

HD 21

Rôl awdurdodau lleol o ran cefnogi'r broses o ryddhau cleifion o'r Ysbyty

The role of local authorities in supporting hospital discharges

Ymateb gan: HC-One Wales/ Cymru

Response from: HC-One Wales/ Cymru

HC-One Wales/Cymru Submission: Local authorities' role and effectiveness in supporting hospital discharge



HC-One Wales/Cymru support c.700 residents across 14 care homes. We are proud to be part of the HC-One family, caring throughout Wales, England, and Scotland across c.17,000 beds in c. 290 homes.

Context

Genuine integration of health and care to discharge people from hospitals remains an unfulfilled ambition across most areas of Wales. The people who suffer most from fragmentation are the frail elderly, especially those living with dementia.

The Government has recognised the need for joined-up working through the *50-day Challenge to Improve Hospital Discharge*, and HC-One Wales/Cymru welcomes this effort.

Across our homes we see opportunities and potential for significant improvements in discharge processes and a clear role for local authorities.

Innovation in service delivery, whether in the NHS or social care, needs willing and able partners. Social care providers can offer innovative solutions if they are included in discussions and decisions, whilst pressures and opportunities in both sectors can be better managed through a partnership approach. Social care can help alleviate immediate pressures on NHS capacity by enabling better discharge.

Currently, too many beds are held by those who are facing delays for local authority assessments or do not have an appropriate setting available for their discharge. Many of these patients are managing dementia as their underlying condition. The cost of this care is high, both directly and in lost acute capacity for elective care, and the cost to individual patients is a sometimes-severe decline in their mental and physical health.

How Local authorities can support safe, timely, and efficient discharges from hospital

Local authorities, particularly social services, play a crucial role in facilitating safe, timely, and efficient discharges from hospitals. Their effectiveness can be assessed through various metrics, including the speed of discharge processes, the safety and outcomes of discharged patients, and the efficiency of resource usage.

Delayed transfers of care - Local authority attribution

HC-One Wales/Cymru welcomes this investigation into the scope of the impact that local authorities have on hospital discharge. However, we note that local authorities are only one key part of a wider system. Whilst their decisions and resources have a significant influence, efficient and effective discharge needs a coordinated system with shared accountabilities.

HC-One Wales/Cymru finds that local authority assessment delays and time spent organising care are significant. Additionally, the underfunding of local authority care fees has resulted in a significant gap to the cost of delivering services, limiting the ability of the market to provide the capacity we need. Delays for assessing and providing care are prevalent.

For many who could leave hospital there are no care home beds for them to go to, or domiciliary care cannot be organised. Christie's Healthcare Market Insight Wales Report for 2024 found that 40 care homes have closed since 2020, largely in areas with the lowest public fees. The market is also pivoting to higher fee private services to meet costs, driving up inequalities for those who most need care.



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HC-One Wales/Cymru are proud to deliver the majority of our care in partnership with local authorities and care boards and are proud of our investments in colleagues, services and homes. But we want to go further and build capacity which will help throughout the system, particularly for hospital respite and discharge services.

Main barriers for local authorities in facilitating discharge:

- **Waits for assessments:** Delays in local authority needs and funding assessments are a significant barrier, often due to high demand, limited staffing, and limited ability for local authorities to meet potential needs.
- **Disagreements:** A lack of coordination between health boards and local authority teams about needs can delay discharge. Complex cases often result in a period of negotiation over fees rather than proactive decision-making and organising of care.
- **Variations in practices:** There are considerable variations in hospital discharge practices across Wales, which affect the consistency and effectiveness of local authority delivery. Identifying and adopting best practices and innovative approaches can help improve consistency, as with the 50-Day Challenge.
- **Challenges in arranging care home placements or home care packages:** Finding suitable care home placements or arranging home care packages can be difficult, particularly for patients with complex needs, as capacity leaves the sector due to limited public funding.
- **Social care workforce shortages:** There is a shortage of social care workers in care settings and community social work teams, which impacts the ability to conduct timely assessments and provide necessary care.

Recommendations:

- **Invest in workforce:** Leverage public investment in recruitment and retention strategies to address workforce shortages. Commit to funding the Real Living Wage across all commissioned services to drive up standards.
- **Streamline care assessments:** Implement measures to reduce waiting times for care assessments, increase social work capacity, and leverage digital platforms to improve efficiency of sharing data and information across the NHS and local authorities.
- **Enhance coordination:** Improve cooperation between health and social care teams to facilitate smoother discharge processes. Protect and develop cross-functional roles which support integration, such as care coordinators and case managers.
- **Pool resources:** Given limited local authority funding, and the significant savings for health boards if health and care work in partnership, HC-One Wales/Cymru would recommend pooled budgets. Leveraging the scale and opportunities of NHS Funded Nursing Care (FNC), Continuing Health Care (CHC), and local authority resources, the buying power of the public sector could create and block-book sustainable capacity to meet needs.
- **Improve practices:** Work with users and providers, public and private, to identify how services can be tailored to result in improved outcomes. Promote the adoption of practices and innovative approaches across health boards and local authorities.

By creating a consistent high standard of commissioning, private and third sector providers will be better able to invest in services across Wales, rather than prioritising already successful markets and driving up inequalities.

For more information, please contact ExternalAffairs@HC-One.co.uk