17th May 2021

Dear Residents, Family and Friends,

We would like to thank you all for your support over the past couple months, the homes have shared some amazing stories and photographs with families reconnecting with their loved ones, these special moments remind us why we love doing our jobs so much.

Thank you for your continual support, through the ongoing challenges the COVID 19 pandemic continues to throw at us. We continue working hard to ensure the safety of your loved one and our staff team are at the forefront of all our decision making.

Following on from our letter in March we wanted to ensure you were kept up to date with the Government guidelines that have come into action today (17th May 2021). We hope this letter will give you reassurances and comfort in the fact we as a company strive to protect your loved ones whilst working to make visits possible.

We continue to update our guidelines in partnership with local authorities Some of you have been able to visit your loved one over the past two months as one of the two nominated visitors either in our pods or designated visiting areas, we have carried out more work in improving the home environments for you and your loved ones, this includes:

* Updating our policy and procedures
* Carried out care plan and risk assessments on visitations for all residents
* Identified a Coronavirus Lead for the company whose role is to support and update all homes with COVID-19 related news
* Encouraged and successfully carried out vaccinations 96% of residents and 86% of staff
* Changed environments to create visiting pods for you all

GOV.UK published the new changes on 14th May 2021, below are those guidelines we can now implement into our homes; each home will be writing to you personally to communicate their amendments specific to their home:

*This guidance sets out the government’s advice to support safe visiting:*

* *every care home resident can nominate up to* ***5 named*** *visitors who will be able to enter the care home for regular visits (and will be able to visit together or separately as preferred)*
* *residents with higher care needs can choose to nominate an essential care giver who may visit the home to attend to essential care needs*
* *the 5 named visitors may include an essential care giver (where they have one) but excludes babies and preschool-aged children (as long as this does not breach national restrictions on indoor gatherings)*
* *to reduce the risk of infection residents can have* ***no more than 2 visitors*** *at a time or over the course of one day (essential care givers are exempt from this daily limit). The named visitors should be tested using rapid lateral flow tests in line with the testing regime detailed below, should wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), maintain social distancing and follow all other infection prevention and control measures (which the care home will guide them on) during visits.*
* *Named visitors and residents are advised to keep physical contact to a minimum (excluding essential care givers). Visitors and residents may wish to hold hands, but should bear in mind that any physical contact increases the risk of transmission. For this reason, there should not be close physical contact, such as hugging*
* *residents with higher care needs can also choose to nominate an essential care giver. As set out above, essential care givers are included in the total of 5 named visitors but excluded from the 2 person limit per visit or per day*
* *any children visiting (apart from babies and preschool-aged children) should also be counted towards the maximum number allowed for the visit. National restrictions on indoor gatherings must be followed.*
* *to support effective infection prevention and control in care homes, named visitors:*
	+ *should be tested using rapid lateral flow tests in line with their testing regime detailed below and produce a negative COVID test prior to their visit*
	+ *should wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), maintain social distancing and follow all other infection prevention and control measures (which the care home will guide them on) during visits*
* *care homes can also continue to offer visits to other friends or family members through arrangements such as outdoor visiting, rooms with substantial screens, visiting pods, or from behind windows*

To support us in making the right steps in being prepared we will be supporting our residents who they wish to nominate as their additional visitors. Where a resident does not hold the capacity to make a decision, we will ask their Lasting Power of Attorney (LPOA)/ Guardianship to support their loved one in making the decision.

We must ask for your support as our number one priority remains the safety and wellbeing of everyone living and working in our care homes and to allow visits.

We firmly believe that maintaining family and social connections is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of care home residents.  We are absolutely committed to ensuring residents are able to enjoy visits from their family and friends wherever possible while complying with current restrictions.

We would like to highlight that visiting will be suspended immediately if there is an outbreak of COVID 19 within the home for 14 (fourteen) days, after the last positive test result. If all recovery testing show negative results theses restriction on visiting will be removed. However, where there is an outbreak of a ‘variant of concern’ (VOC) all visiting will stop for 28 (twenty-eight) days. An outbreak is classed as two or more confirmed cases of COVID-19 or clinically suspected cases among individuals associated with specific settings.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their patience and ongoing support, this is uncertain times and the support and continued trust you have in us in caring for your loved ones fills me and all of the Senior Management Team with pride, thank you.

Yours sincerely

**Mrs. Shelley Bainbridge**

*Coronavirus Lead*

*Regional Operations Director*

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