

Briefing update

Work to understand COVID-19 death rates in care homes, during the second wave of the pandemic in Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES)

Executive summary

This briefing sets out work undertaken by Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES) Council to understand why care home deaths rates were higher than the national average during the second wave in the winter of 2020/2021. It also describes independent research underway by NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) West to look at factors associated with COVID-19 cases and deaths in care homes within the Bath and North East Somerset area.

The key points are:

- Overall, B&NES had a lower rate of COVID-19 cases and a lower rate of deaths per head of population compared to the England average.
- The rate of COVID-19 deaths in care homes was higher than average, but the rate in hospital was lower than average.
- This pattern seen for COVID-19 deaths is the same pattern that is seen for deaths from 'all-causes' and national data shows it has been this way in B&NES for several years before the pandemic began.
- NHS data shows that care home residents in B&NES have historically had lower rates of emergency admission to hospital than neighbouring areas. The same pattern was also seen for COVID during the second wave of the pandemic.
- Figures for England show that the percentage of people dying in hospital has been falling over the last decade and the percentage dying in their usual place of residence has been rising. It is now more common to die in someone's usual place of residence than in hospital.
- B&NES has one of the highest percentages of people dying in their usual place of residence of any unitary authority in England.
- Initial analysis by NIHR ARC West has looked at factors that might have been associated with COVID cases and deaths in local care homes.

- An accompanying study which involves ARC West researchers interviewing care home staff is ongoing, although pressures on care home staff during the winter of 2022/23 have slowed that research.
- The two strands of work by NIHR ARC West have been designed to complement each other and will be published together as the interviews with staff could help interpret some of the findings in the data analysis.

Background

During the 'second wave' of COVID-19, from September 2020 to February 2021, the B&NES area experienced a higher rate of COVID deaths in our care homes than the England average. To understand this better, B&NES Council conducted some analysis using publicly available data from the Office for National Statistics, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, as well as local health service and social care data. The analysis was conducted during 2022 by the Council's Business Intelligence and Public Health and Prevention teams.

This aimed to address the following issues:

- The overall level of deaths from COVID-19 in B&NES compared to other areas
- The location of where these deaths occurred compared to other areas
- The composition of our care home population compared to other areas
- Admission rates to hospital from care homes compared to other areas.

What the B&NES Council work has shown

- During the second wave, B&NES had a lower rate of cases of COVID-19 than the England averageⁱ
- The overall death rate from COVID-19 was also lower than the England average during that wave^{ii iii}
- Nearly all deaths from COVID-19 in B&NES during the second wave occurred in either a care home or hospital, with a small number occurring at home^{iv}.
- The rate of deaths in care homes was higher than the England average^v
- The rate of deaths at the Royal United Hospital, Bath was lower than the England average^{vi}
- There are two main types of care homes in B&NES. Residential homes, which provide accommodation and help with daily personal care, and nursing homes, which in addition to providing personal care also provide nursing care, for example for people with a severe disability or a complex medical condition^{vii}.
- When looking at care homes in B&NES, the area has:
 - a much higher number of nursing home beds per head of population aged 75 years and older than the England average^{viii}
 - a much lower rate of residential home beds than the England average^{ix}.

- National research^x has shown that the risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19 is much higher amongst people in older age groups and also amongst people with underlying health conditions (including diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease, lung disease and dementia).
- Data on deaths from all causes in the years prior to the pandemic showed that, compared to the England average, B&NES has had a consistent pattern of:
 - a higher percentage of deaths (from all causes) occurring in care homes^{xi}
 - a lower percentage occurring in hospital^{xii}
 - and a lower rate of deaths overall than the England average^{xiii}.
- Rates of emergency admission from care homes in to hospital have been much lower in B&NES than neighbouring areas for a number of years prior to the pandemic and this continued during the pandemic^{xiv}.
- During the second wave of the pandemic, this same pattern of lower rates of emergency admission from care homes in to hospital was seen specifically for COVID-19 admissions as well. B&NES had half the hospital admission rate of a local neighbouring authority area^{xv}.
- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, B&NES had the second highest percentage of deaths occurring in a person's usual place of residence (including care homes) out of all unitary authority areas in England^{xvi}.
- For several years prior to the pandemic B&NES care homes had good access to GP care through a dedicated service which helped to ensure clinical care was available and to support residents with making decisions about escalating care in the event of a future severe illness.
- B&NES had also been proactive in supporting this through use of Treatment Escalation Plans (TEP) in care homes.
- A trend towards more people making a choice and having support to die at home is seen at a national level, where the percentage of deaths occurring in a person's usual place of residence has increased over time from 35.1% in 2004 to 51.7% in 2020^{xvii}. In B&NES, the most recent figure was 56.3%^{xviii}, well above the national average. The percentage of deaths occurring in hospitals has fallen over that same time period^{xix}.

