not have set hours. They will inform you of their availability in advance on a weekly or fortnightly basis and you can match their availability to your requirements.

The consequence is a bank of your own staff, trained to your standards to deploy as required instead of (more expensive) agency staff who are more likely to work in multiple care services. This will support to reduce the risk of spread of infection as they will be dedicated to working in one service, which is difficult to guarantee.

You can also use this bank of staff to support with staff sickness cover, annual leave or maternity. You may also find staff available for a set period e.g. students on university holiday break up to 12 weeks who remain with you part-time when studies resume.

We know employers prefer a fully staffed setting and no matter how robust a staff rota is we cannot plan for all eventualities but having a bank of staff gives you security to cover shifts at short notice and avoid costly agency charges.

Additional staff also helps with the prevention of spread of infection by ensuring you can allocate staff in an effective manner e.g. having staff assigned to different areas of a residential setting.

Staff resilience

As well as building your workforce we know you are keen to retain existing staff. The emotional strain on all of us, and particularly those working in the care sector, is well documented.

Some care providers have found the resources below helpful:

[West Sussex Wellbeing](#)

[Time to Talk](#)

[Mind: Coronavirus and your wellbeing](#)

[COVID-19: guidance for the public on mental health and wellbeing](#)

Regular team meetings – Have you tried using Zoom, Skype or Microsoft Teams yet? Staying in touch and communicating with staff is even more critical during challenging times. The software available is fairly straightforward, with most people being familiar through personal use, if you haven't thought of using one of these mediums, give it a go – personally we are getting used to it and it is an easy way to help staff feel connected and supported.

Employing agency staff – Should you need to use agency staff, consider the following:

- Good agencies should be aiming to send the same staff to you as regularly as possible, which helps with continuity of care. It might be worth double-checking they aim to send the same staff wherever possible.
- Ensure you rota your staff a few weeks in advance, so you can identify gaps early and block book with agencies. Booking in advance means you can request the same care assistants over a longer period.
- Agency cover does not always need to be last minute. You can book care assistants for weeks or even months at a time. This can be cost effective, but it also gives you peace of mind that you can get the same care assistant over a longer period.

- Different agencies have different policies around cancellation, with some allowing you to cancel with no charge 48 hours or 24 before the shift. This would enable you to book in advance and cancel nearer the time should this no longer be needed.
- Many agencies can adjust the rates you pay. Often the more you book in advance the lower the rate you pay. Make sure you speak to your agency to ensure you are getting the best rate they can offer.
- Whenever you have an agency care assistant come to your care home, they should have a brief induction to the home and an introduction to where and who they will be working with. Use this time to go through your PPE process to ensure they are working to your standards while in your home.

While agencies should be in regular contact with their staff, you should always check when they arrive if they have had any symptoms. This can help avoid putting any residents at risk. For more tips on employing agency staff please click [here](#)

We would love to hear from you to catch up on your workforce issues for new or existing staff.

If you'd like to book a time to speak with us, or find out more please email proudtocare@westsussex.gov.uk