

**29th July 2020**

**Updated Statement on COVID-19**

During these unprecedented times, our priorities remain the same: focus on maintaining safety and care for our Residents, Staff and Relatives/Friends throughout. Knowing that not being able to have direct contact with your loved ones has impacted heavily on you from the beginning of lockdown, we had introduced alternative solutions from 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 initially by telephone calls, Skype calls and Facetime calls, assisted by our Activity Co-Ordinators to reduce the impact. We are utilising Facebook, where we can in some of the Homes, to keep constant updates and photos of activities and daily life going on inside our Homes. You can post messages to us and we will endeavour to answer as many as possible regularly.

In line with Government guidelines, we completed ad hoc testing initially and then commenced 'whole' Home testing in June 2020. Residents are being tested every 28 days and staff on a weekly basis. The benefit of robust testing in this way is to understand where any risks are, even when residents and staff are asymptomatic. We currently have no residents or staff who are actively COVID-19 positive across the Group, which is great news. This has resulted in our own policy of 'easing lockdown' in the vast majority of our Homes (separate advice was adhered to under Welsh Government Guidelines) in order to facilitate 'garden' visits with your loved ones. As you can imagine, we are establishing and maintaining social distancing for these visits, as well as strict infection prevention and control procedures. Bookings are by appointment only.

We would like to thank all of you that have given us positive feedback about these visits and the overriding feelings of relief for you in being able to visit your loved ones in this way. We will continue to maintain these visits at the vast majority of our Homes, in line with Government statement made on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020 re: visiting care homes. However, as each Home is regulated by specific Councils and Authorities, we are mindful that this is not a 'blanket' policy yet, due to Government advice in specific regions i.e. Sandwell issued a statement on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020 stating that the area still has high community infection rates and therefore at this time they will not agree to Home visits.

So, for the Homes not currently able to facilitate visits due to Government restrictions, our position on routine visiting remains unchanged. We are still closed to visitors including family members and friends. We appreciate this is frustrating and we apologise for any distress this may cause you or your loved one. Our priority is to keep your loved one safe and we hope you can understand this. Should there be a situation that may require a non-routine visit in extenuating circumstances such as End of Life, the Manager at the Home will work with you to ensure that the appropriate precautionary measures are taken to minimise any potential risks. You can be assured that anyone displaying symptoms or any member of their household who is displaying symptoms will not be allowed to enter the home (disclaimers may be required to be signed). All visitors' temperatures will be checked, handwashing & sanitising facilities will be offered, and appropriate PPE will be provided. Essential medical visits continue throughout.

The Government statement on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020, which many of you have seen, suggests that we should permit one visitor per resident and we are seeking clarification on this for internal visits, as and when they may take effect. Currently we are not restricting visitors on garden visits from one Household to attend within our social distancing guidelines. Before we can progress further with our own policy and risk assessment for internal visits, we are now required by the Government to await further guidance from the local director of public health and where relevant, the local infection control lead from the CCG, Public Health England and Public Health Wales.

We have partaken in establishing some of the options given by the Government guidelines, already prior to their announcement, with video calls and garden/window visits. We are working hard to understand how we may implement further visitations in line with this guidance and will endeavour to communicate this to you as soon as possible. In the interim, please support us and do not approach the Homes requesting an internal visit until we issue our own guidance and protocols, when we are in receipt of the relevant local Authority advice. We will inform you further when we have more clarity on the situation.

Training in COVID-19 and Infection Prevention and Control continues and our teams are fully supported by current up to date 'COVID-19 Management Policy & Procedures' inclusive of associated pieces of 'ever evolving' guidance from Government, Infection Control and Public Health England/Wales.

We again thank you all for your support as we go through this worldwide pandemic. The clapping for carers, the messages of thanks and gifts of appreciation have meant so much to all our nursing and care teams throughout, working tirelessly to keep your loved ones as safe as possible.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Home Manager or Deputy Manager by phone or email at the individual Care Homes.

Thank you all again for your patience, understanding and cooperation.

Kind regards,

**Rosie Howell**

Senior Operations Manager