Additional work with NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) West

The Council also worked with NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) West who conduct high quality, applied health and care research that addresses local health or care issues.

ARC West carried out analysis in early 2022 of locally collected data on care homes, cases and deaths with an aim of identifying any factors in care homes that were associated with COVID-19 cases and deaths within Bath and North East Somerset.

The analysis by ARC West has focused on the following issues, comparing these across Care homes within B&NES:

- The type of care home (residential, nursing, dementia, private, Council)
- Care home size
- Engagement with the council/GPs
- Lateral Flow Tests (LFT) received and used
- People being discharged from hospital
- Staffing (Staff turnover, capacity, staff using shared accommodation, length of time manager in post)
- Number visitors and visitor policy (family and professionals)

An accompanying study which involves ARC West researchers interviewing care home staff is ongoing, although pressures on care home staff during the winter of 2022/23 have slowed that research.

The two strands of work by NIHR ARC West have been designed to complement each other and will be published together, as the interviews with staff could help interpret some of the findings in the data analysis.

Sources of data

ⁱ UK coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard – Cases in Bath and North East Somerset.

<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases?areaType=Itla&areaName=Bath%20and%20North%20East%20Somerset0>

ⁱⁱ UK coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard – Deaths in Bath and North East Somerset.

<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/deaths?areaType=Itla&areaName=Bath%20and%20North%20East%20Somerset>

ⁱⁱⁱ OHID Mortality Profile [Mortality rate for deaths due to COVID-19, all ages \(Persons\)](#)

^{iv} ONS weekly releases: [“Deaths with Covid-19 on Death Certificate Occurred in B&NES up to w/e 29 January 2021 \(registered up to w/e 05 February 2021\)”](#)

^v ONS weekly releases: [“Deaths with Covid-19 on Death Certificate Occurred in B&NES up to w/e 29 January 2021 \(registered up to w/e 05 February 2021\)”](#)

^{vi} ONS weekly releases: [“Deaths with Covid-19 on Death Certificate Occurred in B&NES up to w/e 29 January 2021 \(registered up to w/e 05 February 2021\)”](#)

^{vii} NHS Website. Care homes. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/care-services-equipment-and-care-homes/care-homes/>

^{viii} OHID Palliative and End of Life Care Profiles. [Nursing home beds per 100 people 75+ in B&NES](#)

^{ix} OHID Palliative and end of life care factsheet: Recent trends of deaths in care homes and provision of care. [Figure 5: Care home bed rates per 100 people aged 75 years and older: Bath and North East Somerset and England 2022](#) [Care home factsheet – Bath & North East Somerset.](#)

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- x PHE 2020 [Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19](#)
- xi OHID Palliative and End of Life Care Profiles. [Percentage of deaths that occur in care homes \(All ages\), Bath & North East Somerset.](#)
- xii OHID Palliative and End of Life Care Profiles. [Percentage of deaths that occur in hospital \(All ages\). Bath & North East Somerset.](#)
- xiii OHID Public health Profiles. [Mortality rate from all causes, all ages \(Persons, 3 year range\) Directly standardised rate – per 100,000](#)
- xiv B&NES Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board (BSW ICB). Care Home Emergency Admissions in Bath and North East Somerset, Secondary Uses Service (SUS) Data, April 2016 - January 2022
- xv B&NES Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board (BSW ICB). Care Home Emergency Admissions in Bath and North East Somerset, Secondary Uses Service (SUS) Data, April 2016 - January 2022
- xvi LG Inform. [Proportion of deaths in the usual place of residence as a percentage of all deaths - all adults \(%\) in Bath and North East Somerset](#)
- xvii Nuffield Trust (2022) [How has the proportion of people dying at their usual place of residence changed over time?](#)
- xviii LG Inform. [Proportion of deaths in the usual place of residence as a percentage of all deaths - all adults \(%\) in Bath and North East Somerset](#)
- xix Nuffield Trust (2022) [How has the proportion of deaths that take place at different settings changed over time?](#)