



Benefits of Using the Capacity Tracker in Mid and South East Essex

Commissioners in Essex have been using the Capacity Tracker to support care homes through the COVID-19 pandemic, with the added benefit of further strengthening existing working relationships across the region.

How has Capacity Tracker benefited your local system, and what can you do now that you could not do previously?

One of the reasons the Capacity Tracker is so useful is because it captures national information. Other similar tools can only obtain information specific to Essex, but the tracker has saved us a lot of time Google-searching for homes out of area.

The sharing and accessibility of information on the tracker is a real benefit. Before the Capacity Tracker was in place, we never had oversight of where vacancies were available across the system, and could not see how occupancy changes in Essex over time – we would know what we were buying and had some assumptions in place about capacity, but we did not know the specifics of vacancies versus occupancy. The tracker has allowed us to gain all of this information at just a glance.

As a result, we now have early oversight of when vacancy levels are increasing, and we can use this information to decide whether we should intervene to help homes much more quickly.

Conversely, it has also been useful to see how many vacancies are available within an 'x' mile radius of a location, in case we ever needed to re-home residents to a new setting.

Prior to the tracker being in place, we also tried to collect business continuity information ourselves, but this was really difficult. The business continuity reports on the Capacity Tracker have enabled us to monitor use of PPE and therefore to be more proactive in approaching those providers reporting low levels of PPE. Therefore, if the care homes keep all the information updated it will reduce the level of calls being made to them.

Furthermore, the Capacity Tracker has helped us to identify where further training may be required within care homes; so the information provided has helped us to allocate funding to cover this more effectively. We have also used the PPE information to monitor and mobilise support where necessary.

The systems also informs the local hub groups on the levels of staffing and staff absences in the home.

How has Capacity Tracker benefited your local system, and what can you do now that you could not do previously? (continued)

From a strategic point of view, this system has improved the collaboration of care across the sector. There have been huge benefits in bringing together the three different council areas – Essex, Thurrock, and Southend-on-Sea – together for tactical hub discussions during the pandemic.

A dashboard has been created for across the three areas using information directly from the Capacity Tracker, which has informed the group around levels of PPE, vacancies, and has highlighted any staffing issues. We have used this information to go back to the homes flagging issues and provide that extra bit of support required. The tracker has really brought together these elements for care homes, which was never in place before and is now a huge advantage, as the councils no longer work entirely in isolation.

Has the Capacity Tracker been easy to use and navigate?

The Capacity Tracker is very user friendly – in fact, it is easier to get information out of it than other similar systems. It is also really useful that the data available is live, meaning you do not have a two or three day delay before being able to access it.

Across Mid and South East Essex we have achieved 100% registration from the homes with on average 86% updating on a regular basis, so we feel this shows that care homes also find it easy to use.

It has been much easier to escalate any issues quickly using data from the tracker, and we feel the existing relationships have only strengthened through enablement of conversations and visibility of information.

How did you promote use of the Capacity Tracker?

We promoted the Capacity Tracker by sending out lots of communications via our provider portal, and a newsletter is sent out three times weekly to our care homes. We have also held webinars on a weekly basis to assist homes that find face-to-face support with the tracker most useful.

The biggest challenge when we first began using the tracker was the worry that with being in the middle of a pandemic, we did not have a system in place that could identify quickly where our beds were. We are now confident that if a second wave hits, we would have this information at our fingertips, thanks to the Capacity Tracker.

Can you give any real-life examples of where the Capacity Tracker has supported you as a commissioner?

The Capacity Tracker has enabled us to find five homes that are no longer operating that we did not previously know about, which has helped to ensure our list of contacts are kept completely up-to-date.

On another occasion, we had a placement flag as available on the tracker in one of our care homes, so we contacted the home to find out what price they could offer.

The price mentioned by the home was different to the cost they had advertised on the Capacity Tracker, and therefore this allowed us to negotiate a new price.

A lot of the information on the tracker will really help to inform the shape of the market in Essex going forward, which will aid us in planning for the future.