

23rd December 2020

Dear Residents, Family and Friends

We hope that this letter finds you safe and well whilst this pandemic continues to cause many challenges for us all.

We write to advise of the current situation relating to visits by families and friends, and by the professionals who provide their services to the care homes.

We are sure you are all aware that there is a new virulent strain of Covid-19 which is now circulating across much of the country. The Essex region has seen the impact of this more highly transmissible strain and other regions could potentially see the same.

During the current wave of the pandemic, the national guidance is changing very frequently. We are doing our utmost to keep up with this and adapt as the guidance changes.

The majority of our residents are extremely vulnerable or, at least, vulnerable due to their age and the long-term conditions they live with. As a result of these considerations, we have the following measures in place to help protect our residents:

- ❖ We continue to support visits in Pods and window visits – this is in all tiers
- ❖ We cease visits during lockdown as per national guidance
- ❖ We cease visits during an outbreak in a care home
- ❖ We work closely with our local authorities, local Infection Prevention & Control teams and Public Health Departments and implement their advice

Due to the concerns with the more highly transmissible strain of the virus, and the fact that the virus continues to impact on so many people's lives, we continue to stress the need for complying with the 2-metre social distancing requirements and request that visitors comply with our Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements; so please wear surgical face masks when visiting in our Pods, and if doing window visits, please understand that we will be keeping windows closed and we request that the number of visitors is limited, to enable you to keep the 2-metre social distance.

National guidance continues to advise that one named constant visitor is continued; this is to minimise the risk of transmission of the infection and being especially important with approximately 1 in 3 people not being aware that they have it. If a visitor requires the assistance of one person due to health and welfare concerns, we will do our best to accommodate this in the Pod, provided it is large enough to accommodate 2-metre distancing between the visitors. Sadly, if it means that social distancing may be compromised, an alternative named visitor may need to visit instead.

We are currently considering the implementation of the Lateral Flow Tests and are reviewing the research to enable us to make an informed decision about this before implementing. The considerations are even more important now that we know we have a new strain of the virus and that 1 in 3 people may be at risk of transmitting this without knowing it.

The roll out of the Covid-19 vaccination is slowly underway, and different regions are at various stages of implementing this. The vaccine is mostly going to be provided in the care homes to residents by NHS services and most staff are being asked to attend a vaccination site. We know that two doses are required to optimise the immune response, so as long as the vaccine works against the new strain, we hope that we will be able to relax the visiting rules shortly in the New Year, although we expect most of the country to be in Tier 4 shortly after Christmas. We are closely watching the evidence that is emerging about the efficacy of the vaccine against the new strain, but at this stage it is too early to have a clear update on this.

In terms of residents leaving the care home over the Christmas period, again the national guidance advises against this and we have taken the decision to support this. This seems to also be pertinent given the current situation.

It is important that residents receive the care they need, and we continue to support visits by the health professionals providing services in preventing our residents' health declining. These health professionals are also required to comply with our infection prevention and control measures.

We provide a range of services across the organisation that help to maintain safe working practices within the care homes. These staff continue to visit, when essential, to maintain the facilities safely for our residents and staff use.

We have all been through an incredibly difficult year and we recognise how stressful the difficulties with visits are. We kindly ask for your continued patience during these unprecedented times. We will do our best to keep you informed.

Happy Christmas with best wishes for the year ahead.

Yours sincerely

The Runwood Homes Board of Directors